

Mark 5:1-20

Grace Finds the Outcast

Good morning, Church...

It is great to be here with you all.

We will be in Mark 5 this morning, as we continue our study of the Gospel of Mark...

Before we get into this, I want to thank you all for your prayers and support for our missions team that went to Ukraine...

It was an eye-opening and heart-wrenching trip.

We met a family that is serving full-time with Vitaliy, our missionary in Ukraine.

The father was blown up in the war; he is a warrior, a giant of a man, and yet he has permanent damage to his spine and legs, and is even awaiting another surgery.

Ukraine gives its wounded soldiers \$50 a month to live on.

An American had donated \$75,000 toward a home for this man, whom we called Panda.

Vitaliy uses him in the ministry and was trying to get him to move to Ternopil with him.

He said, “We will send the ministry vans to get your family out,” as they lived in the bombing zone.

Panda replied, "All that my wife, our daughter, and I have fits in two suitcases."

His daughter is my Sofia's age...

They got them out; he served with his cane the whole week with us with those kids, and was the one who preached the Gospel message on the Thursday night; many of those kids came to the Lord.

Talking with our missionary, Vitaliy, he said he was about \$25,000 short of being able to buy a house for them.

We prayed, and I spoke with my father, who met Panda at a Chaplains conference a few months back.

My father went to his board, and I went to mine, and presented the story.

Between the two churches and two anonymous businessmen, we were able to cover the gap for Panda and his family.

The guys got a video of us telling Panda and his family the good news of God's provision.

It is on one of our Instatok's somewhere, for those of you on those platforms.

If you ever wonder where your giving goes, and what God is doing with the funds coming through this church, our elders and I are committed to be a funnel for God to bless others around the world in His Name.

If there is any legacy I want to leave for the next generation, I hope it is a generous and openhanded church.

I know some of you wanted to know how you can give to the work in Ukraine. Still, every time you drop your tithe in that offering box, our budget is automatically set up to send funds to works all over the world, including the Gospel work here in our own community.

I hope you know that your commitment to the work here in Old Town has far-reaching impacts.

Vitaliy told me that a lot of money comes into his ministries, but we are one of 3 churches that support his family directly.

He is grateful to you all... And as I pray about who to link up with as a ministry, I have to know the missionary, and I personally want to know firsthand

how the ministry operates before we even consider taking them on.

Our team saw firsthand the Smolin Families' work, and our missionary in Ukraine is running with the tenacity of the Apostle Paul... up at the front lines, and caring for the children impacted by the war.

He took us to the factory where the coats are made for the children in the winter, which you all had a huge part of last winter, as we were able to send \$5k to that specific work of keeping the kids warm.

Listen, I have learned that when we join God in the work that is important to Him, He blesses us in ways we could never imagine.

Throughout God's Word His eyes are on the weak and fatherless.

When we look to partner with people, that is our aim: to go to the places God's eyes are continually on.

We were also able to leave \$7k with the Smolin family, as they are those types of missionaries who never ask for anything.

The tears in their eyes showed us that it was timely and necessary, as they confessed that their family had great needs they were bringing to the Lord.

That gift was a specific amount to get them through the trial of this season.

My father was there a few months ago and ministered to the police chaplains, and shortly after he left the city we were in, Putin sent missiles and drones in.

All the targets that got hit were within a mile of the Smolin's home.

We were able to visit those sites, and we were warned that there really is no warning about when and how.

Putin has enacted a terror campaign, and he is not concerned about citizens dying.

We saw firsthand his strategy, as we went to a bombed-out factory, and right across the street, an apartment complex was leveled.

He said the reason is: Putin knows that all the EMS services will go to where the citizens are buried, and they will be forced to let the factory burn down.

Father's left that morning for work, to come home to their wives and children dead beneath the rubble.

War is the worst thing humans do to one another.

We were there to bring hope to kids who live with these types of realities every day.

We learned kids are kids, and they have an amazing ability to adapt to the chaos around them.

They enjoyed playing, laughing, and dancing freely.

But I can't get out of my heart and mind the tears they had streaming down their face the last day of camp, knowing that they were going back to that chaos.

They had a week of love and joy, a week when we were blessed not to hear a single siren.

But as the buses left that final morning, you could feel the heaviness of it all...

The team and I found hope in the fact that the Seeds of Truth had been sown in their hearts... many who left that camp were now ready for eternity if death came for them.

Church, we live in Disneyland in the United States; the things we complain about, get indignant about, are almost embarrassing...

The reality that much of the world lives with daily is so incredibly different... it is something you have to see to believe... You can't even begin to understand any of it

through a Fox News lens or your favorite podcaster's opinion.

You need to pray about going and seeing the world for yourself.

Sure, we had people telling us we were foolish for going to a war zone...

We live in a culture that trains us to avoid discomfort at all costs. But church history tells a different story. Christians have always run toward places of suffering because that's where Christ was already at work.

Christians were brave; they always went into the darkest places of the world and saw those dark and terrible places as an opportunity to let the Light of Christ shine brightly.

It is the example of the early Church, and it is even the example Jesus set forth for us to follow.

We went into a place most people wanted to avoid because that's exactly what Jesus does. He crosses boundaries, enters darkness, seeks the forgotten, and rescues the hopeless.

This morning, Jesus will intentionally cross the Sea of Galilee, not seeking a crowd, not to preach to the religious in a synagogue, but to rescue a man, one man. Jesus will go to Gentile territory, go to a cemetery, and confront thousands of demons, and deliver the poor soul imprisoned by them.

He went to help the one others were afraid to help.

The world tried in its wisdom to restrain the man, but Jesus came to redeem and free the man.

This morning, Mark wants us to see that no darkness is too deep, no bondage too strong, and no person too far gone for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Savior doesn't wait for the captive to find Him; He does not wait for a more convenient time, but He goes looking for the captive.

Let's pray, and we will get into the text!

In our study of Mark so far, we have seen Jesus demonstrate His power and authority over a demon, sickness, and the Great Physician has healed many.

We have learned that Jesus has authority over the elements of nature, even... He could calm the raging sea.

Today, we will see a greater demonstration over the dark powers that rule this world.

Let's look at verse 1 of Mark Chapter 5, to capture the setting.

A Demon-Possessed Man Healed

(Matt 8:28-9:1; Luke 8:26-29)

5:1 Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes.

As Jesus instructed, the disciples made it to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

We are told here that they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes.

This is the area surrounding the city of Gadara.

This would be on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee...

Now, as they come off the boat and step onto dry land, an interesting event takes place.

First, think of the high these disciples must be on right now.

Realizing Jesus can, with a word, control the elements of nature, the storm, the water below... What a mountain peak experience.

So often, when we go to retreats, or even step out in faith and go on missions trips, we can reach this mountaintop experience...

Think of Peter while on the Mt. of Transfiguration, wanting to build tabernacles or tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah...

Let's stay here; let's live in the glory of this moment.

But that is not reality... we are never permitted to stay on the mountaintop... to bask in the glory, and soak up the moment.

There is a work to be done... we get those mountaintops to prepare us for what is waiting for us below...

And here in the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus and His disciples will encounter a naked man consumed with monsters living outside the city in the tombs and caves.

Many deny that there is a spiritual realm, but maintain the material world is all there is...

But the Bible, which we believe is the ultimate truth, testifies to a spirit world, or often an unseen world.

There are times, however, I have encountered the spirit world, and it has been as real to me as this pulpit I am preaching from this morning.

I have had demons speak to me through the snarl, spit, and snot of their host, and I know this reality very well.

There are many ideas of where the demons came from...

Some suggest the Nephilim, or the half-offspring of the pre-flood marriages between fallen angels and the daughters of men... They are immortal as their father's were, and after the flood they seek a body to inhabit.

Others believe they are fallen angels... and yet the scripture is clear on one thing...

There is a hierarchy of evil in the kingdom of darkness, just as there is in the armies of heaven...

On our side, we have the Lord of Hosts, Jesus, as Commander-in-Chief...

But under Him is Michael the Archangel... other angels, beings, creatures, and those called the Cherubim and Seraphim.

In the opposing fallen kingdom are those angels who followed Lucifer when he challenged heaven's authority.

Satan is not like our God, omnipresent, everywhere at once... but he works with an army, at the head of a dangerous spiritual underworld that is working against everything good and godly in this existence.

We are told in

Eph. 6:11-12 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*.

Now, the Christian, who the Holy Spirit indwells, need not fear this spiritual foe and his army.

Light and Darkness do not dwell together... if the Light of Christ burns within you, through you, darkness only has to flee...

The Word of God assures us...

1 John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

A Christian cannot be demon-possessed, but they can open themselves up to oppression... where, in a backslidden state, they open themselves up to dark forces...

They themselves dim the Light of Christ in their own hearts and minds...

And to be frank with you, there are times when I cannot see that fine line between oppression and possession.

Our enemy is clever, cunning, and so crafty... we do not need to fear him, but to arrogantly cast him off as nothing to worry about is a complete disaster to your walk.

Respect his power, his wit... Even our side's spiritual commander knew better than to face him alone...

Jude 9 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil... dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

When you are abiding in the Lord Jesus, you will be keeping Him between you and the enemy forces.

I have seen devils flee in fear of our Lord, and demons shudder and beg to stop when I invoke the Name of our Lord.

In fact, even when I was walking in darkness, I found myself in places no one raised in the church should be, and even in my fallen state, I have invoked that mighty and powerful Name of Jesus, and darkness fled.

I could never walk away from my faith, because I have seen what only the Name of Jesus can do in these situations... Buddha's name would not do;

Muhammad's name falls incredibly short... but the name above all names, Jesus, holds the power of the universe in it...

Phil 2:10-11 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Look now, starting in verse 2 as we consider Jesus's authority...

2 And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, **3** who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, **4** because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. **5** And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

This picture here presents us with some really stark realities about the demonic world.

Firstly, the world does not know how to handle this type of situation, and it is often equated to mental illness and even drug use.

Secondly, Pharmakea, drug use, is sorcery in the Bible and is definitely a doorway to evil and spirits.

My wife and I witnessed this firsthand in our life of addiction before Christ.

We knew the demonic realm...

In 2006, Jess and I were in Russia, where our team encountered a 15-year-old boy, Kostya, who was demon-possessed.

His Wiccan grandmother used to tie him up in a chair in the kitchen and make him drink wild concoctions.

He said one day, he felt this darkness overtake him from his feet, and it moved up into his whole body.

From the time he was a little boy, he was tormented by this monster within...

His body bore the scars of a lifetime of suffering, as he had stories of himself being at night in the cemeteries, and having superhuman strength, throwing off police officers like rag dolls.

None of us doubted this by the look of his wounds.

He talked of self-mutilation, which is another way a demon ravages a human soul, convincing them to do self-harm in the darkness of their rooms in loneliness; the person will cut themselves, believing the voices in their head.

This tormented man cut himself with the stones...

I realize cutting is an issue; some have even said it is a trend or a cry out for help, and every case of cutting is

not from demon possession... but the act is sourced from hell.

Satan and his fallen army hate mankind... they hate everything about us... they have no chance at repentance or coming to God for salvation.

Their choice was made once and for all... and they look at man, who is made in the image of God, and they will stop at nothing to thwart that image.

The person tormented by demonic influence is typically not doing little tiny surface cuts, but creating deep wounds in their flesh, possibly in an attempt to get the demons out.

This man was using sharp stones, crying out, or screeching out in torment day and night for relief.

J. Vernon McGee says, “He was a wild man; no one could confine him. He was miserable. He suffered great physical harm which he inflicted on himself. He’s a creature of pathos and pity, and on the human plane he is a hopeless case. He’s inarticulate and just crying out. What an awful condition! And all due to demon possession!”¹

¹ McGee, J. V. (1991). [*Thru the Bible commentary: The Gospels \(Mark\)*](#) (electronic ed., Vol. 36, p. 63). Thomas Nelson.

Demons control a man so that he cannot do what he wants to do. Demons cause people to do frightful and terrifying acts. They cause people to perform soul-destroying acts. They cause mothers to kill their children, husbands to kill their wives, and children to kill their parents. People commit senseless acts, and they do not know why they do such terrible things. These things are happening in our day, and mankind is blaming everything but demons as the cause...²

Of course, there is a balance to all of this, because it is within man's heart continually to do wickedness and rebel, and our sinful nature is a big problem as well.

I have seen people straight sin, and when confronted, they say, "The devil made me do it."

No, it is because you gossiped, or you lied, or you stole... because that is what your wicked heart is bent on doing it... repent and confess; blame shifting is the tactic of the devil taught in the garden...

Not every sinful deed is an act of demonic influence.

² <https://www.calvaryav.org/index.php/messages/recording/message/set-free-from-bondage/listen>

But we would be very unwise to dismiss the spiritual realm altogether, because demonic possession is real, and takes place even today.

Look at verse 6 now...

6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. **7** And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."

We cannot read past these verses too quickly... they clearly demonstrate that Jesus is superior to the demons and the kingdom of darkness.

They themselves recognize Him and pay homage.

Demons are never, ever seen trying to stand up to Jesus, nor do they challenge His authority, because they know who He is...

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!

The demonic realm still works within the limits that our God puts forth... They are in submission to Jesus, and they know it.

Never let that reality leave your consciousness.

We never have to be fearful of demonic activity, because there is power in the name of Jesus.

Luke 10:17-20 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

18 And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. **19** Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. **20** Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

In Jesus's Name is the key...

We prayed over Kostya in Russia for a good 20 minutes; the young man asked us to deliver him.

I looked around, and we were standing in a glass entrance to a hotel... thinking we were about to get tossed around like the police men in the graveyard.

But as we prayed, the young man convulsed; I could feel a shaking under his skin that I still have not felt since...

It was as though his skin was boiling over the muscle...

He foamed, and snot came pouring out of his nose...

Then a missionary from the city over who was there serving with us said, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I command you to come out of him."

The boy went limp immediately, and slowly came to, and through the Russian translator, said the devil was gone...

They immediately led him to Christ... and that week, we watched a tormented boy turn into the freest, happiest, light-hearted man of God.

There is power in the name of Jesus, Church; consider the testimony of God's Word on this...

Paul encountered a girl tormented by the spirit of divination.

Acts 16:18 But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

There is authority in that name, Jesus Christ...

Just working here weekly in this fentanyl-laced community, we get bouts with demons often... that drug like none I have ever seen open pathways for demonic torment...

And we have learned that those who sit under the banner and protection of Christ the King have nothing to fear...

We invoke that name, the name above all names, and the foul-mouthed spirits want nothing to do with us.

Something I have learned about those possessed is they have opened access points, messing around with witchcraft, the Wiccan religion, séances, Ouija boards, and drugs and alcohol are probably the most common.

They call alcoholic drinks, spirits, for a reason.

As believers, we are instructed in

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

We are exhorted to keep our minds sober, because the enemy of our souls is real, and he wants to destroy your life.

Be mindful of the doorways he uses... of course, I expect the wine drinker and the social bar hopper to be upset with this take on it...

But I have seen alcohol destroy more families than any other drug...

And so often, it is the gateway that opens a person up to other more life-dominating influences...

Your adversary is patient... if he can get you to get comfortable with drinking a little here and a little there... the slow fade will begin... and choices made with an altered mind are often regrettable and life-changing.

Also, be mindful that it can be the choices of the parents and grandparents that open this door to our families, and allow demonic forces in.

I have been called to a home where a native American grandmother was inviting spirits into the home, which turned out to create a dark influence over the kids and others in the home.

When the grandmother saw the power of Jesus exercised, she stopped her practices and joined the church.

But our choices impact more than just us...

So, the demons here recognize Jesus...

Verse 8...

8 For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" **9** Then He asked him, "What *is* your name?"

And he answered, saying, "My name *is* Legion; for we are many."

Jesus did not ask politely here or make a suggestion; He commanded these unclean spirits to come out of the man.

“What is your name?”

“Legion.” Many monsters lived in this man...

A Roman legion consisted of around 6,000 soldiers, over 100 cavalry, and countless technical support troops.

A legion would have represented power, efficient organization, and huge numbers.

This wild-eyed, tormented man would have many evil spirits staring through his eyes at the Son of God.

Jesus shows no fear, as this whole army of devils knew they could not come against Him.

They were now concerned only with the conditions of their surrender.

How would Jesus treat them?

They make this request... Verse 10...

10 Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

11 Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. **12** So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them." **13** And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

They were not ready for their eternal imprisonment and thought the herd of pigs was their answer.

These spirits are very powerful, but they still operate by permission, because they are not all-powerful.

We have a clear picture given in the ancient book of Job...

As Satan appears before the throne of God, and God asks,

Job 1:8 "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?*"

Satan had his eyes on this man of God, and he makes this accusation:

Job 1:9-11 "Does Job fear God for nothing? **10** Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. **11** But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

God allowed Satan to have a certain reach over Job's life, but God set the line and told Satan to go no further.

Satan had to work within the parameters of God's demands.

We see something similar in the words of Christ to Peter:

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;

and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren."

Satan had been eye-balling Peter, and Jesus kept His servant by His power.

Our enemy is not all-powerful; he cannot do what he wants...

Jesus gives these vile spirits permission to go into the pigs, and they went hog-wild!

The Greek tense here graphically describes the disappearance of the swine, one by one going off the cliff into the sea.

Jesus really messed up this big business here... 2000 pigs, this would leave a dent in the economy.

Some even suggest that the shepherds themselves were Jewish, operating an unclean business so that they could profit in the Gentile marketplaces there on the eastern side of the Lake.

So many lose their spiritual compass in the name of business and making money.

This was a dramatic end to the swine... and what these spirits drove the pigs to do is what they intend to do to a human host.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

The Bible gives the purpose of our King and Kingdom here on earth.

1 John 3:8 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

His power is still at work today, still delivering people from the power of darkness.

Jesus came to triumph over the devil and his wicked hold on this earth.

Whatever you are struggling with or bound to today, it is no match for Jesus.

Look now, starting in verse 14...

14 So those who fed the swine fled, and they told *it* in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. **15** Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one *who had been* demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. **16** And those who saw it told them how it happened to him *who had*

been demon-possessed, and about the swine. **17** Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

These people just witnessed the wonder-working power of Jesus.

They went through the city and in the country retelling the account of it all.

But when the people came out and saw the dead swine in the Lake, the man healed... They wanted Jesus to leave...

They only knew to shackle and chain this man... yet Jesus freed him... and they asked Jesus to go...

People are still like this today...

They see us healed and in our right mind... and they think we have lost our minds...

I have seen Jesus heal the worst of humanity, me being one...

I was lost, out of my mind, crazy even, but He restored my life...

These people were only concerned with the lost business...

Money is such a blinding factor to many...

And Jesus is a polite God; He will not stay where He is not wanted...

Verse 18...

18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. **19** However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." **20** And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

The formerly tormented man wants to go with the One who healed him.

I get this guy... when Jesus touched my life, I wanted to be with Him as often as I could...

Jess and I ran to the church doors every time they were open.

But notice the instruction from Jesus, as Grace and Love now touched this man...

Go and testify...

He was not told to go to seminary and enter the ministry, or go through a training course of some kind...

He was commanded to go and preach...

And it shows us that for many who only want to hang around Jesus, do churchy things, there comes a point where we need to go and proclaim this Gospel.

Christianity is not just a worship experience... that is the American expression...

There are things we are called to do... Go and make disciples of the nations...

We are called to go after the lost...

This picture before us this morning shows us how far Jesus is willing to go to reach a person...

And no one is out of His reach...

Today, He reaches the lost through His Church... you are His hands and feet...

You are a missionary every day... We go... and although many will be like the people of Gadara, we go for the one who may respond.

There in Ukraine, they played a game with the kids... Understand that Slavic people are naturally very strong, emotionless... they deal in reality... Especially now that war is their reality... These kids did not have time to be coddled to Jesus... the reality they live in every day is that they can go into eternity at any moment. So, we were there under the guise of an English-speaking group... But the Gospel was woven into every lesson... the last day they explained the great illustration they were planning to lead up to the Gospel presentation... Which, they told the kids, if they did not want to attend that night, they did not have to. The game was set up all over the camp... it was a game of life... The kids started with a sum of money... and they could earn more money at the workstations... And again, the Slavic culture made everything hard for these kids... The carpenter station, where they could

earn more money, was blister-making work on their hands... but they frantically worked through the pain to get more money.

There was a store set up with all kinds of treats, candies, and toys, but the prices were marked up high; the kids really needed to earn a lot of money...

They could enlist as a soldier... and they had a timed boot camp...

And it was intense; the Ukrainian camp leaders were throwing balls at the kids who were not doing the exercises properly...

But at the end, they were paid poorly...

The kids frantically went off to another station to earn more...

About midway through, they opened a Casino, promising big gains with no labor...

Those kids went over there; they were allowed to win big at first, but the thrill of it kept them gambling. But it was all set up; once the child put all their money in, the house would win...

The kids were devastated...

They sent Vitaliy and me, and we were two evangelists, because around the corner was the only station that was free, and no transactions were made... it was a little chapel with Panda as a pastor, preaching the Gospel to whatever kids came in.

They had passports, and there was a unique hole punch Panda would put on their passports if they came into the chapel and listened.

My heart broke. After about 20 minutes, I could not get one kid to go into that chapel...

The first question out of their mouth, was, "How much money do I get, and how much does it cost?"

Vitaliy's wife Natalie was bringing in tons of kids to the Casino. I stood in front of that Casino and yelled, begged, and pled with those kids to listen.

The game became more than a game... I was inserted into the reality of every Christian who is pleading with their loved ones...

Many of the kids promised they would go to the chapel, but only after they made a little more money...

The whole game was set up: once they got enough money to get what they wanted to get at the table, the prices went up... their only option as time was running out was that Casino...

Then once the Casino was done taking their money, they would convince the kids to sell them their passports, which was the only way to play the rest of the game...

The Casino promised that if they won, they would get it back...

The dice never fell in their favor...

I was almost in tears for these kids...

They did not know that whoever got that punch out in the chapel would be invited to a pizza party at the end; there were also hamburgers and soda.

But the illustration became more than that for me... I needed to get the kids in that chapel... one little boy. I walked over there three times for him to leave to earn money.

I sat defeated, but as I looked up, I saw the little boy in turmoil, and by himself he was drawn into the chapel... It felt so real... as though the Holy Spirit was drawing him in...

I couldn't bear to watch to see if he stayed that time... Out of 120 kids, I was only able to get 4 to go into the chapel; Vitaliy had better luck with 10...

Time was up... and the entrance to the dining hall was instantly closed up... with a guard at the door, and only kids with that special stamp could enter...

The room was all windows... and the over 100 kids who chose to chase the money had to sit outside and watch the 15 kids enjoy the party...

They told us the other kids would not get to partake in that food all night...

As Americans, where every kid gets a trophy, that reality hit us hard...

But the Ukrainians live in a harsh reality...

The kids outside, many of them cried, because they wanted to go to the chapel... They knew it was

important to the game, but they just thought they had more time...

My little guy was the 15th kid with the stamp... I hugged him so big as he came in...

The kids did get dinner that night, and after that, they were invited to hear what was discussed in the chapel...

I saw maybe only 10 kids outside who did not want to come in... and the majority that night gave their lives to Jesus...

Listen to me carefully this morning... Jesus came to rescue humanity from darkness, from this fallen kingdom, and it does not matter how far gone you are today...

He has all authority and power; He is the only One who can truly help...

Addiction, demonic strongholds, whatever it is, stop excusing it all, and find freedom...

Maybe, like those kids in Ukraine, you have been putting off this decision... You believe you have more time... but you don't know when the whistle is going to

blow and the game of your life will be over... Choose Jesus today... so you are not outside for all eternity...

Let's pray....

Prodigals, lost loved ones, co-workers... bring them to the altar today...