

### Jesus Displays His Power over Demons

- I. In His Day
- II. In Our Day

*(Mark 1:21-28) They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. {22} The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. {23} Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, {24} "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!" {25} "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" {26} The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. {27} The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." {28} News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.*

Tell me, do you think there is such a thing as an evil spirit? Are there actually demons roaming our world, influencing the lives of human beings? If something bad happens to you, if you have an unexplainable sickness, could you be under the spell of an evil spirit? Is it possible for buildings to be haunted and people to be physically possessed by evil spirits? What do you think?

If I had to guess, I expect that you fall into one of three camps. First, there are those who would say, "Evil spirits? Are you kidding me? People get sick because of germs, not evil spirits! What are we, in the Dark Ages? There is no such thing as a Devil or a demon." If that's the camp you are in, you're not alone. In a recent Barna poll, 60% of the Christians that were surveyed said that they believed that Satan is not a real person.

On the other end of the spectrum you have those who not only believe that there are evil spirits influencing our world, but who have actually experienced demonic possession among the members of their own family or culture. They have participated in rites designed to drive evil spirits out of a house or out of a fellow human being. I know, because they've shared their stories with me.

In between those two ends of the spectrum is this middle ground. Maybe that's where you are. Someone who says, "I know there is a Devil. I believe what the Bible says about Satan being a fallen angel. I know that on multiple occasions during his earthly ministry, Jesus drove evil spirits out of people. What I don't know is whether that kind of thing still happens today. I mean, is demon possession for real? Does this account of Jesus' driving out a demon have any application for our lives today? Well, let's take a closer look as we consider this theme today:

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Our text picks up with Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Mark tells us, *The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority (Mark 1:22)*. But not only did Jesus teach with the authority of God. He also acted with the authority of God. That becomes evident in what happens next in our text. Mark tells us, *Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus*

*of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”*

You realize, this is just one of many times that Jesus was confronted by someone who was possessed by an evil spirit. Scripture records at least six different incidents where Jesus healed a demoniac. And that's in addition to general statements like the one in Mark 1:34, *Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons (Mark 1:34).*

Notice, that passage draws a distinction between physical diseases and demon possession. Those are two different things. I know there are some who would say, “No, those people who the Bible says were demon possessed were simply suffering from epilepsy or they had some form of mental illness. They were probably just schizophrenic or bipolar.” Now, wait a minute. You realize, even today those who suffer from demon possession display characteristics that are unlike any other form of mental or physical disease—characteristics that can already be seen in the biblical account of demon possession.

Like what? What are some of the characteristics of demon possession? Characteristic #1. When Jesus is dealing with a demoniac (that is, a person possessed by a demon), he speaks not to the person who's been victimized by the demon. He speaks to the demon himself. And vice versa. The evil spirit, or in some cases evil spirits, speak back to Jesus. Remember the Gadarean demoniac? When Jesus asks him his name, he says, *“My name is Legion, for we are many.” (Mark 5:9).* Jesus ends up forcing all those demons into a herd of pigs, and immediately the man is back in his right mind. But notice, Jesus draws a distinction between the victim and the victimizer.

Second characteristic of demon possession: The evil spirits often display a knowledge about things which would otherwise be unknown. You talk to a Hmong pastor who was present when a spirit was driven out of someone and he'll tell you that the scariest thing is when the demon starts announcing for everyone in the room to hear, all the secrets sins you've ever committed. In some way, demons know things that others don't know.

Don't you see that characteristic displayed here in our text? What does the evil spirit say to Jesus? *What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.* Even if no one else in that synagogue recognized that this Jesus of Nazareth was the sinless Son of God, this demon knew the truth. That's a consistent characteristic of demon possession. They announce the truth. Remember that slave girl out of whom Paul and Silas drove an evil spirit? She announces, at the top of her lungs, *“These men are Servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved” (Acts 16 17).*

Now don't misunderstand. Just because these evil spirits announce the truth about God and his servants, doesn't mean they are believers. It doesn't mean they're on God's side. No, they're still opposed to God. They're just trying to muddy the water for people. What do I mean by that? Well, I know that when this spirit says about Jesus, *“I know you are the Holy One of God?”* that sounds like he's giving a ringing endorsement of Jesus. But does Jesus really want the endorsement of a demon? How would you feel if it comes out that Hugh Hefner once said about you, “I really appreciate her morals” or “I look up to him as my role model.” Uh, no thanks, Hugh.

In fact, that's why Jesus does what he does here in our text. He simply tells this blathering evil spirit to *“Be quiet!”* In other words, “Keep your mouth shut. Stop using the truth to try to deceive people.” But if you think about it, isn't that what demons do? Isn't that what Satan did to our first parents? If you think about it, there's a certain amount of truth to that statement, “When you eat of the fruit, your eyes will be opened, and you'll know good and evil. You will know good—as something you once were. And you'll know evil as something you

now are. Satan still does the same thing today. He tells us half-truths. Sin does feel good...for a moment. Everyone else is doing it—it seems. It doesn't always look like God cares about you. But in the end, those are all lies. Lies meant to hurt you, to torment you. That's always Satan's goal. In fact, don't you see that in the lives of people who are possessed by demons? The Gadarene demoniac, for example, was forced to live among the corpses in the cemetery, cutting himself with rocks and crying out in anguish night and day. Even here in our text, Mark reveals that, *the evil spirit shook the man violently*. The ultimate goal of every demon is to hurt people, sometimes physically, always spiritually and emotionally—but in the end, eternally.

My friends, now do you see why what Jesus did was such an awesome act of both compassion and power? Jesus simply speaks. With the power of his word, Jesus says to the Spirit, “*Come out of him!*” And with that, Mark tells us, *the evil spirit...came out of him with a shriek*.

Isn't that amazing? The same God who, with his word called into existence the entire universe, the same God who with his word calmed the stormy seas, is the same God who with his word drives out the demon. And what was the reaction of those who witnessed the power of Jesus' word? Mark tells us, *the people were so amazed that they asked each other, what is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to the evil spirits and they obey him*. So is it any wonder that, as Mark closes this account, *News about Jesus spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee*. Great story, isn't it?

The real question is, “So what? I mean, does this biblical account have any application for our lives today? I mean, if I don't personally know anyone who's possessed by an evil spirit, does it really matter that Jesus drives out demons?” Yes it does. And here's why. You realize, in order for Satan to achieve his purpose in life, namely, to bring you to hell with him, he doesn't have to physically possess your body. All he needs to do is to control your heart. All he needs to do to bring you or me to hell is to get us to fear, to love or to trust in something, anything, more than God. Do you realize how often Satan succeeds in doing that? In our Sunday Bible class this week, were talking about Idols of the heart--all those good things in our lives that we're tempted to love or to focus on more than God--whether it's our desire for pleasure or our love for our job or our family or ultimately ourselves. You think about how many times Satan wins that battle. How many times we let Satan control our thoughts and words and actions. It's as if the enemy is inside of us. Maybe we aren't so different than that demon-possessed man, crying out for someone to deliver us from the demon within us.

Isn't that where Jesus steps into the picture? What does Scripture say? *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1John 3:8)*. Jesus showed that power over the forces of evil by driving demons out of people. But the real display of power came there on the cross when he took every single one of our sins and was punished in our place. Scripture says that Jesus *cancelled the written code...nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:14)*. You realize what that means? It means that Satan's got nothing on you anymore. Satan can't accuse you of any of the sins you've committed. If Satan says, “Remember that terrible thing that you did?” You can say, “Sorry, Satan. But my God, the one who judges me, has already forgiven that sin. You can't hold it against me. You can't accuse me. That also means you can't control me, Satan. And you know why? Because you don't own me. I don't belong to you. I belong to Jesus. Jesus bought me with his blood. He made me his own. That means that you can't tell me what to do.

My friends, you realize, that little conversation I had with the Devil, is yours—from the moment you were baptized. How does the baptismal liturgy put it? “*This gracious water of life, washes away sin, delivers from death and the devil.*” Did you hear that? Your baptism has

delivered you from the Devil! Does that mean Satan is going to stop tempting you? No, it means that because you are now dressed in Christ's righteousness, Satan can't control you. Jesus has driven that demon out of your life.

My friends, do you see why this account of Jesus driving out an evil spirit is important for your life? Because this miracle is being repeated in our lives today. Through the living, powerful Word of God, Jesus is setting people free of the demons that have haunted them. With the washing with water and the word, with the body and blood given and shed for you, Jesus is saying to each one of you today, "I have nothing against you. And more than that, Satan's got nothing over you. Christian, you are free. Believe it. And live it, in peace and in joy, for Jesus sake. Amen.