

DEMONS, JESUS AND PEOPLE

MARK 5:1-10

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In today's sermon, we will be talking about demons, about Jesus, and about people. Our scripture reading teaches us some valuable lessons about demons. It also gives us some insight about our Lord's authority over demons. And then, it raises some interesting questions about people and how they are influenced by demons. Demons, Jesus and people... The three-way interaction between demons, Jesus and people create what we call *spiritual warfare*.

Spiritual warfare has become a very popular topic in recent years. As a result, there is a huge amount of information on the subject of how demons influence people and how Christians should deal with Satan and the many evil spirits which are under Satan's control. Unfortunately, not everything that is written is biblically based. Much of what is written is based on experience. However, we should never depend on experience only to develop our thinking or theology on this subject. We should not place our faith in certain methods of doing things unless we are certain that the Bible teaches us to do so. When it comes to spiritual warfare, our faith must be in God and His Word and nothing else.

The approach I will take to the subject of spiritual warfare in this sermon will not be exhaustive. I will not spend time talking about the many indirect ways we are attacked by the forces of evil and how we are supposed to counter such attacks. I try to do that in one of the modules I teach during the Sunday school hour. But, in this sermon, I will not attempt to do that. Instead, I want to key in on the subject of demon possession and demon oppression. In other words, I want to address the difficult subject of how to deal with direct attacks of Satan and demons in the lives of people.

When we go to the Bible to find answers to our questions about demon possession, we discover the scriptures to be very clear about some things and very unclear about other things. Regarding the nature of demons and the authority of Jesus Christ over them, the Bible is very clear. However, in regard to people and how they are influence by demons, the Bible is not so clear.

I used to think it is bad to be uncertain about things, but now I understand there is value in uncertainty. Not being certain how to approach every struggle we face in this life forces us to place our faith in God and seek for the right strategy for the particular challenge we are facing at the time. When it comes to counseling people, the manuals and guidebooks are limited in what they can do to help us. Often, while I am counseling people, I find myself praying in my heart, "Lord, I don't know what to say. Please give me the wisdom to know what to say."

So my purpose in this sermon is really twofold. First of all, in dealing with the subject of demon possession, I want us to increase our confidence in the things that are certain in the Bible. Second, in regard to the things about demon possession that are not certain, I want us to learn how to depend on God instead of set formulas found in books and taught in certain training sessions.

First, let's think about the things that are certain. There are Biblical statements about Satan and demons that are very clear, and there are Biblical statements about the authority of Jesus over demons that are equally as clear.

In regard to Satan and demons, the Bible makes it very clear that they do exist. Both Old and New Testaments make references to Satan and evil spirits. In the New Testament the word "devil" appears 30 times and the word translated "demons" is used repeatedly. And, there is no basis in scripture to conclude that demon-possession does not take place in modern history. Some people living in developed societies do not believe in such things as demon-possession because they claim that they have never seen a demon-possessed person. But, we must avoid drawing theological conclusions based on our experience only.

The fact that there are places in this world which have few or no reported cases of demon-possession does not mean that demon-possession no longer happens. Satan's goal is to deceive people, and he will do so in the most effective way possible. When a person is demon possessed, the destructive powers of evil are clearly seen. For

those who fear evil spirits, such manifestations of evil can be very intimidating. I have heard about places in the world where people tremble in fear at the sight of a demon-possessed person. I am sure that makes Satan happy, but I am convinced that there is something that makes Satan even happier. I believe that Satan is happier when people do not believe in him at all. In developed countries, where Christianity has been present for centuries, many people no longer believe in the existence of the devil. In such places there is little need for Satan to use a direct demonstration of his destructive power to control the minds of people. By appearing as an angel of light, Satan can be far more effective at deceiving people who do not believe in him.

So, to begin with, let us establish the fact that there is scriptural basis for believing in the existence of Satan, demons, and demon possession. Even if you have not seen a demon-possessed person such as the one described in today's scripture reading, you can still believe by faith that demons exist because the Bible makes it clear that they do. People believe that demons do not exist are not basing their belief on scripture.

At the time of Christ's ministry, the Jewish people did not question the existence of the devil and demons. In MARK 3:22, a group of Jewish leaders accused Jesus of using the prince of demons to cast out demons. Their accusation revealed their viewpoint of Satan and the relationship Satan has to demons. Their understanding was that Satan was in charge of many evil spirits who could influence people. When Jesus answered them, He did not deny this viewpoint. In fact, He based His argument upon its accuracy. He said if Satan drives out Satan, then his kingdom will be divided. Christ's words confirm the fact that there is a huge underworld or kingdom of evil spirits and they are controlled by Satan who is the prince of demons. We must begin our discussion by assuming this fact.

Another fact that is brought out in our scripture reading and is confirmed by scripture as a whole is that, under certain conditions and for certain purposes, evil spirits are allowed to have access to people. And there are times that the influence is so great that they actually have complete or partial control of the speech and behavior of people. In the Old Testament we see how an evil spirit influenced King Saul, tormenting him and causing him to have violent behavior. In the New Testament, there are many more examples of evil spirits controlling the behavior and speech of people. In MARK 9:17-18, we read about a boy possessed by a spirit that robbed him of speech and threw him to the ground where he would gnash his teeth, foam at the mouth, and become rigid. And, of course, the man portrayed in today's story is also an example of a person whose behavior and speech was actually controlled by evil spirits. MARK 5:5 says that "night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones." And when he talked to Jesus, it was not himself talking; rather, it was the demons using his voice to speak.

Some people consider the man in this story to be the most severe case of demon possession recorded in the Bible. And, as a severe case, it reveals to us some important things about demons and their work of destruction in the lives of people. First, notice the work of the demons as revealed in the story.

The condition of the demon possessed man in this story is one of isolation, lawlessness, restlessness, and physical suffering. He was isolated. He lived in the graveyard, apart from other people. He was lawless. MATTHEW 8:28 says that he was so violent that no one could pass by that road. They tried to restrain him with chains, but he would break himself loose. He was restless. He was not comfortable with his condition. He would cry out in agony. And, he suffered physically, cutting himself with stones. Demons are out to destroy people and use people to harass and intimidate others. Anyone who continually allows himself to be influenced by Satan and his demons will eventually suffer both mentally and physically and his life will be used to do harm to others. And so, the story reveals to us the work of the forces of hell upon a human being.

But, not only is their work revealed, the demons themselves are also revealed in this story. MARK 5:6-7 tells us that the evil spirits were able to recognize who Jesus was even from a distance and pay homage to Him. The same kind of thing also happened in other places in the New Testament where people were possessed by evil spirits. I am not sure the demons really wanted to worship Jesus. What they were doing might have been a reluctant submission in the presence of a power much greater than themselves. But, when the man fell on his knees and proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of the Most High God, the demons which were in control of the man were actually displaying a type of worship, a worship motivated by fear and not love. JAMES 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder." In the presence of Christ, demons bow down and worship, but they tremble in fear as they do so.

And then, there is another strange thing revealed about demons in this story. It is their strange desire to enter into a herd of pigs once they realized that they must obey Christ's command to leave the man. I am not sure I

understand how demons can enter into pigs or anything that does not have a spirit. But, it does seem to be necessary for them to find some kind of instrument through which they are able to manifest their evil power. Unless an evil spirit is able to attach itself to something outside of itself, it seems to be powerless. But, once it does find a home, its power is always destructive. There is no case in scripture where an evil spirit takes hold of a person to do anything good.

So one of the main values of our scripture lesson is that it helps us to understand the nature of evil spirits and their destructive work in the lives of people. It gives us facts about demons of which we can be certain.

And, our scripture lesson also gives us some facts about our Lord's power over demons and the forces of hell. MARK 5:8 tells us how Jesus drove out the evil spirits. It was not a long and involved process like we read about in books or see in movies. It was a simple command. Jesus said, "Come out of this man you evil spirit." The Bible does not say that Jesus shouted in a loud voice. He didn't have to shout. He only had to speak a few simple words, and the evil spirits had to obey Him. It is the word of quiet authority that so amazed those who watched Jesus cast out demons. In MARK 1:25, there is another example where Jesus cast out a demon with a simple command. There, all He said was, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" And, it was done. On that occasion, the people asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority!" The people were not so amazed that Jesus could cast out demons, because the Scribes were also casting out demons. But He did it with a word, and with apparent ease, with an authority the demons immediately recognized and obeyed. Christ has absolute power and authority over Satan and his host of demons. We must not forget this as we minister to those under the influence of evil spirits.

Jesus used His absolute power over Satan to drive out the demons and to bring healing to the man. LUKE 8:31 tells us that the demons begged Jesus not to order them to go into the Abyss. So they asked Jesus to allow them to enter into a herd of swine. Jesus granted their request, knowing that once the herd was possessed by the evil spirits, they would immediately rush into the water and perish. Jesus knew that the whole herd of pigs would die and the demons would pass out of that area and on to the Abyss or underworld. And so, by allowing the demons to enter into the swine, Jesus was judging them.

Every story recorded in the Bible has value, and this story is no exception. We have seen that the value of this story is to reveal the nature of demons and their destructive work as well as the power and authority of Jesus over demons and His work to heal and restore. Jesus used His power and authority to drive out and judge the evil spirits. He then restored order, and encouraged the healed man to become a testimony to his family.

The sad part about the story is that not everyone learned the lessons Jesus wanted them to learn. Instead, they asked Jesus to leave them, obviously hoping that He would never return. God forbid that we should do the same. If we even hope to have victory over the forces of evil that surround us, we must turn to Jesus. He is the only One with the authority and power to drive the demons away.

But now, we must move on from the things that are clearly explained in our scripture lesson to the things that are not clearly explained. This kind of story raises many questions in our minds. It makes us wonder how demons can take control of a person's behavior. We wonder how people today can become like the man in the story. We ask ourselves, how can we tell whether or not an evil spirit is controlling a person? And, as Christians, what should our responsibility be when we meet someone who seems to be controlled by an evil spirit? I would like to spend some time wrestling with some of these questions.

Before we begin, let me remind you of the value in struggling with questions that are not clearly answered in scripture. I firmly believe that, when the Bible does not give us specific instruction, it is because God wants us to trust in Him for the strategies we should use. As we place our trust in Him, He will give us the wisdom and revelation we need as we engage in the ministry of delivering people from the bondage of demons. So the value of raising questions that do not have specific answers is to set us free from the bondage of feeling that there is only one approach to this ministry. There are many approaches and we must trust God for the approach that best fits the situation in which we find ourselves.

The first question I will raise of which I do not believe we can find a specific answer is, how do we tell the difference between someone who is demon-possessed and someone who cannot control their own behavior because of a physical or mental illness?

When I lived in Kaohsiung, there was a man in our church who had a rare disease that caused him to lose

control of his muscles. Certain people determined that the cause was demon possession, and a ceremony to cast out the demon was held. But after the ceremony was over, the disease did not go away. Fortunately the man never lost his faith in God. But, the ceremony proved to be an embarrassing experience.

As I search for the answer to my question in scripture, I come to the conclusion that there is no absolute answer. Even some of the examples of demon possession recorded in scripture appear to be a physical illness rather than the influence of evil spirits. For instance, in the ninth chapter of MARK, the example of the boy being thrown to the ground where he foams at the mouth and gnashes his teeth would appear to be a description of someone having an epileptic seizure. The only reason we know it was demon possession is because the Bible tells us so.

But in real life, it is not always easy to tell the difference, and we must realize that the Bible does not make it clear how we can know the difference. I have a good Christian friend who spent time working in a hospital for the mentally ill. We would often talk about the difficulty of trying to understand whether the problem of a certain person was physical, emotional, or spiritual. Probably, in many cases, it was all three. People are complex, and the Bible does not give us one strategy to use with every case of what appears to be demon possession or demon influence in a person's life. And, this should *drive us to our knees in prayer*. The fact that we cannot always figure things out should cause us to place our faith in Jesus. He is the only One who can give us the wisdom and knowledge we need to deal with every case we meet.

And then, there is the question of whether or not a Christian can be demon possessed. I have heard people debate this question, struggling to come up with a clear answer. But, it is difficult to find a clear answer to this question in the Bible. No one denies the fact that Christians can be influenced by demons or oppressed by demons; however, to say that a person who is 100% indwelt by the Holy Spirit can, at the same time, be 100% controlled by a demon doesn't seem to make sense. So how can we explain it when a person who has professed to be a Christian for years appears to be completely controlled by a demon, even to the point that the voice coming from his mouth is not his own, but it is the voice of a demon? Should we say that he was never a Christian in the first place? Or should we say that he is not possessed; rather, he is only heavily oppressed. At what point does demon influence become demon possession?

Listen folks, I'm raising these questions to make a point. I want all of you, and especially those of you considering leadership, to understand that being effective in the ministry of spiritual warfare does not require having the answers to all the questions, it only requires that you place your faith in Jesus. In fact, the person who thinks he has all the answers to all the questions is the person who tends to trust in himself and his own methodologies. You don't have all the answers, you only have to have faith.

Consider now a third question that has no absolute answer. It is the question of methodology. When we are fairly certain that a certain person is possessed by a demon, what method should we use to minister to that person?

There have been several occasions where I have attended sessions where trained people go through a certain procedure to determine if a person is demon possessed. And then, they go through a certain procedure to cast out the demon. Popular procedures usually include singing hymns and trying to converse with the demon before the name of Christ is used to cast the evil spirits out. And, praying is often done at a very high volume, as if the one praying were shouting at the demon. In one training session I attended, we were told that speaking in tongues would help the demon come out. I do not want to stand in judgment over such practices. I believe that by using such procedures, demons have actually been cast out of people.

I only want to emphasize the fact that scripture does not give us a procedure to use to cast out demons from people who are possessed. Even the practice of asking a demon its name before you cast it out is not a biblically founded practice. The only example in the Bible where it appears that Jesus asked a demon to identify itself is in the story we read today. But, a careful examination of the story reveals that Jesus asked him the question after He commanded the evil spirit to leave and not before.

People also have a lot to say about how other people become demon-possessed. We are warned that dealings with the occult or taking drugs can result in demon possession. And, this may be true in some cases. But again, scripture does not clearly spell out how people become demon possessed. Surprisingly, much of the information we receive does not come from the Bible; rather, it is a result of experiences that people have had talking to demons. People say that the demons themselves will often reveal how they entered into a person when they are

commanded to do so in Christ's name. But, the word of a demon must never be put on the same level as scripture. For some reason, God has not left us with a detailed biblical description of how people are possessed by evil spirits. I am not sure why, but there must be a good reason why the Bible does not give a clear answer to this question.

And, there are more questions that I can raise, but I think I have made my point. I want you to be cautious. I don't want you to be placing your trust in theories and methodologies and answers to difficult questions that are not based on scripture. But, I also want you to be bold. There are things about which we can be certain. The twofold purpose of this sermon is to *encourage us to maintain a balance between caution and boldness*.

In MARK 6:7, Jesus gave His disciples authority over evil spirits. In MARK 6:13, we see the disciples exercising their authority by driving out many demons. And, the authority over evil spirits was not just restricted to the twelve disciples. ACTS 19:12 tells us how the apostle Paul drove out evil spirits during his ministry in Ephesus. It is quite biblical to think that the same authority given to the disciples has been given to all Christians.

We have the authority to cast out demons, and along with the authority comes responsibility. We must realize that demon possession can still happen. But, we must exercise some caution in determining whether or not we are dealing with true demon possession rather than a mental or physical illness. Sometimes the advice of a psychiatrist or a physician can be helpful. And, when we are sure that we are dealing with demon possession, we must realize that the Spirit of Christ within us has the power and authority to cast the demon out. The most important factor is not the method we use or the words we say; rather, it is our faith. On one occasion where the disciples were unable to cast out a demon, Jesus did not advise them to change their method. Instead He told them that they needed more faith and that by spending more time fasting and praying they could increase their faith. (see MATTHEW 17:19-21).

We do not have to think that there is something wrong with us if we are not engaged in casting out demons on a regular basis. The forces of evil are around us every day. There are plenty of people who appear to be quite normal, but underneath they are suffering just as much as the demon possessed man recorded in our story. We have a responsibility to confront the evil we see around us, regardless of what form it takes. To do this we need to have a close walk with God. Our faith must be strong. Without a strong faith, all the books and seminars on spiritual warfare will have little value to us. God help us to draw close to Him daily in prayer so that we can find the strength and wisdom we need to use the authority of Christ to drive out the forces of evil.