

Sermon – 28/11/2010 am

Jesus Rebukes an Unclean Spirit

Study Text: Luke 4:31-37

The student's body went into sudden convulsions as he lay on his bed. The other students in the dormitory were alarmed. They did not know what was happening to their friend. Most were from tribal backgrounds. Some were familiar with the work of witch doctors and shamans. By the time I was called one student had begun burning garlic, with the idea of warding of the evil spirits.

Was this boy demon possessed? As I arrived the local evangelist also arrived. He listened to see if the boy said anything to indicate an evil spirit possessed him. The evangelist pointed out that in the Bible a demon possessed person spoke differently to the man that was possessed. Often there were many demons that spoke in the plural. As it turned out this was not the case. The boy was suffering from epilepsy, a medical condition. A doctor was called to give him medication.

In his home town of Nazareth Jesus was rejected by the people. They did not believe he was the Messiah, the anointed of God. After they tried to kill him Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town by the lake of Galilee. He went on teaching in the synagogues where the Jews met for worship each Sabbath day. We can assume the pattern of worship was the same as at Nazareth, namely reading a passage of Scripture and then explaining it.

Jesus astonished everyone by his teaching. Maybe again showing how the Scripture pointed to him and how it was fulfilled in their hearing. Jesus spoke with authority. He spoke with power that they had not seen in other teachers (4:32). People continued to reject him but not on mass as they did at Nazareth.

1. Reality

Jesus ministry took on a new dimension one Sabbath in the Capernaum synagogue. A man stood up and shouted at Jesus the top of his voice, 'let us alone! What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth' (4:34). The man was disturbed and he was disturbing the meeting. What was disturbing the man? He had *a spirit of an unclean demon* (4:33). In other words he was demon possessed. It may be that the man was physically unkempt and dirty but the word 'unclean' describes the demon not the man.

Demons are created beings. They belong to the realm of angels. They are angels that rebelled against God their creator and are forever cursed. The prince of demons had recently tempted Jesus in the desert, trying to get Jesus to worship him. He knew Jesus was the Son of God. He knew why Jesus was sent into this world – although not all the details of the cross and resurrection. For the devil it was a battle of kingdoms.

Satan was the ruler of this world, and had been since the Fall. Jesus was a threat to his kingdom, to his rule and to his very being. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). He came to destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil (Hebrews 2:14). When his temptations failed the devil set out to oppose Jesus and his work in other ways. He tried to disrupt his ministry through demon possessed people. He cared nothing for the people that the demons possessed.

In the Bible demon possession is mostly found during the ministry of Jesus. The apostles encountered these phenomena only twice (Acts 16:16f, 19:13f). Exorcising demons was not the focus of ministry in the early church. Yet it has become the case in some churches today.

A young man came to our door one day seeking support for his ministry. He told me he was called to a ministry of exorcising demons as he travelled from place to place in India. The occurrence of demon possession in spiritually dark places is a reality, but I explained to this young man that exorcism was not an end in itself. If he was exorcizing demons in the name of Jesus then these people must be brought into the church and taught the word of God. The man was not really interested in teaching the word of God.

In Acts 19 we read of the seven sons of Sceva who tried to exorcise an evil spirit. 'We exorcise you by the Jesus who Paul preaches' they said to the demon (Acts 19:13). The possessed man leapt on them and gave them a thrashing. They did not know Jesus and they did not know the power of the devil. They were playing with fire as it were. Great harm can be done by such ignorance, ignorance that we see all too often in churches today.

Psychologists and others will deny the possibility of demon possession. The modern world sees such phenomena as a matter for the cinema rather than a reality. Even some Christians deny the reality of Satan and hence of demon possession. But the Bible clearly teaches the reality of Satan and of demon possession. It is not merely a mental state with an organic explanation. It is a spiritual phenomenon in which evil spirits make their home in a person and impact that persons mind and body.

There are people who deliberately seek demon possession. Witch doctors and shamans that hold sway over people in some religions, actually seek the power of evil and then exercise that power. We have devil worshippers even in our own society. Such phenomena are a reality. Here in the Bible we read of a man with the spirit of an unclean demon. There is no indication that he sought this possession. He was a victim.

One commentator points out 'Jesus nowhere speaks of forgiveness of sins or of purification sacrifices that have to be brought after his curing of such cases (as he did in some cases of physical illness)'. Moreover, demon possession is to be distinguished from sickness and disease, even mental sickness. We cannot say that there is an evil spirit behind every sickness and disease. We must not go around trying to exorcise demons from medically sick people. We are told to be discerning and to test the spirits (I John 4:1).

2. Recognition

The unclean spirit in the man in the synagogue recognized Jesus, not only as coming from Nazareth but as the Holy One of God. This is not a common title but it is appropriate. Jesus is the Son of the Holy God. He is the one set apart by God to establish his kingdom. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. 'Holy' also means 'pure' or 'clean', in contrast to the 'unclean' demon.

It is ironic that the demon recognized Jesus as the Messiah of God when the Jews at Nazareth failed to recognize him. It is tragic that today millions of people fail to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who was sent into this world to establish the kingdom of God. Jesus said his kingdom was not of this world. It is the eternal kingdom.

Jesus did not fight against worldly powers but against spiritual powers that are behind the kingdoms of this world. *Our fight is not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers,*

against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

People who deny the existence of God or of the devil are, through their very ignorance, playing into the hands of Satan. They stand condemned by God, for as James reminds us, *even the demons believe there is one God* (James 2:19). The demons in this man at Capernaum recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God. They were filled with fear and trembling.

3. Rebuke

The unclean spirit had possessed the man and he could do nothing about it. He was helpless under this demon possession. Mere humans are powerless when it comes to defending themselves against evil spirits. But Jesus demonstrated power over these demons. He rebuked them and they were gone. The people watching were amazed (4:36).

Jesus rebuked the demon saying *be quiet, and come out of him!* (4:35). The literal meaning is 'be muzzled' or 'stop your mouth'. The demon spoke the truth about Jesus but his knowledge was not accompanied by faith, hope or charity as JC Ryle writes. Jesus did not need the testimony of demons. He did not listen to Satan's temptations and he did not listen to these demons. He acted immediately and decisively to silence them. Let us not get caught up in any dialogue with the devil.

Jesus did not enter into ritual or incantations to exorcise these demons. Such things we see even in the church sometimes. People think they have some formula that works. The only thing that works is the power of Jesus. Jesus spoke and the demon was silenced. The apostle Paul, in the case with the demon possessed slave girl, commanded the demon in the name of Jesus. But remember the sons of Sceva also.

Jesus was not taken by surprise when this man cried out. He recognized the voice of demons and acted to silence them. He did not think that this was a voice 'from the other side' with some new revelation. Demons are real and they are powerful but they are unclean. Those who are curious and ignorantly listen to demons will be playing with fire. They will get burnt. They will be destroyed along with the devil and his angels. We must flee every form of evil and have nothing to do with unclean spirits.

I heard that there are two movies being shown at present about the paranormal and about exorcism. It seems that movie makers are cashing in on the general ignorance of the population on these matters. People are going along for the thrill but come away scared and confused. We do not know how many turn to worshipping Satan out of fear.

Jesus had nothing to do with these unclean spirits and we would do well to follow his example. We may not come across anyone who is demon possessed (apart from in the movies) but such phenomena will increase as the Day of Judgment approaches (II Thessalonians 2:9). Have nothing to do with the occult or demonology of any kind – including books and movies.

We read here how the demon tried to hurt and even destroy this man in the synagogue. It threw him down. Mark adds that the unclean spirit convulsed the man (Mark 1:26). We read of a boy who was convulsed and thrown about by an evil spirit before Jesus rebuked the spirit (Luke 9:42). Jesus did not allow the evil spirit to hurt the man in the synagogue (4:35). He was delivered of the demons and restored to normality by Jesus. We would hope he was thankful to Jesus and followed him after this.

You believe in God. Good. So does the devil. You know there is a devil and demons. Good. You know they are more powerful than you. Good. You know that Jesus is the only name by which these demons can be rebuked. Good. Be neither ignorant nor paranoid about demons. Trust in Jesus and listen to him and him alone for in him we have the victory.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon