

Sermon – 03/07/2011 am

Man with Many Demons

Study Text: Luke 8:26-33

We were in a mini bus winding our way into the hills of Orissa in India. We were going to visit a village where people of the Bonda tribe lived. Suddenly two men stepped in front of our bus. They were naked except for a loin cloth. Each was carrying a bow and arrow. The driver stopped and let them on the bus.

As the two men stood in the aisle the smell of their unwashed bodies drifted through the bus. Everyone sat in silence because Dr Paul, the missionary lady working among this tribe had just told us how violent these people were. At the slightest provocation, like taking more than your share of food, they would spear a person to death. These men on the bus had probably killed someone at some time.

1. Pathetic

After Jesus calmed the storm on the lake he and his disciples reached the other side, across from Capernaum. When Jesus stepped out of the boat he was met by a demon possessed man. He was a pathetic figure. He was also a man not to be messed with. He terrorised the people of the area. He was scary and he was strong. Most people gave him a wide berth – but not Jesus.

For a long time this man had lived among the tombs of this region of the Gadarenes (8:26). Some manuscripts have 'Gerasenes' and a few 'Gergesenes'. Near the village of Khersa on the eastern shores of the lake are ruins and also caves on a rocky hillside which runs down to the lake. Gentiles rather than Jews probably lived in this region; unless they were renegade Jews who kept pigs.

The demon possessed man was such a problem in society that they had chained him hand and foot to keep him from harming others, and harming himself. But he broke the chains as the demons drove him into this solitary place. The demons possessed his mind and body so that he wore no clothes and sheltered in the caves where people were buried.

We may not see such demon possessed men today but we do see many who are under the power of Satan and living similarly pathetic lives. I mentioned the Bondas in the hills of Orissa. There are tribes in the North-East of India also. The Chakesang people once lived pathetic lives. Driven by the devil they went out to kill men in neighbouring tribes. They kept their heads as trophies.

In 1992 I had the opportunity to visit the Chakesang people. In their newly built church before hundreds of people I preached from this very passage. Jesus had set them free from this evil bondage and they were rejoicing in the Lord.

Among the Hindu's there is a group of devotees called Nagas. These men remind me of this demon possessed man that Jesus met. They smear ash over their bodies but wear no clothes. They go around stark naked. They attract some attention but are usually strong men and deal violently with anyone inclined to make fun of them.

But what about our western society? Are there not people similarly driven by Satan to live pathetic lives in our society? A strong, almost naked man is idolised in our society. Just look at reports into the lives of football players. Just look at magazines and web sites promoting body building. They

feature semi-naked men and women on the covers. We see people parading down our streets half naked during the Mardi Gras. Would this demon possessed man that Jesus met have looked out of place in this street parade?

‘Satan still urges many in whose heart he reigns, into self dishonouring and self destroying habits of life’ writes J C Ryle. He goes on to say ‘fearful it is to see what a wreck of body and mind Satan often brings young persons. Fearful it is to observe how he often drives them out of the reach of good influence and buries them in a wilderness of bad companions and loathsome sins! Fearful above all it is to reflect that in yet a little while Satan’s slaves will be lost for ever, and in hell’.

Maybe you know someone who is a drug addict or an alcoholic. Drugs are ruining the lives of so many young people in our community. How can anyone damage their own lives by such things? It is so insidious. It is of the devil.

What else can you say when you see people emerging from pubs and getting into fights. What else can you say when you see people vomiting as they lie in the gutter. And we live in a civilised society! We say people who run around naked and fighting each other in the forests is primitive. We look in horror at this naked and violent man that Jesus met.

Is there any cause for hope? Yes there is. Jesus is the hope, the only hope we have. Jesus delivered the people of the Chakesang tribe from their bondage to Satan. Jesus delivered this demon possessed man that he met from the many demons that possessed his mind and body. Jesus is delivering men and women today from addictions to alcohol, drugs and other evils.

Let us pray to the Lord believing that he has the power to deliver from all evil. In the Lord's Prayer we pray ‘deliver us from evil’. Some say ‘deliver us from the evil one’. Let us pray especially for young people that they will not be tempted to try substances and activities that will harm their mind or body.

2. Power

The day Jesus set foot on the opposite shore of Lake Galilee was a great day for this pathetic man. When he saw Jesus he cried out and fell down before him (8:28). He was not worshipping Jesus; he was begging Jesus to leave him alone. He knew who Jesus was. He screamed out ‘what do you want with me Jesus, the Son of the Most High God’. Screaming and yelling are symptoms of Satan’s working.

The Most High God is more of a Gentile than Jewish way of referring to God. The demon possessed man that Jesus met in the synagogue at Capernaum similarly cried out ‘leave us alone’, but he called Jesus the Holy One of God (4:34).

It was not the man himself who recognised Jesus; it was the demons possessing him. It was not the man himself crying out to be left alone, it was the demons possessing him and using his vocal system. Jesus was not about to leave this pathetic figure alone. He was a human being made in the image of God. He was a human being made to glorify God his maker. He was not glorifying God in his present condition. He was suffering as a slave of Satan.

‘Leave them alone’ the anthropologists and others say to missionaries taking the gospel to the tribal people of Africa, Asia or America. ‘They are happy running around naked and killing one another at will’ they say. ‘Leave them alone’ the politically correct say when you try to direct young people in the way they should live. ‘Leave them to their binge drinking, their drugs, their pornography and their sexual immorality’ they say. Some even want to legalise drugs.

Secular humanists believe that the young should be left to make their own choices. But do they have the power to choose what is best? Jesus did not leave the pathetic man he met to his own resources. He was powerless to get rid of the demons possessing him. He needed help. He needed power greater than that of the demons. He needed the power of Jesus. Education about drugs and other evils is good but it will not stand against the power of Satan. We need the power of Jesus, the Son of God, to overcome evil.

Jesus had ordered the unclean spirit to get out of the man (8:29). That was why the man was crying out. It was a scream of defeat. Jesus did not stop to ask this man about his condition and if he wanted help. He was not actually speaking to the man but to the demons. When he asked the man his name it was the demons who answered saying 'Legion, for we are many' (Mark 5:9).

It is difficult to understand the nature of demon possession but here is one sign – the man was not himself. He spoke in the third person. This man was obviously crazy but there was this extra aspect to his behaviour. Jesus recognised that he was confronted by thousands of demons that had taken up residence in this poor soul.

3. Pigs

The demons were exposed by Jesus. The people of the region had done all they could to help this crazy man. They had kept him under guard and chained him up. But they had no idea why he was behaving so badly. The demons liked it that way. They were tormenting this man and his community without them knowing. The people were ignorant of the devil and his power.

Jesus correctly diagnosed this man's problems and followed up with the effective cure. He ordered the demons to leave. But would they go? Demons are spirits. They evidently seek bodies which they can occupy – if not human then animal. They wanted to avoid going to the abyss. The abyss is where evil spirits are imprisoned before being cast into the fires of hell for eternity (Revelation 20).

The thousands of demons in this man begged Jesus not to send them to the abyss. They begged him to let them go into the pigs that were feeding on the nearby hill. Jesus gave them permission so they went out of the man and into the pigs, and the pigs raced down the hill and drowned (8:33).

How amazing! This is incredible! How are we to understand what happened – if we possibly can? We will look at this question and the response of the various witnesses next time God willing.

For now let us remember how these demons were trying to destroy 'Legion's' life. They wasted no time in destroying the pigs. Satan or the devil is active today trying to destroy the lives of men and women, young and old. If he gets the young, then all the better for him.

But remember above all that Jesus, the Son of God, defeated Satan at the Cross and in his resurrection. Jesus became like us '*that though his death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil* (Hebrews 2:14). In the name of Jesus you can resist the devil and he will flee from you.

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