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“ ‘Marking’ Time: Demons”
Isaiah 40:28-31; Mark 1:32-39

Last week we considered the manner in which Jesus demonstrated His ‘authority’... the power exhibited in His **words** and **actions**. In particular, this ‘authority’ was directed at a man in the synagogue who was **“possessed by an evil spirit.”** This ‘theme’ of demonic possession continues in this week’s passage from Mark’s Gospel. Of course, it is not limited to a single individual, as the one Jesus encounters in the ‘church sanctuary.’ In this instance, it says that **“the whole city was gathered around the door... (having) brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.”** (v. 32-33) And that Jesus, as before, **“cast out (the) demons.”** We go on to read that after a brief time of respite and prayer, Jesus **“went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”** Pointing people to God through **Word** and **deed!**

SO MUCH MENTION is made in this first chapter of Mark of **“demons”** and **“evil spirits”** that I felt compelled to address this topic. Even if my dear wife DID take one look at the title and declare, ‘Well THAT ought to be a great way to celebrate *Communion* Sunday!’ And, I must agree, it is not a subject that most Christians would go out of their way to discuss. But then again, the Scriptures... and the One they point to, Jesus Christ... DO like to push us out of our ‘comfort zones,’ do they not?

When you and I think about being ‘demon possessed,’ what do we think about? Perhaps *“The Exorcist”*, that 1973 horror flick starring Linda Blair as a young girl who undergoes an exorcism of the evil spirit; an experience so vividly, graphically displayed that it was voted by several movie-rating organizations as the scariest movie of all time. That movie, now itself over 40 years old, was based on an event that was reported to have occurred in the mid-1940’s. Before that memorable movie, I doubt that many of us had hardly ever given thought to its subject. And despite the ‘fact’ that one of the most well-known Christians in the world, Mother Theresa, supposedly underwent an exorcism later in life, this topic of demon possession, and ‘dis-possession,’ is seldom heard of in Christian circles.

And yet, in this 1st Century Middle Eastern culture in which Jesus lived, demonic activity is referred to very often... judging from what we've read so far in Mark's Gospel, encounters with the forces of evil were quite commonplace. Why is that? Many Bible scholars say that this was a result of the prevalent Gentile/pagan influence in Galilee... and particularly the openness of these idol-worshippers to the **occult**. Regardless, there is much testimony in Scripture to the concerns about demonic activity: From Paul's letters, to those of Peter and Jude, faithful followers of Christ attest to the need for fellow believers to be wary of being, in Paul's words, **"participants with demons."** (1 Cor. 10:20)

What about US, today? Do we also need to be concerned about becoming **"participants with demons"**? The reality of such 'participation' is relative to what our perception of such a 'demon' is. When I hear the word 'demon', I think of some satanic, devilish creature... some surreal, ghastly 'anthromorphic', or human representation, of **evil**. [pic of Darth Maul]

Of course, we have no Biblical basis for what 'demons' look like. How do they manifest themselves? By their 'words'. By their 'actions.' Not by what they 'looked like.' What was it that Forrest Gump said? "Stupid is as stupid does." Well, the same applies to evil. Talk about demons shouldn't focus on some mental image that we have. But on what the results are. 'Evil is as evil does.' And for me, there is **no doubt** in my mind that there are forces of evil at work in our world. Forces that can get inside of a rational human being and force him to do things quite irrational, immoral.. indeed, downright EVIL.

This evil *can* manifest itself in very bizarre ways... like the man in the synagogue last week who Jesus 'exorcised.' But evil spirits can attack us, and act through our weak human spirits, in much less obvious, but just as harmful, ways. In the same way that we are *supposed* to listen to the voice of God, through the Holy Spirit, to act in ways that please Him, We can also hear the seductive, convincing voices of spirits hostile to God. Voices that may sound good, may sound 'rational,' but whose end is drive us **away** from that which pleases God.

As you and I seek to live lives that honor the God who loves us... that loving God who watched the suffering and death of His beloved Son so that we would not have to... we must always be on guard to discern just where those 'voices in our heads' are coming from. In the

words of John, ***“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God... every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.”*** (1 John 4:1a, 3a)

Our every word, our every deed, our every thought, should be held up to the ‘litmus test’ of the life of Jesus Christ. To make sure that the ‘symphony’ of voices in our head is in ‘harmony’ with the voice of our Lord and Savior. To make sure that our words and actions don’t bear witness to the influence of evil in our lives, those words and actions must imitate CHRIST! [‘picture’ of Jesus]

Which brings me to what I think is the most important aspect of this passage. How did JESUS deal with the challenge of evil spirits who wreaked such havoc on His people? Late in the evening Jesus was healing sickness, both of physical and spiritual natures. The next day He went out early and ***‘proclaimed the message in the synagogues’*** and continued to ‘cast out demons.’ But its what He did in the meantime that was most important. ***“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”***

So the Son of God, having had a full night of the ultimate ‘pastoral care,’ (like a hospital chaplain in NY city working the night shift) and then facing a busy next day of ‘circuit-riding’... of ‘exercise, exegesis and exorcism’... gets up in the wee hours of the morning to go out into a ‘deserted place’ (also defined as a ‘wilderness’) and PRAYS. Even though we know that Jesus’ flesh had to be ‘tuckered out,’ His Spirit had the strength of will to seek the love and wisdom of the Father. No matter what distractions He might be facing.

Should you and I not learn from our Savior’s example? As you and I battle those ‘demons’, those spirits of lies and deceptions that would seek to destroy us, we MUST seek a power greater than our own. In the depth of our despair, in the face of great obstacles, as we wander in the ‘wilderness’ of doubt and the unknown, we must continue to follow the lead of Jesus... to seek out those quiet times and places to be before the Father in prayer, seeking His will for our lives.

As our Lord rose early that morning... His earthly body likely crying out to ‘stay in bed!’... He may well have found some inspiration in words of the prophet Isaiah: ***“He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of the weak. ...those who wait on the LORD will renew their strength.”*** (Isaiah 40:29, 31a)

Even Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of Most High God, needed to **renew His strength** by **waiting on the Lord**. It would have been easy for Him just to hit the ‘Snooze button.’ He could have readily said, ‘I’m **tired**, I’ve got a long day ahead of me... I’m going to **rest** a little while longer. I’ve got too much on my **mind**; I just don’t have **time** to go pray right now.’ But of course, He didn’t. No, that sounds like our excuses, doesn’t it? Particularly that ‘time’ one. To ‘wait on the Lord’ takes time... a commodity that we are too often either **wasting**, or **complaining about!**

John Calvin, one of the ‘founding fathers’ of the Reformed faith, once said that “I have so very much to do in the day, that I could not even think of beginning it without at least 4 hours in prayer.” Four HOURS!! Most of us would probably think we’re doing pretty well if we would begin our day with 4 MINUTES! And while I am not saying that you and I must emulate what Calvin suggested, we would all do well to pattern our lives after Christ: to be followers of God in **Word**, in **Action**, and in **Prayer**. That no matter what attacks we may suffer at the hands of evil, by the nail-scarred hands of Jesus we are MORE than conquerors. As we wait on Him, our strength WILL be renewed. **All it takes... is a little time...**Time to WAIT on GOD! Amen. ‘Let it be so’...

“The fewer the words, the better the prayer.” -- Martin Luther

Charge & Benediction

Today we have considered our struggle with the forces of evil... and how they are overcome through the power of prayer. Of how that ancient prevalency of demonic activity was related to pagan non-believers and their worship of idols. As so many will engage later today in a modern-day ‘idol worship’... the Super Bowl... may we all remember the One who ensures His followers the true, ultimate **victory**, Jesus Christ. He alone is a ‘giant’ of the faith, and the only Answer to our ‘patriot’ dreams. Just as we will watch the TV with great interest, even moreso is God watching us. As we seek to be pleasing in His sight, we know that our efforts are not on our own. That the Spirit of the living God is...