

Luke

Rebuking Demons

Luke 4:31-37

With Study Questions

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Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. ³² And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. ³³ Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!" ³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in *their* midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. ³⁶ Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this *is!* For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." ³⁷ And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region (Luke 4:31-37).

Introduction

To the best of my recollection, I came to faith between my junior and senior years in high school. During my senior year (1973) a movie came out that popularized demon possession. It was called *The Exorcist*. It was based upon a book by William Peter Blatty that he wrote two years prior. A group of friends and I went to see the movie, which was probably not advisable. It was very dark, very scary and based upon actual events, from the 1940s and 50s Blatty had heard about while a student at Georgetown.

I had somehow learned that, as a Christian, it was impossible for me to be possessed by the devil or a demon, so I figured I was safe. Nonetheless, I went home after the movie and laid awake in fear all night. I am convinced that the devil, at some level is caged or chained in terms of what he is capable of or allowed to do. At the same time, it is not advisable to get too close to the cage of a vicious animal.

It is for this reason that Paul writes that we not "**give place to the devil**" (Ephesians 4:27). The means by which we give the devil a place, in

the context of Paul's words, is by catering to our own flesh (lying, anger, stealing, laziness, foul words, etc.). Peter makes a similar argument, teaching that an undisciplined life can make us prey to the devil who **"walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Peter 5:8).

We live in a world that mocks the idea of a devil. At some level I understand that. More than once I've interacted with a person who was more concerned with getting the demon off their shoulder than taking responsibility for his own sinful heart. At the same time, evil is a very personal thing. And personal things come from persons. There is, as it were, a genesis of evil, an author. And that is the devil, whom Jesus called the father of lies (John 8:44).

Sometimes the movies get it right. In the 1995 movie, *The Usual Suspects*, Verbal Kint got it right, when he said, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." We can speak too much of the devil and we can speak too little of the devil. But we shouldn't pretend he doesn't exist.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus had been tempted by the devil. This was followed by Him giving a lesson which resulted in the church trying to throw Him off a cliff (seems a bit demonic). Now He enters another synagogue in Capernaum, where we see His first recorded mighty act in Luke. Jesus had not given in to the temptation of the devil. Here we see Him demonstrate His power over the devil. But it all starts with Jesus teaching in church.

Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. ³² And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority (Luke 4:31, 32).

With Authority

Jesus had earlier taught in Nazareth, where He was raised (Luke 4:16) and that ended with them trying to throw Him off a cliff. Now He went down¹ to Capernaum. Luke records that those in attendance were astonished at His teaching because **"His word was with authority."** What is meant by this?

¹ Though Capernaum is north of Nazareth, it is of higher elevation. Therefore He went "down."

In some places the mentioning of His teaching with authority is accompanied by referencing His ability to “**command even the unclean spirits**” (Mark 1:27), but there are other places, like this passage, where the authority is simply attached to His teaching. Again, what is meant? It is difficult to say in an absolute sense, but William Hendriksen makes some valuable observations which differentiated the teaching of Jesus with the scribes.

- First, He spoke the truth and was not evasive or unclear about who He was (John 14:6).
- Second, He addressed matter of great significance like life, death and eternity. The scribes often wasted time on trivialities (Matthew 23:23).
- Third, Jesus had a theme or system in His preaching where the scribes often just rambled on.
- Fourth, He taught with the use of illustrations and parables where the scribes “were often dry as dust.”
- Fifth, He spoke as one who loved the people to whom He spoke unlike the scribes who “**devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers**” (Luke 20:45).
- Finally, and most importantly, His authority consisted of His message coming from the heart and mind of the Father (John 8:26). His message carried its own authority and was self-evidently true. Those who are of God hear God’s word as true (John 8:47).

If the message we hear in church does not, at some level, mirror this, then our churches are not fulfilling their mandate to present the kingdom of God. It’s been said that the devil never misses church. The following is an example.

Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!” ³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him in *their* midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him (Luke 4:33-35).

So Many Demons

It might be asked why there appears to be so many demons around during the ministry of Christ? If you recall in our study of Revelation, chapter twelve records the birth of Christ, and with His birth the devil and a host of demons thrown **“to the earth” (Revelation 12:2-4)**. We tend to romanticize the birth and life of Christ and forget that from His cradle to His tomb He contended with a blitzkrieg of darkness.

Trying to kill Him at His birth, they killed all the male babies in the region. His entire ministry was surrounded by religious and political nefariousness. The Devil utilized kings and priests, friends and foes, families and governments. All of this with the desired end of death. In the same way an active shooter at a church in Texas aroused numerous members to produce a weapon, it has been suggested, with some merit, that the presence of Christ and those who seek to preach in His name in dark, unevangelized places “will arouse the presence” of demonic activity.

I am not suggesting that there is no demonic activity in the world today, but the presence of Christ on earth, during one of the darkest eras in human history, may explain why there was siege coming from the evil one.

A Knowledgeable, Defeated Enemy

We don't know a great deal about this possessed man prior to this event. But there he was, in the middle of church, and he seemed to have theologically savvy. I don't apologize that, as a church, we seek to have high theological/doctrinal standards for elders and deacons. But if one examines the pastoral epistles and the requirements God lays down for these offices, they are largely based on character (a good home, temperate, hospitable, not a drunk, not violent, not greedy, not quarrelsome, not covetous, etc. 1 Timothy 3:1-7).

This demon is knowledgeable. He knows that Jesus is the **“Holy One of God.”** Perhaps the demon's claim to know Jesus is an attempt to gain some level of power over Him. It is difficult to determine why the demon is so willing to acknowledge Christ. But don't be surprised that some of the vilest square footage on God's earth is covered with a steeple and a cross.

It's been said that the devil never misses church, and he works hard to get on the boards, in the seminaries and, if possible, in the pulpit. This is

why Jude writes that Christians must **“contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3)**. It’s a fight! The Greek word for **“contend”** is worth a look. Notice the root:

Contend-*epagonizesthai*

Agonize contains the willingness to struggle and suffer. There is no coasting in the ministry. The demons don’t seem to get tired. They seem competent in theology. But James does mention an attribute that accompanies their good theology.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder (James 2:19)!

This demon seemed to know that Jesus came to destroy him/them. We may fear darkness. We may fear death. We may fear the devil. But the Scriptures present all these as having a fear of Christ.

And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time” (Matthew 8:29)?

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me” (Luke 8:27, 28).

We see in Christ, the death of death.

He will swallow up death forever (Isaiah 25:8).

Jesus rebukes the demon, which amounts to a sharp, authoritative reprimand. Then He silences him and commands him out of the man. And even though the demon **“had thrown him in their midst”** in perhaps a

desperate act of defiance, the man remained unharmed. The Lord puts us through just what He deems fit for us to go through.

Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, “What a word this *is!* For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.”³⁷ And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region (Luke 4:36, 37).

It’s About Him

It is a good rule in ministry that those serving Christ should seek some level of invisibility or expendability. While we need to be careful not to push that to the level of not loving or caring, we should still not get in the way of the message, which should always be about Christ.

Little doubt, with the amount of demonic activity during this time, there was also a great deal of fear. Demonic activity can be scary. To see the power and authority that Jesus had over this demon seemed to cause a change in focus. The people’s fear of demons may very well have pushed them to Christ.

I recently did a wedding in Hawaii. As beautiful as it is, Hawaii can be a very dark place. I met a young couple, and we started a light discussion on our fears. I have a fear of flying. She was a flight attendant with no fear of flying, but she was afraid of ghosts. I shared with her how I was on a mission trip in Hawaii, years ago, when I had what appeared to me to be, at whatever level I could ascertain, a demonic encounter. I didn’t share this to scare her, but to give her the answer to such fears.

My response to this type of thing had nothing to do with holy water or a crucifix (as in the movies), but a clinging to Christ. We do not have, in ourselves, what it takes to overcome the powers of darkness (and those powers do exist), but we have Christ. And the powers of darkness have no chance against Christ. He nailed their power to the cross...

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:15).

As Sinclair Ferguson explains,

...it's not possible to be possessed by a demon when you're possessed by Jesus Christ.

Questions for Study

1. Explain what it means to give place to the devil (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss what it means that Jesus taught with authority (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is a possible reason for the amount of demonic activity during the time of Christ (page 4)?
4. How is the devil characterized when it comes to being an enemy? What are his strengths, weaknesses? Contrast that with Christ (pages 5, 6).
5. Why do you suppose the event in this passage happened? What is the purpose here (page 7)?