

Jesus and Beelzebub

Luke 8:1-3, 11:14-28

This morning we are looking at two passages in Luke's Gospel where Jesus deals with evil spirits. The modern scientific approach has tended to pooh-pooh any notion of evil spirits. It dismisses any concept of a spirit-world and denies that human beings have a spiritual part to them. It sees evil spirits as a primitive and unscientific explanation for things such as fits and mental illness and the idea of people being affected by evil spirits was roundly rejected and ridiculed. Since the Bible talks freely about such things, and Jesus is frequently reported as casting out evil spirits, this just proves what a lot of unacceptable nonsense the Bible contains.

However a post-modern generation has rejected this older mechanistic view of the world and firmly believes in the spiritual; the human spirit and even in evil spirits. It has become common in non-Christian circles to speak about people 'overcoming their demons'; although demons are not usually considered to be evil entities, but the disadvantages, trauma and evil things we have to face in life. We are urged to look at our fear, negativity and anxieties right in the face and refuse them. *"No demons in your life will be strong enough to prevent you from achieving your purpose ... Demons hold no power in your life. No matter what demons you have, you can find someone who has overcome the same demon. What does this tell you? That demons are merely those things which are meant to provide you with an opportunity to gain knowledge and strength and having gained them, provide a means of using them to find your purpose and to leave a legacy."* Harry Tucker.

Another blog urges: *"Ask for strength. Call upon whatever powers that be to help you. Maybe you have great friends to talk to. Maybe you have supportive family. Maybe you have a spiritual belief that you call upon. It doesn't matter where you derive your strength."* Today there is increasing talk about spirituality, demons and about faith, but not as the Bible presents it.

The Bible actually gives us the most reliable information about the reality and nature of spiritual life and evil spirits. Yet it is an area that many Christians shy away from or water down what the Bible teaches, usually out of fear. But there is no need to do either of these. In Luke 8 we read that Jesus cured a number of women from evil spirits and diseases. The word cured or healed is the word *therapeuo*, from which we get our word therapy. And the word 'diseases or sicknesses' is literally 'things that takes away our strength'. There are many things that rob us of our natural strength and powers. Infections make us sick, robbing us of our energy, accidental damage to our bodies robs us of our mobility and normal function, stress, fears, anxieties and depression can cripple us emotionally; there are a whole range of debilitating conditions that we all face at various times in our lives. But the Bible

includes in this list the activity of evil spirits, often called unclean spirit or demons. These are spiritual beings, personalities that were originally created by God as pure, good spirit-being, such as angels, but somewhere along the line they rebelled against God, very much as human beings rebelled against God, and they have become essentially 'bad' or 'evil' or 'unclean' or 'impure'.

Such beings, having been thrown out of God's presence, act rather like spiritual parasites, feeding upon the fears, or hatred or anger or lust or resentment or jealousy or sicknesses etc. that they are able to incite in ordinary members of the public, who are usually quite oblivious of their presence. The effect of evil spirits is to debilitate us emotionally and physically, to take away from us any power to control certain areas of our lives, and we need healing from them.

Jesus clearly had the power to heal people from all their weaknesses, whatever its source, and many of those who found new strength through Christ became his followers, like these women who helped support him with their private finances.

In Luke 11 we read of Jesus driving out an evil spirit that has made a man unable to speak. As soon as Jesus commanded the spirit to leave, the man spoke, which astonished many who were watching. But some cynics commented that Jesus was driving out demons by Beelzebul the prince of demons.

Baal Zebul was the name of the principal Philistine god - Lord of Heaven. Philistine for heaven is zebul, while zebub is a fly. The Hebrew *Baal Zebub* is most probably a derogatory corruption, deliberately renaming the Lord of Heaven, the Lord of flies. Baal Zebul's shrine was at Ekron, the Philistine capital city, and this pagan god is mentioned in 2 Kings chapter 1. Ahab's son King Ahaziah fell from his upper storey room, after the lattice of gave way, and was seriously injured. He sent a servant to enquire of *Baal Zebub* in Ekron as to whether he would recover, but the servant was stopped on the way by Elijah. An angel had appeared to Elijah and told him to ask the king "*Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to to enquire of Baal Zebub in Ekron?*" The word of God then came to Elijah that Ahaziah would die of his injuries, which he did.

To the Jewish mind, the only true Lord of Heaven is the Lord God of Israel, not Beelzebul. For them then name Lord of Heaven was an insult to God. The Philistine god was nothing but the Lord of flies, the prince of demons, and some took him to be Satan himself. Some observers were speculating that if Jesus was able to command demons to come out of people, he must be a servant of the prince of demons himself. Now they had not actually voiced their comments to Jesus personally, but the Holy Spirit revealed to Jesus what they were thinking. He did not take offence, or try to defend or justify himself, but he did want to show the foolishness of such reasoning. If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, then the kingdom of Satan is divided against itself

and *“any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself how can his kingdom stand?”* They must have been equally astonished when Jesus said; *“I’m saying this because you are claiming that I drive out demons by Beelzebul.”* They must have thought, “How did he know what we were whispering amongst ourselves?”

Jesus then adds, *“Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”* Matthew’s account has Spirit of God instead of finger. (see N&N) God’s finger is an image of his power. God wrote on the ten commandments on the stone slabs with his finger and David in Ps 8 speaks of the heavens being the work of God’s fingers, but ‘the finger of God’ was the term used when the Egyptian sorcerers could no longer match the signs that Moses was doing and had to acknowledge that the third plague of lice was God’s doing. They told Pharaoh *“This is the finger of God”*. So the finger of God is the mighty power that the Holy Spirit of God exercises that is beyond human or magical capabilities. Jesus is emphasising that humanly no one can expel a demon from someone, but he was doing it by the ‘finger of God’ which made it as easy as flicking a finger. He may well have often flicked his finger and said, “Get out!” when he was commanding evil spirits to leave.

Friends, this is a normal feature of life in the Spirit; it is no big deal. Getting insights from the Holy Spirit and commanding evil spirits to leave does not need any special call and gifting from God. Anyone who has been filled with the Holy Spirit can do it. How did Jesus cast out demons? By the finger of God; the power of the Holy Spirit. Even though he was the Son of God, Jesus never used his own power, but relied on the Holy Spirit. In this he was setting an example to us. He later sends out the disciples to tell people about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick and drive out demons. And do you know what? It worked – they told demons to leave and they just left! It was the finger of God. Why because the Kingdom of God had arrived. It is here, and Jesus is its King. Have we entered the Kingdom of God? If we have been ‘fathered from above’ by the inner working of the Holy Spirit then we have.

Jesus then gives another illustration. He said, *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.”* (v21-23) Let us recognise that evil spirits are powerful – for various reasons they get access to people’s bodies and live inside them as if it were their own house. It fully arms itself and protects its squatting rights by all sorts of schemes to dissuade its host from getting the help they need.

Then “*someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him.*” Who is he talking about, himself or the Holy Spirit? Either way the Lord is certainly stronger than any miserable parasitic evil spirit. Paul talks a number of times about the Lord’s superior power over Satan and all unclean spirits. The crunch came when Satan thought he had won a victory over Jesus by tempting Judas to betray him and goading the crowd to cry out “Crucify him!” What glee Satan must have felt when he saw Jesus, God’s own Son, hanging there on the cross! He had no idea, what was in store for him; he knew nothing of God’s secret plan. Paul says that had ‘the rulers of this age’ understood what was going to happen they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory. By Jesus’ death the legal document that specifies all the proven charges against us, which gives Satan rights over every one of our lives, was removed by being nailed to the cross. His death annuls every one of those charges and so we can be declared not guilty. Consequently we are told that Jesus made a public spectacle of the rulers and authorities, triumphing over them by means of the cross, the very thing that Satan thought was his victory over Jesus! Jesus is the One who is stronger than the strong man. He was able to overpower him and plunder his spoils and today he has even more power to do so because of the cross and his resurrection and if he was able to give his disciples authority over “*unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness,*”(Matt 10:1) then how much more since his victory on the cross is he able to give us that same authority today. Paul therefore declares that ‘*we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*’ enough to give his life as a sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus concluded his illustration by saying that “*he who is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.*” There is no neutrality. Anyone who is not *pro*-Jesus is automatically *anti*-Jesus. God does not recognise indecision or don’t knows. If we cannot commit ourselves to follow Christ we are antichrist and that puts us clearly on the side of Satan and Beelzebub and unclean spirits. When he spoke about ‘gathering with me’ he used the word ‘*synago*’ – which is what the Church did when it met together to worship God and learn about him. *We gather together* with the Lord here at ABC. It basically means ‘doing church’. Anyone who does not do church ‘*scarpers*’ - the word is derived from scorpion, and what would you do if you found a scorpion in your living-room – you would scatter, scarpers, get yourself as far away from there as possible. That is what those who are not for Jesus do. They keep well away from church and God’s people, because they realise the deadly threat that Jesus represents to their life-style; also the unclean spirits that inhabit them are also seriously under threat from God’s power and will try to get the person as far as way as possible. This is why the Gospel charge is to go out and preach the gospel, not invite them to church. If we were really doing church properly we would expect visitors to either run out of the building or fall on their faces declaring that God is here!

Jesus concludes his teaching on about evil spirits with a graphic explanation of what happens when an evil spirit is driven out of a person. “*When an unclean spirit comes*

out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first." v24-26.

When an unclean spirit is driven out of a person it is then looking for someone else to be its host. If it comes back and finds the person in whom it originally lived 'swept clean and put in order,' but uninhabited, then it can get back in and the person's last state will be worse than before. It is so important that we never let our house ever stand empty. This is why it is so important to be baptised both in water and in the Holy Spirit. Baptism takes away the legal right that any demons have to live inside our bodies. But they won't just go unless they are driven out. Only when we invite the Holy Spirit to take up residence inside our bodies and to fill us with his presence and to take control of all the areas where the unclean stuff used to hang out, are we safe from being further infected with unclean spirits.

Can a Christian, a believer, a follower of Christ, have a demon? Of course they can. Most of us had our demons when we came to Christ and if they were not driven out they will stay there, debilitating us all our lives until we die. So let's make sure we get them dealt with. Can they come back in once they have gone? Yes if we don't take care to make sure we go on being filled with the Holy Spirit every day of our lives. Can other demons get into us after we have become believers? Jesus says, 'Yes they can' and our last state can end up worst that we were before, if we are not vigilant; always on the alert and making sure we are continually walking with the Lord and being filled with his Spirit.

Paul says "*Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*"

Where is God? He is everywhere, and if we have welcomed the Holy Spirit to take up residence in our bodies, then he is living inside us. Wherever we go God goes. God can never be any closer to us than being inside our bodies. A human body is a temple for the Holy Spirit to live in. That is how God designed us; not just as the physical home for our own human spirit, but as a home for God's own Spirit to live in. We are meant to be indwelt by the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit to walk in the Spirit and go on being filled with the Spirit. Anyone who does not have the Holy Spirit living inside them is wide open to any other spirit getting inside them and controlling them. Unclean spirits take every advantage of the fact that over 95% of the population never invite the Spirit into their lives, so there are plenty of vacant properties for them to move into. When we become believers many of us never realise that we no longer belong to ourselves as have been bought with a price and the Holy Spirit is meant to be living inside us Don't assume we automatically receive the Spirit at our conversion. Jesus made it quite plain that if we want the Spirit

inside us we have to ask. We have to invite him in; we have to receive him and hand over the keys to every area of our lives keys to him.

We are called to be a People Full of God, not full of ourselves, not full of doubts and fears, or criticism, anger, selfishness or pride, constantly struggling with things that continually debilitate us. God wants us to be filled with the love of God poured into our hearts, full of assurance, full of faith, full of inexpressible joy, full of praise, full of power, full of the Holy Spirit and free from any evil spirits; a people full of God who honour God with their bodies, who live in the victory that Jesus has gained for us on the cross and in his resurrection, who are more than conquerors through him who loved us enough to completely give himself for us, who *'hear the word of God and live by it'*. Will we completely give ourselves to him and live in his power?

For freedom Christ has set us free, so don't let any of us put up with the slavery that sin and unclean spirits put us under any longer.

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