

TITLE: “Even the demons believe—and shudder”

TEXT: Mark 5:1-20 (NT p. 39)

[Jesus and the disciples] came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ²And when [Jesus] had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” ⁸For [Jesus] had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

⁹Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” ¹⁰He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; ¹²and the unclean spirits begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.” ¹³So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

¹⁴The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. ¹⁸As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged [Jesus] that he might be with him. ¹⁹But Jesus refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.” ²⁰And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Introduction – Mistaking the Devil

The devil approached a Hollywood agent and said: “I’ll make a deal with you. I’ll give you a client with the looks of a young Robert Redford, the financial success of Eddie Murphy and the longevity of George Burns. He’ll stay with you his entire life and be as prominent on the day you die as on the day you sign him. ...In exchange, you have to give me your immortal soul.”

The agent said, “What’s the catch?”

There are two opposing errors regarding demons. One is refusing to believe they exist at all. They often make jokes about the Devil and are VERY skeptical of those who believe in his existence. The other group of people is intrigued by demons and want to find ways to tap into their powers. Demons are happy with both groups and they do everything they can to keep the one group from discovering their existence and keep the other group interested enough to join them.

1. "Touched by the Spirit World"

In the April 17, 2010 issue of the *Ithaca Journal*, there was a long article titled "Touched by the Spirit World." It is about Nichole Wright. The author of the article went to great lengths to show how normal and well-adjusted she is. Nichole is 15 years old. She is very pretty and there is a full page color picture there to prove it. The article says, "She has a number of friends, a boyfriend, is an avid reader, plays the cello and viola and is learning to play the piano. She lives in Horseheads where she is an assistant teacher for religious education at a local church. Oh, and she is a medium—she communicates with spirits, the dead."

Nichole sees spirits regularly. In her home she has "met guys on the ceiling" and she talked about "the man at the foot of the bed" who would play tricks on her. Some of the spirits appear in solid form, some as apparitions. One gave her advice as to how her mother should change her behavior. She also speaks with her grandmother's spirit. Her grandmother died 15 years ago.

Nichole is currently enrolled at a school where she is developing her practice of spiritualism. She gives psychic readings to people. There are a lot of mediums around. I found a card on my car window this past Monday when I came out of Price Chopper. It reads: "Psychic Christine—she has over 10 years experience and gives all kinds of psychic readings." The card offers \$10 off on everything except palm readings.

There are many cases of demon possession described in the New Testament in addition to this morning's text. Why are there not many cases like this nowadays? Satan has become more subtle. The Bible actually says that Satan often disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). That is what is happening today. And that is what mediums are tapping into.

Do I believe that present day mediums actually talk to spirits? Yes. Do I believe they speak to the spirits of people who have died? No. There are only two kinds of spirits. Spirits of the light, who are loyal to Jesus, are angels. Angels who have rebelled against Jesus are spirits of darkness and are demons. Demons can ACT like spirits of light, and even do helpful things, but that is not their ultimate purpose.

If you take away the “D” in devil, you get evil. The ultimate purpose of demons is to lead people away from Jesus Christ. They often do this by getting people dependent upon them for guidance. If you are depending UPON, or stimulated BY, direction from demons, you are not going to listen the Lord. And that is what they want. They want people to listen to them rather than Jesus. And, like the pigs in the text, demons have led many people to their destruction.

I never saw the movie “The Exorcist.” Images tend to stick in my mind and I don’t need any more horrible ones to add to the ones I already have. But, anyway, what happens if you don’t pay the exorcist? ...You get repossessed.

We do not need an exorcist. If you have Jesus in your heart, Jesus is more powerful than any demon and Satan himself. Satan, and all the demons, know who Jesus is. As we read in James “Even the demons believe—and shudder.” Jesus can and will keep you safe from Satan if you stay close to him. Satan is like an evil dog that is chained up. If you stay away from his reach, you are safe. But if you willingly enter his chained circle, you expose yourself to his evil plans. And it’s always easier to get involved with Satan than it is to get free from him.

2. Those who willingly entered Satan’s circle

A woman who used to attend our church started watching a TV program where the host supposedly spoke to the dead. She was intrigued and never missed a program. She emailed me and asked what I thought about this. I emailed back this passage from Deuteronomy 18:10-14:

¹⁰No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, ¹¹or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. ¹²For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you.

¹³You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. ¹⁴Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so.

She wrote back that she wanted to talk to her mother who had died years ago. She refused to give up her quest and drifted away from the church.

I have spoken with many people over the years who have been into astrology, reading the future through the stars; palm reading and Tarot cards, which supposedly tell the future. One lady said it was just an interesting hobby, but she paid for readings every week and eventually she too stopped going to church.

One of the ladies in a Bible study I used to lead at Willowbrook, grew up in a Christian home here in Dryden. She had a friend who went to the spiritist community in Freeville called the Temple of Truth. One evening when she was staying overnight at her house, she went with her to a séance. She said she KNEW it was wrong from the beginning and she was scared every moment, but she went.

The medium went into a trance and said, "There is someone here who thinks this is just a hoax." She opened her eyes, pointed to the girl and said, "and it's you. ...To show you this is real, ask me something and I will answer you."

She tried to think of something that would be impossible to answer and she finally said, "My father, before he died, gave me a ring, which I lost years ago. That ring was very special to me. Tell me where it is."

The medium told her where it was. When she got home, she looked, and there it was!

I asked her if she ever went back. She said, "David, I was glad to find the ring, but I knew it was wrong to go to that place, I knew it was wrong to stay and I knew it was wrong to listen to that ...whatever it was. And whatever it was, it was NOT from God. I NEVER went back again."

Satan and his demons can do some really nice and helpful things, but their ultimate goal is to make a person as miserable as possible. The Gerasene demoniac is a case in point. Before the demons were cast out, he had the power to break shackles and chains, but he was also was a tormented individual. Torment. That is what Satan wants to do to you and those you love ...and he wants to do it forever and ever.

3. Guidance from Jesus

In the text, when the demons were cast out, he BEGGED Jesus to go with him.

Jesus appreciates being asked what you should do. If you want guidance and direction, Jesus will give it to you. Pray. Ask the Lord what he wants you to do. Jesus loves you more than you love yourself and more than any other person can possibly love you. And Jesus wants the absolute BEST for you and those you love.

The main thing I have learned regarding prayer is that I have to be willing to give up what I want in order to hear what God wants. The man in the text wanted to go with Jesus and Jesus said, "No." NO is an answer, it just wasn't the one he wanted. WAIT is an answer. (The most frustrating answer, but an answer nonetheless.) YES is an answer. (And I do get that sometimes and so will you.)

Once you get answer from God, DO IT. You will learn pretty quickly to discern the difference between your own guidance and God's guidance. I just read about a lady who was on a walk. When she went past a church, she noticed that some shrubbery out front was on fire. She ran into the church office, told the receptionist. The receptionist called 911, gave the location and explained the situation.

The dispatcher said, "You mean to tell me that there's a burning bush on your church lawn ...and you want to put it out?"

There are burning bushes and burning bushes. GOD spoke to Moses in a burning bush, but there may have been others that had simply caught on fire. How will you know whether it's God speaking?

God will never tell you to do something that is forbidden in the Bible.

God will not tell you to something that will hurt others or yourself.

If you have doubts, ask Christian friends to pray with you.

If all is a go, then do what you believe God wants you to. You may find out why right away, you may not find out till later, or you may never find out this side of heaven.

We have an old TV. Perhaps ancient would be a better adjective. How old is it? Our VCR player died and I went to Best Buy for another and one of the young salesmen "was not familiar with them." He said, "I'll get one of the 'old guys' who work here and he may know." The 'old guy', mid 30s, told us they have not had VCR players for years.

Since our VCR and DVD player was in the same machine, I asked for a DVD player. Our TV was so old they no longer made connectors that would fit. So, it was time to get a new TV. A few years ago, I had looked at them and they were so expensive I gave up. Now they are a lot LESS expensive. So my prayer for a new TV was answered with a "Yes." (Just so you know, we got free installation with the set and it took the technician an hour and a half to set it up and teach us how to make it do what we wanted it to do.)

But before I could have THAT technician come, I had to get TIME Warner to come and give us a new converter box. I have had some REALLY bad technicians from Time Warner and one really GOOD one. The good one said to call him but when I prayed, I didn't think I should. I asked three times to be sure and it was the same every time.

So, this young man came, installed the new box and took away the old. I spoke to him and I sensed some problem. I told him I was a minister and believed in Jesus. He said, "My life is a mess. I need SOMETHING to make a new man out of me. I was thinking of going to church."

I said, "Mike, MY life was mess until Jesus came into my heart. Jesus can do from the inside out what we cannot do from the outside in." I asked if I could pray for him and he said yes. I laid my hand on his shoulder, asked for healing for his marriage, asked for the Lord to help him and draw him to him. I then gave him my card and put my email address on the back.

This was last Wednesday. He hasn't called or emailed. I keep praying for him. When you do what God tells you to do, you may never know, until heaven, the amazing and wonderful things God has done through you.

Conclusion – Full armor of the gospel

I will close with these words from Ephesians 6:10-17;

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Each day I put the protection of the full armor of the gospel on my family, on you my church family and on my friends. The Bible also says, "Resist the devil and he will flee." Each day I also pray for every one in our church family to be able to resist temptation and to resist Satan so he will flee.

This morning I ask you to pray these prayers each day, too. And please include Carol and I in your prayers. Thank you.

Amen.