

Notes offered prior to the Bible Reading:

- We are brought into the synagogue for the first time in Mark's gospel account. Let's walk away with an appreciation: There is a striking continuity in worship (weekly gathering) from the Old Testament, through the time of Jesus, right up to our worship today. There was a pattern that included Scripture Reading, singing (Psalms) and explanation of God's Word.
- We witness this day the 1st miracle of Jesus that is recorded in this Bible book. It comes in tandem with Jesus teaching. The take away? Every word of this section is direct support for line 1 of Mark's gospel account: this is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. 23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!" 25 "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" 26 The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. 27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

People gathered. They came to hear God's Word read and explained. Did they have any inkling as they found their worship seats this day what they were about to witness?

Jesus taught them. People listened. The message Jesus shared blew them away. They were wonderfully staggered. To hear the description is to almost be transported to the scene. Rapt attention filled the synagogue. Excitement. They were hearing the good news of God clearly and powerfully communicated. Jesus had come to "*bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, to comfort all who mourn*" (Is. 61:1-2).

Who would want to disrupt such an awesome scene? A demon would. A demon did.

Now we better get straight what this is... and what this isn't.

What's Hollywood's portrayal of demons, and what are commonly held views in society?

One of you responded to the survey this week with the observation: people think that demons are "tricksters." You'll often see a cartoonish portrayal of demons. **[image]** What does that do? It doesn't seem like there is much to be concerned about there.



One man whom I surveyed at the mall brought out the more menacing view: people think demons are "trying to conquer the world." **[image]** This view might at least lead people take them seriously. But have we arrived at a real understanding yet: what are demons, and what is their real end goal?

1) Demons are fallen angels. They were originally created as holy servants of God. They turned against God. Jude vs.6 & 2 Peter 2:4 explain – demons are "*angels who did not keep their positions of*

authority... they sinned... and God has kept them in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

2) So demons are spirit beings (they have no bodies) that have been around since the time they were created during the 6-days of creation. (They fell sometime after the 6 days.)

3) That being the case, they possess a great deal of power and knowledge.

4) But, those same facts tell you: no demon is all-powerful, no demon is eternal, no demon is all-knowing. They just have studied human nature a very long time. And so, we learn in the Bible: we are up against powerful spiritual combatants in the devil and demons.

Did you catch that? The battle is spiritual. And do understand: the devil and his demons may seem quiet and content in a given place, for a given time, as long as false doctrine is taught and error holds sway. But as soon as God's truth is being presented to people the devil and demons are enraged. They do all they can to hinder it.

That's what happened right here [referring to the Mark ch.1:21-28].

The demon could see what was going on as Jesus taught. People were hearing the truth about their sin and God's love for them in sending a Savior. So the demon tried to interrupt, to distract, to deceive. Whatever he could attempt in an effort to mislead people - that's what he was after.

“What do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us?”

Why would the demon say “us”? There is another case a few more chapters in – at Mark ch.5 – where we hear of a man possessed by many demons. But in this instance in the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus clearly identifies that there is one demon, not many. So who is the “us”? Remember, the demon had taken control of this man who was at the synagogue. Wouldn't it be diabolical if he could get people drawn in by his words – as if Jesus is the bad guy: Jesus on one side and us on the other – to get people to start thinking Jesus had come to destroy us people too?

The demon goes on to say that Jesus is “the Holy One of God.” That should get people's attention, right? Sure, but knowing he's a demon, understand that his goal isn't to draw people to Jesus for help. Just the opposite. The demon wants to scare people away from coming to Jesus for help. How diabolically twisted! The devil and other evil spirits would try to mislead people to think: Jesus is out to punish you – He only wants to condemn you.

But Jesus did not come to throw his holiness into our faces and to condemn us by it. Jesus did not come to destroy people, but rather to free and rescue us.

The devil and demons would be real happy if we didn't get specific about this. If you would see my need, and if I would see your need, but if we'd all ignore or overlook our own individual need. You and I have broken all God's law. You and I deserve only God's wrath and punishment. With that honesty and clarity, we can really appreciate what Jesus has done for us. Be comforted, all you who mourn your sin and look to your Lord for rescue.

- *“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned because he has not believed in God's One and Only Son” John 3:17-18*
- *“Since we have flesh and blood, he shared in our humanity, so that by his death he might destroy... the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Jesus is*

merciful. He is faithful. He made the payment required to make peace between us and God. Hebrews 2:14-17

That is the truth the demon attacked.

It shouldn't surprise us that Jesus makes the demon shut up. He knows any testimony coming from the "father of lies," the devil, and the demons who lie right along with him is no good. How can anyone trust anything emitting from such a source?

The demons are only trying to undermine God's cause. They try to manipulate and mislead while using the very name God. You see that, right?

It is a common occurrence for demons to mention God. They even initiate conversation with "God" in the dialogue. This is true elsewhere in Mark. In Mark 3 we're told: "*Whenever the evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'*" They'll throw around the name Jesus even, and offer what sounds like pious praise to Jesus. Over in Mark ch.5, the demon calls out: "*Jesus, Son of the Most High God.*"

But think how big of a difference there is between simply calling Jesus "God" and giving people the truth of his name: "He saves." Jesus is the only One who offers free forgiveness and eternal life. Obviously, the demons don't want people to hear & believe that news.

So what does this all mean for you? How much, at how many points, do the attacks of demons factor into our daily life? I'd actually rephrase that question, in order to help us get the answer. What day is there that such attacks don't factor into our life?

For instance: what do people mean when they say they believe in God? I asked that question this past week in the survey. People often simply mean: "some entity outside themselves" – "a higher power" – "a creator." Jesus may even be included in the mix there – sometimes as consummate teacher (deliverer of divine truths), sometimes as the model of human behavior. But do you hear the attack? Do you hear what is absent in all that? What's missing is what all the prophets tell us: "*whoever believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 10:43).

And wherever there is religious thought, but it is void of the gospel, you better believe: the devil will be there to rush in and fill the void with his hell-bent lies. Some of these lies manifest themselves in empty Deism (that's what we just covered); others in something that may sound more sinister, but really is no different. I'll give you an example...

I fielded a call this week from a friend of our congregation who asked what she should do about a Wiccan acquaintance. And what warning did I have to share with her? Well, turns out I had seen a newspaper article online a week ago. A Wiccan individual is quoted trying to establish some understanding and common ground. She said: "Wiccans, we believe in God." She even went on to say, "We believe in Jesus." Hear the danger? Still today the devil and demons can offer some words that sound like very pious praise. Don't buy their lines!

I've read other examples from our day and age (Becker, *Wizards that Peep*). Cases are on record where evil spirits/demons were reported present through séances. Evil spirits in such cases have been willing enough to refer to God. They have even referred to Jesus. They don't have to deny his existence. They'll even sometimes encourage people to look to him as the example of what people ought to be. But you see where that leaves people? It leaves people trying to earn God's acceptance. There's no other conclusion

without the good news of what Jesus has done for us. And that – the news that Jesus is the one to trust in for salvation – is the one thing which evil spirits will throw their whole force into opposing.

Today many people deny the possibility of demons, of demonic activity and of demon possession. We don't. Demonic activity is something that individuals to whom I've ministered in all 3 areas I've shared God's good news (Utah, New Mexico and now here in NC) have encountered.

But we should also be quick to point out: demonic activity is not limited to demon possession or a demon showing his presence in a place by strange, unexplainable happenings. There is so much more.

Ephesians 6 describes that: *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil, the powers of this dark world."*

The demons may try any number of tactics in their battle with us. Instead of showing themselves, they may try to "fly under the radar." For example, they may choose to try and convince people that they don't exist. Or...

They may try to "counterfeit" themselves as messengers from God. We're told the devil masquerades as an angel of light. Demons deceive by misleading masses of people or individual souls to follow false teachings.

"The flaming arrows of the evil one" are steadily aimed and shot at human hearts. The goal of all their activity is to keep people from God's saving truth or to overthrow the faith in us who trust in Jesus as Savior.

So here is an important reminder: **[slide →]**

Where the word of God is preached in its truth and purity, there the devil and demons will be most busy at their work. We see that reflected on this day on record in Mark ch.1. We should expect the same pattern throughout our days.

Be reminded, then, of *"the gospel, which by God's grace you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to Word you've heard preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. Here is the news that is of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred..."* (1 Cor.15).

"This is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it" (1 Peter 5).

How?

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.... With the belt of truth, with the breastplate of righteousness, with the gospel of peace... take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one; take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." (Eph.6)

