

Mark 1:21-28. Jan 31 2021. Healthy perspective on demons

Do you remember the parable where, right in the middle of the action, Jesus describes a *demon* showing up? Yeah. To teach an important spiritual truth, Jesus pictures a demon *like a bird who is snatching up seed*. He explained: “A farmer went out to sow seed... some fell along the path, and birds came and ate it up. ... Some people are like seed along the path, where the Word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and snatches away the Word...” (4:3-15)

“...hearing a parable with demons in it... demons snatching God’s Word out of people’s ears... Jesus wants us to understand that we [may] meet more of these demons every time we hear the Word of Jesus.” – *2000 Demons: No Match For My Savior*, E. Allen Sorum

“What is the demons’ main goal, their keenest desire? ...[to] take us away from our God. ... We may get distracted from this overarching strategy of the demons, but they never are.” - E. Allen Sorum

In the middle of the Bible account in front of us (Mark 1:21-28), an unclean spirit – a demon – shows up. And we are suddenly face-to-face with a topic so vitally important *for us* to understand.

Let’s get some perspective. In the wider culture around us there are several popularly-held, dangerous opinions on the topic of demon-existence and demon-activity. The one is denial of the devil and demons. Some who identify as Christian deny that Satan is real and intent on hurting people.

Another opinion fraught with danger is the view that the devil and evil spirits are pretty harmless, or worse even, that they can be friendly or a help.

What do you think of cartoonish portrayals of the devil or demons? Do such portrayals, to any degree, indicate or lend to a false perception by some that there isn’t much to be concerned about from demons?

Match.com produced advertisements recently featuring a devil. I say “a devil” and not “the devil” because it is a far cry from *the real devil*. It might gain a laugh. But is it feeding the impression that some hold that the devil and demons are harmless, or even... interesting, or even... a potential friend?

“A friend?”, you might wonder. Well, there are many who seek out connection with evil spirits, whether understanding what they are doing or not.

- A World magazine article, Jan 30th edition 2021 (p.26), discusses the recently released Netflix show “Surviving Death.” Note: the show does not direct people to Jesus. Episode topics include Near Death Experiences, but most episodes are about various claims to communicate with the dead.
- The NY Times, in a Jan 15 (2021) article, cites: “a surprising number of people say they’ve consulted fortune tellers: 1 in 5 Americans according to a 2017 YouGov survey.”
- The article adds: in 2019 the market research firm IBISWorld reported that the psychic activities industry - including telling of fortunes, conducting séances, etc. – “had revenue of \$2.2 billion.”
- And where are some people turning for help in the midst of the present pandemic we are going through? According to data from Yelp, interest in businesses in the “supernatural readings” category more than doubled this past April. And one particular online marketplace for psychics reported a steep rise in customers. www.nytimes.com/2021/01/15/style/did-you-predict-this.html

What are we to make of all this?

People might be confused about activities like these. But what’s going on when people seek spirit contact through such activities, or others like Ouija boards or other things marketed as games like Charlie-Charlie (which is essentially the same activity as a Ouija board)? Realize, since the souls – the spirits – of departed people go to heaven or hell when they die, they aren’t around here on earth. And God has told us the way He communicates with us, giving us what He wants us to know, is through His Word right here, the Bible. The only possible spirits left, then, that might just reply to invitations for contact like the ones opened via Ouija boards, Charlie-Charlie, and séances, are? Demons, if any are present at the place. And you better believe they’ll snatch up opportunities which they think will serve their ultimate goal.

You see why it is important that we talk about this subject, right? We want to come to and maintain a healthy perspective when it comes to demons and demon activity. What is the healthy perspective when it comes to demons?

- Skepticism or denial (which leaves one thinking they are no threat)? No.
- Curiosity or engagement (thinking they are friendly or even helpful)? No.
- Neither of those; instead, awareness and avoidance.

Think of what that means. Since skepticism and denial of the devil and demons are popular, you may very well face people who judge you as gullible, unsophisticated and unenlightened for believing in the existence of evil spirits, demons. And then other people may look at you as out-of-touch when you decline to join in or you say something to point out the danger of an activity like fortune telling or calling on spirits. "It's just a little fun, harmless adventure," they may claim. But God makes clear otherwise.

Let's talk about what this Bible account in Mark ch.1 in front of us reveals about what kind of enemy we face in the demons and about their ultimate goal.

The timing of this demon's outburst should be seen as no coincidence. We're told at the beginning of vs.23: "Just then!" What was happening *just before* the demon started all its hollerin'?

People were hearing Jesus teach. They were receiving the truth about their sin and God's love for them in sending a Savior. See why the demon chooses this moment to raise its voice. He interrupts. He tries to distract... and to deceive. What was he up to? Attempting every effort in his power to lead people away from hearing God's saving truth. That's what demons are always after.

Take the demon's words as an example. Does the exchange seem confusing at first? The demon says that Jesus is "the Holy One of God." It's true. It might even sound like praise. But the demon's goal isn't to draw people to Jesus. Just the opposite. The demon wants to scare people away from Jesus. Think back to the other words of the demon, and this becomes clear. "Have you come to *destroy us*?" "Us," the demon says. But there was only one demon that we hear identified present this day. And who were the individuals hearing this statement, this declaration about Jesus? The people gathered in the church this day heard it. "Have you come to destroy us?"

How diabolically twisted! The devil and other evil spirits *would* try to lead people to think: Jesus is only out to punish, condemn, destroy.

This demon is trying to manipulate and mislead using the very name God. And this isn't the only time we hear a demon throw around the name "God." 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 identify Jesus as God. But they don't – they won't – point people to the truth: "He cares. He is here to save you." The demons will try everything in their power to keep people from hearing & believe that news.

Jesus makes the demon shut up. (Comforting? Yes.) The demon is up to no good. The very last action from the demon proves it also. Jesus commands the demon out of the man. And the demon must go. (Comforting? Yes.) But as the demon goes, it gets in its one-last shot at causing embarrassment or pain by convulsing the man. Clearly, the demon's only intent is to hurt people.

So where do things stand as we take a step back. We've heard one voice this day that offered a lot of noise – crying out distraction and deception. Harm the only intent.

But when Jesus' voice cries out, look what it reveals. To those gathered in Capernaum, and to us gathered here today, He speaks: truth, healing and peace. His care is everywhere. Look at His love! And He gets the final word in the exchange with the demon. So His supreme power is clear, sending the demon packing and relieving this man whom the demon had oppressed.

Expand your view out from this day, and think of other times Jesus' voice cries out. He cries out from the cross, "My God, I am forsaken." He didn't come to condemn us; He came to take our condemnation. He cries out, "It is finished!" He completed His mission to take our punishment and give us His perfect life.

Cling to your trust in him! Let nothing move you from your faith in His saving work for you. He is your Way, the one and only, to eternal life. Hold on to His Word. Treasure every bit of it. Watch that it doesn't get snatched away. Live in repentance, where you're honest about the ways you've fallen for the devil's noise – the demon's distractions. Be always ready to hear God through His Word identify where you've let down your guard, and confess when you've fallen for a deception the devil and the demons fire at us. And rest in Jesus' forgiveness.

We should be quick to point out: demonic activity is not limited to demon possession or a demon showing his presence – like in the synagogue in Capernaum. 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 choose to try and convince people that they don't exist. Regardless, they are always at their business of promoting lies. The goal of all their activity is to distract people from God's saving truth or to challenge the faith in us who trust in Jesus as our Savior.

So what is our defense? Take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Take heart! Your defense is greater than your enemies – for it is straight from God.

“Do you ever think of the gospel as your anti-demon weapon?” - E. Allen Sorum. “...the good news of Jesus. The gospel. The message that promises forgiveness and hope to the browbeaten, that gives peace to the shuddering soul.”

Reflect on His promises to you in His Word and in your baptism. Read a Psalm in the morning as part of your start to the day. Say a blessing, calling out the name of our saving God, and pointing to what He has done to make us His own. Sing a hymn or two during the day, or listen to them. Or do that before you go to sleep at night. Hear the Bible truths fill your heart and mind. Let the Word of Christ dwell in your richly. And thereby...

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24