

Jesus Disrupts Demonic Plans

by Stewart Ruch

Jesus has ultimate victory over demons and Christians must understand and engage with demons in the right ways through His authority and the power of the cross.

Duration: 28:28

Scripture: Mark 1:21

Topics: "Demons"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the reality of demons and unclean spirits as depicted in the Bible. He emphasizes that these entities are real and have a menacing and destructive presence. The preacher shares a personal experience of feeling a menacing presence in his room, which he believes was an encounter with an evil entity. He highlights the importance of understanding the reality of the demonic and unclean spirits in order to fully grasp the way of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

Transcript

Several years ago, early on in my ministry, I was invited to teach for a week up at a camp in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The camp ended up being full, so I was actually asked to stay about 15 minutes away from the camp, so they put me up in an absolutely forgotten sort of rural motel. It had seen much, much better days.

As I drove up to it, it literally was just a kind of creepy place. I got into my room, and it was clear from the staleness of the air that it had not been open probably for several weeks, if not months, and I just had a general feeling of unease about the whole place, but I talked myself through it and just sort of tried to talk myself down from an irrational place. I had a roommate.

He was actually a kind of prominent national Christian scholar who was staying with me, and he stayed in the room next to mine. About midway through the week, we were seeing a lot of things happen for the students that I was teaching and others were teaching, breakthroughs in their life, changes in their lives, a great sense of traction when it came to them growing closer to Christ or coming to know Christ. Not all of them did, and about midway through that week, Wednesday night, I was sleeping.

I'd gone to bed. I'm a very deep sleeper, but I woke up abruptly, and I just had that feeling like you have perhaps before that someone's in the room. Someone had interrupted.

I thought maybe it was my roommate. I looked, though, and there was no one to be seen. I get the feeling of an unmistakable presence in the room would not go away, and as I sort of woke up, the presence felt like a menacing presence.

It was a sense of anger and a desire to come against me from this presence. I couldn't see it. Again, if you looked in the room, you just seen a guy sat bolt upright like this and nothing else that you could see, but I felt something palpably, and the feeling moved from sort of disorientation to absolute terror.

I was extremely afraid. I just felt terrified. I finally got my wits about me, and I realized there's something unclean.

There's something demonic in this room right now, and I cried out to Jesus. I just prayed out loud, and it was actually hard to pray even though it would seem so easy to do. I had to get my words about me, and I was just, I was thrown off.

It was like I was in a storm, and I finally just said, Jesus, Jesus, please send that thing away. The room felt vacated. I heard my roommate next door in his sleep go, whoa, and then it was quiet.

I prayed that whatever that presence was, he would continue to move past my roommate. I mean, I didn't want him to visit him either. I asked him how his night of sleep was.

The next day, he said he was fine, and I had to reflect later, what's that? How do I orient and contextualize that experience, and as we read the Bible, some of you are long-term students of the Bible. Some of you may be very brand new to the Bible. You don't know the books of the Bible, but as we read the Bible, one thing that you will find over and over again is the reality and the presence of not just evil, but evil entities, beings of some kind, usually invisible, although we do see them visualized in some books like the book of Revelation.

That's the last book of the Bible, in which they have menacing, destructive presences, and even actions. They are called unclean spirits, or synonymously, demons, and it's really important, if you're wanting to understand the way of Christ and the way of the kingdom, what Christ has established here on earth to reign, you understand the reality of the demonic and unclean spirits. Here's what's interesting.

There's 66 books in this Bible. This Bible just means little books. You won't find one book about demons, but they're actually very important to understand.

You won't even find a whole chapter in one of these books on demons. What you will find is the presence of God and the New Testament, the person of Jesus Christ, confronting demons, correcting demons, overpowering demons, and you'll actually find his followers who have given their allegiance to Jesus doing the exact same thing with demons. You learn about demons by Jesus's confrontation with them and ultimately by his victory over them.

It's very important that we're clear from the beginning of this teaching that Jesus in the cross and the resurrection has ultimate, utter victory over the demonic. It's also important to understand demons have authority. Jesus has greater authority, but you must ask yourself reflectively, who has greater authority in my life? Who has had greater authority in my life? And who has it now? Demons have authority.

Jesus has greater authority. Who has the greater authority in my life? Turn to your bulletin in Mark chapter one. We'll look at the authority of demons, verses 23 to 24 from this passage, and then we'll look at the

greater authority of Jesus, verses 25 to 27.

Here's what we learn about demons in this passage and then extrapolating from this passage in other passages throughout the scriptures. First and foremost, we learn that demons are spiritual beings. Indeed, verse 23, this man has an unclean spirit, which is to say that they cannot usually be seen.

They are spiritual. Often we talk about being materialist and we think that means we like to buy things a lot. We're consumeristic.

But the root meaning of materialist is that there's a fixation or an actual faith or trust put in things that are material and material alone. This is really interesting. For these folks in this context, first century ancient Middle East, Near East, in this context here, they're astonished by Jesus but utterly familiar with unclean spirits.

For many of us, we're familiar in some capacity, whether you're new to this or not, with Jesus and at least who he is or some idea about him, but we're absolutely astonished by unclean spirits. And for us, particularly as Americans, culturally, because we have such a commitment to the material reality, which then translates into a focus on producing, consumer, et cetera, which isn't necessarily intrinsically wrong, but because we're so focused on matter and the material, we actually find this a bit hard to believe. This puts us in a distinct minority historically throughout the ages and geographically now.

Most nations in the world have some baseline belief in what they may call the occult, what they may call it spiritism, what they might just call spiritual reality. It's baseline trust, baseline belief in this. Baseline apprehension this happens.

Not so for us. As a matter of fact, this can cause us as Americans to first of all read this and just not really want to delve into it. It can cause us to be cavalier about the reality of the demonic.

And this cavalier kind of posture toward the demonic can play out in lots of ways. We may listen to music that exalts in some way or romanticizes or plays kind of playful with the reality of the demonic. We may watch movies in which the demonic is depicted and find it interesting or thrilling as opposed to rightly disturbing.

And that which Christians who live under the reign and the authority of Jesus would never want to expose themselves to. Demons have a kind of intelligence we see. They know that Jesus is from Nazareth.

They know that that's his hometown. They know his name, Jesus. As a matter of fact, their intelligence extends to some apprehension of theological realities.

They rightly call him the Holy One of God. In just a few verses, Mark will say the demons knew him. They don't just know Jesus.

They'll know other followers of Jesus. As a matter of fact, there's a follower named Paul, one of the key leaders and teachers of the early Christian church. And Paul will be in a confrontation with the demonic.

And they'll say, we know Jesus and we know Paul. We know your name, we know who you are. Demons can cause physical symptoms.

We see that the scriptures teach that there were those who were crippled because of a demon. There were those who were blind because of a demon. Those who could not speak, they were dumb because of

a demon.

The scriptures do not teach that everyone who has those physical maladies has a demon. But they do teach that those can be caused by demonic presences. Demons are bullies.

They're cruel. There's nothing fanciful or cute about the demonic. They seek to prey on children.

They seek to prey on the infirm. Seek to prey on the ignorant. The ignorant of those who don't know God, who don't know the wonders of God, the love of God, the grace of God.

They seek our destruction. They cannot have ultimate control over a human person. They cannot ultimately control the will of a man or a woman, but they can have profound influence in varying degrees.

And they must be understood at the level in which the scriptures give us understanding. They must be engaged in the right ways through Jesus and by Jesus. They must not be ignored.

Demons, we see, can connect to people. Paul, again, the teacher I mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10, says to the people he's writing to, it's a church in Corinth, he says to them, I don't want you to have communion, participation, close relationship with demons. I don't want you to have that, which of course presupposes one can have that.

And very likely in that church, there were those who did have that, and Paul had seen that. The Christian thinker of 20th, 21st century, Leanne Payne, who's done a lot of writing on this, and she breaks this demonic connection to persons into three, I think, very helpful arenas. The first is demonic oppression.

Paul, again, describes this in a book called Ephesians, where he says that we wrestle against spiritual forces of evil. That's oppression. The idea of oppression is that something coming from the outside, staying on the outside of your heart, your mind, your personhood, your body, but they're pushing against you.

You're wrestling against spiritual forces of wickedness. Oppression happens consistently and constantly to followers of Christ, many times the follower of Christ not knowing what it is that's happening to them. What does oppression feel like, or what does it look like? Well, it can look like many things.

It often looks like a distraction. If you're called to a particular gospel work in the building of your family, or a particular gospel work in your art, or a particular gospel work that you're called to in the marketplace, or whatever it is, as a student, the demonic will seek to distract you from that gospel work. It will seek to not look demonic, but have demonic influence by keeping you from doing the work of the love of God in the gospel.

Demonic often seeks to distract. It will seek to depress you. There is a way in which the demonic, and I don't fully understand how this works, but it has influence on our feelings.

It's very powerful and very important. So the one can feel unnecessarily depressed. Now, there are physiological reasons and chemical reasons for depression as well, or anxiety.

But the demonic can engage that, interact with it, or just bring it for reasons that we don't always know. The demonic can disorient. That's the experience I had that night when I woke up.

You're disoriented, you're lost. You don't have your physical or spiritual, emotional bearings, you just feel swept up. The demonic can actually influence our dreaming.

Remember, demons are bullies. When are you very prone and vulnerable? When you're sleeping. And the demonic has the ability to somehow influence our dreams.

We can have demonic-influenced dreams, dreams of terror, dreams of fear, dreams of anxiety, dreams of horrible things happening, graphic images, particularly if we have exposed ourselves to graphic movies, graphic websites, graphic novels, whether it's pornographic or violent graphic, or even relationally inappropriately graphic. Demons can stir those images up. They can come to us when we're sleeping and prone.

I'm gonna stop on this point just briefly because as we were worshiping, I have a particular heart this morning, and I don't wanna limit this too much because I think this can apply across the board because we all fight oppression, but I think there's some of you who are artists. It's my sense this morning. And you're being oppressed.

As an artist, you're a maker, right? So you imitate God in his making. It's part of your calling as an artist. And you make for the glory and the beauty of God.

Your work is extraordinarily important to the advancement of the kingdom, to the evangelization of those who don't know about God. And I have a very strong sense that there are some artists gathered here today. You're here, you're called to make for the kingdom of God, and you are oppressed.

Some of you have an oppression of depression. Some of your work is drying up. You're not able to create and to make as you were.

I don't know if it's writing music, or if it's drawing, or if it's painting. I don't have a particularity there. I do have, there may be some musicians, but there's other artists as well.

And the Lord wants to speak to you very clearly about the authority of Jesus. To be very clear about the authority you're putting yourself under, and for you to know that this work that is being stilted, and this work that is being held back, can be released by the authority of Jesus and freedom from demons. I'll talk more about that.

I'm gonna get to that. But I had to stop and talk to you. I think there's somebody who's struggling with this, more than one, I think.

Okay, that's oppression. Then we see that there's demonization. Demonization is a next level, where there's kind of recurring internal influence of the demonic.

Indeed, new Christians, Christians who have not been prayed for in particular ways, can suffer from this kind of, it's not possession, it's not what I'm saying, but a kind of internal recurring influence from the demonic. The early church recognized this, so that those who had converted to Christ, they were in the process of being baptized and received in the life of the church, they were called catechumens, would actually in their process, after having converted, but waiting their baptism, they would have the laying on of hands, that's what they called it, they would lay hands on them, and they would pray for them to be released from demonic spirits. Because the church understood then, as she understands now, that in our past, we can open ourselves up to demonic, unclean spirits, primarily through immoral behavior.

So sexual relations prior to marriage. Substance abuse. Engagement, again, with graphic images that are not true, beautiful, noble, glorious.

A set in envy or jealousy. A relational idol, it's all about idolatry and idols that we give our faith and our trust to and in return, they give us an unclean spirit, potentially. They're linked together very clearly in the teachings of the scriptures.

And they have to be released. They have to be removed. And they can be removed.

I was present once for the prayer of a young man. He had been far from God, he had recently returned to Christ, he was in the process of growing sanctification, of growing, becoming holy, and seeking after God. He was at a conference, and the conference wasn't how to get rid of your demons, that wasn't the name of the conference.

It was a conference for growing in Christ. A time came for prayer, and this man was being prayed for, I was in the room, and they laid hands on him. And as they were praying for him, they began to pray in some of his past.

It became very clear, it was like watching somebody with food poisoning, that's the best I can describe it, where there was something inside of them that had to get out of them. In this case, and it isn't always this case when a demon comes out, it was very dramatic. Physically, he had to be held down by four other men.

He lurched back like this, this was right here in Wheaton, lurched back like this, and then just roared, it was a scream. It was heart-rending, heart-rending. And then, like in food poisoning, it had been expelled.

He was okay. He was exhausted, he looked, he was at peace. It became clear later that he had been engaged in premarital sexual relations.

An unclean presence had taken up residence in his rebellion, rebelling against God's glorious design for sexuality. And it had taken hold of his heart in some way. Was he controlled by his unclean spirit? No, he was not, but he was influenced.

And God, as he came to Christ and walked to Christ, wanted to free him. Finally, there is possession, and I think that's what we have in chapter one of Mark. This man is possessed.

This man has not known Jesus. Jesus is just being revealed here on earth. Possession can happen for one who has not known Christ, where there could be a full sort of exertion and control of the person.

Not utter, and we'll see this in his case, but a profound control of the personality. The demon speaks to the person, the demon can act through the person, bring a crippling again, a blindness, whatever it might be, a convulsing. This man is clearly possessed.

And what we see is that demons ultimately are threatened by Jesus. They ask Jesus, I know, or they say, I know who you are, the Holy One of God, to which Jesus would rightly say, yes. But before that, they've asked him, have you come to destroy us? And Jesus' answer is yes.

I've come to destroy you. Yes. You will no longer have power like you've had before.

See, they knew, as we don't understand the authority of Jesus, they knew he was the Holy One of God, but their knowing, their intelligence was profoundly limited. What they could not know, what they did not know, is what we can know with utter and sparkling clarity, that the Holy One of God had come to earth to give up himself, that the Holy One of God actually wanted to share his holiness rather than condemn the creatures who were unholy, that is humanity, that is to say that we are in sin, that he wanted to share his holiness so much so that he would go to the cross and die in the absolute center of the gospel, the goodness of God, for us. They didn't know that.

They couldn't understand that. These demons, which are small and cramped and cruel and bullying, couldn't understand a God who was holy and yet absolutely ready to wholly give himself to humanity. That they did not get, and that they misunderstood.

And that was their peril and their downfall. It was then and it is now. For the cross of Jesus Christ has absolutely overcome the enemy.

Yes, we're very clear at the cross, if you've studied this at all, that Jesus is substituted for sinful humanity. That's true. We're also very clear that he has sacrificed for us like a lamb upon the altar.

That is absolutely true. But what seems to be the most profound, driving truth of the New Testament and the early writers is that he is victorious over the enemy. He has absolute victory.

Augustine, early church thinker, fourth century, puts it this way. He says the cross was like a mousetrap and Jesus' death was like the bait and Augustine says the devil rejoiced over the death of Jesus. And by rejoicing over it, he came close and snap, the cross of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Christ broke his neck like a mouse's neck in a mousetrap.

Enjoy that image. It's a really good image. You see what he's saying? He's saying that the devil's a mouse.

He's a rodent and his demons might have rodents behind him. And his intelligence is so limited that he thinks that at our greatest moment, it's his greatest moment, that at God's weakest moment, it's actually God's strongest moment. I give the Holy One of Israel, yes, I am.

Have you come to destroy us? Yes, I have. Yes, I have. The cross is like a great and cosmic mousetrap.

The win's for us, the victory. From oppression, from demonization, yes, from those who are possessed. Okay, so, if you're listening, you're going, oh, there's still a lot of demonic things happening, aren't there, Stuart? I mean, there's a lot of evil happening.

How does that work if Jesus has ultimate, complete authority? Is Jesus' authority limited? No. Is it circumspect? No. But Jesus has given us the choice as to under whose authority we will live.

So if you give the demonic authority, it will take it. And if you ask the demonic to leave, it has to leave in the name of Jesus. Look, look, this man's possessed.

He's not just oppressed, he's not just demonized, he's possessed. But look at verse 23, which actually has the gospel in it. And immediately, there was in the synagogue a man.

Do you see that the will's not been utterly obliterated? There's still enough in that man, somehow or some way. Mark doesn't tell us, I wish he did, to find his way to the synagogue. He found his way to the Holy One of Israel.

He found his way to Jesus. He had heard of him, this is when he teaches with an authority not like the scribes and the Pharisees. He knew something about him.

We don't know if he crawled his way there, we don't know if he ran his way there, we don't know what he looked like when he got there, but he got into the presence of Jesus. He chose his way into the presence of Jesus. And once he made it there, do you see how Jesus acts so quickly to free him from these bullying and destructive realities? We can choose our way there in Jesus and by his power and under his authority, but outside of his authority, oh, the perils spiritually.

Kath and I received a phone call from someone, one of your brothers here, I'll call him Robert, that wasn't his name. And he said, I'm about to make the most kind of momentous event of my life, it's gonna be very, very important coming up, and I know it's right, I know God wants it, but I can't quite get there, I can't do it, I can't step into this next season of my life. So would you pray for me? And we had a long relationship with him, we said, of course we will.

So he's gonna come over to the house the night before Kath had been in prayer, and she felt like the Lord said to her, there's a demon, he's got a demonic influence that's keeping him from this next step. So when he got there, what we didn't say, it was, you know, before we even get started, we think you have a demon, so sit here on the couch and let's just take care of this, we didn't do that. Because again, there's no book about demons, right? It's about Jesus, so we started with Jesus.

And we asked him about his walk with the Lord and he shared very carefully, and we asked him about his practices of recent and his moral life, and we asked him to be very transparent, and he was. And then we laid hands on him. And you never, ever as Christians, going about the work of the gospel that you're all called to do, ever want to underestimate the power of laying hands on someone in the name of Jesus.

One of the most powerful, powerful ministry tools we've been given. So we laid hands on him very quietly on our couch, and we asked the Lord to come and be present. We didn't do anything that anyone here could not do who knows Jesus.

And as he prayed, he became clear. It's like there's something in me. It's like there's something preventing me.

Well, because Katharine had a clarity prior to this, we were ready for that. And we began to pray for him, that whatever this something was would emerge, it would get clearer. And through an hour or so of prayer, and I won't go into all the details, it became very clear there had been a demonic presence that had actually come upon him as a child, a very young child.

We were able to identify this presence. He, in the name of Jesus, commanded this presence to leave his heart, his influence, his mind. We supported that in prayer.

And this was very quiet. He did arch back a little bit, and then there was just a release. That unclean spirit was gone.

He was profoundly freed. He hasn't been the same since that prayer time. Katharine was reflecting on it afterwards, and she made a really insightful point.

She just said, you know, he had been working with the Lord, spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting and Bible reading for a couple of years, really seeking God's heart profoundly. He had chosen the authority of

Jesus. He had prepared himself for that life-changing moment.

Be very clear about which authority you're living under, and then live under that authority. Choose that which is beautiful, noble, good, true, pure. Embrace it.

Choose what authority you're living under. If you're being oppressed right now, then receive the laying on of hands. We have prayer ministers, that's what we do.

This is the laying on of hands on Sundays on the side throughout the week. You can have someone pray for you here at resurrection, the laying on of hands. If you're being oppressed, dreams, disorientation, depression, whatever it might be, have someone lay hands on you and pray for you, whatever pressure might be there.

If you think, because of past decisions that you've made, that you might have a kind of internal influence of the demonic, we can pray for you on that. You don't have to live with that, and we'd love to. You can reach out to a prayer minister here, reach out to Deacon Val, and be assured that yes, Jesus is the Holy One of God, and yes, he's come to destroy the demonic.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

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