

October 23, 2016

“Lord over the Host of Hell”

Matthew 8:28-34

FCF: Confusion about demonic powers

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Through Jesus’ healing of the demoniacs,
(anchor) we see we can truly trust Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

A caricature is a sketch of a person in which their more striking characteristics have been exaggerated. They are often political, cartoonish and two-dimensional, meant to mark and criticize their subject. They can certainly be amusing. And they are just as often misleading.

Consider our caricature of demons. On the one hand, we have horns and a tail, red suits and hooves. On the other hand is a dualistic idea of demonic forces on an equal footing with the Lord in a battle of equals. These are both caricatures - cartoonish and misleading. The Christian vision is deeper than that - deeper, sobering and encouraging. And it grounds us in reality.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 8:28-34](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew is proclaiming, “The Kingdom has come. And Jesus is the King.” Jesus has proven it in both word and deed, through His teaching and through His miracles. Here in chapter 8, we have seen several examples - His cleansing of a leper, His healing of a centurion’s servant and of Peter’s mother-in-law, and the calming of a storm. Each of these are signs of three things - Jesus’ character, a foretaste of His kingdom, and His authority.

What we need to do is to connect the dots. Think of those puzzles with the numbered dots on the page. Our kids greatly enjoyed them, especially before bedtime and on road trips. They can be settling and satisfying. You move from one dot to another in numerical progression and a picture forms. You see something that wasn’t there before. Why? You connected the dots.

That’s the very thing we need to do here - to connect the dots, to move through a logical progression that is settling and satisfying. We need to be able to say, “If Jesus has power and authority over that - some great thing - then surely He must have power and authority over this.”

Last week, we looked at 8:23-27, Jesus’ calming of the storm. This was a “seismos” - a great shaking upon the water, a storm that was more than just a storm, an event that then leads in more ways than one to our text this morning, showing us that Jesus is Lord over the hosts of hell. And that through Jesus’ healing of these two demoniacs, we see we can truly trust Him.

I. THE REALITY OF DEMONIC POWERS

But before we can consider Jesus’ rule and authority over the demonic powers, we need to wrestle with the reality of demonic powers. What are we talking about here? Are they real?

A) Background

To get at that, we need to take a step back and consider the broader background.

1. Origin

What is the origin of the host of hell, these demonic forces? Where did they come from?

a. Angels

Let's start with angels - personal, intelligent, moral beings, created by God. Like mankind, there was a focal test. Some passed. They now worship God and render service to His people.

b. Satan

But some did not pass that focal test. Satan is their leader. He has several revealing titles: the evil one, the father of lies, the tempter, accuser, destroyer, the prince and god of this world.

c. Demons

The demons are his servants, other fallen angels, all cast forever out of God's presence.

2. Agenda

That's their origin. What is their agenda? What are they after? What do they do?

a. Hostility to God

They are hostile to God, bent on disrupting His purposes and desecrating His image bearers.

b. Tyranny on earth

So, flowing from this hostility to God, is a tyranny on earth - inflicting and exploiting physical and spiritual suffering. Deceiving, discouraging, muddling the minds of their victims.

B) Case Study

All of which we can see in this case study our text provides ([READ Matthew 8:28](#)).

1. Effect

Think of the effect these demons had had upon these men - the suffering, physically and socially cut off from society. It's a foretaste of hell. Or the effect upon this community - more concerned with financial loss than anything else, convinced Jesus meant harm and begging Him to leave.

2. Upsurge

Now, you may wonder why such things occur with such frequency in the Gospel accounts, more so than before or since. Keep in mind what is happening, the return of the rightful King. This provokes a desperate attempt by Satan and his host to dig in their heels and hold their ground.

The point being that this is real. To take the Bible seriously is to take demons seriously.

Illustration:

We occasionally read of such things on the mission frontier. And I would argue that this may be what lies behind so many of our ghost stories. Let me relay a story Megan Arnold told me. It was a first hand account from a well respected professor at RTS-Charlotte ([READ quote](#)):

When (Dr. Kelly) and his wife, (Caroline), were attempting to buy the family home on his family's old plantation property, the current owner, who had put a lot of money into renovations, was asking a considerable amount for the house. One reason, they later discovered for her wanting to sell it was that there were mysterious electrical issues which would go on the house, lights sometimes not working and other issues I'm not sure about. No electrician could find anything wrong. In addition, she had invited a couple to stay in her house during an absence, and after one night, so many weird "electrical" issues occurred that they were spooked and left. After this incident, she determined to lower the price considerably, so that (the Kelly's) were able to finally afford it. I'm not sure how long after they moved in the following

occurred: (The Kelly's) were sure that the electrical issues in the home were due to an evil spirit. They called the elders of the church here (this verified by one of the elders in my hearing) and prayed over the home. They heard a shatter in an uninhabited bedroom which legend says had belonged to an ancestor who had committed suicide in that room. Upon entering the room, they discovered a hole in the window. After inspecting, they felt sure the window had broken from the inside towards the out as evidenced by the glass shards being outside the window instead of inside. They never had the electrical issues again. This story was told in utter seriousness.

Application:

Now I know that, even after relaying this, some of you are still skeptical and dismissive. And I would argue that that is a mark of our arrogance, our chronological and cultural snobbery that is far too slow to believe such things. And, as a result, we are far too open to such influence.

R. C. Sproul once asked a class, "How many of you believe in God?" The majority raised their hand. Then he asked, "How many of you believe in the devil?" Only a couple raised their hand to that. To which he said, "If you believe that God is an invisible, personal being who has the capacity to influence people for good, why do you find it hard or incredible to imagine that there is an invisible, personal being who has the capacity to influence people for evil?"

And I would add this, speaking to Christians. You say you believe that the Bible is the Word of God. So why would we believe it is true in all these other areas but dismiss it here?

If we could see how that cuts us off from reality and robs us of even greater confidence and comfort. For again, through Jesus' healing of the demoniacs, we see we can truly trust Him.

II. JESUS' REIGN OVER DEMONIC POWERS

Which then finally brings us to the second point, Jesus' reign over demonic powers.

A) His Authority

Let's go back to our text and consider His authority (**READ Matthew 8:28-29**).

1. The words from the demons

a) The question

Note the words from the demons. Their question betrays hatred and fear. They clearly know their time is coming and their fate is sure. And they know who Jesus is as the rightful King.

b) The request

And note their request (**READ Matthew 8:30-31**). They plead not for mercy but merely a delay in their destruction. What then of the destruction of the pigs? Clearly, the demons were seeking not a new host but merely a way to express their rage. They just want to burn the house down.

2. The word from Jesus

a) A glimpse

Now note the word from Jesus (**READ Matthew 8:32**). This is a terrifying picture of what held these men, of what may have awaited them, and of what awaits Satan and the demonic forces.

b) A command

But the critical point is that Jesus refuses to bargain with the demons. He speaks a command and theirs is an instant response. All of which makes clear His dominion and dominance over all.

B) Our Security

That is His authority. What of our security? What does this mean for His followers?

1. Jesus' victory over all His foes

What we read here anticipates what was to be accomplished later. (READ Colossians 2:13-15)

Through Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, hell's host have been broken. Our debt has been paid and the demonic powers have been trounced, defeated and publicly shamed.

2. Our union with Jesus

And we have been made one with this conquering King. Our union with Him means we share in the victory that Jesus has won. So though the demons are still active, we have nothing to fear.

So there is the reality of the demonic powers. But Jesus utterly reigns over them.

Illustration:

Think of it this way. On June 6, 1944, the Allied forces bravely invaded the beaches of Normandy, France. It was D-Day. Once the beachhead was established, the outcome of the war was sure. The German army would resist and the Allies would feel that resistance, but their final defeat was inevitable. That, in many ways, is where we are now in this period of history.

Application:

So what does that mean in terms of the demons' hatred of God and their resistance to His purposes now? We need to throw out the caricatures. Satan and his hordes can resist and give trouble of all kinds but they cannot thwart what God has willed and determined will be.

But what does that mean in terms of the demons' hostility to God's people? Can a Christian be possessed by a demon like we see here? No. We can be harassed, tempted, accused, and deceived. But we can never be controlled. We are one with Jesus, indwelt by His Spirit.

What of the demons' work should we be concerned? Not the dramatic but the ordinary. That is, their work to make us question God's goodness and keep us beholden to our idols.

But here too we can be encouraged. For Jesus is the King and the purposes of the King for His people cannot be thwarted. Through what we learn here, we see we can truly trust Him.

CONCLUSION:

I'm not sure where this saying came from, but it was likely sometime in the late 1960's. "If we can put a man on the moon, surely we can..." and then you fill in the blank. Here lately, we might even say, "If we can put a robot on Mars..." Even this past week, *ExoMars*, a joint European-Russian venture looking for signs of life on Mars, put an atmospheric probe into orbit and a stationary lander on the surface. And even though the lander was lost in a hard landing, there's still much to be said for what was accomplished. So again, "If we can put a robot on Mars, surely we can..." and then you fill in the blank. It's the "greater to lesser" argument. The idea being that if this greater thing can be done, surely these smaller things can be done as well.

It's connecting the dots. Think how this would have played out for those who witnessed these events that day. Imagine the encouragement for these two former demoniacs. They'd been

freed from terrible oppression. Surely they could call back upon that for the rest of their days whenever things got hard. Or think of the apostles - sent forth by the very One who had worked this miracle and the impact that must have had upon them when they faced hostile opposition.

So what then of us? Here we see that with the most dangerous and mysterious enemy we face - the host of hell, the demonic powers - even here Jesus owns them. Satan and his minions, the very one who deceived our first parents, through whom all the sin and misery of the world came - his forces are no match for our King. As Martin Luther said that the devil is God's devil so too the demons are God's demons, utterly defeated enemies. Their power is limited and will last only for the time and to the extent which God has determined until their final destruction.

Connect the dots. The kingdom has come. Jesus is the King. What or who do we have to fear? My friends, through Jesus' healing of the demoniacs, we see we can truly trust Him.

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