

October 31, 2010

Silence of the Demons

Mark 1:21-34

INTRODUCTION

Why in God's providence did Martin Luther hammer his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg church door on All Hallows Eve in 1517? Well I don't know the whole answer. But I suspect that part of it was to usher in a new era in the advance of Christ's kingdom. The Reformers in Geneva had a motto: *post tenebras lux* (after darkness light). The true church has always celebrated this day as a new dawn of the light of God's word. Now the world celebrates this day as a day of darkness, evil spirits and black magic. But on October 31, 493 years ago, the light of God's word was let loose from its prison cell in Rome.

Not to pick on the Roman Catholic Church—but, let me mention two historical realities that have resulted from its false gospel: 1) In the modern era, the nations that remained Roman Catholic all became enslaved by totalitarian governments because their people had no categories for the authority of God's word over all things (including over the state); 2) Also in the new world where Romans Catholic powers colonized, the people thoroughly incorporated their native witchcraft into their Catholic practice. It is the most common thing in the Latin world to go to Mass *and* practice voodoo in the same hour. Now to what do we attribute such darkness? It is an evil spiritual world where personal agents of evil enslave those who do not know Jesus Christ. In our text today, we are going to get our first glimpse of how the true King relates to these spiritual pretend-lords.

- THE WORD THAT ESTABLISHES THE KINGDOM
- THE WORKS THAT SIGNIFY THE KINGDOM

The Big Idea is that Jesus pushes back the kingdom of darkness by the authority of his word.

This may seem like it doesn't have a whole lot of application. But remember that the kingdom of Christ is advanced through the church by the preaching of the same gospel that Jesus preached. Think of Paul's words in Ephesians 3:10-11.

so that through the **church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the **rulers and authorities** in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice who the *actor* and the *acted upon* is in this text: It is the church who speaks loudly to the demons (rulers and authorities) with the gospel, which Paul calls here the “wisdom of God.” So when God made the world He ordained that just as Christ would advance his kingdom through the preaching of his gospel, so the church, after him, would advance that same kingdom through the preaching of that same gospel. We defeat the demonic by the word of God. As a Christian you need to understand that your part in the ministry of the word has a historic effect because it has a spiritual effect.

DOCTRINE

I. THE WORD THAT ESTABLISHES THE KINGDOM

A) Jesus and His Enemies Race to the Place of Teaching {21, 23}

1. Capernaum had become the new home of Jesus after He left Nazareth. It’s as far from Herod’s center of power in Tiberius as you could be and still be in Galilee. That’s probably the only significance of his starting out there. The setting of the **synagogue** is important. It was instituted during the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century before Christ and the modern Yiddish word for it (*shul*) draws attention to the fact that the synagogue is more of a theological school than it is what we would today call a “worship center.”

2. Note the parallel use of that familiar word—*euthys* (immediately)—about Jesus (21) and the evil spirit (23). Jesus made a bee-line for the synagogue; the demon made a bee-line for the synagogue. One commentator offers a good explanation of this race to the place of teaching: “In the desert of temptation, Satan had been defeated. So now it is not surprising that the prince of evil is going to attempt in every possible way to oppose Christ and his kingdom. Does the Anointed One seek entrance into the hearts of men? Satan sends out his servants, the demons, to take control of these hearts.”¹

Now take note that when the Word is preached there is no middle ground. Everyone who hears is either amazed or irritated. You may remember that Jesus said: “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” [Mat. 10:34]. Ultimate personal powers are involved in those extreme reactions.

¹ Hendriksen, p. 62

B) There is a Link Between the Authority of the Teaching and its Power {22, 27}

1. The word for **authority** (*exousia*) was often used for the force of power in Greek. The ancients didn't separate authority and power as we do today. The comedian George Carlin was asked before he died whether he still stuck to the motto of the Sixties to question authority. He said 'No'—he said the new motto should be “destroy authority.” Well the resentment toward authority is nothing new, but the truth is that everybody respects some authority. The biggest bullies and the loudest mouths can always be shut up and brought low as soon as someone bigger and louder shows up. Superior force is good for exposing cowards and phonies for who they are.

2. This teaching is contrasted with the **scribes** who represent any religious class that talks just to hear themselves talk. Paul teaches us that “the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” [1 Cor. 4:20]. In this statement to the Corinthians Paul isn't pitting power against words—he is pitting powerful words against little boys' babbling, the chattering classes who use words to keep everyone in suspense and abuse people with verbal games. God's favorite words are different than mere scribal scribble:

Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? [Jer. 23:29]

Make no mistake: Jesus was entering bully-occupied territory. Whether it was the human bullies called scribes or spiritual bullies called demons, Jesus' job was simple—beat up the bullies in front of all these people that the bullies had been picking on. And just as Jesus is called The Word [cf. Jn. 1:1, 1 Jn. 1:1, Rev. 19:13], so it would be his word that did the whooping.

Now was this normal? Were synagogues hot-spots for demons in the pews? Well you may remember that description in the book of Revelation, where Jesus refers to sectors of the professing church as a “synagogue of Satan” [2:9, 3:9]. The teaching in Israel in Jesus' day was locked up by evil forces and those being taught were being oppressed by those teaching “doctrines of demons” [cf. 1 Tim. 4:1].

C) There are Supernatural and Natural Reactions that Fall Short {24-28}

1. Notice the confession of the demon first: *I know who you are—the Holy One of God (24)*. Today there is a kind of Jesus-Identification salvation that treats the gospel like a game of ‘Where's Waldo' as if entrance into the kingdom comes by correctly identifying Jesus: “We

have the right Jesus. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have the wrong Jesus" (which is true of course); but is that what entrance into heaven rests upon? If that were all it took to be saved then it would seem that demons like this would have entered the kingdom well before the disciples did! James shows the folly of this in his letter:

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! [Jam. 2:10]

Well this demon did more than shudder. Some commentators think that the reason that the evil spirit named Jesus was some desperate attempt to exercise control over him or at least to confuse the people into thinking that he had some secret knowledge that they didn't and distract them. Whatever it was, the arrival of the true King was not good news for this spirit. My own opinion—which I base on the fact that the demon called himself US in verse 24 (me and my friends here)—is that the demon attempted to identify himself with the people and arouse their sympathy for this man and the brotherhood *against* the cruel, divisive, doctrine-mongering rabbi who comes into the church to show everyone how right he is. This Jesus of Nazareth is a *truth-terrorist!* What has this divisive doctrine to do with US? Have you come to destroy US? Do you hear it everywhere today in the church?

2. This is the first of four exorcisms recorded by Mark. So perhaps we can start to take notes of some common features. This one consisted in two parts: a) silencing the demon and b) driving the demon out. Both are important. First of all, Mark contrasts Jesus rebuking the demon with the doctrine that the demon attempted to teach. Notice that the doctrine was true but that it was untimely or in some other way out of place; so that it says, ***But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'*** (25). This reminds us that true theological statements are often used by the devil to twist the whole. Didn't Satan even quote God's word to Jesus himself! This is what lies are, remember: they are twisted truths. Secondly, this force of the Word repelled the spirit back downfield, *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him* (26). Interestingly Luke's Gospel makes the point that the demon came out "having done him no harm" [4:35]. In other words, he didn't mess with him anymore! Replacing the unclean doctrines of demons with the pure light of God's word is messy business. It will hurt, the patient will cry out and convulse back and forth until he or she is either held captive to the word of God or wiggles away. But to the person who wiggles away from the light, Jesus gives a surprisingly vivid picture of the role that demons play in this:

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation [Mat. 12:43-45].

This should be a sobering warning to those who hear a lot of God’s truth and tend to wiggle.

3. The simple astonishment of the crowds and the fame He gained in the region tells us nothing about the spiritual condition of the people who first encountered him. Dead corpses are perfectly capable of having their jaws drop if you shake their coffin hard enough.

Moving from the synagogue to the house, we can see that the power of darkness works from the place of teaching to the place where we all live. If there were demons in the house of God, then there would certainly be demons in the houses of mere mortals, complete with sickness and all other sorts of oppression.

II. THE WORKS THAT SIGNIFY THE KINGDOM

A) Jesus Heals the Sick and Shows that He Cares About the Symptoms of Sin {29-33}

1. At first Jesus healed by teaching; now He teaches by healing. Mark uses the double-*euthys* again: Immediately Jesus went from church to home (29) and immediately they told him about Simon’s mother in law who had a fever (30). And notice that even though the disciples couldn’t see the trees from the forest—the trees are the symptoms of sin; the forest is sin itself—even though they would have to be taught this eternal perspective, Jesus comes down to their level and serves this woman at the level of her symptoms: *And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them* (31). Luke’s Gospel adds that “he stood over her and *rebuked* the fever, and it left her” [4:39]. Now a fever is an odd thing to rebuke, unless (as sicknesses are also judgments of God) this is a sign of the reverse of the curse in a judicial sense as well.

“and with his stripes we are healed” [Is. 53:5, cf. 1 Pet. 2:24].

When Christ became a curse for his people, He did not remove the curse in terms of its temporal effects. The Word of Faith movement teaches this and it is a serious error. But we still get sick, we still get oppressed, and we still die. We are healed fully and finally: but in

the order of the Kingdom of Christ, this healing comes *from the inside out* starting with the root of the problem, sin, and only then in the end its effects (sickness, oppression and...)

For he must *reign until* he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death [1 Cor. 15:25-26].

Well naturally natural people caught the buzz about this miracle-worker and flocked to the house—by the way, notice that this is still the Sabbath—*That evening at sundown they brought to him all that were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city gathered together at the door (32-33).* The whole city. Did this enormous gathering gather for the right reasons? Well doctrinally speaking, No. But does that mean that Jesus compromised by attracting as many people as possible? Of course not. Remember the healing and exorcisms are signs, and apparently Jesus condescended further to all these people. It continues: *And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons (34a).*

B) Jesus Casts Out Many Demons to Show that His Kingdom is On the Move

1. Although Christianity is bigger than the world, it does not leave the world unaffected. Whether in healing or in casting out the demonic, Jesus does affect *this* age (if nothing else) as a sign of the next: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” [1 Jn. 3:8]. So notice the huge principle for doing church right here in the *big* attitude of Jesus. Notice the profound concentric circles of Jesus here and ask yourself if you have these circles in your mind:

a) Jesus must teach these people that the signs are just that—signs—and that the cross that lies ahead is where your main focus is to be. He can’t compromise his mission:

b) On the other hand, Jesus purposefully brings these people in by the “city-load” and condescends to their level. He gathers the maximum number of people.

You know I hear people all the time saying, “Well the problem in a big church is you get lost in the crowd,” or “Man if a thousand people showed up here in the next year I wouldn’t know what to do with these people.” But that reminds me of the people I used to hear when we were asked the question ‘What would you do with a billion dollars,’—“Oh, man, I wouldn’t know what to do with a billion dollars!” Uh, then can I have your ticket? I could think of a few things. The problem with big churches isn’t big churches! The problem is always only ever selling the gospel out for the sake of that size! If you don’t know the

bigness of gospel gathering, then you don't know the Bible and you don't know your Servant King! Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said that,

the first test always to apply to anything that offers itself to us as the kingdom of God is that of size. If the thing that is offered to you as Christianity is a little thing, it is not Christianity.²

The kingdom of God is an intense, excited, expectant, ready-to-serve gathering of souls to be touched by Jesus!

C) Jesus Would Not Permit the Demons to Speak Because They Knew Him {34b}

1. Many scholars have referred to this as the “Messianic Secret,” where Jesus purposely conceals his identity specifically because it would detract us from his work. So to Mary at the wedding He says, “My hour has not yet come” [Jn. 2:4], to the disciples who were finally getting it “he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ” [Mat. 16:20], on the Mount of Transfiguration he commands them: “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead” [Mat. 17:9], and finally John tells us that the authorities, “were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come” [Jn. 7:30]. And of course this reminds us that as we gather indiscriminately, we do not speak indiscriminately. We keep first things first—the cross, not *our* mission, is the view we give those we gather.

Jesus doesn't pit faithfulness and fruitfulness against each other. Watch every point of the life of Jesus carefully. *He always extends the biggest circle and always drops the sharpest sword!*

2. Now what do we mean exactly when we say that Jesus kept his identity a secret to protect his work? Do we mean that his work was actually in danger if people found out? Hardly. Next week we will see a man that Jesus healed and charged to present himself in the temple and tell no one who had healed him [cf. 1:40-45]. What's the first thing the man did? He couldn't stop telling everyone! You don't think Jesus knew that would happen? So the more biblical answer is to say that by keeping himself a “secret” Jesus was protecting the view of his people toward his work. Jesus would not be named and claimed by any spirit less than the Holy Spirit! The astonishment of the crowds, the knowledge of the demons, the fame and the attention of the town—none of that is evidence of a saving work of God on the heart. This is a clear way to see that we only meet Jesus favorably through his ultimate work

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Kingdom of God* (Crossway, Wheaton 2010, fp. 1963); p. 75

(which isn't healing the sick and casting out demons); his ultimate work which these symbolized is his death in our place which conquers death itself.

APPLICATION

To the Skeptic – How do we understand the rise of neo-paganism and Wiccan given the prediction of modern atheists (like Voltaire and Freud) that religion is an early stage of evolution that fades as society progresses? In other words, why are there increasing numbers of people in the West who have no trouble conjuring up the spirits so long as they are not the Holy Spirit? And if you have no trouble calling the new spirituality 'Christian,' how do you understand that in the Bible the Lord does not honor those spirits who are willing to say some true, nice things about him? Of course one can always fall back on the objection that the Bible was written by men in the church (and we address nonsense like that in our worldview classes here), but one thing you cannot do is to square the new spirituality with the Jesus of the Bible. He silences all that.

To the Saint – I hope it's clear that the point of this passage is not to give Christians a practical three or four step manual for how to perform an exorcism! The demonic is real and more prevalent than you think; but they are not defeated by superstition. Demonic possession and exorcism is a physical sign of a more prevalent reality. That's not to say that possession is not also a symptom that is everywhere throughout human culture. But the symptom is just that—a symptom—a lesser reality than the role of demons in the overall kingdom of darkness that touches us all. The main relationship between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan is the battle of truth versus lies. So how have you structured your life at home, at work and in ministry to push back the kingdom of darkness at exactly the points where it is pushing you back? At exactly the point where it is pushing your spouse and children back? At exactly the point where it is pushing against the church you attend and the churches that your friends attend? What light and what word do you have to speak to silence those demons?

To the Sinner – We are "sin-sick sinners." That doesn't mean that our sin is really "just a sickness" that is our nature. Yes it *is* our nature. But whoever told us that just because something is natural or ordinary or regular or 'what everybody does,' that this makes it OK? Does God ever say that in his word? No! So when you and I come to the Great Physician, Jesus, we must come to agree with him that the things that our nature produces are things that must be **rebuked**! Are you *that* desperate to have your sins taken away? Or are you attracted to your sin? Are you too attached to the dark places and powers in your soul that

you won't let go? Do you think it is enough to confess Jesus as the Holy One of God, as this demon did, and expect that He owes you a healing and a place in his house? Then you are under the sin of delusion.

CONCLUSION

Demonic oppression, sickness and even the everyday effects of your sin are all symptoms of a larger disease. Jesus offers a cure to the whole. He doesn't simply chase the vultures of this world off the branches. He lays an axe to the root of the tree and those who are his want the whole thing—not simply picking Jesus out of a police investigation lineup, but—the ultimate, central work of Jesus where every demon was silenced because the only thing they have against you (namely your record of debt against a holy God) was canceled and nailed to the cross [cf. Col. 2:13-15]. That is what everything in the three year earthly ministry of Jesus points to. Will you put your trust in his work or are you content to just stand back in natural astonishment and think it's neat or useful or even powerful?