

July 3, 2011

# *The Demon is in Too Deep*

Mark 9:14-29

## INTRODUCTION

In 1959 one of the great preachers of the twentieth century, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preached on this passage. And being a doctor himself he took an interesting angle on the Great Physician's diagnosis of this boy and his demon. According to the Doctor the boy represented the culture, the demon his underlying assumptions and the disciples were the church. The failure of the disciples to treat the condition represented our surface-level attempts to interact with the unbelieving culture.

- WHAT THE WORLD DEMANDS FROM THE CHURCH
- WHAT THE WORD DOES TO THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS
- DEMONIC STRONGHOLDS DIFFER IN DEPTH

**The Big Idea** is that the local church will fail to attain the kingdom in history where there is disbelief about the reality of Satan's kingdom and the superior power of Christ's word.

That "disbelief" includes unawareness. In fact, when it comes to the reality of the kingdom of darkness or the superior power of Christ's word, most Christians in modern America suffer from a disbelief of spiritual oblivion. It's not that the church considers these things and explicitly resists them. We are simply oblivious to them.

## DOCTRINE

### I. WHAT THE WORLD DEMANDS FROM THE CHURCH

#### A) The World Under Darkness Wants Answers {14-16}

1. *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" (14-16).* Just like Israel had become divided over the Golden Calf when Moses was up on Mount Sinai and he

returned to them glowing with the glory of God [cf. Ex. 32], so it is here. But this incident is a little different. Pay careful attention to what people are saying out there and you will see the world that claims to disbelieve in the supernatural demanding you to solve problems that are basically supernatural.

### B) The Church at the Surface Has None {17-19}

1. *And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able" (17-18).* Notice first of all that this is not a demon possessing some tribesman in some remote cannibal village where the name of God was not known. This was among God's people. Lloyd-Jones observed that the Bible consistently teaches that those who are closest to the flame, if their hearts are not turned to God, become the most hardened, the most singed, the most inoculated. Doctors know a thing or two about inoculations. An **inoculation** is an injection of just enough of a disease to keep your body from getting the real thing. And the Doctor compared these "post-Christian" cultures, like the modern Western culture, to a patient inoculated with the Christian faith. We have a memory, but it's a distorted memory, of what Christianity was and it is exceedingly unattractive. Communication between the church and those possessed by the kingdom of darkness will be a long, drawn out process. More often than not, those sitting in the pews have gotten the inoculation: maybe they're second or third generation Christian homes and sit in churches that aren't necessarily in grievous error, but in paralyzing understatement, not pressing in to the kingdom and a little dose of the gospel flows through the veins of the soul with enough tranquility for a thousand demons to surf the waves.

2. So notice in verses 14 through 18 that both the religious world and the secular world is banging on the door of the church demanding answers for why the church has been irrelevant, so that in verse 19 Jesus can answer them all, '*O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me*' (19). The unbelieving culture and the enculturated church establishment are all placed under one head—faithless generation—and Matthew and Luke add to their faithlessness that they were "twisted" [17:17, 9:41]. But the answer, even in all things spiritual, is to bring them to the Word. **Faithlessness** is a major characteristic of the visible church that is the wasted carcass of skin in the final stages of being shed off of the living, faithful thing. I take it that this is the cause

of Jesus' harsh tone—In one sense He is no longer speaking to his disciples, but to the visible, yet false, church.

## II. WHAT THE WORD DOES TO THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS

### A) Christ is Supreme Over the Depths of Disbelief {20-24}

1. *And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth (20).* There is that word immediately again: for the second time it is a demon. Last time it was applied to a demon it was because it raced to beat Jesus to the place of teaching [cf. 1:23]. Calvin's observation on this strong demonic reaction is instructive: "That the devil should rage with more than ordinary cruelty against the man, when he is brought to Christ, ought not to excite surprise; for in proportion as the grace of Christ is seen to be nearer at hand, and acts more powerfully, the fury of Satan is more highly excited. The presence of Christ awakens him like the sound of a trumpet. He raises as violent a storm as he can, and contends with all his might."<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more certain in the Art of Christian War than that the demons will writhe and howl at the brains of anyone who is in danger of encountering the Word of God. The waves of demonic activity are high on Sunday morning and in the pastor's study.

2. *And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (21-22).* Unlike the scribes, who had malicious intent, this man's beef with the disciples was only motivated by love for his son. So you see, serious, dangerous errors are not simply the product of some stereotypical cultist. We can doubt God's power or intentions all in the name of love.

3. *And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (23-24).*

C. S. Lewis said in his introduction to *The Screwtape Letters*,

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist and a magician with the same delight.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, p. 324

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Simon & Schuster, New York 1996); p. 15

Many Christians don't have any trouble believing that there are demons; their trouble comes in a one-dimensional view of demons, suitable only for children: boogie men from the underworld. We think demonic activity is real *yet* totally separate from all of the ordinary parts of life (except maybe for sickness, including mental illness). But in the life of Jesus, continuing on in the Acts of the Apostles, we see a constant, all-encompassing, spiritual battle in which the physical world resides. Every minute of our lives is inside of an eternal war.

### B) Christ is Supreme Over the Territory of Disbelief

1. *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again" (25).*

You will notice that he was **deaf and mute**, like the man from 7:32, but in a much deeper stranglehold.

2. *And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose (26-27).* Is this an another actual resurrection, signified by the words "corpse," "dead," and "arose," or is this simply close enough to it to function as a sign? Mark says that the boy was *like* a corpse, so that this was only *like* a resurrection. But with signs, "like" is good enough. And just like with an individual, groups of people can be "like a corpse." The fall of man was a 'group death' and the final resurrection will be a 'group rising.' So on a smaller scale, a revival in the church is a group going from corpse to rising.

So the word of truth that Christ *is* drives back the extremities of the devil's kingdom of death, it ensures that it cannot return and then advances his own kingdom of life. There is a total check and reverse on the spiritual war map when we speak Christ's truth.

## III. DEMONIC STRONGHOLDS DIFFER IN DEPTH

### A) The Powers and Strategies of Demons are Diverse in Kind

1. *And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (29-30).* They're diverse in kind—**This kind**, He says. We may remember that the disciples had been granted power to cast out demons [cf. 3:15, 6:13]. And this is no shortage in that power supply. This is a lesson for the disciples, then and now. This power against darkness must be

labored for in God's ordinary means of grace—like prayer—and in some manuscripts of Matthew 17:21 it says “by fasting and prayer.”

2. Do you also notice that the disciples were specifically asking Jesus about an inability that they had; and rather than making the disciples feel better about their lack of faith about spiritual things, He gives them a specific thing that they didn't do and need to do? In other words, the church is placed, by Jesus, in the category of faithless generation. Sometimes doing “business as usual” is as unbelieving as skepticism about the supernatural. When the demons get in deep enough into the subconscious of a people, the church's “business as usual” won't do. So, Lloyd-Jones, asked, “Is the spirit of this age like the spirit of past ages? It is not...The whole notion of right and true is gone.”

Paul gives us a glimpse of a constant, all-pervading warfare, not simply between angels and demons, but between the church and the demonic: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” [Eph. 6:12-13].

#### B) Prayer Signifies a Long, Hard, Specific Season in the Spirit

1. It isn't prayer versus changing the way you think. It isn't prayer versus persuading the unbeliever to change the way he thinks. The two are mutually connected: “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” [2 Cor. 10:4-5]. This prayer is not simply going to be enduring business, but it must be specific: it's aimed against **this kind**. Prayer for God to obliterate a demonic stronghold that we are aware of is not the same thing as prayer for your aunt Millie's rent check (and you should pray for your Aunt Millie's check).

#### APPLICATION

**To the Culture** – Tomorrow is the fourth of July and that always provokes talk from Christians about why we can't seem to exercise some demons. We live in a culture of darkness and we have been engaging that culture at the surface: what the unbelieving world produces artistically, what it does out in public, what it enforces in the courts. And the church should be in all of those arenas! But *is* the church in those arenas with a worldview;

or are there scattered, isolated Christians in those arenas, a few foot-soldiers with no massive force of truth backing them from the church. We exercise the culture like a Catholic priest exorcises a literal, individual demon, with a piece of jewelry and a series of mantras. But the demon is in too deep for that. J. Gresham Machen said this:

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed in winning only a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is destroy the obstacles at its root.<sup>3</sup>

**To the Church** – Maybe the reason we don’t go to prayer meetings is because we don’t know that this is real and that it’s more real than anything else you think is real. What do you think we labor in the Spirit for? And what do you think the demons are most opposed to when they oppose the church? Do you think it’s to give you a headache, or even a bad dream? Then your problem is not that you’re too Charismatic: your problem is that you’re a narcissist. You think spiritual activity is about you and your own pet demon!

The demon is in too deep.

**To the Sinner** – The sin of disbelief—the treason of disbelief, of a “faithless generation”—is talked about in the Bible as existing within a condition of blindness: “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” [2 Cor. 4:4]. The devil doesn’t care how he blinds sinners. He’s enough of a pragmatist to use whatever works. Either the supernatural seems mythical to you, or even if true irrelevant, or even if relevant compartmentalized to the private. Nothing I say in less than an hour can undo a lifetime of worldview packing into the darkest recesses of your mind. The demon is in too deep. But not for Christ. Part of the good news is that “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” [Col. 1:13], “who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” [Gal. 1:4].

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<sup>3</sup> Machen, “Christianity and Culture” quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 1994); Introduction, xiii