

THE ENEMY RETURNS

Mark 1:21-28

Intro: We have already read in Mark's Gospel about an encounter that our Lord Jesus Christ had with the Devil. Both Matthew and Luke give us a much more complete account of that time of testing which our Lord successfully endured. It would seem that the Lord was tempted in all areas which have to do with sin: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). This, the Apostle John wrote later is "all that is in the world." By this he meant that all sin falls into one of these three categories.

When Luke ended his account of our Lord's time of temptation, he said, speaking of the Devil, that "he departed from him for a season." The suggestion was that he was not through with the Lord, that he would be back to cause our Lord further trouble.

Well, it wasn't long before he was back, not the Devil personally, but one of his henchmen, a demon. We must remember that although the Devil possesses great power, being the leader of the fallen angels, *yet he is not omnipresent! He can only be in one place at a time.* Also, there is only one Devil, but there are many demons. The KJV often speaks of the demons as devils, but there is only one Devil, who is also called Satan, but there are countless numbers of demons. So in the event which we are considering today, we are dealing with a demon. Mark called him "an unclean spirit." This means that he was a spirit being which no one could see, but he was not a holy spirit; he was an unclean, foul, morally defiled and defiling. God is holy; the Devil and the demons are the personification of unholiness. There is no provision for the Devil or for demons to be cleaned up! Christ did not come to die for the Devil or the demons; by His death He sealed their doom. So the Devil is the Archenemy of God, and his influence upon people is always bad, terribly bad. The Devil is out to destroy all that is godly, all that will glorify God, all that is pleasing to God. And the Devil and demons are tireless in their efforts to destroy the work of God and the people of God.

The time of our Lord's ministry on earth was a time of increased activity. I don't know that we can say that the Devil never had been as active as He was during the time that our Lord was here on earth, but I am inclined to believe that that is true. He sought to kill the baby Jesus when Herod put out the order for all boy babies under the age of two years were to be put

to death. That was the reason that Joseph took Mary and the baby Jesus to Egypt. But behind that edict to kill the boy babies the hand of Satan could easily be recognized. It was when Satan entered Judas Iscariot that Judas went to the Jewish authorities and agreed to betray the Lord into their hands.

The Apostle Paul said in his Ephesian letter, addressing the church in those days shortly after our Lord returned to heaven, that the believers were to “put on the whole armor of God that” they “may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil” (Eph. 6:11). And to the church at Corinth, when Paul was exhorting the church to forgive the man whom they had put under discipline because of his sin, he pointed out to them that the Devil will gain a foothold in the lives of the Lord’s people who are not willing to forgive a repentant brother. And then to show the danger that they faced by not forgiving him, Paul warned them with these words:

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11).

The Devil is very clever, and he will look for any chance we give him to take advantage of us. Only by constant obedience to the Word can we remain safe.

The Apostle Peter was speaking from personal experience when he wrote,
8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:
9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).

We can never afford to let our guard down. One prayer that we need to pray continually, is that the Lord would keep us from temptation and sin. It is no sin to be tempted, but temptation often leads to sin, and that is what we need to avoid by the grace of God.

So our passage has a practical message for all of us individually as well as for all of us as Trinity Bible Church. And I say that because of the circumstances under which this demon-possessed man appeared. But now let us turn to our text.

I want to call your attention to:

I. THE SETTING OF THIS INCIDENT (Mark 1:21-22).

We all know, or should know, that our Lord was born in Bethlehem, but He was raised in Nazareth. In verse 9 of our chapter we read that the Lord left Nazareth when He went to be baptized by John the Baptist. We don't know exactly where He was when He was tempted by the Devil, but in verse 14 we find the Lord in Galilee where by the sea of Galilee (vv. 16-20) He called Peter and Andrew and James and John to be His disciples. Then as we come to our text for today we find Him in Capernaum which was also by the sea of Galilee. If you consult the map in the back of your Bible which shows the land of Israel in the days of our Lord, you will see that all of this took place in the northern part of Israel, Nazareth being a few miles west of the Sea of Galilee.

Where in Capernaum was our Lord, and what was He doing? You can see from verse 21 that on the Sabbath, Saturday, the Lord was in the synagogue, and He was teaching. If you consult Luke's account of this event, you will see that the Lord did this on a number of Sabbath days. So this was evidently an assignment that had been granted to him by the leaders of the synagogue. But we are concerned about what happened on one of those Sabbath days. It was like we may experience going to church. We go Sunday after Sunday, and nothing out of the ordinary happens, but suddenly on one of those days something happens when everybody present will always remember.

The Lord was not entertaining the people; He was teaching them, teaching the Scriptures. And we read that the people were "astonished at His doctrine," meaning His teaching. One commentator I consulted said that they were not astonished at the content of His teaching, but at the manner of His teaching. I disagree with that. I believe that they were astonished at the content. It was the content that impressed them with its authority. The Word of God, according to Hebrews 4:12, is "living, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Now the teaching of the Word of God doesn't always come through to the people who are hearing it like something that is "sharper than any two-edged sword," but it certainly would under the teaching of the Lord Jesus. And yet I am sure that most of you have been in services when the Scriptures which were being taught hit you like a sword in your heart, and you felt the authority of Scripture exposing your sins, and your thoughts, in a way that made you known how intimately acquainted God Himself is with

everything about you. The scribes were not teachers like our Lord was. They had a mixture of truth and what the Lord called “the commandments of men” which they were teaching as the Word of God. But what they were teaching was not the pure Word of God. And so the power, the authority, which the people experienced under our Lord’s teaching, was not present in the teaching of the scribes.

I get not-a-little disgusted with preachers who think that they have to dramatize their preaching, or depend upon jokes to entertain their people, or give them a little humanistic psychology, in order to keep them coming when God has given us His holy Word. And there is no greater attraction for human hearts than the preaching and teaching of the Word of God in answer to prayer. But, as Sinclair Ferguson says in his commentary on Mark, the tragedy of those days of our Lord’s teaching was that people could be astonished and astounded with His teaching, they could experience the power and authority of the Word, and yet would go away unchanged in heart and life. Maybe some of you will be like that today. I hope not. But that may be unless God is pleased by His Spirit to give you eyes to see and ears to hear what the teaching of God’s Word means. Oh, how we all should be asking the Lord to move upon our hearts whenever we hear the Word of God explained.

There is plenty of food for thought here. The Bible makes it very clear that there are three things that we all need to be concerned about, and this is especially true of those who teach the Word. Preachers, teachers, and people, we need to be concerned about being holy people as it is defined and explained and illustrated in Scripture. We can’t straddle the fence between the world and the Lord and expect to have the blessing of God.

Secondly, we need to be men and women of prayer. We all seem to recognize the importance of prayer, but how much do we pray, really pray? Are we continually asking the Lord to teach us to pray. Is prayer so important to us that we put prayer ahead of everything else which seems to demand our attention. The extent to which we pray shows how deep is our realization of our dependence upon the Lord in daily life.

The Lord scored 100% on both of these points. But there is a third point, and the Lord excelled here as we are learning today. It has to do with the ministry of the Word. The Lord had the authority to originate Scripture, being the Son of God. But what did He do? He taught the Scriptures. He didn’t get involved in the politics of the Roman Empire. He knew that

man's greatest need was for salvation, that his greatest problem was sin.

What happened on that particular Sabbath Day?

“There was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.” This is the equivalent of saying, “There was in their synagogue a demon-possessed man.” How long he had been coming to the synagogue, we do not know. How many times he had heard the Lord Jesus teaching, we do not know. But suddenly the demons (because he spoke in the first person plural) had had enough, and they cried out in torment. The people were astonished at the Lord's teaching; the demons were tormented by it. And they told the Lord to leave them alone. If there is one thing that the Devil and his demons cannot stand it is the teaching of the Word of God. They hate it. The Word is their biggest problem. Do you believe that?

Will you notice also that those demons had good theology. They believed in the humanity of Jesus. “Jesus of Nazareth” they called Him. But they also believed in His Deity: “the holy One of God.” They knew Him, and they confessed that they knew Him. But they did not know Him as John Mark did. Or as Simon Peter knew Him. Or as Andrew knew Him. Or as James and John knew Him. And they did not want to know Him as His disciples knew Him, knew Him as their Savior. They were terrorized by the Lord, and knew that He had power to destroy them, and that He was going to do that some day.

That was a day that the Jews in that synagogue would never forget. But what did the Lord do? He just spoke to the demons telling them to shut their mouths, and to come out of the man. What did they do? They made one last attempt to kill the man, cried out with a loud voice, and came out of the man. Regardless of how many demons there were in that man, even with their combined strength, they were no match for Jesus, the Holy One of God.

What followed?

They started asking questions among themselves. Doesn't that amaze you? It amazes me. Whom should they have been questioning? He was the One with the answers. But people would rather have a discussion among themselves rather than going to the Lord to find out what He would say about Himself, and what the object of His ministry was. But that didn't happen. Instead, the report of what had taken place spread like

wild fire throughout Galilee and to the regions beyond.

Concl: Our text concludes with the words of verse 28. (Read.) What was the report that was being spread about our Lord? What is being said about our Lord today among your acquaintances, and mine, if anything? What should be the talk about God and about our Lord Jesus Christ? To a great extent this is our great responsibility, as it is the responsibility of the Lord's people in every generation. Mark was speaking here about Jewish people who, for the most part, did not know the Lord. What would they be saying about the Lord?

Let me suggest three things:

- 1) They would be talking about His teaching, the power of His teaching, the authority with which He spoke, but mainly the content. People need the truth today, but they are not getting it. We need to talk about the Lord's teaching.
- 2) We would have to say that the Lord was always on the side of that which is good and holy, and against anything that is contrary to God and His Word.
- 3) We would need to talk about the power that He has to change people's lives. The demon-possessed man could not help himself. He could not even speak for Himself. The scribes had done him no good. The people of the synagogue were just as helpless to help him as he was. But all the Lord had to do was to speak just five words in the Greek, and the man was set free from his enemies. This man, more than anyone else, should have spent the rest of his life talking about the wondrous works of the Lord as he had seen it in his own life.

As we begin a new week, let us take every opportunity to talk to others about the Lord and what He has done for our souls.

Psalm 105:1-2

- 1 O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people.
- 2 Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works .