

Up Close Influence

In our message today, we will again be considering how some of the truths within these scriptures make some people, perhaps most people, uncomfortable, even fearful, as they hear them, truths about our health, our sicknesses and our diseases that we would prefer not to consider. But they are truths nonetheless, and we must consider them.

In some of our recent messages, we've been considering the many causes and the effects of sickness and diseases within our daily lives. And we've considered how, as Jesus went about healing the sicknesses and the diseases of the people of His day, He continually encountered the involvement of demons deeply entrenched and interwoven within those people's health conditions.

And so, as I read about all of these accounts within our scriptures, I'm convinced that yes, there really is often a clear and present connection between "sickness" and "disease" and "sin" and "demonic involvement". And that it was not only true during the days of Jesus, it is also true during these present days that we live in.

But folks, there is another real problem that is taking place that we seldom talk about. That problem is that you and I really don't like the thought and the possibility that we personally might be being affected by the presence of demons.

I have mentioned on other occasions that I often work ahead to prepare these messages. And as God's timing would have it, I began working on this message just after both my wife and I were quarantined in our house suffering with the Covid19 Virus. And I can't help but put some of the parts of this question that we have been considering together with all that is taking place.

The question again that we, that I, struggle with . . . "Are there demonic forces really involved in my personal life and in my illness with this Covid Virus?"

Yes, I can easily attribute the worldwide pandemic to the works of the devil. That's not up-close and personal. But I confess to you that it is an altogether different and difficult step to accept that there are demonic forces involved within my personal illness?

And again, I do believe that this is where many of us Christians pull up short in our belief. Many, even some of our more reputable bible teachers, will say that

such things as demonic involvement was only done during the days of Jesus, that it was God's way of demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ as He cast the demons out. But dear friends, we must not be so naïve that we think that such things only took place in those days, and have now ceased.

But why should I, why should we, falter at the thought of the involvement of demons, "up close and personal", within our sicknesses and diseases during this present day? I believe that it probably has to do with "pride" and with fear. I, we, don't want to think such thoughts about ourselves.

It's actually frightening to think that a demon might have gotten close enough to me to perhaps lead me into a circumstance where I was exposed to this virus. And then even also to perhaps lead me to make wrong decisions about how I should medically treat my symptoms, and then on and on.

But the evidence that demonic influence does take place is spoken about over and over again in these scriptures.

In a situation given in Mark chapter 9, where a young boy was deaf and mute and would convulse and throw himself into the water and into the fire. In one translation, that boy was described as being an epileptic and a lunatic. But most importantly, the boy seems to have been an innocent victim, his illness not of his own doing and coming from a source outside of himself. And there, it's clear that Jesus saw that the boy's illness was being caused by a demon. And Jesus cast that demon out.

So then, if it really is some form of "pride" and of fear that keeps my eyes blinded to the involvement of demonic influences in my personal illnesses, then I really must get past that kind of foolish denial.

Folks, no matter the underlying causes of our sufferings, whether our sufferings come through casual contact with a pathogen, or they come through our genetics or they come from demonic influence, our answer is still the same. Our remedy will come through trusting ourselves completely into the care of the Lord. And whether God chooses to use doctors who will prescribe some form of medication, or He uses the power of His personal healing touch, it all comes from Him, from God.

Listen again to our scripture passage for today, and let's consider this matter further. Follow along here in Luke chapter 4, beginning in verse 38.

38 And he (the Lord Jesus) arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. 39 And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

40 Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. (Luke 4:38-41)

May I repeat myself in what I said a moment ago? Here, once again, in simple and matter-of-fact words, we read how demonic involvement was entrenched within sickness and disease.

And the clear message that keeps coming to you and me from such words as these is that we dare not, whether from pride, or from fear or from ignorance or otherwise, disregard or refuse to believe that demons truly are involved in and around many of the matters of our daily life. Their existence and their influence are a reality that we must reckon with, and especially in the matters of sickness and disease.

Consider for a moment . . . We fully accept that there really is a Covid Virus and that it is all around us. We can't see it or touch it, but it is there, and it is infecting us and bringing us misery. And we are willing to take precautions against it, vaccinations and masks. Why do we not realize and accept the presence and the reality of the threat that demons bring to us?

Again, let me say, as I have said on other occasions, our modern-day perception of demons and their activities among us have become distorted by the Hollywood version of who they are and what they do. And demons may sometimes take on those shapes and features. But it is obvious from these scriptures that most of the time demonic presence and their mal-effects go unnoticed, well concealed within the common matters of our day, matters such as with illness and disease, just as we are studying here today.

I would suggest to you that these dear people who lined up to receive Jesus' loving, healing touch truly were just common, ordinary people. And they had

common, ordinary sicknesses and diseases. They were, in every way normal, just like you and me.

And I would suggest to you that they were probably very surprised when, as Jesus laid His hands on some of them, demons surfaced and came out of them.

In a conversation that I was having with someone recently, we were considering the question of whether a person can know if a demon is influencing or even controlling their life. And our conversation went to the difference between “influence” and “oppression” and “possession”.

We know from these scriptures what one form of demonic possession might look like. That's given to us in the account of the demoniac who lived among the Gadarene tombs. And that, I'm sure is, at times, the manner in which “demon possession” presents itself. But is it always the only way?

Let me read about that incident to remind us of what it looked like. This is from Luke chapter 8.

²⁶Then they (Jesus and His disciples) sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!” ²⁹For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. ³⁰Jesus asked him, saying, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” because many demons had entered him. ³¹And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. ³²Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. ³³Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned. (Luke 8:26-33)

While you and I might barely be able to imagine what this account of demonic possession might have looked like, it really did take place just as it is written here. And as strange as it might seem to us, we must ask ourselves, “just how really different is this demonic activity from that which we know takes place daily

across our land, in the “crack houses” and “meth labs” and “street gangs”, and “porn shops”, and especially in children’s bedrooms where they are being molested by adults.”

And what about the savage slaughter that took place in the killing fields of Cambodia, or the massacres that took place with the ISIS Muslim soldiers beheading those men on public television. And what about the Muslim terrorists who mercilessly blow themselves to bits while killing innocent men, women and children.

And even today, as we witness the merciless onslaught of the Russian Army as they attack the smaller and weaker nation of the Ukraine. And when we look into the face of Vladimir Putin on the television set, do we not clearly see a demon.

Are we foolish enough to think that those horrible atrocities arise simply out of the imagination of common ordinary people? As one popular expression puts it, “it’s just man’s inhumanity to man”? Let me say to you that we dare not be that foolishly naïve! There is much more at work in and around us than just the vile imaginations of men’s hearts.

. . . But one of our problems is that most of those things take place at a distance from you and me. We mostly only hear about those things on the news. What about those things that are closer to our lives, things here and now with us as church going, born-again believers? What about us?

My conversation with my friend led to the question, “Is it possible for a born-again believer, a person who has the Spirit of Christ abiding within them, to also have the presence of a demon, either “influencing” or “oppressing” or even “possessing” their souls, their thoughts, their actions and their health?”

That can be a frightening thought and one that our minds very quickly want to reject and not even consider. But we must!

Because as we see folks like one of my friends who spent many years in prison for all of the criminal acts he did involving his gambling habits, and assuming from his testimony that he was one of us born-again, bible-believing Christians, we must ask, “What was taking place within his soul?” And what is taking place even now as he battles daily with debilitating health problems.

And we each know at least one other person like this man, perhaps more than one. "What about them?"

Let me begin the answer to that question by saying that while these scriptures do not specifically address that question, there is a consensus that comes from these scriptures that assures you and me, that as born-again believers, we cannot be fully possessed or owned by a demon . . . strongly influenced, yes, even "oppressed", yes, but not fully controlled by one.

The consensus comes from knowing that as we accept Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit of God comes to abide within our spirit and soul, and His presence is our surety, a thing that God calls an "earnest deposit" that God Himself puts within our souls that guarantees our eternal relationship with Him. And in that kind of abiding presence, we have protection against the demonic world taking full ownership over our souls.

But what about "influence", even a "strong influence", or "oppression"? Folks, we must conclude, simply from looking at our own lives and the lives of other believers around us that, "YES", without a doubt, strong influence does take place.

Remember that Adam and Eve were not "possessed" by satan, strongly "influenced" by satan's beguiling ways yes, but not "possessed". Satan did not indwell them.

And also remember that these scriptures do not tell us that Peter was "possessed" by the devil as he tried to tempt Jesus not to die on the cross. Yes, satan's influence was so up-close that Jesus was able to look into the face of Peter and say, "get thee behind me satan". But those scriptures do not tell us that satan had entered into Peter as satan did with Judas.

And in another place, Jesus warned Peter by saying that "satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed that your faith will not fail". And satan's sifting would be very "up-close".

And folks, we must ask ourselves, how often does satan use our words, as he did with Peter. And how often does satan sift us as wheat?

Here in today's scripture passage was a group of ordinary people who had come to hear the preaching and teaching of Jesus. And some of them were sick and some had brought others who were sick with them. And concealed within their diseases was the presence of demons. Listen again to these words!

⁴⁰When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" (Luke 4:40-41)

Folks, I have no doubt that God is being very "matter-of-fact" with these words so that you and I can grasp that there might often be a demonic presence within the illnesses and diseases that beset us.

We are not told what kind of diseases these people had, nor how the diseases manifested themselves within the people's lives. We can only assume that their diseases were common and ordinary, much like those that we suffer from.

But again, residing within some of their illnesses and diseases and no doubt causing them misery, were demons. And as Jesus healed their diseases those demons came out of the people. The demons were the source of their illnesses and diseases.

What should be the conclusion that we draw from these words? Is all sickness, disease and suffering brought to us by the demonic world?

I personally don't know because God has not as yet given me a clear word on that question, but most likely not! Our bodies are naturally weak and frail and susceptible to viruses and diseases. And many of us are born with predispositions to certain forms of sickness.

But with that being said, these words surely do seem to be a confirmation that at least some of our illnesses do truly come from the presence and influence of demons.

And how are you and I supposed to deal with those influences. We have no power, within ourselves, to do battle with the powerful forces of evil. So, what then are we to do?

First, as we are told in James chapter 4 verse 7, we must,

7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
(James 4:7)

Dear friends, again, these are plain and simple words. The "devil" spoken about here is not necessarily satan himself, but surely is one of the devils, just as satan is a devil. And if by our "resisting the devil", he will "flee", reveals in no uncertain words that that devil is very up-close to us, influencing us and doing whatever

he can to cause us misery and harm. And that that devil will “flee” away from us if we “resist” him.

So, then yes, I personally have no doubt that even though I am a born-again believer, with the Holy Spirit living within my heart, the devil is still permitted to get very up-close and personal with me, and I must resist him.

But how am I to “resist the devil”? There is only one sure way to “resist the devil”. It is as with every other matter of daily life, our hope, our comfort and our protection come only from the Lord. He is our shield and our buckler. He is our sure defender.

All God asks us to do is to, each day as we get out of our bed, “put on His whole armor”, and His whole armor will protect us.

Listen to those words in Ephesians chapter 6. You have heard them often but consider how you might put them into place in your daily life, and especially, as we are considering here today, as it might relate to sickness and disease. Listen!

¹⁰Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Note in these words that God gives His protection, His relief and His guidance for any and all circumstances of life. And note also how God specifically began these words with warnings about the demonic forces that “battle” against you and me every moment of our life. Each part of the armor gives a protection and a guidance for every form of attack, whether those attacks be physical, emotional, mental or Spiritual.

Does God instruct us not to go to the doctor? No, not at all. Doctors are fine. But have you ever asked yourself why you or a loved one keeps going to the doctor but never seems to find relief from the suffering?

When suffering comes our way, I would encourage each of us to begin first and daily with putting on this “whole armor of God”. Folks, there is comfort, relief and healing to be found within God's “whole armor”. Listen again and I'll close.

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Let's pray!