

Luke 4:31-44

Demons in Church?

It wasn't that many years ago that we were so completely materialistic as a society that if any one talked about demons or angels as if they were real beings they were considered either insane or quaintly anachronistic; a throw over from some long forgotten age of superstition and ignorance.

Of course the problem with dialectical materialism is that it leaves us empty. People know that there's something more to life than just atoms and molecules. There's a longing inside of us all to have a connection with something beyond ourselves.

For the past 15 or 20 years the pendulum has been swinging back. Now a show like "Touched by an Angel" is one of the most popular on television. We've had a whole spate of afterlife movies trying to give aging baby boomers some hope beyond the grave. Religions of all sorts have seen a resurgence in interest.

There has been an influx of psychics that claim to talk to the dead. These individuals have been the subject of interest on major talk shows (Oprah, Montiel, etc). Many of them continue to return to anxious audiences of bereaved people who want to know that their loved ones are in a better place. The most famous of these psychics include: James Van Praagh, John Edward, and Sylvia Brown.

John Edward has a book, *One Last Time*, that was number one on the Los Angeles Times Bestsellers list in November, 1999. James Van Praagh book "*Talking To Heaven*" and Sylvia Brown "*Adventures of a Psychic*" were on the NY Times bestseller list.

On the web Dr. Helena Steiner-Hornsteyn was born with the gift of X-ray vision. This was nothing unusual for her since her mother's side of the family were women of exceptional spiritual powers for many centuries. Already as a child she could "see" through the human body and discover organs, etc., and notice various kinds of energy exuding from the body. Often others ask Dr. Steiner-Hornsteyn to connect with their deceased loved ones and receive messages from them. She found that in fact to be quite easy! If you are in need of intuitive healing for body, mind or spirit visit her homepage now.

About.com featured a poll in which 64% believed they could communicate with the dead.

What do we know about the spiritual realm? Where would we go for factual information about the unseen? There's no shortage of books, speakers, seminars, and web sites that purport to enlighten us but what proof do we have that any of them are true.

Actually there is only one source that checks out and that is the Bible. Only the Bible contains clear, specific, verifiable prophecies that are 100% accurate.

In the OT Book of Deuteronomy God gave this command:

There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD

In that same chapter God gives this wisdom: *And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' --when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.*

Right from the start, in the 5th Book of the Bible God gave us the standard. If a prophet claims to speak in His name and what he says doesn't come to pass don't believe him.

God's prophets are always right all the time. That's a lofty claim, isn't it? But when we look at the Bible prophecy after prophecy about Israel, about various nations and kings, and about Jesus Christ have been fulfilled down to the minutest detail.

I believe when all the evidence is considered, only the Bible stands up to that kind of scrutiny. I believe the Bible first of all, gives us the reasons to believe, then it gives us the answers to our questions about the supernatural.

Since December we have been carefully working our way through a study of the gospel of Luke in the Bible. Last week we looked at chapter 4 to see what kind of reception Jesus got in His home town. When He was around 30 years old He was baptized by John the Baptist and He had begun to preach.

Turn to Luke 4 pg 995

Things didn't go to well in Nazareth. The hometown crowd didn't like what He had to say and tried to throw Jesus over a cliff. That brings us to verse 31 and our passage for today.

Read vs 31-32

After escaping martyrdom in Nazareth, Jesus returns to Capernaum. *He went down to Capernaum.* Nazareth is perched in a hollow in hilly area southwest of the Sea of Galilee at an elevation of 1,300 feet above sea level. Capernaum, is a town near the water's edge at the north end of the lake at an elevation of 686 feet below sea level. Nazareth was Jesus' hometown, but now he moves to Capernaum and makes it his new base of operations. In Matthew 9:1 it is referred to as "*his own city.*"

Jesus walked east 20-25 miles to Capernaum. During Jesus' day it had grown into a city big enough to support a Roman tax office, a garrison for Roman soldiers, and a Jewish synagogue built by a Roman centurion.

Jesus lodged in Capernaum for several weeks, "*and was teaching them on the Sabbaths.*" Jesus is here to bring healing with the word of God. These people, who had not heard the voice of a prophet in over 400 years, needed to experience God's word in a fresh way.

The Sabbath began with sunset Friday night, and Jesus would attend the local synagogue service the following Saturday morning. Jesus was developing a reputation so He was invited to speak.

Jesus' ministry of teaching out-of-doors hadn't become necessary yet for two reasons: (1) he wasn't yet being mobbed by crowds of people that made preaching indoors impossible, and (2) he hadn't stirred up yet enough opposition to be banned from synagogues. So far he was hardly a blip on the religious establishment's radar screen, and Capernaum is far from the powers that be in Jerusalem.

His audience in the synagogue was made up of those whom the prophet Isaiah had diagnosed when he wrote in 700 B.C.: "*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up of only rules taught by men*" (Isaiah 29:13).

What's interesting here is that the people "*. . . were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.*"

He startled these people. They were used to commentary on scripture and on other commentators in the scribal tradition. Matthew 7:29 and Mark 1:22 add the phrase "... not as the scribes." If you read the Rabbinical writings of early Judaism, you understand the style: comments that basically refer to what a former Rabbi has said, most of it meaningless minutiae. But when Jesus taught, he taught authoritatively, with the Spirit upon him. He spoke more like a prophet than a scribe, with a "Thus saith the Lord..." rather than "thus spoke Rabbi So-and-So."

It was compelling preaching. By contrast with anything else the people had heard, it was shocking. Luke uses the Greek word *ekplesso*, "be amazed, overwhelmed." The tense he choose carries the idea of continued action: "they were continually amazed..." Jesus spoke with authority that showed itself in three areas. As we read through this passage I believe we can see how powerless we are in the spiritual realm, but how powerful Jesus Christ is. What I want us to see is how we can have his power in our own lives and how we can depend on that power as we help others.

First there is the power over demonic forces. Read vs 33 -35

Woah, what is this? I thought demons only hung around bars, X rated movie houses, and massage parlors. Here's a demon in church! What's with that?

We don't have time this morning to do a full study of demonology in Scripture but let me just give you a brief overview.

The Bible tells us that God created angelic beings before He created the earth. One of those angels was named Lucifer or "the bright and shining one." Lucifer was called "the annointed cherub." Apparently He was the highest ranking angel. But Lucifer didn't like taking orders from God.

He eventually led a rebellion and a third of the angels followed him. Obviously God won and they lost. Lucifer was cast out of heaven and his name was changed to Satan. *Saw-tan'* in Hebrew comes from a root; *to attack, (figuratively) accuse:-- (be an) adversary, resist.*

From that time on the Devil or Satan has worked against God, and his helpers have been the fallen angels, now known as demons.

Demons want to disrupt God's plan any way they can. They'll even show up in church.

In this case there was *a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon*. For all we know he could have been a regular attendee there. Nobody knew the difference. But when Jesus steps through the door something happens.

The demon in the man has more spiritual discernment than most of the people in the synagogue. As a spirit himself, the demon recognizes the powerful presence of another Spirit. But this Spirit is holy. Not passively Holy, but actively Holy, speaking truth through the Anointed Son of God that is here to set a whole synagogue full of people free. The power is overwhelming to the demon, and so he yells out.

In a minute we'll see the same phenomenon happened at Peter's door that same evening. People are bringing all their sick for healing, but in the crowd are demonized people, too. And they are shouting, "You are the Son of God!"

With all due respect to Linda Blair I want you to see what didn't happen. The guy didn't float through the air. He didn't projectile vomit various colored substances. His head didn't spin around. And blood didn't squirt out his eyes and ears.

Demonic control is a reality but Hollywood has distorted that reality in many people's minds. Thirteen times the NT writers use the Greek verb *daimonizonai*, often translated "demon-possessed." It means "*to be influenced, oppressed, or controlled by a demon, to be like a demon.*" Some have coined the word "*demonized*" to describe this demonic activity.

From my reading of Scripture it seems to me that there are various degrees of demonization ranging from influence to full-blown control. Satan's trying to influence all of us but in some cases a demon takes over a person's life.

Here was a man who was controlled by a demon and apparently no one knew it until he spoke up. **For a very different situation turn to Mark chapter 5 pg 972**

Read vs 1-5

Satan is shrewd. Sometimes he will work in ways that are in-your-face and sometimes he's subtle. But His goal is always destruction.

Back in Luke 4 Look how Jesus handles this situation: **Read 35**
Just jump down and read vs 41 also Read 41

At first glance we might wonder why Jesus stops the demons from speaking. After all,

they're speaking the truth. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Holy One of God. The demons are declaring openly what the residents of Capernaum are probably only suspecting at this point. Why does Jesus stop the demons? Dr. Ralph F. Wilson in *Confronting Demons at Capernaum* gives what he sees as the reasons. He lists 5 all starting with the letter "D".

1.*Distraction*. The demons are creating a scene, interrupting, and drawing attention away from Jesus' teaching. They are subverting his purpose and ministry. If they can turn people's minds from truth to the spectacular, they can prevent truth from working change and freedom.

2.*Defrauding*. The demons are stealing something that does not belong to them -- the voices of human victims they have gained control over. To let them continue to speak through their victims is to give tacit approval to their violation of the victim's faculties.

3.*Deception*. Before long, truth will be mingled with half-truths. When demons speak you don't get pure truth. It may sound like truth, like it did to Eve in the Garden of Eden, but soon there is the subtle twist, the doubt, the hook. Jesus doesn't trust the speakers and so he commands them to be silent.

4.*Derailment*. It is not time to declare Jesus' Divinity and Messiahship. Specifically, Jesus prohibits demons from speaking because, as verse 41 says; *they knew that He was the Christ*. The term *Christ* or *Messiah* had strong political connotations in First Century Palestine. To proclaim Jesus as Messiah prematurely would keep people from hearing Jesus' essential teaching. In Mark's Gospel Jesus prohibits some of the people he heals from disclosing it, because to do so would cause Jesus to be mobbed in every village he comes to. Also, Jesus seldom spoke of himself as the "Son of God," but as "Son of Man." Using the term "Son of God" would cause him to be accused of blasphemy and sidetrack his ministry. The demons at Capernaum are wittingly or unwittingly involved in subverting Jesus' own timetable for his ministry and self-disclosure.

5.*Discrediting*. The endorsement by obviously troubled and demonically-controlled people can hardly enhance Jesus' reputation. It is kind of like a conservative Republican presidential candidate being officially endorsed by People for the American Way. Demonic endorsement is the last kind of endorsement Jesus needs!

Now obviously this was pretty amazing to everyone who had come to worship that morning.

Read vs 36-37.

Consistently in the Bible when demons manifest themselves, Jesus makes short work of them. He commands them to come out. Certainly the crowds in Capernaum are impressed: "What is this teaching?" they ask. It is spoken with the authority of someone who KNOWS it to be true, one who command evil spirits and must be obeyed.

Jesus proactively met the demonic interruption and stopped it by breaking the spiritual bonds that the demons use to control their victims. Jesus came to set people free.

No one else in town had this power. In fact no one else in town had ever had this power. you and I don't have this power. Psychics and mediums don't have this power. That's why the warning from God in Deuteronomy : *There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD*

See all those things just play right into the hands of the demonic realm. People get pulled in looking for power, or spiritual insight, or wanting to talk with loved ones who have passed away. People want spirit guides or to hear from channelers. And so often at first they seem to find what they're looking for. But as time goes on the forces of darkness begin to take over.

Listen to this testimony from a young woman named Katina:

I grew up in church all my life. When I was 17 years old I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. When I was 20 years old and still in college I started slipping away from God.

At 27 years of age I was so far away from the Lord that I experimented with Witchcraft. My experimentation became a lifestyle. I used Tarot cards on a daily basis, I had an altar where I lit "special" candles and I used the ouija board. Don't be fooled like I was into thinking that people who have passed on are the ones talking to you. That's not it at all! You will come face to face with Satan himself because he'll be the one talking to you!

He'll tell you lie after lie and convince you that you're talking to a dead family member or some wise person whose passed away long ago.

Using the ouija quickly became an addiction. I would spend about eight hours per week in DIRECT contact with demons. After awhile I started to experience strange things. For example: In the middle of the night I'd awaken by the sound of someone running down the hallway and opening or slamming the front door. I would get up to check it out, but there was nothing to see.

There were times when I would hear someone walking up my bedroom steps and walking across my floor towards me in bed. I would turn around, but no one was there. I would lie in bed and feel the entire bed shake as if it were pushed. Shadows would move across my walls when there was nothing to cast a shadow. A lamp that sat securely on my desk catapulted out at me. These were just the beginnings of more terrifying things that were yet to come.

You may be saying to yourself right now, "Why didn't you just turn back to the Lord?" It's because I really didn't know how! At this point my mind was not my own. You see, by stepping into the devil's playground I unknowingly gave him permission to control more and more of me. I was terrified! I was afraid to go to bed because I was tormented every night.

I actually know what the presence of evil "feels" like. If there's a bad spirit around me every hair on my body stands on end. There's also a "whoosh" feeling that starts in the pit of my stomach and moves straight up my body. It feels like the "going down" feeling on a roller coaster. This started happening more frequently and it got more intense to the point where it took my breath away. This was the turning point in my situation.

I walked into a church on December 24, 1998 and re-dedicated my life to Jesus Christ. At that point it was still really hard for me to talk to God because I was dealing with a lot of guilt. I began to pray. I went as far back as I could remember and repented of everything. I was trembling in fear because of all that was going on around me. After I let everything out I realized that the terror I'd been feeling for so long had been replaced with such indescribable peace.

What an awesome God we serve! He deserves all of the glory and honor and praise! He had to stretch way down to lift me up. I'm thankful that God has long arms!

Only Jesus Christ has power over demons, not us. Are demons real? According to the Bible they are but you'll never read about Jesus or the disciples going through a ceremony or exorcism to deal with them. Jesus simply spoke. The power is in His saving message.

*In Jesus Christ there is the power over demonic forces.
In Jesus Christ there is the power over sickness.*

Read vs 38-39

Simon, of course, is Simon Peter. Some religious groups have developed the idea of a celibate priesthood with Peter as the first pope. If he was he was a married Pope because he had a mother-in-law.

According to Jewish custom the main Sabbath meal came immediately after the service at the sixth hour (12:00 noon). So Peter invited Jesus and the disciples to the home of his mother-in-law for lunch. Unfortunately she was sick with a high fever.

On her behalf, "they" (which probably means Peter and the other family members) appealed to Jesus to heal her. While the other gospel accounts focus on the physical "touching" or "taking the hand" of this woman, Luke emphasizes the word of rebuke spoken to the fever.

Now notice, once again, it's the word of the Lord which is powerful. Not only does this high fever leave the woman instantly, she got right up and started working on dinner.

You know, when Jesus calmed the sea, it happened just like that. When Jesus healed He didn't just speed up people's recovery. He healed them instantaneously. That is the Biblical gift of healing.

Again, this is the power of God being shown plainly and clearly.

All of this is starting to draw quite a crowd. **Read vs 40-41**

Here's our demons again. Notice very carefully that while there were demons not all sickness was caused by them. No where does the New Testament teach that ALL sickness is demonic. In one sense all sickness relates back to Satan, but not all sickness has a direct demonic cause. When Jesus healed the sick, only sometimes did he cast out a demon to do it.

In fact look with me at Luke 6. A few pages over. Read 6:17 & 18

There's a clear distinction drawn in the NT between people who were simply physically ill and those who were demonized.

In Jesus Christ there is the power over demonic forces.
In Jesus Christ there is the power over sickness.
In Jesus Christ there is the power over spiritual darkness.

Read 4:42

The next day everyone around wanted Jesus to start healing and doing miracles again. Who would want a healer and teacher like Him to leave? But He had gone out to a deserted place. Why? Was He just trying to get away from the crowd? Did He just need a little peace and quiet? The parallel passage in Mark tells us why Jesus went to that deserted place. He went out to pray He was under growing pressure and prayer is the way to keep our priorities straight.

Jesus knew what He had been called to do. In the synagogue in Nazareth He read from Isaiah 61 and applied it to Himself. He emphasized the importance of preaching, so Jesus stresses the priority of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom over practicing miraculous healings. Then not only does Jesus view preaching as having priority over miracle-working, He also views it as necessary for Him to preach throughout Israel, and not just in a few places.

It's so hard for us not to get caught up with the immediate stuff of life. We want God to take care of the physical for us. When it's our dad or mom in the hospital, when it's our baby that's sick, when we're in pain, we want God to do something about it.

And truly He wants us to know that He has all power. But He's never promised that we'd all be healthy and wealthy in this life did He? In fact even Jesus only did miracles to establish His credentials as Messiah. His main focus was preaching the Good News of forgiveness.

Actually all sickness, pain, and death have their ultimate origin in the same place. Satan tempted Eve and she and Adam sinned. The wages of sin is death.

We live in a world characterized by sickness, pain, and death because it's a fallen world. The effects of sin is the pain we experience, and eventually hell itself.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that He defeated sin and death by the cross and the resurrection. We're all sinners before a holy God. We are undeserving of anything from Him. But Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day.

Jesus says to the people of His day and to all of us: *...whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. He that believes on Me has everlasting life.*

The Book of Revelation gives us the end of this time of pain: *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

You know why the former things are going to pass away? Because the God who has power over demons, and sickness, and is the source of all spiritual truth has carried out His plan of forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ.

Do you know Him this morning? Have you put your trust in Him for forgiveness of your sins and the healing of your soul?

If you haven't, come to Him today. Come in faith believing the message of the Bible. At the mighty name of Jesus the demons tremble. At the mighty name of Jesus believers bow and worship.