

Sermon 6-23-19
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W. Hempstead, NY

Based on the Gospel Lesson for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Luke 8:26-39.

With Authority

Evil spirits – demons – are nasty things. Don't think they're real? You could argue from today's gospel lesson that the man living in the tombs had a severe mental illness. But can that account for his ability to break the chains with which the local people had bound him? In particular, can that account for what happened to the herd of pigs and the terror of the herdsman? And then, what kind of psychological cure did Jesus perform to leave the guy in his right mind after so many years in misery? This was much more than mental illness or psychiatry.

Now, there is an interesting accounting for the origin of evil spirits and demons found in the ancient Jewish apocryphal book of Enoch. It revolves around giants. Yes. Giants or as they are called in the Hebrew – the Nephilim.

The Nephilim are first mentioned in Genesis 6:4, "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown." This verse is without any further explanation and it's hard to know exactly what it means. But, the Nephilim seem to be human males born of a mating between the sons of God (whoever they are) and human females. The Nephilim were strong men of great ability. It's these Nephilim who lived before the flood of Noah that the book of Enoch identifies as being the source of demons.

Now, the term Nephilim is only used once more in the bible in the book of Numbers. The context is this. When Israel came out of Egypt, God commanded them to invade and conquer the land of Canaan. Moses sent twelve men up into Canaan to spy out the land. Part of their report is found in Numbers 13:33, "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." It's clear from this verse that the term Nephilim means giant people.

So, even after the flood of Noah wiped out the Nephilim, Nephilim genes were present in the descendants of Noah's sons, no doubt through their wives. For Scripture tells us that after the flood there were giant people living in the land of Canaan. For instance, we read in Deuteronomy 3:11, "(Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaites. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide. It is still in Rabbah of the Ammonites.)" This verse speaks of a king who was killed by Israel during the invasion of the Promised Land.

And then about four hundred years later we read in 1 Samuel 17:4, "A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall." But Goliath wasn't the only one. We read in 1 Chronicles 20:5-8, "5 In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of

Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod. 6 In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot-twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. 7 When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. 8 These were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men." In addition, God spoke these words to Israel through the prophet Amos about 900 years before Jesus in Amos 2:9, "I destroyed the Amorite before them [your fathers], though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below." Tall as a Cedar? Now that's tall. But notice. Yahweh has no use for the Nephilim blood line. And they were all destroyed by regular sized humans.

In Genesis we're not told how the Nephilim bloodline took hold except with that brief description where the sons of God had children by the daughters of men. Their children were the first Nephilim, the giant heroes of old.

However, the Apocryphal book of Enoch tells us that 200 angels of the group called "the Watchers" disobeyed Yahweh. Heaven is their home. Yet, these 200 disobeyed and settled on earth on Mount Hermon. In effect, aliens settled on Mount Hermon. They were not human. In time these Watchers somehow mated with human women and the hybrid Nephilim children were born to the women.

The book of Enoch says that the Watchers taught their wives great knowledge that was disobedient to Yahweh. In time, the Nephilim, their children, turned to great evil. It sounds like the Nephilim manipulated the genes of creatures, just as we're beginning to learn how to do once again. Also, Enoch tells us that regular human beings couldn't produce enough food to feed the giants. So the giants warred against each other. They even became cannibalistic, eating regular humans. All this came to Yahweh's attention and the book of Enoch along with the apocryphal book of Jasher point to the evil of the Nephilim as the main reason Yahweh destroyed earth with the great flood of Noah.

Now Enoch was a man true to Yahweh. He is briefly mentioned in the pre-flood genealogy of Genesis. Genesis says he didn't die but was taken up into heaven like the much later prophet, Elijah. It's possible that the apocryphal book of Enoch was written by him and preserved down through the ages. If so, Enoch spoke of a vision he had concerning the Watchers and their offspring, the Nephilim.

In this vision Yahweh spoke to Enoch saying, "And go say to the Watchers of heaven ... wherefore have ye left the high, holy, and eternal heaven, and lain with women, and defiled yourselves with the daughters of men and taken to yourselves wives, and done like the children of earth, and begotten giants (as your) sons? ... And now the giants who are produced from the spirits and flesh shall be called evil spirits upon the earth, and on the earth shall be their dwelling. ... And the spirits of the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle and work destruction on earth and cause trouble ... And these spirits shall rise up against the children of men and against the women, because they have proceeded from them." (Enoch 15:1,3,8,11) So, when the Nephilim (the half-human, half angel giants) died, their spirits were bound to this earth. They are spirits disobedient to Yahweh and that's what makes them evil. The giants were the source of the present disobedient evil spirits.

So, as if things weren't bad enough on earth and our sinful natures weren't a big enough burden, we have unseen evil spirits to deal with. This past week I attended

the meeting of the West Hempstead Community Support Association. The superintendent of the West Hempstead school district was there telling of the measures being taken by the district to prevent shooters from getting into the schools, and to identify students who might turn against their classmates in this way. The head of security for Young Israel, the largest temple in town, was also there, describing the measures they and other houses of worship are taking to prevent attackers from getting inside, and what to do if they do gain entry. A representative of the Nassau County Police was also there describing the measures the department is taking to prevent these kinds of mass shootings.

Tell me something. What is it that gets into a person's head to make them a mass murderer? Why does some regular at casinos in Las Vegas rent out a room with a perfect field of vision, smuggle in an arsenal and then decide to open fire upon a festival event down below? They still can't tell what motivated that guy. But that's because a culture based upon Philosophical Materialism refuses to look at the historic biblical perspective and recognize the activity and reality of evil spirits.

In whatever way evil spirits actually got on this earth – for the book of Enoch is only apocryphal – they're still a reality. We see the results of their working, not just in individuals but in whole societies and movements. What caused Venezuelans to follow Chavez and Maduro so that they now have to eat out of garbage cans? What caused ordinary human beings to become Gestapo or become KGB so that tens of millions would perish? Indeed, what insanity gripped New York State so that under the new one party rule the first thing that was done was to make abortion legal right up to birth and beyond? And, of course, we can see the action of evil spirits in our own lives as they bid us to cross over various lines of decency into active disobedience against our Creator.

But in all this, there is good news. His Name is Jesus. We can see the good news in various episodes during Jesus' ministry. For instance, we read in Luke 4:33-34, "33 In the synagogue [of Capernaum] there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!'" It's clear that this spirit saw in Jesus not only its own destruction but the destruction of all like it. By the way, the judgment of evil spirits is something strongly spoken of in the book of Enoch.

In addition, the Greek word to destroy is used as a name in the book of Revelation. We read in Revelation 9:11, "They [the plague of locusts sent to torment rebels] had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon." Appollyon means destruction.

But Jesus didn't act immediately to destroy. We read in Luke 4:35-37, "35 'Be quiet!' Jesus said sternly. 'Come out of him!' Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. 36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!' 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area."

The people of Capernaum knew the woes evil spirits could cause in life. They were amazed to see Jesus' immediate power over such spirits. It was good news

worth talking about. Of course, that's because Jesus is God the Son as well as the Son of Man and the Son of God.

Now, in today's gospel lesson did you notice this in Luke 8:31, "And they [the demons] begged him [Jesus] repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss." An abyss is a giant hole with no bottom. The Abyss is hell, if you will. For there is no bottom to the evil rebellious creatures sentenced to hell will engage in. Fallen angels have already been stripped of their righteousness. Human beings who refuse Messiah will also be stripped of righteousness because they refused Jesus, the righteousness of Yahweh to us.

But the good news in all of this was and is that Jesus, the very righteousness of Yahweh, was the one of whom the legion of demons was terrified. He is the great champion, the guardian and defender of all those who put their trust in Him.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, Satan desperately tried to get Jesus to define the good for Himself. But Jesus would not. He considered Yahweh's Word alone to be His good, even if it meant obediently going to the cross and dying a savage death. Therefore, for His obedience, Jesus was crowned our champion, guardian and defender. Most importantly, He was crowned Our Righteousness before God – your righteousness and my righteousness. His resurrection from the dead absolutely assures us of this.

Now, when it comes to disobedient evil spirits afflicting people, Jesus has done something gracious. He began it even before He went to the cross. Jesus sent out seventy-two of His disciples in teams of two in order to preach the gospel and heal the sick. We read in Luke 10:17-20, "17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' 18 He [Jesus] replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'" Now, if this was the result before Jesus went to the cross, how much more can we then stand in this gracious ministry if we confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh, crucified for the forgiveness of our sins and resurrected for our new life of righteousness?

Therefore, to this day, believing Christians have been given authority, when necessary, to uproot evil spirits from their abodes. It's not a pleasant business, but the result is always a blessing. And because we can only be righteous in the name of the Jesus who has come in the flesh, we don't exercise an authority of our own over evil spirits. We can only exercise Jesus' authority in this ministry. If it were not for Jesus we could do nothing against evil spirits. For none of us is perfect. But as someone has said, "God doesn't send perfect people for the job. Rather, He sends people perfect for the job."

Those perfect for the job are those who trust implicitly in the perfection of Jesus Christ who forgives their sins and cleanses them from all unrighteousness. Evil spirits can't be forgiven and cleansed. We can. Evil spirits know this and will try to get us to doubt the work of Jesus in our lives. They don't want to give up their cozy living arrangements even though it's making someone's life miserable.

Therefore, it's important to memorize and believe a word like Luke 10:19. Jesus has indeed given us authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and overcome

all the power of the enemy and nothing will harm us. He has done so out of His own perfect righteousness, giving us His perfect righteousness as a gracious gift through the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, it's equally important to memorize and believe a word like 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." In the war of words between evil spirits and believers only the Word of God can enable us to prevail. Believers standing on the Word of Truth will prevail by faith in the Son of God.

There's one more thing – community. When Jesus sent out the twelve, He sent them out in teams of two. He did the same thing with the seventy-two. The reason is the community of the faithful. All those called to the righteousness of Yahweh through the righteousness of His Messiah are not strong enough to overcome the darkness alone. We succumb to doubt and fear. However, there is strength in the care of one believer for another and the infilling of Lord Holy Spirit. And we're always stronger giving care than receiving it.

In the teams of two that Jesus sent out, each comforted the other as they dealt with the many life and ministry situations they were thrust into. It's time for us to begin to do the same so that the needs of new believers can be dealt with. Therefore, let those made righteous in Christ be gathered together in the strength of His humility and graciousness. Demons are real. In the war of words we are called to stand together against them. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.

Quotations from the book of Enoch, Translated by R.H. Charles, D.Litt., D.D., London Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917. Published in:
Genesis And The Synchronized, Biblically Endorsed, Extra-Biblical Texts,
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