

***“Under the Influence”***  
**Acts 19:11 – 21; Acts 5:1 - 11;**  
**Ephesians 4:26 - 27**

“Are you troubled by strange noises in the middle of the night?  
Do you experience feelings of dread in your basement or attic?  
Have you or your family ever seen a spook, spectre or ghost?  
If the answer is "yes," then don't wait another minute.  
Pick up the phone and call the professionals...  
Ghostbusters!!!”



Popular culture has always had a place for supernatural, the unseen and the unnerving.

As we talked about last week, I am a firm believer that there are other entities at play in our lives.

We’re told quite clearly, our battle is not against flesh and blood “but against persons without bodies — the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus, Paul, Peter, the Apostles, the Early Church, the Church for the last 2000 spoke of a personified devil.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 6:12

They assumed that in between humans and God there exists a vast array of wicked, intelligent, free, spiritual beings whose behaviour significantly impacts human existence.

Peter wrote, “YOUR enemy, my enemy, your enemy, the devil.”  
You and I have a spiritual enemy.

To put it bluntly, to live as follower of Jesus is to be caught up in a cosmic drama; a war zone where we experience crossfire in a spiritual war.

And think I to be a Christian is to recognise that there is an unseen world that surrounds us.

This unseen interacts with the seen world.

So sometimes this unseen realm is exposed.  
And that’s what we seen in our readings this morning.

In Acts 19 you have Paul casting out demons in the Name of Jesus and you have these itinerant exorcists who seem amazed at his effectiveness.

By way of background Paul in his missionary journey has reached Ephesus.  
He been there preaching for 3 month in the synagogue (which is a Jewish place of worship) until they have had enough and force him out.  
So Paul goes and preaches to the non-Jewish population.

And God is at work – healing and healing through exceptional means as well as exorcisms.

What these exorcist like the seven sons of Sceva would do is they would have complicated incantations with variable success.

In this case they invoke Jesus name as almost like a magic word and discover to their horror that the name of Jesus is no some magic word to be used carelessly.

The person involved exhibits supernatural strength and the seven sons are left a bloody mess.

The people see and hear about this and see Paul is moving in God’s power without incident and they are in awe – “the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour”.

When you read accounts like this, a number of questions come to mind, like, does it still happen today?

Well yes.

This is a story from a friend of mine from the mission field. He writes:

One day I was walking down an alley where we lived and was suddenly approached by distraught man.

He asked me to come and pray for his brother. I asked why he needed prayer. I was told that his brother delighted in bathing in the creek that was situated nearby, which was essentially a urine and faeces infested waterway. I was informed that man had tried more than once to drive nails through his hands. Who could not but pray for such a tortured person? I entered the home and asked if I could pray for him. No sooner had I started praying then dropped to the floor. I waited for him to recover and prayed again. He once more fell to the floor. A third time I sat him in a chair, prayed and again he hit the floor. I began to suspect demonic activity. He was lying on the ground and all I could see was the whites of his eyes. With this I thought, "Oh, no."

I then spoke in English and asked what the names of the demons were. In English, three names came back even though the man didn't speak English!!!

Interestingly, they were all religious spirits which explains the nails in hands episode. For the next hour or so I prayed without success. I realised that my faith level for this sort of thing wasn't that high. So for the next week I prayed, fasted and read and re-read books on demon-possession. I then asked a Filipino pastor to accompany me. This time quietness seemed to come over the man. The last time I heard about the man he was happily married with children and in work.

Along do these kind of encounters still happen today, there is another that inevitably is asked; I'd say the number one question that gets raised? I think it's this:

***"Can a Christian be possessed?"***

If a new Christian asked you that question, what would you say?

Tell the person next to you.

Here's where I'm up to: possession implies ownership and control.

However we're told that for Christians God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son."<sup>2</sup>

We're told the followers of Jesus are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in us, individually and collectively.<sup>3</sup>

Peter tells us that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's special possession.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, if you are a follower of Jesus, where he is your King and Saviour – your sins are forgiven and you live under his rule – then you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

You belong to God.

You cannot be possessed or owned by a demon.

What's also of note is the fact the Bible never uses the term demonic possession.

The word the Bible does use is 'demonised'; to be acted on by a demon or evil spirit.

To be under the influence of the evil one.

A follower of Jesus might be tempted, bound up, tormented or oppressed but can never be 'possessed'.

If that's the case, then how does Satan usually work in our lives.

### ***"So how does Satan often work in our lives?"***

How does that often happen?

What do you think?

Tell the person next to you.

Well I think Ephesians 4 verses 26 – 27 give us insight:

"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold"

What I want to highlight is the word, "foothold".

When you see that word foothold there, is a translation of the Greek word 'topos'.

What it actually means,  
it's the word opportunity,

---

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:13

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19 – 20

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 2:9 – 10

it's the word place,  
or even more specifically, it is the word seat.  
S-E-A-T.  
The word seat.

What Paul is saying is that if you have something in your life,  
like anger,  
and you're not dealing with it, but it's festering, if we have something that is  
lingering, that is festering, in our lives, in the basement, then what this other  
entity the devil does is that he finds a place to land.

And he comes to sit in this festering, lingering place.  
And he uses it to make stuff worse in our lives.

So anger if left unsolved can lead to explosive outbursts, to bitterness and  
other aggressive behaviour.  
It's interesting to note that a few verses later Paul counsels us in verse 31, to  
"Get rid of all anger, rage and bitterness..."

So anger can give the devil a foothold.

But not only anger.

What do we hear in the story of Ananias and Sapphira?  
The account raises a whole lot questions which is another sermon in itself.  
We're told:

"For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them,  
brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it  
was distributed to anyone who had need."

This was an exceptional time of giving.  
The kind of giving that, as it says in the text, happens "from time to time".  
It is the kind of giving that is OTT – over the top, extreme, full on.  
In this case it was the selling of land and houses with the money being given to  
the church leaders to be distributed among those in need.  
It's a "Wow" offering.  
And it wasn't compulsory. No one was compelled to do it.  
It was completely voluntary.  
(By the way, why did they place the money at the Apostle's feet?  
It was an act of relinquishment. It was letting go.)

But Ananias and Sapphira conspired together to feign this “wow” giving.  
They put on this act.

But through the power of the Holy Spirit Peter sees through and says, “Ananias, how is it that *Satan has so filled your heart* that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?”

So Ananias and Sapphira have an area in their lives, and I think the area was greed.

They know that God condemns greed, yet they kept the money for themselves while wanting to appear generous.

And because they have this area of greed in their lives Satan was given a place to land.

So it could be anger, it could be greed.

Then what about our first reading this morning.

What was the area the devil was finding a place to land?

It was the occult.

Sorcery and scrolls are mentioned.

What about Ephesus, the city it was a hothouse of occultic and spiritual activity.

Occultic practices, including the new age, are strictly forbidden in the New Testament.

It could be a significant bad decision you’ve made or a decision from a good place that turned out badly, and it torments you. You keep coming back to it. “If only...”

It could be in the sexual arena.

It could be anything, and you’re not dealing with it.

These can be places for the devil to land and create torment.

How then do we deal with the Devil?

***Don’t let stuff linger in our lives***

If you want to get rid of the flies you need to throw the garbage away.

That’s what we see Acts 19 verse 19:

“A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.”

Fifty thousand drachmas is the equivalent of \$4 million today.

So it was costly.

Which, by the way, is a mark at times of true discipleship.

We're even told in the passage that there was stuff in the church.

We're told:

“Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.”

In other words, these believers had an area of their lives that made them vulnerable to the evil one and they knew they needed to bring it into the light.

You see, when we have stuff on the inside of us or are involved in certain practices, and we let it linger, let it fester, it gives room to the devil; it gives the flies a place to land.

So they lit a match.

They had a bonfire.

They burned them publically.

Why?

They recognised that these were a gateway to the demonic.

That didn't want to let stuff linger In particular in the area of the occult.

Tarot cards, crystals, Ouija boards.

As we heard it's not limited to the occult.

I think bitterness is a landing place for the malignant forces at work in our world today.

It could be drugs.

It could be in sexual area.

It could be a psychological or emotional wound from the past.

In Acts they didn't want to let it linger.

And they did it quickly.

So my have you got a place in your life where you're making it easy for the devil to land?

Is there anything in my life in your life, that is lingering and festering?

Is there something in your life you need to set a match to, literal or figurative?

The very final point I want to make is they sometimes we need help. Sometimes the areas to big, the mess has become too large, and so if you an area, others and myself are will to pray for with you and for you.