

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany
February 3, 2019

Text: Luke 4:31-44

Theme: "The Answer is Yes!"

For questions the obvious answer is yes, such as: Is water wet? Is the Pope Catholic? Am I a sinner? The answer to all is yes, though the last one we have this way of getting into degrees of sinner. Jesus is asked a question today in our text, a demonic sourced question. "Ha! ("Hey," might be better) What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" "Yes," the answer if "yes," and more than that demon or demons. Jesus came to destroy the prince of demons. We read in Hebrews 2:14 Jesus came to destroy the one who has the power of death, the devil.

Yes, the answer most definitely is yes, but the way is not so obvious.

In 1 John 3:8 we read, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil." What is that work? Jesus said to some of the Jews who did not believe in Him, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar, and the father of lies." (John 8:44) Lies and deception are his work.

In his lies he says the wonderful, the blissful, the good, can be better. How sweet is that? We read in Proverbs 9:17, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." ¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol." Solomon is speaking of falling prey to the words of the woman Folly, rejecting wisdom—exactly what was happening when the devil is believed. He does promise to sweeten the deal. How sweet is it in the end?

You know you can sweeten concrete. You can add sugar to the mix and if you get the right amount you can delay the setting of that concrete. When you mix in that sugar it goes through that concrete, not localized to one little portion. So what you have is concrete that is not setting up the way it normally would, not as strong as it would be at this point without the sugar. Normally concrete achieves 65% of its final strength in 7 days, and 99% in 28 days. Delay the cure could be a good thing if there is a problem in actually getting it into the forms. It's not a good thing if someone has slipped that in on you without your knowledge, not sweet at all.

The sweet promised by devil in Paradise was not sweet at all. It meant paradise no more. Now there is trouble between man and woman, between the animals of creation, between the man and woman and the rest of creation, and most of all between the man and the woman and the Creator. The work of the devil is thorn and thistles, friction and fracture, dust and death. And it's not some localized part of creation, not one big

area or several big areas, not 50 or 65 or 99%, no, it's all creation. The devil work of ruination is all around.

We in Capernaum in our text. We see it pretty directly with the demon possessed man. There is physical torment from the spiritual invasion, this spirit of the unclean demon. There is no lack of numbers in Satan's stinging scorpions. Is there more than one in this man? He does say, "What have you to do with us?" (v 34). Maybe he is only reflecting that the confrontation with the Holy One went beyond its own current encounter. We do have examples in Scripture of physical harm from demons. We see the possessed man in Mark 5 (and it is multiple demons with him) is unrestrainable. He would cut himself (v 5). In Mark 9 the father of a demon possessed boy said the demon would throw him into fire (v 22). Later that day after the sun had gone down (ending the Sabbath) we see that there were more in Capernaum who were so possessed (v 41). This demonic torment must have left loved ones feeling helpless, even hopeless. What could they do against such darkness?

But this was not the limit of the devil's work in Capernaum. The mother-in-law of Peter was stricken with a high fever. Sickness is part of the resulting work of the devil. There are many sick brought to Jesus in Capernaum. Those in the 1st century were much more limited in what they could do to combat this work. Sickness could limit life or take it. Of course despite our gains it still can and does.

But the work of the devil was not confined to Capernaum. It was in all of Judea and beyond. Jesus said when asked to stay, "I must preach the

good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well; for I was sent of this purpose. And He was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.” (v 43, 44) Again, the work of the devil is throughout all creation. It is thorns and thistles, friction and fracture, dust and death.

Yes, Jesus had come to destroy. He is the destroyer’s Destroyer. The demon knew what he was up against right off, The Holy One of God. This rolls right off the lips of the man possessed by the unclean, unholy one. It was not a confession of faith but a statement of fact. We could say the demon as already walking by sight and not by faith. Jesus would say to unbelieving Jews in John 8, “before Abraham was, I am.” (v 58) The demon was not using the same words but he knew (as we say in the Nicene Creed) this one was *very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father*. Now this one was right in front of him, in the flesh, really! *Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man*.

Jesus doesn’t answer the question with a “yes.” He simply answers with His power, “Be silent and come out of him!” (v 35) The demon has no choice in the matter, out he comes. He throws the man on his exit, but no harm to that man. This man who had been under the demon’s power was under that power no more at the word of Jesus. Yes, Jesus rebuked the demon, ‘Back off and go away!’ It happens. This particular manifestation of the work of the devil is foiled.

And there’s more being destroyed of he devil’s there in Capernaum. Jesus rebukes the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law. It’s just no more. He

heals all those brought to Him. He rebukes all the out crying demons. 'Back off and go away,' and it happens. And people are rightly amazed. Who would not be. They are amazed at His teaching authority and at His power. They have never heard or seen anything like it!

Again, it all goes beyond Capernaum. "I must preach the kingdom of God to other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose." (v 43) He does. We see all that being played out through Luke 19:27 where He enters Jerusalem. His teaching is with authority and power. He gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, walking to the paralyzed, cleansing for the lepers, life for the dead, freedom for the oppressed. He came to destroy the work of the devil. Every time the work of the devil meets the Holy One of God, that particular work is destroyed. Yes, Jesus does go through other towns and He does reach Jerusalem amidst much anticipation. Is the Messianic kingdom near? Is the Son of David about to take his place on the throne?

The big battle is coming. Maybe all the rest could be seen as skirmishes. The main battle to crush the power of Satan was about to happen but in a surprising way, certainly a surprise to the devil. This week no demons are cast out in Jerusalem, and no bodies healed, at least none we are told of. There is a lot of teaching, much of which had a sting and rebuke to those trying to entrap Jesus. He also instructs His disciples about faithfulness and things that were to come where faithfulness would be tested, such as the destruction of Jerusalem and the tribulations before His return.

The week goes by and the time comes for Jesus to celebrate the Passover with His disciples. Sometime in this week we may say the Destroyer makes his move. “Then Satan entered into Judas....He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.” (Luke 22:3-4) Was the devil trying to show Judas a sweet deal? Where was this coming kingdom, seemed not to be coming. Following Jesus was really getting him nowhere. Maybe it was time to cut your losses and cash in for what you could.

And things go forward. They share the Passover. Jesus says, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” (22:15) And suffer He would. It comes. The enemies planning and scheming so long frustrated now all comes together. This deal with Judas pays off. Thirty pieces of silver was a real bargain. They have Jesus just where they want him. He’s on the cross dying. ‘Hey you, you who would destroy the temple and build it again in three days, how’s that working out for you?’ Yes, where they want him, dead in the tomb, even under a Roman guard! And for the Destroyer, ‘Wow, convinced unholy men to slay the Holy One of God.’ Sweet destruction!

Yes, the answer is yes. Jesus has come to destroy the devil. This was the plan from the beginning, from before the beginning, before the foundations of the world were laid and when the prince of darkness was still an angel of light. It happens as Jesus had told His followers it would happen, as the prophets had foretold. He is handed over, condemned, tormented, put to death, but on the third day He rises. The temple of His

body is cut down, but He raises it again in three days. He has destroyed the work of the devil. He has overcome all the devil's temptations, fulfilled all righteousness and atoned for all the unrighteous. The devil's threats of condemnation are smashed by the club of Christ's fulfillment. Thorns and thistles, friction and fracture, dust and death much give way to the leaves and fruit, reconciliation and wholeness, beauty and life.

In Capernaum and throughout Jesus' work in all the towns and villages and countryside we see the previews as the Kingdom of God has invaded and is liberating the world held captive by the devil. His healings, His casting out of demons are restorations in time that are previews of the victory to come. He has beat back the accusations of the devil already. We have right now, believer in Christ, brother and sister in Christ in this sin corrupted world, even fullness of life. Yes creation is corrupted, still in state of decay, but there is release from death and decay in Jesus, and one day the appearing of the uncorrupted, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet blast when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality. Take that, devil!

The Destroyer will no longer be allowed to tempt and try. He will be thrown in the lake of fire, death itself will be thrown into the lake (Revelation 20:10, 14) Those whose name is in the Book of Life will dwell in the new heaven and earth, those whose names are not in the book will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Yes, yes, the answer is yes! Jesus has come to destroy the work of the devil and to destroy the one who holds the power of death. Bondage to the devil is already destroyed in Jesus. We walk in the life and the light of our

Lord. We await the final day, the beginning of glory, even as we live in victory now. For Jesus' sake. Amen