

## **Possessed**

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Seeking After God 3  
Mark 1:21-27

One sermon resource I checked kiddingly asks about this text, “Hey, doesn’t every preacher want to preach on the exorcism texts?” Yeah, that’s exactly what we think about every time we read that Jesus has tossed out a demon spirit in the gospel.

You and I belong to a stream of Christianity that at a minimum asks questions of these stories. Most of us don’t see a shaking body as anything other than an illness. We understand that the brain has different ways of working, and even something as simple as a virus can cause what in the gospel times would have been considered possession by a demon. We live under science, not a world filled with evil spirits of the supernatural sort. Frankly, it’s enough for me to live in a world with evil things that humans can do all on their own.

So, we’re not going there today with this text. But even as I claim that we don’t believe in possession by a demon, I do believe that we today have other kinds of possession: things, habits, and addictions that do have a hold on us, and that we are called by God to examine, and to give up to the authority of Jesus.

Walk down any busy street, and we see them, or perhaps you are standing in line at the grocery store. Scarily, sometimes they’ll be doing it on the highway – I’m talking about staring at bright, small screens that we call phones (except nobody is calling with them very often). Neuro-scientists tell us that our addiction and use of these devices is changing our brains, and not for the better: our ability to focus for longer periods is reduced, our brain scatter increases. In other words, we are less ourselves that we could be.

Seen in this light, it is clear and all of us become possessed by habits and things that hold us back from the full life that God intends for us. All kind of things can become addictions – the normal ones like alcohol and drugs, but

also things like computer video games, Candy Crush, and even exercise. I'm reminded by a comment from Jane Fonda, the actress, who said that it was progress for her to be an exercise nut after coping with more severe addictions in her life.

We can become possessed in other ways too – a life crisis often overwhelms our lives, and usually that is temporary – meaning that we find our ways out of it. Sometimes, though, we can get stuck, stuck in a pattern that freezes our life. There's a TV show called Hoarders, where people get an intervention from family members because they have allowed their possessions to possess them, and almost always, there is a trauma or crisis that is behind the hoarding behavior.

Other possessed behavior can come like a group psychosis, like racism or sexism, or any one of a number of ways that fail to see reality.

To be possessed is to be stuck in diminished world.

Jesus comes to the person possessed, and says,  
“Be silent, and come out of him!”

This story has me thinking about Jesus and the nature of his authority. In the context of the story, Jesus is clearly able to see better, clearly able to handle the nature of wild and unruly behavior, clearly able to help people be better for it. Like a skilled physician, he wasn't shy about making someone uncomfortable if it meant that they would be healed.

And this got me to thinking about a story I heard on a radio show awhile back in which they interview a blind guy who has developed a way for blind people to see.

Ah, I got your attention, I see. Yes, I just did say that this man has developed a way for blind people to see. Sounds like a Bible healing story, right?

You know how bats actually navigate the world by using sounds like sonar? Well, this guy, Daniel Kish, has developed a way for blind people to do the

same kind of thing by clicking like this: [click] Apparently, you can get really good at this, so good that you can navigate your way around the world. The technique is called “echo-location.” Daniel does this so well that he rock climbs, and teaches other blind people to see. And neuroscientists were trying to figure out, does a blind person create images at all like what we who “see” do? And the answer is: yes! People who echo-locate use the same parts of their brains to create rough images as we do when we see.

But to get a blind person to do this? Well, it’s overcoming a tremendous barrier – the barrier of expectations. Blind people are taught to depend on other people, and little kids are often discouraged from exploring their environment. They are literally stuck inside, stuck to the sidewalks and the bubble that sighted people, even the well-meaning ones, create for them.

Daniel tells about one little boy he encountered, who basically never went outside when they met, even though he lived on a wonderful farm. The boy was highly resistant to changing, so Daniel took a drastic action, he took away all of the boy’s inside toys for a week. After a week, the boy was frustrated enough to join Daniel outside his home, which was surrounded by trees (it was a fruit tree farm). Daniel told the boy, “you are going to climb this tree.”

And it went downhill from there. The boy got up maybe 20 feet of the 60-foot tree, and then said he had to come down. Daniel was insistent. You only go up. The boy resisted, but Daniel was unmoved by the tears and anger. He knew that this was important, that this was going to be life-changing for the boy. He *had* to climb the tree. Daniel was *not* going to give him a choice.

It’s really hard, right, maybe even to the point of abusive. But Daniel has a different take – this is what was going to change his life, to give him full life. One day of tears was going to be worth it. And eventually he did! It took him 3 hours, but the little boy climbed to the top of the tree and down, and later got a wilderness certification.

Amazing, right? It’s like, *the blind leading the blind*. (I know, a bad joke)

Jesus is like this Daniel. He's got the same equipment as we do (remember, fully human), but a totally different way and set of expectations. Jesus has authority because he has walked the walk, he knows The Way to God, while we don't.

And now, Jesus is planning to take on the forces that would rob the children of God of all that God hopes and intends for them. He will not be deterred by forces that will deprive people of living their lives.

Now, what about us? We're not Jesus, but we are his disciples. We are ones that are being snatched from possession by all kinds of things, we are the ones who get distracted by the latest trivial scandal instead of focusing on saving the planet, who get caught up in our "what are people thinking about me" instead of focusing on the things that need to get done.

So let us rely on God and God's messengers to help us dis-possess us from the habits and addictions that trap us.

Let us be willing to help others through the same things.  
Let us be willing to risk to find abundant life!

Amen.