

**The Schemer Part 4:
“Under the Influence”
Acts 16:16 – 18; 19:11 – 20**

So that is our passages for this morning.
Who would like to be in my shoes?

I don't know about you, but these passages throw up a number of questions.

So there are three today, that come from these that I want to explore and they are all interconnected in some way.

Both passages involve Paul and both involve evil spirits or demons, and both involved exorcisms.

We've been talking about the schemer, the devil or Satan, and the evil spirits mentioned here are the cohorts under his command.
And in these incidents, by some means, they've taken control of other people.

Now at this point, I don't know about you, a common question arises.
What is the first question that often get's asked about this area, when you come to passages like these?
Any thoughts?

In my experience it's this:

“Can a Christian be possessed???”

I mean, if a new Christian came to you and asked that question, what would you say?
Tell the person next to you.

Here's where I'm up to: possession implies ownership and control.
In other words, people come under the control, often for an extended amount of time, of a demon.
During that time they are not themselves at all.

That's what the seven sons of Sceva encountered.
And we're told that the demon spoke through this man and this man, he was imbued with supernatural strength by he was able to beat these men to a bloody mess and leave them naked.

He overpowered seven adult men.

Yet we're told that God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son."¹

We're told the followers of Jesus are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in us, individually and collectively.²

Peter tells us that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's special possession.³

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.

The word the Bible does use is 'demonised' to have a demon or evil spirit.

They are under the influence of the evil one.

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

Having said that, full possession where an evil spirit takes control of a person, even for a limited amount of time, does happen.

It is rare but there are some people where, for a certain time, they are not themselves.

It is not a moment of psychosis or drug induced.

[As an aside, what emotion is absent from these passages?

Fear. When talking about this topic fear is often a response that Christians have and yet it is absent in the passages. We are called to be alert and cautious yes, but fear is not why these passages were written.]

If we move from there the next question is, how does this happen; how do people come under the influence of demons?

I mean, we've talked about over the last couple of weeks.

Paul warns believers in Ephesians not to give room or a space to the devil.

Don't give him a place to land.

Take up the shield of faithfulness – live loyally and obediently – and extinguish his fiery arrows.

At times there is a mystery involved.

¹ Colossians 1:13

² 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19 – 20

³ 1 Peter 2:9 – 10

When Jesus ministered, there were often no reasons given for how someone came demonised by an evil spirit.

However, in these passages there are specific areas that are mentioned.

They're mentioned in both these passages.

What were they?

Fortune telling and sorcery, areas of what we call today the occult or New Age.

These are attempts to interact with the world-in-between and they're explicitly forbidden for believers to be involved in.

Did you know that there is a command to God's people in this area?

Come with me to Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 9:

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there.

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire,

who practices divination

or sorcery,

interprets omens,

engages in witchcraft,

or casts spells,

or who is a medium

or spiritist

or who consults the dead.

Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God.”

These all involve efforts to obtain knowledge which is ordinarily hidden, and the means of attaining it is through dealings with the spirit world or with mysterious supra-natural forces.

In Acts it says the girl in had a spirit by which she told the future.

In other words she was a psychic or clairvoyant or a medium.

These activities are a gateway.

Let me put it like this:

Vampires are clearly a myth, right?

But within in many, if not all myths, there are some truths.

Now the thing about vampires, as a representation of evil, is that there is one place of refuge or safety they cannot enter of their own choice – your home.

The only way a vampire could gain entry to a home is by invitation – you have to invite them in.

You get it?

Many years ago I read the story of Randall Baer.

Randall Baer was for many years a top authority in the New Age movement.

He wrote numerous books on “crystal power” and finding enlightenment through some of the practices mentioned in Deuteronomy.

Baer was having an out-of-body experience where he said it was like he was overwhelmed by a cascade of colour and light – it was as if he was looking straight into the sun. Waves of bliss radiated through his spirit. He was totally captivated by the experience.

Then suddenly, another force stepped in. It took him by complete surprise. In the twinkling of an eye, as if a supernatural hand had taken him behind the scene of the experience that I was having.

He was taken behind the outer covering of the dazzling luminosity and there he saw something that left him literally shaking for days.

What he saw was the face of devouring darkness.

Behind the glittering facade of beauty lay a massively powerful, wildly churning face of absolute hatred and unspeakable abominations – the face of demons filled with the power of Satan.

For a moment that seemed like eternity, he realized that I was in serious spiritual danger.⁴

Baer goes on to talk about how that incident led to his own commitment to become a follower of Jesus and his absolute rejection of the New Age and occult.

Though sometimes we don't know how evil spirits gain entry into people's lives, these practises are a gateway to the demonic realm.

So what do you do if you come into contact with someone who under the influence of an evil spirit?

Practising exorcism was common in the time of Jesus and Paul. It was attempted by Greeks and Jews.

⁴ Randall N. Baer, *Inside the New Age Nightmare* (Lafayette: Huntington House, 2000), 55.

And what they would do is use different formulas, magical names or charms. Their success was patchy to say the least.

The seven sons of Sceva appear to be itinerant Jewish exorcists. They had seen that Paul's ministry was particularly effective in this area. The girl was set free instantaneously and the seven sons of Sceva were aware his reputation. But as we saw their attempts were a disaster.

So what about us?

I mean, what is it about Paul that he has such authority?

Was it because he was loud? Is it in being aggressive? Did it come from having a technique?

There *is* something about Paul being an apostle. It says that God did extraordinary miracles through Pauls; miracles that were not and are not the norm. They are exceptional and unusual even for Paul.

But this authority is not limited to apostles alone.

Let's turn to Luke's Gospel, chapter 9 and verse 49:

"Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

Now Luke chapter 10 and verse 1:

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go!"

Then verse 17:

"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

So there were these unnamed others who were doing this ministry of confronting evil spirits.

In this area followers of Jesus have authority but that authority doesn't come from anything of ourselves.

The evil spirit knew Paul's name because Paul knew Jesus.

And Jesus said not to rejoice in having authority over spirits but to rejoice in your names being made known in heaven by Jesus.

The authority we have in this area comes from walking, communing, being close to Jesus. Walking closely with Jesus we receive the Father's approval and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

That's where it's found.

So what's the takeaway this morning?

For some of you it's this: shut the gate.

We're told in Acts 19, those who believed in Jesus repented and those who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.

Get rid of the tarot cards, throw out the crystals, burn the New Age books, stop consulting with clairvoyants!

I mean, why would you want to be involved in a realm that actively opposed to Jesus?

Shut the gate today, when you get home. Don't wait.

The other thing I would say is this: if you ever find yourself in a confrontation with an evil spirit, and you think, "My faith is not up to this", find someone who is... *and learn from them.*