

# The Devil Made Me Do It

## *Seeing Reality:*

Mark 5:1-20

July 31, 2005

Wesley J. Gabel

I marvel at the craftsmanship that went into Vacation Bible School this past week. The work reflects marvelous talent and creativity. Similarly, the work of this universe reflects a great God; and since God is awesome, much of reality, like an iceberg, is beyond the field of human vision. That presents problems. How do you know we are accurately seeing reality?

The Bible teaches that people have a problem grasping reality; but it is not because God is so great. We do not have a neglectful parent that lets his children suffer in ignorance; rather, God's communication to us and our relationship with him is actively opposed. The Bible shows that very thing in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are tempted. People have a problem grasping reality because of deception, not ignorance.

*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*  
(Proverbs 14:12, NIV).

Jesus came to open our eyes to reality. He is God's window to the world; he is "*the way, the truth and the life.*" Thus, as we hold to Jesus' teaching, not with just one hand and another reaching for other truths, but as we hold to Jesus' teaching with both our hands, we become his apprentices, his disciples; and then we'll know the truth, and the truth will set us free. Jesus opens our eyes to an amazing world that includes angels serving humanity. Last week, in a message entitled *Touched by an Angel*, we considered how Jesus and his apostles taught us to *regard* the presence and activity of angels, *revere* or respect them as creatures with divine

assignments and authority, and recognize our *responsibility* that one day we will judge them, commending those who serve us and condemning those who oppose us.

One of the angels to be condemned is the devil. The words, *devil, Satan, demons, evil spirits*, show up 160 times in the New Testament. A 2004 Gallup Poll reveals that belief in the existence of a devil has risen dramatically. In 1990, some 55 percent of the American population believed there is a devil. By 2004, the figure climbed to 70 percent. Belief in a devil doesn't mean that we are comfortable with the subject. The people in Mark 5, who saw the man healed from many demons, weren't comfortable. They asked Jesus to leave. They were afraid. Let's not take potshots at them. We too have fears. Mentioning this subject does not give us a happy feeling. Some of us fear that we may lose respect if we attribute things to the devil or devils. People we love and respect may think less of us. Some of us fear gullibility or deception. Could we be sucked into a cult or superstition? Since darkness is depressing, could focus on the devil be a ploy to steal our joy? And do you remember the famous line by Comedian Flip Wilson, "The devil made me do it!"? Could such a focus get us into a blame-game, where we don't own up to our moral responsibility and take corrective action? All of these fears represent traps that occur when we accept this reality un-tethered from Jesus' vision. Jesus taught that there is one God to whom all creation is subject. That one God sent Jesus and us disciples also to free humanity from deception, oppression and destruction of the devil.

Bob and Betty Walker are members of Bethany. In gratitude for God's healing of their grandson Jonathon, they've named their ministry Jonathon House. Their journey began twenty years ago when little Jonathon was only two. Betty tells the story, and Bob gives us his interpretation. **(VIDEO CLIP)**

Subsequent experiences in Bob and Betty's life both helped them interpret what happened in that elevator and equipped them to help others. Their experience and ministry may seem as foreign as a distance culture or cult. Yet it is exemplified in the history of both the universal church and The United Methodist Church. The reformer Martin Luther didn't merely write songs about defeating devils, like *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, he also actively fought them. John Wesley, Methodism's founder, recorded in his journal his ministry to someone terribly tormented by an evil spirit. This is just a couple, among many historic church leaders, who personally embraced this specific ministry of freedom.

If there wasn't reality here and a call to believers, why would Paul exhort:

***We are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.***  
(Ephesians 6:12, NLT)

Why would Peter warn:

***Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour.*** (1 Peter 5:8, NLT)

Why would Jesus expect his followers, as recorded in Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9, to free a young boy whose life was threatened by these rebellious spirits?

In the Old Testament, the devil and his minions organized an attack on Job instigating violent crime, bad weather and physical illness (Job 1 & 2). Incidentally, similar works of Satan and his minions are observed in the New Testament. Job was attacked on three fronts. Satan used the world around him, attacked him in his flesh, and went right for his heart or spirit. Those are the three battlegrounds everyone experiences. I have them up on the screen.

We were made spirit and flesh, so those are two fronts; and the world about us is the third. Since each living soul is spirit and flesh, God's Spirit wants to live with our spirit as a

companion and counselor in our flesh or body. We invite God's Spirit when we invite Jesus to come into our heart. When God's Spirit comes, he shares with our spirit the love and desires of God. Indeed, we were created to function in that fellowship. However, some of our desires, thinking and actions are harmful. They come from the world outside us, like the serpent to Eve and Eve to Adam, or they come from inside us. Take swearing, for instance. At first you had to *hear* a swear word to say it. That was the world. In time you may speak a swear word out of *habit*. You don't think or choose to swear. You may not want to swear; however, you do it anyway. It's so fast and reflexive that it is biological. There is a neurological pathway that bypasses your conscious choice. That's what the Apostle Paul sometimes labels the flesh. To stop this, you have to retrain your way of thinking and acting. The Bible calls that "the renewal of the mind." With swearing, at some point you may experience an intense desire to invent a word. That's not a habit, and that's not something you heard. That's an urge inside you that God didn't create. That's not your spirit. God created your spirit. That's a different spirit, perhaps the devil or his minion.

Another graphic shows the influence of *disordered community* or a sinful world. We get hurt because of the brokenness of the human family where there are accidents, painful relationships and sinful behavior. Sooner or later, the consequence may be physical or mental illness. It may come from a biological problem, the flesh. It may come as a result of bad thinking developed in painful relationships, the world. It may come from the direct influence of rebellious angels like the man in Mark 5 experienced, the spirit. It may come from an interaction of those forces, so even if we root out one thing, like demons, medicine and counseling may still be needed. Whatever the case, being sick is not sinful. However, it is a result of a sinful world.

The great news is that Jesus is the cure for what ails us. His blood cancels all rights that sin gives our enemies. That's the rights our enemies have over individuals, communities and all creation. The appropriation of Jesus' blood removes the rights and authority of our enemies and ransoms the sinner and all that is defiled by sin. That is why James the brother of Jesus can write: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you!" (James 4:7). We actually can make him run! As we place our faith in Christ, repent of our sins, as we pray, fast and seek God's will, the authority of God is being reestablished in our lives and world. **The kingdom of God is the authority of God being reestablished by God through the people of God. Wow!**

A third graphic shows a divinely-ordered community ministering fully to all of us who suffer in this sinful world. That is the work of Jesus in us and with us. I thank God for giving us knowledge of medicine, psychology and of the spirit. God is pouring out life through the faith and love of his people. I thank God that the key to health and life is not a pill, getting over a bad relationship or getting rid of a bad spirit. *The key to health is the rule of God's love and wisdom that Jesus brings to us individually and collectively as his body... and through us as his body.*

What will Jesus do with a people who wholly embrace him and fully follow him? Isn't that the journey we're on? Isn't that the journey you want? Do you see reality? Do you see Jesus?