

6.14.09 / Mark 1:21-28**Demons**

One easy mistake to make in this story is to assume that the spirit is termed an “unclean spirit” because it is a bad spirit but not a demon. This would be wrong.

The Greek word for “demon” (daimonion) refers to a large class of lesser spirits. In the Greco-Roman world these spirits could be good, evil, or neutral. Within the New Testament, and perhaps the Jewish world as a whole, however, “daimonion” was used to refer to *evil* spirits. It is important to realize that the word Mark uses implies a spirit that is in opposition to God because it is unclean, and God is clean. As such, Mark is calling this unclean spirit a demon. Mark has chosen the words “unclean spirit” because it stresses something he wants to highlight as he contrasts cleanliness and uncleanness and demonstrates what (who) has the authority to make something clean.

Possession stories

Stories of Jesus healing demon-possession are a common theme in the New Testament. Mark tells five main stories, and hints at many more. Mark 3, for instance, records the scribes as saying, “By the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” This indicates that Jesus has made this a habitual activity, but only one of the possession stories has been told at this point in Mark.

Miracle stories, in general, are also not just “look at me” stories. John refers to miracles as “signs”, and there is always a sense that miracles demonstrate power and make a point at the same time.

For something like the exorcisms this becomes even more pronounced – why does Mark tell us this story, and not many others? The answer would seem to be that this story tells us more than the others, and so we should be aware of what is happening above and beyond the “Jesus is powerful” angle, particularly with regard to cleanliness and uncleanness.
