

The Devil – Really?

1. Warm up question. What's the most frightening movie about evil you've ever seen?
2. On Sunday, we explored what we should believe about the devil and demons. The traditional idea is that there is an intermediate level of beings – more powerful than us, less powerful than God – whose activities can somehow affect our reality. Many of us are accustomed to embracing this notion for angels, but not necessarily for demons, i.e., angels turned bad.
 - a. Why is it easier to believe in angels than demons?
 - b. What factors or experiences make you skeptical about the devil and demons?
 - c. What factors or experiences push you toward the idea of the devil and demons?
3. Read Matthew 8:28-34.
 - a. Look back at verse 29. What do you make of what these two men said to Jesus? How did they know he was the Son of God? What do they mean by “torment”?
 - b. Speaking through the men, the demons say that if they have to leave them, they want to go into the swine. Why? What do you make of that? And why did Jesus give them permission?
 - c. Why did the townspeople beg Jesus to leave?
 - d. Do you believe demon possession is possible? If so, how should it be distinguished from mental illness?
4. On Sunday, Jeff outlined three different ways people have interpreted Scriptures about the devil and demons. First, the traditional view says there is an actual intermediate level of beings, commonly referred to as angels and that, as with other kinds of beings, some go bad, making destructive choices that, in mystical ways, can affect or influence our reality.
 - a. Do you find it odd (or hard to believe) that God would create a level of beings above us, i.e., good angels?
 - b. Do you find it odd (or hard to believe) that some angels might go bad? If that happened, and you were God, what would you do with the bad angels?
 - c. One of the most common objections to the traditional view is skepticism that God would allow evil beings like the devil and demons to continue to exist, especially if their existence adversely affects us. Jeff responded with two stories – one about how Jeff and David's cats reacted when they adopted two dogs and struggled to understand why their Daddies would allow two demon doggies to live in their

house. The other story was about their Golden Retriever who went bad and began attacking their Lab. Rather than get rid of the Golden, they used fences and baby gates to keep the dogs separated, because they couldn't bear to get rid of their Golden. Jeff suggested maybe God takes a similar approach toward the devil and demons. What are your thoughts? Do you think God loves the devil and hopes for his redemption?

5. A second interpretive option is to see Scriptures about the devil and demons as metaphorical. In this view, the devil and demons are personifications of the monsters that lurk inside us. They need to be taken seriously, not as literal beings, but as metaphors for the power of evil in and among us.
 - a. In her writings, Kay Warren tells how she went to Rwanda looking for "monsters" and was stunned to find that the people who committed the atrocities "took care of their families, went to work, chatted with neighbors, laughed, cried, prayed, and worshiped." From this she concluded that each of us has the capacity to do monstrous things under the right circumstances. In other words, we all need to be aware of the power of the demons within us. Your thoughts?
 - b. La Rochefoucauld said, "There is hardly a person clever enough to recognize the full extent of the evil he does." What do you think he meant? Do you agree?
6. A third interpretive option is to see the concept of the devil and demons as a stand-in for an even higher truth that we are incapable of understanding while trapped in space-time. In this view, the devil and demons are a way for God to explain the infinite workings of evil in an "age appropriate" way we finite humans can understand. But when we get to heaven, the devil/demons model may give way to something far more sophisticated.
 - a. How do you evaluate this third option? What do you like or dislike about it?
 - b. Which of the three options most speaks to you – and why?
7. Each of the options embrace a common core truth: evil seems to operate in a way that is active, intelligent, and strategic. It often feels like we're being targeted and tested in profound ways by some kind of master strategists.
 - a. Jesus once told Simon Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you to sift you like wheat." Lk. 22:31. Tell us about a time you felt like you were being sifted like wheat. In such times, does it help you to frame what you're experiencing as "being under attack" or "spiritual warfare"? Why or why not?
 - b. Rob Bell once challenged each of his congregants to identify a deceptive message, i.e., a "lie of the devil," that was taking root in their life, write that lie on the sole of their shoe, then be mindful of crushing it with each step they take. What deceptive, destructive message have you internalized that you need to write on the sole of your shoe?