

I want to read something to you that I came across this week; it's written by an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization, called International Crisis Group—they are committed to preventing and resolving deadly conflict that takes place in our world.

“for the most part, [2015] has been a dispiriting year... The Arab world's turmoil deepened: The Islamic State captured large swathes of Iraq and Syria, much of Gaza was destroyed again, Egypt turned toward authoritarianism and repression, and Libya and Yemen drifted toward civil war.”

“South Sudan is entering its second year of a brutal civil war that, for the moment, looks set to grind on... Some estimates suggest the war has already left as many as 50,000 dead and almost 2 million displaced.”

“Ebola ravaged parts of West Africa, and Boko Haram insurgents stepped up terrorist attacks in northern Nigeria. The international legal order was challenged with the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and war is back in Europe as fighting continues in eastern Ukraine.”¹

Closer to home, the RCMP are reporting that in the city of Surrey, in the first 6 months of this year, attempted murders are up by 367%. Abductions and kidnappings are up 100%, sexual assaults are up 53%, robberies are up 22%, and assaults are up by 20%.² In 2015

we also have the mass shootings that took place in South Carolina and Oregon. This kind of news is sobering.

What kind of world do we live in? Is it good? Is it safe? These are simple questions but there are few simple answers. We live in a beautiful, but fragile, world. In this world there is great potential for goodness and beauty, but sadly, there is also great potential for evil and ugliness. This is the world we live in.

It's not as though greed, violence, and oppression are inventions of our own age and time—they have been going on since the dawn of creation. Less than 50 years before Jesus was born, Julius Caesar ruled the mighty Roman Empire. He is lauded by most history books as cunning general and brilliant empire builder, but he was marked by both greed and brutality. Caesar conquered Gaul—1 million slaughtered, 500, 000 families left homeless—so that Rome could grow fat off her wealth.

It was into this world that God came; Jesus Christ came to a beautiful but fragile world. People then, as they do now, were in need of hope. The apostle John describes Jesus as a light that shines in the darkness (John 1:4-9). And try as it might, darkness cannot extinguish light; wherever light goes, the darkness is pushed back.

Though Jesus didn't pick up a sword, lead an army, or run Rome out of town, He was a Conquerer nevertheless. His enemy and His battle

¹ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/op-eds/2015/guehenno-10-wars-to-watch-in-2015.aspx>

² <http://bc.ctvnews.ca/rcmp-blames-turf-war-for-surrey-s-spike-in-violent-crime-1.2497660>

was very different, just as the Kingdom He ushered in is very different.

The Bible tells us that the world as we know it, will pass away; one day, greed, violence, and oppression will be no more. But in order for this kind of world to exist, evil must be defeated and brokenness must be healed before restoration is possible. Here's the good news—this is *why* Jesus came, and this is *what* Jesus is still doing.

As we continue in our series through Luke, let me encourage you to open your bible with me to Luke 4:31-44; in it we will find two stories that further reveal the identity and mission of Jesus Christ.

“31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. 32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority. 33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 ‘Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’

35 ‘Be quiet!’ Jesus said sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. 36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, ‘What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!’ 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

38 Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. 39 So he bent over her and rebuked the fever,

and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. 40 At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said, ‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.’ 44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Last week, we looked at three events that revealed Jesus’ identity and mission: His baptism, His temptations, and His most important sermon. Jesus described His mission in terms of bringing good news to the poor, the imprisoned, and the oppressed. In the stories we’ve just read, we get a taste of what this good news looked like. Here’s my **Big Idea** for this sermon: *Jesus has come to heal, deliver, and restore.*

But in order to get at what these stories reveal about Jesus, we need to deal with a mental hurdle that stands in the way of many modern readers. Once we’ve dealt with the hurdle, we can move on to the stories themselves. *What is the mental hurdle?*

1. Mental Hurdle: “there’s no such thing as evil spirits.”

I’m going to deal with the issue of evil spirits in a moment, but first let’s consider the notion of “evil.” I think most Western people would

agree that evil exists and that it can be seen in the world, but many are reluctant to give evil a name or a face. *Why?* Perhaps because labelling something or someone as “evil” necessarily implies that there is a standard of right and wrong, that we could definitely know the good from the bad. It’s a short step from this concession to the notion of a God who has set up such a standard.

Jesus knew that evil was real and that the capacity for evil resides within the human heart. God has given humanity the freedom to choose, and with this choice comes the capacity to choose that which is not good. God has created a world in which we reap the consequences of the decisions we freely make—to hold God responsible for the consequences violates the freedom we’ve been given.

Ken Blue writes, “To say that God could, if he chose to, prevent all [evil] in our kind of world is nonsense. The kind of world in which God will eventually eliminate [evil] is not the one we live in now,” but in the new heaven and new earth that is coming.³

Jesus knew that evil was real, that the capacity for evil resides within humanity, and, that behind evil stands an **evil one**—the Bible has many names for this enemy of God: the serpent, the devil, Satan, etc.

As you read Luke’s gospel, Jesus is the centre of attention, after all, this was Luke’s aim—to convince his audience that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Scripture tells us very little about who Luke was, but church history tells us that before becoming a disciple of Jesus, Luke was a doctor. Interestingly, Luke includes more

technical details in his healing accounts than any of the other gospel writers. As a doctor, Luke had likely treated many patients and so, in describing Jesus’ ministry, he is careful to say when Jesus is healing someone of a sickness, and when a person’s symptoms were a result of an evil spirit.

What are evil spirits? The Bible describes these spirits as fallen angels, created by God, that turned away from God in rebellion. These spirits stand in opposition to God and seek to destroy all that He loves. At one time it was generally agreed that there is both a physical realm and a spiritual realm with spiritual beings. But during the Enlightenment, with the rise of science, belief in the supernatural was said to belong to the realm of superstition.

Today, even many Western Christians are somewhat embarrassed by the Bible’s descriptions of the devil, or evil spirits. Some are inclined to say that the man in the synagogue wasn’t suffering at the hands of an evil spirit, but rather from a mental illness that went undiagnosed in the ancient world.

It seems to me that it doesn’t require any more faith to believe in the existence of evil spirits than it does to believe in God’s existence. In fact, the existence of such spirits explains a lot about why the world experiences so much evil, pain, and suffering. Let’s move on and get into the stories themselves—*what do they reveal about Jesus’ identity and mission?*

³ Ken Blue, *Authority To Heal*, 91.

2. Jesus—God’s agent of deliverance (Luke 4:31-37)

Luke 4:31-37 describes Jesus as being the agent of God’s deliverance—wherever Jesus went, the oppressed and afflicted were set free. Jesus’ ministry was frequently marked by confrontation with evil spirits—a significant part of His mission was to crush the kingdom of darkness. As we go through this story, I want you to notice a few things:

First, notice the location: Jesus is in a synagogue, a place devoted to the law. People were watching and waiting for God to deliver them. The synagogue was a place where purity and holiness were taken very seriously.

Jesus was teaching in a place devoted to purity, among a people devoted to God, when something began to happen in the spirit realm. A man was listening, but so was the spirit that afflicted him. The man heard Jesus of Nazareth, but the spirit heard the voice of God.

Second, notice the fear: *“Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”* The immediate recognition of Jesus was followed by subsequent terror: *“Have you come to destroy us?”* Jesus doesn’t answer the question but His action leaves little doubt. With a word Jesus set the man free.

Third, notice the plural: The evil spirit doesn’t cry out, “what do you want with me,” but *“What do you want with us?”* This isn’t going to be a one off battle, Jesus is just getting started, and the evil

spirit knows it—it’s the beginning of the end for the kingdom of darkness.

Finally, notice Jesus: I’ve done a lot of preaching in my years as a pastor, and on a few occasions I’ve been interrupted by people yelling out in the middle of my delivery. It’s unnerving; I wouldn’t wish it upon anyone. But the way Jesus engages this man speaks volumes about who He was and what He had come to do.

Jesus didn’t treat the man as a distraction; He didn’t ask the ushers to escort the man out. Jesus was God’s agent of deliverance; this man’s suffering was a part of the reason He came to earth.

Application: Before I move on to the second story, I want to offer a brief word of application. You may be wondering how this man became afflicted by an evil spirit, and, whether this kind of thing still happens today? Luke doesn’t answer either question—he takes for granted that evil spirits exist, and, that they afflict human beings.

Remember, evil spirits stand opposed God and all that God loves, so naturally, they will seek to afflict, oppress, and destroy some aspect of human life, personality, or capacity for relationship with God.⁴ These spirits are not equal and opposite to God—they can’t read our minds, they aren’t all-powerful, but they do wield whatever power that we give to them.

Habitual sin has a way of opening a mind and heart to the influence, and possibly, the affliction of evil spirits. In Ephesians 4:26-27, the apostle Paul tells us that when we allow anger to go unaddressed, we

⁴ John Coles, *Developing A Healing Ministry*, 55.

give the devil a foothold in our lives. We open ourselves to the influence, and possibly, the affliction of evil spirits by participating in the worship of false gods (going to see mediums, attending a seance, seeking a spirit guide, or reading tarot cards).

illus: Early in pastoral ministry, I was invited to join a prayer ministry team that prayed for people in the church. One night, a member of the congregation came requesting prayer; the team gathered around him and entered into a time of silence, asking Jesus to reveal anything He wanted us to see.

As we waited, a vision of this man began to unfold in my mind's eye. This man was on a boat, sailing into a storm—the wind was howling, the rain was pelting down, there was no light to be found. The man was clenching the steering wheel, his knuckles white, and Jesus was standing right beside him. You could see that the man desperately wanted Jesus to take the steering wheel, but the man wouldn't let go—he couldn't let go—he was too afraid to trust Jesus.

At the time I completely dismissed what I had seen—I had never had a vision before, and so I chalked it up to a wild imagination. But when I shared what I saw with the prayer team, they believed that God had revealed something important about what was going on in this man's life. As we talked with the man, it became clear that he had been afflicted by a spirit of fear; it prevented him from having the relationship with Jesus that his heart desired.

In the room that night there were no strange voices, no violent shaking, but the power of Jesus was present, and the man was delivered. That night, something broke in his life and he later described a freedom to trust Jesus that he had never known before.

Every week we provide an opportunity to receive prayer from our prayer ministry team. They frequently pray prayers of blessing and healing, but they also pray for deliverance. They believe, as I do, that Jesus is God's agent of deliverance; what was true of Him 2000 years ago is true of Him today. Maybe as I've been speaking, something is stirring in your heart today—you may feel as though a battle is raging within you right now—don't ignore what you're sensing. If you're willing, get in touch with me this week and I can arrange a time for you to meet with some of our prayer ministers.

Let's turn our attention now to the second story.

3. Jesus—God's agent of healer (Luke 4:38-44)

If vs. 31-37 reveals Jesus as God's agent of deliverance, then vs. 38-44 reveal Jesus as God's agent of healing. Of the 35 miracles recorded in the Gospels, 28 of them (80%) are miracles of healing and deliverance. Throughout the Gospels we see the whole range of healing: Jesus restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the mute. He healed broken hearts, broken relationships, skin conditions, blood conditions, and He even raised the dead.

In Luke 4:38, we are introduced to Peter's mother-in-law; her body was racked with a fever. In Peter's home, a miracle similar to the one in the synagogue takes place; the rebuked fever is dealt with just as easily as the rebuked spirit. The moment she is healed, she responds with gratitude and hospitality.

News travels fast in a small town, later that night, a large crowd gathered outside Peter's house; Luke tells us that Jesus healed and delivered all that were sick or afflicted by evil spirits.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus spent so much time healing? Isn't it because God loves the world? The kingdom of God is all about restoration. When Jesus healed the sick He was demonstrating the reality of the kingdom. Life as heaven knows it, is a life of wholeness not fracture, a life of peace not conflict, a life where love rules the day.

As the kingdom of God broke into 1st century Palestine, people saw glimpses of restoration and wholeness. And what happened in Jesus' ministry, is still happening today. Jesus did not *have* a healing ministry, He *has* a healing ministry. We, the church, have entered into, and participate in Jesus ministry. To participate in the ministry of healing is to reflect the love God has for people who live in a fallen, broken, world.

illus: In the last year, we have experienced a number of healings in our midst. There have been a number of women in our church who have been unable to conceive, and I'm happy to report that a number of our women are now carrying children in their arms or within their wombs.

A few months ago, someone from our church contracted meningitis, and was given very little hope of survival. But this person's small group began praying for them, and they recovered—even the doctors called it a miracle.

Jesus is God's agent of healing; what was true of Him 2000 years ago is true of Him today. Our prayer ministry team would consider it a privilege, if you are willing, to stand with you and ask Jesus for the healing you seek. Perhaps as I've been speaking this morning, faith is stirring in your heart—the faith to approach Jesus and ask for His

healing grace. Don't ignore what you're sensing, get in touch with me this week and I can arrange a time for you to meet with some of our prayer ministers

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to offer one final observation from our text. Ironically, the evil spirits—those who stand in opposition to God—see Jesus more clearly than anyone else in the text: “*I know who you are—the Holy One of God!*” The world around us still debates the identity of Jesus: was Jesus simply a great moral teacher, a powerful healer, a misguided Messiah, or was He God in the flesh?

The people who listened to Jesus that day responded in awe and wonder—they were impressed by the power of His words and deeds. But I find myself wondering, did they ever get around to actually following Jesus? You may know who Jesus is, you may even be amazed by His words, His power, His forgiveness, and love, but have you actually given your life to Him?

At the cross Jesus dealt evil a deathblow. His death and resurrection guarantee that a day is coming when evil will be no more—spirits will be banished and sickness will be defeated. Evil still exists, spirits still oppress, bodies still break down, but the good news is that Jesus has come to heal, deliver, and restore. Each deliverance, every healing is foretaste of the life to come. Life as we know it here and now is not ultimate; there is a greater day coming, a greater deliverance, a greater healing, a greater restoration.

Put your hope in Him; He is faithful and what He has promised will come to pass. **Pray**