

Above All Earthly Powers (Matthew 8:28-34)

Introduction: “*The Power of Nightmares*” (BBC, 2005)

By their very nature, terrorist organizations are hidden, subversive, secretive. Only people on the front lines, generally have ever come across an actual al-Qaeda. They don't operate in the open. And discontented American youth or schizophrenic people may try to join the organization or just say that they have. But the whole thing is to us unseen, faceless, mysterious. This is the way evil works.

1. The reality of demon oppression (v. 28)

Is this just their way of speaking about mental illness? No, they know exactly who Jesus is (v. 29). The background of demonic activity in the OT: King Saul's depression and murderous rage (1Sam 16:14ff). The false prophets in the court of Ahab who let them to destruction (1Ki 22:22). The worship of idols through child sacrifice (Ps 106:37).

2. The reality of Christ's authority (v. 29-31)

One thing that's clear from all the examples in the Bible, all angelic activity on earth, good or evil, happens only by the permission of God. Why would the Lord *permit* them to bring such misery to human lives?

First, God gives people over to the tormenting influence of evil spirits because they have despised the influence of the Spirit of God. God brings judgment by bringing evil on the evil (1Sam 16:14, Judges 9:31ff, 1Ki 22:22, 2Thess 2:9-12).

Second, He permits the activity of evil spirits in order to demonstrate his own power (compare Rom 9:17). The lesson: if the disciples were not to fear the storms they *could* see, the disciples were not to fear the evil they *could not* see.

3. The reality of human unwillingness (v. 32-34)

The spiritual *cause* is *extremely* mysterious, but the spiritual *effect* is *extremely* clear—willful self-ruin. But what we see in those poor demonized men and then in the pigs, we now see in a whole town of Gentiles. They are held in thrall every bit as much from God's love, life, and joy, their lives every bit as much in bondage to evil and death. Verse 31 the demons *begged* Jesus that they might *depart*. Verse 34, the townsfolk *begged* Jesus that he might *depart*. The Lord may well give you exactly what you wish. And you will hear on that day, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt 7:23, see Matt 25:41).

Application: Spiritual warfare today

Clearly, on the one hand, Christ came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1John 3:8, see John 12:32, Rev 20:3). “But woe to the [inhabitants of the] earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Rev 12:10-12, see Acts 16:18, 1John 4:1, Rev 16:13-16) But Paul and the other Apostles drive out demons through Christ's authority. Acts 16 again, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18).

There's *plenty* of self-destructive behavior caused by mental illness and, frankly, just human sinfulness. But the spirits are subject to Christ, and you may pray that the Spirit might depart in Christ's name. For a more modern treatment see *Demon Possession and Allied Themes* by John Nevius, D.D. See also the experience of Michael Carneal and many other school shooters
<http://www.cnn.com/US/9806/04/woodham.trial.pm/index.html>.