

**“Demons and Sickness Rebuked” (Luke 4:31-44)**

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. In today’s Gospel Jesus uses one word three different times. It is the word in the original language *epitimao*, and it means to rebuke, denounce, express strong disapproval (the idea includes having authority to do all of this; and when that authority is expressed, it is done in the form of a command that metes out that authority and puts everything in its proper place, or to mete out in due measure; things can only go so far under the authority of the one who has the power and the right to establish the boundaries). It is a very important word that is immensely appropriate for the epiphany theme. When Jesus speaks this way, He speaks as only God can speak. And in using the word the way He does in our Gospel, Jesus shows that His authority extends both to the spiritual and physical realms.

1. In Luke 4:35 and Luke 4:41, Jesus rebukes demons. That is Jesus has the power and authority to mete out and control the boundaries of demons, and the good angels for that matter.
2. In Luke 4:39 Jesus rebukes (remember same word) the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law (that’s right the first “pope” was married, had a wife; in fact church

tradition records that they had children, but this is another sermon); the point here is that Jesus rebukes and controls what happens here on earth, even things like fevers.

And I would like to make our list even more thorough by reminding you of what Luke 8:24 says when Jesus and the apostles were in a boat and the boat started to be overcome by water. The panicking disciples woke Jesus up and the Word of God records: **“[He] rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was calm.”** Once again, the same word is used.

The Lord Jesus Christ proves in the Word of God that He controls the spiritual realm (all angels and demons must bow before Him); and He controls the physical realm, not only the wind and the waves, hurricanes, tropical storms, tsunami’s, tornado’s, earthquakes, but He also controls the physical aspects of our body (good health, cancers, cataracts, fevers, lupus, diabetes, celiac, ms, Alzheimer’s, all of it). Be sure you maintain an enormously vital biblical distinction: these things Jesus does not *cause*. No, we can thank those fallen angels and human beings (like us) who rebel against God for that. It is not God’s fault that we rebel, it is ours. God does not cause these things, but once these things are released, make no mistake about it, the Lord Jesus Christ is in *complete*

control of all of it. Jesus says in Matthew 28:18: ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”***

Okay, so now we have a new set of questions don't we?! If it is true that Jesus is able to rebuke anything like He did when He rebuked the demons, the fever, the winds and the waves, why doesn't He rebuke (fill in the blank) in your life? I know those blanks will probably be quite extensive. Some of you will fill in the blank with health issues, the death of a loved one or loved ones, world and political affairs, mental health, fiscal health, and even problems that extend into your spiritual walk with God. I know those fill-ins must be very long, very important and very serious. It would not be hard to imagine -- with the insight we gain from Luke's Gospel -- a Christian coming before the Lord and praying, *“Please Dear Lord Jesus Christ, rebuke this injury, so that my son may live; rebuke my cancer, that I may see my grandchildren; rebuke this thorn in my flesh that I may be a more faithful child of God; rebuke my instability in my employment so that I can better provide for my family; rebuke my demons; rebuke my fevers; rebuke my wind; rebuke my waves, for I am weary Lord and know you are all-powerful, and I know that you can do it so please dear Lord rebuke these things and help me Your dear child. In Jesus' Name. Amen.”*

And you know that there are major traditions within Christendom that want to emphasize the rebuking power of God. These traditions want to say and many do say that if you would only recognize what the Bible is teaching about the power and authority of Jesus Christ then quite frankly, you would enjoy the benefits that God has intended to shower upon you all along! Furthermore, you might be accused of ignoring what the Bible says (while the verse is taken out of context), ***“You have not, because you ask not. (James 4:2b)”*** Therefore – goes the argument – you can live the victorious Christian life so as to rebuke anything that stands in the way of your happiness.

By the way, what I've just described is quite problematic to say the least and extremely dangerous. Why would so many Christians buy into it? The reason is because it seems inconceivable that the Bible would record that Jesus was rebuking demons, fevers, the wind and the waves, but that we do not expect Him to rebuke the problems we face. Why don't we pray more like those of other traditions? When they pray, they pray in such a way as to rebuke this and to rebuke that: “I rebuke you cancer in the Name of Jesus! I rebuke you alcohol! I rebuke you demon of addiction!” Perhaps we should do more in terms of tapping into the power of Jesus Christ to rebuke. On second thought, no. As a matter of fact, and in faithfulness to Christ and His Word, please don't.

Dear Christians, the reason *epitamao* (rebuke) occurs in the New Testament is not so that we would imitate Jesus Christ in this regard (Christ is not teaching you to rebuke fevers), that is not the point. The purpose of these Scriptures is to demonstrate to us who Jesus is. There is only One who may speak with this kind of authority; there is only One who can possibly have the power to rebuke the weather; only One who controls anything and everything that happens to billions of people; and only One who commands the worship of beings in the invisible realm. There is only One who has “all authority” and that person is Jesus.

But does this mean that Jesus refuses to do anything about these things that continue to cause human suffering and misery? This is one of the most important questions raised against those who believe in God; it is one of the most important questions raised against those who confess the Lord Jesus Christ. And we must answer that question, but we must do so by pointing out that the question itself is skewed, because it makes an important assumption in asking why hasn't God done anything. It assumes that Christ has done nothing about these terrible problems like devastating earthquakes and the devastating, life-altering hardships many people – even within our own congregation – have faced and are facing. That is absolutely a wrong assumption. What could be

more important and effective than going to the *source* of all these hardships? Going to the source of cancer; the source of divorce, the source of misery, the source of earthquakes, the source of depression, the source of all abortions, the source of all abuse, and the source of all demonic activity? There is one source and Christ dedicated His life here on earth and His death and resurrection to address and conquer that source, and that source is sin. Sin is the *ultimate* cause of all fevers, all heartache, and all earthquakes.

God created Adam and Eve and the garden in which they lived was perfect in provision, but consider how everything changed when sin entered the world. In response to the sin that entered into the world, the Lord said to the man: ***“cursed is the ground because of you, in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground...(Genesis 3:17b-19a).”*** *That is to say our just God allows the just consequences of sin; but that doesn't mean that He hasn't done anything about it. Instead of dabbling with the symptoms of sin; He went to the root of it all and became sin on the cross. “For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21).”*

So people ask, “Why hasn’t God done anything about my cancer?” Answer: He did! He put the source of your cancer on Jesus Christ. People ask, “Why hasn’t God done anything about the people suffering after devastation (be it caused by war, plague, famine, or natural catastrophe)?” Answer: He did! It’s ultimate cause of sin was meted out and thrust upon Jesus Christ. People ask, “Why hasn’t God done something about this [fill in the blank] that has been an absolute curse in my life?! Answer: He did! Hear the Good News: **“Christ redeemed us from the curse...by becoming a curse for us...(Galatians 3:13).”** On the cross, the power and source of all calamity, of all sickness, of all brokenness, of all divorce, of all cursing, of all anger, of all fear, of all floods, of all broken hearts, of all wars; the source, the root, the cause, the power of all of these things was put on Jesus Christ.

He rebuked them into their proper place, their proper realm: on Himself, so that His blood would cover them, so as to make them one with Him, so that when He died what was put on Him would die with Him. Now, nothing – not even the most fierce tsunami or most confounding family problem – can remove you from the hand of Christ (Jn 10:28).

Where is epiphany in all of this? It is nothing short of this: the child of God who knows that the source of all

their hardships and those in the world were put on Christ and it was nailed on the cross and buried with Him.

1. Therefore, we affirm that the source of all hardship has been conquered so that none of the symptoms of sin can rob me of the life that has been given to me by my resurrected Savior.
2. We also affirm that since the source of all hardship has been conquered, I will not pay attention to the devil’s deception that these hardships somehow mean that God is punishing me. No! The punishment for sin was put upon my Savior, so that the suffering that remains come from the consequences of a fallen world. Through these the Lord does not abandon me, but gently calls me to rest in Him.
3. Finally, we also affirm that the source of all hardship has been conquered. I do not have to rebuke anything but my own sinful nature that seeks to cause me to stray from Christ. God says simply, **“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7b)”** But He has not commanded me to rebuke fevers and hurricanes. He has simply called me to confess that the source of all these – all sin – was put onto my Savior and then on the third day, He was victorious over all of these for me!

Luther of course understood. Our life as believers is not about the avoidance of all suffering, but rather it is the new life in Christ that supplies the strength we need to endure all suffering. So Luther wrote his famous hymn: *"[Christ is] by our side upon the plain / With His good gifts and Spirit. And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife, Though these all be gone, Our victory has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth."*

So dear Christian how you understand the rebuking makes all the difference in the world. The wrong approach tries to do what only Jesus can do. Those who take that path wind up in one of two extremes: either the development of a God-complex believing that wish-fulfillment and thought-projection means they are indeed very powerful...watch out for this as you might be accused of being a second-hand Christian if you're not up with the program OR the person realizes that they really don't have all of the rebuking power that thought they would have and so become disenchanted with their faith having misunderstood it from the beginning.

But this is not your way dear child of God. You leave what is beyond your control in the control of the Lord Jesus. And you confess that that which really needed rebuking, **was**. What is left is only the daily baptismal rebuking that takes off the old man and puts on the new, but even this is empowered by our Lord who rebuked your condemnation and called into

existence your new life. Yes, the demons and the fevers were rebuked and by His stripes we have already been healed (Isaiah 53:7).