

## **Lessons for Life: FACE YOUR ENEMIES WHERE YOU FIND THEM**

Third in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin from Luke 4:31-37

*“There was a man in the synagogue possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice.” Luke 4:33*

On Sunday morning, December 9, 2007, twenty-four year old Matthew Murray opened fire at a Youth With A Mission training center in Colorado and killed two people. From there he drove to New Life Church in Colorado Springs. He carried a thousand rounds of ammunition. He began shooting at a family getting out of their van to go to church and killed two teenage sisters and wounded their father. Jeanne Assam was on duty as a member of the church’s security ministry. She is a former police officer, and had been praying earlier that morning about God’s will for her life. She heard shots. They were so loud she thought they came from inside the church. She drew her weapon and ran toward the gunfire. Confronting Murray, Jeanne breathed a prayer for God to help her, identified herself, and then took the shooter down. On the ground, Murray fired again and killed himself. Jeanne Assam said later, “God was with me. I’ve drawn my weapon hundreds of times, but this is the first time I’ve ever fired at a person. My hands didn’t even shake.” She is credited with saving the lives of fifty or a hundred people.

This morning we’re going to look at the third lesson we learn from the teaching and practice of Jesus: *Face your enemies where you find them.* Turn with me to Luke 4:31-37. Luke is regarded as being one of the most accurate and precise historians of the ancient world. He wrote in chapter 1, verse 4 “*so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.*” I remind you of this because what we find in these verses is hard to believe because it’s beyond what most of us have experienced. In this passage we’ll observe two things. **1. The enemy Jesus encountered when he went to church** and **2. Jesus’ engagement with that enemy.** Then we’ll consider two questions: **1. Who is my enemy?** And **2. How should I face him?**

**1. The enemy Jesus encountered when he went to church.** Luke informs us in verses 14 and 15 of chapter 4 that Jesus was circulating through the cities of Galilee and on the Sabbath days he taught in their synagogues. Last week we followed him to his home town of Nazareth. Now, according to verse 31, he came to Capernaum and on Saturday morning he went to the synagogue as the guest teacher. Capernaum was a center for the lake’s fishing industry. It had extensive public wharves built out of stone. Shallow-beamed fishing boats were moored at the docks. A fish processing center was nearby where the fishermen unloaded each day’s catch and prepared their fish for sale. Capernaum was a busy, bustling place. The synagogue sat a little more than a hundred yards back from the harbor. Archeologists have uncovered the walls and foundation stones from a later synagogue built perhaps two hundred or three hundred years after Jesus’ time on the same spot as the synagogue Jesus visited.

Verse 32 informs us that as Jesus taught, the people were amazed, “*for His message was with authority.*” The normal teaching by the rabbis was pedantic and intellectual. They quoted from other, more learned, rabbis and from the officially

sanctioned commentary on the Old Testament Scriptures. It was dry as dust. Jesus, on the other hand, spoke on his own authority. For example, in Matthew 6 we find the formula that he often used: “You have heard that it was said” and then he would refer to the common teaching. Then he said, “But I say to you,” and he gave his own lesson. (Matthew 6:21-22) Jesus’ teaching was bold and refreshing. It was interesting and compelling. It packed a punch. People sat on the edge of their seats and listened raptly. While Jesus was in the middle of his message that morning, verse 33 says that he was interrupted by a man “*possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon*” who “*cried out with a loud voice.*” The man stood up and began yelling. You can imagine how disturbing this was. How would you react if someone here right now suddenly rose and began screaming at me. You’d be shocked. Most of you wouldn’t know what to do.

Let me digress for a moment to say something about demon possession. Two weeks ago when we studied Luke 4:1-12, we saw Jesus tempted by the devil in the wilderness. A demon is a fallen angel. Scripture indicates that hell is ruled by a hierarchy. The devil is the prince of the fallen angels. He is a dictator, a ruthless tyrant. The devil and the demons, like all angels, are spiritual beings. They have no bodies, and therefore we cannot see them. The various demons seem to be assigned to territories where they exercise a reign of terror. It’s much like an occupying army that places its troops in different sections of a country it holds in subjection. The demons’ goal is twofold. First, they intend to dominate people and keep them as slaves to unbelief so that they never are able to know the true God. And second, the demons want to degrade human beings so that they live lower than the animals and ultimately destroy themselves. Under demonic influence people commit gross sins and live in disgusting moral squalor. We have plenty of examples these days. Heath Ledger kills himself by an apparent overdose of drugs, Amy Winehouse can’t stay sober, Britney Spears is out of control and drags her children into the hole with her. These are the so-called glamorous ones. A tawdry Batesburg-Leesville high school teacher is arrested for child porn and soliciting sex with a teenage boy. And hundreds of millions of others around the world eke out their existence in moral and physical ruin.

Since demons don’t have bodies they sometimes invade the bodies of human beings. They suppress their victims’ personalities and wills, and gleefully exult in their physical depravity. There is some evidence that Adolf Hitler was possessed by a demon which used him to slaughter European Jews and to engulf the world in war. Sometimes the possessing demon reveals its presence. For example, the victim may utter filthy blasphemies. On the other hand, sometimes the demons disguise their presence so we don’t realize they are near us. How else could the man in the synagogue have gotten there? The people of Capernaum may have considered him odd or troubled. Or perhaps there was no evidence. He may have been what we call a psychopath, charming and very good at imitating the emotions and reactions of others. At any rate, he was there in the worshiping congregation as Jesus taught that Saturday.

A person risks demon possession whenever his mind is shut off so that the normal defenses of the will are neutralized. This may happen when people do drugs, go into trances, dabble in witchcraft and the occult, practice pagan religion or eastern

meditation—like yoga--where a person empties his mind. The man in Luke 4 or his family probably placed themselves in jeopardy through secret occult practices. It was quite common. A Christian need not fear demon possession himself because the Holy Spirit dwells in him. Christians can, however, be oppressed by the devil and mentally tormented if they fall into sinful practices. Not every person who skates on the thin ice of sin ends up becoming demon possessed. There aren't that many demons. But since we cannot see the demons with our eyes, and we can't always accurately diagnose demonic possession, the demons operate with great effectiveness. We can't defend against what we don't know is there. But in Luke 4 Jesus knew he had an enemy in the church.

**2. Jesus' engagement with that enemy.** Jesus' teaching that morning was evidently more than the demon could endure. Jesus flushed the demon out of his hiding place and he attacked Jesus. Verses 33-34 say, "*He cried out with a loud voice, 'Ha! What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!'*" The demon first of all tried to frighten Jesus by shouting at him. Next he tried to undermine Jesus' authority by asking, "Why are you bothering us? Have you come to destroy us?" The demons know that the day of judgment is coming and that they are condemned. Jesus himself taught that hell was originally created for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41) The demon knew it was too soon. The demon's was accusing Jesus of being unfair and reminds him that he could not touch the demon—not yet. And then he cried, "I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" If you know the familiar name of a person, you may exercise a bit of control over that person. For example, have you ever had a salesman use your first name too intimately? "Well, Rick, shall I write up the contract so you can purchase the product?" He uses your name because it is an effective tool to manipulate you by false friendship. That's what the demon was doing. "Jesus, I know your secret name. I can control you!"

But it didn't work. Verse 35 says that Jesus ordered him, "*Be quiet and come out of him!*" And the demon, to preserve himself, threw the man down and flew away like a bat out of hell. The people didn't see the demon depart. They only saw that the man was no longer tormented. In verse 36 Luke says, they began buzzing excitedly among themselves, "What kind of authority does Jesus have? He commands demons and they leave!" Let's analyze this a bit more. Jesus engaged the enemy right where he found him--sitting in the church pews. That tells us we may encounter our enemy anyplace, often when we don't expect him to be there. Who would think that a demon would be in church? "Oh," you say, "I could imagine it in some churches." And yes, so can I. But in a church where Jesus is, where his word is being taught? Come to think of it, that might be the most logical place to find the enemy--at the place where he can counteract the word of God, scramble the work of God's Spirit, and disrupt and intimidate God's people, just when they thought it was safe.

Sometimes we want to avoid conflict, don't we? Sometimes we want to dodge it, put it off, hope it will resolve itself without our having to act. Sometimes we persuade ourselves it really isn't bad enough to warrant confronting evil head-on. Sometimes we don't really know what to do. Let's face it, the enemy knows all the tricks, all the tactics which will make us hesitate or will raise our level of anxiety. But usually, not

confronting an enemy doesn't work. Failure to engage may give the enemy time to grow stronger or maneuver himself into a more secure position. Remember in the 1990s when the United States government was offered Osama bin Laden, and our leaders made the decision to do nothing? Who knew then that 9-11 was coming? Like a poison, like a deadly disease that slowly takes over the body, delay makes things worse. Yes, prudence and wisdom are required. Strategy and tactics must be considered and weighed. But once the enemy is identified, we need to face him. That's what Jesus did. He engaged him where he found him and defeated his plot to neutralize the church. And Jesus saved the lives of who knows how many people in Capernaum because he acted as he did.

Now, two questions: **1. Who is my enemy?** The answer is, probably not who you think. Back in verse 29 when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, the people became incensed at his words and dragged him to the top of the cliff in an attempt to kill him or injure him. Did Jesus consider those people his enemies? Well, at a certain level, yes. Jesus' brother James, must have been in the Nazareth synagogue that day. He didn't believe in Jesus then, would have opposed Jesus, although later he came to believe. In James 4:4 he talks about enemies. "*Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*" But Jesus didn't treat his brother and the people of Nazareth like he treated the demon in Capernaum. He didn't curse them. He didn't condemn them. He simply slipped away. And in the end many of them became followers of Jesus.

In Ephesians 6:12 the apostle Paul says something intriguing. "*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*" In other words, Paul is saying, human beings are not our real enemy. It's the forces of hell, the demonic beings who use human beings as their tools. It was not the demon possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum who was Jesus' enemy. It was the demon inside the man—in spite of the fact that the man himself may have contributed to his own demonic possession. Jesus drove off the demon and set the man free.

We find an interesting parallel in Acts 13. Paul and Barnabas had traveled to Cyprus. They went to the synagogues and preached about Christ. Then they encountered a magician named Bar-Jesus who is described as a "*Jewish false prophet.*" Bar-Jesus had attached himself to the Roman ruler of Cyprus, a man named Sergius Paulus. Paul and Barnabas began to tell Sergius Paulus about Jesus, but Bar-Jesus interrupted them and argued against them, trying to keep Sergius Paulus from believing. Finally Paul had enough, and verses 9-10 tell us, "*Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, 'You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?'*" Then Paul struck him temporarily blind. After he was gone, Sergius Paulus became a believer in Jesus Christ. Paul faced the enemy where he found him—in the chambers of the Roman ruler. Bar-Jesus was a true enemy because he was the devil's willing ally. Who is your enemy? Your real enemy is anyone who actively propagates evil, who destroys human beings, who works to keep them from the Son of God. What about the person who opposes you for his own selfish ends? Is he your enemy? No, not really. Your enemy is the one who is the committed and knowing servant of hell.

**2. How should I face him?** You and I do not have the ability to inflict a spiritual curse against an enemy. You and I are not Jesus. We're not Paul. So we must be careful in our judgments. The ones we see as enemies may merely be misguided people like those at Nazareth. But if our enemy is Satan, we battle him with truth and the word of God, with righteousness and the rule of law, and with prayer. Sometimes we may need to stop the servants of the devil by using extreme measures to protect people from them. That is what Jeanne Assam did in Colorado. That's what police do. That's what armies sometimes do. That's why America fights in Iraq. We are facing a demonic enemy.

But what do we do when we engage people who feel to us like enemies but are not really? We conquer him with love. Sometimes we meet that person in our own homes. A man comes to his pastor. He says, "My wife is causing me problems, What should I do?" The pastor replies, "The Bible says, 'Husbands, love your wives.'" The man says, "But you don't understand. She is really mean. I'm ready to move out." The pastor says, "Well, that may be a good idea. Why don't you move next door." The man says, "Why next door?" The pastor says, "The Bible says, 'Love your neighbor.'" The man says, "I can't do that. My wife is really a hateful, terrible woman. She's going to destroy me." The pastor says, "Now I see. Would you describe her as your enemy?" The man says, "That's it! Now you've got it!" The pastor says, "The Bible says, 'Love your enemies.'"

And we go after our so-called enemies with the gospel. Notice what verse 37 says, "*The report about Him was getting out into every locality in the surrounding district.*" Jesus set a man free by driving out the real enemy, and as a result, people talked. Someone has described the gospel as "subversive, transforming work." We defeat them with forgiveness. In 2006 a gunman near Lancaster, Pennsylvania invaded an Amish one-room school and killed five Amish girls aged 6-13, and then killed himself. His act stunned the world. But the Amish community did not take revenge. In their grief they publicly forgave the killer. They even set up a charity fund for the shooter's family. Their actions stunned the world even more than that terrible crime. And people talked about Jesus.

Finally, we attack them with prayer. Arthur Burns was a Jewish economist of great influence in Washington during the administrations of several Presidents. On one occasion he was invited to a prayer breakfast sponsored by a large number of evangelical politicians and Christian leaders. They asked Arthur Burns to pray, and Burns stunned them with the following prayer: "Lord, I pray that Jews would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Buddhists would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ." And then he blew them away. He prayed, "And Lord, I pray that Christians would come to know Jesus Christ." That's quite a prayer. And that's the way to face an enemy who is not really your enemy: With a prayer for him on your lips. For prayer unleashes the power of God and sets people free.

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