

SERMON NOVEMBER 1, 2015: "JESUS, DEMONS, THE SUPERNATURAL, AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE, PART I" (Luke 11:14-16 ff.)

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¹⁴ Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." ¹⁶ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. (NIV 2011)

INTRODUCTION

(Longer anecdote at the introduction to this sermon on the audio version.)

Having studied psychology and worked in various patient-care jobs, I've seen many levels of brokenness, and ways life is not as God originally designed it to be. But although I have felt increasingly equipped to understand and address the physiological, emotional, social, and even spiritual causes beneath the surface, I have felt less equipped to address demonic forces where they might be at work.

God made us with bodies and souls, so the physical, emotional, social and spiritual are all intertwined. But if we only address a problem on, say, the medical level, and neglect spiritual dynamics, we might just find ourselves doing symptom control.

In this three-week sermon series—"Jesus, Demons, the Supernatural, and Spiritual Warfare"—we'll address direct demonic opposition in our lives. If we read the Bible seriously, we have to agree it's real. That doesn't mean medication or counseling aren't good; it just means we cannot only look at the world through the lens of science. We have to also be informed by what Scripture says about the supernatural realm—and here we'll start from Luke 11.

This is especially relevant around Halloween, when there's a fascination with ghosts, demons, witches, the supernatural in general. It might be seen as just a game, but according to the Bible, these things are real and shouldn't be played around with.

Ultimately, every one of us is in the middle of a battle. There are demonic forces that are bent on destroying you and God's work in your life. And that's true whether or not you've had direct demonic experiences. In *The Screwtape Letter*, C.S. Lewis makes the observation that the devil has two strategies: Either to paralyze people with fear by direct manifestation and threats, or to convince people that he is just a little guy in a red leotard with horns and a pitchfork...not a real threat. Both are serious errors.

The reality: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

But he is a master of disguise, and we won't always recognize him as a roaring lion as we might expect. When I went to Haiti a few years ago, a missionary said how some people feel an oppressive weight as soon as they step off the plane, which doesn't lift until they leave. I didn't feel this, but I did feel attacked where I was vulnerable—with faith-related doubts and questions. I didn't see demons trying to frighten me at night; but I did experience attacks on my identity in Christ, and His sufficiency for me. We have an enemy who is strategic in his attacks.

Or another example from Karl Payne, previous chaplain of the Seattle Seahawks, of how our enemy may try to get at someone, and how we need to recognize the potential demonic oppression (even toward those who are Christians, like this woman):

“What do you tell a strikingly beautiful woman sitting across from your desk who's convinced she's an unlovable, ugly duckling? She's just been flown in from out of state, following a two-week hospital stay for attempted suicide. She sheepishly tells you that her ongoing problem is the degrading voices and depressing thoughts she lives with on what seems like an hour-by-hour basis. These voices or thoughts habitually tell her she's ugly, dirty, too fat, damaged goods, a fool for trusting God because He doesn't really love her, too lazy to read her Bible, and too stupid to get anything worthwhile from it when she does try. She further informs you that although she's able to read novels by the hour, when she opens her Bible, she can't keep her eyes open more than a few minutes. She now believes that her only hope for true freedom from her mental prison and suffering is by shedding her own blood and ending her life. The added irony to this story is that this woman is about thirty years old, a tall, riveting, beautiful, professional model who turns heads everywhere she goes. She feels mentally paralyzed, emotionally drained, physically dead or dying, questions her salvation and sanity, and is convinced she is unlovable, beyond hope and help, and too ugly and weak ever to attract a man of God.” (Karl Payne, *Spiritual Warfare: Christians, Demonization, and Deliverance*)

What we'll see this morning is that, recognizing our enemy's strength, anyone standing on his or her own has every reason to fear. But as we take refuge in Jesus (and this is an open invitation!), we don't need to fear. So over the next few minutes, we'll see how our enemy is real, powerful...and defeated.

OUR ENEMY IS REAL

So first: our enemy is real.

VERSE 14: Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute.

Before we dive into this, we should remember that not every problem is caused by the devil. We live in a broken world, and we can do harm if we assume that every area of brokenness is solved by “demon-hunting”. But we also do great harm if we only look to other causes and forget that we have an enemy who is alive and active.

The Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A #127) reminds us that we have three enemies: The world, the flesh, and the devil. We saw last week how the flesh—sinful human nature and desires to go our own way—opposes God’s will for our lives. The pressures of the world also war against Christians (not the physical universe, but all cultural forces that oppose Jesus).

In this sermon series, I’ll focus on the devil as our enemy. But we can’t forget that the other forces are also real and powerful. We can’t just look for a demon behind every bush; we also have to recognize our own selfishness and unbelief, and the environment in which we live.

In Luke 11:14, how did Luke know that this man had a demon and not just a physical disease? Remember, Luke was a doctor, and he didn’t call every problem a demon. He recognized physical illness (see Luke 4:40-41) and mentions it independently from demonic oppression (see Hendrikson, 264).

Ultimately, humans are not only bodies (so healing is not just about medical problems and solutions), or only brains (so healing is not just about psychological problems and solutions), or only souls (so healing is not just about immaterial problems and solutions). We are ALL OF THESE...wrapped up in one. And that also means that we shouldn’t separate out our “body” or “brain” as if it can be separated from us as a whole. All has been created good and all has been twisted by the fall. It’s important to learn to discern what the root cause is—but also to remember that Jesus can bring healing on all levels, through direct intervention or through those to whom He has given skill to heal.

And I also don’t want to limit this sermon to only demon *possession*. It’s about how we respond to the opposition of the devil, whether in the form of direct intimidation, or subtle deception.

So the battle is raging, and our enemy is real—trying to keep us from believing and living in light of God’s Word and Spirit.

OUR ENEMY IS POWERFUL

Second, our enemy is powerful.

The demon in verse 14 was powerful enough to keep this man from talking. Not every ailment is at root demonic, but according to Scripture, some are. And this man on his own was NOT stronger than the demon. Satan is more powerful than you are if you’re standing on your own.

So this isn’t stuff to play around with—even around Halloween. It’s not just a game. But neither do we have to be afraid...

OUR ENEMY IS (ULTIMATELY) DEFEATED

...Because our enemy is also defeated.

VERSE 14: When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed.

JESUS, not the demon, is ultimately in charge.

The devil wants us to respond to him with fear or fascination—but never with faith in Jesus. A big draw of the occult (think Ouija Board, séances, etc.) is the allure of power, knowledge, and control. But remember that the devil is liar; his fate is already sealed. Why would anyone “choose to follow a lesser authority that is ultimately lost when it’s possible to be loved by the highest authority who has won”? (Karl Payne, *Spiritual Warfare: Christians, Demonization, and Deliverance*)

But our enemy is only defeated in and through JESUS. So outside of belonging to and trusting in Jesus, there’s no victory. And remember, we don’t need to be strong, as long as our King is strong and our confidence is in HIM!

In this passage and in our lives, Jesus uses His power to restore wholeness in body and spirit. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” (1 John 3:8) Jesus isn’t just about saving souls; His aim is to save WHOLE people—body, mind, and soul (see Barclay, 151). As we grow in relationship with Him and His people, coming clean about sin and turning to Him, we experience this wholeness.

This wholeness through Jesus is a glimpse of God’s kingdom. And “The kingdom is not beautiful words; it is the overthrow of evil.” (Morris 198) We can EXPECT God to act powerfully...and pray for the eyes to see where He’s at work.

ENGAGING IN BATTLE: OUR RESPONSE

Our enemy is real, powerful, and defeated. What does this mean for us?

¹⁵ But some of them said, “By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.”

¹⁶ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

SLANDER AND UNWILLINGNESS TO COMMIT

Some people see what Jesus does and slander Him and reject Him.

Others respond to Jesus’ authority over the demon by asking Him for another sign. “Show us more—that you REALLY are strong and from God!”

The second group is unwilling to commit. And this is probably more relevant to our time and culture. There is a strong trend in our culture (of which we are a part) against committing.

Ultimately, no one can stay a fence-sitter when they encounter or hear about Jesus. The problem is not a lack of evidence about who He is; the problem is a heart problem.

Either we’re under Jesus’ protection and rule, or we’re in the enemy’s camp. And only Jesus can deliver anyone from that allegiance and oppression—as He shows in casting out this demon. If we do belong to Jesus, we have confidence and victory.

Jesus' miracles recorded in the Bible call for commitment. And that's the urgency of pointing people to Him as Lord and Savior: He's ours and their only hope against an enemy stronger than we are. And we can confidently share of His authority even over the strongest forces of evil.

And Jesus doesn't use his authority to tyrannize. Karl Payne tells how he once got a phone call from a Satanist who had harmed himself because the devil demanded a blood sacrifice. "I tried to help him understand that whereas his master had demanded he sacrifice his blood to demonstrate obedience, my Master had willingly shed his own blood because of His great love for me." (Karl Payne, *Spiritual Warfare: Christians, Demonization, and Deliverance*, 63)

Our enemy is real and stronger than we are. But our strength doesn't matter unless we're trusting in ourselves; it's the strength of the One we have faith IN.

So the take-away from this sermon is NOT just "Don't be afraid". Someone who is not yet a Christian has every reason for fear; they do not have Jesus' protection and authority. And even if we are Christian, we might not be placing our confidence in or appropriating Jesus' power and promises FOR US. The take-away is to be daily confident in Jesus for deliverance from even the strongest evil powers.

PRACTICAL AND EVERYDAY

So what should we do if we experience the attacks of our enemy—whether that's in the form of manifestations or paralyzing anxiety or obsessions, or lies that contradict God's Word (like the woman in the example at the beginning)?

First, engaging in battle with our enemy is not always glamorous...It's the long, hard, and ultimately joy-filled road of discipleship that Jesus promises us.

Just some thoughts about engaging in battle with our enemy. First, remember that he is real, he is powerful, AND that he is ultimately defeated: Jesus has sealed his fate.

- 1) The enemy wants to tear you from Jesus. So ENTRUST "your" life to Jesus and SPEND TIME WITH HIM. We are vulnerable if we aren't close to Jesus and others who love Him.
- 2) You can TELL the devil to leave in Jesus' name—because JESUS is stronger and you belong to Him.
- 3) READ, BELIEVE, and LIVE by what God says in the Bible ("Read your Bible and pray every day" can feel over-simplistic, but when combined with faith-filled obedience, it's huge. God's Word is our sword against the devil's lies.)
- 4) Don't GO IT ALONE...Rely on the Holy Spirit, and walk alongside other Christians.
- 5) PRAY: "Prayer is the walkie-talkie on the battlefield of the world." (John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/prayer-the-work-of-missions>) And "Satan trembles when he sees / The weakest saint upon his knees." (Cowper, as quoted in Hendrikson, 617)

- 6) Cultivate a lifestyle of CONFESSING your sins, FORGIVING others when they wrong you (holding a grudge gives the devil an advantage in your life—Eph. 4:26), and FOLLOWING Jesus.

A final point: “people need to get rid of the garbage (sin/issues) that attracts rats (demons), not just shoot rats...where sin is present, we may be more susceptible to attack, but [remember that] not all attack is the result of sin in the individual’s life.” (CRC Study committee on Third-Wave Pentecostalism, 46)

Our enemy is real, powerful, and ultimately defeated. “When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke...” Jesus is just as alive now as He was in Luke 11, and He STILL gives freedom to those who come to Him. HE is ultimately victorious, not any of the powers of evil.

All who entrust their lives to Jesus have the rock-solid promise of Rom. 8:38-39: For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.