

## *Casting Out Your Demons • Luke 4:31-37*

Everyone has a mother. That is a universal human experience. And almost every mother cares deeply for her children, even when they are grown up and on their own. Motherhood is a great privilege and normally a tremendous delight, although it can be a great burden because of the struggles, problems and pain children can experience.

Few people in the world care as much as moms do, so try to imagine the feelings of the unmentioned mother of a deeply troubled man whose story is woven into the biography of Jesus in Luke 4:31-37:

Then (Jesus) went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, “Ha! 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!”

“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.

All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!” And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

My guess is that this man’s mother must have carried some very deep hurt. She may have been embarrassed by the way he behaved in public, by the way people stared at him as he walked down the streets of Capernaum. She probably was overwhelmed with the evil that gripped him because

there was nothing she could do to help him. (It is hard to be a parent who wants the best for your child and yet what he or she needs is beyond your power to provide.)

Perhaps she prayed for him. It may be that he was at the synagogue that day because she had specially invited him hoping that Jesus might give him some special attention. Perhaps the only hope she had left for her beloved son was that somehow Jesus could make a difference.

One thing is for sure. This story raises the powerful question of what happens when extreme evil runs into the authority and power of Jesus Christ.

The story begins with Jesus going from his hometown of Nazareth to the lakeside village of Capernaum. Luke says that he went down. That is literally what he did because Nazareth is 1300 feet above sea level and Capernaum is 695 feet below sea level on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. So Jesus went down an elevation of almost 2000 feet.

When Jesus arrived at Capernaum his reputation had preceded him. The word was out that he was a fabulous teacher and a powerful miracle worker. No doubt synagogue attendance was at an all-time high that Sabbath morning when Jesus was scheduled to teach.

The people were not disappointed. Jesus was amazing. It wasn’t just that he was an articulate and scintillating speaker, although he was outstanding. What captured them most was that he spoke with authority. That was something new to them because the typical rabbi teacher of their day would not give his own opinion or

speak with authority when asked a difficult question. Rather, he would serve a smorgasbord of alternatives but no definitive answers.

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Today we hear a lot of this. Some say that every religion has its own truth, that all religions lead to God, that every truth claim is as good as any other truth claim.

Jesus was different. He was direct and clear. He was the ultimate expert on truth and life. In fact, that is something that still bothers people today. Jesus says with such confidence that he is the way to God and the only means of forgiveness of sin, that he is the only way that someone can have eternal life. That authority that amazed people then still amazes people today.

But even more than this astonishing authority, Jesus had a spiritual authority. They didn't know it yet but Jesus was God. He has divine authority and power greater than anyone or anything else in the universe. While he may not always exhibit his full authority and power, he is almighty. Everything is ultimately under his control. He is the Boss. Nothing could ever stand against him—no person, no evil, nothing. A billion nuclear weapons would not be enough to overpower Jesus. He was and is all-powerful and all good.

What happens when the power and goodness of God collides with extreme evil? That is the next part of this story.

In the synagogue service that Sabbath was a man who was controlled by a demon. While Jesus was teaching this man shouted with a loud voice, *“Ha! 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!”*

We weren't there so we don't know all that transpired. We could give him the benefit of the doubt and say that perhaps he was somewhere in the back and only intended to be heard by those around him. Except it doesn't usually work that way! If this man thought that he would be invisible to Jesus or to the rest of the people there he was terribly mistaken. But more likely this was a direct confrontation, if not from the man then from the demon who had taken over his life.

When we read what this demon said we realize that he was a believer. This demon fully recognized who Jesus was and the power Jesus had.

Did you know that demons believe in Jesus?

They do! They believe in God and openly admit that Jesus is the Holy One, the Savior from sin who died on the cross and rose again from the dead on the third day. Later in the New Testament in James 2:19 we are told, *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”*

But demons believe without commitment. They know the truth but they refuse to act on it. They refuse to turn away from evil and embrace Jesus as Lord and follow him.

The same happens with people. There are people who absolutely believe all the truth about God, Jesus and the Bible but who refuse to commit their lives to Jesus as Lord. They are as lost as demons, as bad off as if they had never heard of Jesus in the first place.

New Testament stories about demons raise a long list of questions. Are demons real or are they merely expressions of primitive superstition? Can demons take over people's lives? What are demons anyway? And, if they are real and can take over a person's life, how do you get rid of a demon once you have one?

These are good and legitimate questions that are not adequately answered in a short period of time. The quick replies are that demons are invisible spiritual beings—like angels, only bad instead of good. They represent the devil and work very hard to rule the world with sin.

That is not to say that everything bad that happens is directly because of demons. Some very bad things happen to very good people just because we live in a world that has been messed up by sin. If every demon were to disappear we would still have sin and the problems that come with sin. The truth is that, even if we got rid of the devil and every demon as well, all of us have the malady of sin within us and are capable of doing evil.

Yes, demons can take over people's lives although it appears to be a fairly uncommon exception rather than a common experience. The Bible stories about demons are concentrated in a comparatively narrow swath of the three-year period during the public ministry of Jesus. Apparently this was a time when there was an unprecedented clash between the powers of good

and God and the powers of evil and Satan. Before and after then there are comparatively few mentions of demons taking over individuals' lives, so from that we may assume that this is a relatively rare occurrence. It might even appear that those who are controlled by demons have at some point consented to that taking place.

Only God can get rid of a demon. The truth is that demons are stronger, smarter and stickier than we are capable of dealing with.

While demons may be associated with primitive heathen societies there are sophisticated American scientists who acknowledge the power and presence of evil spirits that are unresponsive to any drug or other therapy. We hear about criminals whose wicked behavior cannot be explained by genetics, family of origin or mental illness. There is no adequate explanation for the behavior of these people other than that they are just evil.

When it comes to the man in this chapter of Jesus' biography we don't know a great deal about him. Surely there is much more to his tragic story than is reported here. But it's not hard to guess. Whenever any life is taken over by evil it is wrecked. The pain is indescribable to the person and to everyone nearby. Sin is like gangrene. It starts small and spreads fast, killing life and stinking as it does it.

Well, let's finish the story and see what happened when the amazing Jesus collided with extreme evil.

Jesus took immediate control. He directly confronted the man with the demon (or was it the demon with the man?). He told him to shut up. Jesus wasn't going to allow another syllable of influence for evil.

Next, Jesus used his supernatural power of good against the demon's supernatural power of evil and commanded the demon to exit the man. And he did! Immediately the man was thrown

to the synagogue floor, the demon departed and the man was physically uninjured. The demon was just an invisible spirit again until he could find another body to inhabit.

It's hard for us to capture the moment. Some of us are skeptical; others are unimpressed. It was one of those situations where you had to be there to understand.

Those who witnessed what happened knew this was real. They were amazed at Jesus' authority and power. They knew how this man had been before and they saw the overwhelming transformation. It was indisputable—Jesus has power over evil. When they left the synagogue they told everyone who would listen about what

had happened. The story spread everywhere.

It reminds me of the eyewitness accounts of skeptical scientists who have witnessed evil voodoo rituals or police officers who tell about the power of evil in American crimes or of ordinary

people who have personally experienced what demons can do. And then some of them tell about the encounter with Jesus Christ and how God broke the power of evil like nothing else ever could.

Let there be no doubt. Evil is as horrible and ugly today as it has ever been. We may control some of it with police or courts or medicine or social programs that are very good but there is also evil that no human remedy begins to dent. The only authority and power strong enough to deal with that kind of evil is Jesus Christ himself.

Think how that man must have felt at the end of that memorable day. He was free, free at last. Instead of evil there was good. Where once a demon controlled him now God controlled him. It was the very best day of his life.

And what might it have been like for his

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mother? Did she fall to her knees and thank God for giving her son back to her? Were her worst nightmares over and her highest hopes realized? Yes! It is the most wonderful day of life when evil is defeated and God is triumphant.

That was long ago and far away. We have our own struggles with evil today. Probably it doesn't look like it did with the man from Capernaum but the evil is just as real and the yearning for freedom is just as much.

What is the evil from which you would like to be set free? Who or what has a lock on your life and won't let go? What is it that you have struggled against and nothing has worked?

I invite you to put whatever it is up against Jesus Christ and let him win. Give your sins, your problems, your pain, your life to Jesus Christ, the all-powerful Son of God. With his amazing authority and power let him chase the demons away and set you free.

How do you do that? It is more than just believing. Even demons believe! It's commitment. Commit your life completely to Jesus Christ so that he has full power and authority over every part of you. You will be amazed at the difference Jesus will make!

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