

TRINITY

BIBLE CHURCH DALLAS

The Sermon

Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Luke 4:31-37

"Jesus Confronts a Demon"

March 17, 2024

TRANSCRIPT

All right, you ready? Okay, I'm ready. Luke 4:31-37, Lord willing, and I want to begin by reading the passage, prayer, and then we will look at it carefully. The title of this is "Jesus Confronts a Demon."

Luke chapter 4, beginning in verse 31, this is the word of God: "And He" – Jesus – "came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them on the Sabbath; and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet and come out of him!' And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people, he came out of him without doing him any harm. And amazement came upon them all, and they began talking with one another saying, 'What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out.' And the report about Him was spreading into every locality in the surrounding district." What a passage. What a Savior. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father, grant us understanding as we look at this passage. May Your Spirit, Your Holy Spirit, be a true primary teacher today. May He be

actively at work in our minds and in our hearts, in our lives today as we sit under Your word. Bring this passage home to each of our hearts. Meet us at our points of need, some of our needs of which we are not even aware at this moment until the searchlight of Your Scripture reveals them. So we ask that You perform a sanctifying work in each and every one of us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses, we see the confrontation between Jesus and the kingdom of darkness. We learn here that spiritual warfare is not a conflict between two equal powers. One is vastly superior to the other. Jesus is infinite, but a demon is only finite. Jesus is the Creator, but a demon is only a creature. Jesus is the Sovereign, but a demon is only a slave. First John 3:8 tells us, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." Here's but one sampling of this purpose for His coming into the world.

Whenever we study spiritual warfare, there are two extremes that we must avoid. On one end of the spectrum is the danger of denying that there are demons. This passage makes it clear, abundantly clear, that demons are real in the world and still exist in the world. The other extreme is to give too much credit to demons. There are certain churches and people who see a demon behind every bush. And if their washing machine is broken, they blame it on a demon. And they really believe more in the sovereignty of Satan than they do in the sovereignty of God. And so that's another extreme way over here.

But somewhere in the middle is the balance that we must have. Demons are real, but, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world," 1 John 4:4. So we want to walk through this passage and we want to consider this direct encounter between Jesus and a demon, and it is but one of many confrontations between light and darkness that will unfold during Jesus' public ministry.

So beginning in verse 31, the first thing I want you to see is "the coming to Capernaum." The earthly ministry of Jesus now brings Him to Capernaum.

We see this in verse 31, "And He came down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee." He came down in the topography, or the elevation, of the land. He has been in Nazareth and He's actually going up north and east, but going down in elevation.

Capernaum is a city in Galilee, it's in Galilee as the northern region of Israel. And Capernaum was a significant city. It's on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. It's a fishing village with a population of about 1,500 people at this time. And Capernaum would become Jesus' base of operation for His ministry. It would become the hub. It would become, in essence, the headquarters during His one-and-a-half year Galilean ministry. In fact, Matthew 9:1 calls it "His own city." And so Capernaum would become His adopted hometown, born in Nazareth, but now this would become His base for ministry.

Capernaum was the hometown of Matthew the tax collector. It would be here in Capernaum that Jesus would approach the tax booth where Matthew was sitting, and say, "Follow Me." Matthew had been given this franchise, if you will, by the Roman government to collect the taxes from his own fellow Jews and turn it in to the Roman government and be able to skim off the top what he could keep for himself. That all took place here in Capernaum.

And Capernaum was where Jesus healed the paralytic who was lowered down through the ceiling. And Capernaum was where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, and where Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion without even going there. He just spoke the word from a distance and there at Capernaum, Jesus healed the Roman official's servant. And so it was a significant enough city that there was a Roman centurion based there with his soldiers.

And as Jesus now is in Capernaum, He was teaching them on the Sabbath. Jesus was always in the synagogue on a Sabbath, and He was teaching them - as I told you two weeks ago, a traveling rabbi, when he would come to a synagogue which was a gathering place for public worship on

the Sabbath. For those who could not access Jerusalem and the temple, there were synagogues just scattered all over the Holy Land where people could locally come together to worship God. There would be singing of a psalm, there would be the reading of Scripture, there would be the exposition of the word, there would be public prayer, something like our worship service.

And so as Jesus is here in Capernaum, they invite Him to minister the word to them. No doubt, His name and His reputation has far preceded Him coming to Capernaum and He is given the opportunity now to stand up, to take a passage of scripture, to read it, and then to expose it, to explain it, to teach it, and to even exhort with it. And so Jesus is performing this ministry of teaching. He was always teaching. In fact, they called Him rabbi, which just simply means teacher. He was saturated with the Old Testament Scripture, and He was continually teaching and preaching, teaching and preaching wherever He went.

Verse 32, "and they were amazed at His teaching." This word "amazed" means literally to be struck out of your mind. We would say in the vernacular today, "It blew their minds." They've never heard teaching like this ever. All the other rabbis and all the other teachers would just simply quote other teachers and they would quote their traditions.

And as Jesus stood here, He didn't quote anyone else. He was His own authority. And as He taught, He taught the authority of Scripture, and that became, really, the power and the authority of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the greatest expositor who ever lived, who ever walked the face of the earth. And so they were stunned. They were astonished because of how penetrating and profound and powerful His teaching was. They have never heard anyone open up the Scripture and give the true God-intended interpretation of this passage as scripture, and it was light shining like the sun in the sky shining into their minds and revealing the truth about God and the kingdom and grace.

It says in verse 32 why they were so astonished and amazed, "for His message was with authority." His message, His discourse, His exposition, His sermon, His lesson was with authority. This word "authority," *exousia* in the Greek, means "out of self." He wasn't having to grab hold of anyone else to be the stream to flow into His teaching, it was just simply the Scripture, the Old Testament Scripture, and the authority of Scripture was His authority, and He was rightly handling the Scripture. He wasn't going fast and loose with the Bible. And He was strongly delivering it, and He was pressing it upon the people and making demands of them based upon the Scripture, and it was binding their conscience to line up under the authority of Scripture.

So, this was His coming to Capernaum, and what is singled out here is His teaching ministry. What we take from this is the preeminence and the importance of the ministry of the teaching of the word of God.

People often ask me how do they decide where to go to church. And it may even be a family that has a lot of kids, and it may be they tell me about this youth ministry and this building and these programs. Or it may be the woman has friends who attend a church over here and becomes a little network of relationships. "So, where should I attend church?"

I have young men come to me and say, "I feel I may be being called into the ministry. What do you think I should do? What's the most important thing for me to do right now?" And my answer across the board in each and every one of these situations, the counsel I give is, "You need to find a church where the teaching and the preaching of the word of God is the strongest because that's where you're going to grow." And the greatest thing for a family is not that the kids be entertained, it's that dad is on fire for God, it is that dad is being fed the word of God, it is that mom is growing in the grace of God under the preaching and teaching of the word of God.

And that takes place in various different capacities. It takes place in a public worship service like this. I mean, there's no entertainment value here. There's no light show going on here. There's no smoke machine going

on here. There's no little drama team here trying to be discovered for their acting abilities - little Grade D actors from the thespian club - just pure straightforward teaching of the word.

That's why we have Sunday school. That's why immediately after this worship service, right here there's going to be a Sunday school class and they're going to be looking at 1 Timothy 2:1-7. If you want to learn about the extent of the atonement and for whom Christ died, you just need to stay right here. But there are other Sunday school classes going on. It's just teaching, teaching, teaching the word of God. That's why we have two women's Bible studies. That's why I teach across the street the men's Bible study on Thursday morning.

None of us can have too much teaching of the word of God. It was primary, it was central in the public ministry of Jesus, and it must be primary and central in this church. It must be primary and central in your spiritual life. You will grow no further than the input of the word of God into your life. You may not measure up to the input of the word of God that's flowing into your life, but you will not grow one inch beyond the flow of the word of God being taught and being preached to you.

So this is very significant how these first two verses begin this encounter before we even get to the demon. The emphasis is upon the authority of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and that continues in this church through His word. We have nothing to say in any sermon lesson or class to you except the word of God. In fact, Bible is our middle name: Trinity Bible Church - I just thought of that; flashes of genius before your very eyes.

I want you to note, second now, in verse 33 and verse 34, "the clash with darkness," because wherever the word of God is being taught, it stirs up the kingdom of darkness. Verse 33, "In the synagogue" - and I've already explained to you the synagogue, it's a place of gathered worship on the Sabbath for cities and villages that couldn't make it to the temple in Jerusalem on the Sabbath - "there was a man possessed by the spirit of an

unclean demon." A man. We don't know who the man is. He comes to, in essence, church on the Sabbath. He would be seated among us in a setting just like this, and he was possessed.

This word "possess" means held fast, dominated, controlled, indwelt by the spirit of an unclean demon. A demon is real. A demon is a fallen angel who was a part of the rebellion in heaven led by Lucifer to try to overtake the throne of God – the insanity of even such an idea. And Lucifer was cast down to the earth, has become Satan, the devil. And a third of the angels were cast out of heaven, a third, not a small number; and they are demon spirits, and they are unclean. The word means impure, unholy, evil.

"In the spirit of an unclean demon" means they have not a body, they are a spirit being; and because they are a spirit being, they can move into someone's body and occupy that body. If they had a body, they would not be able to indwell someone else's body, it just wouldn't fit – round peg, square hole. But the fact that they are a spirit (small "s"), they are disembodied spirits. They have a mind. They have emotions. They have a will. They exist in the invisible world of the supernatural. They are powerful. They are highly organized, highly structured. There is a hierarchy of demonic spirits over which Satan presides.

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul says, "For our struggle" – that means our wrestling, our fighting – "is not against flesh and blood," – no, it is against the powers behind flesh and blood – "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers," – that means there are rulers among the demons who are over many, many other rulers in, like, this pyramid of an organizational structure, that they are all lined up; there are rulers – "and against the powers," – and powers are those demons who carry out and inflict extraordinary force of evil powers (*dunamis*, dynamite) against the world forces of this darkness, suggesting that there are certain demons behind world rulers and world prime ministers and judges and magistrates, behind presidents, behind senators and congressmen, who are influencing diabolically the insanity of their decisions – "and against the spiritual forces of wickedness," spreading unusual, vile evil, like abortion,

and pornography, and homosexuality, and lesbianism, and transgenderism. There are dark, evil powers pushing this.

And the devil carries out his work. There's only one devil and he is not omnipresent, he can only be in one place at one time. You likely will never meet the devil, you will meet his demons. Just like in World War II, you go to Europe to fight, you probably will never meet Hitler, you'll fight against German soldiers.

And so these demons carry out the vile agenda of Satan who's stunningly brilliant. They oppose the work of God, 1 Thessalonians 2:18. They blind the minds of unbelievers, 2 Corinthians 4:4. They snatch God's word when it is sown into hearts, Luke 8:12. They tempt believers to lie, Acts 5:3. They sow unbelievers into the church, Matthew 13:38-39. They incite persecution against believers, Revelation 2:10. They deceive the nations, Revelation 20:3. They disseminate false doctrine, 1 Timothy 4:1. They possess great power to wreak havoc in the world. Let us not be naïve. Let us not have our head in a theological hole in the ground. They are real.

And in verse 33, "He cried out with a loud voice." The "he" refers to the demon. The demon cried out. The word "cried out," *anakrazó*, it needs to shout, it means to scream. This deafening voice comes out of this man. It says, "with a loud voice," a *megas* voice, intense, booming.

In verse 34, this is what the demon says out of the body of this man, "Let us alone!" This is actually the demon speaking as he controls the vocal cords of the man. It's the mouth of the man but the voice of the demon. "Let us alone! Do not hinder our work! We have been given assignments. What business do we have with each other?" The answer is nothing; we have no partnership. What fellowship can there be between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial?

"What do we have to do with You," – notice this in 34 – "Jesus of Nazareth?" There's four things this demon knows from this text. He knows

who Jesus is, he knows where Jesus was born and where He came from, he knows what Jesus is here to do, and he knows who sent Him here: God. Demons are brilliant. And they're not liberals, they're not woke, they're orthodox. They know who Jesus is. James 2:19, James says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shutter." Some of the most doctrinally-sound confessions of the person and work of Christ come from demons.

Verse 34, "Have you come to destroy us?" They know exactly why Jesus is here. "You have arrived to destroy us." The word "destroyed" means to ruin us, to put us out of the way, to abolish us. And the "us" refers to the totality of the demonic empire. So this one demon speaking, as it were, in a representative way, "us" is plural, but then the next word is singular: "I know who You are." This is the demon speaking out of this human body, controlling the mind, controlling the mouth, controlling the vocal cords, pushing this message out, "I know who You are." There's no mistake in identity here. There's no confusion in the kingdom of darkness concerning who Jesus is, where He came from, why He's here, and where He lived.

And then verse 34 ends, "the Holy One of God!" "Of God" means sent from God, sent by God here. They know exactly who He is. They once were in heaven themselves. They once were in heaven in the very presence of Jesus. At that point, He did not have a human body in eternity past. Oh, they know Him: "You're the Holy One of God," not of this earth; the Holy One, the flawlessly perfect One, the morally pure One, the transcendent majestic One without any character blemish. Unholiness becomes very uncomfortable in the presence of holiness.

And what a striking thing it is here that this scene does not take place in the house of ill repute. This scene does not take place in a prostitute's den. This scene does not take place in some seedy backroom. This takes place in the center of the worship service where the people of God are gathered to hear the word of God taught.

Demons do some of their greatest work in churches. They cause pastors to misrepresent the word of God. They cause listeners to disregard the word of God. They cause listeners to doubt the word of God. They cause people not to take God serious. They cause unconverted people to remain unconverted by keeping a veil over their eyes. All this occurs in church, in the public gathering of God's people.

Third, I want you to see "the command of Jesus" in verse 35. "But Jesus rebuked him." Jesus immediately addresses this. Jesus now admonishes the demon and warns him. He speaks to the demon, not to the man. He speaks to the demon. "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Jesus goes to the source. "Be quiet! Shut up! Silence," - Jesus does not even want to hear the testimony of hell - "and come out of him! Vacate the premises now! Leave him now! Come out," which clearly indicates he was inside the man, inside his body, as a spirit has moved into the house of the body of this man, and Jesus now calls for an evacuation. It is an exorcism.

"And when the demon had thrown him down," - this word "thrown down" means to hurdle down to the ground to cast him down. We would say today in the vernacular just slam dunk him and just hurdle him down to the ground - "in the midst of the people," - verse 35, as they are worshipping the Lord, as Jesus is teaching the word. It's as if these demons cannot bear to hear the Son of God exposit the truth of the word of God. It is inflicting them with pain to have to hear the truth, which is what provokes this whole situation. It is the preaching of the word of God that incites this demon to say, "Leave us alone!"

And at the end of verse 35, "he" - the demon - "came out of him" - the man - "without doing any harm." This demon had to obey Jesus. Jesus does not obey demons, but demons obey Jesus. There could have been no successful resistance mounted against the lordship of Jesus Christ. This is

not a cosmic tug of war, "And if we had yet a few more people over here on Jesus' side, we can defeat the devil." It's a standstill.

No, Jesus is omnipotent. He has all power. Demons have only a delegated power that God has given to them. All demons are under the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ and they can only act within the limits that have been assigned to them by God. Read Job 1 and 2. God defines the playing field, and God defines how far Satan can even go to inflict great harm to the life of Job: "You may do this, you may do this, you may do this, you may not cross the line and do this." And then, "Okay, you can do this." God is sovereign, and God has reasons of extraordinary wisdom and genius why there is even a devil, why there are even demons, and how God uses them to accomplish His own purposes. They are powerful, and they inflict great harm, but they are under the authority of God.

So, fourth, in verse 36, "the consternation of people." How did the people respond? How would you have responded? You might have started looking for another church. Verse 36, "And amazement came upon them all." "Amazement" here means astonishing.

"They begin talking with one another, saying, 'What is the message? What does this mean?' For with authority (*exousia*) and power (*dunamis*), He commands the unclean spirits." Those two words, "authority" and "power," are not overlapping, they mean two different things.

For example, out here on Central Expressway, or I-75 - I'm an old-timer, I call it Central Expressway - if there's a policeman standing out in the middle and puts up his hands and a semi-truck is barreling down the highway and the policeman puts up his hands to stop the truck and the truck hits the brakes and comes to a screeching halt, he did not stop the truck with his power, he stopped the truck with his authority because he's wearing a badge and a blue uniform. If you pick up some heavy weights, you're picking them up with power, not with authority. Those weights don't know who you are, it's with power. That policeman doesn't stop the truck with

power like he goes out and tackles the truck, he stops the truck with his authority.

But to have both authority and power is a testimony to overwhelming, unlimited sovereignty. And they recognized it before their very eyes. "For with authority and power He commands" - that means He charges like a military officer charging his troops and foot soldiers with what they are to do - "He commands the unclean spirits and they come out," every time.

Verse 37, "And the report about Him" - about Jesus. The word "report" means, literally, noise, sound. That whole part of Galilee came under the sound of these reports. Word of mouth, word of mouth, word of mouth - "was spreading" - it was spreading like a wildfire going far and wide, it says - "into every locality," meaning into every nook and cranny, into every place - "in the surrounding district." In the neighboring region is what this means. There's nobody who has not heard of Jesus Christ. There is no one who has not heard about this incident of Jesus rebuking this demon to come out of this man.

This is extraordinary. And this happens early on in His Galilean ministry. It says if as soon as Jesus has come out of the wilderness being tempted for forty days and forty nights directly by the devil himself, He now meets this demon. Hell was doing everything they can to dam up the river of truth that's going to be flowing from the Lord Jesus Christ, and everything they can do to derail the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, when we saw last week, they tried to throw Him off of a cliff. The devil was behind that. "He is a murderer from the beginning," John 8:44.

So wherever the word of God goes forth, there will be demonic assistance. But, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." And, "The light always extinguishes the darkness." The darkness cannot extinguish the light, but the light can extinguish the darkness.

So, what is the main lesson here? What are we to take from this exorcism beyond the fact that Jesus has all authority and all power over the forces of darkness, just like He has all power in all authority over the grave, over death, over storms on the Sea of Galilee, over disease, over the lives of individuals? What is the lesson behind this though?

Well, we saw earlier in verse 18 that Jesus took a scroll of Isaiah and He turns to Isaiah 61:1, and He reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim" - notice this - "release to the captives," - and at the end of that - "to set free those who are oppressed." This refers to those who are under the bondage of Satan, who are held in the grip of demons in their unbelief. "To proclaim release to the captives," - that's what just took place with this man - "and to set free those who are oppressed."

Now, we need to understand every unbeliever is oppressed by the devil, and every unbeliever is held captive by the devil, and not just in the first century, but in the twenty-first century. And there will be those among us here today who have not yet come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and among different reasons why they have not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ - and maybe you know who you are here today - is because you are held captive by the devil, and you are blinded by the devil. Your parents have witnessed to you, your spouse has witnessed to you, preachers and teachers have witnessed to you, and you just will not believe. You refuse to believe. Why is that, because the gospel is so simple, and only a fool would reject the gospel. Why is that?

Second Corinthians 4:4 gives the answer: "The god of this world," (small g). That's Satan and his hoard of demons. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." You're blinded by the devil, and his influence is like a claw grip over your eyes. You cannot see it until Jesus says, "Let him go!"

When you were converted, that is exactly what happened. Jesus was not in His resurrected body on site saying that, but that is exactly what happened by the power of the Holy Spirit. God conquered the death grip that the devil had on you. It's your pre-conversion state is worse than what you ever have imagined, and your conversion is a bigger miracle than you have ever imagined.

In 2 Timothy 2:26, the Scripture says, "The snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." There's the bondage of the will: free will. Go read your bible. Yeah, you're held captive by the devil to do his will, and those chains will never be broken, and you will never come to faith in Christ ever until Jesus Christ intervenes and commands that you be set free.

Before conversion, you were under the spell of the devil. You were duped by the devil. You were blinded by the devil. You were deceived by the devil. And if you're unconverted, you are to this very moment. Your only hope is for Jesus to come to your life and release the stronghold and the stranglehold of the devil in your life.

This breaking of the power of the devil is clearly seen in this passage, and it must be your experience. "If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed," John 8:32. Though you may not be demon-possessed like this man, you will nevertheless be demon-blinded and demon-imprisoned until the Son of God intervenes in your life and releases you to come to Himself.

Has this ever happened in your life? You probably are unaware of all the theological dynamics that took place when you came to faith in Christ. I mean, you may have been in your bedroom, you may have been at a summer camp, you may have been at a youth group gathering, you may have been by yourself reading your Bible. You didn't have all of the theological infrastructure to understand the profundity of what all was taking place in your life, you just became painfully aware of being convicted of your sin, and you became suddenly aware of your need for salvation and for Jesus Christ and His forgiveness and His grace.

That may have been all that you actually knew. But as you study the Bible and as you learn more and more as you sit under the teaching of the word of God, God just keeps moving the fenceposts out further, further, further, further. You get the bigger picture, the bigger picture, the bigger picture, and you come to realize, "Oh, my Lord, my conversion; that wasn't something I just decided to do, that was a clash of heaven with hell in Christ and the power of darkness that once held my life in its grip."

So, have you ever come to faith in Christ? Has this ever happened in your life? If not, then I would plead with you this moment to turn to Christ, to humble yourself, but throw yourself upon His mercy, to believe that He is the Son of God, that He lived a sinless and perfect life, that He died on the cross for sinners bearing their sins, that He was raised from the dead on the third day, that He has ascended to the right hand of God the Father; and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If you have never called upon the name of the Lord, I plead with you to do so this moment. You cannot afford to be wrong about this, or you will be with all of the demons in hell forever. There's only one way of escape and that is to come to the One who has all power in all authority to forgive your sins. Come to Christ, believe upon Christ, and trust your life to Christ. Do you hear this? Entrust your life to Christ, and He will save you. This is your greatest need.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ. How sovereign He is. How mighty to save He is. How He has come to destroy the works of the devil. O God, may in this house of worship here today, may every soul that would still be held captive by the devil be released by Your saving grace. May Christ truly be recognized as Lord in every life here today. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

For the closing benediction, very short, very sweet, my desire for you. It's the last verse in the book of Galatians: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen."