

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Demon

Luke 4:31-37

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Scripture

Luke began writing about the public ministry of Jesus when Jesus was in the region of Galilee. The basic question that Luke asked and answered is: “Who is Jesus?”

Luke first gave us a summary of Jesus’ *ministry* in Galilee (4:14-15). Next, he gave us an example of Jesus’ *teaching* (4:16-30). Then he gave us an example of Jesus’ *authority*, which is seen in the way in which Jesus healed a man with an unclean demon.

Let’s read about account in Luke 4:31-37:

³¹ And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³² and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. ³³ And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” ³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. ³⁶ And they were all amazed and said to one another, “What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!” ³⁷ And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. (Luke 4:31-37)

Introduction

When you think of someone who personifies authority, of whom do you think? Perhaps you think of parents, or teachers,

or policemen, or politicians, or bosses. Generally, people exercise authority because it has either been given to them or assumed by them.

Today we are going to examine the authority of Jesus. How did Jesus exercise authority? Unlike anyone else in history, Jesus' authority is *intrinsic*. That is to say, Jesus' authority was neither given nor assumed. He possessed authority simply because of who he is.

So, let's examine Jesus' authority in Luke 4:31-37.

Lesson

An examination of Jesus' authority in Luke 4:31-37 will show us various responses to his authority.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Examples of Jesus' Authority (4:31, 32b, 33a, 35)
2. Responses to Jesus' Authority (4:32a, 33b-34, 36-37)

I. **Examples of Jesus' Authority (4:31, 32b, 33a, 35)**

First, let's look at examples of Jesus' authority.

Jesus exercised his authority in several different ways. However, in our text I would like to show you two ways in which Jesus exercised authority.

A. *Jesus Taught with Authority (4:31, 32b)*

First, Jesus taught with authority.

Jesus left Nazareth and **went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee** (4:31a), about 30 miles away. **Capernaum** was a small town on the upper northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, about two miles from where the Jordan River flows into the lake. Jesus literally "**went down**" from Nazareth to **Caperna-**

um because Nazareth was about 1,200 feet above sea level and **Capernaum** was 686 feet below sea level.¹

Capernaum was a prosperous fishing village with a more varied population than Nazareth. Several of Jesus' apostles were associated with the town, such as Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:21, 29), as well as Matthew, who was a tax collector in that area (Matthew 9:9). **Capernaum** eventually also became Jesus' adopted hometown (Matthew 9:1).

By this time Jesus was enormously popular. His teaching and miracles were the talk of the country (Luke 4:14). He was invited to speak in every synagogue in every town in Galilee. Crowds thronged to get a glimpse of Jesus.

So, when Jesus got to Capernaum, as was his custom (4:16), **he was teaching** the people **on the Sabbath** (4:31b) in their synagogue. People who visit Capernaum today can view the remains of a second-century synagogue, excavated in the 1920s, that may well have been built on the site of the original synagogue in which Jesus preached.²

Luke notes that Jesus' "**word possessed authority**" (4:32b). The parallel passage in Mark's Gospel says that Jesus "taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Mark 1:22, *NIV*).

R. C. Sproul says that "it was traditional for the [teachers of the law] to take pride in the fact that they added nothing of their own to the orthodox teachings that they taught."³ In those days the teachers of the law would read the text of Scripture, and then simply quote comments made by previous teachers on that passage. So, their teaching was a chain of references. After reading the Scripture passage, they would say, "Rabbi Hil-

¹ I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 191.

² Edward M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison, eds., *The New International Dictionary of*

² Edward M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 118-119.

³ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 75.

lel says this about this passage. . . . And Rabbi Gamaliel says this. . . . But Rabbi Isaac says this. . . .” And the teachers of the law would never say what they themselves understood the passage to mean. They always quoted other authorities.

R. C. Sproul continues:

That is still very much the case with scholars today. If you have ever read a scholarly book on any subject you may have found working through the many technical footnotes in small print a bit laborious. There are a number of reasons why footnotes are used in scholarly literature. Firstly, they are used to give credit to another author for the use of information from his or her work. Secondly, they are used to give fuller explanation of a point or a concept. Thirdly, perhaps their most important use is to give evidence to the fact that the author has done his homework and has read the best literature on the subject.⁴

But Jesus did not teach like that. He taught with authority. Matthew gave us an example of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus frequently said, “You have heard that it was said. . . . But I tell you. . . .” (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28).

Jesus did not quote other teachers. Why? Jesus did not quote other teachers because he *is* God. He is his own authority. When he taught, what he said was the very word of God.

That is why Jesus taught with authority.

B. Jesus Cast Out a Demon with Authority (4:33a, 35)

The second example of Jesus’ authority is that he cast out a demon with authority.

While Jesus was teaching **in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon** (4:33a).

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 75-76.

Some people deny the existence of demons. They say that this man was only struggling with some psychological disorder. But Luke knew better. Luke, after all, was a doctor by profession, and he knew diseases and disorders. No, this was indeed a case of a person who was under the domination of a demon.

Commentator Norval Geldenhuys rightly says that demon possession “was not merely an ordinary form of mental disease as some writers have alleged, but a special phenomenon which was particularly frequent during Jesus’ earthly sojourn and thus was directly connected with his coming to destroy the power of darkness.”⁵

Jesus frequently encountered demons during his earthly ministry. As minions of Satan, they were all trying to get Jesus to disobey God and thereby shipwreck his mission to seek and to save the lost.

Even though we may not see much of the kind of demonic activity that Jesus saw in his day, we must not think that demons are not active in our world today. In his marvelously insightful book titled *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about [demons]. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.⁶

The **demon** caused a commotion during Jesus’ teaching by speaking to him. I am sure that if anyone had perhaps started to drift off to sleep during Jesus’ teaching—which I find difficult to imagine—he would have instantly been awakened!

Now the demon’s words took barely 10 seconds to say.

⁵ Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 174.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1977), 9.

Instantly, **Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent and come out of him!”** (4:35a). Jesus ordered the demon not to say another word and to leave the man. Unable to resist the authority of Jesus, **the demon** threw the man **down** on the floor of the synagogue **in their midst**, and **came out of** the man, **having done him no harm** (4:35b).

In Jesus’ day there were lots of self-proclaimed exorcists. They used weird and bizarre methods to try and cast demons out people. For example, a ring would be placed under the demon-possessed person’s nose. Then the exorcist would recite a lengthy spell, and there would be a staged splash in a nearby basin of water—by the unlucky demon, of course!⁷

But Jesus engaged in no such mumbo-jumbo or hocus-pocus. He simply said, **“Come out of him!”** And the demon came out of the man. Why? Jesus did not recite spells because he *is* God. He is his own authority. When he cast out a demon, what he did was demonstrate the very power of God.

That is why Jesus cast out a demon with authority.

II. Responses to Jesus’ Authority (4:32a, 33b-34, 36-37)

Now, let’s look at responses to Jesus’ authority.

This text shows us various responses to Jesus’ authority.

A. The People Responded to the Authority of Jesus (4:32a, 33b-34, 36-37)

First, notice that the people responded to the authority of Jesus.

The people responded in three marvelous ways to the authority of Jesus.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 151.

1. With Astonishment (4:32a)

First, the people responded to the authority of Jesus with astonishment.

Before the commotion with the demon, while the people were listening to Jesus in the synagogue, **they were astonished at his teaching** (4:32a). The Greek word for **astonished** literally means “to strike with panic or shock.” They were thunderstruck in their souls! Jesus’ teaching packed a powerful punch!⁸

The people in Capernaum had never heard such teaching before. They had never heard anyone teach with authority.

Harry Ironside was a well-known preacher during the first half of the twentieth century. He was once greeted by a visitor who said he had enjoyed the service, although he did not think Ironside was a great preacher.

Ironside replied, “I know I’m not a great preacher. But what was it about my preaching that brought you to that conclusion?”

The man answered, “I understood everything you said.”

This was an unwitting confession of one of the reasons for Ironside’s greatness!

Jesus taught with authority. The people in Capernaum responded to the authority of Jesus with astonishment. If we had been there, we too would have been thunderstruck!⁹

2. With Amazement (4:36)

Second, the people responded to the authority of Jesus with amazement.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 148.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 149.

After Jesus cast the demon out of the man with authority, the people in Capernaum **were all amazed and said to one another, “What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!”** (4:36).

We don't know what Jesus actually taught that Sabbath day in Capernaum. However, one scholar thinks that it is quite likely that in the early days of Jesus' itinerant teaching ministry he taught on the passage in Isaiah that he had used as his teaching text in the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

By casting the demon out of the man, Jesus set the oppressed man free. And he did it simply by speaking a word of **authority and power** to the demon. Is it any wonder that the people of Capernaum were **amazed**?

Martin Luther captured the power of the word of God over Satan and his demons in “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”:

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us;
The prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

3. With Reports (4:37)

And third, the people responded to the authority of Jesus with reports.

When the people left the synagogue that day, **reports about Jesus went out into every place in the surrounding region** (4:37). All the people who had heard and witnessed Jesus' authority in teaching and in casting out a demon spread the word about him.

This is a natural response, isn't it? When people hear or witness something that is extraordinary, they want to tell others about it.

We have been transformed by the grace of God and have also experienced the authoritative word and power of God in our lives. We should constantly give reports about Jesus in every place we go. We should tell others that they too can experience the transforming grace of God in their lives, just as we have.

B. The Demon Responded to the Authority of Jesus (4:33b-34)

Finally, notice that the demon responded to the authority of Jesus.

While Jesus was teaching, the demon **cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God"** (4:33b-34).

The demon knew who Jesus was, and he responded to the authority of Jesus with terror.

The Bible says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). As Jesus began his devil-destroying work, the demon recoiled in terror. "Unable to bear the presence of Christ," writes Kent Hughes, the

demon “writhed in the presence of Jesus’ holiness.”¹⁰

Jesus finally crushed Satan and his demons at the cross. Writing to Christians Paul says in Colossians 2:13-15:

¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities [that is, Satan and his demons] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Jesus].

The reason we are confident of Jesus’ victory over Satan is because three days after Jesus died, God raised him back to life. The resurrection of Jesus proves that his mission to seek and to save the lost was successful, and that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus (Matthew 28:18). That is why the resurrection of Jesus is so important, and why Christians all over the world celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

Conclusion

So, having examined Jesus’ authority in Luke 4:31-37, how will we respond?

We can respond with astonishment, amazement, reports, or terror.

Christians respond with astonishment, amazement, and reports. We have been transformed by the grace of God, and we are astonished, amazed, and love to tell others about it.

Non-Christians may sense no terror of Jesus now. However, the moment they die, they will stand in the presence of Jesus, and then they—like the demon—will be terrified.

I pray that will not be true of you. Amen.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 150.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O God our Father, I thank you for the account of Jesus' authority in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Jesus taught and cast out a demon with authority.

Throughout Jesus' life and ministry on earth, Satan and his demons tried to get Jesus to shipwreck his mission to seek and to save the lost. However, they were not successful. Three days after Jesus was crucified, Father, you raised him back to life as a sign that you accepted his death on behalf of sinners.

On that day in the synagogue in Capernaum the people responded to Jesus with astonishment, amazement, and reports of his authority and power to transform people. May everyone here today respond to Jesus in that same way.

One day each one here today will die and stand before you. And those who do not acknowledge Jesus as God and as the Savior of sinners will respond in terror—just like the demon did that day in Capernaum. May no-one find himself or herself responding like the demon. But grant transforming grace to anyone who asks you for it today.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!