

Luke 4.31-41:
The Power of the Kingdom Breaks Through

True power isn't something you can really describe with words, *is it?* Like a *massive storm*, or an *earthquake*, or a *volcano erupting*, or the *Grand Canyon* or *Mount Everest*. Words and pictures can only do so much. To have some comprehension of *real power* you need to see it. You need to feel it.

Well, up to this point in Luke's Gospel we've been *hearing* a lot about the power of Jesus. That he's the *Son of God*, the one come to deliver his people from their enemies. But he hasn't yet *really* put his power on display.

Sure, he resisted Satan's temptation in the wilderness. He's been preaching with authority about himself and his mission at synagogues around Galilee. But he hasn't quite demonstrated his true power for people to see and experience. That is, until this passage we just read.

And now that the time's come for Jesus to show something of his true power, he demonstrates that he's *exactly* who he said he was at the synagogue in Nazareth—the Son of God, the Messiah, anointed with the Spirit to bring healing and liberty to the oppressed.

1. The Exorcism at the Synagogue (verses 31-37)

Now, in previous scene we looked at last week, remember, Jesus was just driven out of Nazareth, after he talked about his person and his mission when he was teaching at the synagogue.

The people became filled with rage when he told them he'd perform miracles for outsiders but not for them. So they tried to throw him off a cliff. But Jesus just passed right through their midst.

So then we see in verse 31 that from Nazareth he moved on to Capernaum. Now, when Luke says here that Jesus "*went down* to Capernaum" it can be a little misleading. Because he's not talking about the direction Jesus went. As he actually would've travelled Northeast to get to Capernaum from Nazareth, not South.

But in the ancient world, to “*go down*” or “*go up*” often meant a change in *elevation*. And the altitude of Capernaum was around 1800 feet below Nazareth. So Jesus “*went down*” from Nazareth to Capernaum, which was at a lower altitude, as it was located right by the Sea of Galilee.

And so after almost being killed by a lynch mob, Jesus just goes about his business and enters into another synagogue on the Sabbath, this time in Capernaum.

And notice that there are a lot of parallels between this scene and the earlier one in Nazareth. Once again it’s a Sabbath day. Again he’s teaching in the synagogue. Again the people are amazed at the things he’s saying and how he’s saying them. And once again there’s conflict.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I *really wish* there was more information here about what Jesus was teaching about this day. *What was he saying?* Well, we don’t know for sure.

But I’d guess it was probably something pretty similar to what he said about Isaiah 61 in the previous scene. Something about being the promised Messiah come to bring healing and freedom from oppression. And that message is probably what provoked this demon to lash out.

And this whole scene here at the end of chapter 4 is a specific application of that message he gave at Nazareth. His ministry was to be about restoring the poor, the oppressed, the outcast and outsiders.

And here he heals a demon possessed man, an old woman, and then a multitude of sick and demon possessed people. It’s *exactly* what he said he came to do at the synagogue in Nazareth.

And so, again, as he’s teaching in the synagogue here at Capernaum, the people are *amazed* at his speaking and his authority, just like they were in Nazareth. So, we should all be saying to ourselves, “*Hmm... Now we know how things ended the last time people were amazed by Jesus in a synagogue. What’s going to happen here?*”

And this time, once again, Jesus faces opposition. But it's opposition of a different sort than we saw last week. This time there's opposition from the demonic world.

And the stage is really set for Jesus' encounter with this demon at the end of verse 32—where we read the people were amazed at his teaching specifically because *"His word possessed authority."*

Because what happens next? His authority is *simultaneously challenged* and *confessed* by this demon! And Jesus casts him out *with a word!*

Now, this demon clearly knows who Jesus is—just as Satan knew back at the beginning of chapter 4. And there's a sense of fear in what he says in verse 34: *"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."*

He essentially says, *What are you doing? Why are you here? You've come to overthrow us, haven't you?* You see, this demon's *afraid*. And for good reason!

And so Jesus demonstrates his authority. He shows the demon that his fears *weren't unfounded*. Because he rebukes him and says, *"Be silent and come out of him!"*

And then what happens? The demon throws a bit of a fit and the man falls down. But then Luke says, *"he came out of him without doing him any harm."* Now, note how effortless this all was for Jesus....

No spells. No tricks. No oil. No reading from a book. No struggle. Simply a word, spoken on his *own* authority, and the demon's out. It's over. And the man *wasn't even harmed*. Not quite like what you'd see in the movies, *is it?*

And we see in verse 36 that the people responded once again with *amazement*. *Of course they were!* I mean, *what other response could you have to this?* They were amazed at the beginning when all he was doing was teaching.

But here they're *really amazed* when they see his authority in action. Now they understand something more of what kind of power he really has. It's not just that Jesus is a really good speaker, who talked with conviction.

But now they know his *very words* actually *contain power*. He can *even* give orders to the demons. And so, they're all saying to themselves, "*What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!*" Note: *Authority and Power*. They may've heard about exorcisms before, but *not* like this one!

And again, here we see the balance in Jesus' ministry between word and deed. He taught the word of God. But then he demonstrated the validity of his teaching by what he did.

And it's telling that Jesus' very first miracle in Luke's Gospel is an exorcism. Because that demonstrates the fundamentally spiritual character of Jesus' mission. He's on a head-on collision with the spiritual powers!

Because, you see, he came to overthrow the powers of darkness and release mankind from the curse that came upon the world because of our first parents' *submission* to the devil's temptation.

He came that we might be delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light. And here, out in the open for everyone to see, Jesus shows his *authority over* the powers of darkness, just as he did when he resisted Satan in the wilderness.

So, in response to this dramatic scene, Luke tells us in verse 37 that his fame continued to grow. "*Reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.*" So his popularity's growing and there's a *whole lot* of intrigue about who this Jesus might be.

2. The Healing of Peter's Mother-in-Law (verses 38-39)

And he now has the beginning of a following. And we know that because of where he goes next and what he does there. As in verses 38-39 we have this account at the house of Simon (who we later know to be Peter the apostle).

And while he showed his authority over *demons* in the previous scene, here he shows his power even over *human sickness*. As he heals Simon's mother-in-law of her fever.

Now, both of those things—demonic oppression and human sickness—are results of the fall of mankind. And Jesus is showing here that he's come to do away with the curse that was placed on humankind for sin in all its aspects.

He's come to crush the head of the Serpent and put an end to human suffering. He's casting out Satan and his kingdom and bringing in the kingdom of God. This is nothing less than putting into action his fulfillment of Isaiah 61.1-2.

And it's important to realize, this *isn't* just a low-grade fever. But it's a *high fever*. You see, Peter's mother-in-law *isn't* just a little sick. But the situation's actually pretty dire. And there *weren't* any antibiotics in the first century. So, there's a very real sense that her life could be in danger.

And just as he cast out the demon in the synagogue, so Jesus here releases Simon's mother-in-law from her fever *with a word*. For in verse 39 we read that Jesus "*rebuked the fever, and it left her.*"

And notice the similarity here with the casting out of the demon in the synagogue. Verse 35 says Jesus "*rebuked*" the demon. And Verse 39 says he "*rebuked*" the fever. Verse 35 says the demon "*came out*" of the man. And Verse 39 says the fever "*left*" Simon's mother-in-law.

Now, why do I point that out? Well I point it out because there's an intimate connection in Luke between Jesus' authority over evil Spirits and his authority over human sickness.

Because he's the Son of God come to restore the world from its fall into corruption. And in each case these are evils which he came to take away. Because *both* demon possession *and* sickness are symptomatic of *death* in both its *spiritual* and *physical* aspects.

And Jesus releasing people from both of those things shows just what he read at the synagogue in Nazareth—he came to “*set at free those who are oppressed.*” He came to bring liberty from *all forms* of oppression.

And notice what this woman’s response to the healing is—“*and immediately she rose and began to serve them.*” Immediately. You see, she’s so completely recovered, that she gets up *without hesitation* and serves them.

She doesn’t have any lingering effects. It didn’t take a little while for her to get back on her feet. No. The healing is *so thorough* and *complete* that the moment she’s healed she gets up and expresses her thankfulness to Jesus by her actions.

Now, there’s something really important to see in this response, *especially* when you compare it to the initial reaction to Jesus’ teaching in the synagogues.

You see, the people in the synagogues and throughout Galilee are all *amazed* by Jesus, *right?* But this is the *first instance* where we actually see somebody *doing* something in response to Jesus’ ministry, other than trying to throw him off a cliff.

This woman didn’t just stand around in amazement. But she’s *moved to action* as a result of her healing. And notice that her action is *service*.

She didn’t say, “*Oh hey, I’ve been laid up with this horrible sickness for so long, I think I’m gonna go have some me time. Maybe I’ll go out shopping, get some new shoes.*”

No! She gets up and starts *servicing* Jesus and her family. What a wonderful example that is of how the gospel ought to motivate us to action.

Jesus has done great things for us all. *Will you take that for granted?* Or will you live a life of service out of thanks and love for what he’s done for you?

Sure, there’s a place to just sit in awe of Jesus—his grace his glory. We need to do that. We need those times where we enter into his

presence, like we do every Sunday, so that we can be healed by him and strengthened.

But then what do you do after that? That's the question. What do you do after you hear a healing word from Jesus? Well, the calling is service to him and your neighbors. And we have a wonderful depiction of how that works in Simon's mother-in-law.

I mean, *think about it*. She's lying there incapacitated. She has this high fever that, if left unchecked, will likely take her life. Just as *in ourselves* we lie sick and dead in our sin and corruption—*utterly hopeless* apart from his grace.

But then Jesus comes to her and heals her with a word. And she gets up and serves him. She shows her faith and love now by her hospitality. *What a great example that is for us!* And so, *just as we've been healed and restored by Jesus, so let us serve him and each other in our lives.*

3. The Healing of Many (verses 40-41)

Well then the whole scene closes with these mass healings at Simon's house in verses 40-41. And notice here that the two events of the previous two scenes are now brought together on a grand scale. As Jesus is here *both* healing people of sicknesses *and* casting out demons *at the same time!*

Now, picture this scene. It's been a really long day at this point. Jesus preached and cast out a demon in the synagogue. He went back to Peter's house and miraculously healed Peter's mother-in-law.

And now it's evening time. It's getting dark, and all these sick and demon possessed people start coming to him from *all over the place!* They're coming out of the woodwork!

And remember, earlier Jesus showed that he wouldn't perform signs on demand just to prove who he is. But now we *do* see him performing miracles upon request. So, *What's the difference here?*

Well the difference is that these people are *sincerely* hurting. They *believe* Jesus can help them. And their requests *aren't* out of curiosity or skepticism. They come from true need, and faith.

And so Jesus does what they ask—*every single* one of them. Mark well what Luke says in verse 40, “*all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him and he healed every one of them.*” I mean, this isn't just a few people. This is a *whole bunch of people*, and *not one* of them was turned away!

And note the progression of the narrative up to this point. Jesus *wouldn't* perform signs for the devil. He *wouldn't* perform signs at Nazareth. *Then* he *cast out* a demon from *one man*. *Then* he *healed* Peter's mother-in-law of her fever.

And now here he's *promiscuously* healing and casting out demons for a multitude of people! Friends, this is *nothing less* than the breaking *into our world* of the very *kingdom of God* in the person of Jesus!

As he clearly demonstrates his authority *even over demons and human suffering*. The ruler over all things has come! The Lord of all creation has *broken into* the world that's saturated with sin, evil, sickness, and disease. And he's come to *redeem* it—to both *proclaim* and *bring* liberty to the captives and the oppressed.

And all the demons knew it. They all knew Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. You can almost sort of imagine after the temptation in the wilderness Satan went around and gave them all a heads up. “*Listen guys, we have a real problem on our hands here.*”

Because in verse 41, *what happens?* As the demons came out of their victims they shouted, almost with a sense of wonder: “*You are the Son of God!*” *What we suspected is really true!*

See, the demons *know* he's the Christ—the Son of God. And they're *scared*. And even more than the people at the synagogue, they're *in awe*. Because they know his true authority and power. Without even breaking a sweat, he cast them all out and *commanded* them what to do!

Now, here's what I really want you to see from this closing scene. *Don't miss it.* — It's *this Jesus—this King; this One with all authority—who did not, does not, and will not turn away anyone* who comes to him needy, broken, sick, or oppressed, for healing and salvation.

Even the demons are in awe of his power and authority. But he didn't come just to put on a show. He came for the weak, the oppressed, the sick, the lost. And in this scene we see that he *didn't turn away* a single person that came to him for healing and restoration.

As Jesus says himself in John 6.37: "*All the father gives me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will never cast out.*"

So, *are you sick, weak, oppressed?* What have you done in your life? What have you done *this past week*. Or even just *this day?* What wrongs have been done to you?

What do you need Jesus to heal you of? Note well his mercy, brothers and sisters. Don't miss it. His arms are open to heal, to forgive, to give mercy. The only thing that's required is to ask.

And when you receive his mercy—when you hear his word of grace—don't just sit in awe. Yes, do that. But remember the example of Peter's mother-in-law: Get up and serve him.

Show hospitality to his people and to your neighbors. Love the people he brings into your life in tangible ways, especially those who have no way to help themselves. *That's how* you show your love and devotion to him. *That's how* you show your thankfulness for his grace—through loving service.

Because Jesus *already defeated and cast out* Satan and his demons at the cross. As we read in Colossians 2.15, he put the spiritual authorities to open shame and triumphed over them.

But the battle still rages as we live as his disciples in this world. And we wage war against the kingdom of darkness *not* with physical force or aggression. But through holiness, humility, and service. Through shining as lights of righteousness and love amidst a dark world filled with hatred.

As St. Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 5.8-11:

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.