

LUKE

“The Authority of His Word”

Luke 4:31-44

Sunday, March 26, 2017

By David A. Ritchie

“And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he 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.’ 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. 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!’ And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon’s house. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’ And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea” (Luke 4:31–44, ESV).

Almighty and Everlasting God, I thank you for the words of your Holy Scripture. Your words are living and active. They possess authority and power. I pray that as we set our hearts and minds to study this passage, that your Holy Spirit would give us ears to hear the very voice of Christ. Where there is bondage to sin, I pray his words would bring freedom. Where there is brokenness, may his words bring healing. Where there is despair, may his words bring the hope of an everlasting kingdom. We pray this in the name of the Holy One, the Son of God, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I. Introduction

My wife Kate and I have three sons, who are currently ages five, three, and one; which means our lives are very fun. But it also means things can go from zero to pandemonium really quickly in our home.

Often as my workday is coming to an end and my wife is making dinner for our family, the boys enter into what Kate likes to call “*the witching hour*.” It is that time of day when after a long extended time of peaceful coloring, reading books, and playing with Play-Doh, the boys suddenly mount an insurgency of insanity.

The older two decide it is time to play *Batman V. Superman* – a movie which, incidentally, neither one of them have seen – but nevertheless are able to recreate, due to the destruction and havoc they wreak upon our home. They climb on chairs, get up and run across the kitchen table, and then sprint

to the living room where they pull every cushion of every couch and proceed to beat the trash out of one another. Meanwhile, during this WrestleMania, the one-year-old decides it is a time of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of newly teething teeth. In vain, my wife will attempt to manage this chaos while not burning the chicken, but for some reason, during this particular hour of the day her words fall on deaf ears.

So it is often during this time between five and six, when I have finished my last appointment for the day and I may be sending a few last emails, that I will get a call or a text like I did last Tuesday that says some version of the following, **“I need you to come home now please” (show slide of text message).**

And when I get a text like that, I don’t mess around. I don’t give her a call to ask what’s the matter. I know exactly what it means. So I get in the car. I come home. I enter the house. And with a clear firmness and fatherly tone, I will simply say, **“Stop!”**

And when the boys hear that certain tone of voice, a sudden hush goes across the house. Even the one-year-old stops dead in his tracks and looks at me. Suddenly there is peace.

And this drives my wife crazy, by the way. It mildly infuriates her that one word from me can be so instantaneously effective.

And I admit, I don’t know *how* it works and I don’t know *how long* it is going to work, but we’ve learned certain tone of my voice as a father that my sons immediately know must be recognized, listened to, and obeyed.

Here in today’s Scripture reading, I believe we have a similar but infinitely greater dynamic at play. Jesus has begun his public ministry as a preacher of God’s word. But instantly, the people recognize something very different about the way Jesus talks. To quote our text directly, **“his word possessed authority.”**

The Greek word translated here as “authority” is “ἐξουσία.” It literally means “the potential or resource to command, control, or govern; *capability, might, power.*”¹ When this same story is told in the Gospel According to Mark, Jesus’s authority is contrasted with the sermons of the Jewish scribes (Mk. 1:22), who would drone on endlessly about how various rabbis of history interpreted a certain passage. But when Jesus spoke, he spoke clearly, passionately, directly, and even more his words brought about change. His word possessed authority.

So for the rest of our time today, I want to explore this topic of **“The Authority of Jesus’s Word.”** And I would like to look at the authority of Jesus’s word from three angles: **1.) The Authority of Jesus’s Word Over Evil, 2.) The Authority of Jesus’s Word Over Brokenness, and 3.) The Authority of Jesus Word Over All Creation.**

II. Text

1.) The Authority of Jesus’s Word Over Evil.

This first episode of today’s passage also happens to be the first mighty, miraculous act that Jesus performs in the book of Luke. And what is that act? Jesus casts a demon out of a man.

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 352.

But what is a demon? The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible says, “Demons are fallen angels, divinely created supernatural beings who, under the leadership of Lucifer (Satan), rebelled against God.”²

And it seems fitting that after Satan attempted to attack Jesus earlier in chapter four, that, right off the bat, Jesus goes on the offensive against the kingdom of evil.³ Now, the New Testament never once makes the argument for the existence of demons. To believe in evil spiritual beings that deceive, tempt, and coerce humans was a normal, presumed part of the worldview of the first century.⁴

But when we look at something like this, we assume we know better. We say to ourselves, of course ancient people thought demons were real, but we know that these people were struggling with some sort of psychosis.

We after all live in a post-Enlightenment age. Something is true only if it can be known by science. And whenever we run into a problem, we use our rationality, our scientific method, and our technology to control that problem.

And I certainly don't think science and rationality and technology are bad things. They can do a lot of good. However, they are powerless to explain and end the power of evil.

Did you know during the so-called age of Enlightenment, there were thinkers who actually suggested that one day mankind would become so rational and scientific that all war would end? And do you know what happened at the end of the Enlightenment? We got to the twentieth century and had two World Wars, which killed more people in combat than any other event in history.

I like what Fred Craddock writes about this passage where Jesus casts out a demon: *“All this may seem very primitive to an enlightened modern, but we have not, by the announcement that we do not believe in demons, reduced one whit the amount of personal and corporate evil in the world. The names of the enemies have been changed, but the battles still rage.”*⁵

So let's for a moment step into this supernatural belief. There are a few things that are very interesting to note. Number 1: the demon is a supernatural being, who immediately recognizes that he is in the presence of a supernatural being. He knows exactly who Jesus is. Number two: he recognizes that not only does Jesus have the power to destroy him; Jesus's mere words have the power to destroy his whole realm (“Have you come to destroy us?”).

And notice how Jesus responds. He doesn't have to cast some mystical spell. He doesn't have to power up. He doesn't have to summon his chi. He simply commands the demon, and the demon must obey. The demon releases the man and is not even allowed to hurt him.

I know there are some of you who don't believe in something like demons. But I imagine you that you have experienced overwhelming temptation. I imagine you know what addiction feels like or what it

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [“Demon, Demon Possession,”](#) *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 610.

³ I. Howard Marshall, [The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 192.

⁴ David George Reese, [“Demons: New Testament,”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 140.

⁵ Fred B. Craddock, [Luke](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 66.

means to be in bondage to a sin. I am imagine you know what it feels like to fight a loosing battle with evil despite your most rational thinking and most dedicated will power.

The good news I have for you today is that Jesus is stronger. Although evil is real and evil is powerful, the power of evil is doomed. The fight between good and evil is not between equal parties. In the end Jesus wins. He will set all captives free.

2.) The Authority of Jesus's Word Over Brokenness.

It is worthy to note that everything that happened in point number one happened in a church service (technically a synagogue service). Can you imagine? If someone asked some of these folks, "how was church today?"

After the synagogue service is over, a man named Simon (who will later be known as Simon Peter, the Apostle) invites Jesus to his house for lunch. As it happens Simon Peter's mother in-law lives in this house as well, and she happens to be very sick. And the text says, "they appealed to him on her behalf."

It is important to note here that sickness in not a part of God's design.

In the beginning God created all things well. He pronounced that his creation was good. But sin entered into God's good creation and introduced brokenness where there was peace. We see this brokenness when we see sickness and death. But the voice who created all things by the power of his word still possesses authority even over this brokenness: *"The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'" (Psalm 29:3-9, ESV).*

And here in Luke 4, we hear that same voice in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the same way Jesus rebuked the demon Jesus rebukes the disease.⁶ Again, Jesus does not need to use any magical spell. He does not need conjure his power or force. He simply speaks, and creation bows its knee. It is almost as if Creation itself is recognizing the very voice that spoke it into existence.

However, while Jesus doesn't pray in order to heal. We do see examples of people praying. Simon Peter and his family appeal to Jesus on behalf of this mother in-law. Later, people from all over the city bring their sick loved ones to Jesus. He lays his hands on every one of them. And they are set free and healed.

Now if you were hear last week, notice how much of a contrast this is with Jesus's experience in Nazareth. In his hometown of Nazareth, people were too familiar with Jesus and they felt entitled to him giving them what they wanted. But here we see something else. We see a humble, yet expectant pursuit and petitioning of Jesus. And as a result the power of heaven is unleashed.

This is the power of prayer. It is realizing we have no power. The power of prayer is in acknowledging and trusting the power of God.

⁶ Ibid., 67.

I had a friend ask me this last week, “You know, if God is just going to do his will no matter what, why should we pray?” I think the simplest answer to that question is that we pray because God asks us to pray. He delights in working in and with and through the prayers of his people. The book of James says, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

And what this passage shows us is that we serve a Redeemer who is willing and able to heal our brokenness. What if our default response to him was humble, faith-filled prayer?

3.) The Authority of Jesus’s Word Over All Creation.

After twenty-four hours of supernatural ministry, Jesus goes to a desolate place to seek communion with his heavenly Father. But soon he is found by the crowds. If Jesus would have let them, the people of Capernaum would have made Jesus stay with them his whole life. But Jesus tells them: *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose” (Lk. 4:43).*

What Jesus has begun in Capernaum will not be a localized event. It is God’s kingdom breaking into all of creation. In fact, this is the reasons why Jesus is casting out demons and healing diseases. He is not just putting on a magic show. He is giving us a glimpse of the kingdom of God to come. As Pastor Timothy Keller has written in his book *The Reason for God*, *“Jesus’ miracles...were never magic tricks, designed only to impress and coerce...Instead, he used miraculous power to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and raise the dead. Why? We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power but also wonderful foretastes of what he is going to do with that power. Jesus’ miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts, that the world we all want is coming.”*⁷

III. Conclusion

I’ll conclude by talking about one other feature of this text that has fascinated New Testament scholars for centuries. In gospel-studies it is know as the “The Messianic Secret.”

Notice that when the demons recognize Jesus our text says they call him “the Holy One” and the “Son of God,” and know that he is the Christ. And they aren’t lying.⁸ But Jesus rebukes them and silences them. The question is why?

Now Jesus is doing everything that the messiah should do. He is preaching good news, setting captives free, and announcing the age of the kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 61). But fascinatingly, Jesus never once makes an overt claim to be the Messiah, but he does not deny the title when people ask him if he is the Messiah.⁹ Why is Jesus seemingly holding his messianic identity as a secret?

In his *New Testament Theology*, George Eldon Ladd suggests it is because the people of Israel knew the term messiah, but they didn’t know what it really meant: *“They wanted a king to deliver them*

⁷ Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. (New York: Dutton, 2008), 77.

⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 195.

⁹ George Eldon Ladd. *A New Testament Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 143.

from Rome, not a savior to redeem them from sin....Had Jesus publically proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, that proclamation would have been received by the people as a rallying call to rebellion against Rome...Against this background we can understand why the word ["Messiah/Christ] generally came to be used of Jesus only after his resurrection, when his messianic mission was finally understood and the messianic category so completely reinterpreted that the term underwent a complete transformation (Jn. 21:30)."¹⁰

The people of Israel wanted a political messiah. But the problem isn't Caesar – it is sin. Thus, Jesus is going to completely redefine what a messiah is: not just by his power, but by his death and resurrection.

In this way, the power of Jesus word displayed in this passage is only a foretaste of what is to come.

Jesus will one day defeat all evil, because he endured the worst evil had to offer when he died on the cross. He will one day heal all brokenness, because he was broken for our sake. But one day because of his resurrection, Jesus's authority will be acknowledged by all: *"...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5–11, ESV).*

Community Group Discussion Questions

- 1.) What did people notice was so different about the way Jesus spoke (see: Luke 4:32), and how should this form our understanding and expectation of the word of God?*
- 2.) Jesus doesn't pray for demons or disease to leave, rather he simply gives commands. What does this suggest about the true nature of Jesus?*
- 3.) Luke 3:38 says, "Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf." Jesus responds to their petition. How should this passage encourage us to pray?*

¹⁰ George Eldon Ladd. *A New Testament Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 140.