

## 7. Jesus' Authority over Demons

Luke 4:31-44

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

### Capernaum, Christ's Center of Ministry

<sup>31</sup>Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. <sup>32</sup>They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority (Luke 4:31-32).

Capernaum was located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The journey from Nazareth to Capernaum is a descent from 1,200 feet above sea level to 686 feet below sea level. Capernaum is situated on the North West shore of the Sea of Galilee in the depression known to us as the Great Rift Valley that stretches from Lebanon's Beqaa Valley past Mount Hermon to the north of Israel all the way down the Jordan Valley, through the Gulf of Aqaba, and all the way to Mozambique in South Eastern Africa. The Galilee is one of the most beautiful areas in the world with many wild flowers and flocks of migrating birds using the land bridge of Israel from Europe and Asia to Africa. It is likely that Capernaum became the center for Christ's ministry, for Matthew's gospel said of Capernaum that it was, "his own town" (Matthew 9:1). Mark gives us an indication that the paralyzed man was healed in Capernaum after his friends broke through the roof of Jesus house:

<sup>1</sup>When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, **it was heard that He was at home.** <sup>2</sup>And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them (Mark 2:1-2).

It is possible that the reason that there were so many people outside the house was that all the locality had found out where Jesus lived. Of course, at some point, because of the crowds, He could no longer live there. Some would say that Jesus never had a home because He had said, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). It's possible that He was referring to His travelling around the country as an itinerant preacher and that He often had times where He would sleep out in the open, but in the above passage, Mark seems to indicate to us that Jesus had a home in Capernaum. Of course, it could also have been rented accommodation or someone was letting Him use their home.

Again and again, we see Jesus teaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath. He made it a habit to be in Church. The great need of that time and our time, too, is the teaching of the Word of God. When darkness is so strong, people have such a strong desire to find light—the light of God's Word.

Archeologists have found the ruins of the synagogue where Jesus taught in this passage. Most tours to Israel take a visit to the synagogue in Capernaum, and very near to it is the place where most believe the Sermon on the Mount was taught.

### The Authority of Christ Over Demons

<sup>33</sup>In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, <sup>34</sup>“Go away! 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!” <sup>35</sup>“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. <sup>36</sup>All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!” <sup>37</sup>And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area (Luke 4:31-37).

Let’s put ourselves in the shoes of the attendant who was in the Synagogue on that day and witnessed this wonderful deliverance. If you knew that this particular person was demonized, would you have let him in? We have two possibilities about this man: 1) that he was totally new to the synagogue and had come to hear Jesus, or 2) that the man was a regular attendee of the congregation. Whatever way we look at it; the demon was a closet-demon. It was a clandestine operation in the man’s life. The words, “*Go away!*” at the beginning of verse thirty-four, translate from a single Greek word, *ea*, the meaning of which is uncertain. It could mean the verb “to leave alone,” or it can mean an emotional outburst—similar to “Ah!” expressing anger, fear, or dismay at the nearness of the Light of the World—Jesus.

What do you think would be warning signs to you that tell you that a person has a demonic problem? What opens the door to demons entering a person’s life?

What opens the door? Sin, plain and simple. There seems to be natural spiritual barriers to demons infesting a person’s life. In the book of Job, for instance, when Satan wanted to destroy Job’s testimony of a righteous life, he complained that he could do nothing against Job. He said “*Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has*” (Job 1:10). The word translated as *hedge* describes an invisible barrier of protection from the spirit world. In Job’s case, the enemy was allowed to attack him without sin being the cause. Satan seeks to get a toehold in a person’s life by tempting toward a specific area in the person’s life where he is weak. The more the person gives expression to the sin, the more the enemy gets a hold. The toehold becomes a foothold and, finally, becomes a stronghold.

Demons work best when they can hide in a person’s life, and the person so occupied does not realize what’s going on. People with such a spirit occupying them are very aware that they have compulsions and a drive toward dark things at work in their lives. There can be evil thoughts that are not normal. Often, the thoughts are self-destructive and persistent. Sometimes, the thoughts are actual voices that the person hears. The voices will sometimes deceive the person into thinking that it is God’s voice or a higher self. In eastern cultures, demons masquerade as an ancestor that has previously died.

Both the men that shot John Lennon and President Reagan said that God had told them to do it. Of course, we know that God does not motivate people to murder—that is totally of Satan. There are physiological and mental illnesses, which can also affect a person in this way. I believe that when Jesus ministered to people, He ministered to the whole person, spirit, soul, and body. In western civilization, we tend to think inside categories or boxes with clear categories. For example, in Christianity we teach about spirit, soul, and body as being three distinct parts of our

humanity. It can be a helpful way for us to understand our nature, but during the time when Jesus walked this earth, this type of thinking would have been foreign to most people. In Jewish thought, the person was thought of as a whole, and in speaking of soul and spirit, often the two were interchangeable. In the Eastern world view, the spirit, soul, and body are very intertwined, and one affects the other. I believe that Jesus came to set us free, our whole person. On this side of eternity, we do not see the whole picture. Paul says that when we receive our new bodies, **“we will know Him as we are known”** (1 Corinthians 13:12).

There is a degree of wholeness that we will only experience when we are with Him in eternity. It is my desire to see as much as I can of God’s kingdom now, extending into my life and the lives of those around me. We are taught to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” As Jesus’ disciples and ambassadors on Earth, we seek to be the conduits of His kingdom on Earth. When we walk in His authority, we will encounter opposition at times. The darkness will react against the light!

Demons seek to express themselves through the person in whom they have managed to gain a stronghold. People in such a condition are often in the grip of a compulsion, an expression of whatever demon that is resident in their lives. The person may have had a separate side to his life where he has given in to some sin that has become a habit and ultimately a compulsion.

Sometimes, people with this problem will go to church to assuage their guilt concerning the private life they are leading. Of course, the enemy never expects that the Spirit of God will show up. The enemy spirit doesn’t mind church as long as there is little life and light. As soon as Jesus is glorified and people look to Him in expectation, the darkness will manifest itself. Self-help theories and philosophy will not provoke an unclean spirit. An unclean spirit can bear to be in church, but there can be visible reactions when in worship or in hearing the Word of God, such as seen here in this passage.

If the man was new to the synagogue, it is possible that he had heard of Jesus, and was spiritually aware that Christ was the answer to his inner need of deliverance from the demon. If he was a regular attendee, it is likely that he found peace for a time while he was with God’s people, but something broke loose on that day. When God is moving in the midst, the demons will manifest themselves. Sometimes, it can be screams, i.e. a spirit can take control and use the person’s vocal chords. Sometimes, the voice will be different to the person’s body that the demon is using. Other times, there will be terrible blasphemies and swear words emanating from a person who is not known to have ever used words like that. After praying for a person, the individual may not even remember what was said during this time.

The demon could no longer contain himself in the darkness in the man. He screamed out loud at the top of his voice (v. 33). After the scream, the demon spoke through the man, **34“Go away! 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!”** I’m sure that shook a few people in the synagogue that day. The presence of the Spirit of God was evident in the room, not only because Jesus was there but also because of the words that were spoken. These were words of truth that cut to the heart of the man. Do not underestimate the power that is inherent in the Word of God.

For the word of God is **living** and **active**. Sharper than any double-edged sword, **it penetrates** even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Under the anointing of the Spirit, the Word that is preached is powerful and is “living.” The Greek word translated as *living* is “*Zao*.” It means not only living but also causing to live, i.e. vivifying, quickening. Demons panic when truth is preached under the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As the church of the Living God, we do not need to be scared when demons manifest. It is because they can no longer hide in the darkness when the light of God is brought to bear upon them. John wrote, “**the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world**” (1 John 4:4). When the church is gathered together, demons get scared and begin to tremble. James writes, “**You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder**” (James 2:19). This word shudder means to quake and tremble.

When Jesus preached, things happened. When ministers of the Word of God are controlled, full, and led of the Spirit, hearts are laid bare. Conviction comes to the people if they are in sin, and evil is confronted. People leave church feeling better than when they entered. They are vivified and energized by the ministry of the Word of God under the power of the Spirit of God. “**The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life**” (John 6:63). To speak God’s Word brings life, light, and liberty to a person’s spirit. “**Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty**” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Verse 36 says that they were amazed at His teaching because his message had authority. What do you think that looked like? What was it about His message that was so different from their regular teachers?

### **What is Authority? How Does It Come?**

In our last study, Luke was showing us the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth. Now, his focus is to show us the display of power and authority, which was brought against Satan and his kingdom. Twice in our passage, Luke uses the word authority (vs. 32 and 36) to describe the ministry of Jesus. In my opinion, there was more to His message than the structure of His sentences and clarity of logic. Christ did not buttress His message by quoting previous Rabbis. The Lord did not have to support His teaching in any way, for He had and has authority in Himself: “**You have heard that it was said...<sup>39</sup>But I say to you...**” (Matthew 5:38-39). He preached God’s Word which is dynamic and powerful itself, but not only has the Word of God authority in itself, there was and is authority and power that is intrinsic in the Speaker.

A person with spiritual authority brings forth a clarity and conviction that speaks to the heart and will of a listener. Jesus was said to have authority and power: “**With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!**” *Exousia* (authority) is the permission or authority to do something; it denotes the right to do something. The other word translated into English as *power* is the Greek word *Dunamis*, from where we get the English word dynamite. This word means to be capable, sufficiently powerful. It is intrinsic power. *Exousia* is likened to the traffic cop standing at an intersection directing traffic. He has authority to tell you to do

something. If you do not do it, then he has *dunamis* ( power) in his gun strapped to his waist to make you do it! Demons recognize this authority and power. It is important for us to get a firm understanding of the authority and power that resides in the Word of God, in Christ Jesus himself. Let us try and get a handle on this important truth, for He has also given authority to His Church to carry on His ministry (Matthew 28:18-20).

*Exousia* (authority) is often used of a king conferring his authority or permission to exert a certain action. There are different kinds of authority, but all are spiritual in nature. There is nothing tangible to grasp. You can't see authority. Authority, though, has to have power along with it. There is no authority if power is not delegated to back it up. Jesus gave the seventy disciples power and authority to drive out demons and to heal sicknesses, and the result was that the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17). Authority is exercised in an office situation by the use of power along with it. For instance, your boss exercises authority over you by his use of rewards for correct action, e.g. salary increase or promotion to a higher level. There is also coercive power, i.e. the boss can use the threat and fear of being dismissed or a pay downgrade to influence your performance.

There is also authority that comes with knowledge or superior skill, but it has to be knowledge along the lines of the job in hand. Knowledge as to world-politics is not useful to exert authority on the football team. Superior skill or knowledge of the game and its rules are what gives authority in that situation. There is also illegitimate authority and power, as in when a leader's values are exerted and they are different to your own. This happens sometimes when a person is given titular leadership (a leadership title) and put in place over someone with superior skill and knowledge. If the titular leader's character does not go along with the position, power, and influence that he has been given, the result is disharmony, disunity, and low morale. True spiritual leadership is never forced upon the will of the person led. A person with true spiritual leadership should never have to say that he is the leader. People follow spiritual leadership because there is a desire to follow the leader. True spiritual authority is not coercive, nor does it make a person feel inferior, but it respects moral freedom.

Jesus exercised true spiritual authority in His leadership. He never forced His will over people. His leadership style was one of true agape love which ignited a desire from those who heard His words to want to be like Him! You can only exercise true spiritual leadership when you have earned the right by the degree of your character and the presence of the Spirit in your life. How many times have you heard of leaders who failed morally, resulting in hurt and disillusionment of those who chose to follow them? Unfortunately, this has been an all too common occurrence.

When we grow in our experience of the grace of God through walking with Him and growing closer to Him, our character will be refined. The evidence of the Spirit of Christ at work in a believer's life is the fruit of the spirit, and His spiritual authority will also be available to the believer. As Christians, we are representatives of Christ on earth. When we understand who we are in Christ and what He has done for us, we will desire to see His kingdom come. Of course, the enemy does not want the believer to understand this. Part of our growth in Christ is learning to exercise this authority.

When Jesus spoke, He was speaking to the demon that had come to the forefront in controlling the person. No longer was it hidden. Christ's words were backed by *dunamis* power: <sup>35</sup>“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” (v. 35). Evil spirits recognize spiritual power and authority. Remember the story of those who were not Christians, yet who tried to cast out a demon in a man? <sup>14</sup>Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. <sup>15</sup>And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:14-15). Demons only recognize authority that is delegated authority from God, and Jesus was recognized as to Who He was and is by the demons in the man. The man was totally set free from the spirit and felt a freedom in his life at last!

Just a word of caution. Don't take on demons without sufficient prayer backing. The Scripture says, “Greater is He who is in us than he that is in the world.” But having said that, it is always wise to find someone with experience of this kind (of deliverance prayer) when attempting to deal with any demonic activity. Remember, when Jesus sent His disciples out, He sent them two by two. Please talk to your pastor about these things before seeking to confront demons.

### Authority over Sickness

Luke gives us another example of Jesus' authority. The second time it is in the home of Simon Peter:

<sup>38</sup>Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup>So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. <sup>40</sup>When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. <sup>41</sup>Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ. <sup>42</sup>At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. <sup>43</sup>But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." <sup>44</sup>And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea (Luke 4:38-44).

When we picture the disciples travelling around the country with Jesus, we do not imagine them to be married men. Here in this passage, we are told that Peter did have a wife. His mother-in-law was sick. Paul the Apostle also tells us that Peter had a wife:

<sup>3</sup>This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. <sup>4</sup>Don't we have the right to food and drink? <sup>5</sup>Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? (Cephas is another name for Peter) <sup>6</sup>Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? (1 Corinthians 9:3-6)

Notice how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, “he rebuked the fever, and it left her.” The Greek word used here for the English word ‘rebuke’ is “*Epitimaō*,” which means to blame, censure, chide, rebuke, warn or berate. It is an abrupt, curt, and biting charge pointedly

expressing disapproval, the taking to task of someone for a fault, and connotes a sharp or harsh tone (Lexical Aids to the Key Word Study Bible). Wouldn't you wonder about Jesus talking to your mother-in-law like that? This is more than likely the first time Christ has met her. He is in Peter's house and rebuking his mother-in-law's sickness. Jesus would not normally speak in this kind of tone; He was speaking directly to the illness. The result? She got up totally healed and began waiting on them.

[Does it sound to you that maybe this sickness was due to bondage?](#)

Jesus did not always address an illness or sickness in this way. I certainly would be quick to say that not every sickness has a spirit behind it. In certain countries where the demonic is openly practiced, the link between illness and spiritual practices, such as voodoo, is more common.

Verse 40 states that the people brought to Jesus ALL who had various diseases, and He laid His hands on EACH ONE and healed them. Notice, too, that demons came out of many people. He had power to shut their mouths and would not permit them to speak.

Because of being in ministry all day, Jesus now needed to replenish himself. Ministry can be exhausting, and one can feel depleted after times of giving of oneself. The Lord Jesus went to the source of His power and authority, His Father, and He found a solitary place to pray as was His custom (verse 42). In this act, we see a powerful example of where the power comes for healing, deliverance, and the ministry of teaching the Word of God.

[Where do you go when you need to pray? Is there a specific place that you like to get alone?](#)

After His time of early morning praying, the Lord is directed to leave that particular area to reach other towns and village. He said, **"I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also"** (v. 43). He has a strong sense of mission. He does not say, "I want to," but I must! It's a strong word in the Greek language. This is why Jesus had come to earth: **"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work"** (1 John 3:8). He was moved with compassion for the lost, just as each of us also need to be. He could not sit idly by while the sheep were wandering over the hillsides away from His Father. God's love compelled Him to reach the lost and hurting.

Luke presents us with Jesus the King of the Jews, a Man endued with power and authority that is loving to the core—the kind of love that is self-sacrificial. Many of us have negative experiences from our past or our childhood of some authority figure that was not loving, but austere or delivering discipline without the motivation of love. It can be easy to shrink back from any authority if this is the case. He wants to show you His unconditional love. Do not shrink back from Him, and do not shrink back from others. Ask God to help you become the loving influence that you have sought for in your life. If you have not seen loving authority modeled to you, see the person of Jesus modeling it to you and go and do likewise! Even though you may feel that people have failed you, the Lord Jesus will never fail you. If you have been disappointed by others in the church or by authority figures in your life, bring your hurts and disappointments to the Father, and ask Him to heal you.

Has there been a positive authority figure in your life that you can remember? Perhaps a family member or a teacher? What kind of impact did that person have on your life? Did they inspire you? Share briefly with one another.

We need to see the authority of God in a new light, for it is always motivated and administered with His love. When we trust an authority figure that is motivated by love for the individual, it is easy to receive instruction, direction, and follow that type of person. Jesus told us that He is meek and lowly of heart (Matthew 11:29). He lovingly pleads with us to come to Him and to find rest for our souls. People wanted to follow Jesus not only for the wonderful things He did but also for who He was and is. His love is perfect, and we know that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). The light will always dispel the darkness.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You that You have already overcome the Evil One. Father, help us to be people who know and declare Your word. Let us be those who would bring Your light and presence into the lives of others. Spirit, teach us how to walk in obedience and authority.

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