



Luke 4:31–37

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people.

32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 ‘Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Naz-

areth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!’

35 ‘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.

36 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!’ 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

Reflection

It's hard to manage how it felt for Jesus to be run out of his hometown by his childhood friends and neighbours. Imagine those closest to you in the world trying to kill you. Imagine the Son of God being murdered in a church. That's what almost happened in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. They couldn't handle seeing one of their own come good, the carpenter's boy claiming to be the Messiah. As Jesus said, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown.' But deeper down, the root cause? The all Jewish Nazareth couldn't handle Jesus' mission to the Gentiles. So, rejected by those formerly closest to him in the world and barred for life from his hometown, and no doubt carrying all the emotions that you would expect with him, Jesus returns to Capernaum and begins a ministry to outcasts like himself. Reading from today's

passage in Luke 4:31–37

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37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

In the synagogue in Capernaum Jesus finds an outcast like himself. His custom was to teach in the synagogue. And (just as in Nazareth at first), in Capernaum he did so to great acclaim. All who heard him were amazed at his teaching, his gracious words, his depth of insight, his great learning but most especially they were amazed at the authority with which he taught. This man was different. He spoke God’s words as if they were his own – with a certainty and a clarity, with insight and a familiarity; almost as if he were the one who had written them down in the first place. And

the people of this small multi-ethnic fishing town – fishermen, merchants, craftsmen, labourers and their wives – were ‘struck with amazement’, literally in the Greek ‘struck with panic or shock’ at the power and authority with which Jesus preached.

Unlike the Pharisees, the usual preachers in the synagogues, who were endlessly quoting their teachers and other authorities Jesus preached God’s word clearly and powerfully without embellishment. In the ancient Jewish work the Talmud, we get an idea of how the Pharisees taught God’s word, belabouring it with tradition and scholarly opinions. We read lines like these from famous Jewish preachers, ‘Nor have I ever in my life said a thing which I did not hear from my teachers.’ Or ‘He never in his life said anything which he

had not heard from his teachers.’ Their teaching was a chain of references, endless citations and quotations, secondhand theology bereft of original thought – a complex labyrinth, petty, legalistic, boring and weightless. Then came Jesus. Clear. Convicting. Filled with the Holy Spirit. And they were struck with amazement by the authority and weight of his words. The type of preaching that could cause a town to want to throw him off a cliff; or a town to fall down on their knees in repentance and faith – so clear and painfully direct in its application and with the tangible weight of God’s own authority lying behind every word.¹

Last week we saw Jesus defeat Satan in the wilderness through God’s word. Satan

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 153–58.

wielded lies, Jesus wielded truth. Three times Satan tried to tempt Jesus, and three times Jesus used Scripture to defeat him. Jesus staked everything on the authority of the written word of God. And something similar happens again today. Jesus' teaching is interrupted by one of Satan's lesser minions who had entered into the person of one of the synagogue attendees. Verse 33,

33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 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!'

No doubt people surrounding the man stood aghast and moved back several metres making him centre stage, perhaps seeing him for the first time, revulsion on their faces at his words, his shrieking tone of voice, his contorted face and his dishevelled clothing, the unclean spirit that his body hosted likely affecting both his body and mind.

Milton's Satan said, 'Evil be thou my good.' And as such, in contrast to the delighting crowds, the evil Spirit cannot bear the presence of Jesus, it writhes in the presence of Jesus' holiness. As foul things scurry from the light, evils spirits, lovers of darkness, recoil from the light of Christ. James says that demons believe and shudder, and that is what unfolds in the synagogue in Capernaum. Only for the one who preaches with

such authority to say with an authority that extends into the spiritual realm, verse 35,²

‘Be quiet!’ ‘Come out of him!’ Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

Think

And the captive goes free. The outcast is welcomed back amongst family and friends; sane, cleansed and whole again. Because this is why Jesus came. Jesus came to free those enslaved to Satan, sin and death. By the power of his word. Which means that in light of our passage today there is hope for the worst of us.

² Ibid.

Spend some time today thinking through the people that God has placed in your life. Those you believe are least likely to respond to Jesus. The ones who wouldn't be caught dead in the church, who are firmly entrenched in the pursuits of our world. Those with the hardest hearts, those who are most proud of themselves and their achievements, most self-reliant, most sure. Jesus' words have the power to free this person from the invisible chains that Satan, our fallen world and their sinful flesh have bound them in. Those chains can fall away as though dust at a word from Jesus, just like he did for this poor man in the synagogue in Capernaum.

You might also like to meditate over this morning over the way evil gravitates to successful ministry like moths to a flame.

Whether it is attracted to it or simply exposed by it, when the Gospel is preached faithfully and believers are encouraged and built up Satan's schemes invariably try and frustrate God's work. How many churches start so strongly and end up divided, torn apart by seemingly petty things or ruined by moral failure? But in the end, the solution is the same, and lies in the power and authority of God's word. God's word faithfully taught and preached and lived through the power of the Holy Spirit and a people regularly praying to their Father in heaven for his blessing on their church is the surest way to be delivered from Satan's schemes.

Pray

And so on this note please spend some

time praying today. Thank God for the authority of Scripture, the power in Jesus' words to set captives free and call outcasts home into the family of God. Pray that he would do so for those people the Holy Spirit called to your mind earlier. And pray especially today for your local church. Pray against division and moral failure and arguments over the small and inconsequential. Instead pray that lives would be powerfully and eternally changed by God's word and that your church would be built up as one into him who is our head, Jesus Christ.