

With Authority and Power He Commands

Luke 4:31-41, 5:12-16

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Read Luke 4:31-41, 5:12-16

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16)

Introduction

When I was at Baylor University, my freshman year the basketball team was not very good, but my sophomore year they had a new coach who had brought in a bunch of great players. So I heard that the team was going to be really good. I was hopeful and excited. When I went to some of the games my sophomore and junior year, I was even more impressed by how much better we were. But then some friends and I went to play basketball in one of the gyms on campus during the offseason, and who was there? Three of the starters on the team - Willie Sublett, Nelson Haggerty and Andre Branch. It's one thing to hear about a player's skill level or even watch it from the sidelines, it's another thing to try to compete against them. My amazement and awe went way up when I tried to dribble down the court, only to have one of them swipe the ball away and take it for a fast break dunk on the other end before I even knew the ball was taken from me. And trying to guard one of them, forget it, they would fly right by me. Seeing these guys' skill up close made me appreciate their play even more than seeing them play from the stands.

We all know how much experiencing things in person can amaze and astonish us more than just hearing about things. You can see pictures and video of the Grand Canyon, but until you're there and experience it in person, you don't really know how amazing it is. In the chapters of Luke that we've arrived at, the people of Israel are buzzing with reports about this miracle-worker and prophet who is going around the countryside healing, casting out demons, and teaching the people God's ways. But it's one thing to hear a rumor and second or third-hand stories. It's another thing to see these things with your own eyes, to experience Jesus for yourself. And so we will see that the people are "astonished" at His teaching in verse 32 and then "amazed" at His ability to command the unclean spirits in verse 36. These words mean something much deeper than what I was talking about with being impressed by seeing athletic skill up close. The Greek word for astonished is *ekplesso*, which can mean "overwhelmed" or "struck with panic, shock, or amazement." Cue the AC/DC music, because it means "thunderstruck."¹ That's the impression Jesus made on people. But His authority and power did not just amaze and astound the crowds, it also drove out demons and healed the bodies of those afflicted with every kind of disease and illness. And as we see Christ's work in their lives, we get a picture of God's work in our own lives.

The first of the three stories we'll look at is in verses 31-37,

I. An Exercise in Exorcism (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*

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know The Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 154.

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.

Craig and Maria Garriott started a PCA church in inner-city Baltimore in the 1980s. Maria wrote about their experiences in her book *A Thousand Resurrections*. In one of the chapters that talked about their church after it was up and running, she wrote, "our church services were not immune from drama... Once, a man walked in off the street, marched up to Bill Bolling at the podium and told him to take up a collection. 'I need \$136 for rent,' he said. Another time, a burly, deranged attendee took a swing at one of our elders, sending him crashing into a pew. Another woman, whose childhood had been particularly traumatic, sometimes erupted during services, screaming, weeping, and threatening suicide."²

We haven't had those kinds of disruptions at CenterPoint, thankfully, but I suppose every church should be ready for something like that to happen. Anyone could walk in off the streets, and furthermore, when the gospel is proclaimed and strongholds are being challenged, spiritual warfare may break out. Evil spirits react to the presence of good and of God. They don't like being challenged. R.C. Sproul said that there are very few references to demonic activity in the OT and very few references in later church history. "However, while Jesus was on the earth, it is safe to say, 'all hell broke loose.'"³ Satan ramped up his attacks when Jesus came in the flesh. When Jesus brought the kingdom of God with Him, Satan wasn't going to roll over and admit defeat. [*I talked about the reality of Satan a couple sermons ago, and I'd say the same thing to people who want to dismiss the demons in the NT as split personalities or insanity or some medical diagnosis – the Bible presents this as historical fact, so we will treat it like that. We trust Dr. Luke to know the difference.*]

We tend to think that the places you'd encounter a demon are in dark alleys, crack houses, nightclubs, rock concerts, casinos, etc - places where bad things are happening. But here there was a demon sitting in church! The demon sounds like he was equal parts defiant and scared, asking Jesus what He wanted. Had He come to destroy them? But this wasn't a conversation or a negotiation. "Shut up and get out!" Jesus spoke with authority. The demon had no choice but to obey and flee. Without actually saying it, Jesus was making the strongest claim of being God by His actions here. Who has authority over the spirit realm? Only someone who is stronger than them spiritually. You do not want to try to cast out demons without being really sure you have the spiritual authority to do it – just ask the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19 who tried to cast out demons and were assaulted and beaten by the demons they were attempting to exorcise. But Jesus can free anyone from any bondage, because He has complete authority over every spiritual being.

This Sabbath Day continued with more miraculous acts,

II. Saturday Night Fever (4:38-41)

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ And demons also came out of many, crying, "You

² Maria Garriott, *A Thousand Resurrections*. (Washington DC: City Songs, 2006), p. 85.

³ R.C. Sproul, *Mark* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2011), p. 26.

are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

This is interesting, because Jesus has not called His disciples yet in this Gospel, and we haven't really been introduced to Simon Peter yet. That comes next week. But, how many of you thought the disciples were a bunch of single guys following Jesus around? You didn't realize that Simon Peter had a wife. She's not mentioned, but if you have a mother-in-law, you have a wife. You can just imagine Peter talking to his wife: "Ok, honey I'll tell Jesus about your mom being sick; maybe He can do something about it. Yeah, I know He just cast a demon out of a guy in the synagogue, but I don't know if He'll definitely heal her." And his wife glaring at him, "Can you just ask? It's my mom and her fever is dangerously high!" But then Jesus came over for lunch after church and as soon as He heard about her sickness, He rebuked the fever and healed her. Interestingly, the same word is used for rebuking the fever as for rebuking the demon. Not only did Jesus restore her to health, but she was well enough to immediately begin serving everyone!

Back when I was a youth and worship pastor, I felt that my Sundays were very long. I would arrive at church at 8:30 am to set up and rehearse the band, then teach Sunday School and lead music, then talk to people and break down the stage; then grab a quick lunch before turning around to set up and lead youth group most of the afternoon. It was a long day; even longer and more taxing if I was preaching, which was not very often back then. But it was nothing like what Luke recorded for Jesus' day. Everything we've read so far happened on one sabbath day (remember that Saturday was the sabbath). Preaching wipes some guys out, they go home and take a nap. Which is great, because the Sabbath is a day of rest. Throw in an exorcism and a healing; that would probably have wiped most of us out. Did Jesus get to rest? No - after that, it says that the rest of the town came to the door! Sounds like Jesus spent all night healing and casting out demons, bringing unbelievable deliverance to Capernaum.

Again, the demons knew exactly who Jesus was - verse 41 says as they were coming out of the people they cried out, "*You are the Son of God!*" Jesus did not allow them to spread the word about Him. But it's just so fascinating that the people were still trying to figure out who He was, there's all this gossip about Him, but the demons knew exactly who He was.

Let's skip over to the middle of chapter 5 for a similar incident,

III. The Leper Who Ignored Social Distancing (5:12-16)

¹² While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ¹³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴ And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." ¹⁵ But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

How would you feel if you were around someone who has tested positive for COVID? Most of us are fleeing from those who test positive, expecting them to quarantine. Now imagine you are the one who is positive, I know that some of you have been, and everyone is looking at you in fear of being infected. Now imagine that you're not going to get over it in 2 weeks. And imagine there's no cure, not even a vaccine. And the effects of the disease are going to take more than your sense of smell and taste, it will attack your nervous system, spreading through your body, you'll start losing limbs and your organs will stop working. Now one wants to be around you for fear of contracting this

disease, so now you need to quarantine for the rest of your life. You'll never get to hug your loved ones again. This was the life of a leper. Dr. Paul Brand called leprosy a "painless hell" because the disease destroys the body's ability to feel pain even as it breaks down.⁴

So a leper came to Jesus; he broke the law by coming close and kneeling in front of Him. He was so desperate to be healed that he begged Jesus. [So Jesus kicked him and said, "Get away from me, I don't want to be made unclean by you." Oh, sorry, just checking to see if you were paying attention.] No, He touched the man. He could have just spoken the man's healing, but He touched Him. Mark's Gospel says that it was because Jesus was "moved with pity." How like our compassionate Lord to reach out and touch this man, who probably hasn't felt a human touch in many years.

And what is supposed to happen when someone clean touches someone who is unclean? The clean person becomes diseased and unclean. Everyone who was watching this must have winced and grimaced: "Oh no, now Jesus is unclean and He's going to become a leper." But with Jesus, the natural flow of things is reversed, the man is made clean. And so, after showing himself to a priest and going through the steps that the law demanded, this man could go find his family and hug them, and go out into the community and be among people again. That man's life was totally changed.

Conclusion

Even before the leper was healed, though, he understood something about Jesus. Something that is foundational to the nature of God: He will act if He chooses to act, if He wills it. Remember the leper's request: "*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.*" That's a great summary and understanding of God's Sovereignty: anything God wills to do, He can do. If God willed it, He could stop all human sin and suffering tomorrow. He could send every demon and evil power back to hell at any moment He chose.

Psalm 135:6 – "*Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.*"

Psalm 115:3 – "*Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*"

If we truly believe that God is omnipotent – all powerful – then the question is never "Can God do something?" but "Will God do something?". God could bring revival to any nation on earth that He chooses. God could bring destruction to any nation on earth that He chooses. He could end COVID, He could end abortion, He could end racism, He could end human trafficking and exploitation at any moment and in any way that He chose. Just like Thanos snapped his fingers and wiped out half the population of the universe in the Avengers movie, God could snap His fingers and achieve anything that He wanted to. He doesn't even need any Infinity Stones to do it.

So the question is: Why doesn't He do those things? They would bring Him so much glory and it would make the world so much better. And I have no answer for you, except to say that in His sovereign will and wisdom, God has decided not to. In His patience, He allows our sin and rebellion to continue, for some evil to go unpunished for a time, for the creation to continue to groan waiting for redemption, as Romans 8 says. But don't think for a second that God is not acting; His hand of providence is working things out constantly. But a lot of what He accomplishes is through the agents of reconciliation that He has tasked with accomplishing all of those things. You mean angels? Well, yes. But 2 Corinthians 5 calls us "agents of reconciliation" and "ambassadors for Christ." The body of Christ, the church are His hands and feet to bring godly change to the world. His will is for us to believe and obey.

⁴ Hughes, p. 172-3.

The leper's words teach us how to pray: if it's your will, Lord, this is what I want. If it's your will to give me this new job, please help me make it happen. If it's your will to heal my dad's cancer or my friends' auto-immune disease or my child's life-threatening injuries, please heal them. Jesus didn't have to heal the leper or Peter's mother-in-law, but He chose to. God wants us to ask for things in prayer – in fact James 4:2 says that *“you do not have because you do not ask.”* But He wants us to ask in faith, acknowledging His sovereignty, knowing that the answer might be “no” or “not right now” and that there will be lessons to learn in walking that path. But if God wills something, He can do it, so keep petitioning Him in prayer.

It's Valentine's Day, and I've already given my wife flowers, a card, and chocolate because I love her deeply. As I talked about in my Pastor's Thought, there are different kinds of love, and I just want to say that I love my brothers and sisters in Christ here at CenterPoint with a *phileo*, brotherly love. But my love is very conditional, as all of our loves are conditional for each other. God loves you with an everlasting love, *agape*, a covenant love, that He willed to put on your account. Let's put these two ideas together: God's love and God's will. Because they come together on the cross of Christ: John 15:13 – *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”* John 6:40a – *“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.”*

Jesus loved us so much that He gave up His life on the cross to pay for our sin. He did it because God willed it. *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”* And then God wills to bring us to faith in Christ, and promises that when we believe in Jesus that all of our sins are forgiven and we are granted eternal life.

Jesus showed the heart of God in His ministry on earth. As we talked about last week, He balanced healing and helping people's physical needs with giving them the spiritual knowledge they needed to understand God's ways. And ultimately, He revealed God's heart by healing us completely on the cross – 1 Peter 2:24 – *“He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”*

The way we receive Jesus is the way the leper modelled for us: falling on our face in full humility and helplessness and asking that He find in His will to give us grace and healing. And God promises that He will answer that prayer, spoken in faith. Amen.

Benediction

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.”*