

What Words These Are!

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[0 : 00] I'll start with a picture as we begin. It's the first slide there. That's Elon Musk. I think lots of you might know his face. He is an engineer and he's an inventor, a businessman.

He's from South Africa. He invented the Tesla car, and I think there he is launching a new space, the SpaceX project, which apparently is going to get us into outer space. At the moment, he is the richest man in the world, and he's so brilliant and clever and innovative, such a tech genius that people hang on his every word.

This was demonstrated last week when he started to post his share market tips on the internet. On the 27th of January, he posted the name of a company, just one word, the name of a company on the internet, and in a day, that company's share price went up 800%.

He did it again the next day with another company, and the next day, and the next day, until on, I think, Friday, a week and a half ago, he posted the name of a company so bad, it has no assets of any kind, yet still the company's stock went up eight, nine times in a single day.

Elon Musk had to come off the internet, stop posting his tips, because he realised how influential and powerful his words were. And so our subject today is powerful words.

[1 : 29] You see, CEOs and presidents and businessmen, royalty teachers, prime minister, even parents, how many do you know can speak and have the effect that old Elon did?

And with all that being said, of course, our author, he wants us to consider Jesus in a league of his own. In our story, Jesus is teaching and casting out demons, he's healing people of diseases.

It's very Jesus-y type stuff. It's all just a regular day in the life of the special one. But Luke wants us to understand this story through the lens of powerful words.

And so if you've got this insert in your little packs today, that's going to help you. We're at point number one. Verse 31. Then Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath, he taught the people.

Obviously, we weren't there in Capernaum that day. None of you are that old. But it's safe to assume that his sermon was the same one he gave in Nazareth, his hometown, a couple of weeks earlier.

[2 : 44] It's on the top of the handouts, and it should be on the slide now, please, Tim. There it is. This is the sermon. The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's jubilee, the Lord's favor. It's a 51-word sermon, but in verse 32, they were amazed at his teaching because his words have the authority.

And you can tell that they have authority because of what comes next. Look at verse 33. In the synagogue, there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit.

He cried out at the top of his voice, 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. And in the West, we might dismiss this man as having some sort of mental condition or epilepsy or something like that.

We're not used to this sort of demonic activity. Unless, of course, you did what I did when I was 13. So when I was 13, I stayed at my mate's house and we managed to get our hands on a VHS copy of The Exorcist.

[4 : 01] I've done dumb things in my life, obviously, but this is right up there with one of the dumbest things I've ever done. Don't watch that movie. Just don't watch that movie. It's the scariest thing you'll ever see.

And not because of the dark theological themes. You just won't sleep for a month if you watch it. So please stay away. But if you go to parts of Africa or Asia, things in that movie are much more commonplace.

There's no mistaking what is happening to this man. He's seized by evil. And so you know what you need to do. You need to find the local witch doctor, find the local shaman, find the local Irish priest.

And hopefully with the right ceremonies, the right spells and incantations, enough holy water and the right amount of cash. Hopefully, fingers crossed, they can exercise the demon.

But with Jesus, it's six simple words. Verse 35. Be quiet. Come out of him. Evil is real and active in the world.

[5 : 11] Satan opposes all of God's good plans. Evil enslaves us, holds us captive. But remember Jesus' sermon? I think they're still on the screen.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. His words, they're plain and ordinary. That sermon seems very plain to us. But remember, in Exodus, his words shook the mountains.

They made the people tremble, just as they trembled the demons that day. Verse 35. Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out.

Notice this man. He was freed to safety. It says, without the demon injuring him. I think that's a lovely personal touch on the end there.

But the thing is, it's Jesus' words that are the amazing things. Verse 36. All the people were amazed and said to each other, what words these are.

[6 : 13] With authority and power, he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out. You see, it's the same amazed reaction that people had when he started preaching in verse 32.

Our author is linking exorcism and teaching together. The exorcism authenticates the words. Words which have God's authority. Jesus is providing a glimpse of the kingdom.

A place where people are freed to safety from the grip of evil. It's a little glimpse of the kingdom. I wonder how you rate human efforts to get rid of evil.

Think of Elon Musk there. All his money. All his philanthropy. Politicians, laws. People of influence. How would you rate all of human efforts to get rid of evil?

To end racism. And violence. And corruption. Jesus. Six simple words. Be silent.

[7 : 19] Come out of him. And that is basically what he does in the next incident as well. It's a story about Simon's mother-in-law.

Verse 38 says that she was suffering a high fever. Now we shouldn't confuse this with a bout of man flu or the coronavirus.

High fever here, it kills people. And so now Jesus is dealing with death. Verse 38 says that the woman is suffering from a high fever.

But the correct translation is that she is seized or held captive by the fever. It's the same prison that the man who had the demon was held in.

But again, with just a word. Verse 39. So Jesus bent over her and rebuked the fever. And it left her. It's very strange, isn't it?

[8 : 18] To rebuke a fever. To speak to an illness as though it was a living creature. But Jesus deals with death the same way he deals with evil in the man before.

You see, death and evil, they're two, I would say, amongst the two biggest problems in our world. They're imitators in God's kingdom. And so Jesus rebukes them both with a word and sends them packing.

And again, I love the personal touch here with Simon's mother-in-law. It says, she got up at once and began to wait on them. You see, she's free to serve like the man was freed to safety.

And I think that's a good way to describe life in God's kingdom. We're freed for safety. Free to serve the king.

He says, the spirit of the Lord is on me. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. To set the oppressed free. You see, there are lots of people who have powerful words.

[9 : 30] But there's only one Jesus. Line up all the powerful people in the world. Line up all the religion. Line up all the religious figures. Let them all have a go at death and evil.

There's only one Jesus. Six simple words. And he sends them packing. And by this stage of the story, news about the special one had spread.

Verse 40. At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness. Notice a lovely personal touch again. And laying hands on each one, he healed them.

See, Jesus always has time. Always has a lovely personal touch. Verse 41. 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 Messiah. You see, 2,000 years ago, in Palestine, if you wandered around, you could literally see God's kingdom manifest.

[10 : 32] Everywhere Jesus was physically walking around. It was a taste of the kingdom. Today, Jesus is physically in heaven. So I don't think we should expect miracles to the same concentration that we see in the Gospels.

I'm not saying miracles don't happen today. But back then, the point of the miracle seems to be to authenticate the word. To validate Jesus' authority when he speaks.

And actually, if you follow Jesus around for the rest of Luke's Gospel, it's more words than miracles, in fact. And so before Luke goes any further, before Jesus says things about sins forgiven and eternal life in heaven, we need to learn that when he speaks, his words have all of God's authority.

And I think that's the purpose of this story today. We need to learn that when Jesus speaks, his words have God's authority. That way, when he speaks about the really big things, we can trust that what he says is true.

See, that's the whole point of the miracles, the exciting stuff. They just validate his words. And I think that summarizes Jesus' priorities quite nicely.

[11 : 50] And this is our second point. Verse 42. The people were looking for him. And when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.

You can't blame them, can you? But he said, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns, because that is why I was sent. And I reckon if you can do exciting, you know, exorcisms and healings to not do that in favor of boring old preaching, I think that's quite surprising from Jesus.

But if his words have God's authority, then it's right, isn't it, that he prioritize speaking. And actually, that's his agenda for us too, for his disciples as well.

Tim, can I have a slide, please? This is right at the end of Luke's gospel. This is what Jesus says. This is what is written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached by us in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. Thank you. It must have been hard for Jesus to prioritize teaching, to move on from town to town, especially when there were so many physical needs in his face.

[13:11] But actually, it's because he's so loving that he kept moving from place to place. You see, God's kingdom, it can't be limited to one town in Capernaum or to one place.

It's time for the kingdom to be proclaimed everywhere. I wonder where you were when you first heard the good news of Jesus. Was anyone here in Capernaum?

Were you in Judea? Or were you in Melbourne? Or Sydney? Or Brisbane? Or Adelaide? Or Tasmania? Were you in China? Or India?

Or America? Or Canada? Or South Africa? Or Israel? When the good news was told to you. Aren't we grateful that disciples didn't stay in Capernaum?

That they moved on, that Jesus moved on from town to town to proclaim to the world the words of authority, the good news of Jesus. Forgiveness of sins, eternal life.

[14:11] It's because obedient disciples down through the ages prioritized the preaching, the proclamation, the speaking of the word. And this, therefore, is a really important passage for us as we begin a new year.

There's so much ministry to do here in Manningham, so many physical needs in Melbourne. How will we prioritize what we should focus on? I think Jesus helps clarify what is important.

We won't all be preachers standing in pulpits on a Sunday, but will we all prioritize works, the end goal of which is someone proclaiming the good news of Jesus?

I think it makes sense of why we're so passionate here about Bible groups, why we have ministry trainees, summer Bible studies with Peter Adam.

It makes sense why we spend a moment just to pray for AFES workers on the local university campus, or CMS missionaries in the far reaches of the world, or Bush Church Aid going the distance in Australia.

[15:24] All of these ministries, the end goal of which is someone proclaiming the good news of Jesus, our freedom from death, our freedom from evil.

For Andrew and myself, basically all of Thursday, Friday, Saturday, you'll find us hiding somewhere, working on sermons. And that's about 50% of our week, three days, and that therefore is 50% of our salary in this church is devoted to us getting preaching right, faithfully, clearly engaging, teaching you the word, not because this church loves head knowledge as such, but because we're clear that Jesus' words have God's authority.

His words have the good stuff. And that is, this is the important bit for everyone. Not all preaching happens on Sunday. In fact, I hope you're doing lots of preaching or proclamation or speaking with your loved ones.

It doesn't mean you get a, you know, raised soapbox like this and stand up and start shouting at people, but I think it just means telling them what Jesus means to you, what he has done in your life.

Why not tell people how knowing Jesus has helped you this past year with the coronavirus, or perhaps how knowing Jesus has made a difference when you had tragedy and trauma in your life.

[16:59] Speaking Jesus' words, it comes under attack. I think certainly this past week in Victoria, people are very sensitive about Jesus' words and sexual issues and gender issues.

Most people want Christians to be seen and not heard. But if we don't speak up, however awkward or unsafe or even illegal, how will your loved ones hear the precious words?

Words are the only way they'll get to know Jesus properly. It's how we got to know him ourselves. It's worth the risk, isn't it, to be bold and speak.

If you can't speak to others because of your health or perhaps your living situation, why not pray that God would put other Christians, other disciples along the path of your loved ones, that they would be bold and speak up.

Pray that other disciples would lead your loved ones to the Lord. It's okay if we can't speak because of certain circumstances. I'm not sure it's okay if we won't speak.

[18:11] Just as Jesus kept moving to preach from town to town, because that was the most loving thing to do, speaking to our loved ones is the most loving thing we can do for them.

Here's some homework for your car journey on the way home. I printed it as two questions on the bottom of your handout. What do verse 42 and 43 tell us is the most pressing priority on earth?

Second question, what ministry will you involve yourself in this year, the end goal of which is someone speaking the good news of Jesus?

Here's some suggestions. Are you going to pray for loved ones to be saved? Are you going to give financially to support AFBS workers or Bush Church aid? Are you going to give financially to CMS missionaries?

Are you going to do practical work around the church that frees Andrew and myself up to focus on getting Jesus' words right? Are you going to serve on Sundays? Are you going to establish or reestablish contact with a loved one so that in a few months' time, they'll trust you enough when you speak about spiritual issues?

[19:25] All of these things, however practical, have an end goal of supporting the proclamation of Jesus. I just want to finish with a couple of quick anecdotes.

In this church, we do lots of funerals. I'm sure 2021 will be no different. And lots of the funerals that come to us are from people outside of our church.

And probably we wouldn't even say that they would be Christians. But Andrew's happy to do them, happy for Mark and I to do them as well, because regardless of the person in the coffin, we get to stand up and tell the good news of Jesus to a whole room of people who by rights probably would never get to hear the gospel.

And we don't know what effect that has. We don't know what effect that will have on them. But Andrew's just playing his part as an obedient disciple, proclaiming, you know, as Luke 24 said, forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

Another ministry we have here, just to finish, is called Mops, M-O-P-S, Mops. It's for mothers of preschoolers. The idea is every second Wednesday, mothers from outside the church, they come in here and they, you know, it's kind of a support group.

[20 : 42] They do craft and they, there's a little bit of a speaker. It's not overtly Christian, but it's just a way, a sort of introduction. But if you talk to Margaret Chesson, who runs Mops, and the other ladies who look after the children in the sports hall while the other mums are having the group, they will tell you that the reason they do this work is so one day some of these non-Christian mums will eventually, you know, be brave enough to come in to sit in church where they'll hear the preaching of Jesus.

Even the most practical work, such as looking after children in a sports hall, plays a part in prioritizing the preaching of the words.

So let me pray that we'd all play our part as well.