

What Words These Are!

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 0 0] There's Elon Musk there on the screen. I'm not sure if you know him, but Elon Musk is an engineer and a businessman. He's an innovator. He's from South Africa. He invented the Tesla electric car and I think he's standing in front of the SpaceX project. You can sort of see that in the background, which he's running as well. He is the richest man in the world as of a couple of months ago. He's so brilliant and innovative and all these sorts of things that people hang off his every word. This was proven last week when he started posting his stock market tips on the internet, so on Twitter. What he would do was tweet one word, the name of a company, and in a day, these companies went up 800% in their value.

He did it on the 27th of January. 28th, he did it again. He posted the name of a company and it went up. It blew up, as I say, 800%, 900%. It happened again on Friday. He tweeted the name of a company that was so bad, the company had no assets of any kind, yet still, because he tweeted it, the company went to nearly 1,000% in a single day. A couple of days ago, Elon Musk, he came off Twitter, off the internet, because of all the hysteria and influence that he was creating. And so our subject today is powerful words. CEOs, presidents, politicians, businessmen, kings, queens, teachers, and parents, who do you know that can just, with a word, make things happen, like Elon. With all that being said, of course, our author, Luke, he wants us to consider Jesus in a league of his own. In our story, Jesus is teaching, he's driving out demons, he's healing people of disease. It's all very, you know,

Jesus-y type stuff. It's just an ordinary day in the life of the special one. But Luke wants us to understand it through the lens of powerful words. And so we're at point one.

If you've got the back there, it says where we're going today. Verse 31. Then Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath, he taught the people.

Now, obviously, none of us are old enough to be in Capernaum that day. We weren't listening to that sermon, but it's safe to assume it was the same sermon he gave two weeks earlier when he was in his home synagogue of Nazareth. The sermon is on the screen now. It's from chapter 4, verse 18.

[2 : 4 7] The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he's anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's jubilee, the Lord's favour.

It's a 51-word sermon, much, much fewer words than I'm going to say today. Yet verse 32, they were amazed at his teaching because his words had authority.

And you can tell his words have authority because of what happens next. 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 epileptic fit or some sort of mental health condition. We're not used to this sort of demonic activity. Unless, of course, you did what I did when I was 13. When I was 13, I stayed at a mate's house and we got ourselves, got our hands on a VHS copy of a movie called The Exorcist. Can I just say, I've done some dumb things in my life, but watching The Exorcist when you're with another 13-year-old bloke is about the stupidest thing I've done. It's the scariest thing that's ever been. Please don't watch this movie, not because of the dark theological themes, but because you won't sleep for a month.

It's just, it's a horrible movie. But if you go to parts of Africa or parts of Asia, what happens in the movie is much more commonplace for them? There's no mistaking what happened to this man.

[4 : 43] He was seized or in the grip of evil. And so what you need to do is call the local witch doctor, the local shaman, the local Irish priest, and hopefully with the right amount of ceremonies, the right spells, the right incantations, the right holy water, and the right amount of cash, with fingers crossed, maybe, maybe they might be able to exorcise the demon. But with Jesus, six simple words. Verse 35, be quiet, come out of him. You see, evil is real and active in the world.

The power of Satan opposes all of God's good designs. Evil enslaves people. It holds us all captive. But remember Jesus' sermon, what he has come to do? He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to set the oppressed free. His words, they sound plain and ordinary. That sermon looks plain and ordinary. But back in Exodus, which Teresa read, when Jesus speaks, mountains tremble.

People are terrified, just as the demons were terrified. Verse 35, then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out. And notice this man, he was freed to safety, it says, without the demon injuring him. I think that's a lovely personal touch at the end. But the thing is, it is Jesus' words which are astonishing. Verse 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 came out. You see, it's the same amazed reaction they had when Jesus started preaching in verse 32. Our author is deliberately linking exorcisms and teaching together. The exorcism authenticates Jesus' words. It shows that when he speaks, he has all of God's authority in his words. In fact, the exorcisms really authenticate what he's saying. And actually, they provide a little glimpse, a glimpse of the kingdom of God, a place where evil is sent packing, where people are safe and set free. I wonder how, you rate human attempts to get rid of evil. Think of Elon Musk, other rich and powerful people, presidents, governments, laws, influences. How do you rate their efforts to get rid of racism, violence, violence against women, corruption? With Jesus, six simple words, be quiet, come out of him. And that is basically what he does in the next episode with Simon's mother-in-law. Look at verse 38. Verse 38 says that she was suffering from a high fever. We shouldn't confuse this with a bout of man flu, whatever man flu is, or the coronavirus. A high fever back then kills people. And so here Jesus is now dealing with death. Verse 38 says that the woman is suffering a high fever. But the correct translation is that actually she was seized or held captive by the fever, just like the man was held captive by the demon. But again, with just a word, verse 39,

Jesus bent over her and rebuked the fever and it left her. It's quite a strange thing, isn't it? To rebuke a fever, to speak to a sickness and disease like it's some sort of living creature. But Jesus deals with death the same way he deals with evil in the man before. See, I think death and evil, I think they're the two big problems in our world. They're imposters in God's kingdom. And so Jesus rebukes them both, sends them packing. Again, I love the personal touch with Simon's mother-in-law. It says, she got up at once and began to wait on them. See, she's now freed to serve, just like the man was freed to safety. And that is a good way to describe what life in God's kingdom is like. Freed to safety, freed 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 proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Elon Musk, all these guys, their attempts to get rid of death and evil. But there's only one Jesus, isn't there? Let's not confuse him with other religions, other religious leaders. Let them have a go at death and evil. How do you think they'll fare? Six short words, and he sends them both packing. It is amazing to know Jesus.

And by this stage, news of what he's done has spread throughout the region. So verse 40, at sunset, the people brought to Jesus, all had various kinds of sicknesses. Notice again, the lovely touch. He laid hands on each one of them and healed them. He always has time to look after people. Verse 41, moreover, demons came out of many people shouting, you are the son of God.

[10 : 39] But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they knew he was the Messiah. You see, 2000 years ago in Palestine, there was a brief glimpse of God's kingdom. It broke through and manifested itself everywhere. Jesus physically walked around death and evil sent packing. Today, Jesus is physically in heaven. And so I don't think we should expect miracles to the same concentration. I'm not saying that miracles don't happen today, but I don't think we should expect them the same way. Back then, they were only there to draw attention to Jesus' words, to give a short glimpse of the kingdom wherever he was walking. And actually, if you follow Jesus walking around the rest of the gospel, he does more speaking than miracles. And so before Luke's gospel goes any further, we need to learn the lesson that when Jesus speaks, his words have God's authority. Because soon he's going to tell us about sins forgiven and eternal life, about God's judgment, about who's in and out of the kingdom. We'll need to know that when he speaks, he has the authority of God and God's word.

I think that's why this episode is here. And I think that nicely summarizes Jesus' priority for us. that his priority is the word. Verse 42. This is our second point.

The people were looking for him, and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. I think that's understandable, given all the healing he's doing. But he said, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. And I reckon if you're able to do miracles such as healing and casting out demons, it seems strange, doesn't it, to prioritize boring old preaching. But if his words have God's authority, then actually speaking, preaching is exactly what he should be doing. And actually, this is Jesus' agenda for all his disciples. Can I have the next? This is at the end of Luke's gospel. Jesus says this.

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 in his name to all nations.

Beginning at Jerusalem, you, we, are witnesses of these things. It must have been hard to prioritize preaching, especially because there were so many obvious physical needs right in front of him.

[13 : 21] Jesus has all the love of God. But actually, it's because he's so loving that he moved from town to town. God's kingdom can't be limited to one town in Capernaum. It must be proclaimed to all the nations. I wonder where you were when you first heard the good news of Jesus. Was it in Capernaum? Is anyone that old? Or were you in Melbourne? Were you in Sydney? Were you in Adelaide or Brisbane or Tasmania? Were you in China? Were you in India, America, Canada, or even South Africa? Aren't we grateful that disciples didn't stay in Capernaum, that Jesus didn't stay there? He kept moving on.

How is it that you know and love Jesus, that you have certainty about sins forgiven? It's because obedient disciples down through the ages kept preaching and proclaiming and speaking the words of freedom, the words of eternal life. And therefore, this 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 obvious physical needs in Melbourne. How will we prioritize what is important? I think Jesus helps clarify it, doesn't he?

I see, we won't be preachers on Sunday. Not everyone does this job, but will we prioritize works whose end goal? It's someone speaking to someone else the good news of Jesus. I think that makes sense of why we're so passionate about putting everyone in a Bible study group, while we have ministry trainees and summer Bible studies. It makes sense why we talk about AFES and CMS missionaries.

Didn't Helen say that that's how she became saved when Claire Livingston opened her mouth and spoke? It makes sense why we're passionate about Bush Church Aid, who spread the gospel in the far reaches of the outback. All of these ministries have the end goal of someone speaking to someone else the good news of Jesus. For Andrew Price and myself, basically, if you try and find us on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, we'll be hiding somewhere, writing sermons, preparing our preaching. And that is pretty much 50% of our week. And that means 50% of our salary that this church provides is set aside so that we can focus on preaching the gospel faithfully and clearly and well. Not because we love sort of head knowledge in this church, but because we're clear of where the good stuff is. Jesus' words have life, freedom from death and evil. They have all of God's authority. And this is really important for you.

Not all preaching happens on Sunday. In fact, I hope you're doing most of your preaching or speaking with your family and friends. That doesn't mean, you know, you get a raised platform and start shouting at them. It means, though, why not just tell people what Jesus means to you? Why not tell them what, knowing Jesus, what he means to you in your life, what he has done for you? Why not tell them how being a Christian has helped you deal with, you know, this past year or perhaps another tragedy in your life? That is preaching. That is proclamation. It's also just ordinary conversation for obedient disciples. Speaking Jesus' words, it has certainly come under fire these days, certainly in this last week in Victoria. When it comes to sensitive issues about sexuality and gender, most people want Christians to be seen and not heard. But if we don't speak up, if we're not willing to have the awkward conversations with your loved ones, how will they get the precious words? Words are the way people know about Jesus. It's how you got to know about him yourself. And so it's worth taking the risk to speak and proclaim. If you can't speak to others because perhaps of your health or your living situation, perhaps you can't speak to your family because of all the baggage that's between you, why not do this?

[18 : 06] Why not pray that God would put other disciples along the path of your loved ones and for them to open their mouths and share the words? Pray that other disciples would lead your loved ones to know the Lord the way you do. It's okay if we can't speak for various reasons. I don't think it's okay that we won't speak.

Because we're afraid. Just as Jesus kept moving from town to town to preach the good news, so too, it's the most loving thing you can do for anyone, especially your family and friends.

Just to be practical, here's some homework for the car journey home. I put it on the handout as a couple of questions. Here's two homework questions. What do verse 42 and 43 tell us is the most pressing priority on earth? That's a question for your handout. And a second question. What ministry are you going to involve yourself in, in 2021, that will lead others to eventually hear the words of Jesus?

Here are some suggestions. Are you going to pray for people to be saved? Are you going to give financially to support an AFES worker or Bush Church aide? Are you going to give financially to support CMS missionaries?

A world that knows Jesus. That's their tagline. Are you going to do practical work around the church because it frees Andrew and I up to preach and teach the word? Are you going to serve on Sundays?

[19 : 42] Are you going to re-establish contacts with a loved one or a friend so that hopefully in a few months time, they'll trust you when you start talking to them about spiritual issues? See, all of this work has the end goal of someone speaking to someone else the good news of Jesus.

Let me just finish. I'll finish with two anecdotes and then I'm done. In this church, we do lots of funerals. I did one on Friday and I'm sure that 2021 will be no different. I think it's partly because some people really love the buildings and that sort of stuff.

Many funerals that contact us are from outside the church family and so we'd probably say that they weren't Christians. Andrew Price, he's happy to take those funerals and do them. He's happy for me to do them as well because regardless of the person in the coffin, it's an opportunity where we get to stand up here and speak the gospel to a room full of people who, all things being equal, would probably never get to hear the words of God, the words of Jesus. We don't know what effect it has over the years. We can't possibly know that for sure. But Andrew is just playing his part as an obedient disciple. He's just speaking when the opportunity arrives. The other anecdote I want to talk to you about is a ministry here called Mops. Mops, as lots of you know, it's mothers of preschoolers.

And the idea is mums from outside the church, they meet here fortnightly and they sit around a table, they do a craft or they listen to a talker. It's not overtly Christian. But Margaret Chessom, who's over there, Margaret will tell you the other mums who look after the kids in the sports hall for the other mums, they will tell you the reason they're doing it is so that eventually these mums from outside the church will trust them enough to accept an invitation to sit in the pews on Sunday where they'll get to hear the gospel. Even things as practical as looking after children in a sports hall plays a role in prioritizing the preaching of the word. So let me pray that we would play our part.

We praise you, Lord Jesus, that your words can set people free from death and evil. And long would your words be heard in this place.

[22 : 22] And we pray, Lord Jesus, for our loved ones who don't know you, please would we speak up? Please, if we can't speak up, would other people, other disciples be brought along their path so they can speak up?

And please, Lord Jesus, would we prioritize your words, not our words, in this place? Would everything that we do here revolve around somehow, somewhere, someone hearing the good news of Jesus?

We pray these things in your name. Amen.