

Luke 4:31-44

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

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... .. As we come to God's word together, let's pray. Father, we ask that you would help us this morning to not just gather information, about the Bible, or even just information about you, but as we come now before your word, we pray that we would come to know you truly and better. That your Holy Spirit would be poured out this morning so that we might see you in the face of Jesus Christ and that we might know how deep and how certain and how transformative is your love for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Luke chapter 4, verses 31 through 44. And he, that is Jesus, went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee.

And he was teaching them on the Sabbath and they were astonished at his teaching for his word possessed authority. And in the synagogue, there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon and he cried out with a loud voice, Ha!

[1 : 2 8] 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. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be silent and come out of him.

And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. 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. And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. 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. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever and it left her and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

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. And demons also came out of many crying, You are the Son of God.

[2 : 3 1] But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him and would have kept him from leaving them but he said to them, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well for I was sent for this purpose.

And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. So this winter and spring, we are studying the first part of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

And we're doing that because it's good, you know, in our life as a church to come back continually to the center of what it's all about. Because what Christianity is all about is not ultimately, what the church is all about is not ultimately a set of ideas or a code of ethics though it certainly implies those things.

Ultimately, Christianity is about a person. It's about the historical person of Jesus Christ. So if you're not a Christian, we hope this series in some ways gives you a front row seat to the main event.

Here we go. Here is what it's all about. What do you make of Jesus Christ? And if you're here and you are a Christian, honestly, we hope that this series sparks a season of renewal for you.

[3 : 5 9] Because you see, spiritually in the Christian life, spirituality in the Christian life really boils down to beholding Christ. To adoring him, to worshiping him, to having our hearts drawn to intimacy with him together.

And through that work of the Holy Spirit, we're changed more and more to be like him. So that's why we're in Luke in this season. And our text this morning we see right away is about Jesus' authority.

Verse 32, they were astonished at his teaching because his word possessed what? Authority. And then in verse 36, what is this word for with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out?

We see the same theme repeated when Luke repeats that word rebuke in this passage. Did you catch that? In verse 35, Jesus does what? He rebukes the unclean spirit. And then in verse 39, he rebukes the high fever of Simon's mother-in-law.

Then in verse 41, he rebukes even more oppressive evil forces. the rebuke here is Jesus' authoritative commanding word. So in our passage, Luke wants us to come face-to-face with Jesus' authority.

[5 : 19] Which maybe starts to challenge what we think we know about Jesus. And honestly, what we're comfortable with. I think most of us are probably comfortable with the idea of Jesus, the great moral example.

He lived a good life and so should you. Or we're comfortable with Jesus, the encourager, the motivator, the one who gets behind me and helps me along the way, whatever I happen to choose my life path to be.

Those ideas about Jesus, we're okay with them and there's some truth in each of them. But you know, according to the earliest witnesses to the life of Jesus that we have and the gospel of Luke is one of those, that's not primarily the picture that we get of Jesus.

It's not Jesus the moral example. It's not Jesus the great motivator. But Jesus, the utterly authoritative one. And I think we see at least three things about Jesus' authority in our text this morning that we're going to walk through.

The first thing is we see the threat of Jesus' authority. Jesus' authority threatens us. I think if we're honest, we don't really like the idea of authority.

[6 : 31] I've used the word authority about a hundred times already in this sermon and we're all sort of feeling a little uncomfortable, aren't we? Come on, we're all children of the enlightenment, children of the modern era, and for us, authority is nearly always viewed suspiciously.

And you know, perhaps there's some or maybe a lot of justification for that. When people in positions of power abuse their authority, it's only natural to start to think that authority is a bad thing or at least a dangerous thing, a thing that needs to be sort of carefully contained like a hazardous substance.

At best, we only want someone to have authority in our lives if we grant it to them and if it has very defined boundaries. I join a sports team or I join a theater group or I take a new job and I implicitly sort of grant that coach or that director or that boss some degree of authority in my life.

They get to call the plays, they get to make the artistic decisions, they get to lead the company, but it's all very defined, all very compartmentalized. At the end of the day, I still keep my autonomy and I still have authority over my life.

And so when Jesus arrives before us in this text as one with authority, with utter authority, with complete authority, such that what he says goes, I mean, come on, if we're honest, we don't really like it.

[7 : 59] Deep down, I think, we might even hate it. We can handle a moral example and we can handle a motivator, but not an authority.

Have you thought about why that is? Why is the prospect of Jesus' complete authority such a threat to us? Why does it repel us so often?

Well, deep down, I think it's because we think it will destroy us. What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us? How many of us, maybe not in the same language, have thought the same thing? If I were to let Jesus' authority shape my entire life, if I were to let him have complete sway over me, if I made him my Lord, then the only possible outcome that I can envision in that scenario is that it would destroy me.

My happiness, my joy, my freedom. And you know, this threat of his authority goes deeper than just having some new inconvenient things that I'd have to start doing or some sort of old things I like, I'd have to stop doing those.

[9 : 16] You know, it's not like, well, now I'd have to start going to church and I'd have to stop posting snarky comments on Facebook. It goes deeper than that, doesn't it? It gets down to our identity.

You sense, you and I sense that there's something you have to let go of at a deep sort of subterranean level if Jesus is going to have this sort of authority in your life. And that's scary because up till now, there's a particular way that you've defined yourself. This is who I really am or this or this, whatever it is. But now, you have to belong to him. He has to be the Lord of your life. He's the defining thing now. I wonder how many of our intellectual objections to Christianity really at bottom are about this. Now, there's nothing wrong with questions and there's nothing wrong with honest doubts.

[10:30] If Christianity, after all, claims to be true, then we have to at some level ask questions and raise our doubts and wrestle with them. And here at Trinity, we want to be the kind of place where we ask those questions and wrestle with those doubts together.

We want to welcome that sort of exploration. But at some point, there comes a moment when the questions before us as we consider Christianity stop being intellectual and they start being personal.

Am I willing to stop being the Lord of my own life and let Jesus be Lord? And we have to ask ourselves, am I willing to be brutally honest with my own doubts to the point where I can admit that some of my intellectual questions might be a smokescreen, a way of avoiding the real question of whether or not I can embrace Jesus' authority over me?

In other words, friends, can you be honest enough with yourself to acknowledge when deep down what's keeping you from Christianity is that you're afraid, afraid that submitting to his authority will simply destroy you.

But you know, this isn't just an issue for those of us who are considering Christianity. It's an issue for those of us who are already Christians too. Because there will always be remaining sin in our lives. We will constantly encounter times when we don't want to live our lives under Jesus' authority.

[11:59] We'll come up against some clear word in Scripture and it will run counter to our desires or our plans or it will run against the grain of our culture and strike us as awkward or impossible even and we'll be tempted in that moment to sort of explain those passages of Scripture away or we'll come up with a whole list of reasons why my circumstances just make it too hard or too demanding or too costly to follow what he says and obey him.

And the pattern is the same. Don't you see? Even in our hearts. Even in the hearts of believers there's still the voice that says have you come to destroy us?

Which is why we all need to see the rest of what Luke shows us here. The second point we see and what Luke wants us ultimately to see about Jesus' authority here is that it doesn't just threaten us. Ultimately it liberates us. Jesus' authority sets us free. You see this evil spirit in verse 34 he sort of throws down a challenge to Jesus doesn't he?

He says have you come to destroy us? Now perhaps the word us there is referring to just sort of evil spirits in general. But the us could also be referring to the evil spirit and the man who is afflicted both of them together.

[13:21] In other words this evil spirit is saying to Jesus you take me down he goes with me what are you going to do to us Jesus? Have you come to destroy us? But what happens?

At the word of Jesus' authoritative rebuke the evil spirit comes out of the man and as Luke says at the end of verse 35 having done him no harm.

you see the exercise of this total authority that Jesus has doesn't spell this man's destruction it ushers in this man's liberation it's his release.

The same is true of Simon's mother-in-law but this time the destructive force isn't spiritual it's physical and with a word Jesus frees this woman from a life threatening illness she's unbound and immediately Luke says she can rise and minister.

Do you see the picture that's emerging here? As humans we're threatened on every side by forces greater than us by forces that threaten to undo us do we not feel that?

[14:29] Their interior and their exterior their spiritual and their physical but here now at last a greater authority has arrived and this authority Jesus himself sets us free.

Now you have to see that the liberation this passage depicts challenges both the skeptical mindset and the traditional mindset.

What do I mean? Well it's easy to see how this passage is a bit of a challenge to the skeptic isn't it? I mean there's a whole lot of talk about demons here. Demons really?

Maybe some of you are thinking isn't this the 21st century? Can we really believe in evil spirits anymore? Wasn't that just sort of a pre-modern way of talking about mental illness? I get it. To many of us in the west belief in evil spirits seems completely irrational and maybe even a little primitive. But actually you know I would submit to you that it needn't be either.

[15 : 32] And it actually isn't either. On the one hand it's not necessarily irrational if there's such a thing as a God after all. If God exists some personal spiritual good then it's not irrational to think that there just might be personal spiritual evil in the world.

And on the other hand it's not necessarily a primitive belief either. Take a look very closely at this passage. Luke in this text is distinguishing quite carefully and quite deliberately between physical illness and demonic affliction.

He's not conflating the two. And the New Testament never does. In fact the Bible as a whole would lead us to have not a primitive but actually quite robust and sophisticated view of the world and ourselves.

Because it acknowledges that we're physical and emotional and social and psychological and also spiritual beings. That all of these things form a very complex view a very robust view of what reality is and the Bible doesn't allow us to sort of limit or narrow or oversimplify the reality in which we live. So yes this passage challenges our skeptical mindset but you know it also challenges our traditional our conservative mindset. How so? Well it's showing us here that the redemption that Christ brings isn't just spiritual but it's physical as well.

[17 : 03] Christ hasn't just come to save our souls and whisk us away. He's come to heal the material world as well. So if we're followers of Jesus we can't retreat from caring about physical needs.

Whether it's illness and disease or poverty or racial injustice or the well-being of the environment Christ has come to set all creation free one day from its bondage to decay and disease and death and those who follow him will care about seeking peace and justice and healing here and now.

Challenges both sides. You see what's going on in this passage is that in these mighty works of Jesus' authority we see signs of what he will do over all the earth one day.

In the Old Testament God promised to put an end to evil and death and sickness and suffering. And here in Jesus' ministry in the first century that promise came forward breaking into history.

It's as if God's future for a moment came flashing forward like a streak of lightning ripping open the old world so that we could see what it would be like when God one day finally liberates the whole creation from everything that threatens to undo us.

[18 : 25] Here's a glimpse of it. In other words, in Jesus, the kingdom of God, God's coming reign of peace and justice was showing up ahead of time. It was showing up ahead of time because Jesus, the authoritative one, the king of the kingdom, had landed in enemy territory to demonstrate his authority and to begin an insurgency of freedom.

It was showing up ahead of time so that we could know the one who would one day make everything right. And end every evil power and drive every disease and decay from his good creation.

So you see, friends, coming under Jesus' authority won't destroy you. It heals us. It frees us. It gives us back our true selves.

It's like we're fish sometimes, I think. It's like we're fish sometimes just sort of flopping on the sand, wondering why it's so hard to breathe. even though we're free and in control of our lives and here by our own decisions, even though all the cultural forces around me are telling me that this is how I should find joy and freedom, and yet there we are, and it's so hard to breathe.

And then Christ comes, and his authority rises before us like a wave, and it's terrifying in its height and in its speed, and as it starts to turn and come down, we think it's going to crush us.

[20 : 06] But when it does come down, it carries us, not down into destruction, but it takes us back into the rich ocean depths for which we were made.

So friends, where's the sticking point for you? Christian, is there some area of obedience that you just can't trust is for your good?

Look at Jesus' authority here, and know that it has come to liberate you and set you free. Following whatever internal desires or feelings you might have, no matter how loudly they speak, can't guarantee you the freedom you want, the freedom for which you were created, but his voice does.

The same voice that thunders over the waters and shatters the cedars, as Psalm 29 says, is the same voice that silences the evil powers here, heals the multitudes, and that same voice speaks his word to us for our instruction, for our liberty, and for our freedom.

And as you follow his word in obedience, you're following the word of your liberator. But we also need to be reminded, and this is especially true if you've been following Jesus for some time, that the ultimate freedom is yet to come.

[21 : 34] As we said, these miracles in the gospels are previews of God's plan for his redeemed world. And following Jesus long enough, if you follow him long enough, you will encounter hardships and disappointments and setbacks and frustrations, there is no doubt.

And they will be painful reminders that the kingdom, although already present and at work in our midst, is not yet complete. And yet passages like this are here to remind you, to remind us, to keep trusting in his liberating authority.

glory. If his first coming was in humility, and with a simple word he made disease and evil flee, friends, what will be true of his second coming in glory?

What liberty and healing and wholeness will we experience then? Psalm 96 puts it this way, let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice.

Let the sea roar and all that fills it. Let the field exult and everything in it. Let all the trees of the forest shall sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth.

[22 : 43] You see what the psalmist is saying there? When the Lord's authority is unveiled on that day, the whole created order will erupt in praise. It will be set free in a way that we can only imagine.

And as we look back to these events in the gospel, we can look forward with confidence to an even greater future that awaits. And that will keep you from despair when things are hard.

And that will keep you from complacency when things are easy. But there's one last thing about Jesus' authority that we need to see in this passage. And it's actually just a small hint here, but it will grow as Luke's gospel unfolds.

And this third point is what I'll call the secret of Jesus' authority. authority. You know, it's one thing to be shown that Jesus' authority is a liberating authority, and it's one thing to sort of know that with our heads. It's another thing to actually get that in our hearts.

What could make it real in such a way that it actually moves us to really trust his authority and to know that it sets us free? We have to see that there's a bit of an unfolding secret of Jesus' authority in the gospels.

[23 : 56] At the end of our passage, Jesus tells the crowds who want him to stay that he's got to keep moving. He's got to keep preaching the good news of the kingdom. He's got to keep going. He's been sent with a mission, and that mission isn't just to stay in Capernaum and build a following of people who are amazed that his mighty works.

But why not? Why not stay? Why not build a bigger following? What's the urgency? And on top of that, why is Jesus so adamant in this passage that the evil spirits remain silent?

They know who he is. They get his identity right. Yet he doesn't allow them to speak. Why? Well, of course, on the one hand, demons aren't exactly the best PR for a new ministry, are they?

Imagine that conversation in first century Galilee. Hey, I heard that Jesus of Nazareth might be the Messiah we've waited for. Oh, yeah? Who told you that? A demon. It's not really the sort of press you want.

But, you know, there's a deeper reason why he commands their silence. You know, everyone in that day had their own idea of what the Messiah was supposed to come and do, how he was supposed to exercise his authority, and most of those ideas involved military authority and political authority.

[25 : 18] But that wasn't Jesus' mission. That wasn't what he'd come to do. His authority wasn't going to be exercised that way. And so for now, he told the demons to be quiet because he was going to show people in his own time what he'd come to do, what was driving his mission, what purpose sent him to other towns with such urgency to proclaim the kingdom of God.

You see, most of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries thought that they were the good guys, and the pagans, the Gentiles, the Romans, they were the bad guys. So in that scenario, ending evil was very easy.

The Messiah should take his authority and crush the evil people out there. But here's the problem. What if evil isn't just out there? What if it's in here as well?

What if we need to be free not from merely external enemies, but from internal enemies of our own making? How then would the Messiah use his authority to destroy evil without destroying us?

How could he cleanse us of evil and yet somehow make it so that we too, like the man in verse 35, can come away without any harm? As Luke's gospel unfolds and then races to its climax, we see exactly how Jesus does that.

[26 : 36] The secret of Jesus' authority is that its ultimate act comes not in a display of power but of weakness. On the cross, Jesus would use all of his authority to hang naked and weak to pay the penalty for our sins.

So that three days later, having risen from the grave, he could have all the authority to speak the liberating word, the most liberating word of all, the word of forgiveness and the word of peace and the word that makes us right with God, the word of our justification.

You see, Jesus took up this ultimate authority and laid it aside for you. He was destroyed so that you never have to be.

And if that's what he's done for you, if that's how he's already exercised his authority for you, then friend, how could you not trust him?

How could you not trust one who does that for you? How could his authority not ultimately be your true freedom? In the last battle, the final book of C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, the whole story revolves around this little shed, this little sort of tiny stable.

[28 : 04] And from the outside, it looks pretty beat up and raggedy and small and confining and sort of barely big enough for a person to fit inside. But once the characters sort of step in and enter through, they realize that inside it contains worlds.

That the inside is bigger than the outside. The authority of Jesus is like that. From the outside, it looks like every other authority that we know.

Constricting, confining, an enemy to our happiness. But when you step inside, you find just the opposite. That it's an authority unlike any other. It's freedom. And it contains worlds within worlds. Some of you have tasted that freedom. And his authority really has set you free. So keep going, friends. Further up and further in, as they say at the end of that book. And some of you have been looking at it from the outside, maybe for months, maybe for years.

If so, then this is your moment right now to step inside. To accept Jesus' liberating authority over your life, to rest in what he's done for you, and to live in his freedom.

[29 : 19] And as the characters at the end of that story say in wonder, at the end of Lewis' story, they say, you know, the further up and further in you go, the bigger everything is. Let's pray.

Father, we confess that we need your help to trust the authority of Jesus, the rightful king.

Help us to see it and to see how much you love us and how much Christ has done for us so that we might take a step through that door and come to know the ultimate freedom that you bring.

And Father, what ought our response to these things be? But to rejoice. To be glad and joyful that, Jesus, you have come and you've taken up your rightful reign.

And you've set us free from all that oppresses us and all that destroys us and all that holds us bound. Jesus, how could we not rejoice this morning that you have come and through laying down your authority, you have freed us from guilt and sin and death.

[30 : 37] And Jesus, having taken up your authority again in the resurrection, you now reign forevermore. Give us glad hearts this week, Lord Jesus, that rejoice in you and find your authority to be a sweet thing, we pray.

Amen.