

## *The Authoritative Word of Jesus*

Luke 4:31-44

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

**16** Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Prayer of Thanksgiving...

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We are continuing in our series through Luke's gospel.

Last week we saw Jesus in his hometown, Nazareth. He was in the synagogue and declares that a prophecy from Isaiah was fulfilled in him. Then he confronts the religious leaders that were there and they were so angry that they take Jesus out of the synagogue and try to throw him off a cliff. He gets away from them and of course leaves town...

### **Luke 4:31-44**

**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 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.

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

**42** 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, **43** but he said to them, “**I must preach** the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” **44** And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

3 Scenes: the synagogue, Peter’s mother-in-law’s house, the desolate place

First, Jesus is in the **synagogue** of Capernaum. He’s since gone down to Capernaum after being forced out of Nazareth and he is doing what he typically does on the Sabbath which is going to the synagogue. He is there teaching the people and Luke tells us that they are astonished by his teaching. And, then, if he hadn’t been impressive enough by his teaching, he does something even more impressive. A man is in the synagogue who is demon possessed and the demon actually addresses Jesus. Jesus then rebukes the demon and he leaves the man unharmed. And of course, the people are astonished.

Then, Jesus goes to **Peter’s mother-in-law’s house**. She is very sick with a high fever. Jesus goes in and heals her. Then later that day, at sunset, the text says that all of those in town who needed healing came to Jesus.

Then, in the third scene, Jesus leaves that house and goes to find some **space** to rest and pray after a really full day of ministry, but the people of Capernaum, understandably, were overjoyed at what Jesus had done and they didn’t want him to leave. But Jesus says to them, no, I didn’t come for this reason, I came to preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other places as well. I didn’t come just for you, Capernaum, I came for the world.

FOCUS OF THIS PASSAGE: THE WORD OF JESUS

- Teaches in the synagogue
- Casts out demons with the power of his word
- Heals by rebuking a fever
- Declares his purpose for coming is to preach

This passage is about the word of Jesus...

**In amazement in the synagogue, the people ask a very good question, a question that we are going to ask with them this morning: “What is this word?” What does this passage teach us or remind us about the word of Jesus, the word of God?**

## I. In these scenes we see that the word of God is authoritative

### AUTHORITATIVE IN HIS TEACHING

Again they are astonished at the authority of Jesus' teaching. In the parallel account in Mark 1, it says they were astonished because he didn't teach like the scribes. It was different when he spoke. Jesus, when he stands, does not need to use secondary sources to give support for his teaching. He does not need to use commentaries. He speaks authoritatively as God.

Theologians will refer to Jesus' three-fold office, that is, how he fulfills the major offices in the Old Testament: prophet, priest, and king. Jesus is the true and final king in God's kingdom. As the ultimate priest, Jesus stands between God and man, representing man before God as the sacrificial lamb which takes away the sin of his people. Jesus is not only the final priest and king, but also the final prophet. He stands between God and man, as God in the flesh, speaks the words of God. He is unlike any prophet before him. The prophets of the Old Testament would say, "Thus says the Lord..." However, Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you..."

### AUTHORITATIVE OVER DEMONS

In the desert, Jesus defeated the devil himself with the word of God, and here in Capernaum he defeats Satan's forces the same way, with his word. And they have no other choice but to submit and obey. Jesus as he exercises his authority does not need to negotiate. Jesus does not need to persuade, he does not need to work out some kind of deal with demons. He speaks and the demons obey. And this is another reminder of something we talked about a few weeks ago, that Satan, and by extension his demons, are not equally as strong as God. God stands sovereignly over Satan and his followers.

**His authority is expressed through his word.** And this is true throughout the entire story of the Bible, God's authority, his rule is expressed through his word...

In **Genesis**, we read the creation story, that when all was formless and void, God's authoritative word as Creator brings order to the chaos.

Later with **Abraham**, after the fall has brought brokenness to the world, God speaks a promise to Abraham. It would be a promise of what would be. It is a promise to bring redemption. And it was a promise that would not fail.

With **Moses** at Mt. Sinai, God expressed his rule and authority over his people with the word of his Law.

However, God's people reject his authoritative word time and time again, so he raises up **prophets** to speak His word to them. A word calling them to repent and return to Him.

Though the kings raised up to rule Israel would fail, God would, through His word, promise a **coming king** who would reestablish his rule over his people. That king would be Jesus

-who is called the Word, the One who is the ultimate revelation of God to man. (John 1)

-who says that God is doing his work through his words (John 14)

Ultimately, God speaks authoritatively through the **canon of Scripture**. We believe the Bible to be the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

I want to give a quick caution. There is, for some, the tendency to give weight and attention to the words of Jesus and not to the rest of Scripture. You may have had or have a Bible that highlights Jesus' words with red letters, which, by the way, is not wrong. It can be helpful if you want to glance through the gospels to more easily identify who is speaking. But if we are not careful we might begin to see the red letters as more important or authoritative than the black letters.

And I want to caution you about that because this is very similar to "neo-orthodoxy" which came about right after World War I. The leading proponents of Neo-Orthodoxy did not believe the Bible to be objectively true. The only true revelation of God is Jesus. The Bible is revelation only if the reader has some kind of encounter with God as they read it.

However, listening to Jesus' teaching would actually tell us something different. Jesus taught what one theologian calls a "Trinitarian handoff" in revelation, that is that each member of the Trinity is involved in revelation, not just Jesus. Jesus said in John 14 that he speaks the word of the Father. But that is not it, he later says that as he leaves he would send an Advocate, or the Spirit, also called the "Spirit of Truth," who would lead them to remember what Jesus had taught. "It began with the Father who gave his words to his Son, only for the Son to give these words to the Spirit, who testified concerning the Son."<sup>1</sup> The apostles then delivering the message of Christ, ultimately in inspired Scripture.

I say all of that to say, that when we speak of the words of Christ we can speak ultimately of the words of Scripture. When we see the descriptions of the words of Christ in this passage we see the descriptions of the words of Scripture. We believe that the black letters are as authoritative as the red letters.

**2 Tim. 3:16-17**

**16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**That the word of God is authoritative has some major implications for us, namely:**  
**1. Acknowledging God's authority means submitting to His word.**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture*, 217.

Jesus would say this...

**John 14:23a**

**23...**“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word...”

Christians heed God’s word. We submit ourselves to it. When a king speaks, his subjects listen. Because he speaks an authoritative word. But unlike human kings he speaks perfectly, without error, always for the good of his people.

Again, acknowledging God’s authority means submitting to His word.

## **2. Conversely, rejecting God’s word is rejecting His authority.**

This is precisely what happens in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are given instruction by the authoritative word of God, and they, being tempted, decide to rebel against that word. And in rebelling against that word of instruction, they are rebelling against the One who gave that word.

Listen to what God says to David when confronting him with his adultery and murder...

**2 Sam. 12:9a**

**9** Why have *you despised the word of the Lord*, to do what is evil in his sight?...

**2 Sam. 12:10a**

**10** Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because *you have despised me...*

If you have despised my word you have despised me. If you have rejected my word you have rejected me.

Rejection of authority is in our nature and this is in our culture. This is the culture of our day. Our culture today says ultimate authority is found in self. There is not one divine authority figure that determines truth and error, right and wrong. That ability is found only in ourselves and no one else has the right, or the authority, to say I’m wrong.

However, to not heed God’s word, to not obey, is an act of rebellion. Consider the audacity that we have, that though demons, sickness, winds and waves, all of creation obeys him, we will look at him and say, “no.” That’s what we are saying when we do not heed the authoritative word of God.

We cannot say that we acknowledge the King’s authority *in* our lives while at the same time rejecting his authoritative word *for* our lives.

The King has spoken from creation to this day, and his word is authoritative. That day in the synagogue, and all throughout Jesus’ teaching ministry, people came face to face with the authoritative word of God from the Word Himself.

## **II. Not only is the word of God authoritative, the word of God is transformational.**

Consider those healed by Jesus. Consider the man in the synagogue that day and others who were set free from the bondage of demon possession. Consider how different their lives were after their encounter with the authoritative word of Jesus. Their lives were changed.

And this is the reality of all who have had the word of Christ planted in their heart and made to bring forth fruit.

Just as Jesus' word brought about the creation of the world, his word brings about the new creation of the individual. And this continues with Scripture...

### **Heb 4:12**

**12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

What the author of Hebrews is saying here is reading God's word is a confrontation. We are confronted about our need for a Savior. So it can be hard to read or listen to it being taught. But confrontation with God's word leads to transformation in our lives. Please understand that the living and active word is a surgeon's blade, not a butcher's knife. It cuts to heal you not to harm you. What it brings about is good.

Therefore, this affects our view and use of Scripture.

We believe that God's word brings change in our lives. So we put it at the focus of all of our teaching ministries. It is why we put so much emphasis on the text when we preach in our worship gatherings. It is why we encourage all Christians to spend time in God's word each day. It is why we encourage the studying and memorizing of Scripture. It is why when we sit down with someone for counseling we will always point them to Scripture. Because the authoritative word of God is what brings transformation. It is what changes our hearts, which will ultimately change our behavior.

That day in Capernaum, a newly liberated man, Peter's mother-in-law, and many, many others experienced it. And if you look around this room, you will see many, many others with similar stories. Stories of people who were confronted by God's word and, by God's grace, not left to push back against his word, but to humble themselves to it. Stories of people who, by reading and hearing the Word preached and taught, heard their need for a Savior but also hearing that a Savior was available to them in Jesus. Stories of lives transformed. Not perfect by any means, but growing in their love for God and others.

## **III. Not only is the word of God authoritative and transformational, the word of God is missional.**

### **Luke 4:42-44**

**42** 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, **43** but he said to them, **“I must preach** the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” **44** And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Nazareth wanted to rid Jesus like a disease, Capernaum wanted to keep Jesus for themselves. The truth is, at times we can be either. We can push back against his authority at times, or we can hoard him for ourselves, preferring him to be something he isn't.

In Capernaum, the people wanted Jesus to be something he wasn't sent to be: merely a miracle-worker, a gift giver, or an entertainment act. However, He came to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. This was the core of his mission, the miracles confirmed his identity and gave a glimpse of the new kingdom.

And he wasn't going to be limited to one town or village. He needed to preach to others as well. This good news of the kingdom needed to be heard by all.

Which brings up a question, why did he silence the demons? They began to identify Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus silences them. Why?

Some think that Jesus wasn't ready for his identity to be known. But that hardly seems the case. If it was, Jesus probably shouldn't be teaching and performing these incredible miracles. No, Jesus was now in his *public* ministry, he wasn't trying to hide anything.

It isn't that Jesus didn't want people to learn about him, it is more likely that he didn't want others to learn about him from the demons. Satan and demons may say what is true. We see that even in the temptation of Jesus, Satan quotes truth from Scripture. But they never say it out of loyalty to Christ or with any intention to lead people to Christ. They would more than likely try to deceive people even by pointing out Jesus' identity.

Athanasius, a 4th century church father, observed, *“The Lord himself silenced them and forbade them to speak. He did this to keep them from sowing their own wickedness in the midst of the truth. He also wished us to get used to never listening to them even though they seem to speak the truth.”*<sup>2</sup>

Now, Jesus didn't want the demons to speak of Him, however he does desire you and I to speak of Him. He's called all of his people to go and teach his authoritative word to the nations of this world.

**Matthew 28:18-20**

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius, “Life of St. Anthony,” in *Luke*, ed. Arthur A Just Jr., Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT 3, 85.

**18** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Every Christian, not just foreign missionaries, but everyone of us have been called to make disciples, to baptize them, to teach them to observe what Jesus has taught, and by God’s grace, we don’t do that alone. Jesus, the One with all authority, goes with us as we speak his authoritative word.

So, we want to be generous with God’s word. The gospel is not a limited commodity. We don’t keep it for ourselves. We desire to see it spread throughout this city, region, and ultimately the world.

God’s Word is authoritative, it is transformational, and it is missional.

## CONCLUSION

Now, when we speak of the authority of God’s Word over our lives, it is easy to feel the weight of conviction because we all know that we don’t always submit to his authority. Time and again we reject his authority trying to establish our own. We truly are rebels in God’s kingdom. He is the King, we are not, though we constantly try to steal his throne.

But thankfully, the King is a gracious King. And though it might feel terrifying for you to think of submitting yourself to a divine authority or the consequence of not submitting to Him, there is very good news.

The One who spoke the world into existence would on the cross make another declaration with his dying, yet nonetheless authoritative, breath, “It is finished.” Jesus would give his life for rebels who push back at his authority, until the day they are transformed by his powerful word.

On the cross, the authoritative One takes the punishment on behalf of those who have rejected his authority. And now by faith in his finished work, we can be reconciled back to the King against whom we have sinned. God now accepts us based on Jesus’ righteousness rather than rejecting us for our unrighteousness.

If you’ve never turned in faith to Christ, that is your greatest need. Hear the authoritative word spoken in Christ, who calls you to repentance and offers you life. Be transformed by his word and let’s go out and share it with those around us.

## VERSES

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Luke 4:31-44

2 Timothy 3:16-17

John 14:23a

2 Samuel 12:9a

2 Samuel 12:10a

Hebrews 4:12

Luke 4:42-44

Matthew 28:18-20

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think through the biblical story. How has God exercised his authority through His word?
2. Why do we push back against his authoritative word?
3. In what ways has God's word changed your life? How have you seen it change others?
4. How can you be more active in seeing the good news of the kingdom of God spread to others?