

What Is this Word?

Introduction

The Text

³¹And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³²and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. ³³And 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.” ³⁵But 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. ³⁶And 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!” ³⁷And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. (Luke 4:31–37)

An Opening Observation

- A. Last week we watched as Jesus returned to His hometown in Nazareth. And in their synagogue He announced to them both His identity and mission. But instead of being met with applause He was met with rejection: “²⁸When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff” (vv. 28-29).
- B. As we transition into this morning’s text, I wanted to make an observation here for us.
 1. In the Greek OT and NT, the word translated here “drove [Him] out” (v. 29) is rich with significance.
 - a. It’s the word used to describe what God does with Adam once he had become an unclean thing in his sin: “He drove out the man . . .” (Gen 3:24a).
 - b. It’s the word used to describe what God planned to do with the unclean nations as Israel was entering the holy land of Canaan: “I will cast out nations before you” (Exo 34:24).
 - c. It’s the word that describes what Israel was to do with things that had been contaminated with plague (Lev 14:40), or sin (Num 15:35-36; 2 Chr 29:5), or any other form of uncleanness.
 - d. It’s the word used throughout Luke’s gospel to describe the casting out of unclean spirits (cf. 11:14; 13:32).
 2. It’s a word that we might use to describe what we do with our trash (Wednesday night in my neighborhood): we take it out of our house, we drive it out of our city, we get it as far away from us as we can.

- a. And it's the word used to describe what Jesus' hometown crowd—His family, friends, and neighbors—do in response to His teaching in their synagogue: “they rose up and drove him out of the town” (v. 29).
 - i. They treat Him like the unclean thing, like the trash that nobody wants.
- C. But, where you or I, in the face of such rejection, would either burn with anger or dissolve into depression, Jesus just moves on looking for others to love.
 - 1. He doesn't pledge vengeance. He doesn't throw a pity party. He simply leaves Nazareth and goes “down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee” (v. 31).
 - a. Isn't Jesus amazing?! Don't you want to be like that?!

Jesus' Word

- A. As we move now into vv. 31-37, it is Jesus' word that comes clearly into focus.
 - 1. There's mention of His “teaching” in vv. 31, 32; and His “word” in vv. 32, 36. There's reference to His “rebuke” in v. 35 and His “command” in v. 36.
- B. Because of this, I'm going to organize my thoughts with reference to Jesus' word: (1) Jesus' Word Is Authoritative (v. 31-32); (2) Jesus' Word Is Powerful (vv. 33-35); and (3) Jesus' Word Is Healing (v. 36).

(1) Jesus' Word Is Authoritative (vv. 31-32)

The King of Kings

- A. With the country in a great deal of turmoil after last week's election, it seems appropriate to meditate for a moment upon the authority of Christ.
- B. In one sense, it is certainly right to approach the outcome of the election with utmost sobriety and seriousness. The president of the United States, after all, has the highest authority in our land, if not the highest authority in all the world.
- C. But do you recall in Jesus' last hours, when He wasn't cooperating with Pontius Pilate, a governor of Rome. Pilate, a bit perplexed by Him, says: “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (John 19:10). To which Jesus responds: “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (v. 11a).
 - 1. In other words: “Pilate, don't be fooled, there is an authority over you that gives authority to you.” And His name isn't Caesar. His name is YHWH—His name, we come to find, is Jesus. Jesus is the Lord of lords and King of kings. To Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given” (Matt 28:18).

- a. “Pilate, you can only do what I permit you to do. You can crucify Me, but you cannot kill Me. By nailing me to that tree, you will only unleash a torrent of grace on the world and accomplish the will of My Father.”
 - i. All earthly kings are but servants in the court of the Most High!
- D. So there is no higher authority than that which resides in Jesus Christ. And, therefore, if we fear anything, it must not be presidents, or policies, or propositions. It must be that we fear Him, and Him alone.

His Word Possessed Authority

- A. Jesus starts to evidence His authority here in Capernaum in the way He’s teaching them in their synagogue. We’re not told what He says, only that: “they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority (v. 31b).
- B. The scribes in Jesus’ day would try to validate their interpretation of the OT by grounding it in the thoughts of great teachers that came before them.
 - 1. But Jesus, it seems, would handle the text on His own terms.
- C. We can probably get a flavor of the way He taught by looking at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel.
 - 1. There’s this section in the middle where Jesus is correcting and refining their understanding of the OT. He begins six times with something like: “You have heard that it was said”—and He quotes largely from the OT. And then continues: “But I say to you...”—and He pushes against the false interpretations of the Rabbis and gives the authoritative interpretation on the matter.
 - a. Far from quoting the Rabbis here, He’s actually contradicting them!
- D. It would be like if I were to march into the Supreme Court and start talking like I have the one true interpretation of the Constitution: “You’ve heard it said...but I say to you...”
 - 1. Some of you might think the Supreme Court needs this sort of rebuke, but the fact is they’d probably sick the guards on me. “Unless you’re George Washington or a member of the crew that originally wrote the Constitution, get out of here. Who are you to talk like you have the one true opinion on the matter?”
- E. So the crowd back in our text sense something different about Jesus. He’s not talking like an interpreter of the Law; He’s talking like the Author of the Law. He’s not talking like a man; He’s talking like God!
 - 1. And because Jesus is God, what He says about any issue is the final word on the issue!

Does His Word Possess Authority in Your Life?

- A. So let me ask you, does His word have authority in your life? Where do you go for the final word on the issues you face? Who wins when God's word says one thing but your flesh, your peers, and your culture say another?
 - 1. Do you open up the Bible and let God tell you what you should think about money, and sex, and career, and marriage, and clothes, and the meaning of life?
 - a. Or are you getting that from somewhere else? There are a thousand voices ready to tell you what to think about all of this and more. But which voice do you give authority to in your life?
- B. There's only one voice among them all that truly has authority. And He's speaking to you through His word today. Let's put God's word over every other word!

(2) Jesus' Word Is Powerful (vv. 33-35)

His Word Works

- A. As we move into [vv. 33-35](#), we watch as Jesus comes face to face with the demonic. And in this encounter, we learn something else about His word: Jesus' Word Is Powerful.
- B. One of the biggest complaints people raise against the church is that we are hypocrites. And by hypocrites it is simply meant that our deeds don't align with our words.
 - 1. We talk about grace and love and righteousness with our lips and then we deny such things with our lives. We teach and we teach but we rarely do anything about it.
- C. But no one can say this about Jesus. It's awesome. With Him the word and the deed are one. His word is not just the way He communicates His thoughts, it's the way He accomplishes His will. He uses His word not just to preach the kingdom of God but to manifest it. He speaks and it happens.
- D. So when a man "[who had the spirit of an unclean demon . . . crie\[s\] out with a loud voice](#)" ([v. 33](#)) in the synagogue, Jesus can both silence and evacuate the demon with just a word from His mouth: "[Be silent and come out of him!](#)" ([v. 35](#)). His word is powerful!

To Destroy the Works of the Devil

- A. It's significant that the first miracle of Christ that Luke records is an exorcism. Here is where the fundamental conflict lies.
- B. Our understanding of Satan and the demonic is seriously warped in our modern culture. He's more of a joke that we laugh at than an enemy we respect.

1. I don't know what Halloween is like in your neighborhood but my neighborhood goes off. I've never seen anything like this. I'm used to people getting their houses all decked out for Christmas. I've never seen so many houses with seriously rated R decorations for Halloween. I felt like I needed a pocket full of garlic, a rifle with a silver bullet, a wooden stake, and maybe some numchucks just to go trick-or-treating with my girls. "They're going to make us work for our candy this year. Get behind me. Let's go!"
 - a. But do you see how can become just a game to us—just a front yard decoration, a costume, a harmless thrill? Few people take Satan seriously anymore.
- C. But Jesus does. In fact He orients His whole mission with reference to the devil. As John tells us in [1 John 3:8](#): "[T]he reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."
 1. Amazingly, all Jesus has to do is speak and the devil's work just comes to nothing.

Do We Believe in the Power of It?

- A. But there's something we must face in all of this. In Nazareth, the place of Jesus' rejection, Matthew tells us that "[He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief](#)" (13:58). But here in Capernaum Jesus is going to do many works, in part we are to assume, because of their belief.
 1. In fact, where in Nazareth Mark tells us that Jesus "[marveled because of their unbelief](#)" (6:6), in Capernaum we are told that Jesus marvels because of their faith (Luke 7:9).
- B. And so the question for us now is: Do we believe that His word works? Under the first point I asked if we believe in the truth of it. Now I am asking if we believe in the power of it. Do we expect His word to change us? Do we expect Him to be doing things in this room even now?
 1. Do we approach Him like that Centurion whose servant lay ill: "[\[S\]ay the word, and let my servant be healed](#)" (Luke 7:7)?
 - a. When I pray for God to remove the tumor on my wife's liver, I'm not just paying Him a courtesy. I believe He can speak a word over her and it could just be gone. He may have other plans, but I know He can do it.

(3) Jesus' Word Is Healing (v. 36)

- A. The end of v. 35 directs us towards my final point: "[And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.](#)"
 1. The authority and power of Christ's word muzzles and expels the demon without causing the man any harm. He's fine. In fact, he's better than he's ever been.

- B. Here's an indication of the goal Jesus has in every word that He speaks: He's not just after destroying the works of the devil. This is just a means to an end. He destroys the works of the devil to restore the fallen human race—you and I.

- 1. Jesus' Word Is Healing.

- C. Why is much of the country in such an uproar right now over the result of the election? Because they're scared. They're scared that Trump will use his newly acquired authority and power not heal but to destroy. Because that's so often what people do. That's the story on repeat throughout our history books. "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

- 1. But Jesus is unlike any King the world has ever seen. He has more authority and power than the whole history of kings combined, but he uses it to bless, to redeem, to heal.
 - a. He speaks a word and in one and the same moment: the oppressors go running off, and the oppressed come running home.

Two Closing Observations

- A. There are two things I want to bring out under this third point out as we close:

(1) Christ's Word Can Work without Faith

- A. I made a big deal about faith at the close of my second point, and I here want to balance that out.
 - 1. Here's one of the most amazing things we learn from exorcisms like these in the Scriptures: God's word can work to bless an individual that doesn't have the strength to believe Him for it. The man is possessed. He didn't have faith, nor could he.
- B. This observation is important for us. Sometimes we can think that miracles will only come to us if we ourselves are believing, but that is not always how the Scriptures describe it.
 - 1. First off, miracles can come to us simply because of God's sovereign grace—He wills it for you, it happens for you. Period.
 - 2. And secondly, miracles can come because of the prayers and faith of those around us. Though I seriously doubt this demoniac himself had faith of any kind, as we've seen, there was an environment, a context, a community of faith around him in Capernaum.
 - a. As James tells us: "[T]he prayer of faith will save the one who is sick . . . The prayer of a righteous person has great power" (5:15-16).

- C. O what a burden it would be to take an already tried and suffering soul and say you have to now muster the faith or it's over for you. It is the very nature of such trials of spirit, body, circumstance to take us to the limit of our faith—"I'm struggling. I don't see how God is good. This is hard."
 - 1. Sometimes our faith rises towards Jesus in these moments. But other times our faith all but deflates.
- D. Here is why the community, the church is so important. They can believe around us, even when we ourselves are struggling with doubt. They can call down blessing for us even when we ourselves are unsure of God's favor.
 - 1. This man owes his healing, not to his own faith, but to the faith of those around him and, above all, to the sovereign grace of God.

(2) Christ's Word Can Clean the Unclean

- A. There's this tension highlighted in the narrative between uncleanness and holiness.
 - 1. This man we are told has "the spirit of an unclean demon" (v. 33) (as if there could be anything other than an unclean demon). But this description sets up the contrast and conflict with Jesus who, we are told, is "the holy one of god" (v. 34).
- B. In our text, Jesus, the bearer of the Holy Spirit, is coming against the devil and the unclean spirit of this demon.
 - 1. The One Nazareth drove out as an unclean thing has truly come to drive the unclean things out of us. He alone is holy but He's coming into our filth and washing us up.
- C. Maybe you come into this room this morning and you just feel filthy—maybe from something that you've done; maybe from something that's been done to you. Whatever the case, you just feel unclean. Like you don't belong here. Like just being here you're making others dirty.
 - 1. Listen, Jesus will handle your filth like no one else. People will often judge and ridicule and exploit this sort of thing in you. But not Jesus. He is a safe place to come out of hiding. He uses His words not to cut you down, but to clean you up.
- D. Because, in the end, Jesus will be driven out in your place. The rejection scene in Nazareth is but a foreshadow of Calvary, where He will not pass through the midst of the mob, but surrender to them—to Judas and the Jews, to Pilate and Rome.
 - 1. And they will drive Him out of their city where they will kill Him like an unclean thing, like a sinner—all of our filth upon Him.
 - a. And He will go through with all of this, so that He can now come to His Bride in this room this morning, lift her up from the dirt, and "cleanse . . . her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:26).