

Luke 4:31-44
Jesus the Deliverer

In *The Screwtape Letters* C.S. Lewis wrote of two potential errors when dealing with spiritual powers. “One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” The Bible tells us that demons are real, spiritual, and personal. Their role today is to do the will of Satan and to try to thwart the will of God. We need not live in fear, though, because we can rest in the assurance that their power extends only as far as our sovereign God allows, and He bends even their most diabolical efforts to His glory.

Luke’s narrative has brought Jesus into the public light. He has related how Jesus had begun to preach His message to those in Galilee. Most recently, Luke narrated the account of Jesus speaking at His home synagogue in Nazareth and what happened when He announced to those in attendance that He was the Messiah. The message was well received at first, but when Jesus gave a fuller explanation of what He meant, the crowd turned against Him.

These verses describe a very busy day in Capernaum, first at the synagogue, then at the home of Peter and Andrew. Jesus had already made Capernaum His base of operations, “and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea” (Matthew 4:13). Perhaps He did this because it was a more significant city. It was large enough to merit the presence of both a Roman centurion with his detachment of soldiers (Matthew 8:5) as well as a royal official serving Herod Antipas (John 4:46). Perhaps He had done so because He knew the difficulties He would face in His home town. In either case, Jesus is preaching and teaching to those who would listen.

The Teaching

Jesus was never discouraged by results. Immediately after being threatened with murder in Nazareth, Jesus goes on to Capernaum. We find Jesus again teaching in the synagogue. It was His practice and, as usual, the people were “amazed at His teaching” (v. 32). This frequent occurrence should not be a surprise. First, Jesus spoke the truth as opposed to the evasive reasoning of the scribes, “for this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). Scribes often quoted each other to defend their points of view. Even today, studying the Jewish Talmud (Mishnah and Gemara) is a matter of studying what various rabbis have commented on the Jewish Scriptures. This is simply man confirming man. Jesus, on the other hand, spoke the literal words of God. There is nothing as compelling as the truth. Even when we refuse to acknowledge it, we know what is true. It is no wonder they were amazed.

Second, Jesus dealt with matters of great significance such as life, death, and eternity. Compare the teachings of the Pharisees, “woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law; justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). Jesus spoke of great things, not the fine points of the religious practice. He did not quibble over the letter of the Law, but regarded its spirit as more important. Think of the “you have heard it said . . . but I say to you” passages of the Sermon the Mount.

Finally, and most emphatically, Jesus spoke “with authority” (v. 32). This conveys the idea of power and energy. There was no hesitation in His voice, no soft, unsure words. Jesus was the Son of God, and He knew what He had come to say and do. There was no question, no second thoughts. He spoke with the passion of someone who knows that what He is saying is true and that what He is saying matters eternally.

The Demon

In the ancient, and even pre-modern world, various cultures attributed any variety of mental and physical illnesses to the spiritual world. Think of the flu. It comes from the Latin word *influenza* which refers to being under the influence of the stars. That is not true of the biblical writers. When there is a physical or mental illness it is described as such, and when there is a spiritual attack, it is seen with equal clarity. There is no biblical account in which demonic possession is described as insanity.

Scripture uses different phrases to describe demonic activity. One wording is to say that a person “has an evil spirit” as is the case, here (v. 33). A second phrase is to say someone is “demon possessed” or a “demoniac” as in Matthew 4:24. A third is when people are said to have an “unclean spirit” as in Mark 5:2. These phrases are interchangeable, as seen in the use of “unclean spirit” in Mark 1:22 which is a parallel passage to this of Luke.

As Jesus was preaching, a demon “cried out” (v. 33). He shouted and screamed out. “Have you come to destroy us?” (v.34) indicates either that more than one demon possessed this individual or, more likely from the wording, that this demon understood that his fate would be that of all demonic powers. Also, the “have You come” cannot refer to Nazareth, but rather, from heaven into this world to resolve spiritual and eternal matters. In other words, this demon understood that there was no hope for him; he was destined for punishment and his question is simply if that punishment was going to begin at this time.

This demon also understood how his fate was related to the coming of the Messiah, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” 1 John 3:8. The word used for ‘destroy’ conveys the understanding of bringing to nothing, or abolishing. This refers to the ultimate destination of all rebellious spiritual beings.

It is interesting that, unlike some, demons are perfectly aware of Who Jesus is. “I know who You are - the Holy One of God!” (v. 34) the demon shouted. As you think of the fear such holy men as Isaiah and others have felt in the presence of God, one can only wonder at the absolute sense of terror and dread this evil being must have felt as he looked at the second member of the Trinity.

We must take away from this passage that if mere verbal profession of faith were enough to gain salvation, then demons would be in heaven. There is such a thing as an unsanctified knowledge of Christ and Christianity. Some people are no better than demons. We ought always to ask if our knowledge of sin makes us hate it? Does our knowledge of the fruits of the Spirit make us cultivate them?

There are two ideas conveyed in this understanding of the holiness of Jesus. First, Jesus possessed the divine attribute of holiness. That is, Jesus is “holy” in the sense of being sinless. We have spoken about His impeccability. That is Jesus, though fully human, was also fully divine and because of the union of

these two natures, was not able to sin. Jesus “knew no sin” 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us. Second, Jesus is holy in the sense of being set apart for the specific task of salvation. As Peter preached, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus would not give this demon the floor, however, and He demonstrated His power over spiritual forces immediately. There was no dramatic struggle, no evenly-matched combat. “Be quiet and come out of him” (v. 35) said Jesus, and “amazement came upon them all” (v.36). The reason was simple, “for with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out” (v. 36). This was not something any rabbi could do, this was remarkable. As was said at another similar occurrence recorded by Matthew in his gospel, “nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel” (Matthew 9:33).

A minor point, but still worth considering as valuable textual evidence, is that it should not surprise us that Luke, ever the interested physician, must have asked whoever related this story to him if the person had been injured in the assault (v. 35).

At home with Peter and Andrew

The Sabbath service probably ended about noon, and after that, Jesus went to the home of Peter and Andrew for the main meal of the day. Peter had been introduced to Jesus by his brother, Andrew, and the two of them ran a fishing enterprise in Capernaum (John 1:35-42, Matthew 4:18). James and John were partners in this business (Luke 5:10). It is likely all of these men were present at the synagogue and invited Jesus home to eat with them.

Upon arriving, Jesus was told that Peter’s mother-in-law was unwell. Again the doctor, Luke, elaborates to tell us it was a “high fever” (v. 38). We are reminded that sickness visits even saints. None of us are exempt from the trials of this world. She was so unwell that Peter and Andrew imposed upon their guest to see if He could help. While some might argue that the fact that Jesus “rebuked the fever” (v.39) means that the fever was a personal being like a demon, Jesus used the same words to calm the sea, “and He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Hush, be still.’ And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm” (Mark 4:39). There is no reason to think Luke is mistaken. Certainly, he would recognize the description of a fever if it was described to him.

The healing was immediate and complete. Immediate in that no sooner had Jesus spoken than “it left her; and she immediately got up and waited on them” (v. 39). The healing was instant, not progressive. The centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:13), woman who was bleeding (Mark 5:29), ten lepers (Luke 17:14), and the invalid at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:9) are all other examples immediate healing by Jesus of those who are afflicted physically.

The healing was also complete. There were no residual effects. Peter’s mother-in-law was not still tired and dehydrated. She was fully restored to health. She “got up and waited on them” (v. 39). There must have been several people in the house. At least Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Mark 1:29) and perhaps even others. To assist her, we can only presume Peter’s wife was available. To prepare and serve a dinner for several people, according to the strict requirements of the Mosaic Law, with the tools and resources available in the first century, seems a challenging task for anyone not at their physical best.

Later that day, crowds began to arrive. “While the sun was setting” (v. 40) indicates that news spread quickly, and that people could barely wait for the Sabbath to be over before they made their way to where Jesus was. In his gospel, Mark says that “the whole city gathered at the door” (Mark 1:33). While this may be figurative language, the fact that “all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him” (v. 40) must show that the number was great indeed. And none went home disappointed, since Jesus “[laid] His hands on each one of them” (v. 40).

Another point must be addressed. Both in the synagogue, and at the home of Peter and Andrew, Jesus refused to allow the demons to speak. (v. 35, 41). If the demons were telling the truth and, in fact, testifying to Jesus as the Son of God, why did Jesus silence them? Scripture does not say, but perhaps if demons affirmed Jesus as the Messiah, it would be confusing to those trying to understand the truth of Who He was and why He came. Also, it might be that if the people believed the demons, they might make some effort to promote Jesus as king, as they had planned to do after He fed the five thousand. (John 6:15). Or perhaps those not looking forward to the kind of Messiah Jesus would become might have precipitated a premature crisis, maybe by even accusing Jesus of being in an alliance with Satan, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons” (Luke 11:15).

The Kingdom of God

“When day came” (v. 42) indicates (but does not absolutely prove) that Jesus perhaps spent the night at the home of Peter and Andrew. In any case, Jesus rose and “went to a secluded place” (v. 42). Mark informs us that Jesus went there to pray (Mark 1:35). This is an example to follow. If the Son of God needed a break from ministry to be certain He was at His best, so too must we. It is a lesson that we ought to pace ourselves in our ministry.

His desire for some quiet time was not successful, as “the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away” (v. 42). Jesus did not rebuke them, but instead explained that even though Capernaum would be His headquarters during His Galilean ministry, Jesus did not devote Himself entirely to the needs of that city alone. Instead He told them He must “must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (v.43).

Jesus preached “the kingdom of God” (v. 43). This idea includes two concepts

God’s rule and sovereignty, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The spiritual blessings received when we are saved, “And Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God’” (Luke 18:24).

These are not unrelated. The reign of God in heaven and earth includes His plan of salvation and our incorporation into the body of believers. Our salvation began in heaven and should bring glory Him Who ordained it.

Jesus went to the cities of the region preaching the kingdom of God. Certainly most of these were small, dirty little villages. Yet, Jesus condescended to give of Himself to them. A good reminder that we should never despise a small audience. Who do we know that is not worth hearing the message of the kingdom of God?

Take Aways

Since we have been spiritually healed, ought we not also to copy this woman and get up and serve the Lord?

Let us remember to find time to be alone with God. The busyness of even the best ministry cannot be self-sustaining.