

The Gospel of Luke

“And he 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”. (Luke 4:31-32 ESV)

“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! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?!” (Luke 4:33 ESV)

Authority and Power over Unclean Spirits

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Luke 4:31-37

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Introduction:

Good morning. Today we continue our survey of the Gospel of Luke. Last time brother Matt led us through Jesus’s return and rejection at Nazareth. He walked us through the wonderful truth that all are welcome in God’s Kingdom. He will graft in people from every race, culture, tongue tribe and nation! We have the honour of being Grafted on the vine. But Matt also preached on how fickle people can be. Hearing with excitement the things they want, and getting agitated when God’s Word defies their expectations. There is a clear warning for us in there. God’s Word offends and simultaneously saves. If we speak God’s Words well, the same will be true for us! Remember the people Jesus grew up with were ready to throw him off a cliff when challenged by the truth of God’s word! God’s word winnows, it separates believers from unbelievers. And often hostility arises when winnowing comes. Let’s not be surprised by that. Similarly, in our text today we encounter another form of hostility encountered by those who follow Christ. The Demonic. This is not a comfortable topic for us, especially in a post-enlightenment culture where empiricism is the only excepted mode of truth. We say, “If I can’t test it, see it, it doesn’t exist.” We have trouble with these “unseen” realities. The Demonic is also scary. And so we are tempted to skip over this reality I bit like an ostrich ducks their head in the sand.

Yet the consistent witness of Scripture is, there is a demonic reality that we ignore at our peril.

So with that said, I think the way I'd like to approach our text today is to simply read our text and pull out one key insight, and then 2 implications and 2 applications to our lives today. Let's read the Word together:

“And he 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! 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.” Luke 4:31-37

This is the Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God!

Our Key Insight: Christ has Authority over the Demons

This is not a mysterious text, nor is it a complicated one. Last month Brother Matt spoke about how Jesus has authority over teaching and interpretation of Scripture, and next month we will see Jesus has authority over sickness and death in our bodies. This is sustained argument Luke is making in Chapter 4, Jesus's Authority. So today we are really just going to zoom in on one Key Insight, JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER DEMONS AND DARK SPIRITUAL POWERS. Look with me to verse 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!” Luke 4:36

Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel we hear of demons begging Jesus not to throw them into the abyss, and demons obeying Jesus when the disciples could not cast them out. These demons are mortally afraid of Jesus! Listen to what they say:

“he [the demon] cried out with a loud voice, “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” Luke 4:33-34

Let's be crystal clear on this, there is no contest between Jesus and powers of darkness. He has utterly defeated them, and has complete authority over them. As Paul says in Colossians:

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Colossians 2:14-15

This is the key insight from our text this morning. Jesus has authority over the Demons.

So with that fact in mind, let's turn to 2 implications of this truth.

Two Implications

1. The Devil and Demons have real, but limited power

Notice from our text, the unclean spirit has *some* power. He throws the man to the ground. In the parallel passage in Mark chapter 1, Mark tells us the demon convulses the man. Earlier, Luke vividly describes how Satan can tempt with Jesus in the desert. Looking ahead in Luke's writings we can see a further spectrum of demonic influence:

“For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.” Luke 8:27

“And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.” Luke 13:11

“For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.” Acts 2:7

I want to draw attention to the nature of these examples. There can be psychological effects of Demons, the Gerasene man was insane. There can be physical disabilities caused by Demons, like seizures or scoliosis like the woman bent over. And in books like Daniel and Revelation we learn Unclean Spirits can influence governments and institutions. Friends, the consistent witness of the Bible is that Satan and the Demons EXIST and have real power. I wonder if we really believe that. One commentator says this:

“However, if Scripture gives us a true account of the world as it really is, then we must take seriously its portrayal of intense demonic involvement in human society. Our failure to perceive that involvement with our five senses simply tells us that we have some deficiencies in our ability to understand the world, not that demons do not exist.” Wayne Grudem

Now before we go on, I am NOT SAYING ALL PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES OR PHYSICAL DISABILITIES ARE DUE TO THE DEMONIC! In the very next verses (that we will look into next month) Luke is careful to separate physical healings from demon expulsion.

But the Bible does indicate that SOME psychological ailments, and SOME physical ailments CAN HAVE a demonic component. That should give us pause.

As modern thinkers, we can't seem to get it right. In our sin we seem to have predilection to blame everything on the Devil, or in our arrogance, nothing on him. I'll quote CS Lewis here:

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”

My suspicion is that most of us fall into the first ditch. We are trained by media, books and our education to consider the Spiritual realm some kind of fictional landscape. The Devil and Demons are categorized with Centaurs and Unicorns in our minds.

And because of this unconscious reckoning, we cruise through our lives FUNCTIONALLY unaware of the real playing field. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes “Real Reality”

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Ephesian 6:12

In our time and culture, the phenomena of the Demonic seems to always be attributed to different sources. For example, we speak of the great tragedies of history in solely human terms. Now humans made real choices with real impact and consequences, so don't overhear me. But can anyone in this room seriously believe that merely social factors in response to economic fallout was the sole reason Hitler came to power? And can we seriously believe that his evil ambition and carefully laid plans for genocide arose solely from a bad upbringing and not making into art school? Whole libraries of books have been written to try and explain in purely psychological, and sociological terms how men like Stalin, Mao and others could authorize such evil on such

massive scales. And the Bible's clear judgement on those books is they all fall short. Psychology and Sociology do explain SOME of what these men did, but it does not explain it all.

There is such thing as evil intelligences behind the scenes, working in and through human beings on individual and very grand scales, sometimes across nations and centuries.

Now before we get too sweaty, we must also observe SATAN AND THE DEMONS HAVE LIMITED POWER. The fact that Jesus can throw them out ought to be evidence enough! But I think it is helpful to reflect on another episode narrated in the Bible. Listen to the Author of Job:

“And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” Job 1:12

Notice Satan has to *ask permission* to test Job. God has complete authority over Satan. Like we often say here, “Satan is like a dog on a chain” he can only go as far as God lets him. This is part of what some call God's Dark Providence. As one commentator has said:

“Sometimes God's good lies hidden within other people's evil; that is part of the mystery of Providence. The Bible never promises you unbroken sunshine.”¹

Similarly, God can give permission for the powers of darkness to instigate incredibly difficult circumstances that end up advancing His Kingdom and His Will. Often in ways we find inscrutable at the time. Consider the Story of Joseph, nobody anticipated why God would allow that tragedy and mistreatment of him, and yet in that case we do see the “endgame”:

“As for you, **you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20 ESV)

Now in this life, we don't always get to see the “endgame”. Job never finds out what was going on and why he faced such Dark Providence. He is left to trust that God is who He says He is. But the point is this:

OT and NT both indicate that The Devil and the Demons HAVE REAL, BUT LIMITED power.

¹ The Frowning Face Of Providence. Paul Carter. https://cornerstoneorillia.org/cornerstone-baptist-church-blogs-and-news/post?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=3107&cHash=dd79952abc2c68f573d5802d6b24d7f3

The second implication of our text today that we must see is:

2. Jesus has the power to set us free from spiritual powers that harm and hinder us

Let's look at our text again!

“Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us... And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm?” Luke 4:34; 35b

The Demons know that their time is short, you should know that too! They know Jesus has come to bind and destroy them. The Apostle John makes this point clearer when he says:

“for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” Revelation 12:12

Their time is short, our enemy is vicious, but Jesus has overcome! Christ has bound the strong man and plundered his house. Listen to our King:

“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions, unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. Matthew 12:28-29

The Demons and Satan are an utterly defeated enemy.

This is what Theologians refer to as the Christus Victor theory of atonement an underappreciated concept in our day. We frequently talk about Penal Substitutionary Atonement, as we should!

That is the part of the Gospel that highlights Christ's death on the cross and His payment for our sins; how Christ's payment satisfies God's wrath and judgement over sin. We may cite

Colossians chapter 2:

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14

Amen and Amen! It was my sin that held him there! He did pay my sin debt. But let's keep reading! Verse 15 continues:

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Colossians 2:14-15

So Christ ALSO triumphed over the powers of darkness and evil and the devil! That is one of the purposes Christ came! To liberate us from the powers of evil and darkness. He is **CHRIST THE VICTOR!** One Theologian defines it this way:

“To see Jesus as Victor means to see the atonement in terms of a conflict between the power of good and the power of evil...Through his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection Christ brought down the principalities and powers of Darkness. They have suffered an irrevocable and crushing defeat but they continue to fight on”²

And I think he’s right. Listen to what John says:

“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.** 1 John 3:8

And the Author of Hebrews says:

“that through death [on the cross] he [Jesus] might **destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil**”. Hebrews 2:14

We could go on to Revelation chapters 19-20 further elaborate on Christ’s defeat over the powers of Darkness and the Devil, but the point is made. Christ is victorious over the spiritual powers of darkness. This is why John in the book of Revelation describes the Throne Room of God like this:

“before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.” Revelation 4:6

There is no strife, no waves of chaos on God’s throne room sea. All is calm. All is in perfect control. Demons are not swarming the gates of Heaven. The war is finished. There are still battles for us to fight and win. Absolutely yes. The powers of Darkness fight on, BUT “They have suffered an irrevocable and crushing defeat.”

Christ is victorious over our enemy who seeks to harm and hinder us.

So in light of this I want to suggest two ways that we should apply what we’ve learned in this passage:

² Bloesch, Donald. Essentials of Evangelical Theology. Hendrickson Publishers. 2006. Pg 158

Two Applications

1. Have a right sized respect for the powers of darkness

Now, I feel very comfortable presenting this as an application because the Apostle Peter calls us to:

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

Being sober minded means having a right sized view of what the Bible teaches on this subject. JI Packer helps articulate the Bible evidence:

“He [Satan] should be taken seriously, for malice and cunning make him fearsome; yet not so seriously as to provoke abject terror of him, for he is a beaten enemy.”³

Firstly, Right sized respect starts with understanding the limitations of what we know. There is a lot we are not told about Spiritual realities. The Bible leaves much UNSAID on this topic. God in his wisdom does not frighten us with needless details, nor has he ordained the need for complex rituals around spiritual protection or exorcism! Praise God for that! Demonology as expressed in the Bible is straight forward, Call on Jesus! But leaves many unanswered questions, and that calls for humility.

Firstly, right sized respect means we don't mock things we don't fully understand. Remember the warning Jude makes:

“But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment”. Jude 1:9

If the Archangel Michael is careful in how he speaks to the Devil, how much more careful ought we be? VERY CAREFUL! In fact we should probably do the exact same thing Michael did when interacting with Satan or his Demons.

“The Lord rebuke you!” Jude 1:9b

Just call on God. Call on the name of Jesus Christ! And leave it there!

³ J. I. Packer as quoted in Graham A. Cole, *Against The Darkness* (Wheaton, IL. Crossway, 2019), 24.

Secondly, right sized respect of for the powers of spiritual darkness means we don't play with or fondle them. To state the obvious, we as Christians should not be playing around with Ouija boards, tarot cards, psychics or other means of accessing dark spiritual forces or entities.

Thirdly, right sized respect means we live in such a way that acknowledges Satan and his Demons are real. We are not above being tempted or tried by them. So don't live like an ostrich! Not everything happens in this world because of genetics, or psychological determinants, or purely "scientific" reasons. The Bible is absolutely clear there is a whole other plane of existence that has influence on our lives!

I find it ironic in some ways that God ordained me to preach this message! Since grade 8, I've been known as Mr. Science Geek. I was known as the resident most committed to evidence based medicine. And now as a professor I'm constantly telling my trainees to empirically validate their treatment decisions. In many ways, I am "Mr. Evidence." And with my deep commitment to empiricism on the table, I would just like say, that's not all there is folks. There is more to reality than what we can see and measure.

I don't know the details of how it all works, and I have thought about it a lot. And for the record, I DON'T THINK WE CAN KNOW ALL THE DETAILS. There are many, many unanswered questions. Like, how much of mental illness is spiritual? How often is physical illness "from the devil". I can't answer that.

I can tell you genetics has an effect. Identical twins raised separately, if one has schizophrenia there's a 50% chance the other will. That's genetics.

I can also tell you upbringing has an effect. Traumatized children have significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality, etc. They also have a higher risk of diabetes and heart disease!

I can also tell you choices made by people matter. Too much sugar gives you diabetes, tobacco gives you heart disease and smoking pot increases the risk of anxiety, depression and speeds the onset of schizophrenia. Those are EMPIRICAL measurable facts.

The point I'm making is this, there's a lot going on at any one time to explain any kind of illness, loss of function or oppression. In medicine it's called *multifactorial model of disease*. And I would add to that model based on what we have learned today. There can also be spiritual inputs to these conditions.

In God's dark providence, Satan and the Demons are permitted powers to tempt, test, pester and harry. This can be in the form of psychological, physical or even situational instigations by Satan or the Demons. Remember Job. Tremendous – but *ultimately limited* – powers can be given by God to Satan refine and test his people. Often in ways we cannot understand on this side of glory.

So be watchful to his wiles. He and his Demons, along with your flesh, and decisions by other sinners will position temptation in front of you. This explains why porn prompts or a “friendly face” of the opposite gender “just suddenly appears” right after fight with your spouse, or a sketchy business opportunity comes on the heels of an unexpected bill. He is prowling, lurking, waiting for opportunities.

Now being watchful is not being fearful. Dr. Grudem reminds us:

“While it is wrong to ignore the devil's existence, it is also wrong to cower before him in fear: Resist him! Wayne Grudem

And that leads us to one final application of what we've learned in this passage. In light of what we have learned, we should:

2. Live in the reality of Christ's Victory

Listen to Martin Luther:

“And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.”

This is the flip side of point one. If we need to see Satan and the Demons have limited power, we also need to see Christ Inestimable power!

Recall the words of Jesus:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:17

Not some authority, Not limited authority, all authority!

This is why we run to him. This is why we seek shelter under him! He is mighty to save!

Mighty to save from Demons

Mighty to save from the Devil

Mighty to save from Death

We need to live in that reality!

This means we do not cower before the conquered powers of Darkness. Demons may be big, but Jesus is bigger! They flee from Him! THEY cower before our King!

This means we pray in faith, knowing Christ has secured the ultimate victory!

This means we fight tooth and nail, straining against remaining sin because

“he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4

He is Christus Victor! The victorious Christ!

This knowledge MUST DRIVE US TO CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM! Listen to how Spurgeon explains the effect of running to him:

“If Satan sees a soul constantly driven to Christ by his temptations, he is too crafty to continue them. He will say to himself, 'These attacks of mine accomplish nothing; for, every time that I tempt him, he runs to his Saviour, and so becomes stronger and holier’”.
C. H. Spurgeon,

As James says:

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” James 4:7

So as you flee temptations, Draw near to Him! Flee to Him!. Love Him, Sing songs to HIM,
Worship HIM, Pray to HIM,

HE IS OUR SAVIOUR!

In Christ the Victor...

We have the assurance of salvation for those who believe

We have the power of the Holy Ghost to help us resist temptation.

We have the power of prayer, to deliver us from the evil one!

We have everything we need!

In a moment we will sing

“We have peace that outlasts darkness, Because of Hope that's in the blood
There's future grace that's mine today, That Jesus Christ has won – He is Christus Victor!
So we can face tomorrow, For tomorrow's in His hands!
For All we need He will provide, Just like He always has!
We are fighting a battle, our Saviours already won!”

Amen? If we sing that, let's live in the freedom of that too! Amen?