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JESUS—LORD OVER ALL

Luke 4:31-44

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Luke Lesson 17

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While I appreciate our American form of government, the down side of it is that it fosters a lousy concept of what it means to submit to authority. Democracy and our Bill of Rights mean that we can challenge anyone, from the President on down. Nobody can tell us what to do! We have our rights! We won't submit unless we're forced to submit!

About the closest thing we have to learning submission is the military, at least as it used to be. I've heard that now the military practices sensitivity toward recruits. But I'll never forget the most inappropriately named man I've ever met, Mr. Angel. He was the guy in charge of us recruits for the first week of Coast Guard boot camp. He was built like Clint Eastwood, tall, lean and mean. His reputation went before him, so that everyone feared him before he set foot in our barracks.

The first time Mr. Angel flung the door open and stomped in, cursing at the top of his voice, no one in our company said, "You don't have a right to talk to us like that!" When Mr. Angel said, "Hit the floor, you no good bunch of (expletives deleted)," we all hit the floor instantly. Then he said, "You stupid bunch of lame-brained idiots! Don't you know how to respond to a command? When I give a command, you had better say, 'Sir, aye, aye, Sir!' and then obey." If your response was a bit delayed or not quite as enthusiastic as Mr. Angel had envisioned, you found yourself suddenly hanging by your lapels at eye level with this furious mad man who was snarling unkind profanities and informing you of his plans for doing you great bodily harm. The Coast Guard's reason for throwing you into the arena with a guy like Mr. Angel was to teach you that when someone in authority spoke, you had better listen and obey immediately.

From the outset of his gospel, Luke wants to establish the point that Jesus Christ is in authority. He is Lord over all, and thus the proper response to Him is to submit to Him and do what He

says. After showing us how Jesus was rejected in His hometown of Nazareth, Luke doesn't want anyone to get the mistaken idea that Jesus is not Lord. So he walks us through a Sabbath day with Jesus, showing us how He preached the Word, cast out demons, and healed the sick with authority. He wants us to see that ...

Because Jesus is Lord over all, we should submit to Him and serve to further His purpose.

Have you ever wondered what a typical day was like for Jesus? Our text shows us a typical Sabbath day for our Lord. He went to the synagogue, where He taught the Word. While there He healed a demon-possessed man, the first miracle recorded in Luke. Then he went over to Simon Peter's home for dinner. Simon's mother-in-law (Peter was married) was ill with a high fever (only Luke, the physician, notes that it was a *high* fever), and Jesus healed her. Instantly, she arose with enough strength to serve the Lord and the other guests. Then, after sundown, when the Sabbath was over, the whole town lined up at Peter's door with their sick loved ones, and Jesus healed them. Early the next morning, Jesus slipped away to a quiet place (Mark, not Luke, tells us it was for prayer, even though Luke often emphasizes Jesus' prayer life). The crowds found Him and entreated Him to return, but Jesus refused, explaining that He had a mission to preach to the other cities also.

These incidents show us clearly who Jesus is, but also we see ourselves and how we should respond to Him.

1. Jesus is Lord over all.

The clear theme here is Jesus' authority, seen in three areas:

- A. Jesus taught the Word with authority.

Note 4:31, 32: Jesus "was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were amazed at His teaching; for His message was with authority." The synagogue crowd was probably used to rabbis who would cite other rabbis and speculate on what they thought the Scripture meant. But Jesus spoke plainly and clearly, saying, "This is what God means by this Scripture and this is how you should obey it." He spoke as one sent from God who knew what God declares. He wasn't offering helpful hints for happy living. He proclaimed the sovereign

authority of God and called people to obey His authoritative Word.

Note also the emphasis on Jesus' preaching in 4:43, 44. When the people came out to persuade Him to return to Capernaum, Jesus refused, explaining that He had to preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for He was sent for this purpose. And that is precisely what He did: "He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea" (meaning here, all of Palestine). Let's apply this:

First, *Since Jesus emphasized the preaching of the Word, so must we.* In every age there has been an attempt to diminish the importance of preaching God's Word. This is no accident, since Satan knows that the Word of God is powerful unto the conversion of sinners and the edification of the saints. One of the main factors in the Reformation was the recovery of the preaching of the Word in churches that had become accustomed to a priest droning in Latin through a bunch of rituals. John Calvin put an emphasis on explaining and applying God's Word from the pulpit in a systematic way. He taught through the Bible, verse by verse.

In his excellent book, *Calvin's Preaching* [Westminster/John Knox Press], T. H. L. Parker notes that Calvin's "high view of preaching did not meet with universal approval either outside Geneva or within" (p. 9). There were many who complained that they did not like Calvin's emphasis on the authority of the Word and the need to reform our lives in obedience to God. In a sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16, on the way God's inspired Word gives reproof and correction, so as to train us in righteousness, Calvin addresses those who complained that they didn't want his hard sermons on holiness: "What! Is this the way to teach? Ho! We want to be won by sweetness." "You do? Then go and teach God his lessons!" "Ho! We want to be taught in another style." "Well, then, go to the devil's school! He will flatter you enough—and destroy you" (cited by Parker, p. 14).

As in Calvin's day, so in ours, there are those who say that preaching is not needed, that it is not in tune with our times, that people can't bear to hear messages filled with doctrines that make them think and that exhort them to obey. So many churches have turned to what J. Vernon McGee used to call, "sermonettes for Christianettes." But just as the preaching of the Word brought

Reformation in Calvin's day, so it will in our day, if we are receptive to God's authoritative Word of Truth.

Second, *Since Jesus emphasized the authority of God's Word and the need for obedience, so must we.* Jesus, of course, spoke with an authority which no other preacher can imitate, because Jesus is the Son of God. But, at the same time, Jesus upheld the authority of Scripture and the need for us to submit to it. Luke reports that Jesus was sent to preach the kingdom of God (4:43). Much could be said about the kingdom, but at bare minimum, it is the place where Jesus is Lord and people are subject to Him. Leon Morris sums it up as "God's rule in action" (*Luke* [IVP/Eerdmans], p. 111). The kingdom of God is both present and yet future. It is present to the extent that people live in submission to God's authoritative Word. It is future in that the day is coming when Jesus will return and rule with a rod of iron on the throne of David. In His earthly ministry, Jesus always upheld the authority of Scripture and the need for us to obey it (see Matt. 5:17, 18).

Thus when we come to the Word, we must study it for understanding, because we cannot obey what we do not know. But our knowledge should always be with a view to obedience. As Calvin put it in the same sermon, "The Word of God is not to teach us to prattle, not to make us eloquent and subtle and I know not what. It is to reform our life, so that we desire to serve God, to give ourselves entirely to him and to conform ourselves to his good will" (Parker, p. 15).

Third, *Since Jesus unswervingly devoted Himself to His mission to preach the kingdom of God, so must those whom He has called to preach.* There were many good things that could have distracted Jesus from His purpose, such as going back to Capernaum and having a more extensive healing ministry. But He refused the pleas of the people and did not get sidetracked from the purpose for which God sent Him. Again, there are many great causes and activities that pastors can get involved with. I see many pastors who spend the bulk of their time organizing programs and serving on committees and many other things, most of which are worthwhile activities. But if God has called a man to preach, then he had better devote himself to the ministry of the Word, and not get bogged down with all these other obligations (Acts 6:4).

Thus, Jesus' lordship is seen in that He taught the Word with authority. Also,

B. Jesus cast out demons with authority.

Luke shows us, first with the man in the synagogue and then with many who came to Peter's door, that Jesus had authority over evil spirits. Did you know that outside of the Gospels, there are only four references to demon-possession in the whole Bible: two in the Old Testament (Saul, 1 Sam. 16:14 ff.; the deceiving spirits in the mouths of Ahab's prophets, 1 Kings 22:22 ff.) and two in the Book of Acts (the Philippian servant girl, 16:16 ff.; the sons of Sceva, 19:13 ff.; see Norval Geldenhuys, *Luke* [Eerdmans], p. 174)? It seems that when Jesus began to minister, the powers of hell knew that they were in a battle to the death, and so Satan unleashed his forces to oppose Jesus.

Luke reports that this man in the synagogue had a spirit of an unclean demon. This probably refers to moral impurity. The demon impelled the man, above and beyond his own lusts, to immoral behavior. Who knows how long this man had sat in that synagogue week after week, listening to the droning of the rabbis, not disturbed by what he heard. Perhaps he had been able to hide his problem from public view up to this time. But when Jesus preached, the demon recognized Jesus' power and purity, and he cried out through the man's voice, "Ha! What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

Jesus silenced the demon and without any hocus pocus or incantations, He simply commanded it to come out of the man and it obeyed. The reason Jesus silenced this demon and the others who were proclaiming Him to be the Son of God (4:41) is that He did not need or desire the testimony of these evil witnesses, even though what they said was true. The demons believe in God, but they shudder (James 2:19) because they are under His judgment.

Demonic forces are very much at work in our world today, although sometimes they are given more credit than they deserve. The world and the flesh are usually quite capable of dragging us into sin without demonic influence. Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and thus cannot be possessed by demons, but believers

can come under demonic attack (Eph. 6:10-20) and opposition (2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Thess. 2:18). Evil spirits are sometimes behind false doctrine, and thus we must be discerning (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1).

If you or a family member have any involvement with the occult, such as astrology, ouija boards, fortune telling, seances, etc., either deliberately or innocently, you must repent of these evil practices and get rid of any paraphernalia related to them. While believers should not go around looking for confrontations with demons, if you come in contact with a demonic person, you can claim the name and power of the Lord Jesus Christ over that demon and command it to leave. But, remember, even Michael the archangel did not dare pronounce a railing judgment against Satan, but rather said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9). Demons are frighteningly powerful forces for evil, but greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). The power to overcome demons is not in us, but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Jesus healed the sick with authority.

Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and then He healed many from the town who lined up at Peter's door that evening. While Mark 1:31 says that Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, Luke reports that He rebuked the fever. I think the reason Luke mentions this is to emphasize Jesus' authority. Just as later Jesus would rebuke the raging wind and sea (Luke 8:24), showing His authority over the forces of nature, so here he rebukes the fever to show that He is the Lord over disease. Note, also, that Luke distinguishes between demon possession and disease (4:40, 41). While some illness can be due to demonic power, clearly not all illness is due to demonic power. To go around rebuking the demon of cancer or whatever disease is not in line with Scripture.

There is much confusion today because some teach that Jesus' promise to the disciples, that they would do greater works than He did (John 14:12), means that we should routinely be seeing miracles of healing and even resurrections from the dead. If that's what Jesus meant, then Paul was in sin when he told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach ailments (1 Tim. 5:23). He should have told him to claim his healing by faith. Paul must have lacked faith when he told Timothy that he left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). Why didn't he heal him? When the author to the He-

brews wrote to this second-generation church, they had to be reminded of the signs and wonders that the apostles had performed (Heb. 2:4). It is obvious that those miracles already had diminished in frequency. To claim that we should be experiencing the same frequency of miracles that Jesus did is to misunderstand the purpose of miracles in the Bible.

Contrary to what many think, miracles are not uniformly distributed throughout the Bible. They occur mostly in clusters around the time of Moses, again with Elijah and Elisha, a few in Daniel's time, and at the time of Christ and the apostles. These were all crucial periods of God's dealings with His people.

There were several reasons for Jesus' miracles. First, they authenticate His person and teaching, proving Him to be the Messiah sent by the Father (see Luke 7:20-22). Second, the miracles show us who Jesus is. He feeds the 5,000 and claims to be the bread of life. He claims to be the light of the world and opens the eyes of a man born blind. Third, the miracles give symbolic lessons of spiritual truth. The sick and the dead represent the human race, broken under sin. Without Christ, they are helpless. But when He speaks the word, they are instantly cured. Thus the miracles show us God's great gift of salvation. Finally, the miracles show us either implicitly or explicitly how we should respond to Jesus Christ. We must come to Him in our utter helplessness and cast ourselves totally on His mercy and power. The miracles also warn us how not to come to Jesus, since many sought after Him not so that they could follow Him as Lord, but just to use Him for their own selfish purposes. An evil and adulterous generation seeks after miracles.

Let me give some brief guidelines about seeking God's miraculous healing today. First, check your motive. God's glory, not your comfort, should be foremost (Phil. 1:20). Second, submit to the Lord, who knows better than you do what is best in any situation. Paul thought it would be best to get rid of the thorn in his flesh. God knew otherwise (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Third, don't limit God by unbelief (Mark 6:5, 6). God is able to do the impossible, if it's His will. So, pray for miraculous healing, believing that God is able, but recognize that it may not be His will. Fourth, look for the spiritual lessons God is trying to teach you in the trial. There may be a sin you need to confess (James 5:13-16). You may need to

learn to trust God in a greater way (2 Cor. 1:8, 9). You may need to learn to focus more on the things above and the hope of heaven (Col. 3:1-4). You may need to rearrange your priorities (Matt. 6:33). God uses affliction to conform us to the image of His Son, and so instant, miraculous healing is often not His will.

Thus Jesus' authoritative teaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick shows that He is Lord over all. It follows that ...

2. We should submit to Jesus and serve to further His purpose.

I can only touch on three lessons:

- A. We should willingly submit to Jesus because of our desperately needy condition.

These incidents show the human race under Satan's cruel dominion, broken and wounded under the effects of the fall. We should look at the demoniac in the synagogue, at Peter's sick mother-in-law, and at the long line of sick people lined up at Peter's door that evening and see ourselves spiritually. The human race is under the curse of the fall, captives in Satan's domain of darkness, headed for spiritual judgment, the second death.

I like to watch people when I'm in a public setting. It's fun to imagine what they are like, to think about their lives. But it also can be sad, because every person you see is in the process of dying. With some it's not so obvious yet—they're young and healthy. But others walk with a limp, their bodies are maimed or scarred, their physical features are marred by the hard things they have endured. Like the bumper sticker says, "Life is tough—and then you die."

I don't know how many families there were in Capernaum, but when they heard that Jesus was at Peter's house and that He could heal, they lined up en masse. I wonder if any home in Capernaum was not represented? That scene could be multiplied in every town and village in the world. It's a graphic picture of the desperate, needy condition of the human race before God. In light of that great need, we all should cast ourselves on His mercy and submit to Jesus as Lord, because He is the only Savior.

- B. We should willingly submit to Jesus because of His great compassion and care.

Jesus could have quieted the crowd and then prayed, "In the name of the Father, you all are healed." Instantly, everyone in the crowd would have been healed. They could have gone home, and Jesus would have had an easier night. But instead, He laid His hands on each one (4:40), showing His compassion and care for the individual. The Bible is clear that we must come to Jesus on an individual basis, and that when we do, He will deal with us personally and compassionately, like a shepherd with his sheep. Jesus does not beat His wounded sheep. He tenderly binds up their wounds and pours healing oil on their sores. You are invited to cast all your cares on Him, because He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7).

C. We should willingly serve Jesus to further His purpose.

The people of Capernaum *used* Jesus to get healed, but they did *not submit* to Him and *serve* Him. In fact, they wanted to hinder Him from His purpose by keeping Him to themselves. Later, Jesus condemned the people of Capernaum, because in spite of the many miracles they had seen, they did not repent (Matt. 11:20-24). But Peter's mother-in-law pictures the proper response for those who have experienced the Savior's healing touch: she arose and began to serve Him (4:39). The danger is that we will use Jesus for whatever need we have and then, after He does what we want, we set Him aside and go on with our personal agendas.

Conclusion

If we see our true condition before God, we're all like those people in Capernaum—wounded, sick, and needy. We need to do as they did and come to Jesus. When you do that, He deals with you personally, touching your ugly sores and imparting His cleansing and healing to your soul. Then you have a choice: Like the people of Capernaum, you can walk away and never truly believe in and follow the Lord Jesus. Or, like Peter's mother-in-law, you can rise up and immediately begin serving Him out of gratitude. That is the only reasonable and proper response if you've felt the Sovereign Lord's healing touch in your heart.

Discussion Questions

1. How are American churches belittling preaching? How can we help Christians see their need for sound doctrine?

2. How can we know if a problem is demonic or just "normal"?
3. Agree/disagree: If we had more faith we would see more miraculous healings?

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