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# Knowing Jesus

## **The Authority of Christ**

**Luke 4:31-44**

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**1/20/2019**

**Main Idea: Jesus' words and actions displayed that the kingdom of God is on the move.**

**Lesson Objective: Trust in the saving power of Jesus.**

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## Introduction

*As your class time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**When you hear the word mission, what thoughts or images come to mind?  
Have you ever been on a short-term mission trip?**

The passages for today describe a short trip Jesus took to Capernaum from His hometown of Nazareth. It demonstrates that from the very beginning, Jesus meant His message to move outward to the whole world. As followers of Christ, we are called to be on the move for the sake of fulfilling His mission. This movement may not always take us on a literal journey, but it should cause us to act for the sake of gospel advancement.

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## Authority in the Message

### Luke 4:31-32

*<sup>31</sup> And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, <sup>32</sup> and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#).*

Last week we studied how Jesus had announced his ministry in Nazareth, the town where he grew up. His announcement came after His baptism and temptation. When Jesus went “public” with His identity as Messiah and His intention to usher in the Kingdom of God, His message was rejected in his hometown and Jesus’ response is what brings us to the point of our passage. We see that Jesus left Nazareth and headed toward the region of the Sea of Galilee. It may seem odd to us that the Bible mentions that Jesus went down to Capernaum, when on the map the city is actually above Nazareth. However, Nazareth is roughly 1,300 feet above sea level, while Capernaum is 695 feet below sea level.

Jesus met with the people in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. The synagogue was meeting place and prayer hall of the Jewish people since antiquity. During the time of Jesus, the term “synagogue” referred both to a group of people and/or a building or institution. Although these notions are not mutually exclusive, it is quite probable that at its inception the synagogue did not refer to an actual building, but to a group or community of individuals who met together for worship and religious purposes (This is similar to the same use of our word “church.”). The synagogue was so important and central an institution to Jewish life in Palestine that there are records of as many as 480 of them existing in Jerusalem in the time around the ministry of Paul. Josephus, a

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historian from antiquity, emphasized the centrality of the reading of Scripture and the importance of study found in the times of Jesus' ministry.<sup>1</sup> We can see this as Jesus chose to visit the synagogues. Later in the book of Acts, Paul's main strategy for the proclamation of the gospel was revealed. It was to visit the local synagogue and teach the people from the Holy Scriptures about the life and works of Jesus Christ.

A typical day in the synagogue would focus on different readings from the Scriptures. The participants would have read from the Torah first and then read from the prophets. After reading from the prophets, they would comment on particular passages that were read. The instructor would typically sit on a type of stool in front of the men, while they sat in "bleacher" style seats rising up from the main floor. During those days, women were not common visitors in the synagogues because of the use of the Hebrew language (Only men were allowed to learn Hebrew due to the Jewish traditions. There may have been some women, but it would have been extremely rare.).

The discussion of the Holy Scriptures would come from known rabbinical interpretations from the text. For example, when a passage was read and the instructor was seated, he would quote other rabbis' thoughts or commentaries that he had learned in order to explain the passage. We see this commonly today as preachers and teachers use other sources outside of the Bible in hopes of explaining the Biblical text in a way that people can better understand them. However, when Jesus spoke up, He was different. He didn't speak or quote from others. He was the ultimate authority, and the people noticed. He didn't need to quote from others. His message came directly from God. This

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<sup>1</sup> Eric M. Meyers, "[Synagogue: Introductory Survey](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 251–252.

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was very different! But there again, Jesus wasn't just a rabbi; He was the Son of God. This caused the people to notice right away that there was something different about Jesus than the other rabbis. Any time we see Jesus speaking of the Scriptures, we will see that the people were amazed at His knowledge and understanding.

This does not mean that we cannot or should not use notes or resources in our sermons and lessons. God has blessed us tremendously by giving us vast resources in Biblical studies so that we can understand and explain the Biblical meaning to an ever-changing culture. Jesus' example comes because He was God in the flesh. He was there when those passages were written, and He didn't need others to tell Him what they thought it meant. He spoke as if He had written the words on the page, which by understanding the doctrine of inspiration, He played a major role in the writings.

**Why did he go to Capernaum? (See the context from verses 21-30.)**

**Why were the people amazed with Jesus' teachings?**

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## Authority over Evil

### Luke 4:33-37

*<sup>33</sup> And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, <sup>34</sup> “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.” <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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!” <sup>37</sup> And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)*

While Jesus was in the synagogue, there was a man who was demon possessed. This should strike us as being very odd, because why would the demon go to a place that was designated as a place of worship of the LORD? This is a warning to us all that just being in a church building does not keep us from being harassed by Satan’s tactics. There is no doubt that Satan has used many organized religious groups to cause havoc on mankind and their pursuit of God. Sitting in a sanctuary will not make you sanctified!

We see that the demon recognized Jesus and knew of His background and identity as “the Holy One of God.” These synonyms *Christ, Lord, Son, and Son of Man* were evident to the demons who knew who Jesus really was. We are not told how the demons knew Jesus’ identity, but the assumption is that they possessed supernatural knowledge and thus recognized him.

Demon possession is too frequent and integral to the Gospel narratives to minimize or worse, to discard it as Hellenistic superstition. Significantly, Jesus was confronted by demonic activity during his first public ministry following the introductory sermon at Nazareth, where He proclaimed the “good news” to His

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hometown. Jesus' proclamation of the good news was a direct attack on the forces of evil. Luke wants us to understand the centrality of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry and in that of his disciples. A holy war is being launched and, as v. 34 suggests, the demons know it. This war will be carried on by Jesus' disciples, which should include us.

The possessed man shrieks and utters an expression of "indignant surprise." The word "**Ha**" is followed by an idiomatic rhetorical question "**What have you to do with us?**") that may be rendered, "Why this interference?" The demon, perhaps exemplifying James's comment that "the demons believe and shudder" (James 2:19), senses the purpose of Jesus' presence. In keeping with the pattern in the Gospels, testimony to the truth about Christ comes from a number of different and unexpected sources. The term "**the Holy One of God**" contrasts strongly with the remark that this was an unclean demon.

Jesus responded sternly with a command to be silent. In Jesus' action we may see the beginning of a pattern of prohibiting the premature proclamation of his identity. Throughout the Gospels Jesus guards the fact of his messiahship, probably (1) to prevent a misinterpretation that would draw to him revolutionary minded dissidents seeking a leader against Rome; (2) to allow his messianic works themselves to establish his authority among true believers (cf. 7:18–23); and (3) to avoid an inappropriate self-proclamation as Messiah, especially if there was, as it now appears, an understanding that the true Messiah would allow others to proclaim him as such, rather than doing so himself. If none of these is the reason here, Jesus is at least maintaining his authority by silencing the enemy.

What follows is not technically an exorcism because Jesus does not use an incantation or invoke the authority of another. Instead he speaks a simple

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word of command on His own authority. Luke, always interested in the physical condition of people, observes that the demon came out violently but without hurting the man. Once again Luke notes the amazement of the people. The astonishment this time is not only at His teaching and authority but also at His power over evil. Luke's theme of the spread of the gospel finds expression in the conclusion of verse 37.<sup>2</sup> The message of Jesus began with religious insiders and moved to outsiders. The trajectory of the early days of Jesus' ministry emphasized the inside-out orientation of His message. Jesus was announcing the Kingdom of God. That announcement began 2,000 years ago in Galilee. It continues, even today, to expand to fill the Earth. As followers of Jesus today, we are to be the ones continually moving to bring gospel advancement to the whole world.

**What acts of Jesus are described during His time in Capernaum?**

**How did His actions support the message He brought?**

**Have you ever witnessed a miracle or a dramatic answer to prayer?**

**How did that event support Jesus' claim to be the Son of God?**

**Why do you think Jesus command the demons not to speak of him?**

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<sup>2</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "[Luke](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 872–873.

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## Authority over Sickness

### Luke 4:38-41

*<sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.*

*<sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> 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. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)*

Jesus' authority also extended to physical illness. As He had done with the demon, Jesus rebuked the fever, and Simon Peter's mother-in-law was immediately healed. As a result, word of Jesus' authority over sickness spread through Capernaum. He laid His hands on many people with various diseases, healing all of them.

The ability to perform great miracles will always, always imply that Jesus has great power. However, Luke uses these stories to teach far more than this. First, the miracles will give insight into Jesus' identity. Although Jesus does not publicly reveal his identity until the end of the Gospel, the miracles offer hints to those who have eyes to see. Jesus will be seen as one who has power over nature, demons, disease, disabilities, and even death. Jesus will display his power over Satan and his various agents, and he will on several occasions do that which only God can do, giving the onlookers a glimpse at his divine nature. Secondly, Luke emphasizes that Jesus' power is not available to just anyone. Those who are the recipients of Jesus' miracles are almost always those who show great faith. Luke underscores this teaching by repeating it many times. He

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is especially fond of the expression, “Your faith has saved you,” using it in 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42. Luke is telling his readers that one must have faith in order to receive Jesus’ marvelous blessings.

<sup>3</sup>Thirdly, Luke makes it clear that Jesus’ miracles do not often lead to faith those who observe them. They cause wonder, amazement, and much talk, but rarely do people come to faith as a result. Luke’s point seems to be that those with closed minds and hearts will not believe, no matter what the evidence. Some will even attribute Jesus’ exorcisms to the devil (11:15). Others will ask Jesus for spectacular miraculous signs to prove that he is from God (11:16, 29–33). Jesus refuses each time, saying that it is “a wicked generation” which asks for a miraculous sign. His belief is that those who are looking for God’s activity in the world will respond to his preaching. The desire to see a miracle is a sign of unbelief and a hard heart. Jesus’ attitude is well summarized in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (16:31).

Jesus rebuked the sickness. This leaves the strong impression that demons were able to cause some diseases. On the other hand, Luke could have personified the fever for emphasis on the active force of Jesus’ word. We can see that immediately there was a change in Peter’s mother in law. Sickness must obey the commands of the Master.

As He healed the physical diseases of many people in Capernaum, Jesus also cast out more demons. As with the demon in the man in the synagogue, the demons identified Jesus as divine. Jesus rebuked the demons for revealing

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<sup>3</sup> Mark C. Black, [Luke](#), College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub., 1995), Lk 4:31–37.

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that He was the Messiah because they were attempting to assert control over Him by revealing who He was before the appropriate time.

Ministry for Jesus is the same as ministry by Jesus. It is ministry of kingdom “good news.” It is telling people who Jesus is: the anointed Messiah, Son of God, the Holy One of God come to help the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the oppressed. It is acting on behalf of people in need: healing all kinds of diseases and overcoming anything that would oppress people and rob them of God’s freedom. It is sending people back to their own ministry of serving others. It is opposing Satan in all his guises: tempter, kingdom giver, adversary, ministry planner, theology teacher, and evil spirit inhabiting and inhibiting people.

Such ministry brings many responses. Sadly, too often the responses hurt. Friends and family do not understand. Those we help demand more help rather than joining us in faith and ministry. All have alternatives to ministry that lead to success in the world’s style, but do not come from the Father. Ministry not guided by relationship with the Father is not ministry at all. Ministry is being anointed by the Spirit to carry on the work of the Son in obedience to the Father who sends us.<sup>4</sup>

One other dynamic is worth noting: after He healed their diseases, the people of Capernaum were clamoring for more of Jesus. They wanted Him to stay in their town, do more miracles, maybe settle down there. But Jesus’ mission kept Him on the move. We are guilty of Capernaum’s sin when we keep Jesus to ourselves rather than sharing Him freely and openly with outsiders.

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<sup>4</sup> Trent C. Butler, [Luke](#), vol. 3, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 67.

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**How are you currently on the move (literally or figuratively) for the sake of the gospel?**

**How does the inside-out nature of the gospel serve to reconcile broken relationships between individuals and even between cultures?**

**How have you been guilty of keeping Jesus to yourself? How do you need to act to change this? Who is one person you need to tell about Him?**