

When Jesus Talks ...

Luke 4:31-39

In the early 1980s, brokerage firm E.F. Hutton ran a memorable advertising campaign. Two individuals would be talking privately about their respective investments, when one would say “Well, my broker is E. F. Hutton, and he says ...”. At that cue, deafening silence ensued as every person in the scene instantly became attentive to whatever E. F. Hutton might have to say. It didn’t matter if the setting was a crowded street, a busy restaurant or even a maxed-out sports arena. The voiceover made it all clear that “When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen.”

Then, E.F. Hutton had enough credibility with investors to make such a bold statement, but by the end of the 80s, E.F. Hutton no longer existed. Poor leadership and fraud destroyed the company's credibility and, eventually, the company. So today, when E. F. Hutton talks, according to David Letterman, one simply answers, “Yes, I think I *would* like fries with that.”

When Jesus talks, I don’t know that we always listen as we should, but I know that to fail to pay attention is to our own heartache. When Jesus spoke, raging storms became calm, demons ran, blind eyes received sight, deaf ears were opened and atrophied limbs grew strong. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is Himself the Word of God, the full expression to man of the Father’s character. So when He spoke, He spoke the very words of God, and when we see His teachings recorded in sacred Scriptures today, we listen or we are certain to be disappointed.

When Jesus says, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), that is a conspicuously distinct message from this culture’s wishful mantra of “All roads lead to god.” We owe those who do not know Jesus our utmost clarity on the matter. When Jesus speaks to that which blesses us in our Christian walks and serves to shape us into His image, we owe it to ourselves to listen and obey.

Our text this morning focuses on a very early period in the earthly ministry of Jesus. But, one thing I noticed immediately this week as I was just doing my daily reading and happened to be in this text, was the awesome might that came forth from Jesus simply in the words that He spoke.

I. His Word is the Power that Refreshes Us (31, 32)

³¹Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. ³²They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

A. Capernaum Was a Suitable Base of Operation for this Teacher’s Early Ministry

As Jesus’ ministry was just getting underway, He settled in Capernaum rather than in His hometown of Nazareth, for that town had rejected Him as a prophet. They even tried to toss Him off a cliff, but He miraculously escaped. For the sake of His Gentile readers, Luke described Capernaum as “a town in Galilee”, but for those who lived in Palestine, Capernaum was well-known and proved to be a superior home-base for Jesus in terms of getting His name out.

Capernaum, a thriving town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, was the home of many commercial fishermen including Peter, Andrew, James and John. Matthew collected taxes there. Many craftsmen lived there. The town itself was located on the trade route that connected Damascus in the north to Tyre, Sidon and Jerusalem. Capernaum was also located on the “Way of the Sea”, a famous caravan route that connected the nations of the east with the Mediterranean Sea.

Capernaum meant “town of consolation” which may have referred to its pleasant climate. It was regarded as a kind of health resort, where people would come to rest and recuperate. There was much traffic in and out of Capernaum, which would serve to spread the fame of Jesus. The nature of Jesus’ ministry only enhanced the city’s reputation as a “town of consolation”.

B. Jesus’ Words Were a Breath of Fresh Air for an Age of Spiritual Staleness

Jesus developed a pattern of teaching in a particular synagogue on the Sabbath day. No doubt, the synagogue leader kept extending an invitation to Jesus because of the impact of His teaching. “They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.” Jesus was not a teacher of the law in any official sense, but He had a mastery of the Law that eclipsed that of any the recognized experts. Mark’s account of this story includes the phrase, “not as their teachers of the law” (Mark 1:22). No wonder Jesus was so unpopular with the Rabbis Local #427.

The teaching in most synagogues was less than riveting. That’s because ancient Jews didn’t have access to the Internet. Here’s what I found for coping with long sermons. **1)** Unobtrusively draw your arms up into your sleeves, and try to turn your shirt around backwards; **2)** Listen for your preacher to use a word beginning with ‘A’ then ‘B’ then ‘C’ and so on. **3)** If you get desperate, slap your neighbor. If he doesn’t turn the other cheek, raise your hand and tell the preacher.

When legal experts taught the law, they majored in frivolous, hair-splitting details about how to properly “do” ceremony. Few ever uttered an original commentary on the law. Mostly, they just cited long-dead rabbis. Jesus spoke of His own authority – “I say to you ...”. Conspicuously absent was any concern with justice, mercy, divine judgment or the mind of God. No wonder the teachers of the law failed so miserably at capturing the hearts of people. On the other hand, the people detected that Jesus’ “message” had authority. “Message” here refers to the full body of His teaching and not just to what He had to say on a given day. Jesus brought it all to life.

Jesus’ words resonated in an age of spiritual dryness. Our age today is anything but dry in terms of spiritual matters. On the contrary, everyone seems to be celebrating his spiritual side and touting his idea on what is true. How is the church to respond? Is their an argument to be made for learning the world’s language? I suppose there is. Should we feel a burden to be creative in our attempts to communicate with the world around us? We certainly don’t want to erect unnecessary barriers to communication because we are being stubbornly parochial.

But, let us concede that that we can become so preoccupied with the latest and most cutting-edge methods, that the innate power of the Gospel itself gets overlooked. The Word of God discloses the truth of God’s salvation to people who are hopelessly lost in their sins. It is not dependent on the cleverness of our presentation. Priority One is to proclaim the truth of Jesus with clarity and accuracy and to trust that it wields the power of salvation that the Bible says it wields.

II. His Word Is the Power that Rescues Us (33-37)

³³In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, ³⁴“Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!”

³⁵“Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

³⁶All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" ³⁷And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

A. The Power of this Mighty Deliverer Was Staggering

In a surreal scene, a demon, after screaming from fright and indignation, spoke to Jesus as if he knew Him. Sure, Jesus was an inspiring teacher and a miracle-worker, but this demon actually feared Him. He recognized something the witnesses could not yet grasp. Jesus had entered this world to introduce God's Kingdom into the fallen creation. A holy war commenced when the public ministry of Jesus began, and it made the demon nervous. He knew that he was looking at "the Holy One of God", but Jesus was not ready to disclose that, so he silenced the demon.

What followed was arguably not an exorcism in the sense that the first-century world understood them. It was exponentially greater. Exorcisms typically involved weird and complicated rituals, treatments and incantations. Jesus commanded the demon, "Come out!" William Barclay describes what they were accustomed to seeing:

"The east was full of people who could exorcise demons. But their methods were weird and wonderful. An exorcist would put a ring under the afflicted person's nose; he would recite a long spell; and then all of a sudden there would be a splash in a basin of water which he had put near to hand – and the demon was out!" ... "What a difference between all this hysterical paraphernalia and the calm single word of command of Jesus! It was his sheer authority that staggered them."

The demon knocked the man down, perhaps, the meaningless final gesture of a vanquished foe. In any event, the man was unhurt, but the people were blown away. "He just tells demons what to do and they mind. Who is He, really?" "And the news about him spread." Literally, the text is translated, "There went forth a rumor (or report)" That word for rumor or report is *echos* which is transliterated directly into English as "echo". News of Jesus resounded through the region.

Remember, this was a Sabbath day. Jesus would soon leave the synagogue and spend the rest of the day in the home of Simon (We know him better as Peter). The afternoon would be relatively quiet. People could only travel so far on a Sabbath day, and they could not seek out healing. But a Jewish day ends, and a new day begins not in the morning, but in the early evening, as daylight is coming to an end. But, look at verse 40 to note what occurred as the new day was beginning:

⁴⁰When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. ⁴¹Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.

B. Jesus' Words Still Rescue People from the Grip of Evil

Clearly, demonic possession is not as much a part of the daily landscape as it was when Jesus walked the earth, but does that mean that demons are no longer active at all? Sometimes, I hear credible tales of things going on in the world that only demonic terms can explain. I don't know how active they really are. Today, Satan might choose to be selective when unleashing his minions in a land that has at least heard of Christ, for demonic activity tends to send people running to God. On the other hand, it may be that demonic activity has been greatly restrained because Jesus has so commanded it.

Regardless of what is going on these days with demons, know that Jesus still speaks the Word that rescues people from the grip of evil. Earlier in chapter four, Jesus went to a synagogue in Nazareth before they had run Him off. He received a scroll of *Isaiah* from the ruler of the local synagogue. He went directly to what we know as chapter 61, and He read these words:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." – Luke 4:18, 19

Then, He sat down as a rabbi was expected to do before He began His lesson. They waited to see how He would expound on the text He had just read. Every eye was fixed on Him, and He said an amazing thing: "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

In the flesh, in the tiny regions of Galilee and Judea, Jesus began the work of reversing the curse that fell upon the human race when Adam sinned. Miraculous healings and deliverances from demons were only a part of the master plan. Jesus would break the back of sin once for all when He died on the cross in the place of sinners. Raised to life, Jesus has secured the final outcome. By His Spirit, we have the power to say, "No" to ungodliness, despite what our therapist might tell us, and, in God great and precious promises, we possess all we need to pursue godliness.

III. His Word Is the Power that Restores Us (38, 39)

³⁸Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. ³⁹So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.

A. This Great Physician Healed with a Simple Command

Luke, our author, was a doctor. English speakers miss the medical language in his writings. "Suffering from" was the normal medical term for a condition that was serious and chronic. To "suffer from" was to be laid up. This was not the "sniffles". Peter's mother-in-law was very sick. She had a "high", literally "great" fever. Ancient medicine delineated between great and lesser fevers. Obviously, they could not pinpoint a fever to a tenth of a degree with a thermometer.

Since Jesus was there anyway, the household asked Him to help her. He “bent over her”. In Mark’s account He took her by the hand, and simply “rebuked the fever.” Again, there was none of the prancing and chanting typical of an ancient faith healer. Jesus simply spoke. What He said in this instant was exactly what He would say later in a completely different, but equally remarkable circumstance. On Lake Galilee, a storm rose that threatened the lives of the disciples. Jesus “rebuked the wind and the raging waters” just as He rebuked the fever in this instance.

Had the fever broken by itself, the woman would have needed a few days to recuperate. But, when Jesus healed, He did so instantly and completely. Her response of ministering to the group is worth noting. No one can walk away from a life-changing encounter with Jesus and be unaffected. Serving Him was her only proper response. The Bible says that we are not saved by doing good works that earn God’s forgiveness, but it is quite clear that we were saved to do good works. Works do not earn grace, but they are the only proof that grace has done its work.

B. Jesus’ Word Still Clears Away the Residual Baggage of the Fall

Another hotly debated topic in Christian circles is physical healing. I do not know any believer that would question that God can and does heal out of His mercy, for His glory and according to His purposes. And so, out of our need, for His glory and according to His purposes, we pray for physical healing for ourselves and for others. We should. God invites us to do so. That said, there is great disagreement as to the veracity of so-called faith healers and to the notion that by faith, Christians are entitled to claim healing. Finally, the explanation for any Christian not receiving healing, that their faith is deficient, has, in fact, actually shipwrecked the fledgling faith of some.

A faith healer asked a man how his family was getting along. “They’re all fine,” the man said, “except my uncle. He’s very sick.” “Your uncle is not sick,” the faith healer said. “He only believes he is sick.” Two weeks later, the faith healer ran into the man on the street. “How is your uncle? Does He still believe he is sick?” The man shrugged, “Now He believes he’s dead.”

We can never separate the things Jesus did in His earthly ministry from His mission, which was to redeem a fallen race, to bring the Kingdom of God to this fallen world and to return to His Father to prepare a home for His own. In other words, all of this life anticipates a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal home of the righteous. So, while God is unrestrained from healing at His pleasure, to deliver His people from all the temporal burdens of this temporal world is not really at the heart of His redemptive purposes. And, in that regard, the Bible is quite clear.

¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. – 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

By faith, I know that my tears will be dried in heaven. I know that my aches and pains will be no more. But what I look forward to the most, I also concede is likely to be the area of me that requires most of God’s attention in the now. I am tired of sin. I am tired of failing to follow through on promises to God. I am tired of grieving the Holy Spirit by failing to be all that I should be in the lives of others, and I look forward to the day when the sin in me and the things around me that lead me in to sin will be gone. That’s the healing I hunger for the most.