

Westlake Church Lausanne (09.01.11)

Luke 4: 31-44

Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the word authority? How do you react to it?

When my daughter was 3 years old, after being asked to do something, she looked me straight in the eye and said, “I make the rules about me”.

Perhaps this tendency toward rebellion is ingrained in the genes of Americans after having rejected the authority of the British imperialists.

This is embodied in a statement by Thomas Jefferson:

Believe me, dear Sir: there is not in the British empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain than I do. But, by the God that made me, I will cease to exist before I yield to a connection on such terms as the British Parliament propose; and in this, I think I speak the sentiments of America.

—Thomas Jefferson, November 29, 1775

If such a rejection of authority is part of the US mindset, how much more is it ingrained in the Swiss way of thinking, with their direct democracy that can overturn decisions of the government!

I think that it is fair to say that the word “authority” is not particularly popular in today’s culture.

As we return to our sermon series in the book of Luke today, having taken a break during the Advent season, we will look at Luke 4:31-44, which is primarily about Jesus authority and the response to it.

Before we read the passage, let me remind you of where we were in our series in the book of Luke.

Remember that after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus was led into the desert where he was tempted by the devil for 40 days. After this, he returned to Galilee and began his public ministry by preaching in the synagogues. News about him spread and Luke 4:15 says that “everyone praised him”.

In the passage just preceding the one that we will focus on today, Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth and taught in the synagogue.

They were initially amazed by his teaching, but then turned violently against Him when he suggested that he was sent not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles as well.

That brings us to Today's passage: Luke 4:31-44. If you have your Bibles please turn there, otherwise it will be up on the screen.

It tells the account of one very busy day in Capernaum.

Read Luke 4:31-44.

³¹ And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³² and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. ³³ And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ "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." ³⁵ 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. 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!" ³⁷ And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

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

⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ 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.

⁴² And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³ but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." ⁴⁴ And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

As we look at this passage, there are 3 things that I would like us to consider:

(1) Jesus priority in teaching and preaching

(2) The content of Jesus teaching - the kingdom of God

(3) The authority of Jesus teaching.

The first point will be rather brief, I will spend most of the time on the second and third.

1. Jesus' priority in teaching and preaching

The first thing I would like us to think about is the priority that Jesus placed on teaching and preaching

³¹And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³²and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

This was Jesus custom, when he went to a new place, he would go into the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach. This is what he did in other towns in Galilee – it is what he had just done in Nazareth, and he does it here again in Capernaum.

If we jump to the end of the passage, we can see this even more clearly. After having spent probably the entire night healing people and casting out demons, the people of Capernaum wanted him to stay and continue.

⁴²And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³but he said to them, **“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”** ⁴⁴And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Verse 43 is as close to a mission statement from Jesus as we can get. He says that He was sent for this purpose of preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

And so he likely didn't heal everyone that he could have, and perhaps didn't cast out all the demons that he might have. He made preaching his priority.

This is a pretty strong statement and one that we should not consider lightly. He says that it is the reason that he came.

It is fair to say that since Jesus emphasized the preaching of the Word, in particular the good news of the Kingdom of God, so should we.

There is a tendency these days to deemphasize preaching. Put the emphasis on other aspects of church ministry.

Preaching and teaching the word of God should also be a priority for us.

Jesus said in the great commission: Matt 28:18-20

¹⁸ . . . “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. . . .”

With the authority that he has been given from the Father, he commissions us to make disciples of all nations and teach them all that he has commanded us.

We are in a unique position here in Lausanne. It is one of the most international places in the world. We sometimes are discouraged that people come and go. Just as we begin to develop good friendships their company transfers them to another part of the world. For those of us who are here long term, this can begin to get us down.

Rather than looking at this as a disadvantage, we need to recognize what an opportunity we have. People pass through this area for 2-3 years and have the opportunity to hear the gospel and to grow in it. And then they leave for all parts of the world and taking the Gospel with them. What a strategic place to be preaching the Gospel!

Perhaps you feel that preaching or evangelism is not your gift. You can still contribute to the spreading of the Gospel however by helping enable our pastor and others who preach to fully be devoted to it. Martin is a gifted preacher and needs to be able to make this a primary priority, without getting sidetracked by other things.

Any of you who are here early on a Sunday morning will see him hauling around these big speakers and setting up chairs. We need relieve our him from these responsibilities to allow him to make preaching his primary priority.

There may be others in the congregation who are gifted to do this. We should be training you up. We started this last fall when we had a preaching class where Mark gave a practice sermon.

Both the beginning and the end of the passage demonstrates his priority of teaching and preaching the Word of God. Everything in between is put in the context of this priority.

2. The content of Jesus teaching - the kingdom of God

Understanding the content of what Jesus taught is a key to understanding the rest of the passage.

⁴³ but he said to them, "I must preach the **good news of the kingdom of God** to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

What is the message that he preached? What is the good news of the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God was central to the teaching of Jesus – it is mentioned 148 times in the New Testament; 117 times by Jesus. It is important for us to understand what it means.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word kingdom?

The United Kingdom -- what constitutes it? England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This is nothing compared to the former British Empire. **SHOW SLIDE**

We normally think of a Kingdom as a territory, or perhaps its subjects. This is what the dictionary gives as a primary meaning.

If we interpret Jesus' statements about the kingdom of God in this way, however, many of them make no sense at all.

Jesus said:

*"The time has come, **the kingdom of God is near**. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15)*

What is it that is near? His subjects? The territory over which he has authority (which in the case of God would be both heaven and earth)?

Jesus said:

*"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not **receive the kingdom of God like a little child** will never enter it." (Mark 10:15)*

What is being received? . . . a territory? . . . subjects?

This is not the primary meaning of the Kingdom of God in the Bible. It can in some cases refer to a realm, but this is not its primary meaning – if so these passages we just read would not make sense.

A kingdom in the Bible is first and foremost **the authority to rule, the sovereignty of a king**.

This is perhaps best illustrated in the parable told by Jesus in Luke 19:11-12

The Parable of the Ten Minas

¹¹As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹²He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.

What is it that he received – not a territory or subjects. He received the authority to rule. (Jesus told this parable possibly with Herod in mind).

Once we understand this, much falls into place.

What are we to receive like a little child? His rule in our lives. We are to submit to His kingly authority with the innocence of a small child. We are asked to allow him to be the Lord of our lives.

But even having understood this, can we really say that God's kingdom has come near. If we look at the world around us, either in the time when Christ was born or today, it certainly doesn't appear that people obey God's kingly rule or authority.

One of the most surprising aspects of the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it was that it would not initially come in all its power and glory.

This illustrated by the parable that Jesus told in Matthew chapter 13. I won't read it but only summarize it.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. . . . (summarize story).

(Path, rocky soil, among thorns, good soil)

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the Kingdom of God -- His rule and power -- is that it did not come in the way people expected it. It is like a sower sowing seed. Falls on the ground. What it becomes depends not on the power and authority of the King or on the force with which it came, but rather on the nature of the soil on which it falls. Some falls on the path and is eaten by birds, some on rocky soil, some among thorns and some on good soil. What was perhaps most surprising aspect of the coming of God's Kingdom or rule in the person of Jesus, is that *people have the possibility to either accept or reject Him.*

And we already saw this in Jesus encounter with the people of Nazareth.

There will be a day, when Christ returns, that his sovereign rule will come in all its power and glory such that no one will be able to resist it. But for now, one has the possibility to reject it.

This was an aspect of the Kingdom of God that the Jews of Jesus time did not anticipate or expect. They expected to God to come in power and immediately destroy all opposition (such as the Romans).

3. The authority of Jesus teaching

Having now understood something of the content of Jesus teaching, I would like us notice the authority that it carried.

³¹And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³²and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

What was it about Jesus teaching that amazed people? He had not done any miracles to that point? What was different about his teaching?

The scribes at that time taught from tradition, citing the previous teachings of other scribes and rabbis and speculated on what they thought that the scripture meant. It was likely to be very academic.

Jesus didn't need to teach from tradition. He could speak out of His intimate knowledge of the Father and say, "This is what God means and this is how you should obey it"

The people were astonished at his teaching "His word possessed authority".

You can get a sense for this if we look back to his sermon to the people in Nazareth:

Remember, he picked up the scroll of Isaiah and read it, saying:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Then he rolled up the scroll and said, "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*"

His teaching clearly pointed to his identity - as the coming Messiah; although it took the people some time to understand it. He was his message.

It is unacceptable in our culture to speak with authority in spiritual matters.

In today's postmodern culture, absolute spiritual truth is a no-no. What is true for you is ok, but it may not be true for me. Something else may be true for me.

The only heresy is to say that heresy can exist - that is to say one thing is wrong and another is right.

You can be sure that this is not the way Jesus taught. He spoke as a messenger from God who what God wanted to say.

Jesus was not simply offering helpful tips for happy living. He proclaimed the sovereign authority of God and called people to obey his word.

And as his teaching focused on his identity, the forces of darkness reacted!

³³ And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ “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.”

There was a demon-possessed man in the synagogue, and all of a sudden he reacted quite violently to the teaching of Jesus. I think that we perhaps lose the significance of this event. Think of what it would be like if some possessed person stood up during one of our worship services and started screaming with a loud voice.

I am not going to go into a discussion of demon possession, but it is interesting to note that outside of the four Gospels, there are only four references to demon possession in the rest of the Bible. 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.

It is interesting to think how long this man had sat in the synagogue week after week listening to the droning of the rabbis. He didn't find their teaching particularly threatening. But when Jesus preached, the demon recognized Jesus power and authority and cried out through the man.

³⁵ 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.

Notice that Jesus cast him out of the man simply by his word - didn't wave his hands or recite any kind of incantations.

And notice also that the demon came out of him without harming the man - Jesus power protected him.

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!” ³⁷ And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

Jesus casting out of this demon amazed the people at the authority of His word - his logos.

Later on in the book of Luke Jesus is accused by some of the crowd of casting out demons by the power of Satan. At the end of this discussion he says:

Luke 11:20 ²⁰But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

His casting out of demons demonstrated his sovereign authority as King.

The kingly rule of God has come upon you.

The authority of Jesus word is also shown through healing.

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

By the language that Luke uses here in healing Peter's mother-in-law, he emphasizes the power and authority of Jesus word. He "rebuked" the fever and it left her. The same word that carried authority in teaching had the same authority for healing.

Notice that the healing of Simon's mother-in-law was immediate and complete - there was no recovery period as is typically the case with an illness. She was well enough to get up and serve them. It emphasizes his authority and power over sickness.

The purpose of the healing was not only to make Simon Peter's mother-in-law well - it was also a testimony to whom Jesus was.

⁴⁰Now 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. ⁴¹And 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.

As it was the Sabbath, people had to wait until sunset to be able to carry the sick to Jesus.

But they did - bringing him all who were sick. Some were just sick. Others were demon-possessed, and Jesus healed them all.

Notice the approachability of Jesus. His demonstration of power and authority did not make people afraid to come to him. And notice that he heals people one by one, laying his hands on them. He did not simply stand up over the entire group of them and heal them en masse. He interacted with each one of them.

This was one busy day for Jesus – having started by his teaching in the synagogue and casting out the demon – followed by healing Simon Peter’s mother-in-law and then what was likely intense night of healing and casting out demons – all of which demonstrated the power of the Kingdom – his sovereignty over spiritual forces and sickness.

⁴²And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” ⁴⁴And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

After this day you can understand that Jesus needed to go to a quiet place to recharge. But they came after him, asking him to stay.

But as we discussed, his purpose and priority was to preach the good news of the kingdom elsewhere.

4. Our response

The good news of the kingdom of God is that God’s sovereign power and authority has broken into this world in the person of Jesus.

Jesus said in Matt. 28:18 – All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

We need to ask the question – why is this good news?

It is because of the kind of Ruler He is.

The Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Philippians:

Phil 2:5-11

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He is a ruler who humbled himself on the cross to rescue us. A God of grace.

How do you respond to God's rule in your life? Do you submit to it?

If you are a non-Christian – will you submit to the ruler of the universe? One who is willing to give his life for you on the cross.

To those of you who have made a commitment to follow Christ: Is Jesus your Lord, or is he only your savior?

What was the response of those in Capernaum? They didn't want him to leave. But ultimately did they believe and submit to his rule on their lives?

Apparently not. Later in Matthew 11:23 Jesus comments on their unbelief:

²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Contrast this with Peter's mother-in-law.

. . . and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

What will your response be to God's sovereign rule in your life?