

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MINISTRY

Week One | May 20, 2018 | Jesus is Sovereign Over the Spiritual World

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 4:31-37 and 8:26-39. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Through His ministry of word and deed, Jesus reveals that He is more than a good teacher. He is Lord over the spiritual world.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Because Jesus is Lord over the spiritual world, we who are spiritually needy can come to Him to find rest for our souls.

MEDITATE

"Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him" (Luke 8:39).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *If you asked the people in your workplace, school, or neighborhood who Jesus Christ was, what do you think they would say?*

Q: *Evaluate these answers. Are they partially true or completely false?*

“Who was Jesus Christ?” This question was asked in a street-side survey and premiered in a popular BBC documentary on the life of Christ. As you can imagine, they received rather interesting answers. “Someone who helped people and they like him a lot,” one person said. “Just a messenger of God,” “A really good guy,” “A great teacher,” others claimed. Several responded by saying, “I don’t really know.” Though these answers may seem quite different from one another, most of them reveal the same underlying idea about who the Real Jesus was—an excellent moral teacher and a really good person who did many helpful things for people. This is the overwhelmingly popular view of Jesus in modern society. Many people hold Him in high regard for His teaching and service, just like they might esteem Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr.

There is no doubt that Jesus did many good things for people and that He was an exceptional teacher. But Luke tells us He was much more than that. Interestingly enough, holding Jesus alongside other honorable historical figures known for their teaching and service is a way of *denying* who He really is, the Son of God. According to Luke, we can encounter the Real Jesus by looking at His ministry, which included both word and deed—proclamation of God’s truth and actions that bring restoration and reconciliation to a broken reality.

As we study His words and His actions, we see that His teaching and His service are life-changing precisely because Jesus is the Son of God who has full control over everything—the spiritual world, the physical world, the ordinary, and the religious. He is greater than things that defeat us, like sickness, disease, and sin. He is greater than the societal norms, pressures, and values that run contrary to God’s nature and His plan for us. Through His words and His deeds, Jesus does far more than give us rules to live by or encourage us with stories of how He healed people. He turns our worlds upside down—or perhaps, right side up. Encountering Him involves far more than picking up a few interesting concepts He taught a long time ago, but rather being radically transformed from the inside out.

Q: *Discuss how a partially true answer about who Jesus was is really a completely false answer.*

Q: *Why do you think there is a resistance in popular culture to call Jesus the Son of God?*

|| UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

To start our study on the Real Jesus, we first looked at the author of the book of Luke, his purpose, and his audience. We also encountered key figures like John the Baptist, the line of people who awaited Jesus arrival, and also the spiritual entities that were soon to be defeated. We learned that Jesus' significance is both historical and theological. The book of Luke is the most historically reliable document on the life and ministry of Jesus. It provides striking detail and accurate descriptions of Jesus' context and the particulars of His life. Luke spent many years researching and interviewing eyewitnesses in order to provide such an accurate and reliable account. However, Luke also teaches us that if we want to truly encounter the Real Jesus, we need more than a list of historical or scientific facts. We need to look at the evidence through the lens of theological significance. In other words, we must hold the facts of Jesus' life alongside the bigger story of God's redemptive plan.

Today we will begin our study of Jesus' ministry. While many people consider Jesus a good teacher and a nice guy, Luke will show us that He is much more than that. Through His words and deeds, we learn that Jesus is sovereign over all things, including the spiritual world.

1. FORCES OF EVIL KNOW WHO JESUS IS

2. FORCES OF EVIL ARE TERRIFIED BY JESUS

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

FORCES OF EVIL KNOW WHO JESUS IS

|| LUKE 4:31-37

Q: *What did the demon know about Jesus?*

Q: *What effect did Jesus' word have in this passage? Can you think of other examples in the Bible where God's words were powerful and effective?*

In the early stages of His ministry, Jesus went to Capernaum, a small town on the upper northwest shore of the sea of Galilee. Luke writes that Jesus went down to Capernaum. This isn't a throw-away sentence. While Jerusalem was 1,200 feet above sea level, Capernaum was nearly 700 feet below sea level. This small detail may seem insignificant at first, but it reminds us of Luke's passion for historical accuracy and his desire to present a reliable account of the life and ministry of Jesus. He wants his readers to know that Capernaum was not a legendary land, it was a real place. The events that happened there, as strange as they might be, really did happen. Capernaum was a rather wealthy fishing town and a thriving metropolis. The people who lived there were largely fishermen, merchants, and craftsmen and their families. Jesus adopted this city as His own and used it as home base for a large part of His ministry.

While He was there, He taught in the synagogue. The text says those who heard His teaching were astonished, or struck with amazement. Something about His teaching was different than anything they had ever heard. Why? Because, as the text says, His word possessed authority. His words were the very words of God, the same words that called the world into existence and spoke to Moses on the mountain and to the prophets. When God speaks, things happen. Through His words, God created the world, and through His words He is re-creating the world. As the writer of Hebrews says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The Church has been given the gift of God's Word, the Bible. It is not only authoritative in our lives, it is also powerful. It has the ability to change us, astonish us, shake us to our core, and heal our wounded souls, just like Jesus' words did for the people in Capernaum.

Q: *When you read the Bible, do you consider it to have the same authority and*

power as if you had audibly heard God's words on the mountain with Moses or during creation?

Q: *In today's culture, is the idea of an authoritative word appealing or unappealing? Why?*

Just as God's Word was having a powerful effect on the people who heard it, the enemy unsurprisingly drew near. Satan desires to usurp God and destroy His good creation, especially His image bearers. He seeks to undermine God's Word as a way of thwarting the life that comes from it.

In verse 33, we learn that one of the men in the synagogue was possessed by one of Satan's lesser minions. Luke tells us what we need to know, but he doesn't go into sensational description. As such, he models the way we should think about spiritual warfare and the reality of forces of evil. He is not blind to the spiritual reality. He is clear about what Satan can and cannot do. At the same time, he dwells more on Christ and His power to overcome the darkness rather than falling into sensational fantasy. C. S. Lewis puts it this way: "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. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist and magician with the same delight." In other words, the forces of evil see both ambivalence and obsession as equally effective. If they can convince you there is no real spiritual realm or forces of evil, they can roam undetected in your life. If, on the other hand, you become overly fascinated or fearful of spiritual realities, they gain a prominence and power in your life that controls you. While they are real, Christ's authority over them is even more real as we see in this passage.

Even the demon in this story knew immediately who Jesus was. In verse 34, he asks, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" This was a rhetorical question that basically meant, "Leave me alone." He wanted Jesus to go away. He couldn't stand His presence and knew he wouldn't last long if Jesus was around. The second rhetorical question he asks is, "Have you come to destroy us?" The demon knows the end of the story. He knows that one day Christ will have complete victory over Satan and his forces of evil, and they will all be eternally condemned. He defiantly cried against Him and His coming victory. Finally, in a climactic moment, the demon cried, "I know who you are—the Holy one of God." While everyone else in the synagogue was still coming to realize who Jesus was, the demon had no question. He knew the significance of Jesus coming to earth, and that His incarnation was an act of war against Satan. This wasn't a confession of faith but a proclamation of hate.

Kent Hughes explains that, at the time, there were many self-proclaimed exorcists who used bizarre practices, including spells and rituals, to try to cast out demons. Jesus, however, did not use hocus-pocus, but merely spoke the words, “Be silent and come out of him!” With His authoritative words, He silenced the demon and sent him away. Many in the crowd probably thought the possessed man was dying as the demon violently left him. But, as soon as he was gone, the man was whole again and rejoiced in his deliverance.

The people immediately saw that the power and authority in Jesus’ words of teaching were not just experienced by the people, but by the forces of evil as well. There are and have been many excellent teachers in the world, but Jesus taught with a degree of power and authority no other teacher has ever had or ever will have. Good teachers may command an audience, but they certainly cannot command authority over a demon. While there is no doubt Jesus was an amazing teacher, Luke tells us that He was much more. He was able to publicly put demons to shame.

- ❓ *Discuss how the forces of evil work in the world today to usurp God’s Word and destroy God’s creation and His image bearers. Consider how things like abortion, modern-day slavery, racism, systemic injustice, pornography, etc. “possess” us and ruin our lives.*
- ❓ *How does the Word of God have authority over these particular ways the enemy enslaves us?*
- ❓ *In this story, Satan was at work not in a spooky graveyard or an occult meeting, but in a synagogue, a place where the Lord is meant to be worshiped! In what ways does Satan seek to work even inside the church to undermine Christ’s authority and destroy His people?*

FORCES OF EVIL ARE TERRIFIED BY JESUS

❑ **LUKE 8:26–39**

Q: *What effect did the demons have on the man in this story?*

Q: *What is similar and different about this encounter between Jesus and the demons from the one we read in Luke 4?*

When Jesus and His disciples sailed across the Sea of Galilee, they came to the region of the Gerasenes, which, as Luke said, is on the opposite side of the lake from Galilee. Again, Luke reminds us that the account he is about to tell us is no fairy tale. It occurred in a real place with real people at a real point in history.

In the country of the Gerasenes Jesus meets a man possessed by not just one but many demons. This is not a one-on-one battle. Jesus is up against a multitude, or legion, of demons! Sometimes we picture God and Satan in a great cosmic battle, equal combatants fighting over the world. In reality, the Bible teaches that while there are forces of evil who are at work in the world, God is never at risk of losing to them, and His power far exceeds theirs, even when it is just Him against all the forces of evil.

The demons had tormented this man for a very long time. Remember, the forces of evil seek to usurp and undo whatever God does. They want to distort God's creation and ruin His image bearers. While God breathes life into us and gives us our worth and dignity as humans, Satan seeks to destroy us by dehumanizing us and taking away our life. The demons stripped the man of his dignity by making him wear no clothes. He wasn't able to live in a home, but lived in a graveyard where the dead lie and animals roam. Each of these is an attack on the man's God-given humanity. When people saw the man they probably shrieked in fear like they would upon encountering a beast or a monster. According to Mark's account (Mark 5:5), the man howled at various times of day and night, cutting himself with jagged rocks to try to rid himself of the tormenting demons. But he had no authority over them and no power to drive them away. He was likely full of lacerations, scars, and infection, heart-wrenching evidence of Satan's destructive work.

One early Church father, Tertullian, writes, "The glory of God is a man fully alive." Satan seeks to steal God's glory by destroying, dehumanizing, and killing as many image bearers as he can. He often lures us by saying he can offer "true" abundant life better than God can. In fact, that is the lie he told Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. But as they soon discovered, all Satan does is lie, steal, and destroy. Christ, however, came to bring abundant life (John 10:10) and restore what the enemy has taken. Real, authentic, joyous, and abundant life is found only in Him.

- Q: *Can you think of some concrete examples of things that are dehumanizing, destructive, or degrading to image bearers? It may be an attitude, an addiction, a habit, a practice, a way of viewing oneself and others, etc.*
- Q: *Reflect on your own life. In what ways have you hurt another image bearer by attacking their dignity or seeking to tear them down for your own survival or advancement?*

The demons already knew they didn't stand a chance against Jesus. Kent Hughes interestingly notes that a Roman legion was composed of six thousand foot soldiers and 120 horsemen, as well as technical personnel. So, for the people of the day, "legion" would have communicated great numbers, efficient organization, and relentless strength. However, the legion of demons was aware that Jesus had full authority over them. There was no suspenseful battle. In His presence, all they could do was beg that He wouldn't torment them. They knew He would cast them out of the man, and they begged that He would give them permission to enter into a group of pigs instead.

Again, we see a startling example of Jesus' authority over them. They could do nothing without permission. With His word, He commanded them to flee the man and enter a herd of pigs. The herd immediately rushed into the sea and drowned. But why would Jesus give them permission to enter the pigs, especially knowing what would happen to them? A large herd of pigs would have likely been at least two thousand swine, meaning they were part of a profitable business. Since they were in a region where Jews and Gentiles were mixed, there were many corrupt and compromising Jewish business owners who profited by selling pork to the Gentiles. Pork was considered unclean for the Jews. Not only were they not to consume it, they were also not to come near it or handle it. These Jewish business leaders compromised this rule. Though they did not eat it, they handled it and profited from it. They had become secularized and materialistic. The death of the swine was a sign of judgment on their business.

The man who was once tortured and dehumanized was made whole and sat at Jesus' feet. He had been healed in mind, body, and soul. He was reunited to the One who gives life abundantly and sets us free from the slavery of Satan, sin, and death. Christ had undone what Satan had done in this man's life. The man was a new creation.

News of the man's healing and the death of the pigs spread quickly around the region. How did the community respond? You would think they would all come to Jesus and sit at His feet like the healed man did. Instead, they asked Jesus to leave. While the text doesn't tell us the exact reason, it tells us they were seized with great fear. It is possible they were happy for the miracle, but feared such a strong spiritual power. They preferred to live in denial rather than see Jesus for who He is, because seeing the Real Jesus requires surrendering your life to Him.

It is also possible that they feared economic loss. Losing two thousand pigs would have crippled a thriving business. They were likely worried that if Jesus stayed He would continue to uncover their corrupt practices and ingrained materialism. They did not want to give up their material gain to seek first the kingdom, so Jesus had to go. This is another example of how the enemy takes possession over us. It is far less sensational and masks itself in “ordinary life.” Materialism can have a stronghold over us that makes us just as dehumanized and deformed as the demoniac was. Yet Jesus left a reminder for them of His power through the newly healed man whose heart was full of joy over what God had done for him.

♀: *What kind of scars do you bear? What sin do you feel defeated by?*

♀: *What part of your life would you rather Jesus not come too near out of fear that He may topple it over?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

♀: *Do you tend to be a “materialist” or a “magician,” as C. S. Lewis says? How can you cultivate godly discernment, or awareness, of the reality of the spiritual battle in your life while keeping your eyes firmly fixed on Christ?*

♀: *Do you see a situation in society or in your own life that seems to be hopelessly broken or in bondage? How do these stories encourage you?*

♀: *How can you cultivate a greater reverence for the Word of God in your own life?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, remind me of Your authority, strength, and power, and may the knowledge of who You are give me fear of the Lord instead of fear of the enemy or of men.
- Holy Spirit, show me the areas in my life where I have let the enemy take possession.
- Jesus, thank You that with You there is life in abundance. Thank You that You restore what the enemy has broken.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 8:35 The man was not just physically and mentally healed. By noting that he sat at Jesus' feet, the text indicates he was also spiritually saved. He showed evidence of faith by wanting to follow Jesus.

LUKE 8:38–39 In these verses, Jesus tells the man to proclaim all God has done for him. This is one of the many instances in the gospels where Jesus claims to be not just a good teacher or a prophet, but God Himself. What Jesus does for the man, God does for Him because Jesus is God.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word: Luke.*