

Jesus the Uber Warrior

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[0 : 00] Scripture reading today is from the Gospel of Luke chapter 4. It's on page 1031 of the Church Bible. 1031. Luke chapter 4. And we begin at verse 31.

Jesus, rejected at Nazareth, his hometown, has moved to Capernaum. Then Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people.

They were amazed at his teaching because his words had authority. Now in the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit.

He cried out at the top of his voice, Go away! 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.

Be quiet, Jesus said sternly, and come out of him. And then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

[1 : 19] All the people were amazed and said to each other, What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits, and they come out.

And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area. Jesus left the synagogue and went to the house of Simon Peter. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her.

So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and began to wait on them. And at sunset the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

And moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, You are the Son of God! But he rebuked them and wouldn't allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.

At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him, and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.

[2 : 38] But he said, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

For the word of God in Scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us, thanks be to God. Please keep your Bible open, would you?

And as we come to God's word together, let's pray for his help in understanding it. Dear Father in heaven, whether the Bible is very familiar to us this morning, or whether we're just beginning to look into who Jesus is, please would you open our eyes, so that we might see him as he is, and respond to him rightly with trust and confidence.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Try to imagine that this happened at St. Silas one Sunday morning. You're in church.

You've been here before. But this morning is like no other morning. There's a visiting preacher, and the sermon is amazing. We've never heard anything like this.

[3 : 55] And then suddenly there's a shout from over there. Go away! What are you doing here? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are.

And there's uproar, and no one knows what to do with themselves. And the preacher speaks just six words. Be quiet. Come out of him. And the man falls on the floor, and then he's back to himself, and the shouting stops.

And nothing like that's ever happened at St. Silas before. And nobody knows what to do. And the preacher goes to lunch to his friend's house. The mother of the household is catastrophically ill. We're talking overwhelming infection, not man flu. Could easily die. He goes to the bedside, and again he speaks just a few words. Stop. Go away.

And immediately she looks completely normal. She sits up. Wonderful. Let me get lunch for everyone. Come the end of the day, the West End is gridlocked, because from everywhere, by

every means possible, everyone is bringing their sick and dying relatives in cars and taxis, on wheelchairs.

[5 : 10] There are hospital beds in the street. The tunnel road is completely blocked, because the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is empty. The news crews are everywhere. The pictures are viral, reporting Scotland at last has something interesting to say.

By tomorrow, all the flights and tickets to Glasgow are fully booked everywhere, from everywhere. That's the kind of thing that's being talked about here as a result of this day's worth, just a day's worth of activity by a real person, in this real world, in real time, by Jesus from Nazareth, visiting Capernaum.

Please keep your Bible open, and let's look at this extraordinary, epoch-defining day, in Luke chapter 4. Of course, there are some things in this episode that wouldn't quite happen the same way if they happened here today.

Let me just flag up the big things. We would be much less familiar with the demonic than those people back then were. It's not the impure spirit that surprises the people in the synagogue. It's Jesus' power over it that bewilders them. I think it's fair to say that reporting Scotland would not have a clue what to say about demons. More of that in a moment.

[6 : 31] Secondly, if this were today, the preacher would never go to lunch with someone who had a life-threatening illness. Peter's mother-in-law, she'd be in hospital. She'd be on intravenous antibiotics and oxygen.

This is a very serious illness as witnessed by the fact that her instantaneous recovery brings the whole town to the doorstep. No, she'd be in hospital, but of course, there's no hospital and no antibiotics.

And she might live or die, but this is a hospitality culture. And so back then, the preacher comes to lunch in a household with someone who's extremely ill.

And the third thing that might be different now is that if this happened now, no one would wait until it got dark before bringing their own relatives. Look at verse 40.

At sunset. Why wait till sunset? Were they making the most of the sunshine, doing the garden?

Well, no. It's because this is a very religious culture.

[7 : 35] And they take Jewish law very seriously indeed. And the law says, no working on the Sabbath. And this, of course, is the Sabbath. And so we're not allowed to do anything that might possibly be classed as work, including wheeling a bed down the road.

But Sabbath runs from sundown to sundown. So though verse 40 looks to us like delay, what it's really saying is this, just as soon as their tradition allowed them, they piled in with all the sick people because of what they'd heard Jesus do.

Okay, now let's look at this episode. What have we got here? These are the first two miracles that Luke records in any detail in his account of Jesus. Let's remind ourselves of where we are in the story.

In chapter 3, Jesus is baptized in the Jordan and the Holy Spirit descends on him. And then there are a whole series of spirit-driven episodes in Jesus' life.

Chapter 4, verse 1, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led into the wilderness to be tempted. He's tempted to depart from proper worship of God.

[8 : 53] In chapter 4, verse 14, the Spirit drives him into Galilee. teaching in the synagogues. And then we get an example of his teaching from the synagogue in Nazareth.

Look at 14, chapter 4, verse 18. He refers to himself as the Spirit-anointed conqueror who's come to proclaim good news for the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed.

Now here's the question. What's that going to look like? What does it mean exactly? Good news for the poor, freedom from the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed.

Well, it looks like what we find in this passage. I've entitled this sermon Jesus the Uber Warrior for the two miraculous activities which we find in this passage.

Casting out demons and healing serious disease. These are more joined up than we might first think. And together, they paint a picture of Jesus that not just a picture of a powerful person who can do big things, but of a warrior king who's come to deliver humanity from our greatest enemies.

[10 : 18] What Jesus begins to do on the Sabbath in Capernaum is what he said he was going to do when he preached in Nazareth in the synagogue there.

I'm going to look at this under two brief headings. Jesus has total mastery over supernatural evil. And second, he has total mastery over life-threatening illness.

So the first first. Jesus, the master of supernatural evil. Verse 34. There's clearly something supernatural here, isn't there?

I know who you are, says the voice. No one else in this story knows who Jesus is yet, but this being does know.

And notice the terror. Have you come to destroy us? And then the effortless power in his words.

Verse 35. Be quiet.

[11:18] Come out of him. It's so easy for him to do that. And then the words of amazement. Verse 36. He gives orders to impure spirits and out they come.

On the Sabbath, the holy day, there's a demon in the synagogue in Capernaum. And Jesus is totally in control.

Now folks, we read demons and I imagine a whole bunch of questions pile into our mind at that point. And what your questions are likely to be depends a bit on where you're coming from, I think. A previous generation of people brought up in Scotland, my parents' generation, would largely have viewed talk of demons as the product of a primitive and superstitious culture.

We know better than them now. We know about psychoses and epilepsy and mental disturbance. And that's what this is really. Nothing supernatural about it. They just misdiagnose the problem.

[12:21] That's what you might call the we're modern and we know better than those primitives back then mindset. A more contemporary take on this might be to have our thoughts fly immediately to the genre of fantasy writing and horror movies.

Demons, yeah, so we see those on television every day, don't we? Alternatively, you may well be a person here this morning who comes from a part of the world where it's quite normal for people where you grew up to be very aware of the spirit world.

Where sophisticated, tertiary educated people routinely take precautions in ordinary life to protect themselves against supernatural evil.

And the truth is that in most of human history, in most of the world, most people have been much more afraid of supernatural evil than someone who's been brought up in this country would be.

And the Bible recognizes that. Demonic activity is a real thing in the Bible. It's not uniformly distributed in the Bible at all. In fact, the information about demons in the Bible is relatively sketchy.

[13:38] Incidentally, there's a huge mythology in Christian circles about demons which doesn't come from the Bible at all. Now, the demonic activity we see in the Bible comes mainly in two settings.

In the front line of the kingdom of God and in the ruins of the kingdom of God. Let me explain. In the front line, when God's kingdom, God's rule, is advancing in the world, we see people in the Bible turning from false gods and from fear of demons to trust the true God who has mastery over all evil. And then in the ruins of the kingdom of God where people once believed in God but have departed from worshipping the true God, they turn to false gods and so start to deal with the spirit world again and the fear returns.

Incidentally, that's probably a bit like where we are in this country at the moment. The gospel of Jesus has had massive effect in this country over the last few hundred years but with the wholesale departure from that that's now happened, I don't think it would be a great surprise to see growing awareness of demon possession and growing fear of spiritual evil.

That's certainly what happened in Israel. Towards the end of the Old Testament story, when Israel turned away from the true God to worship idols, one of the things that the prophets promised would happen was that the promised land would become the dwelling place of impure spirits.

[15:19] And that brings us right back to Luke chapter 4 because it's exactly what we find. In Luke 4, we meet very religious people. They seem to take God's commandments very seriously.

No point coming with your sick person until the Sabbath's over. They don't seem to be worshipping idols as their forefathers did. They're at the synagogue, not the shrine of the false god.

They seem to have turned over a new leaf and yet, in the synagogue, on the Sabbath, the holy day, there's a demon-possessed man.

And verse 41, demons came out of many people. This is what we often refer to as the holy land and it's overrun by demons.

In Luke 4, we're in the ruins of the kingdom of God and the religion of Israel is absolutely powerless to do anything about it.

[16:26] Indeed, in the previous Sabbath sermon, they too have wanted to kill the ultimate messenger. They seem to have turned over a new leaf, but despite all their reforms, we're very much in the ruins of the kingdom of God.

But Jesus has total control. Be quiet. Come out. Notice, this is not an exorcism. There's no ritual. There's no fuss. There are no incantations. There's no Latin. He commands and it happens. He's the uber-warrior. He's come to free the prisoners, the oppressed, and in Capernaum, on the Sabbath, we begin to see it happen.

He has total mastery over supernatural evil. Second, he's got total mastery over life-threatening illness.

This is not a small illness, Peter's mother-in-law's. In only a few hours, news of this healing, a healing done privately in somebody's house on the Sabbath when nobody's out and about, the news of it spreads so that the whole town's at the door.

[17:43] And once again, we see this effortless power. It's described in such matter-of-fact terms. Look at verse 39, please. He bent over and rebuked the fever and it left her.

And she got up at once and began to wait on them. Instantly, she's better. No time needed to sleep to regain her strength. No physiotherapy. No rehab. Nothing. Straight from intensive care to the kitchen.

It's extraordinary. She's up and making food and the whole town is galvanized into action as a result. And everyone comes because it's quite clear that Jesus can do what no one else can do. Total mastery over supernatural evil and total mastery over life-threatening illness. So here's the question. Why these miracles?

Dealing with evil spirits, dealing with life-threatening illness, why are these the miracles that Jesus does? And why are these the miracle that Luke records very first in his accounts of Jesus' miracles?

[18:53] Well, I think they are in embryo, in miniature. They represent the whole of what the human problem is that Jesus has come to deal with.

supernatural evil and life-threatening illness are much more tightly connected than we might think. There's a link between deliverance from demon possession and deliverance from life-threatening disease.

Incidentally, the link is not, as some have said, that sickness is a result of demon possession. That if you want to get well, you have to cast out the demon of cancer and then you'll be made well.

That is not a Christian idea at all. No, the link is here. Keep your finger in Luke chapter 4, please. And turn right back in your Bible to the very beginning, to Genesis chapter 2.

Please flip back to Genesis chapter 2. We'll be back in Luke 4 soon. Genesis chapter 2. Adam is made and put in the garden.

[20:04] And he and his wife, who's made later, are free to enjoy every good thing that God has made. Chapter 2, verse 16. The Lord God commanded the man, you're free to eat from any tree in the garden.

But there's one prohibition. But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat from it, you will certainly die.

In chapter 3, the serpent tempts Eve and her husband. And terrible lies are told. Lies about God. He's really a mean person. He's holding you back. He doesn't want you good. And lies about themselves. You could be so much greater than God's told you. You could be so much greater. And lies about what God has said. Look at chapter 3, verse 4. You will not die when you eat that. Right back at the beginning of the human story, we have supernatural evil.

[21:15] And the two things that are clear about this evil is that it tells outrageous lies. And that it wants to entice human beings into rebellion against their maker so that they die.

Jesus, elsewhere in his teaching, describes the devil in two ways. a liar and the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning.

That's exactly what we see in Genesis chapter 3. A liar who wants them to die. And that link between supernatural evil and death is there all the way through the rest of the Bible.

All the way through. One of the New Testament writers describes the devil as the one who holds the power of death. What does the devil do in the Bible?

He tells lies that are blinding and ensnaring because he wants rebellion and death for human beings.

[22 : 23] Back then at the beginning, supernatural evil lied and killed and death entered the world. And death and the sickness that that entails inevitably has come to human beings precisely because of that lying murderer.

And now, whether overtly through demon possession or covertly through the regular lies that are fed to us all the time, the devil still works through lies in order to bring death.

God, he's not really there. You don't have to bother with him. God, he's not really interested in you. God, he's harsh and demanding.

You know that, don't you? He could never want you or love you or forgive you. and Jesus, well, he's just a made up person, a fairy story for weak people and anyway, he's dead and you'd be so much more fulfilled in life just living for yourself and not paying any attention to God.

Terrible lies because he wants death for you. And that's why Jesus is such good news. Do you notice that?

[23 : 51] Back to Luke 4, please. Notice that. It's all the way through the chapter. All the way through. He is a relentless teacher of truth. Look at verse 15. He was teaching in the synagogues.

Or verse 18. The spirit of the Lord is on me because he's anointed me to proclaim. He sent me to proclaim. Verse 19. To proclaim.

He's a preacher. Verse 32. His words have massive authority. Verse 36. Everybody says, what words these are.

Verse 43. Right at the end. I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. That's what I was sent to do. And what does this relentless preacher preach?

Well, that he is the promised rescuer. Good news for the poor. Blind, ensnared, captives like those in Capernaum.

[24 : 53] And what do Jesus' words accomplish? Well, they're supremely powerful. Verse 35. Be quiet. Come out of him. And the demon came out. Verse 39.

He rebuked the fever. And up she got at once. Here's the uber warrior. The conquering king. The one God graciously promised would come to free humanity from our terrible slavery to lies and evil and sin and death.

And on that epoch-defining day in Capernaum, we have the whole thing represented in miniature. Powerless religion. Totally unable to deal with life-threatening disease.

Jesus can deal with it. Totally unable to deal with supernatural evil. Jesus can deal with it. In sharp contrast to the religious of Israel, somebody can speak and conquer.

Well, what about ourselves? What are the implications of this for us? Well, there are many. Let me just mention two or three. First, we're about to embark on what's traditionally called Holy Week.

[26 : 01] And it's ever so easy during Holy Week to think all kinds of unhelpful thoughts about Jesus. For example, one of the things the Gospel tells us is that after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, bad things happen to Jesus.

Things are done to him by people. In many ways, he seems very passive. He's arrested by people. and falsely accused by people. And unjustly tried and sentenced by people. And mocked and scourged, stripped and humiliated by people.

And has nails hammered into him by people. And is publicly ridiculed by lots of people. And of course, all those things do happen. But it is so easy to come away from that with the wrong impression.

So easy to think of him as unfortunate, weak, unable, a victim.

[27 : 10] So easy to feel sorry for him. And that's why Luke 4 is such a helpful passage in Holy Week. Because there is absolutely nothing weak about this person at all.

what we see in his last week is not passivity, but restraint. An iron will.

Supreme power at its most powerful. It looks as though evil triumphs. But what we see on the road to the cross is the supreme warrior in the biggest battle.

For us to be delivered from our captivity to evil and lies and sin and death requires someone who will deal with sins and bring forgiveness and undo death so that people can live.

And he does that most powerful of all things by soaking it all up in his own death for sins. There's nothing weak about Holy Week.

[28 : 26] Second thing, you may be here this morning and be particularly aware of the power of evil or of sickness and death in your own life.

just as it was for Jesus on the road to the cross so it often is for those who belong to him as they follow him.

It may be that you're all too aware this week that evil is real and powerful and personal and that the devil's lies are deeply ensnaring and have brought nothing but misery to you.

And you may be encountering sickness and death wearing their most powerful clothing. You may be unusually aware at the moment that faced with these enemies you are quite unable to stand on your own.

The experience of the believer following the risen Jesus is so often like the experience of Jesus before his resurrection.

[29 : 36] it involves difficulty and hostility and isolation and false accusation and tension and sometimes evil feels close and death powerful.

and sometimes you experience just how hostile is the world around to the one that you follow and to you as a result of following him.

Let me say if that's you today take heart for yes the enemies are real and very powerful but he is the uber warrior and it may be difficult on the way and there may be many struggles many and slips and stumbles and worries and sadnesses but brothers and sisters there will come a day when he will speak and just as he spoke in the synagogue at Capernaum be quiet come out evil will disappear forever and just as he spoke at the bedside in Peter's mother's house go away sickness and death will vanish forever and the dead will jump up alive forever just as they were made to be it will be so easy for him when he does it if you feel now the power of evil and sickness and death take heart he can do it and finally until that great day there's stuff to be done in the meantime isn't there what's Jesus agenda all the way through this chapter to proclaim to proclaim to proclaim to speak to people in the synagogues to teach about himself and what he's doing and why he's come and though we're not him the agenda remains the same why is that day that great day of the destruction of evil and sin and death forever why is that day delayed so that people can turn around and get on the right side of day before it comes so that people will know about him and why he's come before he wraps up evil forever so if you're here this morning and you're just looking and finding out about Jesus there's nothing more important than you could do possibly in this day than to keep finding out and keep coming back and keep asking questions that's precisely what these days are for and if you do know him and you do hope for that day well keep praying and keep speaking and keep asking that people might hear and understand and be delivered from the devil's lies and be free to be the people they were made to be forever let's pray together be quiet

Jesus said come out and the demon came out he rebuked the fever and it left her and she got up at once thank you for the supreme power of Jesus and his words thank you for this in miniature picture of the great victory which he's come to bring about heavenly father no matter what our circumstances in life this morning whether we're here just finding out about Jesus for the first time whether life is going well for us whether we faced evil and sickness and death particularly acutely we pray that you would help us to hope in him and in his words we ask these things in his name amen