

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 6: Authority and the First Disciples -- Luke 4:31-5:11

The crowd in the Capernaum synagogue had heard plenty of teachers. Every Sabbath the scribes would stand and explain the Law, careful to cite which rabbi had said what, leaning on the authority of those who had come before them. But on this day a carpenter from Nazareth stands up to teach, and something is different. He does not quote anyone. He speaks as though the words are simply His own to give, and the people are astonished, “for his word possessed authority” (4:32). Then, before the lesson is even finished, a man with an unclean spirit cries out, and the demon recognizes what the crowd is only beginning to sense: “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (4:34). With a single command Jesus silences the spirit and casts it out. The room is buzzing. What is this word, that even unclean spirits obey it?

From the synagogue Jesus walks into an ordinary home, where Simon’s mother-in-law lies burning with fever. He stands over her, rebukes the fever, and it leaves her so completely that she gets up at once and begins to serve them (4:38-39). By sundown the sick of the whole town are streaming to the door, and one by one He lays His hands on them and heals them. Demons shriek the truth as they flee, “You are the Son of God,” but He will not let them speak (4:41). The whole scene is a window into who Jesus is. Disease obeys Him. Demons obey Him. The created order itself bends to His word. This is no mere miracle worker. This is the Lord of heaven walking through a Galilean village.

And yet, when the morning comes and the crowds want to keep Him, Jesus does something the people do not expect. He withdraws, and when they find Him He tells 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” (4:43). The healings were never the point. They were signs pointing to something greater, the arrival of God’s reign breaking into the world. Jesus did not come merely to make sick people well for a few more years. He came to announce and to bring the kingdom of God, and that mission would not let Him stay comfortably in one grateful town.

The chapter break should not fool us, because the story keeps moving. By the lake Jesus borrows Simon’s boat as a floating pulpit, then tells the exhausted fisherman to push out into the deep and let down his nets. Simon has fished all night and caught nothing, but he obeys, and the haul is so enormous that the nets begin to tear and the boats begin to sink. In that moment Simon does not celebrate. He falls down at Jesus’ knees and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (5:8). He has seen holiness, and holiness has shown him himself. But Jesus answers with the words that will reshape his whole life: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (5:10). And they leave everything and follow Him. Read these verses slowly, and ask what it would mean for you to leave your own nets and follow this Lord whose word even the deep obeys.

Group Discussion: When Jesus taught in the synagogue, the people were amazed because “his word possessed authority” (4:32), unlike the teachers they were used to. Think about the voices that carry the most authority in your life right now, the people and ideas you instinctively trust and obey. What does it mean, practically, to let Jesus and His word hold the place of highest authority over you? Where is that easy, and where is it a real struggle?

Personal Reflection: When Simon saw who Jesus really was, his first response was not excitement but a painful awareness of his own sin: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (5:8). When was the last time being near the holiness of Christ made you genuinely aware of your own need for Him? Is there a place in your life where you have grown too comfortable, where you need to let the Lord show you yourself honestly this week?

Read Luke 4:31–5:11

Study Questions

1. Luke says the people “were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority” (4:32), and that even an unclean spirit obeyed Him and confessed Him as “the Holy One of God” (4:34). What do the authority of Jesus’ teaching and His power over the demon reveal about who He is, and how is this authority different from the authority claimed by every other teacher?
2. The people of Capernaum marveled at Jesus and tried to keep Him from leaving (4:42), drawn by what He could do for them. Be honest with yourself about how you usually come to Jesus. Are you mainly drawn to Him for what He can give you, the help and the healing, or for who He actually is? What would it look like this week to seek Christ Himself and not merely His benefits?
3. Again and again in this passage the demons cry out the truth, “You are the Son of God” (4:41), yet Jesus rebukes them and will not allow them to speak. What does it teach us that the spirits could state the right facts about Jesus and still be utterly opposed to Him, and how does this warn us against assuming that correct belief alone is the same as saving faith (compare James 2:19)?
4. When Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law, “immediately she rose and began to serve them” (4:39), turning her healing straight into service. Think of a time God lifted you out of a hard place or met a deep need. How did you respond once the crisis passed? What would it look like for the things God has done for you to overflow into service to Him and to others?
5. When the crowds tried to keep Him, Jesus said, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose” (4:43). What does this tell us about the central mission of Jesus, and why is the preaching of the kingdom, rather than merely the working of miracles, presented as the reason He was sent?
6. Simon had fished all night and caught nothing, yet when Jesus said to let down the nets, he answered, “But at your word I will let down the nets” (5:5), obeying even though it made no sense to him as a seasoned fisherman. Where is Jesus asking you to obey His word right now

in a place where your own experience or reasoning says it will not work? What makes that kind of obedience hard for you?

7. Faced with the overwhelming catch, Simon fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (5:8). Why does a true encounter with the holiness of Christ produce a deep awareness of our own sinfulness, and how does this honest recognition of sin relate to the way a person comes to genuine repentance and faith (compare Isaiah 6:5; Luke 5:32)?
8. Jesus answered Simon's fear with, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (5:10), taking a guilt-ridden fisherman and giving him a new purpose. Where does fear or a sense of your own unworthiness keep you from being useful to Christ? How does Jesus' response to Simon speak to the excuses you tend to make about why God could not use someone like you?
9. When they had brought their boats to land, Simon, James, and John "left everything and followed him" (5:11). What does this passage teach about the nature of true discipleship, why genuine following of Christ means leaving all to follow Him rather than merely admiring Him, and how does this universal call to count the cost and follow apply to every person, not only to those first fishermen (compare Luke 9:23; 14:27-33)?
10. Look back across the whole passage, from the authoritative word in the synagogue, to the demons silenced, to the sick healed, to the kingdom preached, to three fishermen leaving their nets. You have seen the authority of Christ over disease, demons, and nature, and you have watched His call land on ordinary men. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 4:31-5:11 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah undone by God's holiness and then sent; Mark 1:14-15, Jesus preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand; Daniel 2:44, the God of heaven setting up a kingdom that will never be destroyed; Luke 14:25-33, counting the cost of following Christ; Acts 4:5-13, the boldness of these same once ordinary fishermen before the council.