

"THE WORD OF CHRIST"

I. Introduction

A. Martin Luther once offered the following thoughts as he reflected on how the Reformation had taken root in Germany: "I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything." [Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 94-95]

1. God's Word is powerful.
2. We see its power in the creation account in Genesis 1.
3. God speaks a mere word, and the entire universe comes into existence.
4. God speaks a mere word, and immediately there are birds flying through the air, fish swimming in the seas, and animals walking on the land.

B. God acts by speaking, and everything that he says comes to pass.

1. Because of this, the kingdom of God is not advanced through cultural influence, or slick marketing, or political power.
2. It is advanced through the proclamation of God's Word.
3. This passage in Luke shows us the reason why this is the case.
4. It calls our attention to the divine authority of the Word of Christ.

II. Authority to Teach

- A. Our text begins by describing Jesus's teaching ministry in the Galilean city of Capernaum.
1. As he taught the people in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, they were astonished at his teaching.
 2. And notice what it was that caused these people to marvel at Jesus's teaching.
 3. They were not amazed because Jesus had great rhetorical skills or a winsome sense of humor or brilliant new ideas.
 4. They were amazed because his word possessed authority.
 5. Mark tells us in his Gospel that the people saw a sharp contrast between the authority with which Jesus taught and the way the Jewish scribes taught.
 6. The scribes, along with the Pharisees, functioned as the custodians of Judaism's traditional teachings.
 7. They were responsible for the creation and preservation of the elaborate rules and regulations that were such a burden to the people of Israel in Jesus's day.
 8. While the scribes claimed to have authority, the emptiness of that claim was evident when their teaching was compared to that of Jesus.
 9. The teachings of the scribes were only human inventions, not the revealed will of God.
 10. But Jesus taught as the One who had given the Word of God.
 11. He taught as the Word of God in human flesh.
- B. There are many voices in the world today claiming to speak an authoritative word about what is right and what is true.

1. Sometimes, such words have the force of law behind them.
2. We see this in the recent court case where judges have ruled that it is wrong for a Christian woman who has a florist business to refuse to make floral arrangements for a same-sex wedding.
3. Other times, people make their assertions in a forceful manner.
4. We see this in the recent instances on college campuses where students have shouted down speakers with whom they do not agree.
5. Lots of people claim to be able to speak an authoritative word.
6. But no matter how loud people shout, no matter how much power they use to enforce what they say is right and true, the words of man are absolutely nothing compared to the Word of our God.
7. Man's teachings are always subject to correction and change.
8. Only God's Word will stand forever.

III. Authority over Satan

- A. Luke tells us that while Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a man was present who was suffering from demon possession.
 1. You may have noticed that there are hardly any instances of demon possession in the Bible outside of the Gospels.
 2. By and large, this strange phenomenon took place in a focused way during the time of Jesus's public ministry.
 3. This makes perfect sense when you think about why Jesus came.
 4. He came to crush the serpent's head.
 5. He came to destroy the devil's work.

6. He came to rescue people from Satan's cruel tyranny.
 7. The demons knew this.
 8. They knew that something very bad (bad from their perspective) was about to take place.
 9. So they circled their wagons and tried to prevent people from following Jesus.
 10. And while demon possession was surely an agonizing experience for those who came under such influence, this strategy proved to be a colossal blunder on the part of the demons.
 11. In the end, these cases of demon possession were used by Jesus to testify to his authority as Lord of all the earth.
- B. C.S. Lewis points out in his preface to *The Screwtape Letters* that we need to be aware of two opposite errors that we can make regarding the devils.
1. On the one hand, people can be overly fascinated with the demonic, blaming Satan for everything that goes wrong in their lives.
 2. On the other hand, people can deny the reality of the demonic, going on with their lives as if Satan does not even exist.
 3. Satan makes use of both of these errors as he seeks the destruction of human souls.
 4. He entices people to invent superstitious practices in hopes of gaining control over demonic forces.
 5. This is the error that some religious people make, thinking that they can employ incantations and things of that nature to ward off the devil.

6. Satan also deceives people into living under his influence without even realizing it.
 7. This is the error that secular people make, thinking that they are an authority unto themselves when they are really following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.
- C. This passage in Luke shows us that Jesus has total authority over Satan and his demonic hordes.
1. We even see this in the question that this particular demon asked of Jesus: "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."
 2. This was an exclamation of terror on the part of the demon.
 3. He knew that a day of judgment was at hand for him and his ilk.
 4. Even though Jesus was in his state of humiliation and his divine glory was veiled, the forces of hell still trembled in his presence.
 5. This reminds us that Satan is never outside of the sovereign control of God.
 6. This is why Martin Luther described the devil as "God's devil."
 7. Though Satan seeks to work us woe, he can never do anything beyond what God permits him to do, and God will never let Satan bring ultimate harm to any of his children.
 8. We see this in what happens when Jesus commands this demon to come out of the man.
 9. While the demon threw the man down, no harm was done to the man.

10. Anyone who feels ensnared by evil powers can take comfort in Christ's total authority over the forces of darkness.
11. On your own, you are no match for Satan.
12. But if you are in Christ, Satan will never succeed in his efforts to destroy your soul.
13. As we sing,

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.*

IV. Authority over Sickness

- A. As we move on to the next part of our passage, we see the authority of Jesus's word over sickness.
 1. After worshipping at the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter, where Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever.
 2. Of all the Gospel writers, Luke is the only one who specifies that this was a *high* fever, which means this woman was in serious danger.
 3. Luke was a physician, so he considered this detail to be important.
- B. When the people appealed to Jesus to help this sick woman, Jesus responded by rebuking the fever, and it immediately left her.
 1. Imagine going to a doctor who had that kind of healing power.
 2. Jesus merely spoke the word, and the fever was entirely gone.
 3. The healing was so immediate and so complete that the woman was able to get up right away and begin serving the special guest

who had entered her home.

4. What an example this is for every Christian.
 5. Peter's mother-in-law responded to Jesus's gracious work in her life by immediately serving him.
 6. We should do the same thing.
 7. Jesus has done far more than heal us of a fever.
 8. He has redeemed our life from the pit, and crowned us with steadfast love and mercy.
- C. Later that evening, after the sun went down, people converged upon Peter's home, clamoring to see this man who had the power to make sick people well.
1. They waited until evening because the rabbis forbade healing on the Sabbath, and the day was considered to be over as soon as the sun went down.
 2. News about Jesus spread like wildfire.
 3. And it is at this point that we see a fundamental difference between the healings that Jesus performed and the purported healings done by contemporary faith-healers and other charlatans.
 4. If these modern-day figures really have the ability to cure disease, why isn't CNN making it a breaking news story?
 5. Why isn't everyone canceling their doctor appointments and throwing away their medications and going to see these people who have the ability to make them well?
 6. The reason why is because the works that these people claim to be able to do are nothing like the works that Jesus Christ actually did.

7. Jesus's healings were done in public.
8. They were immediate and unmistakable.
9. The sick and suffering people who heard about what Jesus was doing dropped everything and came to him for help.
10. And this took place in spite of the fact that Jesus did not call attention to his healing works.
11. Because Jesus is God, he has full authority over all sickness and disease.
12. He not only forgives all our iniquity, but in his time he will also heal all our diseases.

V. Authority to Preach the Kingdom of God

- A. After such a busy night, Jesus would have been utterly exhausted.
 1. Yet he woke up very early the next day — Mark says that it was still dark — and he went to a desolate place.
 2. Luke does not tell us the reason for Jesus's early rising, but Mark says that it was in order to find a quiet place to pray.
 3. What a picture of the urgency of prayer!
 4. It is so easy for us to neglect prayer.
 5. It is so easy to let it get squeezed out by our work, our sleep, and our diversions.
 6. But if our Lord found prayer to be so vital in his life, if he stole from his much-needed sleep to make time for prayer, then how much more important is it for us to set aside regular time to pray.
- B. When the people learned where Jesus was, they went out to him again.

1. Jesus responded to this in a surprising way.
 2. Instead of letting himself be detained by all of the needs that were being brought before him, he 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."
 3. Have you ever noticed when you are reading the Gospels that Jesus never goes out looking for sick people or demon-possessed people so that he can heal them?
 4. They always come to him.
 5. He helped many of them, but healing was not his primary mission.
 6. Most of the people he healed probably ended up getting sick again.
 7. All of them eventually died.
 8. The reason why Jesus' ministry was not primarily a healing ministry is because he came to deal with the ultimate source of all human suffering.
 9. He came to break the curse by being made a curse on our behalf.
- C. If Jesus did not allow healing to become his primary mission, then the church must not allow social justice or acts of charity to become its primary mission.
1. The church will always feel pressure to move in this direction.
 2. The fact that the world places no value upon the preaching of the gospel means that it will prod the church to show itself to be socially useful.
 3. The way to resist this pressure is to reflect upon why Jesus did not seize the opportunity to have a much wider healing ministry.

4. He could have healed far more people than he did.
 5. But that is not why he came.
 6. He refused to allow healing to become the focus of his ministry because he wanted to help people in a much more significant, much more complete, much more permanent way.
 7. He came to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.
- D. When Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God, he is referring to God's redemptive reign over his people.
1. As Anthony Hoekema explains, "The kingdom of God... is to be understood as the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of God's people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth." [*The Bible and the Future*, 45]
 2. In preaching the good news of this kingdom, Jesus was declaring that the age to come is breaking into this present age.
 3. This was demonstrated by the signs and wonders that Jesus performed, and especially by his resurrection from the dead.
 4. As we think about the kingdom of God, it is important to clarify that while Jesus has essential dominion over everything in the world, he only reigns as redeemer in his church.
 5. The church is the manifestation of Christ's kingdom in this age.
 6. As one book explains, in this present age "the church acts as a sort of embassy for the government of the King. It is an outpost of the kingdom of God surrounded by the kingdom of darkness." [DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Church's Mission*, 127]
 7. The church can only carry out this function by keeping its ministry focused upon the same thing that Jesus kept his ministry focused

upon: the proclamation of the gospel.

VI. Conclusion

- A. We should never lose sight of the miserable plight that human beings are in as long as they are apart from Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Fallen man is a slave in a domain of darkness, with the wrath and curse of God hanging over him.
 - 2. No amount of money, no amount of pleasure, no amount of diversion can change that hopeless reality.
 - 3. Most of your neighbors are utterly oblivious to this.
 - 4. They are happily entertaining themselves to death, drawing closer to hell every day.

- B. The only power that can set people free from this dreadful fate is the message that is set forth in this holy book.
 - 1. We need to remember that the Bible has the same authority as the word of Jesus in this passage.
 - 2. The Bible is God's living and active Word.
 - 3. It is a Word that has divine power to destroy strongholds.
 - 4. It is a Word that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
 - 5. So cherish the Word of God.
 - 6. Hide it in your heart.
 - 7. And proclaim its message to the people around you.
 - 8. This is how God's kingdom comes.