

Without Injury

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In the immortal words of that wise and famous Chicagoan, Ferris Bueller:

It's not that I support fascism or any ism for that matter. Isms in my opinion are not good. A person should not believe in an ism, he should believe in himself. I quote John Lennon, "I don't believe in Beatles, I just believe in me." Not bad, but then again he was the walrus.¹

Now you're intrigued. What on earth, you're wondering, does this have to do with the Bible or Christianity or anything? (Well, not a lot really. I've simply always wanted to quote Ferris Bueller in a sermon.... *Just kidding!*) There is a connection.

You see, before we start, we need to address our own "ism"—one which many of us have adopted and have believed in whether we know it or not. And, my friends, this "ism" makes it totally difficult for us to properly engage passages like the one before us today. It's called scientism, and it's not science. Rather, it's a worldview or even, you might say, a kind of religion. It proposes that science is our only hope. It is the excessive belief in the salvific power of scientific knowledge and research—offering us science as our great savior.²

Now, what this belief system does is discount things which can't be assessed, measured, or studied thru the use of the scientific method. Knowledge and meaning about such things isn't, therefore, considered real knowledge. In short, we don't need to take it seriously. In fact, it shouldn't be taken seriously. But, what does this mean for things like love or evil or history? If I can't assess or measure or study such things with the scientific method, are they unknowable? Are they not to be taken seriously? Do you begin to see the problem?

Anyone who has ever fallen in love knows the reality and the power of love!
Anyone who experienced the Holocaust knows evil exists!

Well, in today's passage, we're going to see Jesus heal a man who's oppressed by a demon. The scientism in us wants to quickly reject this account as ridiculous—

¹ "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," *Paramount Pictures*, 1986.

² Watch [this](#) helpful primer on Scientism.

as a superstitious tale told by an ancient, uneducated and unenlightened culture. Friends, don't do that. That's the arrogance of scientism speaking.

Let's read today's passage and hear what Luke records for us. Then we'll pray for open minds and open hearts as we consider the reality of the unseen spiritual war which is being waged all around us.

Luke 4:31-37

³¹ Then he [Jesus] went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. ³² They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

³³ In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, ³⁴ "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!"

³⁵ "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

³⁶ 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!" ³⁷ And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

In today's passage, there's both authority and gospel—power and good news. Jesus comes with both. (1st) We'll see that **Jesus comes with authority**. He comes with authority over what's seen, the natural world all around us, and with authority over what's unseen, the spiritual forces which the Bible says are also operating all around us. Jesus is *the* authority. (2nd) We'll see that **Jesus comes with good news**. He comes with authority and, unlike most of us, he uses his authority to work gospel into our lives—to work good news into the world.

Let's look at each in turn.

1. Jesus comes with authority (vv. 31-32, 36-37).

We don't usually think it's strange when teachers teach with authority. In fact, we often expect them to do so; don't we? I mean, I expected my college instructors

and my seminary professors to be authorities in their individual fields. I even wanted for them to teach me as authorities. If they said something about history or literature, I believed it. After all, they were the experts. They had authority.

Yet, in Jesus's time, this wasn't the expectation. The tradition among rabbis was not to blaze new trails in theology. Rather, rabbis based their teaching authority on the teaching of other rabbis. Theirs was an authority by committee and tradition. Original thinking in theology was frowned upon. Your word, on its own as a teacher, wasn't enough—wasn't sufficient. A scribe needed to form authority by committee. He needed to show that others had come to the same conclusion.³

But, this wasn't how Jesus taught. He handled the texts of Scripture directly. He didn't rely on other rabbis or traditions. In fact, Jesus often attacked the scribes and their traditions as flawed and contrary to the Word of God (cf. Luke 11:37-54). In no uncertain terms, Jesus tells them how disgusting all their traditions are to God. Just think about what he says.

- You make a big deal about cleaning cups and dishes in traditional ways, but inside you are filthy with greed and wickedness (Luke 11:39).
- You're meticulous about giving your offerings in specific, traditional ways yet won't give the oppressed justice or the wounded love (Luke 11:42).

No. Jesus wasn't big about honoring traditions. And, if you want to understand why the people in the crowds were so astonished by the authority of Jesus' teaching, just consider how he teaches in his longest recorded sermon. Just consider how Jesus interprets the Word of God—*assuming total authority over it!*

- You have heard (*from the Ten Commandments!*) do not murder anybody, but I'm going to tell you what it really means. If you get angry with others, then you'll be judged by God as a murderer (Matthew 5:21-22).
- You have heard (*from the sacred Word of God!*) do not commit adultery, but this is what that law really tells you. If you look at someone's spouse with lust, then you are an adulterer before God (Matthew 5:27-28).

³ See Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 429.

Friends, we read statements from Jesus like these without pausing to consider how his original audience would've heard them. They weren't thinking, incarnation. They weren't thinking, the second person of the Godhead. They weren't thinking, Jesus is the eternal Son of God. To them, he was just another rabbi.

Look, simply imagine that I'm arguing an important Constitutional Law case before the Supreme Court. This case considers some really deep interpretive issues in regards to what the Framers of the Constitution intended by the 2nd Amendment. Imagine it's time for me to argue my position, and I stand before the nine justices and make this argument:

You have heard it said that "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." But, I say to you that if you even think of taking their guns, then you've already infringed upon their constitutional rights.

How do you imagine that line of reasoning will go? How will it be received? Friends, I'd be reprimanded by the court. I'd be a legal laughingstock; *wouldn't I?!* They'd want to know how my words had any authority *over* the U. S. Constitution—*over* what it says and what it means. I wouldn't have the authority to say those things unless I was *over* the document not *under* it, unless I was the *Framer* or the *Author* of the Constitution.

Friends, Jesus comes with authority. And people are both attracted and baffled by it. They don't know exactly what to do with him. Is he from the Lord or the devil? Is he to be rejected or to be respected? Jesus says things no human being should say, but he also does things—like cast out demons and heal sick people—that are glorious and divine in nature. So, what do you do with the authority Jesus claims for himself? What do you make of this strange rabbi?

This was the precise question C. S. Lewis was faced with—as he was moving from unbelief to belief. He writes this.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at

*him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any...nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to...*⁴

Friends, what will you do with the authority of this Jesus? This is *the* question. This is the most important question you can ask and answer. It changes everything. Please wrestle with it. Don't ignore it.

Well, this brings us to our second point.

2. Jesus comes with good news (vv. 33-35).

I love action movies. My wife not so much. Therefore, I end up bingeing them whenever Natalie is out of town. And, without a doubt, the best ones are the movies in which the hero saves the day from a clearly evil foe when it seems that all is lost. You know what I'm talking about—these are the damsel tied to the train tracks kind of action movies. Someone's wellbeing is threatened and leveraged for evil reasons, but the protagonist foils the diabolical plan. The hero saves the person who is in peril and executes swift justice upon the villain.

It's a happy ending. It's good news.

Friends, I wonder if you recognized *that* narrative in *this* passage of Scripture. It's here. There's *that* kind of happy ending here. There's *that* kind of gospel here. Look at the passage with me again. (What was Josiah's line in last week's sermon? This is better than *Disney Plus*? Well, *it is!*) Just listen.

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. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said... "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 (vv. 33-37).

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55-56.

What a confrontation! It doesn't get too much more evil than demonic forces; does it? And, here is this public showdown between Jesus and this unclean spirit. The spirit initiates. He calls Jesus out and gets it right. The demon has good theology. This demonic spirit knows better than anybody there that day who Jesus really is—"the Holy One of God" (v. 34). And, he also knows exactly what Jesus has authority to do—judge and "destroy" God's enemies (v. 34).

(Friends, for just a moment let their interaction sink in. We should be warned by this demon's revelation. Our salvation isn't simply about having right theology but about having right relationship with God. Don't ever believe you know the Lord because you simply know a bunch of stuff about the Lord. That kind of knowledge can't save you. Only relationship with God by trusting Jesus can save you.)

Well, back to the action. There is something odd about what the demon says to Jesus. I wonder if you noticed it. The spirit asks—"Have you come to destroy us?" when he confronts Jesus (v. 34). Now, this is a mysterious use of a plural pronoun; isn't it? Who is the us? I guess he could be speaking on behalf of all demonic forces. Yet, there's nothing that would indicate that in the text. Or, perhaps, he could be one of many demons oppressing this man. The text, however, doesn't indicate anything about multiple demons as it does elsewhere in Scripture (Mark 5:9). So, what's up? What's with the plural pronoun? Who is this we?

Friends, the best answer is that this demon is speaking on behalf of himself and the man whom he's oppressing. This is a hostage situation. "If you have come to destroy me Jesus, then you'll have to destroy us." And, moreover, if Jesus deals with the evil in the spirit, doesn't he have to deal with the evil in this sinful man too? In this way, the demon may be chiding Jesus. "If you want to exercise justice Jesus, then you can't just destroy me. You'll have to destroy the image of God in this man. You'll have to destroy us both. You'll have to judge and destroy everyone!"

Do you remember the verse Jesus read on the scroll from the book of Isaiah in last week's text? Do you recall how Josiah highlighted the fact that Jesus stopped after reading the first part of the verse? He only read the good news part to the crowd. I've come to free the prisoners, to give sight to the blind, and to release the captives from oppression. Jesus stopped short of reading the part about the Lord's vengeance and judgment (Isaiah 61:2b). *And, here Jesus shows us why!*

God in the person of Jesus has come to separate us from evil *before* judgment. He has come to take our sins away, put them upon his shoulders, and destroy them on the cross. He's come to stand under the Father's judgment for us. And this scene, this confrontation with the demon, is a signpost pointing forward to that good news. Friends, through faith in Jesus, evil is judged and we are saved. So, Luke tells us—“the demon...came out without injuring” the man (v. 35). *Amen!*