

Preaching, Cleansing, Healing & Leaving

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[0 : 00] So, I think that you've been on a bit of a journey with Jesus in a series on Sunday mornings, and we're picking up in this section in Luke chapter 4, verse 31.

Jesus, of course, has just left Nazareth. He had gone into the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, and he sat, of course, as rabbis did, and he read from the scroll of Isaiah 61, verse 1 and 2, as we've become familiar with, and then he preached and explained or expounded what he had read to the people who were present.

Instead of opening their hearts to the message, they instantly resolved to reject him and to reject his message.

Jesus had come to his own, it would seem, and his own had received him not. Instead of receiving him, they took him from the synagogue by force to the brow of a hill where they were going to throw him or push him off and watch him hurtle down to his death.

Jesus, of course, passed through the midst of the crowd in Nazareth, and he left the town or the village. What's interesting is that he never stepped foot in Nazareth, as far as we can tell, ever again.

[1 : 29] He never, ever stepped foot in Nazareth again during his earthly ministry. They rejected him, and he did not return to illumine their minds ever again.

His voice was never again heard in the streets of Nazareth. Now, I'm not saying that no one from Nazareth ever heard Jesus preach anywhere else ever again, but I do think that's significant.

He had come to his own. His own had received him not. They were going to kill him. He left, and he never returned. And there's one or two incidents like that in the Gospels, isn't there?

There's the story of Herod, King Herod. He silences the voice of God in his life when he beheads John the Baptist. He cuts off God's speaking voice in his life, the agent that God had in place to speak to Herod.

Herod silenced him. And it's interesting, as you follow the story through towards the end of the Gospels, that when Jesus is sent to Herod, Jesus is largely silent in his presence.

[2 : 36] Herod wants to be entertained with miracles, and Jesus has nothing further to say to him because he has already cut off or silenced the voice of God in his life.

Now, I would not be so presumptuous as to say that that will happen to you. What I can say to you is that over the course of my life in ministry, I have met one or two people, and I have sensed that they've become a bit callous.

I've sensed that they've become a bit hard of heart. And I have sensed that the speaking voice of God in their lives is largely a thing of the past.

I can say that to you. And I'm asking you this morning, as you think about Jesus leaving Nazareth and coming down to Capernaum, never to return, I am asking you not to harden your heart towards the speaking voice of God and the speaking voice of Jesus.

Well, let me just kind of break this passage that we are looking at this morning into sort of manageable chunks. I'm going to just use the headings that John sent to me by way of title.

[3 : 53] I'm just going to add one more. But we're going to look at preaching, cleansing, healing, rebuking, and then leaving. Those are the five areas that we're going to camp on for a few minutes this morning.

And we'll begin by looking at Jesus preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Capernaum, if you've ever looked at a little map at the back of your Bible, you'll know that Capernaum was in the northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee.

It says that Jesus came down to Capernaum. He did that quite literally because Nazareth is about 1,200 feet above sea level, and Capernaum is about 600 feet below sea level.

So he quite literally had come down from Nazareth to Capernaum. As was his custom on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue.

Where he began to preach. Synagogues, of course, had come into existence when Israel were in exile. You remember when they were carried off as prisoners to Babylon. And during that period of exile, synagogues had come into existence.

[5 : 01] They met together on the Sabbath in gatherings to say prayers, to recite blessings, and to read the law and to have it explained to them.

And soon buildings were built to facilitate these gatherings, these synagogues, or these coming together of people. Soon buildings were erected.

And when they returned back to Israel, these prisoners, when they came back to Israel, they brought this synagogue model with them. And Capernaum had become the adopted home of Jesus.

He had moved from Nazareth to Capernaum with his family. It was his new home. And he frequented the synagogue in Capernaum more than any other synagogue anywhere in Palestine. No doubt, as they sat there that Sabbath waiting for Jesus to preach there, the atmosphere was just pure buzzing. As they waited for Jesus to begin to preach.

[6 : 01] As the prayers were prayed. As the blessings were recited. And they waited for Jesus to pick up a scroll and read from it.

And then begin to preach from it. As they listened to Jesus, the thing that struck them was the authority with which he spoke. There was a ring of power, both in terms of his content and in terms of his delivery.

They had never heard anyone speak with such authority and power as Jesus did. Jesus was an incredible preacher.

The preaching that they were used to listening to was in stark contrast. The preaching of the scribes and Pharisees. They took pride. The scribes and Pharisees took pride in the fact that they didn't add anything of their own to orthodoxy.

They just peddled what had been taught by rabbis and great teachers in the past. In fact, listening to a sermon from the scribes and Pharisees was a bit like reading a PhD thesis.

[7 : 12] Statements are made and then in the footnotes people spend forever stating why they made the statement. And it just goes on endlessly until it bores you to tears.

And when you have to mark one, it's just really frankly horrendous. Listening to the scribes and Pharisees preach was a bit like that. They would make statements and then they would tell you why they made the statement and who else had made the statement in the past as they drew on the weight of others to kind of authenticate what they themselves wanted to say.

Listening to them was a bit like eating reheated porridge. I don't know if you're much of a porridge fan. I eat porridge every morning. My wife thinks it's the most disgusting looking substance that she could imagine.

I had an old uncle and he would make a full pan of porridge once a week and then every day he would reheat the entire pan and carve off a little slice for himself and eat it.

And listening to the scribes and Pharisees was a bit like eating reheated porridge. It was just horrendous. And this, of course, this kind of preaching is not unique to the first century.

[8 : 22] Many of us are weary listening to sermons like this even in the 21st century. But Jesus was different. His sermons were full of authority and they were relevant.

You never went to the synagogue to listen to Jesus and left wondering, what in the world was all of that about? And what has any of that got to do with me? When you went and listened to Jesus, you knew exactly what he wanted to say because he stood up and said it with clarity and with power. I long for that kind of preaching in the 21st century. A sense of expectancy that when the word of God is preached, the voice of God will be heard.

Don't you long to come to church with a sense of expectancy that when someone stands to preach, you fully expect to hear the speaking voice of God as he ministers to you in your life and in your circumstances.

I read recently the book by Martin Lloyd-Jones, Preachers and Preachers. I didn't find the first chapter terribly helpful, but there was one little story in it that really struck me. When he was ill and in hospital and out of the pulpit for a long period of time, a little 12-year-old girl wrote to him.

[9 : 43] And in the note she said to him, we are looking forward to you coming back. We hope that you get better soon. We miss you in the pulpit, she said, 12 years of age.

You are the only preacher that we can understand. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great expositor. You are the only preacher that we understand.

You long, don't you, for this kind of preaching. I long for preachers who preach like this. I think that preaching has fallen on hard times.

Preaching is, it either falls into one of two categories. Either it's dreadfully, dreadfully boring. It's like listening to a preacher read from a commentary. There's no sermon structure and there's definitely no application.

And it's dreadfully boring. Or the other extreme is that it's nothing but a bunch of stories and waffle. I think personally that preaching has fallen on hard times.

[10 : 47] Listening to some of the preaching that we are subjected to is a bit like trying to eat soup with a fork. It's just painful. It's dull and wearying.

But I've also been in meetings where I've heard sermons and it's almost like the hush of heaven falls upon the room. And the words of the preacher are like arrows going through the air into your heart.

And you leave church knowing without any shadow of a doubt that God was there. That God spoke to you through his word.

When the word of God is preached, says Martin Lloyd-Jones, people will attend with listening ears. And when Jesus preached, he preached with power and with authority.

And there must have been a clarity about the way that he preached. Preachers are by very nature heralds. That's what the word carousel means. It carries that sense of being a herald.

[11 : 54] The king has spoken and the subjects must hear what the king has said. And preachers must have a sense that they are speaking on the king's behalf as they bring the message to a congregation Sunday by Sunday or wherever else it might be.

They are heralds speaking on behalf of the king so that the subjects might hear what he has said. Whenever a man of God is taken up by the Spirit of God in the preaching of the Word of God, then people will attend with listening ears.

So that's the first thing. I know that Brunfield is the exception to this. Anything that I've said negative about today's preaching, so please forgive me. I'm sure you've got great, great preachers. In fact, I know you've got great preachers here in Brunfield. I've heard John, and this is no reflection of him. It's just a real passion of mine.

Preaching is not rocket science. It's hard, hard work. There's no doubt about that, but it's not rocket science. Just explain, just illustrate, and just apply.

[13 : 07] It's as simple as that. Just show people the relevance of the Bible for their lives. Just bring them into the world of the Bible and make it live. And I long for that kind of preaching in the 21st century.

And I leave church often depressed that people somehow have never caught that. So let me move on before I get myself into trouble. Here's the second thing. Preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Jesus was a powerful preacher. Secondly, I want you to think about the cleansing that took place in the synagogue. As Jesus preached, a man cried out in the middle of the service.

It was a little unnerving. I don't know if you've ever been in a service where somebody cries out with a loud voice. And that's what happened in the synagogue that morning. Somebody began to shout out, Ha!

Jesus of Nazareth, I know who you are, Son of God. What have you come here to destroy us? What do you want with us? Why are you here? And there was an unnerving moment as this man shouted out in the middle of the service.

[14 : 15] Interesting demon possession, isn't it? I find it interesting that it's very rare in the Old Testament. You hardly ever read about it. You read about an evil spirit tormenting King Saul.

But by and large, when you read through the Old Testament, you hardly ever read about demon possession or demon exorcisms. But then when you come to the Gospels, it's all over the place. It's like on every page in the Gospels. You find Jesus encountering demon-possessed people and delivering them from their demon possession. And then when you move out of the Gospels and into the book of Acts and then into the epistles again, it kind of fades a little.

It's not that it never exists. You've got the demon-possessed girl in Acts 16 when Paul arrives in Philippi. But it certainly begins to subside again throughout the rest of the New Testament. Not a great deal of it in the epistles. But in the Gospels, it's all over the place. It's staring you on the face every page that you turn.

[15 : 18] And I wondered, why is that? Why is that? And I think the answer to that question is found in 1 John 3, verse 8. Jesus came to destroy the works of the evil one.

And if Jesus came to destroy the works of the evil one, you would expect when Jesus came to earth, you would expect to find opposition. And you'd expect to find resistance.

And that's exactly what we do find. This one who came to destroy the works of the evil one, we find that he is resisted and he is opposed. And you find he is encountering, combating, and engaging the forces of darkness throughout the Gospels.

Jesus addresses the demon, be quiet, he says. Be quiet. Come out of him. Then the demon throws the man down on the ground and comes out of him.

But we're told by Luke, who's a doctor, who's interested in physical details, he didn't harm the man. Tried to harm him. Threw him down on the ground, but he didn't harm the man.

[16 : 24] The point, of course, of all of this is that the demon did exactly what Jesus told him to do. Even the demons are subject to the authority of his word.

His authority is not just in his preaching, but when he speaks to the forces of darkness, they are forced to listen to him. This demon knows that Jesus is the Son of God. He knows more about Jesus than all of the people in the synagogue put together.

He knows exactly who Jesus is. But this demon is still a demon on his way to eternal hell. Even though he believes in Jesus and he knows a lot about Jesus.

Because the life of faith is about more than knowing about Jesus, isn't it? It's about knowing Jesus in a personal relationship. The difference between the disciples and this demon.

The demon knows Jesus, knows more than the disciples probably about Jesus. But they love Jesus. They're trusting in Jesus to guide them and direct them and instruct them and provide for them.

[17 : 28] But this demon is opposed to Jesus and hates Jesus and recoils from the presence of Jesus. It's interesting that Jesus doesn't let this demon destroy this man, hurt this man.

Somehow, miraculously, he prohibits this demon from destroying this man. You see something of the destructive nature of Satan in what takes place there, don't you?

He's interested in destroying people. Destroying people. Jesus cares deeply about people. But these demons are interested in destroying people.

A little brethren preacher who's probably well known to by the name of David Gooding. Ever heard of David Gooding from Belfast? A godly little man. And in his little commentary on Luke's gospel, he makes this point.

He says it would be wrong and dangerous to suggest that every person is demon-possessed. Of course it would. That would be wrong and it would be dangerous. Demon-possession is an extreme form of spiritual bondage.

[18 : 36] But the writers of the New Testament assert that to a lesser or greater degree, every person who's not a Christian is under the power of Satan in some shape or form.

And that's true. Before I became a Christian, I was under the control of Satan to some degree. And we see something of the destructive nature of Satan in the kind of lives that people live and the kind of directions that people go.

Goodness, I come from a family where the destructive nature of Satan is all too visible. It's on every front. As people make terrible choices and go in terrible directions and make a mess, one mess of their life after another.

And then I see Jesus from time to time break into people's lives and rescue them from that tyranny and that bondage and set them free.

From time to time I see Jesus do that. And I just want to wind this point up by saying to you that if you're here and you sense, well, I'm not demon-possessed, but I know that I'm under the influence of sin and sin has me in its snare and pulling me in directions that I don't want to go and I wish that I could break free.

[20 : 02] I just want to say to you that Jesus could help you break free. The gospel is about setting people free from the tyranny and the controlling power of Satan.

And if I didn't believe that, I wouldn't stand in a pulpit Sunday by Sunday. I believe that with all my heart. I've seen people set free by Jesus again and again.

I could tell you story after story. I know a man that walked into a tent here in the meadows, an alcoholic carrying a carrier bag full of alcohol.

He walked in the tent, probably half cut, and they took the carrier bag of alcohol from him and he went in and he listened to a preacher called Dick Lucas. And he left the tent having become a Christian and he never asked for his carrier bag on the way out and he never looked for a drink since then.

Set free by Jesus. That's possible. Here's the third thing, the healing in Simon's house. The healing in Simon's house.

[21 : 04] We leave the synagogue. We go to Simon's house. Simon has a mother-in-law, which is a little inconvenient for people that think that Simon sort of established celibacy amongst the clergy.

It's a little awkward. If you've got a mother-in-law, you must have had a wife at least at some point along the way. Because the two usually go hand in hand, don't they? Mother-in-laws and wives come as a package deal.

And that's a good thing. And shame on you if you thought I was saying anything about mother-in-laws. It never entered my head. They enter Simon's house.

Simon's mother-in-law is ill. The arrangements had probably been made that when they came back to Simon's house that she would cook them lunch. She wanted to do it.

It wasn't that she was being forced to do it. She wanted to do it. But she'd come down with a terrible fever. Luke says it was a high fever. He's a doctor. He knows more about fevers than I do.

[22 : 02] I know that when I had a fever, my mom told me, you're going to school whether you like it or not. Stop your nonsense. But when you've got a high fever, even walking to the bathroom from your bed, you feel like a 40-foot truck is driving through your brain.

And she's got a high fever. She's rendered powerless. She's lying in bed. And they ask Jesus to help her. And he does help her rather unusually. In the rest of the story, he lays his hands on the sick and heals them.

But in this story, he doesn't lay his hands on Simon's mother-in-law. He speaks to the fever that she has. He speaks to the fever. Almost like the fever can hear him. And he heals her.

And it's not like, you know, I hope that you feel a little bit better by the end of the day. And then sort of halfway through the afternoon, she drags herself out of the bedroom and says, would anyone like soup?

I think I might have a can of Heinz tomato soup here. No, no. She is instantly healed. And instantly she's engaging in what she wants to do. She cooks them a meal. Instantly she engages in the service that she wants to do for Jesus.

[23 : 09] And that's the way it is with Jesus. When he intervenes in our lives, he enables us to do what we were created to do. What we were made to do.

He sets us free to do what we want to do, that we want to do to serve him, to glorify him, to render something to him. Remember that story of Eric Little and Jenny is telling him off on Arthur's seat for all the training.

Remember that story? As he trains to be an athlete and he says to her, God has made me fast. And when I run, I can feel his pleasure. I think that Jesus wants this woman to feel the pleasure of God as she serves him and glorifies him and enjoys him.

I have no idea what it is that God wants you to do. But here is at least one lesson. There's a bunch more lessons from this. But at least one lesson from this story is that Jesus can help you do whatever it is God wants you to do.

And what you have in your heart to do by way of service. Well, of course, these miracles and this demon possession is all about authenticating Jesus as the prophet that John spoke about at the beginning of the service.

[24 : 27] The prophet that was greater than Moses. All of these miracles were about authenticating Jesus, revealing that Jesus was this great prophet that had been spoken of throughout the Old Testament.

Fourthly, there's a rebuking at sunset. That really struck me. He continues to heal people outside Simon's home. And not only is he healing people, but he continues to set people free from their demon possession.

Really interesting. And then the demons, as they come out of people, are shouting, you are the son of God. And he rebukes them. And he says, stop saying that.

You've got to be silent about this. And this is what theologians refer to as the messianic secret. Why did Jesus not allow these demons to announce the fact that he was the son of God?

He was the Christ and the son of God. And I think there's various reasons for that. I think Jesus didn't want the crowds to get caught up with a misguided interpretation of what the Messiah would be and what he would do.

[25 : 33] Remember the story of the feeding of the 5,000? You get a little glimpse of their misguided understanding of the Messiah's role when they want to make him king. They want to call down fire from heaven to consume the Roman legions and send them packing.

They want a political kingdom. And Jesus has come to be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. And they'd never conceived of a suffering servant.

Never, ever. Jesus would reveal his true identity at the right time to the right people, not to a misguided crowd that would be caught up by the euphoria and frenzy of miracles, which is interesting, that he silences these demons.

The other reason, I think, which is really worth just mentioning, and my time is gone, but this is worth at least mentioning, that Jesus did not want demons as his PR agents.

He didn't want his demons speaking to the press on his behalf. There were people much more suitable to represent him and speak on his behalf and declare his identity than demons.

[26 : 47] And if people met demons listening to them announce that Jesus was the Christ, they would have been put off becoming followers of Christ forever.

I mean, who wants to follow someone that's supported by demons? It's just unthinkable. And of course, that reminds us, doesn't it, that Christ's witnesses have a responsibility to live lives that are marked by things like integrity and authenticity.

Jesus doesn't want demons representing him. He wants people that are Christ-like. I'm going to speak about the loveliness of Jesus. The loveliness of Jesus better somehow be evident in the lives that we live.

I'm going to speak about the grace of Jesus. I'm going to speak about the grace of Jesus. Then the grace of Jesus better be evident in the way that we interact with other people. There are enough demons claiming to be Christians trying to speak about Jesus putting others off.

Lots and lots of people who could never witness to their neighbors because of the behavior that has gone before them. It would contradict anything that they might want to say about Jesus. Professor Blackie, Edinburgh University, Christian teacher, teaching a class of students oral recitations, telling them to take the book in their right hand, speak from their diaphragm, one boy takes it in his left hand.

[28 : 16] Blackie thunders down the class, take the book in your right hand, didn't you hear me? He holds up his right hand arm and it ends at his wrist.

He has no right hand. Professor Blackie went down the class, put his arm around the boy and said, as everybody shifted uncomfortably in their seats, wondering what will come next, said, I am deeply sorry.

I had no idea. That story was being told as part of a sermon illustration in Charlotte Chapel many years later and at the end of the sermon, a young boy jumped up to the front of the church and he held up his arm and it ended at his wrist and he said, I was that young man and Professor Blackie led me to faith in Christ but he could never have done it if he had not put the wrong right.

He could never have done it had he not put the wrong right. And here was a Christian professor who understood that the lives of Christ's witnesses need to be marked by things like authenticity and integrity and grace and love.

No demons as PR agents. Well, here's the last thing. Leaving, there's a ton of things that we could say about that. Jesus withdrew to a solitary place at daybreak.

[29 : 38] I know that, I know that we could be legalistic about the whole issue of quiet times but, and I know that there are people who suggest that if you don't have a quiet time in a certain way at a certain time every day and then you're a backslidden rascal.

I understand that and I understand that by and large some of that's legalism. But I think I'm also find myself really challenged by what Jesus does here. Because if the second member of the Trinity, if Jesus, the Son of God felt the need to retreat, to recalibrate spiritually, to commune with his Father,

then who in the world am I to think that I can trundle through every single day, week after week, month after month, without ever talking to the Father?

Do I really think I can do that? If Jesus, the Son of God, felt his need to withdraw and recalibrate and just be alone with his Father, there needs to be somewhere, somehow, time where we just meet with God and commune with him.

Isn't there? There needs to be. Otherwise, we will fall flat on our spiritual faces as we trundle through the day, depending on our own resources and our own strength.

But enough about that. Here, let me just wind up by making reference to the fact that Jesus withdrew and then the crowds found him. They were looking for him and they found him and they wanted to keep him.

[31 : 11] They didn't want him to leave. The folk in Nazareth couldn't get rid of him quick enough, but here they want him to become their pastor. Would you come and be our pastor? Would you preach to us every week?

Don't ever leave Capernaum. That was the cry of the people in Capernaum. But Jesus says to them, listen, there are other towns and there are other people and I want to go to them as well as to you.

I want them to hear the message of my kingdom so that they can take out heavenly citizenship. I want them to hear that they must bow and make me king of their lives.

I want them to hear the good news. And there are other towns and there are other people and I must and I want to go to them. And it's great to sit in church, an evangelical church like this, on a Sunday morning, isn't it?

It's just a delight for me to come to this side of Edinburgh. I worship on the other side. But to come to this side of Edinburgh and to see an evangelical gospel proclaiming congregation like this, it's great, fantastic.

[32 : 21] But there are streets, rows and rows of houses in this city where no one is going to a church. And who will ever tell them about this great king called Jesus?

And who is ever going to interact and engage with them and somehow tell them that they need to surrender to his kingship and make him Lord and Savior of their lives?

Who's going to tell them? I grew up 17 miles from these great gospel preaching churches in the center of Edinburgh. 17 miles I grew up further down the coast. I don't ever remember anyone ever telling me as a youngster about Jesus.

and about what he could do by way of forgiveness and transformation. I don't remember anyone ever telling me about Jesus ever. So it's great to sit in church.

I love it. Sing these great songs. Hear the Bible explained. That's great. But let's just remember as we close what Jesus said. There are other towns.

[33 : 27] There are other groups of people and I want them to hear. And I don't think Jesus has changed. I think Jesus wants the people of this city to hear about him.

And I want to encourage you in every effort that you are engaged in and involved in in sharing the good news of Jesus. I want to encourage you. If I could encourage you to do anything it would be multiply it by about 20.

Multiply it by about 20. Because there are people perishing and going to a lost hell in this city that we live in. And I believe the gospel works.

The gospel in its simplicity works. It doesn't need to be defended. We don't need to apologize for it. We just need to let it loose and watch it at work.

I've told this story and with this I'm finished a million times. But our associate pastor in the church that I served in Canada was a missionary in Africa.

[34 : 26] He came back from Africa worked with us as a church and a lady in our church was following up on the Canadian census and she went into this house where the lady was physically and visibly ill.

She was dressed in a bathrobe or a nightgown and her garden was a wilderness and she says I come from the church at the top of the hill one of our guys would love to come and cut your hedge and cut your grass.

How she knew one of us would love to do that I don't know. But she came up with this suggestion I'd love to do that. Our associate pastor came back from Africa and said I'm going to do that. I hate offices let me out of this place.

He went down every week and he cut her grass and he cut her hedge. And all summer she just watched him. She said nothing to him she just watched him out the window. Poor woman was that ill she could hardly say a great deal to him anyway.

At the end of the summer she came out with a glass of juice and she gave it to him. And she looked at him and she said to him why do you want to help me? And you know what he said to her?

[35 : 30] He said because God has helped me. And I would love to tell you about how God has helped me. Would you allow me to meet with you for just four or five weeks and from a book called the Bible show you how much God has helped me.

She says okay I'm up for that. and he met with her for four weeks and on the fourth week she became a Christian. Listen I just want to encourage you if you take nothing else from this sermon and from this service please take this.

The gospel still works and it can transform lives and there are other people in other places that still need to hear it. Thank you so much for your kind attention.

Thank you.