



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 6, 2008

Released on Wednesday, July 2, 2008

"Christ as Teacher"

Printed Text: Luke 4:31-37; 20:1-8

Background Scripture: Luke 4:31-37; 20:1-8

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 11:1-5

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT: (Luke 4:31-37; 20:1-8)

Luke 4:31-37

- 31** And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days.
- 32** And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.
- 33** And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice,
- 34** Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.
- 35** And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.
- 36** And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.
- 37** And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about.

Luke 20:1-8

- 1** And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders,
- 2** And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?
- 3** And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me:
- 4** The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?
- 5** And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not?
- 6** But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet.
- 7** And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was.
- 8** And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

LESSON AIMS:

This lesson introduces us to Christ as the divine Teacher who taught with authority.

Facts: to digest passages from Luke that reveal Jesus as the authoritative Teacher.

Principle: to show that Jesus' teachings were divinely authoritative.

Application: to reinforce confidence in Jesus, who teaches with complete authority.

INTRODUCTION:

Anyone who has ever gone to college knows all about the long, hard hours of study that must be put in before a student can graduate and receive a genuine degree. Sadly, there are shady institutions that will award degrees to individuals who have not really earned them. These fake degrees (non-accredited) are used by unscrupulous people to acquire jobs and positions for which they are not truly qualified.

A recent news feature exposed a man who had been practicing medicine for years by virtue of false credentials. Think of the damage that might have been done by incorrect medications this man might have prescribed!

When Jesus began to teach, there were those who claimed to be authorities and questioned His authority. This week's lesson firmly established Jesus' authenticity as a divine teacher.

LESSON BACKGROUND:

Time: A.D. 27; A.D. 30

Place: Capernaum; Jerusalem

Following His baptism and His temptation by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus began His teaching ministry. To the Christian believer, Jesus Christ is far more than a teacher. Nevertheless, He is the greatest teacher the world has ever encountered. His earthly ministry was a teaching ministry from beginning to end.

The Gospels portray him teaching in the synagogues, in the temple, on hillsides, along the road, in private homes, from a boat on the edge of a lake, and many other places.

Huge crowds followed Jesus to hear His teaching, and He often accommodated Himself to such audiences. At other times He drew His twelve apostles aside and taught them or spent time privately with needy persons like Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman. Even the last week before His crucifixion was a time of intense instruction in the temple, on the Mount of Olives, in the upper room, and on the way to Gethsemane.

Much could be said about the elements that made Jesus' teaching successful. But our lesson this week focuses on the most important ingredient – the divine authority with which He addressed His learners.

Jesus' Authoritative Action, People's Reaction (Luke 4:31–37)

In the next synagogue scene, Jesus has moved about 20 miles northeast of Nazareth to the fishing community of Capernaum. Here His authoritative words and deeds are received more favorably. Unlike the Nazareth experience, where people sought to throw Him off a cliff (4:29), the residents of Capernaum seek Him eagerly (4:42). Yet it is not clear that they grasp Jesus' true identity, although the demons definitely do (4:34).

1. Where was Capernaum? What did Jesus do there (Luke 4:31, 32)?

Capernaum was a short distance from Jesus hometown of Nazareth. The first incident in our lesson (Luke 4:31-37) occurred early in Jesus' public ministry. After being in Judea and Samaria, He returned to His home region of Galilee. In His own town of Nazareth he was

rejected after having made messianic claims (Luke 4:16-30). He then relocated to Capernaum, a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee (v. 31).

Jesus is said to have come down to Capernaum due to the local geography. Nazareth was located on one of the southern slopes of the Lebanon Mountains, whereas Capernaum, on the shore of the lake, was 685 feet below sea level. Thus the twelve miles or so between the two towns were marked by continuous descent.

In Capernaum, Jesus taught them on the Sabbath days (Luke 4:31). Notice that our text says "days." His teaching was not a one-time-only event. His teaching must have been remarkable, for "they were astonished at his doctrine (teaching)" (v. 32). The word translated "astonished" means, literally, "struck out of themselves." They were overwhelmed.

2. How did Jesus' teaching differ from the scribes? How did the people respond to it?

Jesus' message was given with authority. His teaching differed markedly from that of the Jewish scribes. They spent much of their time on trivialities and quoted constantly from other authorities.

Jesus, however, to the amazement of the crowds, taught without citing authority. He spoke with the authority of God. Jesus spoke the truth and did not just teach words that He had read. He spoke what He knew was true. Jesus focused on the great themes of life, death, and salvation, claiming divine authority for all He said (cf. Matt. 7:28-29). His teaching was refreshing and satisfying to those starved for spiritual food.

3. How did the demon react to Jesus in the synagogue service (v. 34)?

A specific incident from Jesus' ministry at Capernaum illustrates how He supported His authoritative teaching with divine power. A challenge came as He was teaching in the synagogue one day. This challenge to His authority came from the satanic realm.

In the synagogue audience was a man possessed by a demon. Cases of demon possession were common in Jesus' day because His proclamation of God's kingdom brought forth Satan's most extreme opposition. When the demon recognized Jesus, he cried out with a loud voice and disrupted the assembly. The demon recognized Jesus' human identity, yet he also knew He was the Holy One of God come to destroy the works of the enemy.

Thus, in the Capernaum synagogue that day, the stage was set for a clash between two rival spiritual kingdoms. The outcry of the demon within the afflicted man was both an interruption of Jesus' teaching and a challenge to His authority. He could not let it go unanswered.

4. What commands did Jesus give the demon? What was the result (v. 35)?

This is the first of numerous accounts of miracles in Luke's Gospel. The exorcisms highlight that the Spirit-empowered Jesus exudes a cleansing and liberating power, rescuing humanity from evil forces. Jesus' authoritative rebuke of the demon indicates His refusal to give credence to demonic resistance or protest. Thus with two brief commands, Jesus silences the demon ("hold thy peace"), and forces him to depart from the man ("come out of him").

As a result, the demon is compelled to release his power and turn the man over to Jesus. This is a concession to Jesus' superior authority. Amazingly, the demon's violent response in throwing the man down results in no injury, for, as Luke says, the act *hurt him not*.

5. How did the people who saw Jesus cast out the demon react (vs. 36, 37)?

The crowd reacted in amazement. The text says, literally, "Amazement came upon all." The tense of "spoke among themselves" implies that they kept on doing this as they pondered the miracle. They had plenty to ponder, for as powerful and fearful as demons were, they had been overcome by an even greater power. "What a word is this!" they exclaimed. The crowd marveled that Jesus was obeyed. The text here states that He possessed both authority and power. He had superior power to that of the demon, and He had the authority to exercise it as He desired. The demon had to submit.

Those who saw the miracle could not keep the news to themselves. Jesus' *fame* spreads throughout Galilee, even to those regions where He has yet to visit (compare Luke 4:14). The effect of His reputation spreading throughout the area can be seen in Luke 4:40. Later, His fame will spread even farther (Luke 5:15), eventually even "throughout all Judea" (Luke 7:17).

But Jesus does not seek the fame of a miracle worker or an exorcist (compare Luke 5:14). His acts of power are almost like parables: they must be interpreted and understood in light of the entire drama unfolding in His ministry. This is why the city of Capernaum stands condemned. Even though the residents are amazed by His deeds of power, they do not interpret those deeds properly. Thus they are not moved to repentance (Matthew 11:23, 24).

6. In what ways have you witnessed the power of God at work in people's lives?

When we mention the phrase *power of God*, people will focus on different things. For example, I remember watching a well-known evangelist on television when I was a child. The adults around me expressed everything from astonishment to disbelief as the evangelist appeared to heal people of their diseases. I don't recall hearing any adult claim that God could not or would not perform a healing miracle; rather, it was a question of whether or not the evangelist could.

But to keep focusing on such debates is to miss a much more important power of God: His ability to transform sinful people into holy people. When a flagrant sinner comes to the Lord and his or her life is completely transformed, it should be easy to see the power of God at work in that life and give God the glory. We should remember that even a person's ability to suffer patiently is a demonstration of God's power (see Colossians 1:11).

Leaders' Challenge, Jesus' Response (Luke 20:1–8)

More than two years have now elapsed since the exorcism of Luke 4. The issue of Jesus' authority surfaces again when He travels to Jerusalem and confronts the city with His staggering claims and deeds. Jesus' actions involving the temple elicit questions from Israel's leadership regarding the nature and source of His authority. We learn from Luke 19:47 that the Jewish leaders are seeking His demise, so the questioning of 20:1–8 has only hostile intentions.

7. What three groups challenged Jesus' authority in the temple (Luke 20:1)?

This is Jesus' final public ministry in Jerusalem before His crucifixion. It appears that Jesus is daily assuming the role of teacher in *the temple* precincts. His preaching of *the*

gospel undoubtedly includes His earlier teaching about God's in-breaking kingdom (compare Luke 4:18, 19, 43; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16). However, the religious leaders are perturbed by Jesus as He assumes a role reserved for those having official standing. They are outraged by this upstart Galilean's presumption to position himself as a teacher in the shadow of Israel's most sacred site.

These leaders, the *chief priests* and *scribes* and *elders*, undoubtedly are members of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is comprised of 71 members and is the "supreme court" for resolving Jewish legal disputes. They have come to see Jesus as a formidable threat to their leadership authority, and thus this threat must be neutralized.

8. How did Jesus' critics hope to discredit Him (v. 2)?

The chief priests, scribes and elders considered Jesus' authority a threat. These religious leaders profited from the existing Judaism and were threatened by the crowds who welcomed Jesus. They looked for ways to get rid of Him and to undermine His authority. So they confronted Jesus with a question design to do so.

The delegation asked, first, "By what authority doest thou these things?" (Luke 20:2). "These things" most likely refers to the things He was currently doing in Jerusalem and the temple. He had entered the city as a king, rid the temple of its commerce, and taken it over to teach the crowds. What authority did He have to do all this? Was it not they who oversaw the temple and approved those who taught there? Was His presumed authority royal, priestly, or prophetic?

Second, they asked who had given Him such authority. Jesus had not sought their permission. In fact, He had never had official rabbinical training. Did He then come on His own authority? Did He represent some aberrant, unauthorized sect?

This demand of Jesus' credentials was an attempt to discredit Him. If He admitted that He had no authorization, the crowds might lose their respect for Him. But if He claimed God as His authority, He could be accused of blasphemy.

9. What dilemma did the critics face as they tried to answer Jesus' question (vs. 3-6)?

Using a method of argument common in rabbinical discussions, Jesus countered His critics' question with a question of His own. It was a similar one: "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" This question was not intended to evade theirs. It attempted to draw from them the answer to what they had asked – an answer they already knew but did not want to admit.

John the Baptist's ministry had shown all the signs of divine origin and blessing, and the crowds who went to hear him counted him as a prophet (Matt. 14:5; Luke 20:6). So this should have been an easy question for Jesus' critics to answer. Either the evidences of God's appointment of John were there, or they were not. Ironically, a delegation from Jerusalem (like this one now questioning Jesus) had earlier gone to John to confirm his identity (John 1:19-27), and he had spoken freely of his divine mission.

Jesus' critics, who had hoped to trap Him into giving a condemning answer, now found themselves trapped. If they acknowledged that John's ministry was from heaven, Jesus could legitimately ask them why they had not believed him. Another undesirable result of admitting this, though not stated here, was being forced to concede that a spokesman for God did not have to be trained in their rabbinical schools.

On the other hand, if they stated their real opinion – that John's baptism was from men – they would have incurred the wrath of the people, who believed he was a prophet. They

feared that the crowd would turn against them and stone them. Jesus' critics were caught and they knew it; so instead of saying what was true (that John's baptism was from heaven) or even saying how they really felt (that it was of men), they evaded the question completely and essentially stated that they did not know.

10. What was the religious leader's response to Jesus' question (v. 7)?

Ironically, by their claim of ignorance the religious leaders admit their incompetence to discern spiritual matters! Thus they forfeit their own claim to authority. If they, the religious scholars, cannot determine what is from God and what is of mere human origin in John's case, then how can they possibly stand in judgment concerning Jesus?

What begins as an effort to discredit Jesus results in a self-condemnation of the scholars. They are more concerned about maintaining and protecting their privileged position than they are in recognizing divine intervention. "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:48).

11. Why did Jesus not answer His critics' question (v. 8)?

Jesus, of course, was aware that the religious leaders did know the answer. His response was "neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

We should not interpret this as a response of personal spite – since you will not answer my question, I will not answer yours. His refusal was directly related to their answer, for the correct answer to His question was also the answer to theirs. God was the authority behind both John's ministry and Jesus' actions.

If Jesus' critics knew the source of John's authority (as they did), they also knew the source of Jesus' authority, for John had directed people to Him. Thus, Jesus did not need to give an answer. In truth, by this time in Jesus' ministry, He did not have to vindicate Himself by verbal claims. His teaching and works had built an irrefutable case for His divine authority.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus' authoritative teachings and deeds cannot be ignored. They must be evaluated in terms of the nature and basis of His authoritative claims. Jesus' claims are validated by His deeds, which point to His divine status. This is the evidence of the miracles (John 14:11).

But such conclusions are determined by a heart that honestly seeks the truth. As we observed with the religious leaders, sometimes a hidden agenda or personal ambitions blunt the force of divine truth. The truth of Jesus' authority challenges assumptions that are grounded on earthly foundations. The question we must ask is, "Who has ultimate authority to direct our lives?" The alternatives always have been the same: human authority or divine authority. What is your choice?

PRAYER

Father, may Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. We bow in Your presence and acknowledge that You are our authoritative Lord. We give Your Son the honor and glory forever and ever. In His name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Jesus is God's authoritative Son.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

1. Ministry for God will have power only if it is firmly grounded in God's Word (Luke 4:31-32).
2. We need not fear the devil if we truly fear God (Luke 4:33-35; cf. Matt. 10:28).
3. If we are to be servants of God, we must recognize Jesus' authority over our lives and over all creation (Luke 4:36-37).
4. It is not us, but the One we serve, who gives authority to our message (Luke 20:1-2).
5. We cannot accept Jesus' authority over our lives without surrendering our own (Luke 20:3-7).
6. Those who reject Christ cannot demand anything of Him (Luke 20:8).

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "Christ as Healer" and focuses on the image of Jesus as the divine Healer. Read Mark 1:29-45, noting the variety of miracles.

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