

The Crushing of the Serpent Begins

Luke 4:31-44

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Summary: Jesus did not just come to earth to say good words, perform some miracles and gain a following. He came to fulfill a prophecy thousands of years earlier, when God promised Adam and Eve that one of their descendants would crush the head of the serpent Satan. Join Stephen today and discover the scene when Jesus first came face-to-face with one of Satan's demonic followers.

If you were to travel to the capital city of Rome around the time of Christ's birth, one of the places tourists would have been flocking to visit was the great Temple of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom.

If you had the money to pay the entrance fee, you would have joined other pilgrims who stood breathlessly before the centerpiece of this false temple's worship—an enormous altar, covered in gold. Winding upward and around that altar was a powerful looking bronze serpent that coiled toward the temple ceiling and then hovered above the altar, looking down from above at the worshippers.

Engineers had designed hidden pipes that created steam, which would appear on cue from that altar, and float upward,

as it were, to the nostrils of that bronze serpent, and the serpent would make the sound of hissing as if it were alive.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *The Greatest Life of All: Jesus* (Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 107

As far as these worshippers were concerned, it was indeed powerfully and mystically alive.

It's ironic, isn't it? Four thousand years after the serpent deceived Eve into believing that divine wisdom could be hers if she defied God's word, a serpent was still being treated as the source of power and wisdom.

The Bible will refer to Satan by a number of names—one of them is the "serpent" (**2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 20:2**).

Even though the world has a good laugh over Satan—joking about him, turning him into a cartoon creature wearing a red

suit with a pitchfork and a long tail, “there’s nothing about Satan that’s funny or phony . . . he’s real.”

ibid

Nineteen different New Testament books mention him; Jesus refers to Satan 25 different times.

He was first introduced in the Garden, possessing a serpent. Following the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God promised them—and Satan was listening—a coming Redeemer, born of a woman, who would rescue humanity from the curse of sin and ***crush the serpent's head*** (***Genesis 3:15***).

What God promised in Genesis 3:15 was that the Messiah would bear the curse of sin and death, but in so doing, He would defang the serpent, destroy his power and eventually put this fallen angel—this serpent of sin—out of business permanently.

So, get this context in your mind: what Jesus is going to begin doing in His earthly ministry is provide the credentials, the proof, that He is the true Redeemer. And get this: He’s also going to give us just a taste of what life will be like once the curse is finally reversed in heaven.

He’s going to show us just a little bit of what it will be like when Satan and his demons are banished forever in Hell. In a very tangible manner, even before His victory on the cross, Jesus is now going to begin, as it were, to crush the head of Satan.

The serpent crusher has arrived!



Why is it important that God fulfill His promise? Would he be a credible God if even a single one of His prophecies was not fulfilled?

There’s no trickery, no sleight of hand, no hidden pipes to fool the gullible; no, Jesus is about to undeniably demonstrate true power, true divine authority.

And He’s will do it three ways—let me show you in Luke’s Gospel; we’re now at ***chapter 4***.

Jesus reveals His authority in His speaking.

Luke writes here in ***verse 31***:

And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

Luke 4:31-32

The people knew nothing of this kind of preaching. None of their rabbis or scribes spoke with inherent authority.

All they did was quote their predecessors and deliver a tiresome reiteration of rabbinical rules and ceremonial details.

If you saw any of their sermon manuscripts, it would be nothing but a collection of footnotes.

They would get up to speak and they would say, “Rabbi so and so said this; and Rabbi so and so said that.” Even when the prophets spoke, they said, “Thus saith the Lord.” They had delegated authority. The Rabbis quoted authorities, the prophets had delegated authority, but Jesus spoke with internal authority. Jesus said something shocking! He said, “*I say unto you.*”

Adapted from William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 51

In His sermon on the hillside, Jesus repeatedly said, “You have heard it said by others, but I say unto you...” (Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28).

In other words, “I’m not quoting some authority; I haven’t been given some *delegated* authority, No, I *am* the authority, and My word is *the* final word.”

By the way, any church that has any authority and any power only has authority and power because it adheres to the Word of God. Any preacher who has any authority any teacher who has any power doesn’t have it in themselves; their authority and power is seen only when they are teaching and preaching the Word of God.

Jesus isn’t delivering His opinion here in the synagogue; He’s not trying to find out what is politically correct with Rome these days; He’s not following the opinion polls—none of that! He is delivering the Word up God.

Jesus reveals His authority over the realm of Satan.

Notice verse 33:

And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice.

Luke 4:33

Stop for a moment. This is about to become a rather exciting worship service in the synagogue; nobody will forget this one.

Here’s this man who is demonized, or what we would call demon possessed.

An unbeliever can be possessed by demons, but believers who are inhabited by the Holy Spirit cannot be. The Spirit of God inhabits you, believer (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Holy Spirit isn’t about to share a room with the devil.

However, let me add this warning: while believers cannot be possessed by demons, they can be *persuaded* by demons—influenced by demons and tempted by the demonic world.

Let me distinguish it this way:

Unbelievers can experience demon *possession*, controlling them from the inside.

Believers can experience demon *persuasion*, controlling them from the outside.



Even if you have the Holy Spirit in you,
how do you experience the workings of
demons in your life?

This was graphically illustrated when Jesus rebuked Peter for following Satan's agenda and not the Lord's (**Matthew 16:23**).

Now back to this scene in Luke's Gospel: Luke is giving us the first recorded instance of Jesus encountering a demon possessed man, an unbeliever; possession simply means that this demon is in control of the man's personality and body—his thinking, speaking, feelings, and actions.

Pentecost, p. 145

And by the way, don't miss the observation that this man is in a synagogue; he's attending a worship service in a synagogue.

What's he doing in there? Singing the Psalms, saying the prayers, saying amen to the sermon—how long has he been just fine and dandy in there? How old is he? Was he a leader? How long has he been attending the services?

We don't know, but what we do know is that Jesus shows up and this demon isn't about to be comfortable with the person and the preaching of Jesus.

In fact, he can't stand the sermon so much that he evidently interrupts Jesus!

Notice verse 33 again:

And he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?"

Luke 4:33b-34a

That word—**Ha!**—isn't a form of laughter, it's a form of derision. You could translate it, "Hey you!" It carries the idea of someone saying, "Hey, that's enough."

Expositor's, p. 215

The phrase, "**What have you to do with us**" can be understood to mean, "What are you doing messing around here."

Suddenly, this man is just spitting out what essentially means, "Hey you . . . mind your own business . . . get lost."

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 116

Those opening statements are nothing but blustering, by the way. The next two statements reveal underlying fear.

Again, you need to understand in this context that Luke is not just showing us that Jesus has the power to exorcise a demon from a possessed man, but the fact that Jesus has authority and power over the entirety of the demonic realm.

David E. Garland, [Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2011), p. 216

*"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.”*

Luke 4:34b

Luke has already made the connection between the Holy One and the Messiah in **Luke 1:35**. This is a messianic encounter.

Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke, Volume 1* (Baker, 1994), p. 433

The demonic world already knew that God had promised Adam and Eve in the Garden that a Redeemer would be born among men who would rise to crush their kingdom. This little demon doesn't know everything, but he knows enough to know that he's not just in the presence of **Jesus-from-the-little-village-of-Nazareth**; oh no, this is **the Holy One of God**.

The power of darkness is coming face to face with the power of everlasting light. This isn't the final crushing of Satan's power, but it signals that the crushing of the Serpent is beginning. It is beginning!

Now verse 35:

But Jesus rebuked him saying, “Be silent and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, “What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!”

Luke 4:35-36

Let me recommend that you circle the words **authority** and **word**, here in **verse 36**, and then draw a line—as I have—up to **verse 32** and circle the same terms, **His word** and **authority**.

Luke is emphasizing the power of Christ's word.

The Jewish exorcists in the days of Jesus had elaborate rituals and incantations and incense and holy water and prayers. Jesus had none of that.

Jesus doesn't conduct an elaborate ritual, no long prayer, no smoke, no special incantations.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 101

He just speaks the words: “Be quiet . . . and come out.”

He speaks, and the demon submits.

Jesus is revealing His authority in His speaking;

Jesus is revealing His authority over the realm of Satan.

Jesus is revealing His authority over sickness.

Verse 38:

And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over

*her and rebuked the fever,
and it left her, and
immediately she rose and
began to serve them.*

Luke 4:38-39

Dr. Luke is using medical terminology here to describe this case.

The Greek medical world divided fevers into two classes, which they called *minor* and *major*. The word *major* derives from the word *mega*, which Luke uses here.

Luke literally writes that she was ***in the grip of a mega—a major—fever.***

Barclay, p. 52

The word for fever is the word for fire. We would say today, “She was burning up with fever.”

Now the medical community during these days thought that fever was the disease, rather than evidence that the body fighting some disease. So, for the Lord to cure her of fever actually means He cured her of whatever disease her body was fighting, and the fever immediately went away.

It strikes me that the Lord graciously condescends to their limited understanding and instead of explaining to everyone that she’s contracted malaria or cancer or some virus, He simply rebukes the fever.

In fact, Luke uses the same term for Jesus rebuking the fever that he used for Jesus rebuking the demon, and that isn’t

to teach us that fever is the result of some demon.

Luke is simply showing us that the Lord has the same authority over disease that He does over demons.

In either case, it only takes a word from Him to cure this disease.

And Luke—more than likely because he was a doctor—takes the time to tell us in **verse 39** that not only did her fever go away, but she immediately got up **to serve them**. And Luke noted that because this was a medical phenomenon!

Adapted from Pentecost, p. 146

Someone with a major fever who is cured might start to feel better, and then after a good night’s rest and a warm bath they might feel like getting dressed and sitting up for a while, but not in this case. No, she’s immediately healed and immediately infused with strength—it’s as if she was never sick to begin with!

This wasn’t just one miracle, but a series of miracles.

Now look what happens—**verse 40:**

*Now when the sun was
setting, all those who had
any who were sick with
various diseases brought
them to (Jesus).*

Luke 4:40a

The imperfect tense indicates continuous action through the night. Get this image in your mind: there is this steady stream of

diseased and demonized people arriving—continuously—to Jesus.

Barton, p. 16

What a picture of our world! This is what sin brought into the world; we live in a broken world of diseased and demonized and dying and despairing humanity.

But the Messiah has arrived and is now beginning to demonstrate His divine credentials as the Son of God; He's signaling His ability to eventually and ultimately reverse the curse of a fallen and sinful and diseased world—look at His credentials—**verse 40** again:

And he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.

Luke 4:40b

Luke wants us to know that Jesus, the Great Physician, was not a specialist; He didn't just specialize in cases involving fever—He could heal anything and everything.

Adapted from Bruce Larson, *The Communicator's Commentary: Luke* (Word Books, 1983), p. 97

And He was a really unusual physician because He didn't charge a fee or ask about insurance. And none of his patients went home uncured.

Adapted from John Phillips, *Jesus Our Lord* (Kregel, 2007), p. 109

Verse 41:

And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak,

because they knew that he was the Christ.

Luke 4:41

They knew He was the Christ—the anointed One—the Messiah, they knew it! I'll bet they did. The serpent-crushing Savior is beginning His ministry; He's on the move.

He will go on to preach—**verse 43** tells us—good news of **the kingdom of God**, the reign of God. Jesus is revealing the glory of the reign of God; it's just a taste for now, but just wait until it arrives and Christ reigns over all the earth.

Jesus is revealing His power to reverse the effects of the curse, brought on by sin; He's giving us a glimpse into a future glory, and what will that glorious kingdom be like?

I'll tell you: no more disease; no more death; no more pain; no more sickness; no more sorrow; no more tears of suffering (**Revelation 21**).

Is that possible? Can that be true? Oh yes, just look here!



When you experience pain, suffering and hardship, how does this picture of heaven encourage you? How do you rejoice in your suffering?

Can you imagine Capernaum now? Can you imagine a town where suddenly everyone, young and old alike, are healed, healthy, and restored?

R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume One* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 156

Luke makes it clear: ***any who were sick were healed***. It didn't matter what the disease or malady was—internally, physically, anatomically, mentally, psychologically—any who were sick were healed. Here they came; suffering from: muscular dystrophy, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, leprosy. They were blind, deaf, and mute. They had depression, anorexia, trauma. They were deformed and paralyzed. They had Parkinson's, dementia, or ALS. They arrived with cerebral palsy and epilepsy and brain injuries and spinal injuries.

The list could go on and on and on—it didn't matter what they had. But here they came. I can imagine some of them crawled, some limped on crutches; some arrived on carts; some were carried; some walked fast and some inched along, but here they came—the wealthy, the poor, educated and illiterate, all standing in line as equals before Jesus.

And He laid His hands on them all—one at a time—communicating that this healing was emanating from His person, His power, His authority.

He is not sickened by them; He is not contaminated by them; they are cured by Him.

This was an announcement—this was a picture of the coming reign of God—and

the final reversal of sin's curse. This is a taste of Heaven!

Just a taste, to prove who Jesus was.

Jesus reveals His authority in His speaking, over every sickness, and over the realm of Satan.

The crushing of the serpent has begun, with just the power of His word.

Let me read you the lyrics of that great hymn text written by Martin Luther, the converted Catholic monk who wrote 500 years ago something we still thrill to sing today:

*Did we in our own strength
confide, our striving would
be losing*

*Were not the right Man on
our side, the Man of God's
own choosing*

*Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He
The Lord of hosts His
name, from age to age the
same*

And He must win the battle

*And though this world with
devils filled should threaten
to undo us*

*We will not fear, for God
hath willed His truth to
triumph through us*

*The Prince of Darkness
grim, we tremble not for
him*

*His rage we can endure, for
lo, his doom is sure*

One little word shall fell him

*That word above all earthly
pow'rs, no thanks to them,
abideth
The Spirit and the gifts are
ours through Him who with
us sideth*

*Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also
The body they may kill;
God's truth – God's Word –
abideth still
His kingdom is forever.*

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