

THE OPPORTUNITY ON A SINGLE DAY

Luke 4:31–44

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The description of the great Galilean ministry of Jesus begins in verse 14–15 of Luke 4, which tells us that such a ministry was Spirit-empowered. The Spirit was upon Jesus, widely advertised (the report of Him went everywhere), synagogue-centered (for His ministry was taking place within synagogues) and it was exceedingly popular.

Now we find, in the verses before us today, a sort of sample of what a busy day in the life of Jesus was like. The Scripture covers a span of slightly less than twenty-four hours. It finds Jesus in the synagogue, in the streets and in the desert place. I would submit to you that, in order to find properly the meaning of this Scripture for ourselves, we need not only see Jesus in the historical sense of being in the synagogue, the home, the streets and the desert place; but we need to see Jesus, as well, in us in those same places today: when we are gathered for worship in our homes, in our public area of life and responsibility, and in our quiet place with God. It is continually the purpose of Jesus to reduplicate His life in us. So, whenever we find any Gospel incident, if we understand the historical nature of that incident and then translate it into the personal and what He's doing now, we will best understand and apply the Scripture to our lives.

I. This busy day in the life of Jesus begins at Capernaum in the place of religion—the synagogue.

We noted last week that it was Jesus' habit to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. There are two things that Luke shows us that Jesus is doing in the synagogue: One is that He is speaking; the other thing that He is doing is acting out His word. Things are happening.

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When Jesus speaks, His words come with such power to people that their response is that they're amazed at what He is saying. What strikes me when I hear the Word of the Lord today is that same amazement grips me. What is it about what Jesus says that so grips our life? It's because we realize, instinctively, whenever He opens His mouth to teach us, that He is speaking the truth and we can always depend on Him saying the truth. We know that when He speaks, He always touches those things which are a fundamental concern in life. He never wastes His words on trivialities. He's talking about how to live, how to let the kingdom come in us, how to be related to God as a son or a daughter. He's talking about eternal issues, about everlasting life. His teaching sparkles with illustration. It's easy to get a hold of, because He serves us, and the children can get a hold of it as well as the elderly. The scholar and the poor student, as well, can sense the majesty and power of what He is saying. And when He speaks, He speaks as one who loves people. He's not just filling some moments behind a pulpit because it's time to speak. But what He says, He knows that, if others will get a hold of it, it will change them. And because He loves us, He speaks to us and He speaks with authority. We realize that no one has ever spoken like this man and there are no words of anyone that we could ever listen to that could be set above this One's words.

When we gather for worship, one of the fundamental things that happens in worship is the moment of the sermon, which I hope is nothing more and nothing less than simply opening our heart to Jesus, who is speaking to us again. There's power in His Word. Power as we act upon that Word.

In Capernaum, in the place of religion, the synagogue, not only is Jesus speaking, which is the part of every worship service, but there is also that element in which Jesus is acting. There is power in His action. So, in the synagogue service illustration of this, we have a man who has a

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demon who suddenly—in the midst of the worship service—erupts and loudly proclaims, “What do You have to do with us, Jesus? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy one of God.” That interruption is going to be a moment in that man’s life for tremendous change to take place, since there’s going to be deliverance for Him because Jesus is in the service.

This is what we all want whenever we worship. In the case of anyone who has come to the service that is trapped in something they can’t get out of—who needs a breakthrough in their life, who needs to be freed of anything that is constricting them and harming them, obstructing their vision of God and of themselves, prohibiting them from really being free—the Lord will always be present in worship, with His delivering power, to set the captive free.

During the time between services, I had the opportunity to share with one of our members who was relating back to me a moment in the worship service several months ago when a prophetic word had been spoken which powerfully set this person free to serve God, and the last few months, they’ve been totally changed. Because we were doing more and are doing more in worship than simply putting in an appearance; we’re asking the Lord to intervene in our lives. That’s certainly the case at Capernaum with this demoniac. Skeptics have said that when you read the New Testament you have to recognize that this was written by primitive people who simply misdiagnosed mental illness or epilepsy. So whenever you find demon possession in the New Testament, just substitute the fact that in those days they really weren’t all that sharp and they didn’t know how to diagnose mental illness, so anything they couldn’t understand, they called possession. We do know from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 4, that Matthew knew what epilepsy was because he specifically mentions it as one of the things that Jesus healed. So Matthew, the Gospel writer, understands the difference between possession and epilepsy. We know also that in mental illness there is nothing alien that is possessing the person. What they

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have is endemic, inside them. Whereas, possession involves an alien spirit coming upon someone.

I've never had occasion to doubt demon possession because of my experience on the mission field when I was a child; with my parents ministering in Tibet. I remember one evening, staying in the monastery that was called the Place of a Hundred Thousand Idols. The whole place was given over to the worship of evil spirits and the devil. When people literally seek to worship the devil, you have the materialization of evil spirits. I remember, as a child, how difficult it was to even fall asleep that evening; the power of the demonic was so strong. My parents were praying through the evening for protection of God upon us as a family.

I believe what C. S. Lewis said, "The devil is sharp enough in his strategy that he accommodates his strategy to a culture." And when, in a culture, there's an emphasis upon mysticism and transcendental like in the eastern societies, you have more of a sense of personal demonic possession. But in the west, where we tend to prize ideas more and machines and technology, the devil tends more to inhibit those systems. Marxism, hedonism, capitalism—false forms of it rooted in greed or playboyism. All those kinds of things can be demonic in their expression. You may have the inhabitation of ideas and systems rather than just people.

Possession itself is very real. Jesus has come to defeat the work of the devil.

I want to say some things as a pastor about dealing with deliverance from demons, because if the liberals and skeptics have said it's all hogwash and superstition, some charismatics, on the other hand, have built their whole Christian life upon a habit of talking to and binding up and messing around with demons. They may not be demon possessed, but they're almost obsessed with evil spirits. In between those two extremes, there is the Scripture, where we ought to always be.

Scripture has some very definite things to say to us about possession. There are varieties of

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possession, varying degrees of possession. The Gadarene demoniac—who lived among the hills of the tombs and was always crying out and running around naked and bruising himself with stones and nobody could tie him down—had a case of possession that was far more serious than the man at the Capernaum synagogue. That guy, out in the Gadara area, could have never been calm enough to have gotten into a synagogue. So there are varieties of possession and degrees. But we do know that wherever the demons are, they always manifest themselves in the presence of Jesus. When Jesus is there, they have to speak up; they can't keep quiet when He's there. The same thing happens in the Book of Acts, when the apostles are in a meeting and the Spirit is present, the demons speak up. You will never find one example in Scripture where anybody goes around and says to somebody, "I believe there's a demon in you." You will never have anyone saying in Scripture, "I've got a word of knowledge. You have an evil spirit." The evil spirit's there and the presence of Jesus is in the room. The spirit can't keep quiet. The spirit will speak up all on its own. Nobody has to diagnose it. Jesus never ran around telling anybody they had an evil spirit. I am personally offended when people do that and lay that trip upon people. When people are hurting and needy in their life, the last thing they need is some well-intentioned person telling them, "You've got a devil." If you have a demon, it'll rear its head and nobody has to tell you you've got it.

The demons always know who Jesus is. They're absolutely terrified of Him. And Jesus always makes the demons shut up. He's not interested in publishing a book on His conversations with a demon. There are no pigs in the parlor for Him. There's no concept of wanting the demons to talk about what life is like in the underworld. They start saying, "We know who You are." And Jesus says, "Shut up!" Why does He shut them up? He doesn't want anyone believing on Him on the basis of a demon's testimony. Besides, the people don't know at that point who the Christ is,

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anyway. They think He's some person who's going to rule on David's throne in Jerusalem. So, hearing that word trips them up anyway. "Just be quiet," He tells the demons. "I don't want you."

And another thing that Jesus never does and the apostles never do is they never bind a demon. You hear all kinds of phrases today like, "We bind this evil spirit." You take a concordance and look at the word "bind" or "bound" and you'll never find that word used of demonic possession or evil spirits. Where it's used is in regard to church discipline, when you make a decision to evict a member because of immorality or whatever, that decision is a binding decision. One has been bound. You don't bind demons, friends. You kick demons out. You loose the person and tell the demon to go. I don't want a tied up demon in anybody. I feel a lot more comfortable with the Lord taking authority over something than me saying, "I take authority over it." Let the Lord take the authority.

The Lord's healing of demoniacs is a lot different than the popular picture you get in *The Exorcist*, where the priests just about wear themselves out trying to get the demon out of this girl. Jesus just does it! And, by the way, I might mention, that exorcisms always take place in a public setting, not one of them occurs in a private kind of a deal where there's just the two of us and the Lord's revealed to me you've got an evil spirit. All the exorcisms are right out in public, either in the synagogue or in a public place where everybody can see it and everybody knows when the demon has left, even the skeptics and the non-religious people.

One other thing should be noted. Jesus never casts a demon out of a disciple. Never, never! You'll never find it in the New Testament that Jesus casts a demon out of a believer or out of disciples. It's just not there. The Spirit of the Holy One and the spirit of the evil one cannot dwell simultaneously in the same person.

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What's all this leading up to? Simply saying that, in the place where we worship God, we seek not only to be informed through the teaching ministry of Jesus, but we seek to be changed. Our worship together is not coming with power if we simply remain observers and don't act on what the Spirit of God may be putting into our life in a time when we are in worship.

II. Jesus leaves the place of religion and goes into the place of the family, the home.

I think Jesus must have already had an expenditure of energy. I know that, after I've preached several times on Sunday, I'm kind of tired when all the adrenaline has run out of my system. So Jesus goes to Peter's mother-in-law's home. That's kind of interesting, isn't it? He had a mother-in-law. He must have had a wife. He surely did. We read in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that his wife traveled with him when he was in ministry. That's twenty-five years after the event in the Gospel, so we know that Peter was a married man for at least twenty-five years. Jesus comes to his mother-in-law's home and there's no dinner ready. He's tired and wants to eat, I'm sure. They say she's sick. Peter asks Jesus to do something. I think it's neat that Peter wants the Lord to do something for his mother-in-law. You can say he was probably only newly married. But he did. You know what the Lord did in the home? The Lord did a very beautiful thing. He served. He did what He could do. Then He came to the mother-in-law, stood over her like a physician, and Luke, in fact—the doctor who's writing this story—is the only Gospel writer to tell us what the nature of her illness was. The other Gospel writers say that she had a fever. But Luke is the only one that says, "She had a high fever." He's a doctor at that point. Jesus heals her. Her healing is sudden and so complete, she needs no recuperation time. She arises and serves them, prepares dinner for them. The whole idea of "in the home is the place of service."

What an excellent model for us, to recognize that it is in the home that we're most tempted to kick off our shoes and relax. And if we have a mean side to us, or an ugly side, it tends to display

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itself in the home; because there we're safe. Nobody's going to raise or lower our pay on the basis of that. We feel comfortable with people we know. Maybe the home is the area, sometimes, where we expect to be served. "I've worked hard all day and, woman, it's time you served me!" Or, "I've worked hard all day too, husband, and it's time you did the dishes for a change." Or if you're a single parent and coping with kids, you've worked hard all day and... "Kids, how come you didn't clean up your rooms?" It happens in a lot of ways.

Can you identify anything that someone else in your family would like to see changed in your life to make you a better person around the home and in the family? Take this model: Jesus went home and served. When His healing grace is present, then the mother-in-law serves as well.

Somehow, that's a beautiful model for a joy-filled home where there is service going on.

We're saved to serve. Our whole Christian life has been transformed so that we might serve the Lord and serve others.

Not only does He have the opportunity in the place of religion and the place of the family...

III. He has opportunity in the place of public gathering, the street.

When sundown came, the Sabbath had ended; and a whole group of people that never made it to the synagogue that day show up outside Peter's mother-in-law's door. A whole group of people have been left out of the synagogue. Why have they been left out of the synagogue? Because they were sick. And the only way they could have gotten into the synagogue was if someone would have helped them, carried their beds, carried them on a stretcher, assisted them by supporting them while they hobbled along. You couldn't do that—scribal law says you can't work on the Sabbath. The scribes had it so spelled out, that if your eye was hurting (they had it down to a science), you could apply only so much medicine to keep it from getting worse, but you couldn't apply any more to make it get better. Whatever medicine you used for whatever

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ailment, you could use enough to prevent the condition from further deterioration, but you couldn't help anybody get better, because that constituted work.

So these people had been home on the Sabbath. They had missed the situation in the synagogue until, at night, when the sun set and the Sabbath is over, everybody's bringing all these sick people right up to Jesus. What a parable that is! As many of us as have been in this room, we look around, and I marvel at what the Lord has done. Two years ago, when we were preparing to come into this building, we were thinking, "You could shoot a cannon loose in that building and never hit anyone. It's so big." The Lord has given us growth over these years. But as many people as there are in the services today, it's all the people that are still out there that for one reason or another are spiritually or physically ill and do not see themselves as belonging to the church. Somehow, the church has to find ways to get outside the walls to get to other hurting people so that He might touch them.

Thursday morning, Billy Graham spoke at the Crystal Cathedral. He was to meet with all the ministers in the Southern California area, many lay people that are involved in the upcoming crusade at Anaheim stadium later this summer toward the end of July. I am looking forward to that. I think that can be one of the greatest times for the church in Southern California that there's ever been. Seventy thousand seats in the Anaheim stadium; they're adding ten more thousand seats on the infield; ten nights, eighty thousand people a night. I'm making plans to be there every night and bring people with me. You can get people to a Billy Graham crusade you can never get into a church. Billy Graham was sharing the fact that they picked up a concept they're using now in crusades that they got in England. It's called the Triplet concept. What they're asking people to do—and we're going to be one of the churches to do this; we're going to have people involved working in the organization of the Billy Graham crusade—is to form

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prayer groups of three. They meet just once a week. The only thing that the prayer group has to do, the only requirement for the prayer group, is that everyone in the prayer group bring three names to the group that are persons that are not Christians. Three people in the group will pray for those three names. Each person brings three names and nine people are being prayed for in the group. Billy said in all his ministry he's never seen the kind of conversion rate that's taking place as a result of these triplet prayer meetings, people are praying, reaching out to people that are outside the synagogue who, for whatever reason, didn't get there.

We need that same heart. Churches die when they fill up with people and don't make any other plans. People die when we get to a stationary point in our life. Jesus goes out to the streets and He ministers.

Another great thing about Jesus' ministry in the street is that He touched everybody. I'm sure He had to be tired. Have you ever found that your opportunities to serve, the greatest opportunities you have to serve, come when you're the most exhausted? Just at the time you feel like going to bed and falling asleep, some emergency arises or the phone rings or a couple of things kind of happen. I find that my greatest challenges are often directly related to the level of my exhaustion. That certainly had to be the case with Jesus. Here, He ministers in the synagogue, casts out a demon, heals the mother-in-law, and now, out in the streets, a crowd shows up that's going to drain Him of His resources. But He doesn't just stand at that door and wave His hand and say, "Everybody be healed. Now you can go home." Luke says, again the physician, "Jesus laid His hands upon every one." Jesus didn't have to do that. He could have waved His hand. But love individualizes. And just as Jesus laid His hand upon everyone that day in Capernaum, He lays His hand, individually, upon each one of our lives because love particularizes. Love singles out; love brings in one to one.

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There's no other place in this text where Jesus finds himself, except one more. He not only finds Himself in the place of religion, the place of the family, the place of public gathering. But...

IV. He finds Himself in the place of private prayer and solitude.

Mark's Gospel, wedded with the Gospel of Luke, shows us that Jesus got up a great while before day or, as Luke puts it, at daybreak. That's evidently when the disciples come to find Him. He was out there, praying in a desert place, a lonely place, a quiet place. If I'd have kept the kind of schedule the previous day that Jesus kept, I believe I would have slept in that morning. Yet Jesus is out there praying.

I got to thinking, what in the world would Jesus be out there praying about? Many times, in our own life, we don't understand why we should pray since God knows everything anyway. Why pray? But Jesus, of course without giving us the answer to all that, says, "You pray, I pray." He's a model for us. And you always find Jesus praying.

What's Jesus doing? He's out there, probably giving thanks for what the Lord has done. He's asking the Father to confirm the work. It's one thing to have a miracle happen, but it's another thing to live the life after the miracle has happened. So He's no doubt asking that the results will be conserved. He's no doubt considering the cost that is coming to Him, because He's acted to help people. He's probably praying for a replenishment of His strength and He's certainly seeking direction for the next step.

All these are reasons for prayer in our own lives, as well, seeking that solitary place to give thanks, to ask the Lord to replenish our strength, to conserve the work that He has been doing through us, expand it and to pray for direction.

The crowds and the disciples come to Jesus, and they want to capture Him for Capernaum. "Just stay here, Jesus. Stay at Capernaum." And that's a tendency we have in life—to park. To find a

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place where God has been good to us and say, “This is so wonderful, let’s just stay here. Let’s just have a great time forever and ever.” And Jesus says, I’ve got to go on. There are other towns to go to. I must continue.

By that, He is saying to us in life, as a model, “Don’t get stuck.” If you’re at one of those moments in life that’s really a high moment for you, every given Sunday we have people in our congregation that are living the worst week of their life and, for others, it’s the best week of their life. There are times I have to scratch my head wondering what the Spirit is going to say to such a group as this.

For some of you, it’s the best time. You say, “If I could just freeze this week and never have to do anything else! Just live where I’ve been.” But the Lord is saying, “Go on. Don’t get stuck anywhere. Go on!”

How important that is in our life. A few months ago, I said that it’s the difference between the “maintenance philosophy of life” and the “growth philosophy of life.” The maintenance philosophy says simply, “Let’s settle down.” I know that’s a tendency that concerns me as the pastor of this church. We’ve been through a lot of growing and building the last few years. The temptation is, “Let’s just settle down now.” But the Holy Spirit hasn’t settled down concerning the need that is in this community and the people who are outside these walls. We’re not going to settle down either, because the Spirit of God is in us, compelling us not to get stuck. In our own life, look at the opportunities the Lord is putting before you for growth.

I would suggest one thing that would be a great spiritual experience: that we come to the service and get a church bulletin, or perhaps, in our home, get the church newspaper. It’s filled with all kinds of pleas—there’s work needed here, there’s work needed there. I’d say to you that it would be a marvelous prayer experience to take that bulletin and find a quiet place of prayer and read

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through it prayerfully and say, “Lord, is there anything here that you’re going to speak to me about being involved in?” Stretch yourself in service. Extend yourself.

Jesus is with us in the service, with us in the home, with us in the public place, and with us in the solitary place. It’s that place of private and personal prayer with Him that then gives us the strength to do all the other things and be in all the other places. If we neglect this, we will not have the power we need. He did not neglect that time of unique communication with God. Every day brings us the opportunity of letting Jesus live through us in every area of our life. There is opportunity every single day.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, there’s opportunity that You give us this moment, an opportunity to act upon what Your Spirit may have shared with our heart today. Because Your Word is a living thing, one aspect of it will touch a person in a different way than another. Lord, all through this message, Your Spirit has been ministering to our hearts. Maybe to some, Your Spirit has been saying, “While you’re here in the place of worship today, I want to intersect your life. I want to do something to you and for you. I want more to happen to you today than simply the fact that you went to church. I want to change you. I want to forgive you. I want to help you to forgive. I want to give you strength. I want to put My arms around you and let you know how much I love you.” I pray especially for people who’ve come to this worship service today very downcast, very weak. Some, wondering why they should even go on in life when things are so bad. I pray that Your comfort would settle upon them as we’re in this time of prayer. That You will strengthen them and change them and give them an overpowering sense of Your great love and mercy and understanding. I pray for families, for homes that are being hurt because people aren’t serving one another. And ultimately, because they may not be serving You. Purify our hearts so that our

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hearts are ready to serve You and to serve one another. I pray for the person that is just on the horizon of an expansion of their life. They're going to be stretched spiritually. New opportunities are going to be given to them. I pray, Lord, that they'll take it and not draw back in fear, not go back to the old habit of saying, "I couldn't do that." Fill them with Your Spirit and with power. I pray for all of us, Lord, that we'll be praying people. People who have fellowship with You in the way You did, a daily way. Bring our hearts to You, bring our love to You. We ask these things, Lord, in Your name. Amen.