

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on January 10th, 2016 on Luke 4:31-37 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: All Things New
Today's Focus: New Power

"What Powerful Words These Are!"

- 1. That can shut down the devil's power**
- 2. That can secure our true identity**

In the name of Jesus Christ who is the power and wisdom of God (cf.1 Corinthians 1:24).

Throughout our building process I've witnessed some skilled people who know what they're doing using the tools of their trade. I stood with my mouth open watching drywall guys walking around on stilts, hoisting and hanging sheets of drywall and then mudding it faster than I could believe was humanly possible. I saw bricklayers slapping on mortar with their little trowels and smoothing it out with incredible precision. I watched bulldozers moving piles of dirt around in very short order. I witnessed a few new power tools I'd never seen like a pipe bender and a concrete floor grinder.

And then there were all our Builders For Christ workers who knew how to use every kind of saw, lift, or nail-gun. Men and women of all backgrounds and ages working hard and demonstrating strength and skill. What an amazing, inspiring thing to watch this building take shape in less than a year.

It's fitting today that we would acknowledge and honor all our contractors and workers who worked so hard on our building and we'll do that a little bit later in the service as well. I have a hard time keeping to myself just how impressed I am at what I've seen and how excited I am about what we have here in our new minister center.

Well in a similar way that's how people once felt about 2,000 years ago in a synagogue in their town called Capernaum. They were amazed. And because they were amazed they were excited to share the news about the good work that Jesus had done in their midst. But what they were most excited about were his words. They heard him speak and they said, "What words these are!" Because they were authoritative and powerful words. And what we're going to see today as we dig into this story from the Bible from Luke chapter 4 is that the words of Jesus can be just as powerful for us **1) Because they are words to shut down the devil's power. And 2) because they are words to secure our true identity.**

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people.

32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

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

36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!" 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

Now this is an interesting story, isn't it? Jesus has come to town. He's teaching in the Jewish synagogue. And right away everyone's ears perk up. Nobody's falling asleep in church on this Sabbath day. Because this guy Jesus isn't just quoting rabbi so and so who said such and such. He's not just going off on obscure tangents about technicalities of the Jewish law code. He isn't just spouting esoteric stuff to show how smart or how educated he is. He's talking plainly and practically. He's applying Scripture to their lives. Everybody's getting the sense, "He's talking to me and what he's saying rings true in my heart." And Jesus' preaching was having an impact. People were starting to look around. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" "Could he be the one?" "Could our lives here be different because of him?"

But just then a man who was bodily possessed by a demon interrupts Jesus' sermon and tries to hijack the church service. *He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"* Now you may be tempted to say, "Wait a minute...that doesn't happen. There's no such thing as demons." But what makes you so sure? It may well be that such a thing as demon possession may not seem so prevalent in our day but then again why would it necessarily? This was in Jesus' day when the devil was launching a desperate assault to try and sabotage Jesus's personal mission as the Messiah.

You see in Jesus' day the battle was being waged all-out in this short time when the Son of God walked this earth as one of us—a human being. And consider the context. Shortly before this story Jesus had been baptized. This was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as the promised Messiah who had come to destroy the devil's power on our behalf. So at his baptism God the Father declared for all to hear, *"This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). Jesus was therefore made personally secure in his identity as the beloved Son of God by the words of His Father. If there was ever a question in Jesus' mind, "Who am I?" Jesus could immediately answer, "I'm the beloved Son of God. This is who I am. My Father says so."

And it's interesting because you know what happened immediately after Jesus was baptized? Here comes the devil. The devil tempted Jesus when he was alone in the wilderness in what amounted to an all-out assault on Jesus' identity and his mission trying to sabotage both right from the start. Any of you remember how that temptation began? *"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread"* (Luke 4:3). What did the devil attack first? Jesus' identity. He tried to call into doubt in Jesus' own mind whose he was. This is one of the devil's chief tactics. He specializes in trying to cast doubt about Jesus' identity in people's minds and that's what he still tries to do to this very day, isn't it?

But back to our story. Even here in the synagogue with this man who was demon possessed who cries, *"Ha! We know who you are, the Holy One of God"*...you have to think, What was the demon trying to do? He was trying to cast doubt. The demon was trying to cast doubt in the minds of the hearers who were present as to who Jesus really was. In calling out Jesus as the Holy One of God, the demon was trying to claim a little power over Jesus, to make people wonder if Jesus was actually more like buddy

buddy with the devil. So even when speaking words resembling truth, the demon's purpose was to cast doubt. And friends, this is also how the devil still works to this day, isn't it?

The devil's ultimately defeated, yet he has a certain, limited power to wage a guerilla tactic kind of war on our souls. It is a spiritual battle for our hearts and our lives and families. Our struggle isn't against flesh and blood. In other words it's not really against other people, or God forbid...each other. We tend to demonize other people in our lives sometimes while ignoring the reality of how real demons try and work in our hearts through lies and temptations and false ideologies and manipulative Facebook memes. So the Bible tells us that our struggle is primarily against the spiritual forces of evil that are at work in our world (cf. Eph. 6:12-18).

And just as much as he wants to still cast doubt about Jesus' identity, the devil also wants to cast doubt about your own identity in Christ. You don't have to raise your hand but how many of you have ever struggled with feeling like you were a total failure? Have you ever messed up and been told by someone, "Why can't you do anything right?"? How you ever been in a relationship where someone said, "Why do you always have to be such a loser"? Have you ever just felt such despair that you've turned to binge watching Netflix...or burying yourself in the endless layers of a video game...or consuming food or alcohol or pornography or drugs to try and cope because you thought that would make you feel better about yourself only to find out that it just made you feel worse or it enslaved you to something worse? You ever feel powerless to do anything about it? You ever feel like you must be what others say so what's the point of even being alive?

Well here's the good news about Jesus' words. **They are words that shut down the devil's power!**

35 "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. Why the convulsions and contortions when the demon had to leave the man? I think it's to show his resentment for a command that he was unwilling to obey and still had to obey. He had to obey because Jesus has authority and power over the devil and his minions as the Son of God. With his powerful words Jesus shut him up. "Be quiet." In Greek the word means, "Be muzzled." "Zip it." So Jesus shut him up and proved that he is indeed the Holy One of God in a league of his own not in league with the devil. 36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!"

Friends, **What powerful words these are!** They're powerful **1) because they can shut down the devil's power and also 2) because they secure our true identity in Christ.**

I'm going to open up with you a little bit this morning. You know there were times in the last 9 years of starting a church from scratch that I wasn't sure whether we'd ever make it to this point. I wasn't sure if this church was going to hang around long term and become a beacon of light for generations to come or if it was just going to be like a shooting star in the night sky burning brightly for a short time and then gone without a trace.

And there were some dark times where I doubted. The thing is I never really doubted God. I realize now it's more like I doubted God's assessment of myself. I doubted myself at times because I thought, "Who am I to stand up here and claim to speak for God? Is anybody even listening? Why do I even bother

trying when I'm so pathetic of a preacher with so many obvious character flaws and failings?" And the thought of the church falling apart kind of frightened me. But then I realized a couple years ago that it frightened me mostly because I didn't want to feel like a failure. And I realized that I had at times wrapped up my sense of identity—who I am—so much in what I do or my performance as a pastor—that I started to think, "If the church were to fail, it's going to be because I'm such a failure. If the church falls apart it's going to be because I'm such a pathetic leader." Do you see how sneaky the devil is...trying to pass off my performance in life as my true identity? Do you the danger even now? There's as much or more danger here in thinking I'm so special because of what I've accomplished as if this building proves God loves me. What a self-centered sinful thought.

Yet I'll bet you a nickel I'm not the only one here who's ever thought like this, right? Because does the devil ever try and cast similar doubts at you? Does the devil ever whisper things like: "Your kids are messed up because you're such a huge screw up yourself." "You're single because you don't deserve to be with somebody good." "You don't have a good job because you're such a big joke." "You have these weird feelings because you're a piece of worthless garbage."

You see I think this is one of the devil's chief tactics, to try and cast doubt about our true identity. The worst is when he calls into question whether you or I can be called a child of God. "Really, after all you've done? You're as unholy and unclean as they come. I mean the way you talk? After the bridges you've burned? He disowned you long ago. You really don't expect that God could really take you in, forgive you, love you, do you?"

But friends, if you can remember that the devil's a liar, then you should also know that the truth is that God does love you. And we see God's love embodied in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who came in human flesh and blood just like ours to destroy the devil's work in our lives (cf. 1 John 3:8). **What powerful words these are!** Listen, God's Word says: "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 John 4:10). What did Jesus do? As our substitute, he stayed steadily on course to live his life the way God intended each of ours to be—without ever sinning. And at every turn where we have failed, he overcame the devil's lies with the truth of his word. He overcame the devil's temptations and every evil attempt to knock him off the straight and narrow path to the cross. And there at the collision point of the cross is where Jesus waged his ultimate battle against the devil because as he hung there suspended against the sky, he willingly, not grudgingly gave of his holy, innocent life. He did this to set us free from the power of the evil one by paying the full penalty for our sins. There at the cross Jesus won the victory when he paid our sin debt in full. He wrote a check with his holy precious blood. He took our sins in order to give us his perfect holiness. What a great exchange! And just as Jesus backed up it up when he told the demon to be quiet and come out and the demon had to obey, so on Easter Sunday Jesus backed up his claims to be the Son of God when he rose the dead and the grave had to let him come out. Jesus proved that he is the winner. Friends, by faith in Jesus...here's the great news...so are you and me.

And you see, that's one of the tremendous blessings that baptism provides. What is baptism? It's simple, ordinary water on the one hand...but on the other hand it's water used in connection with God's powerful Word at God's command whereby God claims us as his own. In fact just as Jesus was declared

to be the beloved son of the Father...fully pleasing to him...so God adopts us as his own through baptism and declares the same thing about us. Because **what powerful words these are!** “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” They are words that shut down the devil’s power to condemn you for your failures and your sins. They are words that secure your true identity. Do you know what your true identity is? Your baptism means it’s nothing less than Child of God. God’s own child! That is who you are. And friends, this changes everything.

And if you haven’t been baptized, I have some good news for you. It’s not too late and it shouldn’t cost you a penny. Because everything that baptism gives was already purchased and won by Jesus. So baptism, like everything else that God offers, is purely by grace. A brand new identity as a child of God. I invite you to set up a time to meet up with me and talk about how you can be baptized too.

I can’t walk on stilts and hang drywall. I can’t wire an outlet or install a security camera. I can’t operate a crane or drive a bulldozer. But I know of some power tools that are even more impressive—God’s word and sacraments. What powerful words these are! Words that can shut down the devil’s power. Words that can secure your true identity as a child of God. Amen.