

Hints of Hope

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[0 : 00] For now we're going to read this bit from the Bible, which is from the book of Luke, chapter 4, verses 31 to 44. Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people.

They were amazed at his teaching because his message had authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit.

He cried out at the top of his voice, Ha! 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.

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. All the people were amazed and said to each other, What is this teaching?

With authority and the power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out. And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

[1 : 07] Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now, Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever and it left her.

She got up at once and began to wait on them. When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sicknesses and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

Moreover, demons came out of many people shouting, You are the Son of God! But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.

At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.

And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. Thanks, Fergus. We're going to take, as Fergus said, we're going to take a little while now and look through these verses that we've read together.

[2 : 23] Earlier this week, I was in Brunsfield and I was queuing for a coffee at Project Coffee. Favourite coffee shop.

You're not allowed to go in, of course, so you meet your order at the door. They go off, meet your coffee and bring it back out and then you can go for a little walk. So I placed my order and I was waiting outside Project Coffee.

You see, when a man came running along Brunsfield Place, grabbed a woman's shopping trolley from behind her, threw it away and started screaming about how angry he was.

And then he ran out into the middle of the road, started leaping up and down, took off his headphones, threw them across the road and then scarpered.

Off he went, shouting at the top of his voice. You see, we might think that the world we live in today is divorced from the world that we just read about in the Gospel of Luke.

[3 : 26] And in many ways, it's an utterly different world, isn't it? People who were there in the first century, Palestine would be freaking out if they saw our smartphones and us watching TV screens and driving around in our cars.

So, yes, lots of stuff is different in the 21st century from the first century. But people, our troubles, our brokenness, our fears, our sorrows, our struggles, they're the same, aren't they?

You know, the world has changed in lots of ways, but people haven't changed fundamentally. And what we want to just do this morning with you as we see this passage in the Gospel of Luke is just to think about the kind of help that Jesus can bring.

In the previous verses in this chapter, he's announced that his ministry is for the poor and the oppressed. Those who are poor in spirit, those who are troubled, those who are outsiders.

And now he shows us what that ministry actually looks like in practice. And he goes about preaching and healing, bringing help.

[4 : 38] And the help that he gives to the man who was demon-possessed or to Simon Peter's mother who was sick, the help that he gives them is incredible.

It's just amazing and life-transforming. But what I want to say is this, that that help that we see in the passage is just a hint of the kind of hope, the kind of healing, the kind of blessing that lies await for God's people in the coming of his kingdom and the new creation.

The amazing acts of hope that we see in this passage are just small hints of the much greater hope that there is to come.

Jesus tells us what he's up to, doesn't he? In verse 43, he says, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns too.

I've got to be on my way. I've got a great message. What's my message? It's good news for everybody. What's the good news about? It's about the kingdom of God, a kingdom where the blind see, where the sick are healed, where the oppressed are set free.

[5 : 50] And that happens now to some extent in our lives. But when the kingdom finally comes in all its fullness, it will happen completely. The great things here are hints of hope about the future.

So the good things we see in Jesus. If you're thinking through the week, what did Neil talk about on Sunday morning? We're just talking about that. The good things we see in Jesus are just a hint of the hope to come.

I'm going to talk about three things here. The unstoppable power of Jesus. The unexpected methods of Jesus. And the uncompromising focus of Jesus.

So three things. Unstoppable power. Unexpected methods. Uncompromising focus. Think of a drone shot of Capernaum from above where Jesus is.

It's 600 feet below sea level. All roads go down to Capernaum. So the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. So the drone is hovering above. You can see these flat-roofed Middle Eastern houses.

[6 : 53] The narrow streets. It's a Sabbath day. So the marketplace in the centre of town is empty. The drone goes over the harbour where the fishing boats are. And all the boats are tied up.

Where's everybody gone in Capernaum? Well, it's the Sabbath. They're in the synagogue. So the drone takes you down. You get a shot inside the synagogue. Imagine yourself in this room then.

It's really incredible kind of electric atmosphere because Jesus is speaking. And everybody's listening, amazed at what he's got to say.

When suddenly, pow, there's a kerfuffle. There's noise. You jump. You get a little bit of a fright. There's a man shouting at the back of the room. And he's shouting at Jesus to be quiet, saying, What have we got in common, Jesus?

What do you and I have to do with each other? And so Luke tells us that there was this man possessed by a demon with an evil spirit, crying out at the top of his voice.

[7 : 56] Think of the volume. Have you come to destroy us? I know you are the Holy One of God. And what happens? Be quiet, Jesus says.

Be quiet. He rebukes. Three times that word rebuke is used here. In verse 35, it's translated as sternly. But it's this rebuke. This word of Jesus that comes against things that are wrong in this world, things that should not be.

And when Jesus speaks against them and rebukes them, he immediately overcomes them with his unstoppable power. So the demon comes out of the man.

The man falls to the floor, but he is unharmed, uninjured. And the people are amazed. With authority and power, he gives orders to evil spirits, and they came out.

And the word continues to spread about what Jesus is up to. Jesus comes with unstoppable and absolute power over the natural world.

[9 : 04] We'll see that in the healing of Simon Peter's mother. But also over the supernatural world. There is nothing that can stand against the power of Jesus Christ.

It is unstoppable. Remember that. When you think that there are things that are too hard for Jesus, there are not. And when he speaks a word of power, there is nothing that can prevent it.

And the amazing thing about this is that Jesus comes with such power and uses it with such compassion, with such love for people who are tormented and hurting, like the man in this story.

This is a great power, isn't it? It's not some kind of cosmic dualism. It's not the Marvel universe with Loki and Thor battling it out.

This is a completely uneven match. The powers of darkness cannot stand against the word and the authority of Jesus Christ. In chapter 3, verse 14, John the Baptist said about Jesus, one is coming who is stronger than I am, pointing to Jesus as the one who has the power to defeat everything that would destroy us.

[10 : 22] There are many destructive forces in our lives and in our world, but Jesus has the power to rescue us from them all. Now, this reflects a clearly supernatural view of the world that we live in, doesn't it?

And so if you are of a sceptical nature, you're maybe thinking, I don't really know what's going on in this passage, demon possession, evil devils, don't really buy all that kind of stuff.

So is this a metaphor for something else? Is there some kind of illusion behind what seems to be an obvious piece of fiction here? Are they just talking about some kind of mental illness for which no category or definition existed at the time?

So some of us will read this with a degree of scepticism, but many won't. Even in the Western world today, there was an article in the Atlantic magazine in 2018, and it was looking at the whole issue of exorcisms in America.

So slightly unusual article in some ways, but exorcisms and requests for exorcisms were going through the roof across the United States.

[11 : 40] Between 1990 and 2007, the number of people in the United States who believed in the devil went up from 55% to 70%.

70%. So America in the West gets more secular, but belief in the supernatural is growing. So there's something really interesting going on there.

But in many Western people and many Western minds and lives, there's a firm belief in the supernatural. And it's the same, of course, in the non-Western world.

So you may be immediately sceptical of this, but actually many people believe that we need supernatural explanations to make the best sense of life.

So two views of reality clash, don't they? The material and the supernatural. If we start out thinking about the world purely from a material point of view, then these events must have some non-supernatural explanation.

[12 : 42] We just don't quite know what it is. We haven't worked it out yet. And that might be the case. But the other point of view is, well, if we start with a supernatural explanation of the world, with the premise that there is a God, then these events can be clearly explained.

And part of what we all do, of course, is wrestle backwards and forwards with different views of the world, different understandings of what it is to be a human nature, which gives us a better account of the world we live in and the lives that we lead.

And those of us who are Christians would ultimately advocate to say that a purely material account of the world is less satisfying. C.S. Lewis says, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

It explains the world for us in a way that makes greater sense and is more satisfying. Christianity doesn't answer every question we have, but it answers more questions, we think, and it brings great hope.

There's a book here I've got, *Confronting Christianity* by Rebecca McLaughlin, 12 hard questions for the Christian faith to answer.

[14 : 05] And the first chapter, which you probably can't see, but the first chapter is, aren't we better off without religion? Okay, fair question. She cites a Harvard study, an article written by a Harvard expert in public health.

And he just wants to say that he wrote an article called, *Religion May Be a Miracle Drug*. Just point out that people who attend religious services are more optimistic, have lower rates of depression, greater purpose in life, and are less likely to divorce and be more self-controlled.

Religion helps people thrive. Why? Because through it, we find a Jesus who can really help us. At the heart of the Christian account is Jesus Christ.

And he comes to help in amazing and powerful ways. He helps the people in this passage in Luke chapter four. He can help us. The healings point us to hope.

Hope for today and an even greater hope for the kingdom to come. One day, we will have an eternal rest, not an eternal sleep, but an eternal rest that consists of the end of suffering and striving, that offers the deepest peace, a freedom from every tear, every sorrow, every harm.

[15 : 28] And we get to taste that now in the Christian life. We begin to inherit the blessings of the kingdom right away when we become a Christian.

We begin to experience in some measure that peace, that freedom, that hope, that love that Jesus brings, which we will one day experience ultimately and fully at the end of time in the new creation.

So let me say there is power, unstoppable power in Jesus today, offering you hope. Whoever you are, whatever you're struggling with from your past or your present, addictions, harm, grief, loss, whatever binds you, whatever harms you, please take it to Jesus.

In his power, he might help you. So that's the unstoppable power of Jesus. The unexpected methods of Jesus is the second thing I want to talk about.

Here he comes to show us what his mission, his ministry looks like in practice. And it's not what you'd think. Now, I have to say that I found January incredibly long, this latest lockdown.

[16 : 38] Feels like it's going on forever. And over the last year, you know, my mood has fluctuated. What I do with my time has fluctuated. The way I'm thinking about things has fluctuated.

And occasionally I disappear down the odd kind of rabbit hole, a little wormhole where I get caught up in something. And for a little while last summer, I got caught up in a French political drama called Le Baron Noir.

And when I was watching Le Baron Noir, I find out how to win the French presidential election. And what you need is a lot of money and then some dirty tricks.

You need some, some powerful people with dodgy cash to fund your presidential campaign. You need to know the dirt on the other people to manipulate things the way you want.

And you need to make a lot of promises that you never intend to keep. And then you need to mobilize the masses and get them out in the streets protesting. So that's the political playbook for power in France, according to Le Baron Noir.

[17 : 46] Well, Jesus, of course, throws away the usual political playbook. There's no pandering to power. There's no slush funds or money.

He's got no cash. He's got no power. He's got no influential friends. He's not mobilizing the masses. What does he do?

He preaches and he helps. That's what we often call the ministry of word and deed or the ministry of word and action.

So in the early part of chapter four, he tells us what his mission is to preach good news to the poor. So he announces his mission in the earlier part of chapter four.

And then after this passage in the early part of chapter five, he gathers disciples to join him on that mission. But here in the middle, he shows us what that mission actually involves.

[18 : 45] What does it involve? Well, we read in verse 31 and 32. It involves teaching, doesn't it? He went down to Capernaum. On the Sabbath, he began to teach.

They're amazed at his teaching. Verse 36. What is this teaching? So there's lots of teaching in the mission of Jesus. If we get to the end of the passage, if you follow it down, then he says in verse 43, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

Verse 44. He kept on preaching. So he frames this whole passage at beginning and end is framed by teaching and preaching. That's clearly at the heart of his mission.

I must preach good news. That is why I was sent. And then in the middle, we've got these three miracles, don't we? We've got the miracle with the man in the synagogue who's demon possessed.

And then he goes, leaves the synagogue in verse 38, goes down to the home of Simon, who is Simon Peter, one of the disciples to be. She's got a raging high fever. She's really sick.

[19 : 55] So sick that people are really concerned and they ask for help. And Jesus rebukes the fever. Remember that word rebuke again in verse 39. And it left her. She got up at once and began.

So she's instantly restored to enough health and energy that she can get up and serve people. And then more miracles come at the end of the day as the sun sets. All kinds of sick people are brought to Jesus.

He lays his hands on each of them. He heals them. People come. Many people shouting, you're the son of God. These people have demons in them. So he rebukes them.

That word rebuke again, he doesn't allow them to speak. He doesn't want them promoting this idea that he's the Christ when people aren't really ready to hear that.

So do you see this clear pattern of ministry, of mission that emerges in Jesus here or through Jesus here, and that we will see unfolded through the rest of the gospel?

[20 : 53] Word and deed. Word and action. We preach and teach, and then we do things to help people. That's Jesus' mission method. And part of the gospel is about calling the disciples of Jesus to follow him and join his mission.

And it becomes our mission method as Jesus. That's how Christians live in this world. We share good news and we help those who need help.

We share Christ's heart of compassion for every hurting person. And we have good news to tell them about a savior of unstoppable power who can intervene in their life and bring help.

So let's notice the hurting people. Let's take note of those around us who might be struggling. Let's remind ourselves of who our neighbors are and what they might need.

One of my daughters lives in Glasgow, and I saw a handwritten note stuck up on the back of the door of her close.

[22 : 00] And it just said, Hi, I can't remember the names of people, you know, we're Tim and Angie, and we live in flat one stroke one. If you need help with your messages or carrying your shopping, text us on this number.

And they left their mobile number. So if anybody in the close needed a hand carrying their shopping up the stairs, get in touch with them. Simple way to help their neighbors during lockdown. It's hard to be a blessing to your neighbor when you're not really allowed to interact.

But there are still things you can do to check that people are okay to offer your little bit of help. You can send people books. You can share the church services through social media.

You can get in touch and express kindness. You can listen to people over the phone or over Zoom or over FaceTime and hear what's going on. So sometimes we use the idea of bless.

Be praying, listen, eat, serve, share. For a way that we live on mission of word and deed. Well, we can't eat with people right now, but we can be praying.

[23 : 07] We can listen. We can serve. And we can share. So that is Jesus' unexpected methodology for turning the world in its head.

Preach good news and help hurting people. It hasn't changed in 2,000 years. That's the same today as well. Now, I want to finish with this uncompromising focus because, you know, people try to interrupt what Jesus is up to.

Daybreak comes. Jesus is out in a solitary place. Mark's gospel tells us he went there to pray. People come and then they try to keep him from leaving, but he won't let them.

They want to keep Jesus, enjoy Jesus, have more of Jesus for themselves. Jesus says, no, the mission has to go on.

And so he won't let them. He's got this unstoppable, uncompromising focus to doing us good. Verse 43, as I've read it before, he says, I must preach the kingdom of God, the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns.

[24 : 17] Jesus is absolutely committed to his mission. He's excited about it. He's driven. He's committed. He's passionate.

He's selfless. He goes on, whatever the cost. There's an urgency to this. This is his telos, the purpose of his being there. And so with us as disciples, that same heart of love in Jesus must drive us outwards to bless, to help, to tell.

And nothing should stop us either. We must say, no, we have to go. We have to go to our colleagues or to our neighbours, to our family, to our friends, not just to do our work, not just to be a good family member, but also to serve, to love, to bless with the message and the mission of Jesus pushing us onwards.

Now that can feel too difficult for us. And that can feel too difficult for us because sometimes just life feels too difficult for us. Things feel too hard.

But the only way that we can go out to others in this way is if first we let Jesus come into us in this way. And I want to say that Jesus has an uncompromising commitment to doing us good.

[25 : 40] That's what he's saying. Nothing will stop me. I'm here to do good. Nothing will stop me. Even the hard things in my life and your life won't stop Jesus from doing us good.

You might think the things I struggle with mentally, the things I struggle with relationally, the things I struggle with physically or spiritually, the things from my past or the present that dog me and drag me down.

I can't be helped. There's nothing for it. I've just got to live with it. But Jesus is committed to doing you good. He feels your sorrow and your suffering.

And he intercedes for you and he advocates on your behalf. I've been reading this little book as well called Gentle and Lowly. I know some of you have read it too. It's got this idea of the intercession of Jesus.

The doctrine of the present heavenly intercession of Christ is neglected today, he says. That's too bad. It's a consoling truth and flows right out of the heart of Christ.

[26 : 46] The doctrine of the atonement reassures us with what Christ has done in the past. The doctrine of his intercession reassures us with what he is doing in the present.

In Christ, you have an intercessor, a present day mediator who is happily celebrating with his father the abundant reason for both to embrace you into their deepest heart.

Jesus is interceding for you right now. What's Jesus doing today with his work of salvation complete? He is interceding for you. He is before the father speaking on your behalf saying, look at Neil, look at this person, look at that person.

See their struggle, see their sorrow and help. And the author of the book, Dean Ortlund says this. Just imagine if you could hear Jesus praying aloud for you in the next room.

A few things would calm us more deeply. Jesus is praying for you in the next room right now. He goes on to talk about Jesus as our advocate.

[27 : 53] You see, sometimes when we see the ugly stuff in our life, the things that shame us, the things that make us feel disgraced, the things that make our lives feel ugly and dirty and marred, we think Jesus must be repulsed by these things.

He would want nothing to do with me. He must shrink back from this awfulness. But what this story shows us is that when Jesus sees our suffering, he's not repulsed.

He doesn't move away. He moves towards us and lays his hand on us. He's moved by compassion.

By the ugliest, darkest things in our life. And he wants to help. And he can help.

And he has power to help. He will help now. And then one day we will be finally and fully free. There'll be a day.

[28 : 53] Look at all the wrinkles. I don't know if you can see them here. But there'll be a day when there is no crease in our forehead. No pit of dread in our stomach. No mental dissonance in our head.

We will be light, free, unworried, alive, joyous, laughing, celebrating, dancing, rejoicing at the feast of the kingdom of God in heaven above in the new creation.

We will know his love and compassion now in amazing ways if we invite Jesus into our lives. But it's just a hint of what's ahead. 1 Corinthians 2 verse 9 says, Do you know what?

I am so excited at the thought that lockdown will be at an end at some point. I'll be able to see you all again. Worship with you all again on purpose. Free to meet up with my friends and family.

That little bit of freedom that I long for is nothing compared with the freedom that I will have one day in Jesus Christ in the new creation.

[30 : 04] That's when the ultimate lockdown will end. When we will be fully and finally free. That's where all our hopes will be met ultimately.

Not in the end of this lockdown, but in the end of that lockdown. Will this freedom be yours? That's my last question. There's a thing in here that I find really interesting.

The demon possessed man shouts to Jesus. What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth, he says. In verse 34. What he actually says to Jesus is this.

He says, he points at Jesus and he goes, Jesus, you and I have nothing in common. We had a family friend.

Indeed, my dad was not a Christian until he was in his 20s. He was an atheist. But he was converted to a man called David Patterson. And I remember David telling us a story one day.

[31 : 05] He was a minister in the north of Scotland and he was going around visiting every day in his parish. And he visited this home. And it was a Christian home. And the family were gathered and he chatted to them all.

And he read the Bible and he prayed. And then he got up to leave. And the son, the kids were adults. The son was sitting in the corner of the room. And the son was not a Christian, but he was there. But as David Patterson walked out of the room, he walked up to the son.

He pointed at him and he said, son, you and I have nothing in common. And then he walked out the door. And kind of slightly rude, shocking thing to say to the guy.

But it really struck home with the guy he said it to. And it helped him become a Christian because he realized, yeah, what do I have in common with these Christians? And that's what the man in the story says to Jesus.

What do you and I have in common? And that's what I'm saying to you. What do you and Jesus have in common? There is a dividing line in this world between those who love Jesus and those who don't.

[32 : 12] Which side of the line do you fall on? Do you love Jesus Christ and worship him as your savior? Or do you know? There is a dividing line between those who love Christ and those who don't.

There are two different sides, two different paths, two different roads, and two different destinations. Ultimately, your destination, if you love Jesus, is eternal life with God in the new creation.

All that we've spoken of here. But if you do not love him, if you do not worship him, if you do not follow him, then your destination is a lost and doomed eternity. There's a darkness.

And those who choose to walk in the darkness will not know the light of life. Is there this hint of hope in your life today? Because you have Jesus as the savior that you love and trust.

Let me finish there. And then we'll sing a couple of songs and pray. So, Lord Jesus Christ, help us to hear the word of the gospel today. There is great hope in the gospel.

[33 : 22] Bring that hope to rest in our lives and in our hearts. Amen. Amen.