

Sermon for Epiphany 4
February 4, 2018

“Jesus Reveals Power Over the Devil”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Jesus who taught as one who has authority. Amen.

Dear people gathered to learn from the Word of God, you’ve heard the advice before, “Never talk religion and politics, it always leads to hard feelings.” And you know where that advice is coming from – an argument can make the whole Thanksgiving weekend awkward with uncles at each other’s throats because each one is insisting that his opinion is the right opinion. Perhaps one of the reasons those talks can become arguments is that neither side is trying to learn anything, each side is trying to show how right it is.

At Jewish synagogues in Jesus’ day, there were a lot of opinions. They did not have dedicated pastors that were called to serve at one (or two) locations; they had rabbis who traveled around. After the Scripture lesson was read, then men in attendance were invited to give a commentary on the lesson. Men recognized as rabbis, and out of town men, were especially asked to share their views.

You can imagine how the preaching went, though. I think it means this. Well, I think it means that. Rabbi so and so, who studied under the great rabbi such and such thinks it means this instead.

That would be unsatisfying, wouldn’t it? To hear a whole bunch of ideas, to hear debate about who’s the better Bible scholar, and what to believe – that many people in those synagogues weren’t sure afterward what God was saying in the Bible.

Jesus came to the synagogue in Capernaum and began to teach. We don’t know what text he used, or what illustration he made, but we do know the result. The people who heard him teaching were amazed because there was something different about this guy- he taught as one who has authority. This is what God says. This is the truth.

The people liked it, and I think they sensed that they had been missing this the whole time – they liked being confident that this is what the Bible says and what God says.

The devil hated it, though. There was a man there, who was possessed by a demon, and the demon wanted to stop Jesus. We talked last week about how strong the devil is compared to us – here we see again – the devil had a man, possessed by a demon, right there in the church. And the demon spoke up – “What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

The demon knew who Jesus was, and declared it. The Holy One of God. And we might think sometimes, why in the world would the demon announce the gospel to those people, telling them that Jesus was the promised Messiah? Because having the testimony of an unclean spirit, a demon, a minion of the devil did not look good on your resume.

Consider it – Jesus has power and authority. The demon said so. Whoa! I don’t want anything to do with a guy whose got a demon vouching for him. Get away from me!

Jesus takes this opportunity to make his authority clear – that it’s authority from God – by showing that he’s got power over the demon.

Jesus made two commands. "Be quiet!" Jesus did not want the demon saying anything about him – good or bad. And the demon says no more words – because, for all the hatred of demons against God, God's in control, and the demon has to listen.

"Come out of him!" Jesus rescued that man from demon possession. He also showed his even greater authority and power – Jesus didn't just tape the demon's mouth shut – he evicted the demon from the man, and threw it out.

Jesus demonstrated his authority to teach, and his authority to silence the devil's work, and the authority to kick out the devil's workers.

We need that authority and power in our lives today. We need Jesus to speak the truth to us, so that we know it. We need Jesus to hold back the devil. We need Jesus to do for others what he has already done for us – to evict the devil from our hearts, and for Jesus to move in.

This is good news for you today. Jesus continues to do all those things.

Jesus continues to speak and teach with authority so that you can know the truth. Jesus speaks with authority in his Bible, telling you God's truth. Jesus speaks his Word through pastors, and parents, and Sunday school teachers.

Jesus continues to evict the devil from hearts by his powerful Word – just like he did with the demon possessed man, so also through the simple, plain gospel message, Jesus forces the devil out and takes up residence himself.

Jesus continues, as our ascended Lord, to rule over all things. He limits what the devil is able to do and is able to accomplish, and what he allows the devil to do, he uses as part of his plan to further his kingdom anyway.

That's the good news. The power and authority that Jesus shows off in our gospel text, he continues to show off today. I want you to see it, and to rejoice in Jesus' displays of power.

See the way that Jesus holds back the devil's power in our community. There are laws, and many of the laws in our town match up with God's laws. And there are penalties for being dangerous, violent, or drunk. And those penalties, sometimes, stop people from doing bad things, or stop them from doing something worse than what they do. Thank God for that, that even our imperfect laws serve his purpose to reduce evil.

Take a look at the people of our county. Yearn that all of them would be Christians. Desire that all of the Christians would believe everything that God teaches. But rejoice. Rejoice that there are any Christians at all. See that every Christian you know – the ones who are members here, and the ones who are members at other Christian churches – rejoice that each and every one of them is proof that Jesus continues to use his Word to give the devil the boot.

See for yourself that Jesus' Word is unstoppable, and that he will keep his promise that his Word will last forever – his Word that carries his power and his authority that delivers the truth of God and defeats the devil. Rejoice that he has made it yours. Yours to know. Yours to believe. Yours to use.

Can you believe that they let you walk, right down main street, with an unregistered weapon like that? That what you saw Jesus do in the first chapter of Mark, he has given you the power and authority to do as his ambassador, that Jesus has placed into your heart and your hands his Word. God's truth for you to share. God's truth for you to resist the devil. God's truth that the devil has been defeated by the Holy One of God, Jesus of Nazareth, our Savior. Amen.

Text: *Mark 1:21-28*

Jesus teaches and commands with authority.

²¹Then they went into Capernaum.

On the next Sabbath day, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²²They were amazed at his teaching, because he was teaching them as one who has authority and not as the experts in the law. ²³Just then there was a man with an unclean spirit in their synagogue. It cried out, ²⁴“What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

²⁵Jesus rebuked the spirit, saying, “Be quiet! Come out of him!”

²⁶The unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions, and after crying out with a loud voice, it came out of him. ²⁷Everyone was so amazed that they began to discuss this with each other. They said, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him!” ²⁸News about him spread quickly through all the region of Galilee.

