

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ²⁴ “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!”

²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

So, let me ask the question that I’m guessing is on many of your minds after hearing that gospel lesson: What in the world was a demon doing there? This **evil spirit** is one of those angels who, after God finished making the world, decided to rebel against him. Their leader was the devil. This particular demon had taken possession of a man’s body; all his faculties were under his control. So, what in the world would lead this demon to march the man’s body into church on a Saturday? And not just any church on any Saturday. The one church that Saturday where Jesus was preaching. The Jesus he knows from way back in the beginning, when he rebelled against him. The Jesus who he knows can send him to hell with a word.

Jesus being in that synagogue that Saturday doesn’t surprise us. That’s part of what he did for us and for our salvation, he kept God’s commands perfectly in our place. And Jesus getting invited to teach there doesn’t surprise us, either. Word is already spreading around Galilee that a new rabbi is in town. Why not hear what he has to say? But why in the world would a demon go in there?

Well, think about what Mark says was going on there. **The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.** Even after Jesus drives out the demon...as people are walking out of church, they’re not just saying, “Wow, he drove out a demon!” They’re saying, “Wow, did you hear what he preached? **A new teaching – and with authority!**” It wasn’t so much his forceful style that amazed them; it was his message. It was so different from what they usually got in the synagogue.

Their usual preachers, the teachers of the law, they reminded the people of what they had to do and not do if they wanted to please God and avoid his punishment. And they were so zealous about those laws that, over the years, they had added all sorts of their own traditions to what God actually said in his law. They’d tell people how many steps they could walk on the Sabbath, how long the tassles on their robes had to be, how to wash their hands before you ate. And since God never said any of that, they’d quote this rabbi or that as the authority to back up their claim.

But Jesus' message was totally different. He didn't need to quote rabbis; he *was* the authority. God in the flesh. His message wasn't, "According to so and so..." It was, "Truly I say to you." He didn't say, "Here's how to bring your sacrifices for forgiveness." He said, "Your sins are forgiven." And that was the other difference. Not just authority, but grace. Not just how they could love God better, but how much God loved them. Not just what they had to do for God, but what God was doing for them to save them.

And now you get it, right? Why the demon was in that synagogue on that Saturday. The Saturdays before this, he didn't need to be there. When the preachers are spouting man-made traditions that leave people burdened by guilt, they're doing the devil's job for him! But when the authoritative message of God's grace is being proclaimed and believed...well, then Satan's kingdom comes crashing down in human hearts. Then souls are snatched from his clutches. And that's something the devil won't sit by and idly watch. That's something he'll do whatever he can to stop.

And that leaves us with a scary thought. We're more comfortable thinking the devil does his work elsewhere. In churches that preach manmade lies about God. Among unbelievers, getting them to do all sorts of unspeakable things. But this lesson reminds us that the devil's hardest work is being done wherever the authoritative message of God's grace is proclaimed and believed. And you know where that is? Here. Among us.

Ever wonder why we're so easily distracted here? We can pay attention to an hour of our favorite TV show, but we can't stick with 15 minutes of a sermon. Whether it's the devil or our flesh doing the distracting, we're falling right into his trap. Our schedules get so full, and time in God's Word gets left out. And we don't even realize that if it's not the devil filling our schedules, it's his lie that God's Word isn't as important as the rest that we're believing. When we think that one hour of God's Word every few weeks is enough, that we can stay close to Jesus and still stay away from his word, we're believing a lie that comes straight from the pit of hell.

But it's not just here. If he can't get us to stop listening to God's authoritative word in here, he gets us to live as if it weren't the ultimate authority in our lives out there. That out there, we're the ones calling the shots. And it happens, doesn't it? Just ask yourself: What is the authority that drives my thoughts, words, actions on a daily basis? What Jesus says, or what I think is best for me? It's really that first lie he told Adam and Eve in Eden: Living under God's authority wasn't good for them, they should live by their own. And we fall into the same trap.

He might not do it as openly as he did that day in Capernaum; he's content today to stay behind the curtains. But his goal hasn't changed. Where Jesus is at work to save, he's at work to destroy. And since we've so often been puddy in his hands, then we need to see what happens next in that synagogue that Saturday so long ago.

The man stood up mid sermon and shouted: **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!**" And it

was true. Jesus was the Holy One – the Messiah – God sent by God to destroy the devil’s work. But it distracted everyone in the room from the gracious words Jesus was speaking. And it was an attempt to cast doubt on everything Jesus said; why should they trust a guy a demon agrees with? But Jesus won’t let the devil win. He looks past the man to the demon inside him and says, **Be quiet! Come out of him!** And there’s an authority in his words that not even demons can resist. And the demon comes out with a shriek. And there’s no longer a doubt in the room: Jesus is one authority worth listening to.

Friends, Jesus didn’t just come into this world to destroy the devil’s work in that synagogue in Capernaum. We needed more. We needed him to destroy the devil’s work in our lives – the sins he’s gotten us to commit that should land us in hell with him. Thank God Jesus loved you and me too much to let the devil win. It would take much more than words, because sin can’t just be overlooked; it needs to be paid for. But in love, that’s exactly what Jesus did. The one with all the authority was born in a manger to pay for all the times we’ve failed to recognize it. The one who never fell into the devil’s traps did it so that he could carry all the times we have to the cross. The one who can send demons to hell with a word suffered hell there for all of your sins and my sins, taking each and every last one away. Proof he’s destroyed the devil’s work, and crushed the serpent’s head? He rose on the third day.

You see what Jesus was willing to do to rescue us from the devil’s clutches, and you can’t help but conclude with the crowds: Jesus is one authority worth listening to. And when you do, you’ll be amazed right along with crowd in Capernaum. He doesn’t just tell you what to do; first and foremost, he tells you what he has done and is doing for you. He doesn’t just tell you to love him; he shows you how he never fails to love you. He says to you, “Your sins are forgiven.” And it’s not just the pastor’s opinions; it’s backed by all the authority of the one who went to hell and back to make it so.

Listen to the one with authority. It’s what the devil hates most in this world, and he’ll do whatever he can to stop it. But it’s through his message of grace that Jesus continues to foil the devil’s attempts to destroy. Keeps crushing the rule of sin and Satan in your heart and strengthening his own rule there. Keeps you safe in his powerful arms until he brings you safely to heaven. Amen.