

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. (NIV84)

WHICH IS BETTER, POWER OR AUTHORITY?

Which is better, Power or Authority? That might be a confusing question. They might seem like they are exactly the same, but they aren't!

If you are of a certain age, you might remember a family show starring Tim Allen called Home Improvement. On the show, Tim hosted a show called “Tool Time” and tried to help others by giving them tips and pointers about home improvement projects. Much of the humor from that show came in the screw-ups and accidents that he would cause. Often those problems were caused by one factor, do you remember what Tim was always looking for?? (bark) More Power!!

Tim was a car guy. He loved working on cars. He loved giving them more power! He'd swap out engines and make sure that he was getting max horsepower.

Trucks have power! If you are in the market for a truck, its horsepower, its towing capacity is important. You have to make sure that it's big enough and strong enough to do what you need it to do. And when in doubt, listen to Tim's advice! More Power!!!

Power is nice, but authority is a little different. Imagine you buy your dream truck (or car if you're not into the truck scene). You sign all the papers and pull it off the lot. It's finally yours! You get it out on the highway and you want to test what it's capable of. “How much power does this baby have?” you might think to yourself. So you step on the gas, the tires squeal a little bit and your off and running. You get up to 60 in no time, 70's a piece of cake, 80 and it's still going smoothly! I wonder if I can get this thing to 100 you ask yourself, so you give it a shot! But while you are busy watching the speedometer, you are not busy watching your surroundings and you fail to recognize that at that last on ramp that you sailed past, a State Trooper merged onto the highway right next to you. He sees pretty quickly that you are speeding, so he turns on the lights and begins to follow. You are awakened from your new car coma pretty quickly and you slow down, pull over and wait for the officer to write you that ticket!

You had power, but he had authority. He had not just the flashing lights, but all the weight of the government, the court system, and the penal codes behind him. He had authority from the state to force

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you to listen to him, and if you are smart you will submit to that authority. All that authority makes that trooper a person you should listen to!

In our gospel lesson, the concepts of power and authority are put on full display! As we meet Jesus in the Capernaum synagogue, we see a display of power, for sure. But it wasn't his power that was the most amazing to the people! It was his authority! Today we are going to consider the authority of Jesus and then we'll see that his authority means that he can and does use his power to effect change in our lives! Today we'll rejoice that Jesus has both and that he uses both for us!

It's a battle that Jesus had been fighting for thousands of years! Long before he was born onto the battle scene, he's been waging war! In fact it was in the Garden of Eden that war was declared and Jesus was foretold to be the major player on the good side! In fact God promised that Eve's offspring would be the conquering hero, that he would show power and dominance and utterly defeat and destroy the enemy, the devil! He was the one who struck the first blow on mankind, but God and his people would have the last laugh!

And you are in the battle as well! Satan wanted to steal Adam and Eve's soul and their hope and joy and he wants the same from you! Don't be fooled! Don't be naïve! Satan is alive and well. He's powerful! Don't underestimate him! Don't ignore him!

I say those things because that's exactly what we do sometimes, isn't it! We read stories of Jesus driving out demons and we sometimes think that these are old and dusty stories from the past. We don't picture a hairy, scary devil in our world! You might see or even picture the cartoon devil that the world portrays! Guess who's behind that drawing? Satan is! That's exactly what he wants – you to think he's cute and cuddly and no big deal! But he is! The scariest enemy there is, is the one that we forget is even there, is the he one that we don't think is a threat!

In sports they are called trap games. The top team in the nation plays one of the worst teams and they are just assuming a win. They are looking forward to next week's opponents like this team isn't even there! And the good team ends up losing that game often – they get trapped into under-estimating their opponent.

Or maybe it's a false sense of security! We feel like we are safe and so we don't need to be aware! Don't forget the setting of this story! The demon came right into the church! It was right there! He didn't care the people around there were believers. He didn't care who was a member of what religious group! In fact, Christians are the devil's main targets. He already has the unbelievers! It's you he wants!

Don't be fooled to let your guard down! Test what you hear against the Bible. Don't just believe it, see if it's true! That's even from me! I hope you aren't just taking my word for it, cuz I might mess up! I could teach things that aren't true – the devil's tempting me too! The devil does some of his best work when people don't even know that he's there! In Christian bookstores and in Christian's churches, he slithers in and points people away from Jesus and often onto themselves. And people are so thrilled to be in a church or reading a Christian book that they don't even recognize that they aren't reading biblical materials and they aren't looking at Jesus. I subscribe to a satire magazine called the Babylon Bee! The author writes funny satirical articles that often put the spotlight on real

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issues! A recent article title was “Joel Osteen Sees Shadow, Predicts Another Year of Taking the Bible Out of Context!” The article is funny, but its truth is sad! How many people line up to hear him or people like him preach or teach and leave with a message that isn’t at all what Jesus intends?!? And they are clueless to the deception because they are in church!

The devil is there and he’s real and he’s powerful! He’s a force to be reckoned with! And you of all people should know that! You’ve experienced his power in your life first hand! You know the temptations that he lays before you! You know how crafty an argument he makes and how appealing his lies really are! You know those things because you’ve been the victim of them, as have I! We know the devil power and that he’s a threat to us!

We’ve fallen victim to his temptations and we’ve experienced the weakness of the sinful flesh that is ours because of his victory in the garden! We see and know our own self-centered desires and it’s humbling to recognize just how powerless we are to fix this mess that we’ve gotten ourselves in! We are tangled in the devils web and deserve to stay there forever!

But we have a Savior who has not just power, but authority! He has authority to forgive sins, to right the wrongs that we have committed. He has authority to speak for God, because he is God! He has authority to send out his Spirit through the powerful gospel. He has authority to send sickness and disease packing and restore health. He has authority to tell death to die and the dead ones to be raised up! He has authority to engage in the epic struggle between people and the demons. He has authority to fight on our behalf and to win for us!

He won for us, by setting his full power aside and taking on our humble flesh. He won for us by resisting temptations and the devil’s attacks! He won for us by offering his heel to be bruised to fulfill the prophecy and by offering his head to be thorned and his hands to be nailed to the tree. He won for us By bleeding for our forgiveness. He won by using his authority to stand in our place and to be our substitute – in life and in death! He willingly died so that we could be forgiven!!

Jesus has power and authority and he uses it to show us mercy and grace!! Jesus has power and authority and he uses it to crush our enemies and win ultimate victory for us! He showed it that say in Capernaum. He foreshadowed the ultimate victory over Satan that he was in the process of winning! He cast the demons out of that man’s body. He casts the demons out of hearts each time his powerful word is spoken, each time the rich message of his grace.

He shows his amazing authority as he claims you and me in the waters of baptism, as he shares with us the miracle of his forgiving body and blood in the sacrament. He shows amazing authority as his word speaks to us, in new ways each time we read it, with new insights, new encouragements, new strength to face the challenges of each day! His Word and Sacraments are powerful tools, used on us and used for us so that we might be strong to fight at Jesus’ side each day!

And now he shares that authority as he places the Word in our hearts and on our lips. He gives us authority to proclaim it and to share it! First with ourselves! As we spend time in the Word, Jesus preaches to us, comforts us, heals us! Then he motivates us to take it to others – as we parent our children, as we interact with others at work or in our neighborhood! He enables us to work together as a

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family of believers that others in our community and in our world might know that Jesus has power and authority that Jesus has forgiven sins and opened heaven to all who believe in him!

My friends, rejoice in that power and authority! Celebrate that Jesus has made us his and that by his power and authority a heavenly victory has been won for us! Let's live for him! Let's thank him with our lives! Let's seek to serve him always and look for opportunities to encourage others to do the same!!

Our enemies have power – but our Savior has power and authority! We're on his side and that means that we will win!! Jesus promises us that! And his Words are powerful and true!! Amen.