

The Invisible Battle, Part 3
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We are in part 3 of a sermon series entitled *The Invisible Battle*. Just a head's up – next Sunday might not be part 4 of this series due to our travel this week for the denomination. There will be a sermon – I'm just not sure what the text or theme will be. Today however, I am sure! We are looking at Jesus' encounters with the forces of evil in these weeks before Lent begins so that we can learn from his response and be prepared ourselves for the spiritual battles we face. We are in the gospel of Luke today, and to lay the foundation for the teaching I want us to notice Luke's main theme going on in chapters 4 & 5.

At the beginning of chapter 4 Jesus encounters the devil out in the wilderness (which we talked about last week). Next in this same chapter Jesus travels around Galilee in the power of the Spirit. V. 15 tells us *"He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him."* Then he went to Nazareth. We read in our call to worship about his first sermon preached there (Luke 4:16-21), *"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' ²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"*

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked. In other words, 'This is only the son of a carpenter, right?' And Jesus, in hearing what they were saying, replied (The Voice), ²³'You're about to quote the old proverb to Me, 'Doctor, heal yourself!' Then you're going to ask Me to prove Myself to you by doing the same miracles I did in Capernaum. ²⁴But face the truth: hometowns always reject their homegrown prophets. ²⁵Think back to the prophet Elijah. There were many needy Jewish widows in his homeland, Israel, when a terrible famine persisted there for three and a half years. ²⁶Yet the only widow God sent Elijah to help was an outsider from Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷It was the same with the prophet Elisha. There were many Jewish lepers in his homeland, but the only one he healed – Naaman – was an outsider from Syria."

Well, they didn't like what he was insinuating one little bit, which was that God wasn't going to work in their town, and so they drove him out of town with the intention of throwing him off a cliff. But the text tells us he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. I can only imagine what he heard them saying about him as he walked through them. I wonder if some even spat at him. Certainly, a rehearsal for what would come at Calvary, isn't it? But it was not his time. He had work to do!

Jesus then went to Capernaum where he delivered a man possessed by an evil spirit (which we are going to look at my closely in a few minutes), next he went to Simon's home to heal his mother-in-law, which brought droves of people to him for healings and deliverances. He healed them all. After this we read about the miracle of Simon and his fishing nets. *"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch. 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'" When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break."*

It is quite a parade of events here in chapters 4 & 5. You should read all of these chapters when you go home! They are full of an important message for us in the midst of what we are learning about Jesus and spiritual warfare. These chapters are full of teaching about the authority of Jesus Christ. That's Luke's theme in these chapters: The authority of Jesus Christ!

In the wilderness when doing battle with the devil, Jesus showed he had authority over the devil. When he spoke, people were amazed at the authority he had in his preaching. Even though a crowd of people drove him out of Nazareth, he had authority to simply walk away from such an attack. He had authority over disease! He had authority over evil spirits! He had authority over the

fish of the sea! Jesus had authority wherever he went. In fact, let's just say that Jesus *was the authority* wherever he went. What does that mean, exactly?

To have authority is "to have the right to act in a specified way, delegated from one person or organization to another; a person or organization having political or administrative power and control; the power to influence others, especially because of one's commanding manner or one's recognized knowledge about something; the confidence resulting from personal expertise; a person with extensive or specialized knowledge about a subject; an expert." The Greek word translated authority or power is *exousia*. It is especially used in terms of moral influence. *Exousia* can also be thought of in terms of dominion over a certain realm, right, privilege, or ability.

When Jesus faced Satan in the wilderness, Jesus clearly demonstrated that he had authority over Satan, and that he could overpower Satan. There was no question at the end of that warfare encounter that Satan had nothing over Jesus. Jesus could personally withstand all of Satan's assaults on him. But here's another question that impacts you and me personally, the answer to which will impact the outcome of the warfare battles we face. "Can Jesus overpower Satan for me?" "Can he overpower Satan for you?" Or, is the authority he has only for his own personal encounters? As a believer and follower of Jesus, you most likely already instinctively know the answer to this. But let's get the answer from the Scripture so you have the facts to back up your faith. This is Luke 4:31-37.

"He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. "They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. "In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm. "They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!" "And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

Remember from his first sermon in Nazareth, Jesus declared that Isaiah's prophecy from Isaiah 61:1 was being fulfilled in himself, through his ministry, saying that the Spirit of the Lord was on him to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free. He came to set people free from spiritual poverty, from Satan's dominion of darkness, from spiritual blindness, and from a heavy blanket of hopelessness. And right here in the synagogue in Capernaum he began to demonstrate exactly how that was going to happen. Jesus was teaching and people were listening. They were amazed; they were astounded at his authoritative teaching. It was obvious to everyone present that this guy was different. He was the real deal. He was the authority. He was the Word in flesh and bones. They could read the Scriptures all day long. They could read and memorize chapter after chapter and the teachers could stand and expound upon them. But this man, Jesus, made the words alive! He was the reason the words were written in the first place – he was the Word – and all were amazed with the exception of one. That one was terrified.

"I know who you are! You are the Holy One of God! What are you going to do to us?" James 2:19 declares, "Even the demons believe—and shudder." Even the demons believe and tremble. Even the demons know who Jesus is and they are terrified. They know the end of the story. They know that Jesus is going to come back and bind them and then throw them into the eternal lake of fire. They are in constant fear because, like us, they don't know the day nor the hour when the Holy One of God is going to come back for the final judgement. They are terrified of Jesus and his authority. They are as much in a constant state of trembling as we are not in a constant state of trembling. The gospel teaches us that our eternity is settled and secure because of our faith in and position in Jesus Christ! Demons know that ahead for them is not salvation but eternal damnation. So they scream, "What are you going to do to us? Have you come to destroy us? Is this the final hour?"

There are very few references to demons and demon-possessed people in the Old Testament. There are virtually no reported encounters with demons after the gospels and the book of Acts (there is teaching about them but no encounters with them). But when Jesus walked the earth, the only One who had full authority over demons, they literally seemed to come out of the woodwork. Their desire to remain invisible and therefore most manipulative seemed to get tossed out the back door when Jesus, as man, was among us. When Jesus stepped in, his power was so great, his authority so

commanding, his teaching so full of truth, the demons couldn't restrain themselves. The demon in this man screamed in the middle of Jesus' sermon because the Word made flesh caused him to blow his cover!

The Word has power, folks. The Word has power. The Word has power to set people free from spiritual poverty, set them free from Satan's dominion of darkness, set them free from spiritual blindness, and set them free from a heavy blanket of hopelessness. And that's exactly what happened here. Jesus' preaching brought the demon out into the open so that it could be dealt with. Jesus said to the demon (not to the one being possessed by the demon), *"Be silent, and come out of him!"* And out it came.

We know nothing about the man who had been possessed by this demon, except that he most likely was a faithful Jew or he wouldn't have been in the synagogue on the Sabbath. He was most likely living his life, doing all the religious things necessary, and quietly being manipulated by the powers of darkness. The demon's assignment was to keep the man from being delivered from the kingdom of eternal darkness into the kingdom of eternal light. The demon's assignment was to chain him to the darkness without him even realizing he was in the dark. Our eyes do eventually adjust, don't they?

But his encounter with Jesus changed everything! His encounter with the Holy One of God, with the living Word changed everything! His encounter with Jesus, the beloved Son of God, set him free from that which had bound him for who knows how long!

Can Jesus overpower Satan for you? Can he overpower Satan for me? Does his authority reach beyond his own personal space into my personal space? The text shows us that it does. It does. Jesus can overpower Satan on your behalf so that you can live a life free from Satan's counterfeit authority over you. Counterfeit authority, folks. That's all it is. Counterfeit. It is fake news that you cannot be an overcomer! In 1 John 3:8 we read, *"The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."* Jesus came to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. In Colossians 1:13 we read, *"He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

The whole reason God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ was to save you and save me from the works of the devil which lead to destruction. Surely you've read the verse in Matthew 7:13, *"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy¹³ that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."* The Message writes it this way, *"Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention."*

It is so easy to fall prey to the ways of the wide gate without even noticing that we are going the wrong way, even for those of us who attend worship every Sabbath. It's easy to fall into routines that are nothing but roadways to religious behavior. The devil is good at convincing us that this is enough – just showing up for worship. If we're not careful, we'll miss the turnoff to the narrow road of life.

Just this past week I noticed the title to an article that had been laid open for days at my house in the magazine Woodshop News. I can honestly say I wasn't interested in the article, but every day when I went by the magazine my eyes fell on the headline. But then, after many days, I noticed something that had been there all along. Here's a picture of the page from Woodshop News.



Do you see it? Do you see the typo? "What is hardness and why does is matter?" How many times do you suppose the editor read over that headline? How many times did he/she miss it? How many times did I read it and not see it?

We can miss what is right in front of us. We can miss the correction we need. We can miss the truth that we are being manipulated or influenced to think a certain way, to live a certain way, to serve in a certain way when it's not God's way, and we can know this because it is leading to hurt and hardship instead of

healing and wholeness. We can miss what is right in front of us if we are not aware and alert to the

schemes of the enemy. This is one of the main purposes for preaching this series – to make us aware and alert to his devilish schemes.

Let's look again at the verses from Ephesians 6:10-12, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

The key to victory is right there – be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his vast might! The key to victory is preached and sung and prayed every single Sunday here. The key to victory stands before us in Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life – and who has sent his Holy Spirit to live within us to remind us of all that Jesus taught us. The key to victory is Jesus. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. All authority. How much authority? All. Therefore, remember this: Once you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior of your soul and Lord of your life, you have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. And once you've been transferred you can't go back. The devil will try to convince you that you were never over there in the first place, or convince you that you did go back because of your behavior – but he's lying. Once you're in the kingdom of light, you are there forever. Listen again to Colossians 1:13, *“He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* We have confidence in his righteousness, not ours! When Jesus rescues, the rescue is complete. We are completely his, and he is completely ours.

So, let's go back to the question. Can Jesus overpower Satan for me? Can he overpower Satan for you? *“YES!” “YES!”* Again, I say, *“YES!”* Listen, it is a very rare occurrence that a person is possessed by a demon. Influenced? Yes. Possessed? Not that often. I'm not saying it doesn't happen. It does. But it is rare. Look again at what the people in the synagogue did after Jesus delivered the man from Satan's power. *“They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, ‘What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!’”* *“And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.”*

That's what we want to happen as a result of our personal victories over Satan – that people are amazed and wonder, *“Who is this Jesus?”* Because when people start wondering at the transformation they see in your life, in your eyes, in your heart, in the way you're spending your time and your money, in the way you're treating your family, in the words that do and don't come out of your mouth anymore – when they see this transformation happening right before their eyes, a report about Jesus begins to reach every place in the region. That sounds really exciting, doesn't it?

So, if you have a transformation story to tell – a story about how Jesus came and changed you – changed your thinking, changed your heart – you should share it. I challenge you to share it. Just last Sunday Ellen Heckman told me how the devil was trying to get to her and how she was having victory over him. I asked her to write it down to share with you today since she couldn't be here to tell you herself. Here are her words. For those of you who don't know, Ellen's daughter Sabrina was killed in a car accident 9 years ago while on her way to buy new tires for her boyfriend for Christmas.

“I have suffered with depression since my years in college. After Sabrina's death it intensified, needless to say. Since I attended the healing service and asked for prayer to free me from my depression, the very heavy, deep, dark depression has gone. I still have good days and sad days but I'm not incapacitated by sadness anymore.”

Recently, the holidays triggered how much I miss Sabrina, and I started having some very sad days. My thoughts would just get stuck in a groove, and I would keep going over and over how much I missed her. On one of the occasions that this was happening, the Holy Spirit gave me words of scripture in Philippians 4 that I had read many times but never thought to apply in a situation like I was experiencing. I started thinking the words (paraphrased) “whatever is true, whatever is pure, right and lovely, anything excellent or praiseworthy, think on these things.” I found those words broke the chain of sad thoughts and lifted my mind to my Lord & King! And since He has “plans to prosper me, not to harm me, but give me hope and a future” everything will work for good! I now use that scripture each time I realize I'm feeling consumed by repetitive sad thoughts, and they stop immediately!”

That's what daily victory looks like, folks. No more wondering how to stop those accusing voices in our heads. Use the Word. The written Word and the Spirit of Jesus, the Word made flesh – and victory will be ours! Amen.