

Epiphany 4 / January 30, 2022

Luke 4:32

“His word possessed authority.”

Jesus's words had power. The sea was calmed and the wind ceased. Jesus spoke with authority. Unclean spirits relinquished their claim on their unwilling hosts and fled, when Jesus commanded them to go. When Jesus said the word, it was done. The blind received their sight. The ill were cured, the injured were healed, the disabled were made whole. When Jesus called, the dead heard His voice and were raised. Jesus didn't have to say a word. Without a word the water became wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. In Isaiah chapter Fifty-five, God said, “The word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Jesus' words possessed authority, because He is the word of God in human form.

The authority of Jesus' words reveals the nature of His being, as the only begotten Son of the Father and His divine power. The author of Hebrews said of Him, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.” The authority of His words shows the purpose for which He came into the world: to release human beings from bondage to sin, the control of the devil and to lift the condemnation of eternal death from the heads of all who believe. He began His ministry, by releasing people from the effects of sin in their bodies. He concluded His ministry, by releasing people from the effects of sin in their spirits, by offering His body on the cross for the forgiveness of our sin. His word possesses authority. On the last day He will speak again: Create new heavens and new earth and call all who believe in His name, to rise from death to eternal life. Believe it!

Jesus' words had a powerful effect on the people in Capernaum. They wanted to keep Him for themselves. And who could blame them? He cast an unclean spirit out of a man in their synagogue. The first of many! He healed Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. Word spread. That evening, when the Sabbath was over, people from all over town brought their sick, injured and demon possessed friends and family to Him. He healed them too! People came to Jesus all through the night. All through the night Jesus healed and cast out unclean spirits. The local medical clinic and funeral home might not have appreciated the competition and been happy to see Him go, but everyone else would have liked to have kept Him forever. In fulfillment of the words of Malachi, the sun of righteousness had dawned. Jesus had come with healing in His hands, love in His heart; speaking powerful words of health, help and healing. He came to end the tyranny of sin, death and the devil. He showed His power by speaking words of healing, health and wholeness to the human soul; body and spirit.

At this early stage of His ministry, its unclear who the people thought He was and what He intended to accomplish. The unclean spirits knew immediately who He was and what He had come to do! They knew He was the Christ, the anointed King of Israel. They knew He was the Son of God. They publicly identified Him as “The Holy One of God.” They trembled, because they knew He had come to destroy them. The Kingdom of heaven was breaking into the world. They knew they would be broken in the process and their tyranny over the human race would come to an end.

The psalmist praised God for the dignity He bestows upon human beings. He said, “You made humankind a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honour.” Human beings are God's prize creation; created in His image to reflect His glory. Human beings were the pinnacle and the crowning glory of His work of creation. As such, we are the primary target of the devil's wrath and the means by which He makes war against God. Jesus came to cast the evil spirit out of the human heart. He first showed His power by casting evil spirits out of human beings. He came to cast the devil out of the world, first by establishing God's kingdom in the human heart through faith in His name and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us.

People talk about ‘spiritual warfare;’ the struggle believers have with the sin that dwells within us, the sin in the world around us and the sin with which the devil tempts and condemns us. Jesus' battles with the evil spirits in Galilee was the ultimate spiritual warfare. When Jesus healed people and cast out evil spirits, He was going head-to-head with the demons and toe to toe with the devil. But rather than an epic clash of the titans, it was really a non-event, at least in the sense of drama and suspense. The only drama came from the evil spirits, who made a big display, fussing and fuming as they exited their hosts and made their way out of town. There was no suspense. It was no contest. Jesus just told them to leave and they left, just like that! As God said to Isaiah, “The word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose

for which I sent it.” Jesus’ words possessed authority over the devil and his servants to set humans free from their tyranny.

Spiritual warfare was no contest between Jesus and the devils. It was no contest from the beginning. Revelation chapter twelve speaks about a war in heaven, when the devil and his angels fought against God’s angels. John says, “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” The passage literally says the dragon had “no strength.” He had no strength. That’s why he was defeated.

The devil has no strength in warfare against God. He was cast out of heaven. He will finally be cast out of the earth. He is cast out of the human heart when we receive Jesus as our Saviour. Through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit, the devil is cast out of the hearts of believers. When the devil is gone, Jesus enters and makes our hearts His home. In place of the evil spirit, He installs His Holy Spirit, who sanctifies our hearts through the washing of baptism, makes our bodies temples of His holiness and impels us to live in service to our new King, who is truly our Lord and God.

Spiritual warfare is real. It takes place around us and within us! St. Paul lamented the struggle in his own heart, between the desire to do good and the ever-present impulse to do evil. He prayed and asked who would deliver him from this body of death. Jesus is the answer. His powerful word empowers us to resist the temptations of the world around us and the sinful nature within us. His word empowers us to overcome the temptations and torments of the devil. There may be a lot of kicking and screaming as in any battle, but Jesus has already won the victory, through His sinless life and sacrificial death. He speaks to us words of forgiveness of sin, help in the battle against sin and healing from its wounds.

Never wage war with the devil on your own. He has great power over us, but he has no power in relation to Jesus. Stand strong in the Lord Jesus. He makes us strong by the speaking of His powerful word. Never wage war alone, even against your own sinful desires. Take hold of the sword of the Spirit and be defended by Jesus’ powerful word. His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. His word overcomes the evil one. He overcame the evil one. His word sends evil things running away. His word gives poor sinners forgiveness, consolation, comfort, the peace of a good conscience and the assurance of eternal life.

Go to Jesus for help, health and healing. But remember, every physical help and healing Jesus gave was a sign pointing to the greatest help and healing He gives to the spirits of those who take His words to heart and believe. Believe in Jesus, even if your burdens are not taken away. Trust Jesus, even if your struggles do not cease. Return to the promise He spoke in your baptism. He will not leave you nor forsake you. He will not give you more than your faith can bear. He stands with you to bear every burden!

Seek refuge in His word. He stands with you in the fight. He surrounds you in the battle. He is powerful to help us. He is mighty to defend us. We can trust Him to save us! Above all else remember He loves us! He has demonstrated His love by purchasing us from slavery to sin and servitude to the devil, by taking our sin upon Himself and paying our debt through the blood He shed on the cross. In the heat of battle remember Jesus won the victory. Jesus gives us the victory through His powerful word. Stand strong in the Lord and His powerful word. His word possesses authority! His words give forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe. Believe it! In Jesus’ name. Amen