

Deuteronomy 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 8:1–13

Mark 1:21–28

21And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. 22And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. 23And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24“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.” 25But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” 26And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. 27And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” 28And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

We hear God speak in his Word of power. We can't help it—we can't not hear God's Word of power. It would be like a rabbit hiding in a Sagebrush not hearing the growling of a pack of coyotes, like a bank robber not hearing the scream of the approaching police sirens. We may try to ignore or minimize the sound of God speaking in his Word of power, but that would be like a rabbit denying that he hears the bark of the coyotes, the bank robber denying the sound of the sirens. You deny it, and you're dead.

We hear God speak in his Word of power when we wake up in the morning and see the sun come up, and realize that it comes up for a reason—it was created that way, and the Earth we live on was created to rotate around it, it is all set in order by God's Word of power.

We hear God's Word of power when we see tornadoes tear through Missouri, floods sweep into Louisiana. This is God's good and perfect creation groaning under the death sentence of mankind's sin. God still speaks his Word of power upholding all of creation, but because our sin took all of creation into sin and death, God's Word of power is now working in and through a damaged and dying creation.

All creation, the Apostle Paul says, is groaning as with pains of childbirth until the day of judgment. So we hear God's Word of power as we see natural disasters and in them know that this is part of God's judgment against a fallen creation.

We hear God's Word of power when we see a massive cruise ship slip into the water off the coast of Italy, killing many. As a rock cuts into the ship, laws of nature are in play as fluid dynamics has water rushing into the damaged ship, as gravity pulls the ship to the bottom, as water displaces air, and people die. All this is part of the way things happen according to God's Word of power in the order of creation, when sin and the demons are involved. And sin and the demons are involved when men carelessly steer a ship into a rock because they were doing things outside of their vocation.

The people at the time of Jesus saw how this goes, as the Tower of Siloam fell and killed eighteen men. Was it because the engineers who designed the tower under-designed it? Or

because the suppliers brought faulty building materials? Or because the construction crew was careless and didn't follow good rules? Why did the eighteen die under the rocks of that tower? We don't know the specifics, but it was because of the sin of man and the temptation of the demons, and what happens in our world when things aren't done right, we know that.

In the things of our created world, in the natural disasters, in the sicknesses of mankind, in the shipwrecks and disasters we bring upon ourselves—in all of this, we can hear God's Word of power, as he upholds all creation, and as creation groans until the Last Day.

But the problem with God's Word of power is, as long as we live in a fallen world, and as long as we live in our own sinful flesh, and as long as the demons are the princes of this world, God's Word of power will never bring us good news. It will never be a comfort to us, never bring us peace, for while it upholds creation, it does not forgive sins. Rather, the opposite, it shows us God's judgment against sin and against this sinful world. God's Word of power is his Word of Law.

The people who were good at speaking God's Word of power, the people at the time of Jesus to whom you would go to hear how God's Law rules the world and how you need to keep God's Law if you are going to be righteous, it was the scribes and the Pharisees.

They were preachers of power.

If something goes wrong, they could tell you why, and then tell you how to clean yourself up by following their laws. Is a man born blind? Then either he sinned or his parents sinned, say the scribes and Pharisees, and God is just getting his retribution.

The tower of Siloam falling and killing eighteen? Then they must have been worse sinners than the rest—God's retribution.

A woman caught in adultery, stone her to death—God's retribution.

Do you want to clean up your life, be a good Christian? They could tell you how—how to cook your food, wash your dishes, which foods to eat, not to eat, when to prune your grapevines, and anything else in life you have a question about.

The teachers of the Law, the scribes and the Pharisees—they were powerful teachers, dynamic speakers, they could hold an audience in the palm of their hand and get them to do almost anything, even stone to death their own neighbor.

The people, they knew how to listen to someone speaking with power. It was all around them, the scribes and Pharisees pounding people with the Law of God, the officers of King Herod ruling the land with the power of the sword, the army of the Roman Caesar, intimidating the land with the power of Rome. The people knew how to listen to someone speaking with power.

Then comes Jesus. Mark 1:21:

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus astonished them with his teaching. They had never heard anything like this before. He taught not as one who had power, but as one who had authority, and that astonishes anyone.

In Scripture, *power* and *authority* are not the same thing. As a matter of fact, they are somewhat the opposite.

If power is what you can do to others and they can't stop you, like a pack of coyotes having the power to chase down a rabbit, then authority is not what you do against someone by power, but what you give to them as a gift, like a loving child giving the gift of a carrot to a pet rabbit.

If power is what you have of yourself, the power that you have in you according to who you are, like a bank robber robbing a bank because he's the one with an evil disposition and a gun in his hand, then authority is not what you have in and of yourself, but what is placed upon you as an office, what you are given to do in the stead of another, like a police officer having a badge placed upon his chest, so that he is now acting not according to his own power, but according to the authority vested in him by the Mayor of the city.

If power is using your voice and your strength to control and crush others, like the Pharisees controlling what food people could eat and how far they could travel, then authority is your voice being used to give gifts to others from the one who gave the gifts to you.

Power is acting on your own, authority is being given to act in the stead of another.

In the Word of power we see God's Law and retribution, and we find no comfort. In God's Word of authority we see God using a voice to give gifts, forgive sins, bestow life, and chase away the demons.

By the Word of power, we see people placing themselves over others as leaders demanding obedience, by the word of authority, we see God placing people as servants—a pastor to serve his people in the church, a father to serve his family by bringing them to the Lord's Word, a mother to serve children who need her care, a Christian to serve his neighbor, a sinner cleansed by the Gospel to serve his fellow sinner by speaking forgiveness to him.

God, who has all power, who upholds all things of creation by his Word of power, God, more than anything, wants us to hear his other Word, his Word that comes not in power but in weakness, a Word not of condemnation and crushing, but of Jesus dying on the cross—God wants us to hear his Word of authority.

Mark 1:21:

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

Let *us* hear Jesus' Word of authority, and be astonished.

Astonished not that he, God the Son, upholds all creation by his Word of power, for there is no comfort for the sinner in that. Rather, let us be astonished that he who has the power to know every sin of ours, even the sin hidden in our hearts, he who has the power to judge us for our sin, and crush us for it, like the tower of Siloam falling on our heads—let us be astonished that he, out of his love for the sinner, came not in power, but in weakness, not to crush, but to die on the cross, and comes even now in the weakness of common elements such as bread and wine, but in that, giving himself to us, his Body and Blood, for the forgiveness of our sins.

That's his Word of authority: *I forgive you your sins*. That's the Word that astonishes us, for it means that we now stand before his Father clean—clean and righteous, forgiven of all sin, and taken out of the realm of the death and the demons.

When Jesus spoke his Word of authority in Capernaum, that is, after all, what it accomplished. This Word of authority, this Word forgiving sins, when it is spoken, the demons flee.

Mark 1:25:

But Jesus rebuked [the demon], saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

At the Word of authority, the demons flee. Do we realize this in our lives?

The only power the demons have over us is the power of tempting us to sin, then holding that sin over us so we suffer under the guilt, and we even suffer under the shame of sins having been done against us. When sin is repented and forgiven, the demons have no more power.

So when Jesus forgives us our sin, the demons have no more power over us.

And when Jesus uses our voices to forgive the sins of those who have sinned against us, the demons are removed from causing division between two Christians. When the Gospel is proclaimed in the church, Christians are reconciled to one another because they are reconciled to God. When Jesus comes to us in his Body and Blood, the demons must flee.

Like those in Capernaum, let us be astonished at Jesus' Word of authority. It is like no other word spoken in our world which is accustomed to words of power. Let us be astonished—Jesus has his Word of authority proclaimed, and we are forgiven.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.