

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 impure 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 impure 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 impure spirits and they obey him.” **28** News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Unfair Fight

In the aftermath of World War II rules were written for war. Even in war one must fight fair. As time progressed, so did technology, and since then additions have been made, restricting caliber, materials, and even methods used in war. There are honorable ways to fight and then there are dishonorable. But sometimes these rules make it look like we don't really want to win, we'd rather give the enemy the advantage and hope all play according to the rules.

It doesn't look like Mark knows anything about rules of war, the Geneva Convention, nor do the demons for that matter. For them, anything goes. They aren't afraid to invade any area, synagogue, or person to proclaim a message intended to hurt and destroy. At the same time even when they bring everything in their arsenal... it doesn't look a fair fight. Jesus speaks with authority. He drives out demons. He astonishes and amazes all. The enemy doesn't stand a chance.

But if that's the case, if Jesus is so powerful, if he has all authority over evil then why doesn't he help, heal, and restore us? We may pray for deliverance and know that God can help, but he doesn't always seem to heal. Why? Is it because he's fighting fair with the devil and he subscribes to the Calvary Convention of 33AD? That doesn't seem to be the case as Jesus starts a fight at the beginning of Mark.

No, he doesn't hold back. But he isn't here to heal every disease and sickness. He is here to win a war. Jesus didn't come to heal and work miracles but rather to use his authority and power to take out the root cause of sickness and death - undoing the devils work. If anything that is unfair fight. Even the demons recognize the winner. Jesus fights for us, forgives sin, and brings life.

Immediately after spending 40 days in the desert being tempted by the devil, Jesus emerges the victor and then sets up shop in Capernaum. He enters a synagogue on the sabbath with his disciples and starts a fight. A synagogue is not the temple but one of the many places where people could devote themselves to the faith. They gathered to worship, pray, read and study the Word. Here Jesus speaks. But there was something different about his approach to scripture. He is no ordinary teacher.

He didn't elaborate on rules of the elders and the traditions of the people. Jesus was different. He taught "*With authority and not as the scribes.* He reads scripture and tells them what it means rather than what they've heard. This is like Jesus words at the Sermon on the mount, "*You've heard that it has been said... but I say to you.*"

The people are astonished. This doesn't necessarily mean they have a positive reaction to Jesus' teaching. This isn't, "That's refreshing! What comfort!" but, "Who does he think he is? He's talking like he's the authority!" They are astonished. Literally - "to be exceedingly struck in mind," as in impressed, bewildered, or even scandalized. Mark later records a similar encounter in Nazareth when Jesus takes the scroll of Isaiah and announces, "*Today in your hearing these words are fulfilled.*" There they tried to kill him.

Before the people in Capernaum have an opportunity to react a demon does. He knows who Jesus is. In the middle of sacred space he cries out, "*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!*" In the middle of preaching. He cries out, "Why are you meddling with us?" What are you doing here? This is my turf." Jesus silences him with a single word. An endorsement from an untrustworthy source is not generally helpful. Jesus doesn't need their help. In fact he wants him to stop.

The demon is terrified. He knows who Jesus is. He knows why Jesus has come, "*to destroy us.*" The fight is over as soon as it starts. Jesus has authority over even the demons. He speaks the word. There isn't a special formula. Jesus doesn't take any holy water with him. No smells, no bells, just the Word. I'd imagine Jesus turning his back and slowly walking away as an explosion rocks the synagogue and the demon exits. The people have moved from astonished to amazed - something holy and awesome has just taken place. "*News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.*"

That's great. We love to hear how Jesus won. But where is Jesus when it comes to the demons in my life? Then we read the Word and we hear, "*We are sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" It hardly sounds like a fair fight. We never even stood a chance. How can he hold us accountable for something that seems so unfair? In these ways we are often tempted to turn away from Jesus and focus on our pain and problems in this world. Where is Jesus?

He's here. He is with you. The truth, however, is that Jesus didn't come to heal every sickness, disease and death. He did not come to set up and establish a heaven, permanent residence here on earth. But to attack the root of all our suffering. Rather than react like the demons who are terrified we may even challenge his authority, "It's not fair." And given the opportunity we'd lose in our battle against sin.

Astonished, upset, a bit disturbed. Wondering, "Who does he think he is?" I can do no other than simply proclaim what has been put before me. This applies just as much to me. Which leaves me wondering. If the devil and the demons fear the Lord obey him - how much more shouldn't we, those who claim to follow Jesus?

I don't want you astonished and upset. Rather I want you amazed at Jesus' authority and work, not over you, but for you.

The plan is not to heal everybody in the here and now. The battle so much greater than our temporal comfort. Jesus is on task to destroy the devil, his work, and restore the world. It's the secret that seems to flow through the Gospel of Mark, after a healing or miracle Jesus commands them, "Don't tell anyone about this." Jesus didn't want everyone to flock to him for healing. He didn't want to be known as a political political Roman empire-conquering Messiah.

Until his character and the details of his mission are revealed, Jesus identity and his works are concealed. It's not until Mark 8:31 - after Peter's confession and Jesus' passion prediction that all attempts of concealment disappear. Then Jesus goes to Jerusalem. "*They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.*" There is amazement even on Pilate's part in 15:5 when Jesus does not respond to a single accusation

He came into this world of suffering to be beaten to a pulp. He restrained himself and let the devil rope a dope. All authority and power were rightfully his but he set it aside so that wicked men might have his way with him. He then suffered separation from his Father, hell for all of us. The most amazing part is that he came back. He still uses his power and authority for the greatest good of his church.

A Christian doesn't hold onto hope in this world but we look ahead to the life to come. We know this world is not as it should be. Pain and problems afflict Christians and unbelievers alike. How would we know this world isn't as it should be, if Jesus healed every disease sickness and pain? How would we recognize that this world is broken and beyond?

Christianity gives us a picture of a perfect world tragically torn apart by war and rebellion. If anything we should be asking, "Why is there so much good in this world?" Where

is God? In his Word, his Sacraments. In response to the devil and his demons, “This one’s ours,” God thunders back, “Silence. This one is forgiven as well. This one is mine.” God is found here in his word. What does he do? He fights for us.

There on the cross his power and authority have been revealed to all who belong to him. It’s evident to all. We look forward to his return when he will silence every evil, disaster, and death once and for all. Until then he reveals his power and authority to us in Word and Sacrament so we are not without hope. Hold on to that hope. Follow Jesus, the one with all power and authority.

Here he silences the devil and his angels. It’s an unfair fight. But he isn’t holding back. He isn’t going easy on the enemy. The devil has already lost. He knows time is short and so he wants disturb the church and try to take as many away from God as possible. Understand he is still wanders this world looking for someone to devour.

Don’t want to go looking for a fight but see the power and authority of our God revealed in Jesus as he takes up the Word and silences every accusation. In Christ that battle is over.