

SCRIPTURE: MARK 1:21-28

POWER, OR THE LACK OF IT IS ONE OF THE DEFINING FACTORS OF LIFE, ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT OFTEN THINK OF THIS.

BUT WHEN WE DO, WE WILL REALIZE FROM BIRTH OTHERS HAVE POWER OVER US BECAUSE THEY PROVIDE FOR US AND GUIDE US UNTIL WE ARE ABLE TO GO OUT ON OUR OWN.

AND YET, EVEN AS ADULTS WE ARE UNDER THE POWER STRUCTURE OF OUR POLITICAL SYSTEMS, SOCIETY, EMPLOYERS, CHURCH GOVERNMENT, AND SOMETIMES OTHER PEOPLE.

MANY PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TO POWER, SOME TO GAIN IT FOR THEMSELVES, OTHERS SEEK TO FOLLOW SOMEONE WITH POWER.

NOW POWER IN AND OF ITSELF IS NOT A BAD THING, IT IS TO SOME DEGREE A NECESSARY PART OF LIFE.

EVEN SOME HERD ANIMALS HAVE A MALE OR FEMALE LEADER THAT IS ABLE TO SOME DEGREE, TO DIRECT THE HERD WHEN THEY ARE IN DANGER.

POWER HOWEVER BECOMES A PROBLEM WHEN IT IS CORRUPTED, AS IT SO OFTEN IS IN THIS SIN-FILLED WORLD.

SADLY, ALL AROUND THE WORLD, IN BIG AND SMALL WAYS, PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS USE WHATEVER POWER THEY HAVE OVER OTHERS SELFLESSLY.

IN FACT ONLY GOD ALWAYS USES POWER RIGHTLY WITHOUT CORRUPTION.

JESUS DID THAT, HE USED HIS DIVINE POWER NOT TO BOOST HIS OWN EGO, BUT TO HELP AND SAVE OTHERS.

THE BIBLE TELLS US - THERE IS POWER IN WORDS. INDEED CREATION CAME INTO BEING WHEN GOD SAID: "LET THERE BE..."

ANOTHER WELL KNOWN EXAMPLE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S WORD IN PARTICULAR, IS FOUND IN THE STORY OF JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS.

DURING HIS TIME OF TEMPTATION-THE SAVIOR QUOTED DEUTERONOMY 8:3, SAYING: "...ONE DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF THE LORD."

THEN IN DEUTERONOMY 18, MOSES PROMISED GOD WOULD SEND ANOTHER PROPHET WITH THE AUTHORITY TO SPEAK GOD'S WORD TO HIS PEOPLE.

MANY PROPHETS WERE SENT, BUT ONLY ONE NOT ONLY EQUALED, BUT SURPASSED MOSES, AND THAT ONE IS JESUS.

AND, AS THE GOSPEL OF JOHN PROCLAIMS, JESUS IS THE WORD OF GOD MADE FLESH, MADE HUMAN.

THIS MEANS IN JESUS, BOTH THE POWER AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD WERE JOINED TOGETHER WHEN HE ENTERED THE WORLD.

IT WAS THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF GOD WITHIN HIM THAT ENABLED JESUS NOT ONLY TO SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY, BUT TO ALSO BACK UP HIS WORDS.

TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY FROM MARK OFFERS US A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THIS. IT WAS AN ORDINARY SABBATH DAY IN CAPERNAUM WHEN JESUS ENTERED THE SYNAGOGUE TO WORSHIP.

IT WAS EVEN AN ORDINARY THING FOR HIM TO BE ASKED TO READ A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE AND PREACH OR TEACH, SINCE ANY JEWISH MAN MIGHT BE ASKED TO DO SO.

BUT WHEN JESUS BEGAN TO TEACH ABOUT GOD AND GOD'S WORD, THINGS CEASED TO BE ORDINARY, WHICH ASTOUNDED THE PEOPLE WHO HEARD HIM.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIM AND THE SCRIBES THAT WERE TRADITIONAL TEACHERS, WAS THEY BACKED UP THEIR TEACHING BY QUOTING FAMOUS RABBIS.

THIS IS MUCH LIKE PREACHERS AND TEACHERS TODAY QUOTE THEOLOGIAN, OR PREACHERS OR AUTHORS TO SUPPORT WHAT THEY ARE SAYING.

JESUS, HOWEVER SPOKE ON HIS OWN AUTHORITY WITHOUT THE NEED TO QUOTE ANYONE BUT HIS FATHER'S WORD IN SCRIPTURE.

JESUS, WE MAY IMAGINE, SPOKE AS SOMEONE WHO KNEW GOD IN A WAY NO ONE ELSE DID, OR COULD.

AND THIS INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE CAME OUT IN THE AUTHORITY HIS WORDS HAD FOR THE PEOPLE WHO LISTENED TO HIM THAT DAY.

THIS SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING, AFTER ALL MOST PEOPLE CAN APPRECIATE A GOOD SERMON OR BIBLE STUDY THAT CAPTURES THEIR ATTENTION AND SPEAKS TO THEIR HEARTS.

BUT THEN SOMETHING EVEN MORE EXTRAORDINARY HAPPENED IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT DAY.

JESUS WAS INTERRUPTED BY A MAN POSSESSED BY AN EVIL SPIRIT. AND WHETHER HIS CONDITION WAS AN ACTUAL POSSESSION OR MENTAL ILLNESS, IT DOES NOT MATTER.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER AND FOCUS ON IS HOW JESUS HANDLED THE SITUATION.

JESUS PAUSED IN HIS TEACHING, HEALED THE MAN BY THE AUTHORITY OF HIS SPOKEN WORD, THEN APPARENTLY HE WENT BACK TO TEACHING.

IN THIS JESUS SHOWED MORE THAN AN ORATORY ABILITY TO CAPTURE PEOPLE'S ATTENTION, HIS WORDS HAD POWER TO HEAL WITH A SIMPLE COMMAND.

THIS IS WHY MANY DESCRIBED JESUS AS PRESENTING A NEW TEACHING-ONE WITH AUTHORITY.

NATURALLY, AFTER THIS, NEWS SPREAD QUICKLY ABOUT JESUS THROUGHOUT CAPERNAUM AND ELSEWHERE.

AND WITH THIS NEWS ABOUT HIM CAME THE INEVITABLE QUESTION "WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH?"

IRONICALLY THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION WAS ALREADY GIVEN BY THE MAN WHO INTERRUPTED THE SERVICE.

HE SAID: "WHAT HAVE YOU TO DO WITH US JESUS OF NAZARETH? HAVE YOU COME TO DESTROY US? I KNOW YOU WHO YOU ARE, THE HOLY ONE OF GOD."

OF COURSE, SINCE HE SEEMED CRAZY, IT IS UNLIKELY ANYONE PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO HIS ACTUAL WORDS.

HOWEVER WE SHOULD, BECAUSE THEY REMIND US ABOUT SOMETHING CONCERNING JESUS, WE MAY OVERLOOK.

THE FIRST IS THE RECOGNITION BY EVIL THAT JESUS HAD POWER TO DESTROY IT, A POWER EVIL COULD NOT MATCH OR CORRUPT.

THE OTHER THING IS THE MAN CALLING JESUS THE "HOLY ONE". IN THE BIBLE, THAT WAS USUALLY A TITLE FOR GOD.

THUS THESE WORDS CHALLENGE US TO CONSIDER NOT ONLY THE QUESTION THE PEOPLE ASKED ABOUT JESUS, BUT THE MEANING OF HIM AS THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.

IN OTHER WORDS: WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH TO YOU AND WHAT AUTHORITY DOES HIS WORD HAVE IN YOUR LIFE?

THE SAME QUESTIONS COULD BE ASKED OF EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THESE QUESTIONS ARE IMPORTANT. BUT WHAT SUCH QUESTIONS POINT TO ARE THAT ARE EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT.

THE BIGGER QUESTION IS "WHAT CLAIM DO WE RECOGNIZE JESUS HAS ON OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES AND ON THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH?"

TRULY, TO CONFESS AND PROCLAIM JESUS IS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, AND TO DO SO WITH SINCERE MEANING IS A WONDERFUL THING.

HOWEVER OUR CONFESSION IS JUST THE BEGINNING, IT NEEDS TO BE BACKED UP BY HOW WE LIVE DAY BY DAY.

THIS IS WHERE THE REAL WORK BEGINS, BECAUSE WE CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE WITH SIN.

THIS MEANS WE CONTINUE TO CHOSE, OFTEN SUBCONSCIOUSLY IF AND HOW WE WILL FOLLOW GOD'S WORD AND WILL.

THERE IS AN OLD NATIVE AMERICAN STORY THAT HELPS TO DESCRIBE THIS.

ONE DAY A CHIEF SPOKE TO A GATHERING OF YOUNG BRAVES ABOUT THE STRUGGLE WITHIN.

HE SAID, "IT IS LIKE TWO DOGS FIGHTING INSIDE OF US. THERE IS ONE GOOD DOG WHO WANTS TO DO THE RIGHT AND THE OTHER DOG ALWAYS WANTS TO DO THE WRONG.

SOMETIMES THE GOOD DOG SEEMS STRONGER AND GOOD IS WINNING THE FIGHT. BUT SOMETIMES THE BAD DOG IS STRONGER AND WRONG IS WINNING THE FIGHT."

"WHO IS GOING TO WIN IN THE END?" A YOUNG BRAVE ASKED. THE CHIEF ANSWERED "THE ONE YOU FEED."

ALONG THIS LINE, THE QUESTION ARISES FOR ALL OF US: HOW OFTEN DO WE FEED OUR LIVES WITH PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE?

DO WE REMEMBER OR PAY ATTENTION TO THE TEACHINGS AND ACTIONS OF JESUS MORE THAN WE DO TO OUR OWN DESIRES OR WORLDLY INFLUENCES?

THIS INNER STRUGGLE IS LIVED OUT IN THE CHOICES WE MAKE, NOT JUST IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS, BUT ALSO IN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

WE ALL STRUGGLE BETWEEN THINGS LIKE-NURSING OUR ANGER OR LETTING IT GO, OR USING IT IN POSITIVE WAYS.

AND SOMETIMES WE STRUGGLE WITH ASKING FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS, OR WITH FORGIVING.

SO OFTEN WE WANT TO LET GO, BUT INSTEAD, WE DWELL ON UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT WANT TO DO SO.

THIS IS PART OF BEING HUMAN AND A SINNER. THE GOOD NEWS IS WE DO HAVE POWER OVER OUR INNER STRUGGLES, AS WELL AS OUR CHOICES, AND OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

THE POWER WE HAVE IS NOT MERELY OUR OWN STRENGTH BUT THAT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GOD'S LOVE FOR US.

IT IS IN GOD'S LOVE, CHRIST'S REDEMPTION OF US, AND THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE IN US THAT GIVES US HOPE AND POWER.

HERE IS WHAT ANOTHER PREACHER NAMED TIM ZINGALE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THIS STRUGGLE.

"BECAUSE JESUS HAS AUTHORITY, BECAUSE HE HAS POWER, BECAUSE HIS WORDS DO AFFECT OUR LIVES, THEN WE ARE PEOPLE WHO CAN, AND DO, LIVE IN HOPE."

WE HAVE HOPE THAT GOD CAN CHANGE US, HEAL OUR INNER HURTS, OR AT THE VERY LEAST ENABLE US TO GO ON EVEN WHEN THE DESIRED HEALING DOES NOT COME AT ALL, OR AS QUICKLY AS WE WOULD LIKE.

BUT WE NEED TO WORK WITH GOD, RATHER THAN RESIST GOD IN ORDER FOR THIS TO HAPPEN. HOW CAN WE DO THIS?

FIRST, BY FEEDING OUR LIVES WITH PRAYER, AND BEING GUIDED BY SCRIPTURE.

ALSO, BY REALLY LISTENING TO AND HEEDING JESUS' WORDS, SO WE MAY LEARN FROM HIM. THESE ARE ALL WAYS THAT WE ASSIST, RATHER THAN RESIST, GOD IN DOING HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES.

REV. ZINGALE OFFERED AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE POWER OF JESUS; WORDS AND THE HOPE HE OFFERS.

A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER DREW TWO PATHS ON THE CLASSROOM BOARD. ONE PATH HAD A HUGE ROCK IN THE CENTER OF IT.

AND ON THE OTHER PATH THERE WAS A STAIRWAY THAT CLIMBED INTO THE AIR AND THEN DESCENDED TO THE GROUND AGAIN.

SHE ASKED THE CLASS WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM WITH THE FIRST PATH.

IT WAS, OF COURSE THE ROCK THAT BLOCKED THE PATH. IT WAS TOO HEAVY TO MOVE AND TOO BIG TO CLIMB OVER.

THEN THE TEACHER POINTED TO THE STAIRWAY ON THE OTHER PATH AND ASKED FOR COMMENTS.

A STUDENT OBSERVED THAT THE STAIRWAY ENABLED YOU TO KEEP GOING OVER ANY OBSTACLE, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

JESUS, WE ARE REMINDED IS OUR STAIRWAY OVER THE STRUGGLES OF LIFE, WE STILL HAVE TO CLIMB ONE STEP AT A TIME, BUT HE HELPS US DO THIS.

SO AGAIN WE MUST ASK OURSELVES: “WHO IS JESUS TO ME? WHAT CLAIM DOES HE HAVE ON MY LIFE?”, AND “HOW WILL I RESPOND TO HIS CLAIM?”

THE FIRST TWO LINES OF AN OLD GOSPEL SONG OFFERS A PRAYER TO HELP US ON OUR JOURNEY:

“ONE DAY AT A TIME, SWEET JESUS THAT’S ALL I’M ASKING OF YOU. JUST GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO DO EVERYDAY WHAT I HAVE TO DO.

YESTERDAY’S GONE, SWEET JESUS, AND TOMORROW MAY NEVER BE MINE. HELP ME TODAY, SHOW ME THE WAY.
ONE DAY AT A TIME.”

MAY GOD GRANT US THE GRACE TO CONFESS CHRIST AS SAVIOR, AND ALSO TO LIVE BY OUR CONFESSION ONE DAY AT A TIME. AMEN

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THIS IS WHY MANY DESCRIBED JESUS AS PRESENTING A NEW TEACHING-ONE WITH AUTHORITY. AND THEY WONDERED ABOUT HIM, AND SO SHOULD WE.

THINK ABOUT IT: WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH TO YOU AND WHAT AUTHORITY DOES HIS WORD HAVE IN YOUR LIFE? THE SAME QUESTIONS COULD BE ASKED OF EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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MAY GOD'S GRACE HELP US TO LIVE OUT OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH DAY BY DAY. AMEN