

Luke 4:31-44

When he hires qualified men and women for positions in his company (a well-known major business), the owner explains that the entire interview process hinges on one question: "Tell me about your father." A professor at the Lutheran seminary in Australia says they ask the same question of men seeking to be pastors in the church. If an employee and a pastor do not respect their father, and mother, they will lack respect for their bosses and for God. But one who is subordinate to father and mother will properly exercise their authority whether in the business world or in the church.

Authority comes from God whether in the home, in the church, in the workplace, or in the world. When a father and mother raise their children in the discipline and love of the Lord, they are exercising their God-given authority, and their children are blessed. But when a parent abuses his child, as one example, he is being insubordinate to God, and Satan's power is at work. The same is true of bosses, teachers, police officers, governors, presidents, and pastors. When they discharge the duties of their office in the way God authorizes, the people they serve are blessed. But when they do not; when they misuse their authority, they become more of a curse than a blessing, to those they serve.

In our text for today we see two extremes. We see one using His authority properly, and we see one who does not. Jesus and Satan. Jesus teaches, heals, and rebukes demons with the authority of His Father, and all are blessed. Satan is the insubordinate one. He has power, much power. But he has no authority from God. And so when he uses his power, no one is blessed, but by him, many are cursed. Satan was the first one to show insubordination to God. God created him in the beginning as a powerful angel and he, Lucifer, was to serve God. But he rose up against God. He acted without authority and God cast him from His presence and created hell for him and for all the evil angels that followed him.

Satan was the first to be insubordinate to God, but he was far from being the last. Adam and Eve followed in his insubordination by eating the fruit that God did not authorize them to eat. And now all their children follow in their act of insubordination by rising up to rebel against God. When you and I disobey what God commands--and for us this is a daily routine because sin, like a fever, a disease, dwells within us--we are demonstrating that we, too, are children of Adam and Eve.

Looking at our text, one of Satan's followers, an evil angel, a demon, had taken possession of a man, and he was in the synagogue at the same time that Jesus was there. That demon had no authority to enter that man. But that's how the devil works. He despises God's authority, and by his own power he attempts, and succeeds, in destroying God's creation, especially the crown of His creation, man.

As the devil was in church with Jesus that day, you can be sure that he is lurking here as well. He has no authority to be here; no authority to come at you and tempt you. But this is the way he works. To act without authority is to tear down what God has built. It is to destroy what God has created. It is to rob what God has given. And so he attempts to possess us just as he possessed the man in our text. He takes possession of our ears so that we tune out God's preacher, or we hear selectively. He takes possession of our eyes so that they wander to and fro and keep us from focusing upon our worship. He takes possession of our mind so that we entertain thoughts to occupy our mind and thus shut the Holy Spirit out. He takes possession of our heart so that when we leave the House of God we promptly forget what we heard and received, and do not meditate upon the Word throughout the week. Everything God is giving to you here, the devil is attempting to rob from you.

But in the synagogue that day was the one who was there with the authority of God. And when one acts with God's authority, blessings are given, grace is multiplied, sins are forgiven, and the devil is cast out. Jesus not only drove out the demon who had taken possession of the man in the synagogue, but also by His teaching with authority, He was stopping Satan from doing his evil work. It says of Jesus that the people were astonished at His teaching because His word possessed authority. In numerous places in the Gospels we hear the same thing...Jesus' teaching was different from that of the Scribes because He taught with authority. Have you ever wondered what that meant? It does not mean that Jesus spoke with a louder, a more powerful voice than that of the Scribes. It means this--Jesus spoke with authority because He used the Word of God not to demand of the people as the Scribes did, but to deliver God's gifts to the people. The Scribes misused their authority by pointing the people not to the Christ, but to the demands of the Law. They were law teachers, not Gospel preachers. But Jesus freed the people of the Law's demands by forgiving their sins, healing their diseases, driving out demons, and teaching them the good news of the kingdom of heaven.

And He still does this today. Your pastor does not stand here before you presuming to teach you by his own authority. I am here by the authority of God for He has called me to be your pastor. If I were only to lay the burden of the Law upon you with my preaching and teaching, I would be misusing my authority, for God commands your pastor to preach Christ to you, to teach you "*everything whatsoever* He has commanded," to baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, to distribute Jesus' body and blood to those who are penitent, and to forgive your sins in the stead of the Lord. I am not to forgive you by my own authority, for I have none. But I say the words, "*As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I forgive you all your sins...*"

This means that God is here blessing you with His gifts just as He was through Jesus in our text. You bring your sicknesses and afflictions to Him in prayer, and He heals according to His grace. You bring your infants to Him in Holy Baptism, and He drives Satan out of your children and makes them His own. You listen to His words taught here and given here, and He leads you in the way of peace into the kingdom of heaven. You recognize His authority when your pastor absolves you, and you recognize His flesh and blood in the Sacrament, and you go home forgiven.

Where God's authority is, whether in the home, in the world, or in the church, the people are blessed. And because you and I so often misuse His authority as we deal with our children, our spouse, and our neighbors, we need the gifts He blesses us with here most of all. I can say to you, and in fact I must say to you because God commands me to, that He forgives you for the sake of Jesus. He forgives you for misusing His authority. He forgives you for your insubordination to your fathers and mothers, to your boss, to your rulers, your insubordination to Him. This is why Jesus died on the cross. He did not rebel at this command from His Father. He obeyed Him in everything, even in laying down His life for you. Satan is the insubordinate one, but Jesus is the one who was subordinate, obeying His Father in all things to the point of death.

Learn from Him, therefore, how to respect father and mother, how to live in love with your spouse, how to deal with your neighbors, how to live at peace with those who rule over us. And as you learn from Him, find comfort and hope in this--that in Jesus you have a Father in heaven whose heart and whose hand is always full of forgiveness for you. Amen.