

God. Or when Jesus claimed to be God, he could be telling the truth, and then what else could we do than worship him as our Lord with every part our lives? Which is it for you? Here's a test: Is "I think" or "God says" more important to you? Based on the way you live your life, is Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or your Lord?

Of course, the politically correct answer would be, "I'm not sure!" But you don't have to live your life with uncertainty and doubt. You don't have to answer "I'm not sure" to the most important questions of life. Because there is one person who has authority in your life. It's Jesus! And Jesus wants you to know the truth. God loves you. He loves you with all of your faults. But he knows that you can't save yourself. You know that too. So God sent Jesus to die for our sins, to forgive us for all we've done, so that we can live in heaven with God. That's true! God's love for you is not a myth. Jesus' forgiveness is not a story. It comes from the One with authority!

And if you have any doubt about Jesus' authority, then look at what he did to the devil—our greatest, most powerful enemy. From the moment Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God promised to send a Champion to crush the devil's head. From day 1 of Jesus' ministry, that's what Jesus did. He drove out demons—lots of demons. He preached God's Word with authority—over and over again. And then he did the one thing that even the devil couldn't imagine. He rose from the dead. Then he descended into hell to tell the devil, "It is finished! These people are mine. Not yours. I will control their lives. Not you!" We've got a great Savior!

So who's plan for your life do you think is better: God's plan or your plan? Whose way do you think will work out better: God's way or your way? I know this isn't easy. Faith doesn't come naturally to us—it's God's gift through his Word. But every single day is a day to show whether you trust in Jesus' authority. Every single decision is an opportunity to show your faith in Jesus as your Lord. The world doesn't run best when I get my way. The world runs best when Jesus gets his way. He's the One with authority!

So when the news knocks you off your feet, remember who the One with authority is. When your sinful nature wants to put you on the throne of your heart, remember who the One with authority is. When the devil sows doubts in your mind, even in church, remember who the One with authority is. When you feel guilty for your sins, remember who the One with authority is. It's the same One who died to forgive you! When you think about the end, remember who the One with authority is: Jesus. There is a lot of uncertainty in the world, but one thing is certain: Jesus! Trust in the One with authority.

**Mark 1:21-28**  
**Pastor Nathan Nass**

**Fourth Sunday of Epiphany**  
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**<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup>The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. <sup>23</sup>Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup>"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!" <sup>25</sup>"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" <sup>26</sup>The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. <sup>27</sup>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 evil spirits and they obey him." <sup>28</sup>News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.**

### **The One with Authority**

On my trip to Mexico, I studied Spanish for a week at a school where I had twenty hours of one-on-one Spanish class with a Spanish teacher. As a pastor, it was great. I had a captive audience. She had to talk to me! We had good conversations, especially about religion. But there was one thing I noticed: There was always a "but..." We talked about God's plan for marriage—about a husband and a wife committed to each other and to God. "Sounds great," she said, "but I'll never find a man like that!" We talked about government—about how God is in control, no matter who our leaders are. "Makes sense," she said, "but I'm not so sure I can believe that." Then we got to the most important part. We're sinners. "Yes." We need a Savior. "Yes." Jesus is our Savior who died to take our sins away. "Sounds good!" If you believe in Jesus, you'll go to heaven. "Great!" Do you believe in Jesus? "Yes." So will you be in heaven? "I'm not sure." Ahhh!

Maybe that's how you feel. Our world trains us to be skeptical about everything. To doubt everything. The only sure thing is that there is no sure thing. Not in politics. Not in money. Not in love. Not in religion. You have a right to speak your mind. Just don't say that your opinion is right. You can believe what you want. Just don't say that your belief is true for everyone. "Truth is subjective," we're told. "It's different for every person. What makes you the authority?" Isn't that what we hear? It's hard not to believe that. We're supposed to question. We're supposed to doubt. Even—or especially—God! "You can never be certain," we're told. Are you?

It wasn't much different in Jesus' day. The "authorities" then were the rabbis—the teachers of the law—who taught each Sabbath in their synagogues. They had the Old Testament, but they had fallen into the bad habit of basing their teachings on the traditions of other rabbis. It's said that rabbis would get up and say something like, "I've received this as a tradition from Rabbi Ben, who heard it from his teacher, and his teacher from his teach-

er...” They kept getting further and further from the real source. Imagine what the people thought: “Who’s really the authority?”

Until one day everything changed. One Sabbath, a new teacher named Jesus entered the synagogue. The synagogues allowed visiting teachers to participate in the worship service. So, Jesus got up to speak, and he did something really strange. He didn’t ask for anyone else’s opinion. He didn’t apologize for his beliefs. He taught them straight from God. How did the people react? They were amazed! People too often associate “church” with being boring or dry or routine, but listen to this description: *“The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority.”* What a great phrase! “One who had authority.” That’s Jesus!

But the moment Jesus began to preach, the devil went into action. He always does. *“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried 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!’”* We hear a lot about evil spirits—demons—in Jesus’ day. It makes sense. Whenever and wherever God’s Word is preached, the devil always puts up a fight! The devil does everything he can to stop the spread of God’s Word. But Jesus wasn’t scared. *“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”* And just like that, the demons came out with convulsions and a shriek.

What a day to be at church, huh? Have you ever been in a place with stunned silence? If they were amazed before, now what? Thunderstruck. Flabbergasted. *“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 evil spirits and they obey him.’”* It was like they didn’t know what to say! “Wwwhat is this?” In a world of traditions and opinions and uncertainty, Jesus’ words had an authority that they were not used to. And he even drove out demons to back it up. At least for one day, they were amazed at Jesus’ Word. They were sure about one thing: Jesus was the One with authority!

“It’s just too bad we can’t be sure of that today. I mean, wouldn’t it be nice to be able to believe stories like this? It’s too bad we can’t be certain about them anymore....” At least, that’s what other people tell us, right? Authority? It sure sounds like the Bible is about the least sure thing in the world. We are bombarded with this: “The Bible is just stories. Myths. How can you trust in something so old? You don’t have the original copies. Who knows where it came from? You can’t ever be sure!” I bet you have friends or family members who say things like that about the Bible. Maybe you have doubts for yourself about its real authority. How can you respond?

Have you ever heard of Shakespeare? Was Shakespeare real? Of course! Guess how many hand-written manuscripts of his 37 plays are still around today. Zero! But there’s no doubt he existed, right? Of course not! Let’s try someone else. Have you ever heard of Plato? He was a famous Greek philosopher who lived 400 years before Jesus. Do you know how many ancient copies we have of Plato’s work? Seven. Do you know how old the oldest

copy is? It’s from the year 900 A.D. That’s 1300 years after Plato’s death. So we only have seven copies in the whole world of Plato’s writings, and the oldest is from 1300 years after his death. But does anyone doubt that Plato existed and wrote his book? No way!

Now let’s compare that with Jesus and the Bible. It’s true that we don’t have the hand-written copies of the books of the New Testament. But do you know how many ancient copies of the Bible we have? Over 5,000. Do you know how old the oldest copies are? From the 100s A.D., just 100 years or so after Jesus’ life. So think about this: There are seven copies of Plato’s book, all from over a thousand years after Plato lived, but no one doubts whether Plato was a real person. There are over 5,000 copies of the New Testament, many from just a few hundred years after Jesus’ life, but people claim we can’t be sure about Jesus. Make sense? No! There’s no doubt Jesus existed. To deny Jesus, you would have to deny all history! Don’t let anyone lie to you. Jesus was a real person.

But that’s not the real question. The question is, “Do you believe in him?” To put it another way, “Is Jesus the authority in your life?” Think about the evil spirits in our lesson. Did the demons know who Jesus was? Absolutely—*“The Holy One of God!”* Did the demons believe in Jesus? No! They rejected Jesus’ authority. Like the demons, there are a lot of people in hell who know about Jesus. But there’s a big difference between knowledge and faith. What about you? Is Jesus your authority? There’s no doubt he’s real! But is Jesus the One who rules your life?

There’s one detail in our lesson that jumps off the page: The devil goes to church! Did you catch that? When Jesus walked into that synagogue, the devil was there. The devil goes to church every Sunday! He doesn’t possess people so often anymore. But he doesn’t have to. Sometimes being more subtle works even better. He puts doubts in our minds. “Go ahead and hear God’s Word,” he says. “Just don’t trust it.” “Go ahead and talk about Jesus, just don’t make him the authority in your life.” The devil goes to church! And right here he tempts us just like he tempted Eve, “You can make better decisions than God!”

We like that. We like the devil’s thinking. Because deep down we don’t want Jesus to be the authority. We want to be the authority! If I want to live with my girlfriend and not get married, I’m going to live with her, and I don’t want God to tell me otherwise. If I want to go through life bitter and angry at what that person did to me, then I want to go through life bitter and angry. I don’t want God to tell me otherwise. “I think” has become so much more important than “God says!” Except Jesus is the One with authority. If you refuse to let Jesus be the authority in your life, then stop pretending to be a Christian. Because Christ really isn’t your Lord!

The Christian author C.S. Lewis had a clever way of talking about this. He said that when you look at what Jesus said—especially his claim to be God—there are only three options. Either Jesus is a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Here’s what he meant. When Jesus claimed to be God, he could be flat-out lying, right? Or when Jesus claimed to be God, he could be a lunatic. There are other crazy people in history who have thought they were