**The Name Above All Names**

Based on [Luke 4:31-44](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk4.31-44)

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Epiphany 4

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We continue today in the season of Epiphany, the season of revelation, the season where Jesus is “God in man made manifest.” Epiphany gives us lessons and texts that reveal Jesus’ identity. **And in today Jesus identity is revealed, not by disciples, or Magi, or God.** Today, Jesus’ identity is revealed by unclean spirits. Demons confess Jesus to be “the Holy One of God” and “the Son of God.” Moreover, when they do so, Jesus tells them to “Be silent.” What does this mean?

Revealing a person’s identity... it can be an invasion of privacy. When typing our Debit PIN number we are to shield our digits it from the eyes around us. If somebody steals your PIN, your numerical identity, they can have authority to access your bank account. Then they have the power to steal what is rightfully yours. In this computerized age, Identity theft is a big concern. There is a power in knowing one’s identity.

Jesus goes down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee. And he was teaching on the Sabbath, and the people were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. But when God’s word is preached, evil cannot be silent. When the Gospel is proclaimed--in the synagogue, from the pulpit--to God’s people...an unclean spirit cannot tolerate it.

As Jesus is teaching, there is a man with an unclean demon, and when he hears Jesus words, he mocks Jesus. He scoffs. He says, “**Ha! 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.”** The demon knows Jesus’ power and authority. The demon also knows Jesus identity. He is the holy one of God. The demon calls Jesus by name. Why? In an attempt to exercise authority over him.

And this makes sense doesn’t it. Why do we have middle names? **So that our parents can use them against us, of course.** My mother would use my first name all the time. But if she used my middle name, that’s "bringing out the big guns"...to stop me in my tracks because I was being disobedient. “Nathan Allen”, it’s like pushing a pause button. Revealing a name, an identity, it renders you powerless.

And you know, that's what modern psychology and counseling techniques are all about. They make a science out of naming your problems and classifying them. If you can identify and label your problem, you are on your way to overcoming them.

If your child can’t sit still in class or seem to be able to learn anything, that’s a problem. He's out of control, and you worry about your child. “**What’s wrong with him**?” “**Is he just not trying**?” “**Is he incapable of learning**?” Then the psychologist comes in with the answer. “Your child has ADHD.” This is just a label you know, that’s all ADHD is--a naming of the problem. And yet when the Doctor labels it, you feel better, empowered, like we now have some sort of control over the situation we didn’t have before. The Lutheran intellectual, Soren Kierkegaard once said, “You label me, you negate me.” Once you label someone or something, you take away the mystery.

Friends, there is power in naming something, in knowing its identity. The demons know this very well. In Mark 5:9, when Jesus confronts a demon, the first thing he does is demand, “**What is your name?”** And the demon replied, “**My name is Legion, for we are many**.” That’s like going to the doctor who reveals you have cancer. And you ask “what kind” and he says “all kinds”…it’s spread everywhere. Maybe if the cancer was just isolated in one area you can treat it, but it’s everywhere. It spread to the lymphnodes and there’s no point in operating. The cancer is legion, and yet, Jesus has the power to demand it’s name, and cast it out. Jesus has that power because, as Phillipians 2:9 says, “Therefore God has highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.”

So as Jesus is preaching, the unclean demon calls him by name and reveals his identity. “**Ha! Jesus of Nazareth. You are the holy one of God!**” And the demon is right, that’s who Jesus is. He labels Jesus, to negate him. And Jesus tells him to be silent. Now to be clear, this not because the demon can actually control Jesus. After all, it doesn't work, he Names Jesus, but it doesn't render him powerless. Unclean spirits of their own can't be silent in the presence of God's word. So Jesus has to command it "Be silent." And just like the wind and the waves obey Jesus command, so do the demons, because they have to. They are powerless before God.

So why does Jesus silences the demon? Because for the demon to confess Christ is blasphemy. Jesus’ name is holy. It is powerful. It is the name above all names. But for someone unclean to use Jesus’ name is simple profanity.

We pray in the Lord’s prayer, “**Hallowed be your Name**.” “**Holy be your Name**.” God’s Name is certainly holy in itself, but when we pray this, we ask that it be kept holy among us also. **How is God’s name kept holy?** By speaking His word in its truth and purity and by leading holy lives according to it. **But, if anyone teaches or lives contrary to God’s word, they profane God’s Name.**

In your Baptism, God gave you His Name, and he gave you the right to use his name, to speak of him to others and to call upon him. There is power in a name, and when you were baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, God gave you his name and made you his own child. As his own, you have the right to call upon him as your Father, and ask him for any and all good things as dear children ask their dear father. God washed you with water and the word, giving you his holy Spirit, making you holy so that in holiness, you can use his name.

God gives us his name, and we are to use it to pray, praise and give him thanks. It is also possible to misuse his name. When we use his name while we live and act in sin and shame--that is to misuse it.

Friends in Christ, nothing is more shameful than to practice evil in the Name of God. **So it is when churches teach falsely against God’s word. When Christians who make a practice of sinning, come forward and take the Lord’s Supper...that is a desecration.** It is a profanity. That’s why Paul says in, 1 Corinthians 11:27, 29,

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord…**For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.** That is why many of you are weak in ill, and some have died.”

We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. But it is through repentance and faith--given by the Holy Spirit--that God makes us holy and able to use his name without blaspheming it, and to approach his throne of Grace without fear.

But anyone who openly practices sin, without repentance…someone who lives with their partner without marriage; **someone who lives an openly homosexual lifestyle, someone who uses abortion as a form of birth control without shame, these people do not live holy lives**. And though we cannot judge the heart, we can judge the actions and confessions of others and measure them against God's word. **And if the church--the congregation of saints--invites to the Lord's Table someone who lives in open sin, or communes with them, it is an invitation to blaspheme God's holy name** in his holy house and before his people.

Yes God’s Holy Name is solid as Gold and neither man nor demon can overpower it or make it lose its real value. But as Martin Luther once said, “**Though Gold remains gold whether it’s worn by a bride or a harlot, nevertheless, the bride wears it in glory; the harlot in shame.”** Keep us from such shame, O heavenly Father.

The unclean demon confesses Jesus Name in order to shame it, and drag it through the mud...thinking (no doubt) that he can actually hurt God’s Name and hinder His plan. But that’s the joke about Satan and his demons: **his power and authority is only a farce**. Because everything Satan does in order to hinder God’s plan, God uses against him to prosper the kingdom of heaven.

St. Paul, when he’s imprisoned for preaching the Gospel in glory, others preach it against him in shame. Paul says, “**Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice!”** (Philippians 1:15-18). All praise and glory be to the unsearchable impenetrable God, **that when a demon confessed Jesus name and identity in order to blaspheme**, God included it in the Holy Scripture we have heard today, read and proclaimed to His Glory.

Satan’s power is a farce, a joke, really a façade. Our Gospel today has a man oppressed by a demon, and also, Simon’s mother-in-law who is oppressed by a fever. Jesus rebuked the demon with his authoritative word, and it came out of the man, having done him no harm. Jesus rebuked the fever with his powerful word, and it left her to rise and serve. All the things that oppress us in this world have the same source, the evil one. **Even our sicknesses come from Satan, as we learn when he struck Job with boils** (Job 2:7). A**nd when Paul received a “Thorn in his flesh”, he calls “a messenger of Satan to harass me**” (2 Cor 12:7). But God used Satan in his oppression for the Good of his people. He *allowed* Job to be struck by Satan in order to establish Job’s faith. He *permitted* Paul to be tormented with a "thorn in the flesh", (the scripture says), in order to keep him from becoming conceited.

When we hear of the power and authority of Jesus word over the demonic forces that oppress us, we are to remember, in all of our oppressions and afflictions, Jesus is still Lord, and Satan has zero power over him. And because you are Christ’s and Christ is yours, Satan has no authority or power over you either. As the famous hymns goes, “This world’s prince may still, scowl fierce as he will; he can harm us none. He’s judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him.”

Martin Luther once wrote: "Why should you fear? Why should you be afraid? **Do you not know that the prince of this world has been judged?** He is no lord, no prince any more. You have a different, a stronger Lord, Christ, who has overcome and bound him. **Therefore let the prince and god of this world look sour, bare his teeth, make a great noise, threaten, and act in an unmannerly way; he can do no more than a bad dog on a chain, which may bark, run here and there, and tear at the chain."**

But our physical ailments and sicknesses are not our real enemies. **Not our impoverished bank accounts, nor our broken relationships, nor our cancer and sickness, nor our sin, nor satan, nor death are the enemies we need to fear most**. They are all bark and no bite. Jesus is more powerful than all of them, because he is God. So remember this: what we must and do fear above all things is God and His wrath, His punishment. What we must fear is making God our enemy, after he has done all things to make peace. **Sure evil people can make us upset; Satan can harass and torment us; sickness can make us miserable, but these things can only harm the body.** But Jesus says in Luke 12:4-5, “**I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”**

We are the Baptized children of God, and He is our true Father. But take heed, lest you treat the Almighty God like a dotting old fool, a gentle grandpa, that you can use his own love against him. **As if you can wrap the almighty Lord around your little finger, bat your eyes at him and get away with your sin because he’s such a lovey-dovey, a softy.** God has the bite behind the bark. God has all authority and all power and the sad fact of the law is to know that we are all born his enemy. That is why Jesus says, "Ye must be born again", and gives us the way to be born of water and spirit.

God brought us into his kingdom, his family, his blessing, not because of anything we have done, but because what he has done for us. **He sent His Son, who has authority over all the evils that plague us, to stand in our place of enmity with God, and to suffer the punishment and wrath of the one who has all authority and power**. Hell was cast upon Jesus Christ as he suffered on the Cross, paid for our sins and freed us from Satan's captivity. Of his cross, Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Satan has no power over our souls. All he can do is tempt us and trick us. He’s a con artist. He’s a confidence man, and he only has one sales pitch, and that is that God is your enemy. Satan has no authority of his own, so he uses God’s wrath to scare us. And he has a good argument. He says, "**All have sinned**," and he’s correct. He says "**you have sinned**," and he’s right so far. He says "**God hates sin**", and he's right. Satan says, "**sinners deserve hell and eternal condemnation**", …still batting 1000. Then he says, "Surely God is just and righteous, he gives everybody what they deserve...hell only to sinners, heaven only to saints"…boy, Satan can preach the law better than any fire and brimstone legalist.

You're on trial every moment of your life because God sees all, and nothing is hidden from him. **You are on trial and Satan is the prosecutor and he’s got an air-tight case, as far as it goes.** But the thing with false teachers and false preachers like Satan, is it’s not only what they say that’s false. Any faithful Christian can recognize when someone preaches directly against the word. But what’s more insidious is what false teachers leave out. Satan preaches the law like a pro, but conveniently forgets to mention one little word, the Gospel.

We need to hear the Law of God. It is good and wise; it sets God’s will before our eyes. A friend remarked to me once that Jesus seemed to be a Law preacher, when you read the sermon on the mount, etc. **Pound for pound it seems Jesus speaks more about what we should and shouldn’t do, than of what God has already done.** And I think that right, pound for pound. But that’s the beauty of the good news of our free salvation, one pound of Gospel is potent enough to answer back to 1000 pounds of law. **One thousand words of Law can be unraveled by one little word of Gospel.**

So when Satan preaches the law like a pro, he does it to bring you to despair and leave you there. But one little word of the Gospel is the antidote to all of it. **The Law has no more authority for those in Christ, because the Gospel disarms it disable's the hold on the sinner.** Satan uses God’s Law against his people, and we should thank him for that. But that the gospel does is turn every word of law preached against you into good news. The more you are accused of, the more the Gospel forgives. **The more satan piles on, the more grace and mercy is given in the good news of the forgiveness of sins.**  Satan piles it high and deep, the gospel turns the mountain of filth, into a mountain of forgiveness; it turns Sinai into Calvary; it turns sins committed into sins forgiven in just one little word from the cross, "It is finished".

Once he preached the Good News, that he is the only one to fear, but that they need not fear him for he fights for them, he has planted the Gospel. **People want him to stay and heal more but they already have what they need, the message that God is more powerful than your adversaries, and he fights the powers of darkness and death for you.** And so he says to them "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."