

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANGELOLOGY

The Doctrine of Angels, Demons, and the Spiritual Realm

UNIT 5: THE NATURE AND WORK OF DEMONS

Lesson 14

Demonology in the Ministry of Jesus

Christ the Conqueror of the Demonic Realm

*Key Texts: Mark 1:23–27; 5:1–20; Matthew 12:28–29; Luke 10:17–20; Matthew 10:1;
Colossians 2:15*

“If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Matthew 12:28, NASB 1995

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Introduction

Lessons 12 and 13 established the demonological foundation of Unit 5: what demons are, where they came from, and how they operate across the full spectrum of human experience from temptation and doctrinal deception to physical affliction, oppression, demonization, and national-cultural influence. This final lesson of Unit 5 turns from the doctrine of demons as such to the most theologically significant dimension of the entire demonological subject: the encounter between the demonic realm and Jesus of Nazareth. The demonology of the Gospels is not a peripheral feature of the Gospel narratives, to be noted in passing before moving on to the more obviously theological content of the teaching discourses. It is central, not incidental, to what the Gospels are presenting about who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish.

The demonic encounters of Jesus' ministry occupy a remarkably large portion of the Gospel narratives. Mark's Gospel in particular, the most action-oriented of the four, places the first public confrontation with the demonic realm in the very first chapter of Jesus' public ministry (Mark 1:21–28), immediately following His baptism and temptation, and returns to the theme repeatedly throughout the narrative. The pattern is not accidental; Mark is making a specific theological claim about the character of Jesus' messianic mission. The arrival of the Son of God in the world is, in Mark's presentation, immediately experienced as an invasion of enemy territory, an irruption of the kingdom of God into the domain of the prince of this world that is announced not by political revolution or religious reformation but by the confrontation and rout of the demonic powers that have held the fallen world in their grip.

This lesson traces the demonological significance of Jesus' ministry through seven movements: the scope and centrality of demonic encounters in the Gospels; the detailed narrative of the Gerasene demoniac as the paradigm case; the absolute and unresisted authority of Jesus over the demonic realm; the theological significance of the exorcisms as signs of the kingdom's arrival; the binding of the strong man as the Christological framework for the whole; the delegation of exorcistic authority to the disciples; and the critical Christological reorientation of Luke 10:20. Together these movements build the most comprehensive biblical-theological picture of what Jesus' ministry accomplished in relation to the demonic realm, and provide the foundation on which the spiritual warfare theology of Unit 6 will be built.

A word on the homiletical and pastoral stakes of this lesson: the church that has a theologically thin understanding of the Christological significance of Jesus' demonic encounters will consistently underestimate what the gospel accomplishes in the demonic realm, will be susceptible to the anxiety that treats the demonic powers as more formidable than the cross has made them, and will miss the specific forms of Christological confidence that the Gospel narratives are designed to produce. The church that has absorbed this lesson knows that Christ did not merely teach about the demonic realm or demonstrate that He was more powerful than it; He invaded it, plundered it, bound its strong man, destroyed its works, and delegated to His people the authority to stand in the victory He has accomplished. That is the gospel in its demonological register, and it is the pastoral treasure this lesson is designed to deliver.

I. The Gospels and Demonic Encounters: Central, Not Incidental

A Significant Portion of Jesus' Ministry Was Direct Confrontation with the Demonic Realm

The sheer frequency and prominence of demonic encounters in the Gospel narratives is itself a theological statement. In Mark's Gospel alone, approximately one fifth of all the verses in chapters 1–9 are concerned with encounters with the demonic realm: the synagogue exorcism (1:21–28), the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20), the Syrophenician woman's daughter (7:24–30), the epileptic boy (9:14–29), and the summary statements that repeatedly note Jesus healing many who were afflicted with diseases and casting out many demons (1:32–34, 39; 3:10–12). Matthew and Luke follow the same pattern, with Luke adding the unique material of the sending of the seventy and their report of demonic submission (Luke 10:17–20).

The demonic encounters are not presented as astonishing interruptions to the main business of Jesus' ministry; they are presented as characteristic of that ministry, as expressive of it, and as theologically interpretive of it. When Jesus casts out demons in the synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:21–28), the crowds respond with astonishment not primarily at the exorcism itself but at the teaching authority it reveals: "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him" (Mark 1:27, NASB 1995). The exorcism is not a supplement to the teaching; it is the confirmation and the embodiment of the teaching's authority. And Jesus Himself, when challenged about the source of His exorcistic power, does not treat the exorcisms as secondary evidence of His messianic authority; He treats them as the primary sign of the kingdom's arrival: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28, NASB 1995).

The theological implication of this centrality is profound. The demonic encounters of Jesus' ministry are not incidental features of a first-century worldview that the modern interpreter is at liberty to set aside; they are constitutive features of the Gospels' presentation of who Jesus is and what He came to do. The Christ of the Gospels is not a wisdom teacher who occasionally performed miraculous signs; He is the stronger One who invades the domain of the strong man, plunders his goods, and announces by every exorcism that the kingdom of God has come upon you. To understand Jesus' ministry without understanding its demonological dimension is to misunderstand it at its most central level.

II. The Gerasene Demoniac: The Paradigm Case of Demonic Encounter

The Most Detailed Account of Demonic Possession and Exorcism in the Gospels

A. *The Encounter and Its Features*

Mark 5:1–20 has been discussed in Lesson 13 as the primary illustration of demonization, but it deserves extended attention in this lesson as the paradigm case of the Christological dimension of the demonic encounter. The narrative is structured as a drama of recognition, confrontation, submission, and

restoration, a four-act structure that reveals with extraordinary theological precision what happens when the Son of God encounters the demonic realm in its most dramatic expression.

The drama of recognition occupies verses 6–7: the man saw Jesus from a distance, ran and bowed down before Him, and the demonic voice cried out: “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:7, NASB 1995). The recognition is immediate, involuntary, and theologically precise: the demonic beings know who Jesus is with a clarity that the human crowds and even the disciples lack at this point in the narrative. “The Son of the Most High God” is the highest christological title in Mark’s Gospel to this point, deployed not by a human disciple but by the demonic beings who have every reason to recognize the one who constitutes their greatest existential threat. Their terror before Him, begging Him not to torment them, asking to be sent into the pigs rather than into the abyss (Luke 8:31), is equally theologically significant: they know not merely who He is but what His arrival means for them.

The drama of confrontation and submission occupies verses 8–13: Jesus asked the name, received the answer “Legion; for we are many,” and the demonic beings made their request. The dynamic of this exchange is crucial: the demonic beings do not bargain with Jesus on equal terms; they petition Him as subjects petition a sovereign. The permission to enter the pigs is granted at Jesus’ discretion, and the outcome, the entire herd running off the cliff into the sea, is a vivid enacted illustration of the demonic realm’s inherent self-destructiveness. The drama of restoration occupies verses 14–20: the man found sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, his humanity restored by the encounter with the One who came to destroy the works of the devil.

B. The Christological Significance

Several features of the Gerasene narrative carry specific Christological significance that must be noted. First, the authority exercised by Jesus is not invoked through ritual, formula, or lengthy procedure; it is the direct, personal authority of the Son of the Most High God, and it operates by command. Second, the demonic beings’ recognition of Jesus as their ultimate judge (“have You come to torment us before the time?”, Matthew 8:29, NASB 1995) reveals their awareness of the eschatological framework within which the encounter takes place: the final judgment is coming; Jesus is its executor; and the exorcism is a proleptic judgment, an anticipatory and partial execution of the final defeat that Revelation 20:10 describes in its ultimate form. Third, the restoration of the demonized man, sitting, clothed, in his right mind, is the most vivid enacted description in the entire Gospel narrative of what the arrival of the kingdom of God means for those enslaved by the demonic realm: full human restoration, dignity recovered, identity renewed.

“What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” Mark 5:7, NASB 1995

III. The Authority of Jesus Over Demons: Absolute and Unresisted

Demons Never Successfully Resisted Christ, His Word Alone Was Sufficient

One of the most theologically significant facts about the demonic encounters in the Gospel narratives is one that is easy to overlook because of its very consistency: the demons never successfully resisted Jesus. Not once in the entire Gospel record did a demonic being refuse to submit to Jesus' authority. They recognized Him; they feared Him; they negotiated the terms of their departure; they begged for mercies He sometimes granted and sometimes declined; but they always submitted. Their submission was not willing in the sense of freely chosen; it was coerced by an authority so utterly beyond theirs that resistance was simply not an option. This is what the crowd observed in the synagogue at Capernaum with astonishment: "With authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out" (Luke 4:36, NASB 1995).

The manner in which Jesus exercised His authority over the demonic realm is equally significant. He did not employ exorcistic rituals, elaborate verbal formulas, extended procedures, or the invocation of higher authorities. He spoke with His own authority, in the first person, and the demons obeyed. When the disciples in Acts attempted to use Jesus' name as an authoritative formula without the personal relationship of faith and commission that gave the name its power, the results were disastrous: "And the evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'" (Acts 19:15, NASB 1995), and the demonized man overpowered and wounded all seven of them. The authority that cast out demons was not a transferable technique available to anyone who invoked the right formula; it was the personal authority of the Son of God, delegated to His authorized servants as an expression of His lordship over the demonic realm.

The contrast between Jesus' exorcistic authority and the exorcistic practices of His contemporaries was not lost on the observers. Jewish exorcists of the first century employed elaborate procedures, the invocation of Solomon's name, the use of certain herbs and rituals, extended prayers, precisely because they lacked the direct personal authority to command demonic beings. Jesus needed none of this. His word was sufficient, immediately effective, and universally obeyed. The crowd's astonishment in Mark 1:27, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him", is not astonishment at an unusual technique but at an unprecedented authority: the authority of the One who created the beings He is commanding, and whose authority over them is therefore not delegated from any higher source but inherent in who He is.

IV. The Theological Significance: Signs of the Kingdom's Arrival

The Exorcisms Are Not Isolated Miracles but Declarations of the Kingdom's Coming

Matthew 12:28 is the most important single verse in the entire Gospel demonology for understanding the theological significance of Jesus' exorcistic ministry: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (NASB 1995). The verse is embedded in the controversy over the source of Jesus' authority (12:22–37), and Jesus uses it to make the most direct claim about the relationship between His exorcisms and the arrival of the kingdom that He makes anywhere in the

Gospels. The structure of the claim is a conditional that carries the force of a declaration: if the exorcisms are by the Spirit of God (which, Jesus implies, they obviously are), then the kingdom of God has already arrived (“has come upon you,” Greek: *ephthasen eph’ hymas*, arrived upon you, reached you).

The theological significance of this claim is staggering. It means that the exorcisms of Jesus’ ministry are not merely acts of compassion for those who suffer from demonic affliction, however real that compassion is; they are the enacted announcement that the age of the kingdom has arrived. Every time Jesus cast out a demon, He was demonstrating in miniature what the entire kingdom project amounts to: the defeat of the powers of darkness, the liberation of captives, the restoration of human beings to the full dignity of their creaturely humanity under the benevolent rule of the God who made them. The exorcisms are the kingdom of God in action, visible in the specific and particular form of human beings set free from demonic bondage.

This understanding of the exorcisms as kingdom signs illuminates the consistent pattern of the Gospel narrative in which the healing of the sick and the casting out of demons are listed together as characteristic features of Jesus’ ministry (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:32–34; Luke 6:17–19). Both activities represent the same fundamental reality: the kingdom of God breaking into the fallen world order and overcoming the powers of darkness, whether those powers express themselves in the specific form of demonic possession or in the broader form of the corruption of the created order by sin and its effects. The exorcisms are not a separate category from the healings; they are healings of the most direct and most visible kind, in which the demonic causation of the suffering is explicitly on the surface of the narrative.

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”
Matthew 12:28, NASB 1995

V. The Binding of the Strong Man: The Christological Framework

Jesus’ Ministry as the Invasion of Satan’s Domain and the Plundering of His Goods

Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27 contain one of the most illuminating images in the entire Synoptic tradition for understanding the Christological significance of Jesus’ exorcistic ministry: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matthew 12:29, NASB 1995). The image is of a house robbery in which the first necessary step is the overpowering and binding of the house’s owner. Jesus’ logic is clear and brilliant: if I am plundering the strong man’s property, if the people being liberated from demonic bondage through my exorcisms are the strong man’s goods being carried off, then I have already bound the strong man. The exorcisms are not evidence of an alliance with the strong man; they are evidence that the strong man has already been bound.

The strong man in the parable is clearly Satan. His “house” is the domain of the fallen world over which he exercises his illegitimate authority as the prince of this world. His “goods” or “property” are the human

beings who have been enslaved within his domain, whether through demonization, through sin, through the spiritual blindness of unbelief, or through the comprehensive captivity to the fallen world order that Paul describes in Ephesians 2:1–3. Jesus’ ministry is the great plundering: every person liberated from demonic bondage, every sinner who repents and enters the kingdom, every blind man who receives his sight, every dead man who is raised, each one is a piece of the strong man’s goods being carried off by the One who has bound him.

When was the strong man bound? The Gospels suggest that the binding was accomplished in stages, with the temptation in the wilderness representing the first decisive confrontation (Jesus resisting every attempt of the adversary to divert Him from the path of redemptive obedience), the exorcisms representing the ongoing plundering of the bound strong man’s goods throughout the ministry, and the cross representing the definitive binding that made all subsequent plundering possible in principle. Paul’s language in Colossians 2:15, “Having disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him”, points to the cross as the moment when the binding was made final and irrevocable. The exorcisms of Jesus’ earthly ministry were proleptic: they were the foretaste and the guarantee of the comprehensive binding that the cross accomplished. The church’s ministry in the present age is the continuing plundering of the strong man who has already been bound, in the name of the One whose cross accomplished the binding.

The pastoral significance of this image is immense. The church does not engage the demonic realm in an uncertain conflict whose outcome is still to be determined. She engages a bound adversary, plundering his goods in the name of the One who bound him. The demonic realm still operates, still attacks, still afflicts, a bound animal can still bite those who come within its reach. But the binding is real, the victory is secure, and the plundering will continue until the last of the strong man’s goods, the last sinner for whom Christ died, has been liberated and brought safely home. Then the bound adversary will be cast into the lake of fire, and the plundering will be complete.

VI. The Delegation of Authority to the Disciples

What Jesus Entrusted to His Servants and How They Were to Use It

A. The Commissioning of the Twelve and the Seventy

The authority that Jesus exercised over the demonic realm was not kept exclusively to Himself; it was delegated to His disciples as an extension of His own mission and an expression of His lordship over the demonic powers. Matthew 10:1 records the commissioning of the Twelve: “Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness” (NASB 1995). The authority is explicitly delegated, it is Jesus’ authority, given to the disciples for the specific purpose of their mission, and it encompasses both the exorcistic dimension (authority over unclean spirits) and the healing dimension (every kind of disease and sickness), consistent with the pattern of Jesus’ own ministry.

The seventy (or seventy-two, as some manuscripts read) were sent out by Jesus in Luke 10 with a broader mission, and their report upon return reveals the scope of the authority they had been given: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (Luke 10:17, NASB 1995). The phrase “in Your name” is theologically critical: the authority they exercised was not their own but derivative, flowing from and dependent upon their commission from Jesus and their relationship to Him. The demonic submission they witnessed was not a response to the disciples’ personal spiritual power; it was a response to the name and authority of the One who had sent them. This distinction is precisely what the failure of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13–16 illustrates negatively: they attempted to invoke the name of Jesus without the personal relationship and commission that gave the name its authoritative force, and the result was disaster.

B. *The Limitations of the Delegated Authority*

The delegation of exorcistic authority was not unlimited or unconditional. Mark 9:14–29 records the disciples’ failure to cast out the demon from the epileptic boy, and Jesus’ response identifies the reason: “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:29, NASB 1995). Some manuscripts add “and fasting.” The point is theologically significant: the delegated authority was not a technique that automatically produced results regardless of the spiritual state and dependence of the one invoking it. It was an authority that required the specific posture of prayer, the deliberate, conscious acknowledgment of the derivative nature of the authority being exercised and the dependence on the One from whom it flows. The disciples who failed with the epileptic boy had apparently come to regard the authority as a settled possession rather than a continually received gift, and the failure was the result.

The healing of the epileptic boy in verses 25–27, accomplished by Jesus with the simple command “I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again”, models the pattern to which the disciples’ ministry was called to conform: immediate, prayerful, faith-grounded reliance on the authority of the One from whom the commission flows. The lesson for the church’s ministry in the present age is the same: the authority over the demonic realm that Christ delegates to His servants is real, operative, and adequate for its purposes; but it is an authority that must be held with open hands, received continually through prayer and faith, and exercised in the conscious awareness of its derivative and dependent character.

VII. Jesus’ Response: The Christological Reorientation of Luke 10:20

Power Over Demons Is Not the Point, Salvation Through Christ Is

Luke 10:17–20 contains what may be the most important single passage in the entire Gospel demonology for the pastoral and spiritual formation of those who minister in the name of Christ: the seventy returned with joy, reporting that even the demons were subject to them in Jesus’ name; Jesus confirmed the reality and the scope of that authority (“I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning”, v. 18); and then He delivered the decisive reorientation: “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice

in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:19–20, NASB 1995).

The structure of this reorientation is carefully balanced. Jesus does not deny the reality of the authority (“I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy”); He does not deny that the demonic submission they experienced was genuine (“I was watching Satan fall from heaven”); He does not deny that there is something wonderful and remarkable about the fact that spiritual beings of such malice and power must submit to His servants in His name. He affirms all of this. And then He redirects the joy that this experience has produced: “do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.” The redirection is not from something bad to something good; it is from something genuinely good to something incomparably better. The authority over demons is a wonderful gift; the recording of one’s name in heaven is the incomparably greater treasure, not the weapon but the identity, not the power but the relationship with the One who grants the power.

The pastoral implication of this reorientation is one of the most practically important in the entire demonology series. The believer who derives his spiritual identity from his power over the demonic realm, whose confidence comes from experiences of spiritual authority rather than from the election and grace of the God who has recorded his name in heaven, has located his security in precisely the wrong place. Power over demons is contingent and derivative; the recording of one’s name in heaven is the unconditional and permanent reality secured by the cross and guaranteed by the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15–16; Ephesians 1:13–14). The joy that Jesus commends is the joy of those who know that their standing before God does not depend on their spiritual track record but on the grace of the God who has written their names in the book of life (Revelation 21:27) before the foundation of the world.

This reorientation is also a safeguard against the spiritual pride that accompanies effective ministry in the power of the Spirit, the subtle inflation of self-assessment that comes from being an instrument of dramatic spiritual victory. The disciples who returned with joy at demonic submission were in danger of the same inflation that Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3: “If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (NASB 1995). Spiritual power without the humility of those who know themselves to be recipients of grace rather than generators of it is a form of spiritual danger that Jesus’ reorientation in Luke 10:20 was designed to forestall from the very beginning of the apostolic mission.

“Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

Luke 10:20, NASB 1995

VIII. The Cross and the Demonic Defeat: The Foundation of Everything

What Calvary Accomplished in Relation to the Demonic Realm

This lesson has traced the demonological significance of Jesus' earthly ministry: the centrality of demonic encounters, the paradigm case of the Gerasene demoniac, the absolute authority over the demonic realm, the exorcisms as kingdom signs, the binding of the strong man, the delegation of authority, and the Christological reorientation of Luke 10:20. But all of these must be understood within the framework that gives them their ultimate theological weight: the cross of Jesus Christ, which is the event in which the strong man was decisively and finally bound, in which the ruler of this world was judged (John 16:11), in which the rulers and authorities were disarmed and publicly displayed in a triumphal procession (Colossians 2:15), and in which the one who had the power of death was rendered powerless (Hebrews 2:14).

The exorcisms of Jesus' earthly ministry were proleptic enactments of what the cross would accomplish definitively. The Gerasene demoniac's liberation was a foretaste of the liberation that the blood of the cross would purchase for multitudes from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The synagogue exorcism's demonstration of Jesus' authority was a partial revelation of the comprehensive authority that the Father would confer upon the Son at the resurrection and ascension, seating Him "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21, NASB 1995). The binding of the strong man through the ministry was consummated at the cross, and the plundering that continues through the church's gospel mission is the ongoing outworking of what Calvary accomplished once and for all.

The practical implication for the church's ministry is the one that has been the governing principle of the entire demonological portion of this series: the church engages the demonic realm not in a conflict whose outcome is uncertain but in the implementation of a victory already won. The authority Jesus delegated to the twelve and the seventy was not an authority to fight for a victory not yet achieved; it was an authority to announce and apply a victory already in process of accomplishment. The authority the church exercises in the present age through the proclamation of the gospel, the prayer of intercession, and the pastoral care of those afflicted by demonic activity is the same authority: the authority of servants commissioned by a victorious Lord to implement the comprehensive victory He accomplished at the cross. Stand in that. The cross has already bound the strong man. The plundering continues. And the One who bound the strong man will soon crush Satan under your feet (Romans 16:20).

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Ephthasen Eph' Hymas	Greek: has come upon you, has arrived at you (Matthew 12:28). The aorist active indicative of phthanō (to come before, to arrive) with the directional prepositional phrase eph' hymas (upon you). Jesus' use of the aorist tense to describe the kingdom's arrival is theologically significant: the kingdom of God has already come, has already arrived, in the person and ministry of Jesus. The exorcisms are not signs of a kingdom yet to come; they are signs of a kingdom that has already arrived. This realized dimension of Jesus' kingdom proclamation has been central to the Reformed eschatological tradition's insistence that the kingdom is present now, not merely future.
Binding of the Strong Man	The image Jesus uses in Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27 to describe the Christological logic of His exorcistic ministry: the plundering of the strong man's goods (enslaved humanity) requires the prior binding of the strong man (Satan). The binding was accomplished in stages: the temptation (the adversary's failure to divert Jesus from redemptive obedience), the exorcisms (proleptic plundering of the bound man's goods), and the cross (the decisive, irrevocable binding). The church's ministry in the present age is the continuing plundering of the already-bound strong man in the name of the One whose cross accomplished the binding.
Proleptic Judgment	A present, partial, anticipatory execution of the final eschatological judgment, whose finality and comprehensiveness remain to be accomplished at the appointed time. Jesus' exorcisms are proleptic judgments: they enact in miniature and in advance the comprehensive defeat of the demonic realm that the cross accomplished definitively and the last judgment will consummate finally. The demonic beings' question in Matthew 8:29, "Have You come to torment us before the time?", reveals their awareness of the proleptic dimension of the exorcism: what Jesus is doing to them now is a foretaste of what will happen to them definitively at the appointed time.
Delegated Authority	The authority over the demonic realm that Jesus granted to His disciples as an extension of His own authority and lordship. Matthew 10:1 records the commissioning of the Twelve; Luke 10:17 records the seventy's report that demons were subject to them "in Your name." The authority is delegated (originating in Jesus, granted to the disciples), derivative (dependent on the commission and relationship to Jesus), and relational (exercised in His name, not as a transferable technique). The failure in Mark 9 and the disaster with the sons of Sceva in Acts 19 both illustrate the consequences of treating the delegated authority as a technique rather than a relational commission.

Term	Definition
The Book of Life	The divine record of those who belong to God through Christ, the “recording of names in heaven” to which Jesus directs the seventy’s joy in Luke 10:20. The book of life appears in Exodus 32:32–33, Daniel 12:1, and throughout Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). The recording of one’s name in the book of life is the unconditional, permanent, grace-given reality secured by the cross and guaranteed by the Spirit of adoption, more to be rejoiced in than any experience of spiritual power, because it is the identity, not the weapon; the relationship, not the authority that flows from it.
Reino de Dios / Basileia Tou Theou	Greek: the kingdom of God (Matthew 12:28; Luke 10:9, 11; etc.). The dynamic reign and rule of God, expressed in the overthrow of all powers that oppose it and the liberation of those enslaved within them. In Jesus’ ministry, the kingdom arrives in the person and work of the King Himself: the healing of the sick, the forgiving of sinners, the raising of the dead, and the casting out of demons are all expressions of the same fundamental reality, the reign of God breaking into the fallen world order and overcoming its darkness. The exorcisms are specifically described by Jesus as signs of the kingdom’s arrival (Matthew 12:28), making them theologically constitutive rather than incidentally miraculous.
Strong Man (Ischuros)	Greek: the strong one (Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27). Jesus’ parabolic designation for Satan in the image of the bound householder whose goods are plundered by the one who has overpowered him. The image communicates that Satan’s power, though real and formidable by creaturely standards, is insufficient to resist the One who has come to bind him. The strong man’s “goods” (Greek: skeue, vessels, possessions) are the human beings enslaved within his domain. The progressive liberation of those human beings through Jesus’ ministry and through the church’s gospel proclamation is the ongoing plundering of the already-bound strong man’s house.
Exorcism	The authoritative casting out of a demonic being from a person under its control. Jesus performed exorcisms by direct command, without ritual, formula, or lengthy procedure; the demons obeyed His word alone. The delegated authority to cast out demons was given to the Twelve (Matthew 10:1) and exercised by the seventy (Luke 10:17). The Reformed tradition maintains that exorcism in the apostolic sense was a sign gift accompanying the mission of the apostles, while acknowledging that prayer for the liberation of those under demonic affliction is a legitimate and important dimension of pastoral ministry in every age. The question of whether contemporary exorcistic ministry identical to the apostolic pattern is within the scope of ordinary pastoral practice is part of the broader cessationist / continuationist debate.

Term	Definition
Colossians 2:15 Triumph	Paul's description of the cross as the moment of Satan's definitive defeat: "Having disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." The imagery is of a Roman triumphal procession in which the conquered enemy is stripped of armor and weapons and paraded publicly before the victorious general. At the cross, the rulers and authorities who had held enslaved humanity in their grip were disarmed (their weapons, sin, death, and the accusations of the law, were removed by the atonement), publicly displayed (their defeat was made visible in the very event through which they appeared to triumph), and triumphed over (the resurrection confirmed the victory proclaimed at the cross).
Hebrews 2:14–15 Liberation	The writer of Hebrews' description of the cross as the liberation of those enslaved by the fear of death: "That through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." The mechanism of liberation is paradoxical: the devil's most powerful weapon (death) becomes the instrument of his own defeat (the resurrection), and those who have been enslaved by the fear of death are liberated by the One who entered death and overcame it from within. The pastoral significance: the believer's freedom from the fear of death is itself a participation in the comprehensive liberation from demonic bondage that the cross accomplished.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the demonological dimension of Jesus' ministry is central, not peripheral, to what the Gospels are claiming about who He is and what He came to accomplish. The Christ who teaches the Sermon on the Mount and the Christ who binds the strong man and plunders his goods are the same Christ, doing the same thing from two different angles: announcing and enacting the arrival of the kingdom of God, the comprehensive overthrow of every power that opposes the reign of the God who made all things. To read the Gospels as primarily a collection of ethical teaching with incidental miraculous embellishment is to misread them at the level of their most fundamental theological structure. The miracles, including the exorcisms, are not decoration; they are theology in action.

We must also believe that the cross is the theological framework within which every exorcism of Jesus' ministry must be understood, the definitive and irrevocable event that gave the exorcisms their ultimate significance as proleptic signs, that bound the strong man whose goods were being plundered through the ministry, and that accomplished the comprehensive defeat of the demonic realm that the individual exorcisms had been announcing. The exorcisms without the cross are impressive displays of supernatural power; the cross makes them the foretastes of the most comprehensive act of liberation in the history of creation. Believe both: the reality of the individual encounters, and the cosmic significance of the event that explains them.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the reorientation of Luke 10:20 press itself upon your understanding of where your joy and your identity are properly located. The seventy's joy at demonic submission was genuine and reasonable; Jesus affirmed the reality of the authority they had experienced. But He redirected their joy toward what was incomparably greater: the recording of their names in heaven. The joy that belongs to those whose names are in the book of life is the joy that does not depend on current spiritual experience, on the success of recent ministry, on the tangible fruit of present engagement. It is the joy of those who know that the God of all grace has called them to His eternal glory in Christ (1 Peter 5:10), whose standing before God is secured not by their power but by His grace, and whose names are written not in the fleeting records of spiritual achievement but in the permanent register of divine election and redemption.

Desire to think of the church's ministry, in its every dimension, including its engagement with the demonic realm, as the continuing plundering of the already-bound strong man's goods. Every sermon that brings a sinner to repentance is the strong man's goods being carried off. Every prayer that sustains a believer through a period of spiritual oppression is the strong man's hold being loosened. Every act of pastoral care that restores a damaged human being to the full dignity of their creaturely humanity is the strong man's kingdom being plundered. This is what the church is doing when she does what she is called to do. And the One who bound the strong man is the same One who promised that He will build His church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Matthew 16:18).

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- **Read the Gerasene demoniac narrative in all three Synoptic parallels side by side: Mark 5:1–20, Matthew 8:28–34, and Luke 8:26–39.** Identify what each Gospel includes that the others do not, and how the three accounts together build a richer theological picture than any one alone provides. Pay particular attention to Luke’s unique details about the man’s desire to follow Jesus and Jesus’ redirection of him back to his home and family (Luke 8:38–39): “Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.” The restored man’s mission, to testify to what God has done, is the model of every liberated person’s vocation: not to follow the teacher as a spiritual specialist but to go home and witness to the transformation that the Teacher has accomplished.
- **Preach or teach Matthew 12:22–30 as a unit, with the kingdom declaration of verse 28 and the binding of the strong man image of verse 29 as its theological center.** The passage is one of the most theologically rich and homiletically accessible texts in the entire Synoptic tradition for the theology of the kingdom and its relationship to the demonic realm. The challenge of the Pharisees (v. 24), Jesus’ logical refutation (vv. 25–27), the kingdom declaration (v. 28), and the strong man image (v. 29) together build a comprehensive Christological argument that is as urgently relevant to the contemporary church as to the first-century Pharisees who provoked it.
- **Study the failure of the disciples with the epileptic boy in Mark 9:14–29 as a case study in the proper posture for delegated spiritual authority.** Why did the disciples fail? Jesus’ diagnosis, “this kind cannot come out by anything but prayer”, implies that the disciples had been operating from a posture of settled confidence in their own authority rather than from the moment-by-moment dependence on God that prayer represents. Apply this diagnosis to your own ministry: where are you most prone to operating from settled confidence in your own spiritual competence rather than from the dependent prayer that keeps the derived nature of the authority before you? What specific disciplines of prayer would most directly address the tendency toward spiritual self-sufficiency that the disciples’ failure illustrates?
- **Memorize Luke 10:19–20 and make it the interpretive framework for every experience of effective spiritual ministry.** Jesus’ reorientation, “Do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven”, is the permanent antidote to the spiritual pride that accompanies effective ministry. The next time you experience a significant spiritual victory, a person coming to faith, a prayer answered, a person set free from a pattern of bondage, receive the joy that it rightly produces, and then deliberately redirect that joy toward the incomparably greater ground: your name is written in heaven by the grace of the God who called you, and the spiritual victories you experience are the overflow of that grace rather than the basis of your standing before Him.
- **Read the entire demonological narrative of Mark 1–9 in one sitting, noting the pattern and frequency of demonic encounters.** Mark’s rapid-fire narrative style (“Immediately... immediately... immediately...”) creates a sense of urgent, dramatic invasion of enemy territory from the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Read the demonic encounters in their narrative sequence and ask: what picture of Jesus emerges from this sequence? What does Mark want his

reader to understand about who Jesus is and what His ministry is accomplishing, from the cumulative experience of reading the demonic encounters as a sustained narrative rather than as isolated miracle stories?

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging the discussion questions, consider this: has your reading of the Gospel narratives typically treated the demonic encounters as central to or peripheral to the theological content of the Gospels? And has this lesson's argument, that the demonological dimension of Jesus' ministry is constitutive rather than incidental, changed the way you will read specific passages you have previously encountered?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Mark 1:21–28 carefully. What was Jesus doing when the demonic confrontation occurred (v. 21)? What was the crowd's initial response to Jesus' teaching (v. 22), and how does the demonic confrontation and exorcism change or deepen that response (v. 27)? What is the specific content of the crowd's astonishment, what aspect of what Jesus did amazed them? And how does the crowd's description of what they observed ("A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him") illuminate the relationship between Jesus' teaching authority and His exorcistic authority?
- Read Matthew 12:22–30 carefully. What is the occasion of the conflict (v. 22)? What is the Pharisees' accusation (v. 24)? What is the logical structure of Jesus' refutation (vv. 25–27)? What is the specific claim Jesus makes about the significance of His exorcisms in verse 28? And how does the image of the strong man and his goods in verse 29 function as the answer to the question Jesus poses: "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man?" What does the image reveal about the relationship between the exorcisms and Jesus' prior confrontation with Satan?
- Read Luke 10:1–20 as a unit. What were the seventy sent to do (vv. 1–12)? What was the content of their message (v. 9, 11)? What was their report upon return (v. 17)? What is Jesus' twofold response: what He confirms (vv. 18–19) and what He redirects (v. 20)? What is the theological significance of the contrast between "rejoice that the spirits are subject to you" and "rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven"? And what does the specific phrasing "your names are recorded in heaven" contribute that a more general statement like "rejoice in your salvation" would not?
- Read Mark 9:14–29. What was the presenting situation when Jesus returned to the disciples (vv. 14–18)? What does the father's description of his son's condition (vv. 17–18, 21–22) add to the narrative's picture of the suffering demonization produces? What was the disciples' failure, and how does Jesus respond to it (vv. 19, 23–25)? What is Jesus' diagnosis of the failure (v. 29)? And what does this diagnosis imply about the character of the delegated authority and the posture required to exercise it effectively?
- Read Colossians 2:13–15 and Hebrews 2:14–15 as the apostolic interpretation of what the cross accomplished in relation to the demonic realm. What specific actions does Paul describe in

Colossians 2:15 (disarming, public display, triumph)? What is the mechanism of the demonic defeat in Hebrews 2:14 (through death)? How do these two passages together describe the relationship between the proleptic binding of the strong man in Jesus' earthly ministry and the definitive binding accomplished at the cross?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the demonic encounters in the Gospels are central, not incidental, to what the Gospels are claiming about Jesus. What would be lost in our understanding of Jesus' identity and mission if the demonic encounters were removed from the Gospel narratives? And how does the lesson's argument that the exorcisms are "theology in action" challenge the tendency of certain interpretive traditions to treat the miraculous elements of the Gospels as peripheral to their theological content?
- The lesson identifies three stages in the binding of the strong man: the temptation (initial confrontation and defeat of the adversary's attempt to divert Jesus), the exorcisms (proleptic plundering of the bound strong man's goods), and the cross (definitive and irrevocable binding). Is this three-stage reading of the strong man image exegetically defensible? What biblical evidence supports the identification of each stage? And how does this reading illuminate the relationship between Jesus' earthly ministry and the cross as the climax of that ministry?
- The lesson interprets Jesus' exorcisms as "proleptic judgments", present, partial, anticipatory executions of the final eschatological judgment. How does this interpretive category, the proleptic, help hold together the "already" and the "not yet" of the demonic realm's defeat? The demonic beings are already judged (the exorcism is a proleptic judgment) and yet still active (their final execution awaits the last day). How does this tension shape the appropriate Christian posture toward the demonic realm in the present age?
- The lesson observes that the authority Jesus exercised was personal and inherent, the authority of the One who created the beings He commanded, while the authority delegated to the disciples was relational and derivative, operating "in Jesus' name." What are the specific implications of this distinction for the church's present ministry? And how does the failure of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13–16 model the consequences of treating delegated authority as a transferable technique rather than a relational commission?
- Jesus' reorientation of the seventy in Luke 10:20 redirects their joy from an experience of spiritual authority to the permanent grace of election ("your names are recorded in heaven"). How does this reorientation guard against the two specific dangers that accompany effective spiritual ministry: the spiritual pride that comes from experiencing power, and the spiritual despair that comes from experiencing failure? What is it about the recording of one's name in heaven that makes it a more secure and more permanent ground of joy than any spiritual experience?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson presents the church's gospel ministry as the continuing plundering of the already-bound strong man's goods. How does this framing of the church's mission, as the

implementation of a victory already won rather than a struggle toward a victory yet to be achieved, change the posture with which you approach your specific ministry context? In what specific ways does the confidence of “fighting from victory” rather than “fighting for victory” express itself in the character, the expectation, and the perseverance of your ministry?

- The disciples’ failure with the epileptic boy (Mark 9:14–29) is diagnosed as a failure of prayerful dependence, they had treated the delegated authority as a settled possession rather than a continually received gift. Where in your own ministry are you most prone to operating from settled confidence in your own spiritual competence rather than from the dependent prayer that keeps the derived nature of your authority before you? What specific disciplines of prayer most effectively maintain the posture of dependence that the effective exercise of ministry requires?
- The restored Gerasene demoniac was directed by Jesus not to follow Him but to return home and tell what God had done for him (Luke 8:39). This is the model of the liberated person’s vocation: not to become a spiritual specialist but to witness to transformation within the ordinary relationships and contexts of life. How does this model shape your understanding of how those who have been significantly delivered from spiritual bondage should be discipled and directed? And what specific pastoral guidance would you offer to someone in your congregation who, after a significant experience of spiritual liberation, wants to become a spiritual warfare specialist rather than a witness within their ordinary life?
- Jesus’ reorientation in Luke 10:20 directs joy away from spiritual experience toward the grace of election. Evaluate your own current spiritual life against this reorientation. Is your joy primarily in the experiences of effective ministry, answered prayer, and tangible spiritual fruit? Or is it primarily in the unconditional, grace-given reality that your name is written in heaven? And what specific practices, in your devotional life, your preaching, your pastoral conversations, most effectively anchor your congregation’s joy in the grace of God rather than in the contingency of spiritual experience?
- This lesson completes Unit 5 of the Angelology series. Looking back over Lessons 12, 13, and 14 together, the origin and nature of demons, their activity in the world, and the Christological triumph over them in Jesus’ ministry, what is the single most theologically significant truth about the demonic realm that Unit 5 has established? And how has the cumulative teaching of Units 4 and 5 together prepared you to engage the subject of spiritual warfare in Unit 6 with both the sobriety and the confidence that the biblical testimony commends?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Matthew 12:22–30, allowing the kingdom declaration of verse 28 and the strong man image of verse 29 to form the theological frame within which the prayer is offered. Read it slowly: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." The kingdom has come. The strong man has been bound. The plundering is underway. The One who bound the strong man is the One to whom this prayer is addressed. Begin there, in the certainty of the accomplished victory, and let everything that follows in the prayer flow from that theological ground.

Give thanks specifically for the Gospel narratives of demonic encounter and liberation. Thank God for the Gerasene demoniac, found sitting clothed and in his right mind, the most vivid picture of what the kingdom of God means for those it liberates. Thank God for the synagogue exorcism, the first public demonstration of a new teaching with a new authority that the demonic realm itself recognized and submitted to. Thank God for the epileptic boy, restored after the disciples' failure, as a reminder that the authority that matters is the Lord's and not the servant's. And thank God for the seventy's joy and the Lord's reorientation of it, that the incomparably greater ground of joy is not the power but the grace, not the authority but the recording of names in heaven.

Pray specifically for your congregation's engagement with the demonological dimension of the gospel. Pray that they would read the Gospel narratives with eyes open to the theological significance of the demonic encounters, that they would see in every exorcism the kingdom arriving, the strong man being plundered, the liberated person restored to full human dignity under the rule of the God who made them. Pray that they would bring to every dimension of their lives, their prayer, their witness, their pastoral care, their engagement with the suffering of those around them, the settled confidence of those who know that the strong man has already been bound and that the plundering will continue until the last of the strong man's goods has been carried off to safety.

Pray in the specific register of the cross as the demonological triumph. Thank God for Colossians 2:15: the disarming, the public display, the triumphal procession. Thank God for Hebrews 2:14–15: the death that destroyed the power of death, the liberation of those enslaved by its fear. Thank God for Luke 10:20: the names recorded in heaven by grace, the ground of joy that no spiritual experience can produce and no spiritual failure can undermine. Pray these truths not merely as theological propositions to be acknowledged but as personal, specific, individually applicable realities to be inhabited: your name is in the book, the strong man is bound, the plundering continues, and the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Close with an act of deliberate commission: the renewal of your commitment to the ministry of gospel proclamation as the primary means by which the strong man's goods are carried off in the present age. The church's primary weapon in the demonic conflict is not the elaborate protocol of spiritual warfare but

the preaching of the gospel that the Spirit uses to open blind eyes, to transfer prisoners from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son, and to record new names in the book of life. Pray for the power to preach, for the courage to witness, for the grace to serve as ambassadors of reconciliation in a world where the strong man still operates within the confines of his binding, and for the joy of knowing that every sinner who comes to faith is one more piece of the strong man's goods safely home.

"The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."

1 John 3:8, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Mark 1:21–28; 5:1–20; 9:14–29; Matthew 12:22–30; Luke 10:1–20; Matthew 10:1; Acts 19:13–16; Colossians 2:13–15; Hebrews 2:14–15; Matthew 16:18; Romans 16:20; 1 John 3:8

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com