

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

New teaching and with authority. Power over unclean spirits—to silence them and cast them out (Mark 1:27). Cleansing lepers (Mark 1:40ff); healing the sick (Mark 1:34); making paralytics walk (Mark 2:10-12). The action is fast and furious in the Gospel of Mark as Jesus begins His ministry. Jesus' fame is spreading—*“we've never seen anything like this”* (Mark 2:12). The people are *“amazed and glorified God”* (Mark 2:12), after all He must be someone *“come from God, for no one [could] do these signs that [He did] unless God [was] with him”* (John 3:2).

But not so fast. He also eats with sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2:16)—He even has a tax collector as one of His disciples (Mark 2:14). His disciples don't fast (Mark 2:18), but instead they pick grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23); that's work—against the law. Jesus Himself heals on the Sabbath (Mark 3:5); it's against the law. He doesn't follow our Sabbath rules. He's a sinner! He must be! Listen to Him forgive sins (Mark 2:5)! Who does He think He is? He lets those unclean spirits call Him *“the Son of God”* (Mark 3:11), and He doesn't correct them. And worst of all, the people are flocking to Him (Mark 3:11). *“He is a threat to our authority,”* the Pharisees thought, and they didn't like it.

The Pharisees wondered: *“How do you deal with people like Jesus: who don't play by the rules we set up (to be sure, those rules are not from Scripture; they're set in place to put a fence around the Law; but they also keep us in power)? We'd really like to kill Him—stone Him for blasphemy, because ‘[He], being a man, make[s] [Him]self God’* (John 10:33). But we can't do that—the people wouldn't allow that. Look at all the works He's doing.”

*“How do you deal with people like Jesus?”* *“Look at how his family calls Him insane.”* *“He's out of His mind!”* *“He must be ... that's what we can do. We can discredit Him. Then maybe He will shrink away; or maybe His own family will take care of Him for us.”*

*“Or we could make Him out to be demon-possessed, or say, ‘He's doing all this by the power of Beelzebul or by the prince of demons.’* Then no one will listen to Him and people will stop flocking after Him.”

In fact, none of this is new. It's an ancient playbook: discrediting someone; distorting what he said or did; making accusations against him. Satan used it in the garden: *“did God really say,”* trying to sow doubt with the primeval couple. Adam used it against his wife: *“the woman you gave me”* is at fault — trying to lay the blame on anyone but him; the woman used it, too: *“the serpent deceived me.”*

Does it sound familiar? That's because it's still in use today. Modern politicians on all sides still use the same tried and true methods against their

opponents: twist their words, pick and choose words, quote them out of context—discredit, distort, demonize, destroy. Why do politicians use negative advertising when people say so often that they don't like it? Ask any political consultant—because it works.

Does it sound familiar? If you kept up with the Masterpiece Cakeshop case that was just decided by the Supreme Court this week, you heard these kinds of words used by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission against “evil” Jack Phillips, calling his sound Biblical belief regarding same sex marriage as “the most despicable pieces of rhetoric,” and describing Christianity as a “religion [that] has been used to justify all kinds of discrimination throughout history, whether it be slavery, whether it be the holocaust” (SCOTUS Masterpiece decision, p. 13). That civil rights commission sought to destroy Jack Phillips’ livelihood and to indoctrinate him into unChristian ways of thinking, speaking, and doing. As Justice Alito wondered aloud in the decision to legalize same sex marriage, would LGBT advocates seek to “stamp out every vestige of dissent” and “vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy” (SCOTUS Obergefell decision, Alito, p. 6). The answer is “yes.”

Does it sound familiar? Surely it does, for not just they, but we use it, too! We tell lies about our neighbor, slander him, betray him and hurt his reputation. And we don't defend him, speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way. You know it. It's Eighth commandment stuff. It doesn't matter that it's old and that everyone does it, even those given to protect us. It's against God's law! We're guilty! Repent! Be forgiven in Christ! Live like a Christian!

Indeed, it was used against Jesus—He's crazy; He's demon-possessed—and in some ways, it worked on Him, too. Of course, it took some time, and before this poisonous fruit could ripen, Jesus did more amazing things, like raising Lazarus from the dead, and entering into Jerusalem as King, and upsetting things in the temple. It took someone on the inside betraying Him, but the Pharisees did it. They got Jesus arrested, and they brought forth false witnesses to twist words and lie and demonize. They judged Him worthy of death, but not even that was enough. They had to get the governor to carry out the sentence, and that meant turning the people against Him. And they did that, too—He's not our king; Caesar is; release Barabbas; crucify Jesus.

And Jesus was—crucified, died, and buried. A stone was rolled over the opening to His tomb, it was sealed, and a guard was placed there to make sure His disciples couldn't go around and use the same lying methods the Pharisees just did—to make sure *“his disciples [don't] go and steal him away and tell the people,*

*'He has risen from the dead.'*" That *"fraud,"* they said, *"[would] be worse than the first."*

Of course, you know. It wasn't a fraud. All that Jesus said and taught was true. Jesus' works bear witness to it—including His resurrection. And Jesus didn't do them as one possessed by Beelzebul—as if Satan would give up even one whom he has snared in the ancient curse. No, not Satan or his kingdom or his house is divided against itself. Jesus did His work as one *"come from God."* Jesus is truly the Son of God, as the Father declared it (Mark 1:11) and the demons knew it (Mark 3:11). Jesus is He *"whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world"* (John 10:36).

Jesus was sent into the world as *"the stronger man,"* sent to bind the strong man, Satan, the prince of this world. He did it enduring secret plots and false accusations. He did it enduring treacherous betrayal and cowardly denial. He did it enduring humiliation and mockery and torture. He did it enduring the cross scorning its shame. He did it procuring our forgiveness and Satan's defeat: *"it is finished."* He did it stomping on the head of that ancient serpent and on death.

Then, with victory banner in hand, Jesus, brought back to life on the third day, descended into hell—as we confess in the Apostles' Creed. He entered into the strong man's fortress and proclaimed His victory. He plundered the strong man's house, laying down Himself, the stone rejected, as the cornerstone of the Lord's house.

For His victory is ours through faith in Christ Jesus. Though we die, yet shall we live as we believe in the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25). And we, *"like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house"* (1 Pet. 2:5), *"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"* (Eph. 2:20). We're a house being built by the Lord Himself, built upon the Rock (Matt. 7:24). Cultural winds are blowing hard against us — the world will use every Satanic technique it can against us. But take heart. This house will stand. Jesus won. He and His words are our foundation. And we have the promise: *"whoever believes in him will not be put to shame"* (1 Pet. 2:6).

So, *"do not lose heart,"* but let your hearts be comforted. God's Son came for you; He came not in league with Satan, but to defeat him once and for all. Jesus came, scorning the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:2), to forgive all your sins. Trust in Him, especially in the midst of *"this light momentary affliction"* we find ourselves in. Trust in Him now as He cares for you. Trust in His promises that He will come again in glory to take you, built on the Rock, to the Father's house with its many rooms, to *"a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* Rejoice! He will come to take you from this vale of tears to a *"glory beyond all comparison."*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.