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*Know Who is Stronger (Isaiah 2:1-5)*  
*1/28/2018 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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Growing up, I remember watching a cartoon called “Tom and Jerry.” Maybe some of you know it. There were three characters on the show in particular. Tom the cat, he was usually kind of the bad guy, trying to cause trouble for the others. Then there was Spike the dog and his son, Tyke. Spike was a big strong bulldog and his son was just a cute little puppy. Inevitably, Tom would be after Tyke the puppy, trying to hurt him.

Now, the interesting dynamic in the show was that each of the characters knew who was stronger. If Tyke was alone, he knew he had to be afraid of Tom. Tyke knew Tom was smarter, stronger, faster; Tom could do anything he wanted to Tyke. But, when Tyke’s daddy, Spike, was around, that puppy knew he had nothing to fear. He could stick his tongue out at Tom, laugh at him. Tom couldn’t do anything anymore, because everyone knew that Tyke’s daddy was stronger, smarter, and faster than Tom.

I bring this up because this is very similar to what we see in our gospel lesson, except it’s not cute animals chasing each other, it’s a real person, a real demon, and a real God. A man is completely at Satan’s mercy. He can’t even control what he says and does. Satan can make the man shake uncontrollably. Satan can make him scream. Satan can make him say things that he never could have known. That man certainly knew who was stronger. But as soon as Jesus comes into the mix, everything changes. Because Satan and his demons know who is stronger.

But are demons really real? Our world around us doesn’t want to believe it. We downplay the supernatural, to the point that even we start to think, “Yeah, but that couldn’t really happen in my life.” People explain away demons saying that people at Jesus’ time just didn’t understand medicine and psychology, so they would label anything they didn’t understand as “possessed by a demon.” Since most of us have not experienced demons, they say demons are just the stuff of horror movies, nothing we need to worry about in the real world.

There’s a movie that famously quips, “The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn’t exist.” The truth is Satan and his demons are very real. The Bible makes that clear. The Bible even makes a distinction between

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people who had certain illnesses or handicaps and others whose infirmities are caused by demons. These people really were possessed.

But many people still think that it can't be real because they have never experienced it. I've never seen the continent of Asia with my own eyes. Does that mean it doesn't exist? No one I know has ever been attacked by a hippopotamus. But that doesn't change the fact that they are one of the most deadly animals in the world. The truth is: not many people in the Bible dealt with demons either.

The most we hear of demon possession is in the gospels, during Jesus' ministry. Why do you think that is? Why would there be so many demons around when Jesus, the Messiah, came into our world? Because Satan was working overtime then. He knew that Jesus came to destroy him and his work. With Jesus preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near, Satan wanted to show that he is stronger than us so that people would be so terrified of him that they would not pay attention to Jesus and His message. Even today, we find Satan fighting his fiercest where God is doing His work!

Where again did our gospel lesson tell us the demon-possessed man was? It was in the synagogue! In God's house!!! When people are believing false doctrines, Satan doesn't really need to speak up. But when people are hearing the truths of God's Word, you can bet Satan will direct his fiercest attacks right there!

And make no mistake, Satan is still working hard on all of us today. Don't let today's secularism kid you into ignoring Satan or underestimating his power. You see the benefit Satan has in our society? Satan doesn't shake people violently or make them scream in front of you, because he doesn't want you to see anything supernatural. Satan wants you to doubt that anything like that could happen to you. He thrives on lies. Satan wants you to ignore him, and to underestimate his power. Satan wants to attack us in a more secret way.

Don't let him fool you! Satan is still doing exactly what he did back in Jesus' day. No, he's not causing screams and shakings, but you can notice him in your life. When you are alone, no one watching you, you can hear his voice, telling you to do things that you hope no one will ever find out about. When you've done something very good and kind, you can hear him whispering, "See, you're such a good person. You don't really need all that forgiveness from Jesus. You're strong enough and

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good enough without God.”

When you’ve done something shameful, you can hear satan batter you again and again with the guilt of what you’ve done, saying, “See? You don’t deserve to be one of God’s people! What you’ve done is beyond forgiveness!” You can hear him reminding you again and again that you are not good enough for God and that you will never be good enough. When you find yourself committing the same sins over and over, even though you’ve promised yourself that you would stop, you can see the devil at work in your life, almost like you were controlled by someone else.

Know Who is Stronger! satan is stronger than us. He is smarter. He is faster. He can do anything he wants to us. And he wants nothing more, than to convince you that you are beyond the hope of salvation or to delude you into thinking you don’t need salvation. He wants nothing more than for you to spend eternity suffering with him in hell. And he is very good at this. 1 John 3:8 tells us, “The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.” All of us have done what is sinful. Satan claimed control of us a long time ago.

But 1 John 3:8 goes on to say, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work!” Remember again our gospel lesson. When Jesus came before the demon, all those demonic powers came to nothing. Two simple commands, and the demon was gone. We hear even the demon terrified of Jesus as he asks, “Have you come to destroy us?” satan and his demons know who is stronger!

When Jesus comes into our lives, satan can’t do a thing! Jesus reduces satan to nothing! satan’s tricks and traps all fall apart in front of Jesus. The Bible tells us that when the devil lies, he speaks his native language. That’s how he attacks us, by lying. But in our lesson, when the demon is before Jesus, he can’t even lie. He can only say exactly who Jesus is: “You are the Holy One of God.”

God equips us with the powerful weapon of His Word to fight satan’s lies too! He gives us the Bible. When we are in the Word, all of satan’s lies can only melt away. This is why it is so important for us to be gathering with our fellow Christians in God’s Word at worship or to be regularly going to Bible study or to be having family devotions and reading God’s word on our own.

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What's more, notice again Jesus' complete power over the demon. Scream and shake though he tries, the demon can only obey Jesus. And that was just the beginning. We read how satan tried to tempt Jesus to sin, but Jesus overcame everything satan threw at Him. When that doesn't work, we see satan tempting everyone around Jesus, trying to get them to kill Jesus. He tempts Jesus' friends to desert him, one of them even to betray him. He tempts the crowds of people to call for Jesus' death. He tempts the rulers to ignore the fact that Jesus is completely innocent of any crime. And finally, after all his tempting seems to have paid off and Jesus is put to death, satan finds out that this was God's plan all along. When Jesus is in the picture, everything satan does can only lead to his own destruction.

When Jesus died, all of our sins died with Him. By Jesus' death, our sins are forgiven completely and satan has been made powerless against us! satan can try to deceive us into thinking we aren't sinful, but God's truth frees us from those delusions. satan can point out our unworthiness, but Jesus has clothed us in His worthiness! satan can accuse us of all the sins we've committed, but Jesus died for those sins and has taken them all away forever! satan can try his worst to tempt us to sin, and even if he does get us to sin, the gospel of Jesus leads us to repentance and back to God. We no longer belong to satan. We belong to Jesus. We and satan know who is stronger.

We may be powerless before satan, and he may be doing everything he can to destroy us. But Jesus has destroyed the devil. Like that puppy Tyke, who was always safe from Tom when he was around his dad, we are always safe from the devil when we are with our God. And our God is always with us. Our God works his power on our hearts through his Word: every time we join our fellow Christians in church, every time we think about what we learned in Bible study, every time we remember those passages we memorized so long ago. God's Word on the pages of Scripture, that Word in our heads and on our hearts, this is the only weapon we have against satan. And God is always more powerful than satan and all his demons.

We know who's stronger. They know who's stronger. Amen.