

See if you can figure out what's missing in each of these 3 situations.

1) Somewhere, a boyfriend and girlfriend became addicted to opioids. How did it happen? They thought they were strong enough to wrestle with temptation on their own, but began experimenting and found out life seemed more exciting and fun with it. They figured a little sin wasn't a big deal. They weren't hurting anyone and they believe in God.

2) Somewhere, a husband and wife are planning to divorce. *"He's a jerk,"* says she, *"a total loser who tries to control my life."* *"She's a nag,"* says he, *"she wants more money and a bigger house, things I can't give her."* When encouraged to talk to someone, *"It won't work,"* they respond, *"we've tried it before."* When reminded of their vows at the Lord's altar and God's view of divorce, *"God wouldn't want us to be unhappy,"* they respond, *"And we believe in God."*

3) Somewhere, a man and a woman are in church. Each feels pretty good about themselves. They're in church, unlike 60% of the other members who aren't. But they wish the preacher would talk about something current and relevant. They're tired of Bible studies being pushed down their throat. They figure all the deep spiritual stuff is for other people. As for telling others about Jesus? That's the pastor's job, not theirs. Each has a rather neat arrangement worked out with God: *"God, I believe in you. Don't interfere too much in my life, and I won't ask for too much from you."*

What's missing in each of these true-to-life situations? Repentance! Repentance is what's missing. None of them sees their sin as a serious problem. They've convinced themselves that if they don't think sin is a big deal, then God doesn't either.

How wrong, terribly wrong they all are! And just as tragic that these "so-called" Christians have lost touch with their Savior, is the fact that each one of

them, is all tapped out when it comes to power for dealing with life.

That young couple became slaves to the drugs they couldn't escape. That selfish married couple was clueless at handling their problems. The man and woman in church wondering why there's no excitement in life and religion is so boring. No Repentance! No Jesus! No Power!

When Jesus burst on the scene in Palestine almost 2,000 years ago, everything was ready for his coming. The people he came to serve and to save wanted, needed what the Savior had to offer. Our lesson reads: **Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.**

What was different about Jesus' teaching? His message had power. Jesus preached the truth. The powerful truth that convicted people of their sins. The powerful truth that drove them to repentance.

Do you think Jesus tolerated the excuses: *"We're Jews. We're Abraham's descendants. We believe there's a God,"* and yet wasn't concerned about them continuing in their sinful ways? Not a chance! *"Repent!"* was Jesus' powerful message.

His message cut deep into the heart. The people were amazed. They couldn't ignore it in their lives. They didn't always like what Jesus said, but it touched them all the way to their soul.

We may want to ignore Jesus' message – but only at great personal risk. With so much information, media and technology today, people are served a religious buffet – a pick and choose religion that leaves them powerless to deal with life. It says all you need is a little Bible, pick out the parts that make you feel all warm and fuzzy, and ignore the parts that proclaim sin and Satan, damnation and hell.

Today's flavor is a preaching of forgiveness without any recognition of sin or repentance. The flawed thinking goes something like this:

- We can't expect kids - even Christian kids - to completely avoid what all their friends are trying.
- We can't expect Christian marriages to be any more successful than those of the unbelieving world around them. People don't always get along. Divorce is the "best solution."
- We can't expect people to get serious about their faith. Jesus won't actually make a difference in a person's life.

Don't be deceived! And don't you dare ignore the power of God's Word which calls you to repent of another day's filth, while stripping away our self-reliance, and leaving us begging for his mercy and sweet forgiveness.

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Go away! 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!"

"Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down and came out without injuring him.

If Jesus had as little power as we sometimes give him credit for, Luke wouldn't have had a reason to record this event for us. It gives us, along with all the other miracles in the Gospels, a testimony that Jesus is someone special, someone powerful.

With only a few words, Jesus forced the evil spirit tormenting this man out of him. It's clear isn't it? The power of Jesus is stronger than the power of Satan and all his demons. It's true then. It's true now.

What demons are you wrestling with in your life? Truth is, Satan works overtime in Christian lives, in Christian homes and schools and churches. The old evil foe fills our minds with dark thoughts and whispers words of approval when we're content with sin and refuse to repent. St. Paul tells us in Ephesians that **our daily struggle is not against**

flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil.

And I do hope there's a struggle going on in your life. Those struggles are your badge of honor as a Christian. Where do you go for strength? Where do you find the power to overpower - so you don't have to suffer sin's consequences: drug addiction, a failed marriage, discipline problems with kids, impure lives, lives that are disappointments? Where do you find the power to control sin so that it doesn't control you?

You find the power in Jesus Christ. He has the power to destroy sin. He did it once. He'll do it as many times as you need. That's what the cross is all about! Sin destroyed! Satan defeated! Death conquered!

- You have the same power as Jesus, who commanded an evil spirit to release his grip on the man. And the demon obeyed.
- You have the same power as Jesus, who, when tempted by Satan himself, quoted Bible passage after Bible passage.
- You have the same power as Jesus, who told a sinful woman, "*Go and sin no more.*"

Jesus didn't exercise his almighty power on your behalf to leave you powerless for dealing with life. As a child of God, you have the power that only a Christian has. The power to repent of sin.

Don't make the excuse: "*I can't do it; there's no use trying,*" because we're afraid Jesus' power isn't going to make a difference in my life.

Jesus came into this world for you. The miracles he performed he performed so that you could see his power and believe. Make that power your own. Whatever sin you're wrestling with, use the power of Christ to fight temptation. When your life is lacking direction and purpose, use his power for Christian living. Put the power of Christ into practice.