

## Power and Authority

Mark 1:21-34

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On this first day of 2023 we return to our study of the Gospel of Mark. The reason we are jumping right back into our study is because I believe this text carries with it some lessons that are vitally important not only for our church to hear, but for all churches to hear.

We are facing a crisis in our day. Christians need to learn, embrace, and stand upon what we see in Mark 1:21-34. These may not seem like significant events for us on first reading, but they are. Let's turn to our text in Mark 1.

<sup>21</sup> And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

Capernaum was a town located near the Sea of Galilee which is in the northernmost part of Israel. It was a good size fishing town with a population estimated around 1500. It was a thriving commercial center. Jesus spent much of His ministry in Galilee. Many of his disciples were from Capernaum and the surrounding area. It is likely He spent so much of His time here was because of the constant opposition he would have faced in Jerusalem. By having His home base in the north, he was away from the concentration of Jewish leaders and Roman garrisons and could gain a wider hearing.

Synagogues were houses of worship that existed in most cities. You needed to have ten Jewish men to be able to form a synagogue. The leader of the synagogue was not like a Pastor of a church. He served more as an administrator. The synagogue welcomed visiting Rabbi's to serve as the teachers. This is how Jesus came to be teaching in the synagogue. Capernaum was certainly small enough that many had already heard about Jesus. One can imagine he was a "draw" to the synagogue.

We learn the people were astonished at his teaching, for "he taught them as one who had authority, not as the scribes." The scribes were knowledgeable men. Their talks were academic. They quoted sources and experts. It would be like a Pastor getting up and spending the whole time talking about various theologians of the past and their arguments on various issues. These men were scholarly, but not compelling.

### The Authority of Jesus

Jesus spoke "with authority." What does that mean? I think first, it means **he spoke as one who not only knew about God, but it was evident that He had a relationship WITH God.** You don't have to even be a believer to talk about theological concepts. It is a theoretical or academic discussion. However, you can sense the ring of authenticity when someone is speaking who has

a vibrant relationship with God. They are not “giving a sermon,” they are sharing what they believe they have heard from God!

The second thing about the authority of Christ was that **He taught the Scriptures themselves.** Other teachers quoted a snippet of the scriptures to support their arguments. Jesus made the Word of God come alive by letting it speak for itself! We have both kinds of preachers today. One group tries to let the text speak for itself. This is what we do. We feel this allows the Bible to set the agenda for our preaching rather than using the Bible to support our agenda. The other group starts with a topic and some ideas and looks for passages that may say the same thing.

**The job of every believer today is not to show how much mastery they have of the Bible, it is to show how much mastery the Bible has over them!**

This was why it was surprising who Jesus chose to be in His inner circle. These men who had been fisherman and nomadic followers of Jesus were revealing God through them in powerful ways and it left the religious leaders baffled because they knew these men did not have great educations. However, the Word of God had taken hold of them. They believed wholeheartedly in Jesus as their Savior and Lord and were willing to bet their lives on the truthfulness of God’s Word.

The people were possessed by the message of Christ. It was a life-changing message that kept them riveted.

### **An Interruption (23-28)**

<sup>21</sup> Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

<sup>23</sup> Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> “Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

<sup>25</sup> But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. <sup>26</sup> At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.

<sup>27</sup> Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!” <sup>28</sup> The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.

We don’t think a great deal about demons in our world. When someone is demon possessed it is different from a psychological problem. It is something that takes over a person. There is a different life inside of them.

What is interesting about this account is what the demon does. He cries out ““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.” (v. 24) Doesn’t that seem like an odd thing for a demon to say? Wouldn’t you expect a demon to ridicule Jesus, or to try to make Him look bad? This demon is more aware of who Jesus is than anyone else in the synagogue!

There are many possible reasons the demon came at Jesus this way. First, the demon was pushing the timetable on what Jesus was ready to reveal to the people. Jesus wanted to introduce the people to His true nature slowly. The demon was blurting it out.

Second, this is not the kind of advertising Jesus needed. Public officials sometimes will ask people NOT to campaign with them because the reputation of the person “wanting to help” will actually hurt the candidate. It would be like writing a Christian book and having on the cover these words, “One of the best books I’ve ever read.” – Satan. Let’s face it, if Satan is a fan, I want nothing to do with that book!

Third, there was this idea that if you knew someone’s name, it gave you a certain power over that person. Do you remember the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel? Jacob wanted to know the angel’s name. He wanted some leverage. We the same thing, we talk about how we are on a “first name basis” with some powerful people.

Jesus cut the demon off, commanded him to be silent and then cast him out of the man! This man was given his life back by Jesus. It is likely that the people saw the drastic change in the man immediately. He was a new person.

And here is an application in our day. Those who are opposed to the truth of God’s Word (like this demon) will adopt a similar tactic. Those who are hostile to the things of God will call those who stand for God’s truth various names. The secular world around us does not care what we teach, as long as we go along with their values. However, if you stand on the values of the Word of God, you will be attacked, ridiculed and perhaps even “cancelled” which used to be called being black-balled.

Anyone who holds to a Biblical value system and morality may be called,

- A hate-monger
- Out of touch
- Bigoted
- Empty-headed
- A Radical
- A danger to society
- (In some cases) even someone who doesn’t deserve to live

It is important that we realize this. You cannot stand for Biblical values (gender, the value of life in the womb, Biblical marriage, a Biblical view of sex, a Biblical work-ethic, standards of right

and wrong, a definition of truth that is immovable, justice for the weak, parental oversight of their children's education, or that Christ is the only way to forgiveness and new life), without becoming a target in our day.

The fact that Jesus silenced the demon boldly showed His authority. We will not be able to silence the world around us by our intellect or witty comebacks. The arguments of the world are silenced by living our own lives by the Word of God. Satan will try to intimidate us by calling us names just like the demon did to Jesus. We resist by relying on His strength and the truthfulness of His Word.

### **Another Demonstration of His Power (29-34)**

<sup>29</sup> After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

<sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door to watch. <sup>34</sup> So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

I love this story. Jesus shows great compassion to Peter, Peter's wife, and her mom. The impression is that this fever was serious. The woman was bed-ridden. When you put all the gospel accounts together what you get is Jesus came and stood by her bed, took her hand, and told the fever to go away. She was immediately healed, got up, and fixed them a meal.

Later that evening (after sunset) people in the area brought all their sick to Jesus for healing. Why did they wait? Because it was the Sabbath (which is why they were in the synagogue). It was unlawful to move the sick on the Sabbath. It was considered work. As soon as the sun went down, the Sabbath was over, and they could bring their loved ones to Jesus. And they did.

The compassion of Jesus is staggering as is the power and authority of our Lord. He has the power over demons, various illnesses, nature (calming of the storm, cursing of the fig tree), and power over material things (feeding of the 5000 and 4000), Jesus even has authority over death (He raised several people from the dead). Our Lord spoke with authority. He understands the heart of God and the heart of men. He wants us to have the lives we were created to have. It is His authority to which we should submit.

### **Conclusions**

I told you at the beginning of the sermon that I believe these texts have a very relevant application to our society and some great foundational truths to build our lives upon especially as we begin a new year.

We live in a society right now that is trying to limit, undermine, or completely disregard the authority of Christ. During the Covid shut-downs the church was actually classified as “non-essential.” One politician said he would be OK if churches never opened again! Part of the reason we have lost some of our voice is because the church has both remained silent and capitulated to the ever-changing values in the hopes of remaining “relevant.” Here is the thing we need to remember: when the church compromises on Biblical Truth to try to become relevant to the world, it is no longer relevant to the world! We are to have a redeeming effect on culture, rather than be driven by culture.

It is essential we keep a few things clear. **The Lord has authority over all creation.** This applies to demons, diseases, and to everything else. The world can make whatever choices it wants, but God’s truth is still THE truth. Let me risk being very specific. Right and wrong is defined by God and not by the world. It is time for Christians to lovingly, but firmly, take a stand on the authority of our Lord. Whether something is legal or not does not change the authority of God!

- There are NOT dozens of genders. He made us male and female. Which of those genders you are is not difficult to figure out. Yes, we need to talk with people and understand why they feel the way they do, but compassion should never be a doorway to negotiating His authority!
- The definition of Marriage is between a man and a woman, for the purpose of having children, and having a stable and godly influence on those children. The Bible does not stutter at all on this one.
- Abortion may be a person’s legal right, but it is still wrong in God’s eyes. Abortion is the taking of a life from one who cannot defend themselves. Whether or not that life is convenient or not is beside the issue. This is one of the reasons the Lord tells us that sexual intimacy should be reserved for a committed marriage relationship. “Sleeping around” leaves scars and destroys God’s foundational design for the family.
- The notion that taking the life of an older person or disabled person is NOT an act of mercy. To end a life because someone supposedly has “no value” to society is to put yourself in the place of God. We have no right to say that because we feel someone has no value to us (and we don’t know that to be true) that they have no value at all.
- Critical Race Theory and Black Lives Matter are not about defending the victimized. It sounds compassionate, but it is actually fostering further division between races rather than equality. It is also making these groups dependent on the government which is actually taking their freedom rather than gaining it.
- The government does not know what is better for our children than we do! God has told parents to raise their children up in the Lord . . . not the government! The goal seems to be to brainwash our children and make them little lemmings for those who want to have control of others.

These are not political issues! They are TRUTH issues. When a church embraces what God condemns, it ceases to be His church! When church people refuse to speak up for the truth, we can only expect to receive the judgment of God.

**When we stand for the truth of God, we will meet opposition.** There is an unapologetic attack on the Word of God. It is not based on science or archaeology but on worldview. And those who stand on the Word of God will be mercilessly and joyfully attacked.

There are constant attempts to create the idea that the Bible is an outdated relic. Anything in the Bible that refers to the supernatural is dismissed outright because people have concluded the supernatural does not exist. This is called naturalism and the premise is that the supernatural does not exist. I like Rick's illustration here: "It is like saying what is  $2 + 3$  but your answer cannot be 5 because we have decided it doesn't exist!"

The same people who say these things say "we trust science rather than faith." This is a very unscientific approach to science. True science is open to all relevant data rather than dismissing some data because it does not fit your narrative. So, instead of the world being created by a being who has always existed (the Christian view) we are told (by some) that "the world came into being spontaneously out of nothingness!" (Let's go back to early math class. "What is  $0 + 0$ ? We are fighting a battle. If we do not put on the armor of God and get into the war . . . we are surrendering our freedoms.

**Tasks for a New Year.** If we are going to stop this slide into the foolishness of the world around us, several things will have to happen.

1. WE must submit to the truth of God's Word. We cannot claim we are followers of Christ while being selective about what truths we embrace. Before we can speak with the authority of Christ, we must show that we have allowed His truth to live in us and through us. We must show that we submit to God's truth in our own lives.
2. We need to see clearly that the cultural nonsense of the world is not setting anyone free . . . it is enslaving them to the culture. It is robbing them of the best life God wants for them. We need to ask, "Is it really loving to remain silent as someone heads to their destruction? Even if they are singing along the way?"
3. We must maintain a kind tone even as we confront bad things. Loving truthfulness is always more effect than hostile in-your-face confrontation.
4. Finally, we must take an active part in the education and growth of our children. We must be aware of what television is teaching them and limit their exposure. We must know what they are being taught in school and be kind, proactive and involved. We must always be loving and persistent, and we should never give up the reins of our child's future to the secular world in any way. It is just as important to keep having these conversations with our college children as well.

These are our marching orders. This is how we follow Christ and impact the world for the gospel. And if we don't do this, we cannot complain about the lives we get in return.