

What Authority is This?

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 1:21-28

Introduction:

If you have been with us in our series on the gospel of Mark, you will remember how Mark opens by pointing to Jesus Christ as the good news of the gospel. Jesus is the good news because He fulfills the promises of God from the Old Testament to send a Messiah. Mark showed John the Baptist as the voice crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way for Jesus, as one who was mightier than he and bringing a greater baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit who comes to all who believe as they trust in Christ. We have also seen how Jesus identified with his people and fulfilled all righteousness through His baptism and temptation in the wilderness, pointing to Him as the spotless Lamb of God. The passage we looked at two weeks ago, in Mark 1:14-20, began to move us from Mark's prologue to the ministry of Jesus. In it, we saw Jesus proclaiming the call of the gospel, followed by the response of 2 sets of brothers who left everything to follow Him, before they even fully knew who he was. Consider a question with me before we dive in. What would you need to know about Jesus to follow Him like they did? This question has haunted me since we started our study of this gospel. Simon, Andrew, James, and John left everything with little knowledge of who Jesus was, but we have this written portrait of Jesus, revealing so much to us. In some ways, I think every story in this gospel is designed to have us keep asking that question. Almost as if to say each time, what more do you need to know? Mark 1:21-28 starts to open the curtain, so to speak, about who Jesus really is and why we should follow Him. Let's look at this passage through 3 scenes, the first of which beautifully sets the stage, revealing,

THE UNIQUE TEACHING OF JESUS

Notice how Mark begins in verse 21, "And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching." Capernaum was an important port city on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. We see from the start that Mark reminds us of the brothers following Jesus wherever He went by noting how "they went into Capernaum." Where we see Jesus travel to first is of great importance for Mark's narrative. Notice how Jesus immediately entered the synagogue and was teaching. During this time, there was the temple in Jerusalem, where the priests resided and sacrifices were made, and there were synagogues scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. These were halls or auditoriums where the Jewish people gathered to hear the Torah read and taught on by scribes or rabbis. You could equate them to churches or mosques today. They were places of worship and education that were typically located in an area where 10 or more Jewish males, over the age of 13 resided. In the narrative flow of Mark, Jesus begins His ministry proclaiming the kingdom in Galilee, calls four brothers to follow Him, and immediately enters a local synagogue to teach. Note how this highlights the importance of teaching in Jesus' ministry. Continue with me in verse 22, "And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." Does something strike you in these verses? Have you noticed that Mark didn't provide any details on what Jesus was teaching? The focus isn't on the content of what was taught but the way in which Jesus taught, because it sets the stage for something for us to see about Jesus. Mark will share with us things that Jesus taught as we continue to read, but he starts by highlighting the way Jesus taught, so we see something about Jesus before we need to interact with His teaching. He does this by showing the response of those who heard and the reason why they responded that way. Look again at verse 22, "And they were astonished at his teaching." When people heard the teaching of Jesus, they were astonished. We need to feel the weight of this response here. Mark often points out this kind of reaction to Jesus' teaching and miracles. People are most often astounded and left in awe by Jesus. Can you imagine someone's teaching leaving you jaw dropped? There have been some amazing teachers over the course of history, and we have some in our day that are captivating. I think of the popularity of TED talks.

TED talks are renowned for their innovative way of receiving teaching from experts in various fields. They are known specifically for how effective and captivating they are. The most popular teacher on TED talks has 3 talks that have been viewed 21.5 million times. There are plenty of names of effective and good teachers we could rattle off, but church no one taught like Jesus, and Mark shows us why. Pay attention to the end of verse 22, “for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” The thing that was so astonishing about Jesus’ teaching is that it greatly differed from the scribes of that day because Jesus taught from His authority as God the Son. The comparison to the scribes is significant here on many levels. First, the scribes were very skilled teachers and even famous for their skill. They were the experts regarding the Torah, the Law of Moses, to the point that their interpretations of it determined its meaning and gave them an authority to lead people in following it. They were the elite educators of their day, think of a professor, lawyer, and judge in one package. Secondly, the scribes were held in very high esteem. People deferred to them on the street, rose when they came into the room out of respect, and gave them the best seats in the synagogues. Yet, hear what Mark is saying. The scribes teaching paled in comparison to Jesus, not because of oratory skills but because of a massively important term for Mark, Jesus’ authority. The term used for authority is *exousia* in the Greek. And James Edwards notes how this term was used more often than not in the latter portion of the Old Testament and literature that followed to speak of supernatural power and authority, especially connected to God’s works and representatives. You see, the scribes always receive their authority from others, the teachers that went before them. But Jesus’ authority rested within Himself, the one of whom God pronounced, “You are my beloved Son.” Jesus’ teaching was unique because of the authority people saw in it. An authority Mark helps us see is His divine authority. A point that becomes even more clear in our next scene, showing us

THE FEAR AND OBEDIENCE OF DEMONS TO JESUS

Notice, in verse 23, how Mark ensures we see the connection of this scene to the previous one, “And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.” Immediately following people’s astonishment of Jesus’ teaching with authority, our attention is drawn to a man with an unclean spirit. This is a term Mark uses 11 times as a synonym for demon. When used, it is probably intended to relay something specific about them, likely drawing out the difference between the holiness and purity of God’s kingdom and the wretchedness of the kingdom of darkness. The confrontation then begins, look at the end of verse 23 and into 24, “And he cried 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.’” Consider two aspects of the demon’s cry. One is the questions of what Jesus plans to do with all demons. Another is the acknowledgement of who Jesus is. Consider the questions first with me. “What have you to do with us,” is a way of trying to drive Jesus away. The demon wants Jesus to leave it alone. Now, the Bible reveals several things about these spirits that are helpful for us to understand here. Revelation 12:4 shows us how demons are fallen angels that rebelled against God with Satan. The gospels show us some demons are apparently free to roam now but 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 show that others are currently confined in the torments of hell. Ephesians 6:11-12 reveals that all are under the rule of Satan and in conflict with the rule and reign of God. So, it makes sense for them to want Jesus to leave them alone. The second question, “Have you come to destroy us?” reveals how all demons know their ultimate fate of eternal destruction. Church, there is a battle waging in the spiritual realm that we don’t acknowledge often enough, but know the demons understand that battle is futile, and their day of destruction is coming. Why does this one ask if Jesus has come to destroy them? Because they know who Jesus is. Notice how the unclean spirit acknowledges Jesus by both His humanity and divinity. He calls Him “Jesus of Nazareth,” and “the Holy One of God.” There may be an attempt by the demon to gain power over Jesus by knowing His name, but that is not likely what is happening. Mark is likely just helping us to see their understanding who Jesus is. Note how this demon is the second person to announce Jesus’ divinity.

As R.T. France says, “Here, as in 3:11; 5:7, the demon displays a supernatural insight as yet denied to human actors in the story.” The demon fears Jesus because they know who He is, and his cry is designed to open our eyes to that truth. But look at what follows in verses 25-26, Jesus commands silence and expels the demon in verse 25. “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’” Pay attention to the simplicity of Jesus’ response. It involves very few words as strong commands, “Don’t say another word and come out.” Consider with me what it is like to raise kids. It takes time to help kids to see the importance of responding in obedience to parenting, right? This is because it takes time for them to understand exactly who their parents are, and what that means for them. I remember, with our kids, we would get down at their level, have them look us in the eyes, clearly explain the problem and tells them what they needed to do in a firm but gentle voice. Sometimes, we needed an extra step of changing locations so they weren’t distracted and could obey more easily. Overtime, kids understand the purpose of listening carefully and obeying right away, but this takes consistency and patience to instill that kind of response to parenting. But pay attention to what happens in verse 26, “And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.” The demons didn’t need any time to understand who Jesus was or any extra explanation for why they need to obey Him. Jesus wasn’t required to do a certain chant. He didn’t even need to say their name to have power over them. He simply speaks a command and the demon obeyed, because Jesus possesses perfect and absolute authority over everyone and everything. Don’t miss this, because it is imperative to our understanding of who Jesus is and how we should respond. This moment in our story points out an eternal conflict that has been waging and will wage between the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan. And it announces loud and clear that Jesus has all power and authority. Yet, there is an important question we have to wrestle with here. Why did Jesus silence the demon? We will see Jesus not permit demons to share who He is again in Mark 1:34 and Mark 3:11-12. And, in Mark 3, we are told Jesus commands them to “not make Him known.” Wouldn’t the acknowledgement of who He is by demons, and their obedience to Him, be proof that He was the messiah? Wouldn’t more people follow Him if they knew who He was? That is precisely the point of silencing them. Jesus silenced the demons because the work He came to do required that the understanding of who He was, was hidden from the eyes of mankind. Because He came the first time to die. He knew He needed to suffer and die on the cross because a payment was required for sin to redeem his people. He knew He would bear the wrath of God as the just payment for the sins of all who trust in Him. If His true person was disclosed now, the people might cry out for His anointing, instead of crying “crucify him!” He will come again one day, and everyone will perfectly see who He is. Those who trust in Him will rejoice and those who don’t will fear like the demons do here, but everyone will know. For now, see the resolved purpose of Christ to die for sins because it was necessary, and as you do, marvel at it and turn to trust in Him. There is a final scene to consider, where we see,

THE RESPONSE TO AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Look at how Mark focuses in on two responses in verses 27-28, starting in verse 27, “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’” Everyone is stunned. They are both amazed and uncertain. Notice how Mark points back to the teaching and authority of Jesus. This shows us the scene involving the interaction with the demon is designed to directly connect to the authoritative teaching of Jesus. He has authority over both the natural and spiritual realms. His teaching is more authoritative than the scribes and even unclean spirits obey the teaching and commands of Jesus. Think about what this shows us about the teaching of Jesus. It shows us that His teaching is meant to be obeyed. If the fallen angels obey the voice of Jesus immediately, what does that call us to do when we hear the teaching of Jesus and the commands for our lives? There is another response in verse 28 to consider, “And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.” I mean, this seems obvious, of course his fame spread, just think about what everyone just saw. Why include this?

In this verse, Mark begins to open our eyes to a significant theme that runs through this gospel of Jesus as a popular healer and teacher, but, inside of this theme, we will find that popularity will prove not to be from a true understanding of Jesus, but rather a superficial understanding that lacks the true marks of faith. And this should cause us to wrestle with what our true response to Jesus is.

Conclusion:

Mark has given us insight into the authority of Jesus Christ. He has opened the curtain a little to help us see Jesus' astonishing power and teaching. He has shown us how it was unlike any other teaching and how even demons respond immediately and fully to the commands of Jesus. And this all leads to a question for each of us to answer.

HOW ARE WE RESPONDING THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS?

There are constant debates today about what has authority over our lives. There are even attempts to deny such a thing as absolute and authoritative truth. People want to make the truth more and more nebulous, suggesting truth is really only relative to what we want it to be. The world, under the influence and dominion of Satan, wants to you buy into that and make yourself the only authority over your life. And it lies to you when it says this is the way to true happiness and fulfillment. God, our maker, and sustainer, tells us something vastly different. He tells us there is absolute truth and one highest authority over your life. His written word, that points you to the living Word, Jesus Christ. And Christ has the right to call for complete obedience to His commands. Do you listen to the world and your flesh that says you should use all of your hard-earned money to build a little kingdom for yourself and enjoy life to the fullest? Or to Jesus, who says everything you have is provided by God and you should use it for the sake of building His kingdom? To sacrifice and give to the work of the kingdom with joy, trusting God to supply your every need. Are you listening to the world and your flesh that says kids and teenagers are just too hard to parent these days? So, you should just turn them over to their screens or the professionals for that. Or do you obey Jesus, who says press in, build relationships, and patiently raise your children according to His way? To sacrifice your time for them and help them to know Christ. Has the world and your flesh convinced you to speak however you want of anyone? To use whatever platform you have to degrade and tear down those you disagree with or those who hurt you. Or are you obeying Jesus, who calls you to pray for those who persecute you and only speak things that build up? Since the fall of man, the enemy, and our sin nature have been lying to us, telling us to live according to our own rules and not deny ourselves any pleasure or justice. But Christ says deny yourself and come follow Him, learning to live under His authority as your greatest good. Have you rejected authority of Jesus all together? Then repent and turn to Christ, confessing Him as your savior and Lord. Are you trusting fully in His authority? The truth is we won't until He returns because there is a fight of faith in this life. But we can grow in our trust. Growing in your trust in the authority of Christ takes two things. A heart that sees His authority as what is best for your life. And a commitment to pursue a deeper knowledge of His commands through the study of His Word. As the worship team comes up to help us respond today, hear this rightly, this Word and Jesus Christ don't just call for you to try harder to submit God's commands. This Word speaks of your captivity and weakness, but then, it shows you the power and majesty of Jesus to provide redemption and power. And, in God's abundant grace and goodness, it helps you to know that true joy and satisfaction is found in that very submission, not outside of it. From the beginning of Mark's gospel, we are confronted with a question of how we are responding to Jesus' authority, so that, as we continue to study, we will see what we need to see, turn in repentance, and believe in the gospel, submitting to Christ's commands, and following Him for true and everlasting joy. Respond today. Come kneel if the Lord leads. Pray where you are at. Sing with joy for your heart and those around you. Press into God's means of grace. As always, we also have people ready to pray for your and with you. If you need someone to pray for healing, or more trust in Christ, for joy, even salvation, we have a team of people that will stand in the front corners of the room, with lanyards on that you can pray with. Let's pray together.