

A young country preacher was interviewing for his first church. The pulpit search committee invited him over for an interview. As he was being questioned by the committee the chairman said, “Son, do you know your Bible?”

He said, “Yes, sir, I really think I do.”

He said, “Well what part of the Bible do you know best?”

“I reckon I know the New Testament the best,” said the young preacher.

The chairman said, “Well, why don’t you just tell us something you know about the New Testament? Just tell the committee here the story of the Prodigal Son?”

He said, “All right. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus who went to Jericho by night. And he fell upon stony ground and the thorns choked him half to death. The next morning Solomon and his wife Gomorrah came by and they took him down to the ark for Moses to take care of him. But as he was going through the eastern gate to the ark, he caught his hair there in a limb and he hung there for forty days and forty nights. He hungered and the ravens came and fed him. The next day, the three wise men came and carried him down to the boat dock where he caught a ship to Nineveh. And when he got there, he saw Delilah sitting on a wall. And he said, ‘Chunk her down, boys.’ And they said, ‘How many times shall we chunk her down? Seven?’ And he said, ‘Nay, but seventy times seven.’ And they chunked her down four hundred and ninety times. And she burst asunder and they picked up twelve baskets of the fragments. And in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?”

The committee sat silently contemplating what they had just heard until finally the chairman spoke up and said, “Fellas, I think we ought to call him. He’s awful young, but he really knows his Bible.”

I hope you are more knowledgeable of your Bible than that aspiring young preacher. I also hope you know that just knowing the Bible doesn’t make you a follower of Jesus. In fact, Jesus once confronted some Bible experts and said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” John 5:39-40. They knew their Bible but refused the most important message of the Bible – that “God so loved this world...” So the question I want to put before you this morning is not, “Do you know your Bible?” or even, “Do you believe the Bible?” My question this morning is, “Have you surrendered to the authority of the word of God?”

A follower of Jesus surrenders to the authority of the word of God.

Authority is a big deal in Mark’s gospel. The word is used 15x. Every thinking person must decide where the ultimate source of authority resides. We can “question authority” as the Baby Boomers did or resist authority as we see in Ferguson or Baltimore. Authority can come from without as in religion or philosophy or from within when I become my own authority. In the second half of Mark 1 Jesus’ authority is put on display. Mark provides five witnesses who observe various spheres over which Jesus has authority.

1. The eyewitnesses – **Jesus’ taught with authority**. They were amazed at His teaching...1:21-22. The word is “shocked.” They were thunderstruck. They were accustomed to the rabbis teaching God’s word through the insights of other rabbis. Their teaching was layered with the opinions of men. I once heard a British pastor lament, "In our day the scriptures have been reduced to what St. Luke couldn't help fancying someone's having said he thought he remembered St. Peter having told him."

Jesus came on the scene saying, “You have heard it said...but I say to you.” Jesus made no reference to any authority other than His own. Possible preacher...Uncle Luther.

When Jesus spoke His words carried the weight of divine authority. Not because He raised His voice or because He was so eloquent but because there was not separation between His words and His actions...vv. 27-28.

2. The unclean spirits – **Jesus demonstrated authority over demonic spirits**...1:23-26. There is no doubt that the unclean spirit in this man was reacting to the teaching of Jesus. He could not stand it! This demon-possessed man seems to have been in the synagogue. He was religious but living under the influence of Satan, a reminder that the hardest hearts are religious hearts. Wherever the truth is preached there will be opposition.

One of the most compelling arguments for the divinity of Jesus Christ is the fact that while religious leaders are debating the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah, the demonic spirits are never confused about who He is – “the holy one of God.” This serves as an indictment against the religious leaders.

3. Simon’s mother-in-law- **Jesus demonstrated authority over illness**...vv. 29-34. Even though Peter’s mother-in-law was healed miraculously, healing was not Jesus’ priority. All His miracles were performed to support His teaching. Healing is a foretaste of the kingdom to come and a validation of Jesus’ words but it is only temporary. If our only agenda is physical healing we may miss the spiritual transformation that Jesus has for us.

4. Jesus Himself – **Jesus claimed authority to preach or speak for God**...vv. 35-39. Jesus supports the priority of preaching when He clearly tells the disciples, “No.” He says His mission is to preach. And his message has already been revealed in v. 15, “Repent and believe in the gospel.”

5. The leper – **Jesus’ authority was greater than the authority of men**...vv. 40-45. Leprosy was a dreaded disease that brought anguish at all levels: physical, mental, social, and religious. The Law said that, “The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean. He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.’” Lev. 13:45-46.

The Pharisees made matters even worse adding to the word of God with their own regulations.

It was illegal to even greet a leper. If a leper stuck his head inside a house, the house was considered unclean. Lepers were to remain 100 cubits away if they were upwind and four cubits if they were downwind. Leprosy was considered incurable but this leper was convinced that Jesus could cleanse him. He believed that Jesus had the authority to heal Him. He was right. Jesus touches the untouchable and cures the incurable showing that He is not bound by rabbinic regulations regarding ritual defilement. His authority is greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees.

In v. 44 we read the first of many examples of what has been called “The Messianic Secret.” (1:34; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 9:9). Here tells the man to say nothing to anyone. In 5:19 he tells another man who was healed, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” Jesus seems to be confused; sometimes he wants people to tell what has happened and sometimes he wants them to be quiet.

Jesus was very sensitive to God’s timing. (1:15). He knew that if word got out too quickly then people would flock to Him for favors but not understand His claims. They would merely come to see the show. In fact, that’s what happens here at the end of the chapter. (v. 45). He wanted to avoid the misunderstandings that would occur as the result of a premature or erroneous response to His miracles. He did not want His identity declared until He had made His mission clear. He was also aware that He had enemies in the Pharisees and the Herods. He would progressively withdraw the veil from His identity and openly declare it when the time was fulfilled.

Jesus is building a reputation as he extends the boundaries of His movement. Notice the progression: He begins in the synagogue in Capernaum, His home base. Then He moves outside the synagogue to Peter’s mother – in law’s house. Then He goes to the towns throughout Galilee and finally, in v. 45, He moves out into “desolate places.” His reputation is growing and His message is advancing.

Are you a follower of Jesus or just a fan? A fan looks to Jesus for what he/she can get. Someone is sick. You call on Jesus to heal. You are in a tough spot financially. You call on Jesus to help. You go to church or read the Bible because you want a good job or a successful business or a nicer car or a suitable spouse. There is no power in this book. These words are not magic words. I once had a conversation with a veterinarian who worked among the Fulani people of Nigeria. One day a desperate father approached him and said that his daughter was very sick. Of course here in the US you could lose your veterinary license for treating a two-legged creature but in the bush he was the closest thing to a doctor that they had. He treated the girl while the other missionaries who had brought him there attended to the girl praying for her and reading their Bibles. She got well. An amazing new practice sprung up among the men who were caring for the cattle. As they watched over their herds at night they held a Bible over their heads to ward off evil spirits. The Fulani saw the healing power of Jesus’ but did not yet understand what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

So let me close with two questions:

1. How well do you know this book? I said in the beginning that just knowing the book doesn't make you a follower but if you don't know what Jesus said you won't know what He wants you to do.

I want to ask a favor of you. I want to invite you to take an online survey called Reveal. The results of the Reveal survey will give us insight into how well we are helping you in your spiritual growth. I'm asking you to complete this survey. It will take about 30 minutes.

2. Have you surrendered to the authority of the word of God? Jesus told the story of two people who built two similar houses. When the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the first house it did not fall because it was built on the rock. The other house was built on the sand. “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” What is the point of the story? The stability of your life depends on the quality of the foundation. But notice that the foundation is not the word of God but our response to the word of God.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine *and does them* will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

Let's take a moment and allow the Holy Spirit to shine a spotlight on any areas of our lives that we need to submit to God's authority.