

Reviving Your Wonder At Jesus

Jon Benzinger
Mark 1:21-28
January 22, 2023

So as many of you know, I just got back from Israel, the land of the Bible, and if you saw my Twitter or Instagram, you saw that it was a really incredible time. I mean what you have in your Bible is history, not fantasy, and that becomes so clear when you're in Israel. So like if you're doing the Bible reading plan and you read a week and a half ago, Genesis 14, about Abraham going to a place called Dan in order to get his kidnapped nephew, Lot. Do you remember reading that? Well, we went to Dan and we saw the gate at the City of Dan that Abraham and Lot would have walked through 37, 3,800 years ago. And in Dan we also saw the remains of a pagan altar that a guy named Jeroboam built in Dan, 1 Kings chapter 12.

We went to the Mountain, Mount Carmel, where Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal. You can read about it in 1 Kings 18. We drove through Nazareth where Jesus was from. We drove through Cana, where He did His first miracle, turning water to wine at a wedding. We went to a place called Magdala. Sound familiar? Mary Magdalene. That's where she was from. And in that city we saw a first century synagogue, which Jesus traveled all over teaching in that region, which means that those stones in that synagogue certainly heard Jesus' voice. We floated in a boat on the northern part of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus walked on water, where Jesus calmed a storm. And that was just the first couple days. Then we were in Jerusalem where we worshiped in the Garden of Gethsemane. We also worshiped next to the Pool of Bethesda, that's that's John chapter five. That's where we've been in our study of the book of John, where a man was healed. We worshiped right there. We walked on the Temple Mount, walked through Hezekiah's Tunnel that he built, 2 Kings 20.

And the personal highlight for me was getting to preach Christ from John chapter nine at the Pool Of Siloam, the exact spot in John chapter nine, the actual place where a man born blind received his sight from Jesus. It was incredible. I can't I can't wait to get back there with many of you. We'll keep you posted when we have something to announce about that. But because I was just there, I thought rather than showing you a bunch of pictures at a place you've never been before, I thought, how about I preach from a text from a place where I just was last Friday? So Mark chapter one, Jesus teaching at the synagogue at Capernaum.

You can actually stand in this synagogue. In fact, here it is. Take a look. There it is, and here it is again. And I pause on this sign because the white synagogue that you just saw in the previous picture and that you see right there, that white synagogue was built on top of the first century synagogue that we just read about where Jesus taught. You can see the first century synagogue in those black stones along the bottom, and then the white stones were built on top of that foundation, which means being built on top of the foundation of the first century synagogue

probably means that the dimensions and the layout of the first century synagogue is what you see today.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about Capernaum. Capernaum, this city is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. So you can see it there, right there, it's circled in red. The next pic is from the Mount Arbel. Mount Arbel is there, Sea of Galilee. It's the traditional spot where Jesus gave the Great Commission before He ascended into heaven. And from that from that spot, you can see from the City of Capernaum, you can get all over the region of Galilee. That's what He did. You can see Magdala on the left where Mary Magdalene was from, and just around the lake a little bit, you can see Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum. You can see the spot where traditionally people say that He preached the Sermon on the Mount. You can see all of that. It all happened right there. That's where He called His disciples and healed the sick and preached the gospel.

Capernaum is this city that was situated on a main trade route that started in the Mediterranean Sea and moved east and then north into Damascus. And in that city, fishing industry was huge, which is probably why Peter, James, Andrew, and John all had their their small business there. But if you weren't a fisherman and you lived there, you were farmer or a merchant, an artisan. Maybe you were a Roman soldier or a government official. We've read about a government official in John chapter four. His son was sick and so he sent for Jesus to come back with him to Capernaum, but Jesus healed his son from a distance. That guy that guy lived in this city. Well, there was the synagogue that's built there that you stand in and that we just read about. That was built by a Roman official according to Luke seven.

So Capernaum was Jesus' home base, His base of operations. And in this city He healed many people. You remember the account of the man that was paralyzed? He couldn't get to Jesus, so his friends put him on a bed and they lifted him up and took him to the roof and opened the roof and dropped him down? That happened in Capernaum, maybe even Peter's house. He teaches in this synagogue that we just read about and we'll see it again, the same synagogue in John chapter six.

Now, as He moved from travelog, see, one of the cool things that people do in this in this part of the world is they have St. Peter's fish. If you've been there, you know what I'm talking about. It's this meal where they give you a fish, fully intact, eyes and all. I didn't eat that. It's disgusting, but when I think about my favorite food, I definitely don't think about that. I think about Benihana. That's my favorite food. You have a favorite food? Benihana is my favorite. Teriyaki beef, chicken, shrimp salad soup. It's almost lunchtime. I'm getting hungry. Best fried rice in the world. Yeah, that's my favorite. But I'm a huge fan. You're a huge fan of your favorite food. But if we ate it every day, it probably wouldn't be our favorite food for very long right? You'd probably get over it pretty fast. It would diminish in its greatness.

I don't know about you. I grew up going to church. I taught at a Christian high school, before that, taught at a Christian university. Growing up around church, being around church and church people, kids growing up in church, it's it's been my conviction for a while now that all of

that can make many of us, all of us maybe, too familiar with Jesus. And when it comes to Jesus, familiarity doesn't necessarily breed contempt. Like, we just sang our guts out to Jesus a second ago. But what it does do is it diminishes His uniqueness, His greatness, His worth.

Now Mark starts this book about Jesus with a declaration in verse one. He declares at the very beginning that Jesus is the Christ, He's the son of God. And then every incident throughout the rest of the book of Mark is is Mark proving that fact that, that He's the Christ, the Son of God. And so something extraordinary happened when Jesus showed up, because when he shows up beginning of the Book of Mark prophecy, hundreds of year old, is is fulfilled. When He's baptized, we baptized dozens of people. This has never happened here. But when He's baptized, the voice of God pierces the sky, proclaiming that He is indeed the son of God. When he's tempted, it's only by Satan, the most powerful being on Earth who wants to stop Him before His ministry even gets started.

When He calls people to follow Him like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, these middle-class small business owners, they drop everything and follow Him. Why? Because He's not ordinary. He's not usual. He's not common. He's one of a kind, unique, special, royal, majestic, glorious. That's who He really is. But we can begin to take that for granted if we're honest. We can see this uncommon person, He can become very common to us. And because He can easily become diminished, my prayer is that this message will have the effect of reviving your wonder, your awe, your amazement at Christ.

My goal is not to show you pictures from my Israel trip. "Oh, great. I was there. There I was there. Oh, look at this. Look at that." Why? Because the reason Capernaum or other places are so glorious is because Jesus was there. That's what's truly glorious. So my hope is that you'll leave saying, "Jesus is wonderful. Jesus is glorious. He is better than anything that I give my attention to. He's better than anything that tries to steal my attention away from Him." That was verse 22, the people that heard Him teaching that day, they were, "astonished." That's my hope for you. Is that like them, you will be astonished at Christ. Verse 27, the people there that day, "were amazed." Stunned, blown away at what? At Christ. That's what I want for you. Your amazement, your wonder, your awe to be lifted up about Christ. And how does that happen? It happens as we meditate on the things that happen in their midst. Why? Because if the things happen in their midst, cause them to be amazed, then that can happen for you and me too. If we let. If even in this moment right now, we allow God's word to do that work in our souls.

Well, let's see one Saturday in Jesus' life, look back at verse 21, "And they," that's Peter, James, John, Jesus, Andrew. "They went into Capernaum and immediately on the Sabbath, He entered the synagogue. And was teaching and they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes." So if you and I were there that day, what would astonish us, verse 22, would be what Jesus said. It would be His teaching. Because His teaching was unlike anything else the people there had ever heard before.

Now, why was Jesus there that day? While the synagogue service happened on Saturday morning, it consisted of prayers, readings of the Old Testament, a sermon and a blessing at the

end. But unlike Christian churches, synagogues did not have pastors. They didn't have regular teachers. What they had was a leader who organized the activities. So the synagogue was the center of activity in the community as well. So aside from worship on Saturdays, it was a meeting place for the community. It was a school. Actually, in Magdala, there's a part of the synagogue that they're like, "This is where the school, this is where the children were taught." It was a courthouse if there was a dispute. So people were there all the time, but they didn't have a teacher. So what the leader of the synagogue would do would be schedule teachers to come in and out every weekend. And that is why Jesus was there that day. It was His turn.

Now, people were astonished, and it wasn't just because Jesus was a better teacher than anyone they'd ever heard. Obviously, He was though. Notice verse 22 says that what it was about His teaching was that unlike the scribes that they were used to hearing at the synagogue, He taught with authority. See, when the scribes taught the Bible, it wasn't with authority. They would just quote other people, "So-and-so said this and rabbi so-and-so said that." Or human tradition or their own minds, that's the stuff they would teach. But remember when Jesus taught, He would say things like in, Matthew five and seven. You've heard it said, but what? But I say to you. You heard other people say this other stuff. But listen, I say this to you." Why? Because He's not quoting anybody else. He's not recycling other people's teachings. He is the authority when he speaks. He's the standard. No one else.

So as we step back and consider this for ourselves, you and I can revive our wonder at Jesus when point #1) ***we remember His teaching is distinctive. His teaching is distinctive, it's one of a kind.*** It's unlike anyone you have ever or will ever hear. It's distinct from every teaching on planet earth. There's no one like Him. This is an awesome response to Jesus' teaching. And it was very common. People marveled at Him. They're blown away. Even the even the religious leaders that hated Him, they marveled at Him. They say that He has no formal training. He's not a real rabbi, He's a carpenter son. How does He know all this stuff? Because He said things that no one had ever heard before with an authority that nobody could ignore.

See, it's common, especially on Christmas and Easter to see TV shows about Jesus and hear things like, "Well, He didn't really say anything unique and He just recycled the teachings of others. He had to go to India to learn everything He said because He didn't learn it all there, He had to find some gurus." All of that is nonsense. First of all, He said nothing that contradicted the Old Testament. So He just explains the Old Testament. But second, the consistent testimony of the people that were there when He spoke was not, "Oh yeah, I've heard that before. Oh yeah, I heard Rabbi said that too." No, it was, "We've never heard anything like this. There's something special, unique about this man, Jesus."

By the way, there's no evidence Jesus went to India you know to get taught anything. There is evidence that He is an expert in the Old Testament, that's for sure. And there is evidence that He's the God-man so that He taught what He did with unique content and authority because He is God who came to save us from our sin.

So I want you to think about it, if that's all true, which it is, when when your heart begins, if your heart begins to take Jesus for granted, when it gets enamored with other things, lesser things, because, "I've heard all that before." When we lose the wonder that should belong to Jesus alone remember that what He said, what He taught is unlike anything that has ever been or will ever be taught on this planet. And then add to that, that you get to hear it.

You know there's still unreached people groups on this planet, people who've never heard of Jesus, people who don't have a Bible in their own language. It's not just in the jungles of South America or the deserts of Africa. No. Back in September, my wife Katie and I, we went to New England and visited a pastor that our church supports. And he told me that most of the people around him in New England have never heard of Jesus. That his church is actually a mission to make Jesus known to people, listen, for the very first time, in America. I had a lady, one of our members last night, confirm this for me. She said, "I grew up in Massachusetts and I never heard a word about Jesus until I came here." I talked to another couple after the last service who said, "Our our daughter and our son-in-law were thinking about going to Uganda, but realize that there is more of a need for people to be evangelized in Boston." So they're moving to Boston instead of Uganda because people need to hear about Him there because they don't.

And listen, that's not you. That's not you. You've heard about Him. You've been given a massive mountain of grace just to hear the unique message of Jesus, let alone be impacted by it. His teachings are one of a kind in the history of the world and you've gotten to hear it. Teaching that leads people to eternal salvation. Teachings that have led also to the greatest influence for good in the history of the world. Don't take that for granted. Don't see that as no big deal. It is massive. It is huge because no one and nothing is like Jesus and the truth that He taught.

Now, Jesus' authority wasn't just on displaying what He said. It's also on displaying what happened next. Okay, verse 23. "And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit." So in the middle of this message, this demon-possessed man suddenly shows up, which reminds me that demon-possesses people and even demons themselves, if they're there at the synagogue that day, it reminds me that they could be here at church too. That demons come to church.

Demon possession. What is that? It describes a distinct, evil personality or personalities who indwell and take control of a person who's totally passive under their control. Now, demonic possession was not common in the in the Bible. So there's not a single person who's demon-possessed in the Old Testament. There are only two instances of demon possession outside of the gospels. Acts 16 and Acts 19. So why is why is it in hyper drive in the gospels? Well, it's because they are bent on discrediting and destroying Jesus. That's why. Also, just in case you're wondering, demon possession is not how ancient people understood physical illness. And it's not their way of saying mentally unstable because nobody really understood what was going on until Sigmund Freud was born. No, these disgusting, wicked, invisible, pathetic, nonphysical entities are servants of Satan. And they had made themselves at home in this man.

How? We're not told. But knowing the culture at the time and how much mixture there was of Judaism and occultism, this guy was probably dabbling in idolatry, anti-God religion like the occult and the demons came in. But when Jesus starts preaching, they can't hide themselves anymore. They couldn't help themselves in His presence. They couldn't help but burst out. Why? Satan tried to destroy Jesus just a couple verses before in His temptation, but it didn't work. So these guys are dispatched not to destroy Him, but they're dispatched to this to this synagogue to try to discredit Jesus among the people of Capernaum. See, everyone in the synagogue saw this man totally controlled by group of demons, who uses his body and manipulates his vocal cords, verse 23, to cry 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."

The King had come and just like, remember when you were a kid and you would lift a rock and what would happen? All the bugs would scurry and freak out because of the light. Well, that's what's happening here. Light of the World shows up at church and these things just cannot handle it. So they just explode and scurry and scream. Why? They knew Jesus. Colossians 1:16 says that He created them. They were in the very presence of God and they felt the strong difference between Him and them and their hatred boils over. They blow their cover. They can't handle it. Demons hide in false religion. But these couldn't stay hidden because God had arrived. But notice they tried to discredit Him. They call Him Jesus of what? Of Nazareth. That just kind of passes us by, but but don't forget the saying that was common at the time about Nazareth is what? Nothing nothing good comes from Nazareth. "So let me just tell you everybody, this guy's from Nazareth, ha ha ha. What a moron."

Oh, and notice what they say too, where it says, "What have you to do with us?" That's a Hebrew idiom for go away. "What have you to do with me? Get out of here. You're not welcome here. Get out of here. You don't belong here. Mind your own business. Get out of my face." That's what they're saying. And notice it's not just one. Did you see the word, us, there? There's more than one demon in this poor man. But even at their great numbers, they resented Jesus' presence. The King is intruding on their domain. He was too close for comfort. They didn't like it. That's why they say, "Are you there to destroy us?" He's a threat to their existence. They have no hope of stopping Him. They're no match Him. They know that they're in trouble. 1 John 3:8 says, "Jesus appeared to destroy the works of the devil." So they're afraid and defiant at the same time. They hate Him because compared to them, He is, verse 24, "The Holy One of God."

In the Old Testament, that's a title for God. In the New Testament, that's a title for Jesus because Jesus is God. By calling Him this, these wicked, unclean, pathetic demons acknowledge the one who is teaching in the synagogue that day was God himself. And they know they're in trouble. He's going to destroy them. When His kingdom is established, they're done. 1,000 years into the abyss with their master, and then they come out only to be cast in the Lake of Fire forever, Revelation 20. They don't want that, so they scream at Him. And notice His compassionate authority. Verse 25. "But Jesus rebuked him saying, 'Be silent and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him."

See, the exorcists of that day they would show up with their prayers and incantations and spells and techniques and magic, all for a price by the way. Jesus just speaks. And the demons have no other option but to obey Him immediately. They give one last expression of defiance by shaking the man and screaming and throwing him down. But regardless of the show that they put on, they are no match for just a few words from the mouth of the King. And really, you just have to stand in awe at Jesus who didn't flinch before some things that would freak all of us the heck out, right? We'd be no match for. But if He's going to be the savior of the world, He has to be able to save souls from Satan. And this event confirms that He is no mere man. He truly is the Christ, the Son of God.

And now as we consider that for ourselves, that this event is going to help us revive our wonder at Christ, we must, point #2) ***confess His power is dominant. Confess His power is dominant, His power is all mighty.*** It can't be stopped, it can't be overcome. His power controls, dominates, overcomes any and all resistance. Just think about what you what you probably know about Him already. It wasn't just demons, right? All disease, natural disasters, even death was no match for His power, right? And think about it. His power came through His wording, came through what He said. He didn't do parlor tricks. He didn't put on a show. He just spoke, and disease disappeared. He just spoke, demons fled. He spoke, and violent storms were were calmed immediately.

Yesterday, my four-year-old, Emma, came into my room and she said, "Daddy, will you read me a Bible story?" So I opened her Bible up where the bookmark was, and the Bible fell open to Jesus healing Jairus' daughter. Remember this? Mark chapter five. She's so sick, her daddy's worried. So daddy runs over to Jesus and says, "Please come to my house. My daughter's sick. Will you please heal her?" Takes a little while for them to get there. And in the time that it took for them to show up at the house, what happened? Jairus' daughter died. When Jesus finally arrives with the dad and tells everybody, "She's not dead, she's just sleeping." And what does everybody do there? They laugh at Him. So He kicks them all out of the house, takes the parents, takes a couple of His disciples, goes into the room, takes her little hand, says, "Little girl, get up." And she did. Why? Because when Jesus speaks, death is defeated. That's power, that's dominating, commanding supremely superior power to any and all expressions of power that you and I will ever or have ever seen.

See, He may have been God-veiled in human form, but in the moments like this, when His superior divine power burst forth, His power was unmistakably dominant. Just as you consider the dominating power of Jesus, let this truth revive your wonder that nothing that we see is powerful. No power that grabs our all like the roar of a rocket or the splitting of an atom, that that none of that can even come close to the power and strength and might of king Jesus. Any displays of power that you and I have ever or will ever see in our lives are pathetic. They're infinitesimal, the very edges of what the God of the universe can do and that God came to earth in Christ.

"Pastor, I already know that. Calmed the storm, healed the sick. I know that." No, let these truths revive your wonder. Let them help you stand in awe afresh at the Savior. Well, we already know how the people responded to His teachings. Well, let's see how they respond to this. 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.' And at once His fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee." So verse 22, they're astonished at His teaching. Verse 27, they're amazed at His authority over demons. Again, there's nothing common or ordinary about Jesus. This was all, verse 27, new to them. Why? Because every weekend there was just the same thing. But this weekend, the kingdom of God broke into their very existence through what Jesus said and what Jesus did. And notice there were just some of them that were amazed and others were taking a nap. Look at verse 27 again. "They were," what? "All amazed." Every one of them stood in wonder and awe at Jesus again because of what He taught them, because of how He taught them with authority and because of how the demons responded to Him when He told them to leave this man. And then Jesus may have told the demons in verse 25 to be silent, but the people there that day, they were not silent. Verse 28, "They spread it far and wide." They left the synagogue that day, went to their buddy's house. "Hey, you shouldn't have slept in through church today. You should have been there. Something happened that's never going to happen again. It was amazing. It was incredible." And that spreads all over that region, the pictures that I showed you earlier.

Well, think about it, what is it that's behind Jesus' teaching? What is it that was the power working through this exorcism of this man? What is it that gave Jesus the authority to do what He did? Or was it that gave Him power to overcome this crew of demons? Again, a crew of demons, that in our own strength we would be no match for whatsoever? The answer to these questions is the third reason why our wonder, our awe, our amazement at Jesus can be revived. This can happen for us when point #3) ***we admit His authority is divine. We admit His authority is divine.*** It's authority in His teaching, authority over the demons. That's the structural key that unites the whole passage. And then this authority is divine authority. The unique teaching, the dominating power, the authority that was dripping from everything Jesus said and did is because verse 24, He is the Holy One of God.

It's a consistent message of Mark and John, which we're normally going through, that Jesus does what He does because He is the Son of God, which means He is God come to save us from our sins. You and I, we must be constantly amazed at the truth that God became one of us to save us from our sin. When our doubts start to take over and what we're facing is too much to bear. When our wonder shifts from Christ to lesser things, when we feel like God has abandoned us, let us return to this one fact; God himself left heaven became a human being and not just any human being, but a despised, rejected and murdered human being to save human beings from their sin.

Question, does that capture your wonder still, like it once did? Has that singularly wonderful act of divine grace, has that become white noise? No big deal. "Yeah, preacher, I already know that. Take me to the deep stuff. That's that's kindergarten, Jesus died for me. Take me to the good

stuff." Does it still fill your heart with joy? Does it still cause you to weep? Do you stand in awe at this? Does it motivate your love and your obedience and your worship for God? That God became a man to save men from their sins? I hope after today that it does. I hope after today that this wonder and awe for Christ has been ignited a little bit or the flames have been fanned a little bit in your heart.

I hope so, because it didn't for Capernaum. Capernaum, coastal town, prime real estate, a most successful city in Galilee because of its location and all the commerce that took place there. But Jesus was no big deal to them. He wasn't wonderful. He didn't stay astonishing or amazing to these people. They didn't heed His message. They didn't think he was worthy enough to follow. And because of that, Jesus cursed Capernaum. Listen to Matthew 11:23. Jesus put it this way, He says to the people, "You Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?" Rhetorical question answer, no. In fact, you will be brought down to Hades. Why? He says, "Because if the mighty works done in you," mighty works like we just read about, "If the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day." They would have repented if the stuff I did in Capernaum had been done in Sodom. But, Jesus continues, "I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

Oh, Jesus, meek and mild, butterflies in His hair. Well, was Jesus right? Here's a picture I took in Capernaum just last Friday. This is what it looks like now. Exactly as Jesus said it would be, cursed. It's no longer a bustling metropolis with businesses and restaurants, hotels, shops, and tons of people. It is ruined and it is empty. And it's amazing to stand in a town where Jesus once stood, don't get me wrong. But you cannot tell the story of Capernaum without telling the rest of the story. And the rest of the story means that Capernaum is a tragic and persistent warning to not take Jesus lightly, to not ever take Him lightly. It matters when you treat Jesus like He's no big deal, that He's low on your list of priorities, that He's really nothing all that special, that you can just take or leave Him. And it's really no big deal.

It is a massive deal. And this picture shows you. So may nobody within the sound of my voice ignore Jesus, treat Him as if He's irrelevant. Oh, there's so many things that are so much better and so much more wonderful. No, there isn't. He is extraordinary in everything He said. He's extraordinary in everything He did, because He is God. For some, I beg you, let these truths activate in you a wonder for Christ, a wonder and awe and amazement that would then drive you to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to give your life to Him. "I've heard this my whole life." So what? It's true. "Oh, I'm bored of it." That's on you. This is true. This is real. This is this is more real than anything you ever interacted with. Right here, right now. He is truly wonderful. He's better than anything you could give your life to. So may that truth drive you to give your life to Him. And for the rest of us, let these truths capture or recapture or sustain or revive your wonder at our truly wonderful Christ. Let's pray.

Jesus, like I said, it is remarkable to stand in places that You once stood, to see mountains and hills and a body of water that Your eyes looked at as well. But what's truly amazing or really awful, is that Capernaum and Bethsaida and Chorazin, all cities that You taught in, all cities You

did miracles in, all cities that You frequented, are all in ruins today because they ignored You. They didn't think You were all that wonderful. Just kind of common. So please use this word about You to grab a hold of our heart, to grab a hold of our minds and to increase and to sustain and offer You that You deserve. That would be such proof of Your kindness to us, that You would work in our sinful hearts to align our hearts with reality, which is that there is no one greater. There's no one higher. There's no one more wonderful. There is nothing better than You. That's the truth. Align our hearts to that so that we recognize and realize and worship over the fact that all we truly have in life and death is You. We pray this for the glory of Your name. Amen.