

“Divine Authority” – Mark 1:21-45

I’ve been proceeding, verse by verse, through the Gospel of Mark. I started this series back on May 28 and we’re still in Chapter 1. Scripture is so rich, with so much important doctrine embedded, I find I just have to take my time. But this morning, we’ll pick up the pace a bit.

Mark starts his gospel abruptly and he skips over some stuff. There’s no account of Jesus’ parents, His birth or His early life. He mostly ignores what has been called the “year of obscurity”, the first year of Jesus’ earthly ministry. (You have to read John 1:15-4:42 to learn about that period.) So, as we pick up the story this morning, Jesus is in the province of Galilee. His is a ministry of preaching the Gospel, but it is also a ministry of relationship. Last week, we saw how he called the first four Apostles to full-time service. Let’s now pick up the account with verse 21 and we’ll read all the way to the end of the chapter.

Read Mark 1:21-45

I know this is an unusually large bite of scripture for me to preach from, but as I studied this week, I realized that there is one concept that binds all these vignettes together. Mark directs our attention to it in verses 21 and 22. Jesus essentially made Capernaum His headquarters after He had been rejected in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-31). This town was an important commercial center on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and it was also in the heart of one of the most populous districts in Palestine. On the Sabbath, Jesus showed up at Synagogue and began to teach and the folks there immediately realized there was something different about Him.

And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:22)

Now, the scribes were the intellectuals of their day. They were men of letters, professional interpreters of Scripture. We would call them doctors of theology today. They spent their entire lives studying the Rabbinic tradition and they were able to debate the tiniest detail, minute distinctions with regard to Levitical requirements of the Law. They were nitpickers. They generally missed the forest for the trees. And any authority they had was at best second-hand.

In contrast, Jesus is the Word of God. He’s not just the messenger; He is the message. As John writes:

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:18)

And the writer of Hebrews says that our Lord is the brightness of His glory and the express image of God’s person, (Hebrews 1:3). Philip, when He asked Jesus to show him the Father, got this reply:

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; (John 14:9)

Jesus is God. No wonder He exercises Divine Authority! No wonder His teaching in the Synagogue blew those folks away! He was giving them first-hand information. His message was alive, compelling, and absolutely true. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and anyone who wants to get to God, must go through Him.

Do you want to experience God today? Then experience Jesus. Experience all that He is. Learn everything you can about Him. And here is your source; right here. This Bible is

Christocentric; it is all about Jesus from the opening pages of Genesis to the closing lines of Revelation.

Not only does Jesus teach with authority, He demonstrates His authority over all of creation. We see it here, and we will continue to see it as we make our way through this Gospel. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless, human life, but He never ceased to be God the Son. He never abdicated His authority. And boy, is that ever apparent in verses 23 and 24:

Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:23-24)

These verses, and others like it, bring to mind the words of James:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (James 2:19)

Demons are fallen angels, created beings who sided with Satan when he rebelled against God. And yes, they are still active in the world today. But the crazy thing is, they know they have already been defeated. They don't stand a chance against Jesus. They never did. Satan himself is raging right now, knowing that he has but a short time. (Revelation 12:12)

This unclean spirit recognized Jesus. He recognized Him as the Holy One of God, that is, the One who is perfectly sinless. And He recognized that Jesus came to destroy all the works of the devil. This spirit will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire and seeing the face of Jesus terrified him.

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. (Mark 1:25-26)

All the Lord had to do was issue the command. The powers of darkness are forced to obey.

Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." Mark 1:27)

Jesus exercises complete authority over demons. He has authority over Satan.

Not only that, He has authority over disease. Disease is a fact of life in this fallen creation, but it won't always be so. A day is coming when Jesus will return and this universe will be transformed. There will be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. But even today, Jesus exercises authority over every malady that infects human beings.

Peter's mom was sick with a fever. Jesus came in, took her by the hand, lifted her up and immediately, she was well. By the way, He did this on the Sabbath. Those religious authorities would complain about this sort of thing. They considered healing to be work, which was forbidden on the Sabbath. But Jesus has authority over the Sabbath.

After dark, a bunch of folks came to Him.

At evening, when the sun had set ... (Mark 1:32a)

Sabbath ends at sunset. Apparently, these folks didn't want to risk violating the Sabbath.

... they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. (Mark 1:32-33)

And of course, our compassionate Lord took care of them.

Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; (Mark 1:34a)

But then, we see a curious detail:

He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him. (Mark 1:34b)

That's unusual. Most so-called exorcists like to have the demons speak. It's good for business. Why did Jesus not want the demons to speak? Mark doesn't really give us an answer. Some have suggested that Jesus didn't want to stimulate an early crisis, as He would go to the cross at the divinely ordained time, and not one minute sooner. Others suggest that Jesus wasn't interested in testimony coming from the forces of Satan. Please don't spend too much time worrying about it. Here is the important point: **they obeyed**. They didn't have any other choice. Jesus has authority over sickness and over the powers of darkness.

Here's one you might miss. Jesus has authority over every human agenda.

The next morning, Jesus went out to a solitary place to pray. By the way, if prayer was so important to the Holy One of God, don't you think it should be important to us? Every one of us needs to spend time alone with God, time alone with Jesus. But I digress.

Peter and the boys went out to find Him.

When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." (Mark 1:37)

Jesus had become a popular fellow in Capernaum. There were more people with needs. There was much work to do. I think Peter was exhorting Him to come back and take advantage of His popularity. But look what Jesus said in verse 38:

But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth." (Mark 1:38)

As we read through the Gospels, we see this over and over again. Jesus simply wasn't going to conform to anyone else's agenda. Or to put it another way, Jesus has authority over agendas. He has authority over your agenda! He has authority over mine too.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

You know that the very next breath you take could be your last, don't you? As Christians, we especially should seek out the Lord's will. Let Jesus take control. He has authority over your agenda.

But here is another curious thing: Jesus' authority does not completely negate human volition. Now, I need to say this to my Calvinist friends, please wait until I finish before you accuse me of attacking the sovereignty of God. All I'm saying is that God, by His

sovereign will, allows human beings a certain amount of freedom to make choices. But of course, He will always superintend those choices to bring about His perfect will.

In verses 40-45, we have an account of Jesus healing a leper. That's not at all surprising. Jesus healed lots of folks. He healed lots of lepers. But after the leper was healed, Jesus said this:

"See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (Mark 1:44)

And, of course, the guy did just the opposite.

However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction. (Mark 1:45)

Do you notice a contrast between this leper and the various unclean spirits that Jesus encountered? When Jesus told the demons to shut up, they obeyed, but this bozo did exactly the opposite of what Jesus told him to do.

Now, let's not be too hard on the guy. I'm sure he was really excited and thankful. I'm sure he wanted to share all Jesus had done for him. He probably couldn't help himself. But this illustrates a point. God has granted human beings a certain amount of volition. You do have a choice. God communicates His will. You can choose to obey or you can choose to disobey.

Please understand, human volition is extremely limited. Ultimately, God's sovereign will is going to prevail and a time will come when ...

... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:10-11)

Some will confess with the abject fear of demons. Some will confess with the joy of knowing they are part of His own family. No matter what choices you make in this life, God's decretive will is never going to be derailed. He is working all things together according to the council of His will. (Ephesians 1:11)

Jesus possesses divine authority. He has authority over all truth. He has authority over demons. He has authority over disease. He has authority over every agenda. At the end of Matthew, He says:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18)

What Jesus says, goes. The question is, are you willing to obey?

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Why not take Him up on that gracious offer? Go to Him. Put on His yoke and let Him control your life. He'll give you rest. Believe me, He can do it because He has all authority. He has Divine Authority.