

Authority in the Synagogue

Mark 1: 21-28

As we continue moving through the Gospel of Mark, bear in mind that he is writing primarily to a Roman audience, seeking to portray Jesus as the Servant of Men. It is a dialogue that moves rapidly from one event to the next. The fast pace, with which Mark wrote, skipped over several accounts and details that were recorded in Matthew and Luke. It is believed that the timeframe between [Verse 13](#), following Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and [Verse 14](#), dealing with the imprisonment of John, is about a year. It is also believed that Jesus' popular Sermon on the Mount was delivered between [Verses 20 and 21](#). This time period included Jesus' ministry in Nazareth, calling other disciples and being rejected of His own people. It doesn't appear that Mark sought to minimize those accounts, but for whatever reason, he chose not to include them in his Gospel.

Our text picks up after a period of time following the call of Andrew, Peter, James, and John. Jesus is found within the synagogue at Capernaum, teaching the Word. Capernaum served as a home-base for Jesus' ministry. As He taught and ministered among the people that day, it quickly became evident that Jesus was no ordinary man. He spoke with authority and exercised power that captured the attention of those present within the synagogue. As we look in on that day of teaching, I want to examine the [details](#) of this encounter as we consider: [Authority in the Synagogue](#).

I. His Authority in the Scriptures (21-22) – These verses reveal the authority with which Jesus spoke as He expounded upon the Scriptures in the synagogue. Notice:

A. His Passion (21) – [And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.](#) We do know that some time has passed since the last details we have, but Mark reveals that when they came into Capernaum, Jesus immediately went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Now, some may argue that any good Jewish man would have been found in the synagogue on the Sabbath, but I am convinced this reveals the passion Jesus had for the Word and the house of God. We know, according to John's Gospel, that Jesus was the Word incarnate. He is the Living Word. Jesus is immediately found in the synagogue, teaching the Word, going about His Father's business.

- The example of Jesus ought to generate a hunger within the believer to study the Word of God and be found at the house of God. It isn't a burden, but a privilege. Our relationship with Christ alone should compel us to seek His Word and fellowship with His people at His house.

B. Their Perception (22a) – **And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.** As Jesus rose to teach, those present immediately noticed this man was unique. He wasn't like the others; He spoke with authority, having an intimate knowledge of doctrine. They were literally astonished – *being struck with amazement and wonder*. His teaching was not what they expected, but it certainly made an impact on those who heard Him!

C. His Persuasion (22b) – **And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.** Mark declared that Jesus taught differently than other men. He was not as the scribes, but one who taught with authority. His words and teaching were not centered on the teachings of other scribes or surrounded with Jewish law and tradition. He had not come to appeal to their human interest. He came to speak the Word in truth and power. His words resonated with the crowd without the approval of others or references to the teachings of other mortals. He delivered a message unlike any they had heard before.

- While it is impossible for mere mortals to possess the wisdom of Christ, these principles apply today. Those who teach and preach the Word should allow the Scripture to speak for itself. It doesn't need to be propped up by the opinions of men. It doesn't need our personal preferences interjected into it. We are not asked to manipulate the Scripture in order to appeal to modern society. We must be faithful to deliver the text as it is written, allowing the Word to speak!

II. His Authority over the Spirits (23-26) – As Jesus taught in the synagogue, he encountered a man with an unclean spirit. Mark revealed the authority Jesus possessed over the spirits. Notice:

A. The Resistance (23) – **And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out.** In the audience that day was man with an unclean spirit. As Jesus was teaching the Word with power and authority, the spirit within the man caused him to cry out during Jesus' teaching. The spirit was uncomfortable in the presence of Jesus and sought to resist His teaching. The multitude was astonished at Jesus' teaching and the devil always seeks to hinder the reception of truth, even if Jesus Himself was teaching. (This same resistance remains today. We can expect the enemy to put forth an effort to hinder the truth of God's Word from being proclaimed and received.)

B. The Recognition (24) – **Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.** Although the spirit was uncomfortable with Jesus' teaching, and wanted to resist truth being proclaimed, it had to

recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Holy One of God. The spirit actually feared Jesus had come to destroy it, and wanted nothing to do with Him.

- While the spirit had no desire to be in the presence of Jesus, it did acknowledge His deity. The devil will work against the Lord and those who seek to serve Him until he is cast into the lake of fire, and yet he knows Jesus is the Christ. Sadly, many today will not acknowledge Jesus as Lord today. They refuse to admit their need for Him or the deity He possesses. Just as this unclean spirit, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ in Lord, whether in submission at salvation or in condemnation at the Great White Throne.

C. The Rebuke (25) – *And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.* Jesus commanded the spirit to remain quiet and come out of the man. Just as Jesus possessed and revealed absolute authority in the Scriptures, He also possessed absolute authority over this unclean spirit. He had the power to rebuke the spirit and direct its action. Jesus wasn't about to allow this unclean spirit to continue disrupting His teaching or resist His authority.

D. The Response (26) – *And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.* Upon hearing the command of Jesus, the spirit was forced to obey. The Lord had given the command and the spirit departed. It wasn't pleased with the actions of Jesus, causing the man to convulse, and crying with a loud shriek as it departed. The spirit had no choice but to depart, but it wasn't pleased with being cast out.

- No doubt this would have been an unsettling experience, and yet it offers hope and assurance to the believer. We serve One who possesses all power. He has authority over creation, humanity, and even the forces of Satan and evil. As His command, evil has to flee. We will face nothing that Jesus cannot control. While our situation wasn't as graphic, we too were bound by sin and evil. Our lives were controlled by sin and the lusts of the flesh. Like this man, we were unable to provide for our deliverance. Jesus made the way of redemption for us, and I rejoice for the day He delivered me from sin and condemnation!

III. The Awareness of the People (27-28) – Following the unclean spirit being cast out, the people became keenly aware that Jesus was no ordinary man. Mark recorded their awareness of Him. Consider:

A. Their Amazement (27a) – *And they were all amazed...* This should come as no surprise, but we discover the people were all amazed. They stood astonished at His teaching and they stood

amazed as He cast the unclean spirit from the man. He not only had the ability to speak with authority, but His words had authority over evil spirits. Clearly this Man was unique, unlike any they had ever encountered.

- *“I stand amazed in the presence Of Jesus the Nazarene; And I wonder how He could love me, A sinner condemned, unclean. Chorus: How marvelous, how wonderful, And my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful Is my Savior’s love for me.”* We must never lose our awe and wonder for Christ our Lord. His presence and power is beyond comprehension, and yet I rejoice for His provision and grace in my life!

B. Their Acceptance (27b) – *And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.* While they were unable to explain what had happened, there was no doubt that a miracle had been performed before their eyes. They had never heard someone teach with such authority and conviction. They had never encountered one who had authority over the unclean spirits. They stood amazed in the presence of Jesus and acknowledged His power!

- I am happy to report that there are none who compare to Jesus. He alone has the power to heal and redeem. He alone has the power to deliver from sin, taking a heart of stone and transforming it into a heart of flesh. He alone can breathe eternal life into one who is dead in trespasses and sin! I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene!

C. His Acclaim (28) – *And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.* One really couldn’t expect a different response. Following such an eventful Sabbath at the synagogue, Jesus’ fame immediately began to spread throughout all Galilee. The people were unable to remain quiet about the wonder they had witnessed that day. They had to share it with everyone they met.

- What a challenge for the modern church. We encounter the Lord’s mighty presence and authority every day. We too have witnessed deliverance from sin through His power and grace. He continues to speak with authority through His Word, guided by the Holy Spirit, and yet we go about our lives as if we have encountered nothing worthy of repeating. I pray we will become like those in the text, determined to make Him known to a world that desperately needs His touch! Let’s tell everyone we know about Jesus Christ, our gracious and loving Lord.

Conclusion: While we are thousands of years removed, this passage is relevant for our day. Jesus has not changed. He still speaks with authority and has the ability to deliver from the bonds of sin. The church must be willing to proclaim Him to a lost and dying world. If there are needs in your life, especially salvation, come to the One who possesses all power and authority!