



Speaker:  
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## The Synagogue Demoniac

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 4 of 4

5/20/2020 (WED) | Bible: Mark 1:21-28

We shall have a look today at Mark's first chapter and verses 21 to 28.

Last time we looked at the calling of the disciples by Jesus to a full-time ministry role. It says in verse 21 that they went into Capernaum. This was one of the small fishing villages on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. We read here that on the Sabbath Jesus visited the synagogue. I'm assuming that the disciples went with him.

I couldn't help but notice the word "straightway". It suggests a sense of urgency and this reflects the tone of the whole of Mark's gospel. As we'll see. Words like this occur far more frequently in Mark's gospel than in the others.

It wasn't uncommon for the leaders in synagogues to invite visitors to speak. So they invited this visitor to address the meeting, still oblivious to his identity as their Messiah. The congregation was stunned when they heard him speak. They were, it says, "astonished".

We're not told what the content of Jesus' teaching was. Could this be the occasion when he first began to reveal himself from the scriptures? Was it only that he spoke with an air of authority as one who believed in his message, or was it rather the case that they saw in his doctrinal teaching claims that he was the prophesied Messiah?

The people immediately noticed that this teaching was unlike anything they'd heard spoken by the Scribes. Yet presumably many in the congregation had continued to attend the Sabbath meetings despite there being no authoritative preaching being carried out there!

We can see the same thing today. In our country. In our city. Men and women in ministry roles who have NO IDEA what the gospel is. This could describe the great majority of churches in our land. And we can imagine the different reactions that would be seen if a true preacher of righteousness were to be given the opportunity to address these congregations. We have those types who would be offended at the truth of the word of God. Yet I believe there are out there those types who would be amazed and blessed and challenged by such a message and would want to hear more.

I have no qualms about preaching in a Roman Catholic church, a Mormon temple, a Russelite Kingdom Hall or a mosque. Provided that I would not be expected to join in their acts of so-called worship, I'd consider it a great opportunity to be a witness for Jesus

Christ. There is of course a risk attached to this in that ecumenical zealots might try to report this as some kind of joint venture. But the Apostle Paul took that risk and so would I.

What made these words of Jesus so much more confusing and shocking for the people is their knowledge of where he came from and what his background was. Assuming Jesus was known as a mere carpenter accompanied by some friends who were common fishermen we can perhaps understand a little of why the people we're so taken aback. Jesus Christ's teaching was unusual and special.

- Whereas the Scribes' preaching was largely based on the sayings of elders down the centuries, including quotes from the Talmud, Jesus expounded scripture directly with a confidence in his interpretation of it
- Whereas they laid emphasis on the wrong things, Jesus had a right perspective
- Whereas the Scribes were often lacking in compassion in, for example, evicting widows from their homes, Jesus spoke with a heart of love
- Whereas the Scribes preached with uncertainty, Jesus spoke not only facts about the scriptures but as one who clearly had a living relationship with the author of those scriptures

I should say something about who the scribes were. There were no academic requirements for the job apart from an ability to write and be diligent in copying faithfully. As the scripture scrolls were worn out through use, it was necessary to copy them—by hand of course. And this was the Scribes' role. It was probably unintentional, but it was discovered that in copying the scriptures the Scribes had become so familiar with them that they became quite knowledgeable and were consulted by the people on doctrinal matters.

We live in a digital age and have no need for Scribes. Yes even Christians can learn something from the experiences of those men. Jesus has ordained preachers to expound the word of God to his people. But there is still great benefit in the individual believer making it a habit to read the scriptures frequently. I should then encourage you to get into that habit if you are not already.

Jesus was not the only unusual visitor in the synagogue that day. Another came in. But whereas Jesus was filled with the Spirit of godliness, this man was filled with a spirit of wickedness. It says that he was possessed with a demon.

It's very notable that real demon possession seems to have been limited to the time of Jesus and the apostles. I was reading about a Christian man who was a doctor (a physician) who had significant experience working with people suffering from mental health issues. And this man spent some time as a missionary. During this time he encountered many claims that the people in the communities were demon possessed. After years in the field he concluded that he had not encountered even one genuine case of demon possession. He didn't deny that many people were variously under demonic influence. But it was his opinion that demon possession was in the purposes of God limited to a certain era.

It's clear from the Bible that angels, both good and bad, dwell in a different *dimension* shall we say. But we've seen how they are able under the direction of almighty God to manifest

themselves in the material world. Everyone who's ever lived, including you and I, has been influenced by Satan or his demons. But their activity is to encourage you to stir up those residual, sinful tendencies within you. What we read here is a level of demonic influence so different that the demons themselves are said to be *within* a person and need to be evicted.

When we think about the crushing defeat Satan had experienced in his wilderness attack on Jesus, it's no marvel that this is followed by a flurry of his activity. Yet it was this unprecedented manifestation of demonic activity that allowed the Lord Jesus Christ to show his power over the realm of devils by ordering them to obey his commands.

I want us to analyse the words of this demon in our account as it gives us tremendously useful insight into the thinking in the enemy camp.

The first part of the statement was "Leave us alone". *Go away. Leave us to get on with what we want to do.* We see the same attitude in, if you like, the *normal* people of this world. In another incident where Jesus exorcised numerous demons from a man, he sent those demons into a herd of pigs. The pigs were sent into a frenzy and threw themselves into a river where they drowned. Astonishingly the people who witnessed this incredible event did not react rationally. You'd think that seeing the power of God displayed they would bow down and worship Jesus. Have a look at Matthew chapter 8 and Verse 34 to see what DID happen. It says, "And behold the whole city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."

How tragic that the people of this world prefer to side with Satan and tell Jesus to leave them alone.

This devil continues with "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?" *We have nothing to discuss. How about we stay out of each other's way?* Again this is nothing less than a description of this evil world. The people of this world reject Jesus. They reject the idea of a sovereign and almighty God who demands obedience and who deserves worship. And they believe that by coming to this decision they can live independently of God! They seem to be unaware of the reality that IT IS GOD WHO KEEPS THEM ALIVE SECOND BY SECOND. This God who they try to not believe in will be their judge at the last day. To think that at the very moment they open their eyes after death they'll find themselves in the dock, in the courtroom of God, facing overwhelming evidence that they are guilty of crimes against God. They'll immediately hate themselves for their rejection of him their whole lives. AND MORE THAN ANY OTHER THOUGHT THAT WILL HAUNT THEM IN THE ENDLESS EXISTENCE IN THE OUTER DARKNESS WILL BE THE REMEMBRANCE OF DESPISING THE REVELATION OF GOD.

- They will regret not acknowledging the complexity and wholly unnecessary beauty and order of this world
- They will regret not searching with their whole hearts for the Creator of this world
- And if they have been privileged to have been exposed to the gospel message, how much more will it torment them that they heard the very voice of Jesus through his witnesses and reacted with *Leave us alone. We have nothing in common and that's how we like it.*

This demon continues with a question: "Art thou come to destroy us?" They knew him. They knew he as God had the power to destroy them all. Friends, Satan and his host may be wicked. They may be blinded to the futility of warring against God and his church. **But they don't lack faith in the fact of their impending judgement.** And it's remarkable that even in the church of God some have less faith even than the devils themselves!

If this man wasn't a regular at the synagogue it's most likely that he either followed Jesus there or was directed to go by his master, Satan, solely to confront Jesus. Panicking because he knew that there was an expiry date on their freedom to disrupt and damage.

I'm conscious that some commentators have suggested that the demons use of the term "Jesus of Nazareth" was meant as an insult. Yes we do see evidence that some people could not accept the status of Jesus as the Christ because he came from a small town of no repute. But this creature goes on to call Jesus "The Holy One of God." The Holy One of God.

One of the arguments we employ to show that Jesus is divine is that many of the titles of God are applied to Jesus also. If you turn to the book of Habakkuk, chapter 1 verse 12 you will read, "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. Oh LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgement; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." The holy one is identified here as **Jehovah. God.** And it's marvellous to witness in the New Testament that some of the most powerful testimonies to the identity of Jesus Christ as the righteous son of God come from the mouths of sinners and demons. AND HERE, AS IF TO CONFOUND THE CLAIMS OF THE HERETICS THAT WOULD VERY SOON EMERGE TO DENY JESUS DIVINITY, THIS AGENT OF SATAN IN THE ONE BREATH SAYS THAT THE MAN JESUS OF NAZARETH IS THE HOLY ONE OF GOD AND THEREFORE GOD HIMSELF. **This is nothing less than a confession of the truth of the incarnation.** That the son of God was willing to leave the glory of his heavenly position behind to be born into this world as a man. And his motive in doing this may have ultimately been the glory of God showcased through the salvation of his elect. *But it was also an act of great love!* WHAT KIND OF UNIMAGINABLE LOVE MUST THERE BE IN THE SWEET SOUL OF JESUS THAT HE WOULD DISMANTLE THE CROSSES ON WHICH WE SHOULD HAVE HANGED IN JUDGEMENT AND INSTEAD CONSTRUCT A SINGLE CROSS ON WHICH HE PLACES HIMSELF? And this unimaginable suffering had such a merit that it could allow God in all justice to set his chosen ones free: **forever.**

If you are not yet trusting in Christ, I present to you two different futures for yourself. One will result in you falling into the hands of an angry God. The other will see you collapse into the arms of an all loving saviour who will set you on your feet, grant to you sonship, introduce you into the very family of God and provide for you a happy existence with him and all his children for ever!

There are examples in the life of Jesus where it appears that events are not panning out exactly as he planned. But we must always remember that behind the twists and turns of the stories that we read lies a God who has arranged all events in history to the fulfilment of his grand purposes.

We see an example of this in Jesus's early attempts to conduct a low-key ministry. There was perhaps a need to avoid a sudden revolution that would bring down huge opposition on his ministry while it was just taking off. And so we read of Jesus performing miracles and explicitly asking the individuals not to broadcast it. Yet some promptly and go off and do the opposite! So then this rebuke of Jesus in verse 25 could be for the same reason. Or the rebuke and the direction to keep quiet could have been because he didn't want such a vile creature to be openly testifying to his true identity. It could give Jesus' enemies ammunition to use against him. They might suggest that Jesus is in league with Satan. And you might remember that elsewhere that very accusation *was* made.

Jesus here not only tells the wicked entity to be silent, but also commands him to leave the man. "Hold thy peace", he says "and come out of him". And the demon obeyed. It says that on his departure the demon tore the man. "Tore him" does give a slightly wrong impression. It implies that some real violence was done against the man by the demon. But doing a little bit of research in the Bible we know that the man was not harmed at all. Most likely the man was suffering a convulsion on the ground.

All the people were left **amazed**. They were confused. They didn't deny the miracle. They knew something significant was going on. But they just didn't get it. I don't like this habit of modern-day Christians looking down their noses on people in the Bible because of their lack of understanding. **We need to remember that the only reason that we understand anything is because of the light that has been given to us undeservedly from God.** But their lack of understanding here is clearly caused by spiritual blindness and deafness. After all they had heard this man preach with great authority perhaps hinting at his identity. They had heard the testimony of his deity and power from one of the representatives of the Prince of Darkness—a most unlikely source. And this exorcism is powerful evidence that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Holy One of God.

If this were a legal hearing to establish the truth about this man Jesus, the tribunal would hear:

- An authoritative claim from Jesus himself
- Evidence of the same from a hostile witness
- And finally, first class evidence presented to them

All disinterested hearers should have concluded that this was the very King of which all the prophets wrote. And as his disciples observe him in his ministry, it may have started to occur to them just how real this all was. Their own calling to the ministry was as a result of a **thoroughly effective call** from Jesus. Now they witness a **thoroughly effective eviction** of an unclean spirit from a man.

The news of the synagogue incident went viral. Even with the absence of phone and internet communication, the news spread like wildfire. If we witnessed an incident like this today we'd regard it as one of the most significant events in our lives. Incredibly this was just one of *thousands* of miracles Jesus performed while on this earth.

The only other thing I wanted to say about this passage was about how we interpret physical healings that Jesus carried out.

Firstly, there is no doubting that **the object of God's mercy in Christ who is delivered from a disease or a disability is receiving a very real change to their lives for the better.** Just one healing of say cerebral palsy would benefit the life of the one healed and bring joy to their whole circle of family and friends!

Secondly, **there is a hope in us that the unbeliever who is so healed, and those people around him, would be so affected by this display of divine power that they would seek to become disciples of Jesus for the remainder of their lives.**

Thirdly, **these physical healings were carried out, and have been recorded for us, to symbolise the *spiritual* healing that takes place when Jesus saves a soul from death.** In gathering in his elect through the preaching of the gospel down the ages, Jesus takes blind, deaf, leprous sinners and give them eyes to see, ears to hear the gospel and a healing of their sin. And such is the perfection of this healing that we received in ourselves the perfect health of *spiritual holiness* that is Christ's.

In closing, allow me to go just a little further and say that, fourthly, **the healing of people's diseases by Jesus Christ gives US a taste of what will be the experience of all those who belong to him in the world to come.** Not only has he forgiven our sins, but he has promised us an eternity of

- No illness
- No disease
- No pain
- No sin
- No influences from Satan
- No arguments
- No doctrinal differences
- No inequalities
- No disruption to fellowship and worship
- And no possibility that we shall ever die.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible" (1Pe 1:4)

Amen.