

# TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: JESUS – HEALER, EXORCIST, PREACHER

MARK 1.21-39

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**M**ark began with an expose of the supernatural nature of Jesus as Son of God and the powers involved in supporting and opposing him. Then Mark clarified the mission of Jesus, which is a kingdom mission dependent upon a message and the messengers who carry it. Now Mark turns to introduce us to Jesus in his particular ministry functions, namely Healing, Exorcism, and Preaching. Along the way we'll see two issues become prominent: The Authority of Jesus and the Purpose of Jesus. Let's look at 3 stories which, based on time indicators, really comprise 3 parts of one story from v21 to v39. Afterward we'll consider some points of application.

So in the first story Jesus enters the synagogue (a synagogue is like a Jewish church in the first century, where Jews met for worship in reading the OT, preaching, prayer, etc) and both teaches and casts out a demon. In both cases the emphasis falls on Jesus' great authority; this is what the people take away as they observe the words and works of Jesus: He possesses a unique prerogative over both truth and the spiritual world which the people have never seen before.

When Jesus teaches he doesn't cite a list of rabbinic authorities to support his points; he simply speaks as though he himself possessed a unique authority over the Scripture and divine truth in general. The people notice this and remark on it.

When a demoniac surfaces in the synagogue Jesus casts out the demon with a word. In the ancient world, while interest in exorcism was common, actual stories of successful exorcisms are very rare. People liked the topic but had almost no power to do the job. And the accounts we have tend to be encumbered by detailed methods for exorcising the demons; in Jesus' case, he simply tells the demon what

to do and the job is done. Often exorcists in the ancient world would seek to gain power over the demon by learning and using its name, or by appealing to some other power or authority. Jesus does neither, since he himself is all the authority he needs to cast out any demon, regardless of its name and identity.

Now the challenge of the demon is worth considering. The demon recognizes Jesus as more than a mere man; some suggest that perhaps the demon names Jesus in order to get power over him! If so, it was a futile attempt. But in the process this lying spirit speaks true by identifying Jesus as God's Holy One. This title may have the force of special or beloved one, and such an idea would fit well as this text comes so soon after the Father's testimony to Jesus in his baptism. Or perhaps we are to notice the contrast between this dirty spirit controlling the man and the Clean Spirit empowering Jesus since his baptism. Imagine a grimy stain on the kitchen floor screaming in fear when it sees the cleaning solution approaching! And this is the demon's fear; it asks whether Jesus has come to destroy the evil powers that have the world in a death grip. Both Jesus' easy exorcism and the demon's recognition of Jesus' identity serve to reveal Jesus as the divinely sent, authoritative Son of God, God's beloved and chosen messenger and King of the coming Kingdom.

In the second story Jesus enters Peter's home and promptly heals his mother-in-law of a debilitating fever, resulting in her serving Jesus and his disciples a meal. That evening at sundown, Sabbath being ended, the crowds come to Jesus for more healing and exorcism, and Jesus complies, freeing many people from their suffering, whether physical or spiritual. Again we witness the efficacy and comprehensiveness of Jesus' authority over physical and spiritual evil. The mother-in-law is healed so quickly and effectively that she gets to work serving the household; the crowds receive varied and comprehensive healing from Jesus no matter their ailment. The authority of Jesus is deep and wide, powerful and complete.

In the third story, or really, the third part of the same story, given the time indicators which hold it all together, Jesus rises early the next morning to go out alone to prayer. The disciples hunt for him not long after to bring him back to his adoring fans, but Jesus will have none of it. If we, the readers, have become confused like the disciples and the crowds about Jesus' actual purpose, Jesus here clears the fog away: Jesus came to preach. He didn't come to exercise a fruitful local ministry in his home town or region, but to itinerate as a preacher of the kingdom. Nor are his miracles of healing and exorcism an end in themselves, since they rather function to draw attention to and prove the opening kingdom which Jesus preaches.

Now this point is important. Notice Mark's comments about Jesus' growing fame as a result of his miracles. Notice also Jesus' silencing of the demons who try to reveal his identity. This is strange to us because we assume Jesus wants all the press he can get in order to succeed in bringing numbers into the kingdom, but that's not the case. On the contrary, Jesus struggles in this Gospel to make clear the true nature of his Sonship to God and his messiahship for a generation whose assumptions on the subject are off track. As growing numbers attend his ministry based on the miracles, and as the people's misguided expectation about Jesus grows, Jesus will repeatedly attempt to slow the growth of his popularity. Why? Almost certainly because of the mistaken notions of the people concerning Messiah. None of them have in mind a Messiah who comes to repair man's relationship with God by dying on the cross, nor do any consider that Jesus came to provide a suffering example of true Christian discipleship; nor would they care for such truths if they did know them! Even Peter must be rebuked later for his surprising lack of spiritual insight about the nature of Jesus' mission; how much more the crowds who are outsiders to Jesus' ministry and teaching?!

What then, is Jesus' purpose? Jesus came to preach about the opening of the kingdom to all who wish to enter; that entrance, however, requires both Jesus suffering in his path to the cross and the disciple's suffering as they follow in his

footsteps. Jesus didn't come to cure material ills, to eliminate sickness, demonism, poverty and political oppression; none of these evils on their own force the sufferer into hell. What does bring men to hell is their wrong view of and wrong relation to God. And a man can only receive true insight into God, and true restoration to God, through the cross-suffering of Jesus and his own genuine suffering-discipleship. So Jesus shuns popularity and acclaim; he avoids settling down in one location to enjoy growing favor and ease. He willingly takes the path his Father has set him and encounters suffering, misunderstanding, deprivation, persecution, and the loss of every good and common comfort men desire. This path climaxes in the suffering and self-surrender of the cross. Jesus rejects every human notion of God's kingdom and every potential success offered him, for none of these accord with his purpose. And Jesus makes perfectly clear that anyone who wishes to enter the kingdom must tread the same path of suffering and self-surrender for the purpose of God. This is what Jesus intended to accomplish in his healing, exorcism and preaching.

So that's the text. Now for some following applications:

First let's consider how the presentation of Jesus' authority should affect us. Authority is right to rule, power to give orders and both demand and enforce obedience. When confronted by Jesus Christ we come face with our highest authority. Whereas lesser authorities call for lesser obedience Jesus calls for total obedience. Whereas limited authorities rightly expect limited submission Jesus demands total submission. And indeed, this total submission biblically considered is barely different from what we mean when we speak of faith. Faith, in one sense, far from being a doing, is rather an undoing. It is the cessation of my corrupt reliance upon myself or other created things. It is me releasing my grip from whatever thing I was using to secure myself against the frightening and painful eventualities of life. Unbelief means I get a good, strong grip on something in creation in order to achieve security, pleasure and comfort. Faith means I let go that grip and hold onto God alone.

Now Jesus is the highest authority. His impressive right to rule should affect us in such a way that we are moved to intelligent and voluntary self-surrender. As we see what power he has over reality and demons we ourselves should also gladly submit to his strong hand and power. He does what he will with morality, truth, Scripture; with ease he commands every unclean spirit ever created and they must obey. When good children hear the voice of a good father their hearts leap to submit and obey; when the good woman receives the directions of a good husband her delight is to give in. Let us also then, being the wife and children of this good God abandon ourselves completely to his decision, power, authority and care; that is to say, let us fully submit ourselves to him in faith and obedience.

Second, let's take warning as we consider how Jesus must continually correct and clarify the purpose of his mission. We are sinners and therefore inclined to superimpose on God what we think his purpose and priorities should be; somehow our superimpositions always consist of worldly comfort, ease and excitement for ourselves, with God standing by in indulgent approval! Have we learned yet that God will even kill our bodies if it means saving our souls? Have we learned that our personal comfort, ease and pleasure are no part of his chief concern for us? If I gave my children their own way, they would while away their entire life in playgrounds and ice cream and fun videos and leisurely vacations. The result would be children becoming adults who are utterly worthless for every good deed. And mark this: They would be miserable in the end; they would have achieved their purpose for themselves, not God's purpose for them, and that means misery. So I don't give my children their own way. I give them discipline and learning and challenge after challenge to turn them into real, live, human beings, capable of knowing and serving their Creator according to their design.

Likewise, God has no intention of suppressing his purpose for us just because we'd like another. Jesus didn't come so we could store up comfort, ease and pleasure for ourselves; **he himself didn't have such things either. His path led to a cross and every day along the path was cross-shaped with suffering, pain and loss.** By the

choices he made God's people are delivered from sin and Satan. But he calls us also to a life of pain and loss, that we might live in the end. That's what Jesus' purpose really is: To bring us into a Jesus-like life where we take his yoke upon us and imitate him for the rest of our time in the world. What was he? A holy man fixed on God's kingdom, calling others to enter in and teaching them how to do so by word and work. To this also you and I are called. Let's not miss his purpose and point, but fully embrace it with all its loss and difficulty.