

The Work of the Servant-King: Jesus Authority on Display

Mark 1:21-45

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This morning we find ourselves in the city of Capernaum. Capernaum was the center of Jesus activities while he was in Galilee. He taught in the local synagogue. It was also the home town of the apostles Peter, James, Andrew, and John, and the tax collector Matthew. Capernaum is located at the north corner of the Sea of Galilee and the Temple was right on the water. As was Jesus custom he spoke often in the synagogues and the synagogue in Capernaum was no exception.

I wish I could've been there that day to witness the things firsthand that we were about to read. The descriptions are vibrant, and in my mind's eye I can see it so clearly. To hear Jesus teach with such incredible authority that the people are amazed. To see Jesus confront demons and heal the sick and preach to the people would be incredible.

Fortunately God has recorded it in Scripture for us so that we can partially be there and so this morning we are going to see inside the heart of the Savior.

Mark 1:21-45

At one time there was a survey on the Internet to see how many of the 50 United States one had visited. I was curious so I took the survey. What was interesting is that I found myself checking off a couple states because I was on an airplane that landed there and took off again. Even though I had "technically" visited that state, truth-be-told, I hadn't stepped foot outside the airport. I couldn't really back-up my claim with any real life experience.

Some Christians are like that. They talk Jesus, the Bible, and their morality, but there is no evidence in their lives that give their testimony any authority.

Jesus was not like that. Neither are those who truly and fully follow him. Jesus' sermons are like thunder because his life is like lightning. Jesus' passion, his feeling, fired his message. So intense was his feeling that he wept over the impenitent city of Jerusalem

In the first half of our text this morning Mark records for us what occurred on one memorable Sabbath day. We're not told what Jesus said in the synagogue that morning, only that the people hearing it were amazed.

The text says in verse 22 that they "were astonished at his teaching." Literally the word means "to strike with panic or shock." It means that his preaching hit them right between the eyes. Jesus' preaching carried a powerful punch.

He was so real, so true, so utterly, passionately sincere. But as important as these factors were, the Bible places the reason for his success on his word: "for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes."

They were probably not excited to come to the synagogue week after week. They were probably getting fairly meaningless teaching. We see that a lot in our churches today. Paul writes to Timothy that in the latter days, people will choose for themselves preachers and teachers who tickle their ears. That is to say people who tell them what they want to hear, or give them a good pep talk, or make them feel good when they leave the service. The scribes, who were largely Pharisees, were always quoting their great teachers. "Rabbi Hillel says . . . But on the other hand Gamaliel says . . . Then there is Rabbi Eleazar's testimony . . ." It was secondhand theology!

Oh, but not when Jesus spoke.

Jesus is not an ordinary prophet who says, "Thus says the Lord!" Rather, he speaks in the first person and claims that His teaching fulfills the OT..." D.A. Carson: The Expositor Bible Commentary – Matthew. He preached God's Word, not about God's Word. He explained the Law and the Prophets. He was clear and simple. He did not say, as Kent Hughes put it, "I am the eschatological manifestation of the Ground of Being, the kerygma in which you will find your ultimate being, if you are supralapsarian, making no excuse, agreeing that God had decreed pre-cooking Adam's goose!"

They were astonished at the content and manner of his teaching.

But let's not mistake their amazement for belief.

Mark highlights Jesus' authority during the two-day account. He emphasizes the reach of Jesus' ministry extended to the outcasts of Jewish society—lepers, demon possessed, and women—who were excluded from full participation in Jewish religious life. This event marks a pivotal point in the progress of the Word from its original Jewish context to the Gentile world.

If you and I want to clearly and plainly communicate through our walk and talk, God's authority must be part of our life. We need not so much to possess the message alone, but rather to let the message possess us. If we want people to see that it is real, we need to be **passionate about it** and **speak** the Word clearly.

Words are important in our testimony.

To say preach the gospel, use words if necessary is like saying feed the hungry, use food as necessary. Faith comes by hearing and hearing....

Suddenly the synagogue service was disrupted by the cry of a man possessed by an evil spirit. Jesus, early in his ministry has already come into conflict with Satan. This is significant, for Jesus came to destroy the power of the devil. For Jesus to redeem the earth and reverse the curse, he would have to have total power over Satan and his demons. In order to rescue fallen humanity he would have to be able to overpower the evil forces that hold men in physical, mental, and spiritual bondage.

The next phrase, stated as a question ("Have you come to destroy us?"), was really a defiant assertion: "You have come to destroy us!" The question, using the word us instead of me indicates that this demon was speaking for many. They clearly seem to recognize Jesus. This is evident not only because they call him Jesus of Nazareth, but because they recognize his mission. The demon realized the menace of Christ and cried with an instinctive expression of dread. He wanted Jesus to disappear, for he knew that Jesus would destroy him.

Christ had been challenged. Can you imagine the silence for a moment in that synagogue? What would Jesus do? Then Jesus responds with the same authority with which he taught, "Be silent, and come out of him."

This man who has lived without joy and wholeness and peace. This man who was hopeless, has now been given hope. In that same hope is available to you and I today.

Sometimes our lives appear miserable, out of control, and impossible. Jesus gives us hope. The gospel of Jesus Christ, is the gospel of love and power and hope - even to the least and worst of us.

Unlike Harry Potter, or Endora on "Bewitched", Jesus needed no magical formulas to cast out this demon. A simple command of "be silent" demonstrated the authority and power of the Son of God.

And in verses 27 and 28, the people respond again. Their amazement, which also reveals some alarm, prompts them to ask one another, "What is this?"

Their response shows that they are not used to this kind of teaching, and its authority. The people had never seen anything like it. Jesus' authority was inherent within himself and the demonic response was immediate.

In verse 29-34 the scene changes. Church is over, and it's time for lunch.

They didn't head off for Chinese, or burgers, or Fazolis, but they headed off to Peter's mother-in-law's home. Can you imagine her anticipation to host Sabbath lunch for Jesus?

Jayne and I have always relished hosting missionaries and out of town pastors and teachers in our home. We love to ask questions and hear of what God is doing in each ministry. But I cannot begin to imagine having Jesus Christ as a table in my home!

What a disappointment it must have been for her to be so sick that she could not prepare and host the meal.

We don't know what caused Peter's mother-in-law's fever, and so it doesn't really matter. We do know that it was serious enough that she was in bed unable to serve. But Jesus, the Servant King, was again prepared to serve.

This healing is described very simply but with interesting detail in verse 31: "And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her and she began to serve them." The cure was instantaneous and complete.

What the healing of Peter's mother-in-law contributes is the additional evidence that Jesus has the power to heal any sickness, instantly. The woman instantly gets to her feet and begins to serve the entire group. Jesus' authority instantly accomplishes what he wills.

Word of this woman's healing quickly spread, so that by supper time there was a large crowd gathered at the door of Peter's home. The law said the Sabbath ended when three stars came out in the night sky. So when the sun had set the stars were out to the people came. In my mind's eye I can imagine a person after person arriving at the door, so that finally there is a surging mass of crippled and diseased people with their friends.

Above all else Jesus' miracles were foretastes of kingdom power. When Jesus healed diseases and restored broken bodies, he previewed the kingdom, in which there would be no sickness or deformity. When he cast out demons, he previewed the kingdom, in which there would be no demonic activity. When he raised the dead, he previewed the kingdom, in which there would be no death.

And Jesus' heart naturally responded with authority in healing power. What an amazing sight! Demons being cast out one after another, crippled people tossing their crutches into the air. Those near-death standing again and speaking. And as amazing as it was, we should not be naïve about what was really going on. Like many of us today they came to simply get something from God. While this is certainly understandable for those who are suffering severe illness, they cared little about the spiritual implications of Jesus' miracles and teaching. While God is not someone to be used, that is exactly what happened here. Jesus was being used by men, but it is against this truth that we see his heart. Jesus genuinely loved these people, so he lovingly served them by healing them.

It is interesting that Jesus muzzles the demons, "because they knew him".

Why this reluctance by Jesus to have the demons reveal him as the Messiah?

Maybe it's as simple as Jesus wanting to show the world what kind of Messiah he really was, compared to what Israel expected and the people wanted.

Jesus, after a busy evening of healings, got up early the next morning and sought a quiet place to pray. As we study Paul's prayers on Sunday evenings, here we see that Jesus himself seeks the strength that only communion and fellowship with the father can provide.

Jesus is the incarnate God himself. So why does Jesus need to pray? When we pray part of our prayer is confession and certainly Jesus had nothing to confess, but certainly there was thanksgiving and adoration and communion with the father in his prayers. And don't forget that Jesus was indeed a man. Jesus was the eternal God incarnate yet still lived by and in prayer. Jesus was alone in a deserted place praying, but even there he could not get away for long. Jesus was interrupted. For Peter and those who are with him searched him out and found him.

Yet unlike me what I am interrupted in my prayer and study, the heart of Jesus is again revealed. Jesus suggests that they move on to other villages and he might preach there also. Jesus came into the world to proclaim God's gospel and all that was involved in discipleship, more than to be a miracle worker. Yet it was often his miracles that proved his authority, for "all authority had been given him over heaven and earth".

In verse 40-45 we see yet another incredible example of the authority of Jesus. He heal a man with leprosy.

What is leprosy?

Physically: It mutilates the body, inflaming the skin, causing hair to fall off, distorting the face and joints.

In Society: Lepers were separated. Israel was under the conviction that leprosy was a "curse" from God. The leper had to display marks of mourning, as if for the dead. The leper could have no access to the temple, or even to Jerusalem. Lepers could not intermarry. A place for them to live was provided outside Jerusalem, upon the hill Gareb, as the name implies "the hill of scraping" or leprosy (Jer. 31:40; Job 2:8).

Spiritually: Leprosy typified sin. He was to cry, "unclean, unclean" to warn all not to defile themselves by approaching him. This makes it all the more unique that the leper would approach Jesus. By now he must have been laying on the ground a heap of rotting flesh.

The leper sees that Jesus has the authority in himself. Jesus does not need to pray for the leper, He can heal him. The leper was confident in Jesus. The fact that he begins his plea with the words, "if you will" is not a statement of doubt. The leper knew that Jesus could heal him, but he did not know whether Jesus would heal him. The leper did not know the Lord and could not know what motivated his heart.

Jesus again answers with compassion, his touch, and his word.

Verse 41 says that Jesus was "moved with pity", describing a physical reaction on Jesus part. He felt it in his gut. Jesus reaction went beyond pity and sympathy or even empathy. We all understand this when we have a desperately sick brother or sister or wife or husband or child. It is a gut wrenching experience. It creates gut wrenching compassion.

What an incredible revelation of God's heart we see here. God more than understands. Jesus more than understands. Jesus felt the full weight of your sins on the cross. He felt it. It was gut wrenching.

And then there was the touch of Jesus. We will see throughout Mark that idea of touch many times.

Since the man was full of leprosy, we can reasonably assume that he had not been touched by a soft healthy hand in years. If he had a wife, he had not known her touch, much less her embrace, for many years. If he had children there had been, no touch, not even once, and maybe now they were adults. He must have longed for a touch.

Jesus reached out and touched the unclean leper, an act that, according to the Mosaic law, caused defilement. Jesus touching of the leper not only resulted in his being cured but also revealed Jesus attitude toward the ceremonial law. Jesus boldly placed love and compassion over ritual and regulation.

Again Jesus tells the leper not to tell anyone of his cure. By spreading more miracle worker news, the essential purpose of Jesus life could be thwarted.

Jesus sends him to the priest. This is probably so that the priest can declare the man clean per Leviticus 14. It would also be a testimony to the priest of the authority of Christ.

The law was unable to save, just as it was unable to heal. The law could define sickness and health, but it could not produce health. It could only condemn (declare unclean) the illness. Jesus, on the other hand, was able to heal sickness, just as he was able to forgive sins. This was his authority as the Son of God and his calling as Messiah.

Jesus could heal the leper, and he did. Only Jesus could touch the leper and not be defiled, for he cleansed completely. At Jesus' touch nothing remains defiled.

But there may be even more to this story. What if there was also an overshadowing theological reason: the touch of Christ's hand on the rotting leper is a parable of the incarnation. Jesus took on flesh, became sin for us, and thus gave us his purity. "For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God".

Jesus laid hold of our flesh. He touched us and healed us. Jesus bent over the leper, his holy hand resting on the decaying flesh of the foul-smelling man, and you see what he did for him he has done for us?

There is a relevant application to all this. We will never affect others as Christ did unless there is contact and identification. We have to be willing to take the hand of those whom we would help. Sometimes a touch, caring involvement, will do 1000 times more than our theology. We are great in theory. We are careful about our doctrine. But we need to lay our hand on some rotting flesh in our neighborhood and in our office where we work.

The leper was healed. His healing was immediate, sudden, and complete. Can you hear the man crying not, "unclean, unclean" but, "I'm clean! I'm clean!"

This is what Jesus Christ can do for you, for anyone in an instant, in a split second of belief. The healing of Christ in salvation from sin is instantaneous and complete. The apostle John writes, "The blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin".

If you realize that the leprosy of sin has infected you, then you have no doubt that you are a sinner. If you believe that, there is no reason why you should not go immediately to Christ. We have seen it this morning. Jesus has compassion, he feels for your heart. But more than that, Jesus is God and has the authority to save. More, he will actually touch your sin. He will take hold of it. Even better, you will be immediately saved.

What is needed is the faith of the leper who was humble enough to admit that he was in need, and recognized that Jesus was the only one who could satisfy that need.

Can you humble yourself to say, "I know you are willing, make me clean"?