

## “The Authority of Jesus Christ”

Mark 1:21-28

Turn with me in your Bibles to the first chapter of Mark, and this morning we are going to consider verses 21-28. One of the greatest preachers of the 18th century was George Whitefield. He preached in the open air to crowds which numbered in the tens of thousands in cities like London and Philadelphia. There had been plenty of open aired preachers before Whitefield, but never had there been anyone like him in terms of scope and power. In fact, not since the first century missionary journeys of the apostle Paul had such evangelistic preaching been taken so very directly to the masses of the world. One biographer has written of Whitefield:

**Steven Lawson**—*“In his thirty-four years of ministry, Whitefield preached some eighteen thousand sermons, often to multiplied thousands. If informal messages are included, such as in private homes, this number easily increases to thirty thousand sermons, perhaps more. Three sermons a day were common, [while] four were not uncommon. Conservative estimates are that he spoke a thousand times every year for more than thirty years. In America alone, it is estimated that eighty percent of the colonies heard him preach...It is believed that Whitefield preached to more than ten million people over the course of his ministry, a staggering number.”*

Observers noted something quite remarkable about his preaching. He did not merely lecture about religious ideas. He proclaimed the Word of God with such conviction that people felt as though they were hearing a message from Heaven itself. Benjamin Franklin, who was not a believer at the time, was so fascinated by Whitefield’s authority in preaching that he once walked through a crowd to test how far Whitefield’s voice carried. He later said that thousands listened in

complete silence as Whitefield preached with commanding authority. The power was not in Whitefield himself but in the authority of the Word he proclaimed. So that when Scripture was preached faithfully, people sensed that they weren't merely hearing a man, but that they were hearing the voice of God through His Word.

Now, astounding as that may be, just imagine what it must have been like to hear the Lord Jesus preach and teach! We're given a clue in this text from Mark 1. We've been in this first chapter for quite some time now, but there is a lot here for us to consider, especially as it relates to the divine authority Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Mark's goal here in this first chapter has been to show how Jesus is different from any other man. His identity as God's Son is attested to by the Old Testament prophets. It is acknowledged by John the Baptist. It is affirmed by God the Father at Jesus' baptism. It is seen in the way He commands His disciples to follow Him in obedience. And in these verses, Jesus' authority is on display in terms of the words that He speaks and the works that He does. (Read)

Having called His first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, we read now in verse 21 that they went into Capernaum. In those days, Capernaum was a thriving village located on the northwestern shores of Galilee. It figures prominently in Jesus' earthly ministry, serving as the base of operation for His Galilean ministry. Capernaum was the home-town of Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew. Known for its strategic position along the Via Maris (see map), an ancient trade route, Capernaum was a bustling hub of commerce and activity. The town's name, derived from the Hebrew 'Kfar Nahum,' means 'village of Nahum,' which means it might have been the birthplace of the OT prophet Nahum. Capernaum was the location of numerous miracles and teachings of Jesus which demonstrated His authority and identity. And that's what Mark is telling us is

happening in these verses. Notice the word ‘authority’ that is used here in both verses 22 and 27. The word is significant:

**“Authority”** —*the Greek word is ‘εξουσία’ and means rule, dominion, jurisdiction, full right, and power*

The Bible consistently teaches that Jesus Christ possesses absolute divine authority—authority over truth, over the spiritual realm, over creation, over sin and death, and ultimately over all humanity. This authority is central to His identity as God’s Son, and it determines how every person must respond to Him. And it was this authority that was so noticeable in His life and ministry as He stands to teach in the synagogue at Capernaum.

What is the difference between the authority that Christ is showing in His teaching compared to the authority of their religious leaders? What was so different that made these people realize that Christ was different? Well, I want you to notice here in the text, there are at least two ways in which His authority is on full display:

### **1—Jesus teaches the SCRIPTURES with divine authority (1:21-22)**

*“And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”*

Having arrived in Capernaum, notice verse 21 says that immediately on the Sabbath, Jesus entered the synagogue and began to teach. Luke 4:16 says it was His custom. In other words, it was His constant practice. He went to the synagogue every Sabbath. Why? Someone might say, “It was because He woke up in the morning and simply had a feeling that He’d like to go.” But that’s

not it. He went to the synagogue because He made the intentional decision. It was on a volitional basis, not an emotional basis. Let me tell you, if you decide to attend worship on the strength of your emotion rather than on the strength of your volition, your attendance will always be inconsistent. But if you go ahead and make the determination that this is what we do, then your emotions will be subservient to your volition. And with Jesus, that was most certainly the case. In an act of the will, He made it His custom to go to the synagogue.

Now, what is a synagogue? Well, it was a local meeting place. You read about these a lot in the New Testament. There are no synagogues in the Old Testament because the temple was the focus of everything. But in the days of the Babylonian captivity, the Jews had no temple because it had been destroyed. They still wanted to meet, so they got together in small groups. 'Synagogue' is a word that means to come together. If you had ten men, that was enough to start a synagogue. Synagogues began to show up after the captivity, and by the time of Jesus, they were everywhere. They were sort of like local churches, local assemblies. They were places of instruction because the Law of Moses was read on the Sabbath and explained. Throughout the week, it was a school. So they were very important places in towns and villages where people got together, the Law was read on the Sabbath, the Scriptures were explained to them. Each synagogue had a ruler and elders responsible for the reading and explaining of the law unless there was a visiting scribe who would do that. And when Jesus arrives on the scene, the synagogues provide a ready-made opportunity for Him to go from town to town, to preach and teach. Maybe they just came into existence for this very purpose. That's what He is doing here in Mark chapter 1. He goes into the synagogue at Capernaum and is teaching with astonishing authority (see pictures).

## Authority that is inherent

Mark doesn't tell us anything about what Jesus taught. I imagine that it was the very same message He had been preaching earlier in verses 14-15. The focus is not on the content, but the authority with which He teaches. So that verse 22 says, "And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." He taught with an inherent authority.

What does that mean? It means that there was power, a kind of character and clarity that they were not used to. It wasn't just a lecture or some facts. It wasn't a bunch of cliches and empty-headed mumbo jumbo. No, it was truth spoken with authority. The same thing is said by Matthew at the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

**Matthew 7:28-29—“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as One who had authority, and not as their scribes.”**

He just spoke as if He were in charge and as if what He spoke was the truth. And this was in contrast to what they heard from their scribes who didn't speak with a sense of authority. They quoted other rabbis. This rabbi says this, this rabbi says this, there are some people who think this rabbi is right, there are some people who think that rabbi is right. And they prided themselves on being able to attach themselves to past tradition and quote all these revered rabbis. But here is someone who doesn't quote anybody. Doesn't get His theology from anybody. This is not what they were used to.

Jesus speaks, not with a sense of borrowed authority, but with an inherent authority. It is the difference between a man who quotes a book that he may or may not have read, versus the author of the book explaining what the book is

really about. Jesus spoke as the very Son of God and the true interpreter of Scripture. Unlike the scribes, who based their teaching on the opinions and traditions of others, He spoke with inherent authority, declaring the full meaning of God's Word directly and decisively. His words carried the weight of divine truth itself.

### Authority that has an effect

Jesus teaches with an authority that produces a sense of astonishment in the hearers. The people had never heard anything like it before. It did something on the inside of them. Jesus wasn't merely explaining Scripture. He was the fulfillment of it, the One through whom God's revelation was perfectly made known. And as a result, those present in the synagogue at Capernaum recognize that His words possess a clarity, certainty, and power unlike anything they had heard from their religious leaders. Jesus' authority in teaching revealed both His divine identity and His mission to proclaim the kingdom of God with power.

**John MacArthur** — *“His teaching was absolute, not arbitrary. His teaching was logical, not evasive. His teaching was concrete, not esoteric. His teaching was reasonable and systematic, not mystical or muddled. His teaching was on essential matters, not trivialities. His teaching was clear by way of illustrations and progression, not confusing or allegorical. His teaching had the conviction of truthfulness, not merely suggestion.”*

No wonder verse 22 says that the people are astonished at His words. They were taken back by what they heard. The word used there means:

**“Astonished”** — *to be struck; to be rendered speechless*

In the same way, we must recognize that Scripture is not merely human instruction but the authoritative revelation of God. Therefore, we should approach it with a submissive attitude. We must allow it to correct our thinking, convict our hearts, and direct our lives. Genuine hearing of God's Word always calls for a response—not simply admiration of it, but application of it. When we truly receive the teaching of Scripture, we submit our beliefs, priorities, and conduct to its authority, trusting that God's Word leads us as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105).

But there is a second way His authority is on display in the text. Notice how:

## **2—Jesus commands the SPIRITS with divine authority (1:23-28)**

*“And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ‘What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’ And at once His fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.”*

As Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, notice that there is an unexpected interruption. Verse 23 says that there was in the synagogue ‘a man with an unclean spirit’ who made a scene as Jesus is teaching. And it was His very authority that gives rise to the man's outburst. Now, I don't know if you have ever experienced anything like this. If you have, then I can guarantee you will remember it. (illus. of Jinja)

## The demon's reality

Now, I don't want to spend too much time here. We'll come back to this thought a bit later on in Mark. But I do want to say something about the reality of demonic activity in our world. Contrary to what modern culture will say, demons exist and wreak havoc in the lives of people. Our culture today has no category for demonic oppression because its worldview has been shaped by naturalism and secularism. It tends to explain all human experiences in purely material or psychological terms. So that as a result, the notion that spiritual forces can influence and oppress people is often dismissed before it is even considered.

Having rejected spiritual categories, popular culture now trivializes the demonic. Movies portray demons as horror or fantasy rather than real spiritual enemies. And it tends to make the subject seem fictional rather than a serious reality. Many churches have adopted the same cultural assumptions. The demonic is rarely preached about or addressed by pastors. When a church stops teaching the truth about the spiritual realm, people no longer recognize the spiritual warfare described in passages like Ephesians 6:12, which says that our struggle is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and against the cosmic powers over this present darkness."

As a worldview, naturalism has removed the supernatural from everyday explanations of reality. In the wake of the Enlightenment, Western thought has increasingly assumed that everything must have a 'natural' or scientific cause. If something can't be tested or verified empirically, it is often rejected. And as a worldview, it leaves no room for spiritual forces like demons even though the Bible presents them as real and active.

Something else is that psychology has become the primary interpretive grid for human struggles. Conditions that might once have been understood in spiritual terms are almost exclusively interpreted through ‘mental’ categories. Let me say that while many of these diagnoses are legitimate and helpful, today’s approach often assumes that all problems must have purely psychological or biological causes, which leaves no room whatsoever for spiritual oppression.

In earlier centuries, people sometimes attributed too much to demons. But in response, modern culture has swung to the opposite extreme, denying their existence altogether. So that reaction against superstition has gone too far in the opposite direction. But the Bible avoids both extremes! It doesn’t attribute every problem to demons, but neither does it ignore their reality. In the gospels, Jesus regularly confronts demonic spirits as part of His ministry, showing that the spiritual realm is indeed very real.

**Douglas Sean O’Donnell** — *“In a culture in which demons and devils are seen as team mascots, the idea of an evil creature possessing a person is so far from our conception of reality. Yet it ought not to be! For, if we get into this text and understand and apply it rightly, we need to move from the popular worldview into the biblical one.”*

I want you to notice that the unclean spirit is present in a place of worship, hearing the Scriptures read and taught. This reminds us that demonic influence does not always avoid religious settings. In fact, sometimes it hides within them. Demons can attend church! They come through people who are spiritually oppressed. In the passage, the unclean spirit is present through the man it inhabits. The demon did not walk into the synagogue independently—it came in through a human host. That’s the reality.

## The demon's reaction

Look at what happens in verse 23, “And he cried out, ‘What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?’” Why does the unclean spirit cry out? Demons do not like the truth. They did not like the fact that Jesus arrived and taught the truth because they know that the only possible way in which deceived people can be liberated from their clutches is by means of the truth.

Likewise today, people who are under demonic oppression, deception, or bondage may attend church. And I pray they do. They may look outwardly normal, but inwardly they are influenced by lies, darkness, and spiritual captivity. When the Word of God is preached with authority, it often agitates spiritual darkness, just as this unclean spirit cried out when confronted by Jesus. And folks, this ought to be a sobering reminder to us that church services are not merely social events. It isn't merely a place you go to hear music and a sermon. No, they're spiritual battlegrounds. The forces of light are confronting the forces of darkness. Demons come to oppose the Word of God. In verse 23, the unclean spirit interrupts Jesus' teaching, “What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” The goal is disruption and opposition. Satanic forces will try to oppose the clear proclamation of Scripture because God's Word exposes darkness and liberates captives. I think sometimes, this opposition may appear through:

- distraction during preaching
- hostility toward biblical authority
- confusion about truth
- attempts to undermine the message

You can rest assured that where God's Word is preached with clarity and authority, spiritual resistance often follows. And so here you have Jesus, proclaiming the authoritative truth, and it is the gospel truth which does damage to their kingdom. Apart from the truth, no one can be rescued from their power. There's no wonder then that the unclean spirit shrieks and tries to make its presence known.

### The demon's recognition

Verse 24 tells us what the demonized man was crying out, "What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God." The phrase, "What have You to do with us," is often used by someone who is being attacked without provocation. The insinuation is that by His presence there, Jesus had invaded the territory that this unclean spirit had tried to claim as its own. So that the demon is essentially saying, "Why are You bringing this conflict to us?" The use of a plural pronoun there may be an indication that Jesus had come against a whole host of demons. The realm of Satan is under attack because the rightful King has come to reclaim that which had been lost. Jesus is declaring war on the kingdom of darkness.

Notice how the unclean spirit asks, "Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God." The demon knows what its fate will ultimately be. There is coming a time when Satan and his demons will be cast into the lake of fire. Ironically, the demon acknowledges Jesus' authority more quickly than many people in the synagogue. Evil spirits know that Christ has the authority to judge and destroy them. In fact, James says that the demons have a kind of belief, but not the kind that saves.

**James 2:19—“You believe that God is now; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”**

Demons possess accurate theological knowledge. They know who God is, they recognize the identity of Jesus Christ, and they understand that judgment awaits them. However, their belief is merely intellectual recognition, not saving faith. Saving faith involves trusting in Jesus Christ, repentance from sin, willing submission to His authority. Demons do the opposite. They remain hardened in their rebellion against God despite knowing the truth. True saving faith is more than acknowledging facts about God. It involves a heart response that submits to Him as Lord.

#### The demon's rebuke

Rather than permitting the unclean spirit to speak, notice verse 25 says, “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’” The word that is translated as ‘be silent’ means to close your mouth with a muzzle, to put a lid on it, to shut up. The same word is later used in:

**Mark 4:39—“And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”**

It is the word that a person would use to silence a yapping dog. That is the idea here. Jesus silences the unclean spirit, and then says, “Come out of him!” The demon had no choice but to obey. So that verse 26 says, “And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.” The demon had attempted to destroy the man, but Jesus delivered him from that which held him in bondage. And it proves that He came to judge Satan, to strip the evil one of his authority, of his power, and of his slavery of humanity. The apostle John wrote:

**1 John 3:8—“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”**

Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil! Those in bondage, those who are oppressed, those who are lost in sin, Jesus has come to set them free.

Hallelujah!

Notice verse 28, “And at once His fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.” Let’s not miss the importance of what is being said here by Mark. It was because of the authority of His words and His works that everyone was talking about Him. Now, let me ask you a question—why aren’t people talking about Christians like this today? Is it because our lives do not measure up to our words as the Lord’s did? Is it because our lives do not measure up to our Lord’s words? We are faced today with the task of bringing the authority of Christ to bear upon the lives of other people—but are people talking about it? No, they’re not! Why? Could it be that we don’t have authority in our words, perhaps, because people do not see authority in our works? They do not see a difference between us and everyone else. You can’t preach the good news and be bad news at the same time. Actions must follow words! The Scribes peddled a second-hand religion, and it wasn’t real to them, and because it wasn’t real to them it wasn’t real to others. Once person said it this way:

**Kent Hughes** — *“Christ’s sermons were like thunder because His life was like lightning.”*

For Jesus, words and works went together, and that is what gave His life authentic authority. Nicodemus said of Him:

**John 3:2—“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.”**

No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him. And now as His followers, there ought to be a noticed authority which is characteristic our lives as well. Our lives ought to bear the stamp of authenticity. The words that we speak and the works that we do ought to carry the weight of authority with them, pointing others to Christ.

Now, before I wrap this up, let me give you just one closing point of application:

**Jesus' divine authority demands more than amazement—it demands our submission.**

In the story, the people in the synagogue are astonished by Jesus' teaching because He teaches with authority unlike the scribes. They're equally amazed when He commands the unclean spirit and it obeys Him. And yet, the verses emphasize their amazement, but not their repentance or faith. Even the demon recognizes Jesus as 'the Holy One of God,' but that recognition is something that must lead us to place our trust in Christ, to worship and obey Christ.

The central application, therefore, is that encountering the authority of Christ in His Word and works should not stop at being impressed by Him. Many people can be amazed by Jesus' teaching, His miracles, or His reputation. But the only proper response is humble submission to His authority as Lord. And so this is really a call for each one of us to move beyond mere admiration and respond with faith, in obedience, and surrender to Jesus Christ. Have you come to place in your life where you've moved past admiration and have bowed to His authority? He said to His disciples:

**Matthew 28:18-20—“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to**

**observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

*“Father, we praise You for the authority and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, Your One and only Son. He is the way, the truth, and the life. At the mention of His name, demons tremble and the darkness must flee. How grateful we are that Jesus is the One who has vanquished the enemy and sets captives free by His death and resurrection. May our lives be transformed and our witness be baptized with Your power and authority. For in Jesus’ name we ask it, Amen.”*