

Where we start . . .

Imagine you are facing a serious health issue. In order to pursue treatment, you need to select from among a number of doctors for one to be your primary care physician. What characteristics would you look for in a doctor to fill that role?

What we read . . .

When we are in need of help, we really want someone who “knows their stuff.” We look for someone who can appropriately impress us. And that is what we see as we watch Jesus interact with those who have gathered in the synagogue in Mark 1:21-28.

What does Mark tell us about the initial impact of Jesus’ teaching?

What reason(s) might Mark have had for not telling us more about *what* Jesus said on that Sabbath day?

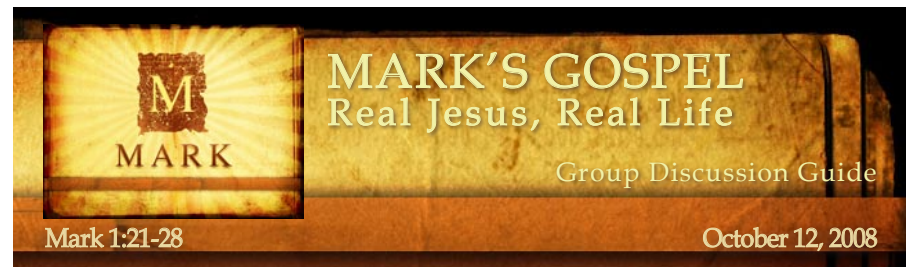
In filling in the rest of the picture of the events of that day, Mark describes the deliverance of a man with an unclean spirit. What would you have felt or seen or experienced had you been there?

Why does all of this—Jesus’ words and deeds—have such an impact on the people there in Capernaum?

Why this matters . . .

Do you see Jesus this way—the way Mark pictures Him for us in Mark 1? Why or why not?

Why is it that sometimes you lose the astonishment and amazement that those in Capernaum experienced in the presence of Jesus?



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Diving in . . .

Often, when we read portions of the Gospels, we read them as “familiar stories.” Because we have a sense of who Jesus is and the kinds of things that He did and does, we don’t really pay much attention to what we read. We glance, we conclude we know what is going to happen/is happening, and we end up getting little out of the reading. So, as we continue to read Mark, encourage your group to read and discuss it with fresh eyes. This week, Mark offers us a simple (and familiar!) snapshot. What is notable about this snapshot is that everyone *there* is amazed and astonished . . . and when most of us read the account we are *not*. Pray for the Spirit to grip your people with a fresh awe and amazement in the presence and authority of Jesus.

Discussing . . .

Who would you select as your primary care physician if you were facing a health crisis? For most people, a variety of things might go into the criteria for choice. Obviously, you want someone competent in the field. You’d look for someone knowledgeable and full of insight. But there’s also the personal component. It would be nice to have someone who was not too unapproachable. You’d want a medically proficient and personally warm provider . . . someone who is very much like Jesus, as we meet Him in Mark. The opening discussion question will, hopefully, nudge your group’s conversation along these lines.

It might be easy to read this small portion of Mark and not see much fresh or new in it. “Oh, yes. Jesus taught. People were impressed. Then Jesus delivered a demonized person. And, people were impressed. {Yawn!} Yep, I’ve heard those things before.”

It could help to think through what Mark actually tells us, and to pay attention to how he describes what happened.

A synagogue was a local center of Jewish life; a place for meeting. The synagogue was the place where weekly worship and teaching times would be held, each Sabbath. (In contrast to the Temple in Jerusalem where sacrifices were offered and faithful Jews would go for the feast a few times a year.)

On the Sabbath day, the Jews would gather in the synagogue and the “ruler” of the synagogue would ask one of the men of the congregation to read a portion of the Scriptures (from one of the scrolls that contained the Old Testament and that were kept in the care of the synagogue). Then, the man would offer some thoughts or instruction on the passage read.

Typically, this task would fall to those who were trained in the Scriptures. The “scribes” were “professional” students of the Old Testament. Their initial responsibility was the copying of the Scriptures. Seeing as there was no other way to make copies, scribes copied the Scriptures by hand. That resulted in them having a

great familiarity with the Scriptures and they ultimately were looked to as not only copyists but explainers of the Scriptures. The scribes would have been readily looked to as a resource for teaching in a local synagogue. But *how* they taught was a bit different than you or I might think of teaching.

The Jews of Jesus’ day had come to collect a large core of “oral tradition,” teachings by rabbis (teachers; either priests, or scribes, or other esteemed Jewish leaders) that explained and commented on the Scriptures. Thus, when a scribe taught, it was typically done by quoting and citing various others and their respective opinions. (“As Rabbi Ben Zerath has said And this is confirmed by Rabbi Yacob Bar Thalami who has told us”)

When Mark tells us about Jesus’ teaching, it is worth noting that he doesn’t tell us *what* Jesus taught but simply comments on *how* He taught. Mark’s summary in 1:14-15 gives us some sense of the kinds of things Jesus might have commented on in His teaching, but Mark does tell us that the people were astonished at Jesus’ teaching because He taught “as one having authority and not as the scribes.” What does that mean? Perhaps we could say that Jesus taught *as if He knew what He was talking about* and didn’t lean on others for His authority. That really shocked His hearers. (The word Mark uses in 1:22 for “astonished” [ESV] means to “strike as with a blow.” Jesus’ teaching really came with impact!)

But Mark doesn’t end there. Here goes on to tell us that a man “with an unclean spirit” was also there in the synagogue. Try to help your group picture what that would have been like. Notice that the man did come into the synagogue running and screaming; he hadn’t been singled out until he spoke up. (Maybe he was a regular “Joe” who frequented that particular synagogue!) But when the man stood and spoke, things took a turn.

Jesus spoke simply, directly, and plainly. “Silence! Come out!” And it was done! And now the people are amazed in a fresh way over another facet of Jesus’ ministry. Try to feel or imagine what it would have been like to be in that moment. (You don’t have to fully explore what it means for someone to “have an unclean spirit” to grasp the impact of the moment. Whatever else it includes, minimally we would have to recognize that the man was, to some degree, afflicted by a malevolent spiritual force and Jesus’ mere *word* was enough to produce a dramatic and life-enhancing change in the man!)

Now the people are *really amazed*. Jesus doesn’t just speak in such a way that He comes across like He knows what He is saying and has the right to say it, but He acts in such a way that He knows what He is doing and has the right to do it! This is what takes everyone’s breath away. And, sadly, it is what we often miss.

As you move on to the *Why this matters* section, spend some time honestly thinking and exploring whether you really do see Jesus this way. Are we amazed by the authority Jesus has? Do we sit in stunned amazement when He speaks a word to us because of the power and authority with which He speaks? (Whether He speaks to us through the Scriptures or in the quiet moments of prayer as He communicates to us by His Spirit.) Are we appropriately in awe by the reality that Jesus’ very word is enough to command the instant obedience of malevolent spiritual beings?

As we camp in this short passage from Mark, we really want to feel ourselves duly impressed with this Jesus who has already invaded our world and anticipate how and where and when we might similarly be awed and amazed and impressed with Him. If we are not amazed, perhaps it is only because we have ceased to really notice the kind of person He is and the gracious and powerful things He does!