

1:21-22

Then they went into Capernaum “village of Nahum” (the prophet of the O.T.?)¹ So, day one he is at a place of high traffic fishing and trade commerce—a town on the approach from the Sea and on the trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia. **and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue** these were meeting houses that were built to hear the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament read after the Hebrew people were taken captive and removed from the place of their temple in Jerusalem.² **and taught. 22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.** Now a scribe, by definition, is somebody who made their living copying a written or spoken record of discourse. However, in this context, we are talking about those who made their living copying the Scripture...more specifically, the Old Testament Scripture. Let’s take it a step further. These folks had developed into a guild of their own. You see, if you belong to a body of tradesmen that own the rights to particular bodies of truth—to be more exact, truth that is absurdly important to both your temporal and eternal well-being—you can have an obvious propensity to use your trade to control the masses. So these scribes soon became “experts”—highly paid experts—in the very writings they were supposed to be simply making more numerable and accessible. You see. **The scribes taught, but not with authority.**

Scribes in the day would quote experts before them. These experts usually took the compiled written form known as the “Midrash.” These experts, in turn, consulted the “Talmud”, which were very early rabbinic writings of the actual Mosaic text. So the “experts” quoted the “experts” who quoted more “experts.” Jesus apparently spoke from the perspective of the author rather than from the perspective of a so-called expert.

1:23-24

23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. If I were going fishing, I would have desired fish that were already clean. Yes, I know people who are both dirty and clean, by this world’s standard, need catching. I would have preferred the fish that knew how to tithe and respected the Bible and had a sense of morality. Jesus, however, shows us that we get the privilege of catching some not-so-clean fish. And we have a choice: avoid them...or catch them. **And he cried out, 24 saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”** I guess I am not sure if I think this is more of a reflection on the Psalms (16:10) or Isaiah (6:1-3 and 20-some other places). Here again, the main point is not which passage they were choosing, but rather that they believed the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. Consider how the demons reflect so many of what we see today in many so-called conversions: “From these words, it is clear that they had great knowledge, and no charity. They feared His power to punish, and did not love His righteousness.”³ Notice furthermore how they could discuss His character, yet they had only a natural, survivalist attitude: “How may I keep from being destroyed?”

Several of these themes show up again in the book of Mark:

1. Demons wanting to avoid Jesus (1:24; Mark 5:7)
2. Demons identifying Jesus (1:24; Mark 3:11)
3. Demons convulsing under exorcism (1:26; Mark 9:20)
4. Those things outside human control obey Jesus (1:27; Mark 4:41)
5. Jesus cannot keep Himself a secret (1:28; Mark 1:45)

Within this text, you’ll notice a theme which you have seen before:

Immediacy in Mark’s voice (1:21; 1:28; Mark 1:10; Mark 1:18; Mark 1:20). I’ll say this again. Not everything is urgent...but something is! Let me say that Jesus “immediately went into the synagogue on the Sabbath”. Mark is trying to show us that this ministry of Jesus was marked with purpose. So he went immediately upon the calling of his disciples. He called them to fish and then showed them how to fish! He

¹James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 49.

²Incidentally, the temple was also destroyed.

³Augustine of Hippo, *“The City of God,”* in *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 177.

preaches right and does right. Notice that his “going into the synagogue to preach and do miracles” was his way of showing the disciples how to fish for men! There was not calling, and then a vetting process. I wonder, how many of you felt called to fish last week and you went out “immediately” and met a neighbor to catch? How many of you “immediately” added Muslims and Homosexuals and people with good morals and people of different colors, by name, to your prayer list for salvation? I wonder how many of you immediately started studying your Bible more, practiced telling your story more, spoke the Gospel to your spouse more?

Now, Jesus had enough sense to start where He had the most influence. He’s a Jewish man, raised by a Jewish man, who taught him to go on a Jewish day of worship to a Jewish house of worship. I do realize that I could say something along the lines of “Even Jesus knew what day to go to church...and He never needed to pray about it or decide ‘should I go to church this week?’” Even though the text teaches this, I don’t think it was the intent of the Mark or the primary intent of the Holy Spirit to do so...not the primary intent. So I won’t.

I could also say something here that would be equally sharp such as “if the people in the synagogue that day decided to spend the day down at the racetrack, they would have missed Jesus.” It’s incredibly true. Anybody knows that when Jesus said “He was building His church”⁴ and that a “church” is a “called out assembly for the purpose of worship” and that as a church, formed by the Lord, they are “two or three gathered in His Name”⁵—anybody knows that You should expect to miss the presence of the Lord if you miss the gathering of His people. And...though this passage certainly could be preached that way because it is a good application, it is evidently not the primary goal of Mark to say so...let alone the Holy Spirit behind Mark’s pen.

So, the clear reality is that Jesus goes to the place where people are ready to hear from God from a learned man. Jesus knows Who He is and Whose He is. Jesus knows His audience, and Jesus knows the cost of speaking to such an audience.⁶ He goes to the place where He will be best heard. Everybody knew, contrary to our own culture, that the most important matters were eternal matters, and that eternal matters were discussed around God’s law in the midst of a house dedicated to that purpose. Ask yourself: “Does my schedule and my agenda reflect my belief that eternal matters are the most important matters and are discussed around the Word of God around the people of God in the assembly of God?”

Within this text lies a newer theme: Jesus is described as “teaching with authority” twice (1:22 and 1:27). Basically, the passage today is bookmarked by these two almost identical statements. We realize, once again, that we have yet another theme that runs throughout the rest of the book—the Words of Jesus are the life-changer, and the Works of Jesus substantiate His Words (this happens again in the very next chapter, 2:9-10). The immediate proof is that, although they are amazed that demons are afraid of Jesus, they mention, again, His authority and His teaching.

“Can unsaved/saved people cast out demons?” It is not recommended that you see it as a “norm”—unless you are about to reveal a new body of truth. This is, by the way, why the Mormon religion feels the freedom to accept, as a rule, miracles: They have “another Testament.” The apostles instruct us to fight these battles with the armor on, standing on our knees (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Now, some considerations:

1. On miracles
 - a. There was no miracle, even in those days, if there were established cures.
 - b. They exist to bring light to new Scripture. That’s what’s happening here, right? There is no New Testament.
 - c. They were never, ever the focus. Every good Work Jesus did was to bring attention and credibility to his Words.
2. On Demon possession: What do we say to those who say “demon possession” was just an ignorant way of diagnosing physical problems?
 - a. “You need to consider that this was a time when overt demon activity was at its peak.” It was, after all, the only period of time where God, as “fully man” walked the earth. Whenever Jesus is in the house, demons show their head too. I doubt very

⁴Matthew 16:18

⁵Matthew 18:15-20

⁶Which, oddly enough, was a potentially high cost according to this account in Luke 4.

seriously there were many demons around in synagogues. I say unto you...the devil need not show up in most houses of worship. And this application follows that since Jesus cannot be present in the flesh we can expect supernatural resistance when those stand in Jesus' stead, teaching His teaching with His authority.

- b. "The spirit world does not get enough activity today." Many of what we see as "evidence" of Satan today are evidences of our flesh.
- c. "Jesus, by His words, confirms that this man was demon-possessed" (1:25). We believe this man was in fact demon-possessed because Jesus said he was.