

“Jesus Christ: The Consummate Teaching Priest”  
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To explore our theme, we take Mark 1:21-22 as our text. “They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”<sup>1</sup> This Scripture brings together four streams of Old Testament thought: the Sabbath, the Synagogue, the Scribes, and teaching. It is my contention that these streams of thought form a four-strand cord reaching back to Moses. It is therefore my objective to show that the Sabbath and the Synagogue are both Mosaic institutions. This is the traditional position taken by many of the Westminster Divines. In addition, I will show that teaching was a specific task given to the Levites. They were called teaching priests. The Scribes continued the traditional work of the Levites or teaching priests. If all of this is correct, when Jesus Christ enters the Synagogue on the Sabbath to teach the Scriptures, doing so with authority and not as the scribes, He fulfills the office of teaching priest ordained by God and described by Moses. And since the teaching priest in the old economy taught the revelation given by Moses, an already existent written word of God, his work corresponds closely with the task of the pastor-teacher in the New Testament Church.

My thesis is therefore quite simple. Jesus Christ is the consummate teaching priest; He fulfills the teaching obligations of the ancient Levitical teaching priests and continues those obligations in and through the teaching ministry of the New Testament church.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

Our text says, “[I]mmediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue...” (Mark 1:21). We begin our discussion by looking at the Sabbath and the synagogue. That the Sabbath is part of the Mosaic legislation is clear from the Fourth Commandment. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). That there is a connection between the Sabbath and worship is also clear. “You shall keep My sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 26:2).

From the modern academic perspective, the connection between the Sabbath and the synagogue is less clear. The mid-seventeenth century seems to be the demarcation point. “The idea that the ‘synagogue’ originated with Moses was held by many scholars after the rabbis. One of the last scholars to keep a firm hold on this long held ‘consensus’ was the oft-cited Grotius, writing in 1644.”<sup>2</sup> This long consensus, holding the traditional position, is unfortunately no more. “Attributions of the origin of the ‘synagogue’ to the patriarchal period and to Moses belong to the past.”<sup>3</sup>

The traditional position links the Sabbath and the synagogue. Leviticus 23 is a key text.

Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “The LORD’S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:2-3).

The principal holy convocations or sacred assemblies required by God were appointed for the weekly Sabbath. John Lightfoot (1602-1675) writes, “How was it possible that the Jews should keep the Sabbath according to the injunction laid upon them of having every seventh day a holy meeting or convocation, Leviticus 23:3, 4[,] if they had not in all times their Synagogue meetings

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<sup>2</sup> Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue, A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2001), 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

or particular congregations...[?]"<sup>4</sup> Here Lightfoot refers to Psalms 26:12 and 68:26 to validate "the plural number used of *Assemblies* or *Congregations*."<sup>5</sup> Psalm 26:12 reads, "My foot stands on a level place; In the congregations [plural] I shall bless the LORD."<sup>6</sup> And Psalm 68:26 follows suit. "Bless God in the congregations [plural], *Even* the LORD, *you who are* of the fountain of Israel." Henry Hammond (1605-1660) appears to hold the traditional position regarding the ancient synagogue, that Moses mandated weekly meetings. Hammond applies Psalm 68:26 making a comparison with the church, "As all Christians shall be obliged solemnly to magnify the name of Mesias, and to that end frequently assemble together."<sup>7</sup>

To bolster the traditional position, Lightfoot adds an argument from Psalm 74:8. The Authorized Version reads, "They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land." Lightfoot interprets the text.

It is said expressly according as our English utters it, Psal. 74.4 [8], that the enemy had burnt all the *Synagogues of God* in the land. Which although the *Chaldee* render it of the Temple only, and *Rabbi Solomon* of *Shiloh* and the first and second Temple only, yet both the plural number used, and the context it self inforceth it, to be interpreted of more conventions than only in one place.<sup>8</sup>

Henry Hammond views the text similarly as speaking of God's enemies and the destruction of local synagogues: "And that they might make one work of it, to root out all religion both from the present and future ages, burning down and destroying all sorts of sacred assemblies, oratories, or synagogues all the nation over."<sup>9</sup> Thomas Godwyn (1587-1643) adds regarding

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<sup>4</sup> *The Works of the Reverend and Learned John Lightfoot* (London: Robert Scot, 1684), 1:609.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew for "in the congregations" is בְּמִקְהֵלִים and בְּמִקְהֵלֹתָם respectively; the LXX is ἐν ἐκκλησίαις in both psalms.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the Book of Psalms* (London: R. Norton, 1659), 330.

<sup>8</sup> Lightfoot, 608.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 364.

synagogues, “That they were in David’s time appeareth; They have burnt all the Synagogues of God in the land, Psal.74.8.”<sup>10</sup>

The Hebrew betrays a striking linguistic connection between Leviticus 23:2 and 4 and Psalm 74:8. The “appointed times” of Leviticus 23:2 and 4 and the “meeting places” or “synagogues” of Psalm 74:8 render the same Hebrew word. “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’S appointed times [מוֹעֲדֵי] which you shall proclaim as holy convocations —My appointed times [מוֹעֲדֵי] are these’” (Leviticus 23:2). “These are the appointed times [מוֹעֲדֵי] of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them” (Leviticus 23:4). “They have burned all the meeting places [מוֹעֲדֵי] of God in the land” (Psalm 74:8).

Finally, Lightfoot asks this question: “What can we make of these High places that are so often mentioned in Scripture in a commendable sense: as 1 Sam. 9.19 & 10:5, 1 Kings 3.4. &c. other, than that they were Synagogues or places of publick worship for particular congregations?”<sup>11</sup> Speaking of the ancient Jews, Godwyn makes the same point. “As they had *Synagogues*, so likewise *Schools*, in every City and Province, and these were built also upon hills. There is mention of the hill *Moreh*, Judges 7.1. that is, *the Hill of the Teacher*.”<sup>12</sup> The clear implication is that synagogue meeting places were also located on high places. Lightfoot understands this to be the case during the times of the Kings. He refers to the words of 2 Kings 12:2, 14:4, and 15:4, “Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.” Lightfoot says,

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Godwyn, *Moses and Aaron* (London: R. Rayston, 1631), 79.

<sup>11</sup> Lightfoot, 608.

<sup>12</sup> Godwyn, 82. הַמּוֹרֶה, the teacher.

*But the high places were not taken away, nor that they should have been destroyed for being places of worship or of publick Assemblies, but the text expresseth still what was their abuse and what should have been removed, namely that the people should not have sacrificed and burnt incense there, which part of worship was only confined to Jerusalem.*<sup>13</sup>

And so the traditional view of the origin of the synagogue goes back to Leviticus 23:2-3 linking the synagogue and the Sabbath. The *Westminster Annotations* concur giving these comments on Leviticus 23:3. “The observation of the Sabbath, was not only in the Sanctuary, as other Feasts were, but in private habitations, tents or houses, as other Feasts were not: for that purpose there were built divers[e] Synagogues, not only in Jerusalem, but divers[e] other Cities....”<sup>14</sup>

We now turn to the subject of teaching. “[I]mmediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach” (Mark 1:21). Teaching is associated with the synagogue and with the Levitical teaching priests. This was true from the time of Moses who himself declared of the Levites, “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, And Your law to Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:10). Preaching on this text, Calvin boldly asserts,

Here we see that because the worlde is so weake, and so easily turned away from God & the right way, it is requisite that God’s word should be preached, and that there should be men appointed thereunto.... Moreover, for the better maintaining of the pure Religion, it behooveth them to have zeale of God’s honour; they must all their life long indeavour to maintaine the doctrine, and therewithal they must have their mouths open to preach the worde that is committed unto them, to the end that that treasure bee not lost or buried, but that all men may bee made partakers thereof. *They shall preach thy law then unto Jacob, and thy doctrine unto Israel.*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lightfoot, 609.

<sup>14</sup> *The Westminster Annotations and Commentary on the Whole Bible-1657* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, n.d.), Vol. 1, Leviticus 23:3.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, trans. Arthur Golding (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 1205 and 1206.

God appointed the Levites as teachers and preachers in Israel. To this end, the tribe of Levi was scattered like salt throughout the land. “I will disperse them in Jacob, And scatter them in Israel” (Genesis 49:7). Although these words were uttered as a curse, “this dispersing of theirs was converted into a blessing, for they were consecrated to teach Jacob God’s Judgements, and Israel his Law, Deut. 33:10. So the people had the benefit of their instruction...”<sup>16</sup> So also Calvin on Genesis 49:7,

But God, who in the beginning had produced light out of darkness, found another reason why the Levites should be dispersed abroad among the people,—a reason not only free from disgrace, but highly honourable,—namely, that no corner of the land might be destitute of competent instructors.<sup>17</sup>

There is a logical connection between the weekly Sabbath required of the people throughout the land and the settling of the Levites to teach throughout the land. Lightfoot makes this connection in his discussion of the synagogue under the heading “*Of their Preachers.*”

From the very first platforming of the Church of *Israel*, the tribe of *Levi* was set a part for the publick ministry, to attend upon the Altar at *Jerusalem*, and to teach the people up and down the Nation, *Deut.* 33:10. *Mal.* 2:7. and for the better fitting of them for teaching, they had eight and forty cities allotted them, *Josh.* 21. in which they dwelt together, as in so many Universities, studying the Law, that they might be able in time to be Preachers in the Synagogues and Teachers in the schools up and down the Land.<sup>18</sup>

This connection between weekly Sabbath convocations and the scattering of teaching priests throughout the land is a “good and necessary consequence” which is “deduced from Scripture.”<sup>19</sup>

But the preachers and teachers of Israel failed in their duties. This was particularly true when the kingdom was divided. “For many days Israel was without the true God and without a

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<sup>16</sup> *Op. Cit.*, Genesis 49:7.

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 2:448.

<sup>18</sup> Lightfoot, 612.

<sup>19</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:6.

teaching priest and without law” (2 Chronicles 15:3). Here we see that the people were without God and without His Word because of the failure of the teaching priests. The three go together. As Calvin says, there was no “maintaining of the pure Religion.”<sup>20</sup> There is an important connection between teaching and law in 2 Chronicles 15:3. “The Hebrew root of both words is the same. A function of the priest was to give teaching (*moreh*) in matters relating to the law (*Torah*).”<sup>21</sup> Recall the “hill of Moreh” (Judges 7:1) or “the hill of the teacher.”

After the restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple, Malachi deplors the lack of adequate teaching. “For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 2:7). The teaching priest is God’s messenger, the “interpreter of God’s will, in teaching and governing the Church.”<sup>22</sup> Calvin confirms this interpretation with his comments on Malachi 2:7.

What the Prophet has said of the first priests he extends now to the whole Levitical tribe, and shows that it was a perpetual and unchangeable law as to the priesthood. He had said that Levi had been set over the Church, not to apply to himself the honor due to God, but to stand in his own place as the minister of God, and the teacher of the chosen people. The same thing he now confirms, declaring it as a general truth that *the lips of the priest ought to retain knowledge*, as though he had said, that they were to be the store-house from which the food of the Church was to be drawn. God then did appoint the priests over his chosen people, that the people might seek their food from them as from a store-room, according to what we find to be the case with a master of a family, who has his store of wine and his store of provisions. As then the food of a whole family is usually drawn out from places where provisions are laid up, so the Prophet makes use of this similitude, — that God has deposited knowledge with the priests, so that the mouth of every priest might be a kind of store-house, so to speak, from which the people are to seek knowledge and the rule of a religious life: *Keep knowledge then shall the lips of the priest, and the law shall they seek from his mouth.*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Deuteronomy*, 1206.

<sup>21</sup> I. W. Slotki, *Chronicles* (New York: The Soncino Press, 1985), 226.

<sup>22</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 5, Malachi 2:7.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 527.

This raises questions about the relationship between the two functions of the priests.

“Usually people think of the priests as specialists in bringing sacrifices, and indeed, that does seem to be their characteristic function in the time long after the return from exile. Nevertheless, the OT ideal of the priesthood was different. The teaching function precedes the sacrificial function in Deut. 33:8-10 and 2 Chr. 15:3.”<sup>24</sup>

We may also have questions about the relationship between prophet and priest. The difference must

be sought in the manner in which priest and prophet both received and dispensed the revelation. The prophet is the man of the *dābār*, which was given him in a direct and personal manner by way of special revelation. The priest, on the other hand, is the man of the *tôrâ*, which is handed down to him either in written or in oral form, and which he communicated by means of instruction in the context of his priestly function (cf. Hag. 2:10-14).<sup>25</sup>

In summary, taking the traditional rather than the modern academic position, we have the following. The synagogue is an institution of Moses associated with the Sabbath in his command for weekly holy convocations given in Leviticus 23:2-3.<sup>26</sup> The Levitical priests are the *ordinary* teachers and preachers of the old economy. Their task is to teach and expound the written word of God in the local assembly. As Jesus enters the *synagogue* on the *Sabbath* and begins to *teach*, he appears to fulfill the role of the ancient teaching priest in this situation. It is our task to confirm this is the case.

When Jesus was in the synagogue, “He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). “Three sorts of scribes are mentioned in Scripture: Kings

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<sup>24</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 257.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>26</sup> This also appears to be the stance of the Orthodox Jewish community. This anecdotal evidence comes from my colleague, Professor C. J. Williams, and his discussion of these matters with his Orthodox Jewish professors while pursuing his doctoral studies.



secretaries, as here [1 Kings 4:3]; 2. Publike notaries, Jer. 32.26. 3. Teachers of the law of God, Ezzr. 7:6. Matt 23.2.”<sup>27</sup> We are interested in the third category. The scribes were “teachers whose office it was to interpret the Law to the people, their organization beginning with Ezra, who was their chief....”<sup>28</sup> “Apparently these teachers were priests or followers of the priestly group.”<sup>29</sup> “By 180 B.C. the office of teacher of the law, the ‘scribe’ who also was involved in judicial matters, was well established.... The Model for the teachers of the law was Ezra”<sup>30</sup>

First, Ezra was “a scribe skilled in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6)

Here Scribe is taken for one that is well studied in the law of God, and had a special function to expound it and teach it. Such were many of the Scribes in Christs time; for it is said that the Scribes sate in Moses seat, Mat 23.2. that is, instructed the people in the law of Moses. And he that is called *a Scribe*, Mat. 12.28. is called *a Lawyer*, Mat. 22.35, in relation to the law of Moses. Such also are called Doctors of the Law, Luke 5:17, Acts 5:34. Ezra is stiled a ready Scribe, because of the great understanding which he had of the law, being well studied therein, and also because of his dexterity and readiness to give the sense thereof unto others.<sup>31</sup>

Second, Ezra was not only a scribe; he was a priest (Ezra 7:2, 11; Nehemiah 8:2). “The genealogy of Ezra set down in v. 1 [of Ezra 7], &c. sheweth that Ezra was a Priest descending from Aaron....”<sup>32</sup> Ezra publicly read the word of God to the people of Jerusalem after the rebuilding of the city walls. He was joined at that time by others to assist in the reading and teaching of the law (Nehemiah 8:4 and 7). “Here are thirteen set down who were heads of the families of the Levites, and taken to be Priests. They stood by Ezra to witness of the truth of what he delivered, and to move the people to better entertain it.”<sup>33</sup> Nehemiah 8:8 indicates,

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<sup>27</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 1, 1 Kings 4:3.

<sup>28</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1916), 11:123.

<sup>29</sup> *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Company, 1948), 9:449.

<sup>30</sup> *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 917.

<sup>31</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 2, Ezra 7:6.

<sup>32</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 2, Ezra 7:11.

<sup>33</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 2, Nehemiah 8:4.

“They read from the book, from the Law of God, explaining<sup>34</sup> to give the sense....” That is, “They expounded it [the Law], and plainly made known the mind of God therein.”<sup>35</sup> The procedure may have been as follows. “There being a very great congregation now assembled, the Priests and the Levites were some in one place, and some in another; and so instructed the people as they made them to understand the meaning of the Law.”<sup>36</sup>

When we come to the New Testament, we find “[t]he scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses” (Matthew 23:2). They were the “Masters and Teachers.”<sup>37</sup> They occupied the “office of teaching the word of God, law and gospel: belonging to the priests under the law, and the ministers under the gospel....”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the scribes, some of them being priests and Levites, continued the work of the ancient Levites or teaching priests. There was therefore continuity in the teaching office from Moses to the time of Christ.

To confirm this continuity, we look again at the synagogue. Specifically, we are interested in the reading and the teaching of the word of God in the synagogue. Acts 13:14-15 outlines the procedure.

But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they [Paul and Barnabas] went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”

F. F. Bruce makes these comments.

After the appropriate prayers had been recited and the two scripture lessons read—one from the Pentateuch and the other from some place in the prophetic books bearing some relation to the subject of the Pentateuchal reading—an address was normally delivered by some suitable member of the congregation. It

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<sup>34</sup> NASB Margin.

<sup>35</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 2, Nehemiah 8:8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Verse 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Annotations*, Vol. 6, Matthew 23:2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

was part of the duties of the “rulers of the synagogue” to appoint someone to deliver the address. On this occasion they sent to the two strangers who had come to their city synagogue, inviting them to speak a word of exhortation to the gathering.<sup>39</sup>

Bruce adds, “At this time the Pentateuch was read in the synagogue according to a triennial lectionary, the 154 or 155 lessons still being marked in Hebrew Bibles as the *Sedarim*.”<sup>40</sup> With regard to the phrase, “word of exhortation,” in this context, Bruce also refers to Hebrews 13:22. “I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.” “The expression ‘a word of exhortation’ (Gk. λόγος παρακλήσεως) was perhaps a synagogue term for the sermon which followed the Scripture readings (*cf.* Heb. 13:22).”<sup>41</sup> Lane says this expression is “an idiomatic designation for the homily or edifying discourse that followed the public reading from the designated portions of Scripture...”<sup>42</sup> We therefore see the synagogue procedure to be the reading of Scripture followed by an exhortation, teaching, or sermon.

When we examine Luke, we find Christ followed the same procedure.

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place.... And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them...(Luke 4:16-21).

Commenting on this text, Lightfoot says, “*Moses* and the Prophets were read in their Synagogues every Sabbath day, Acts 13.15 & 15.21.”<sup>43</sup> Continuing his commentary, Lightfoot describes the procedure as follows.

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<sup>39</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 267-268.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce, 267, n. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce, 268, n. 24.

<sup>42</sup> William Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 568.

<sup>43</sup> Lightfoot, 614.

The reader of the *Hapthoroth* or portion out of the Prophets, was ordinarily one of the number of those that had read the Law: he was called out to read by the Minister of the Congregation, he went up into the desk, had the book of the Prophet given him, began with Prayer, and had an interpreter, even as it was with them that read the Law.

And under these Synagogue rulers are we to understand Christs reading in the Synagogue at this time: namely, as a member of the Synagogue, called out by the Minister, reading according to the accustomed order, the portion in the Prophet when the Law was read (and it is like[ly] he had read some part of the Law before) and having an Interpreter by him to render into *Syriack* the Text he read: he then begins in *Syriack* to preach upon it.<sup>44</sup>

It is quite clear that Christ follows the common procedure. He enters the synagogue, reads the Scriptures, and then gives an exhortation. Not only so, it is clear that Christ engages in the ordinary ministry of reading and teaching Scripture. This is the essence of Mark 1:21, “They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *began* to teach.”

To be sure, Christ performs a significant miracle in this synagogue service.

Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him (Mark 1:23-26).

Jesus encounters the demon possessed man in the synagogue, in an assembly of the visible church of the time. The demoniac declares Christ to be “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24).

“The synagogue cannot hinder a demoniac from entering it, nor that Satan, should in it declare the victory of the kingdom of order and light.”<sup>45</sup> The “unclean spirit” testifies truthfully as to the person of the Savior. Our Lord then engages in quite extraordinary ministry. “Christ cleanses the

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<sup>44</sup> Lightfoot, 615.

<sup>45</sup> John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Mark-Luke*, trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 22.

synagogue.”<sup>46</sup> We distinguish between the ordinary and the extraordinary, between ordinary teaching ministry and extraordinary miraculous ministry. The note in the Geneva Bible (1599) makes this distinction. “Hee [Christ] preacheth the doctrine, by which alone Satan is driven out of the world, which also he confirmeth by a miracle.”<sup>47</sup> The ordinary ministry of the word is confirmed by the miracle.

It is important to make this distinction. This is the early Puritan position articulated by William Ames (1576-1633). “The ordinary ministry is that which receives all of its direction from the will of God revealed in the Scriptures and from those means which God has appointed in the church for its continual edification.”<sup>48</sup> Ames goes on to say, “The purpose of the ordinary ministry is to preserve, propagate, and renew the church through regular means.”<sup>49</sup> This is exactly what Christ does as He enters the synagogue, reads Scripture, and offers an exhortation based upon the readings. In doing so, Christ carries out the ancient work of the teachers of the Law assigned to the Levites by God. Christ comfortably steps into this role.

We now see that “He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). There is a simple contrast. The contrast with regard to authority does not have to do with the authority of office. As we have already seen, the “scribes had the kind of authority that comes from office.”<sup>50</sup> They were “teachers whose office it was to interpret the Law to the people....”<sup>51</sup> Nor does the contrast have to do simply with the authority of Scripture. Both Christ, exercising the ordinary ministry of the Word, and the scribes stood on Scripture.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *The 1599 Geneva Bible* (Ozark, MO: L.L. Brown Publishing, 1995), n. Mark 1:23.

<sup>48</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eudsen (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1968), 190.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> J. D. Jones, *Commentary on Mark* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 27.

<sup>51</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1916), 11:123.

Rather, there seems to be a profound difference between how Christ approached and used the Scriptures and how the scribes approached and used the Scriptures. “A study of Jewish rabbinic interpretation shows that it was typical [for the scribes] to cite a list of authorities to make one’s point.”<sup>52</sup> Because the scribes depended so heavily upon the authority of their great teachers, “their teaching was of the letter, and dead, breathing no virtue of the Spirit, with no grounding of majesty.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, “*Their* speeches were often dry as dust.”<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, “Christ taught *as one that had authority*, as one that knew the mind of God, and was commissioned to declare it.”<sup>55</sup> That is, Christ set forth the truth of God. Paul was later quite zealous for the “truth of God” (Romans 1:25, 3:7, 15:8). This truth is God’s truth distilled from God’s Word. This truth captivates the mind and then burns in the soul. When this is the case, the preacher is full of zeal. Thus the man, Christ Jesus, had a zeal for God’s house, God’s church (1 Timothy 2:5, Psalm 69:9, John 2:17). “He spoke the truth....”<sup>56</sup> He did so pointedly. “There was system in *his* preaching.”<sup>57</sup> “He presented matters of great significance, matters of life, death, and eternity.”<sup>58</sup> Christ also presented the truth simply and plainly. In doing so, “He excites curiosity by making generous use of illustrations....”<sup>59</sup>

Phillips Brooks says, “Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men.”<sup>60</sup> This was Christ’s ministry of the Word. Andrew Blackwood says something similar. “What do we understand by preaching? It means divine truth through personality or the truth of God voiced by

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<sup>52</sup> *NetBible* (Bible Studies Press, 2001), 1793, n. 2.

<sup>53</sup> John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke*, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 1:160.

<sup>54</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 5:454.

<sup>56</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Hendriksen, 63.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Phillip Brooks, *On Preaching* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1964), 5.

chosen personality to meet human needs.”<sup>61</sup> This again was Christ’s ministry of the Word. “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God” (Mark 1:14). “He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons” (Mark 1:39). “Preachers in the Bible spoke with Spiritual urgency. They stood up and gave their message, knowing that they had the truth which people everywhere needed to take on board.”<sup>62</sup> Thus we once again observe, the man, Christ Jesus, had a zeal for God’s house; He had great zeal for God’s church (1 Timothy 2:5, Psalm 69:9, John 2:17).

In addition, by His own testimony, Jesus Christ received the anointing of the Holy Spirit to equip Him for the preaching and teaching task. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18). D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones interprets the text.

This is a most striking statement. It throws great light, of course on the whole meaning and purpose of the Incarnation; but what is significant is that even our Lord himself, the Son of God, could not have exercised His ministry as a man on earth if He had not received this special, peculiar ‘anointing’ of the Holy Spirit to perform His task. It is true even of Him.<sup>63</sup>

Christ’s preaching was truth from Scripture tinctured with throbbing zeal pouring from a Spirit anointed heart. He therefore taught as one having authority. Concerning this authority, Hendriksen comments, “[T]he same authority and power exhibited in Jesus teaching was shown also in the commands he issued to the demons...”<sup>64</sup> The ordinary ministry of the Word carried the *same* authority. In all of this, as Christ taught the Scriptures in the synagogue, He fulfilled the ancient function of the teaching priest. He was and is the consummate teaching priest.

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<sup>61</sup> Andrew Watterson Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons* (Nashville: Abington, 1948), 13. Blackwood refers to real needs rather than felt needs.

<sup>62</sup> Stuart Olyott, *Preaching Pure and Simple* (Bryntirion: Wales, 2005), 150.

<sup>63</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 307.

<sup>64</sup> Hendriksen, 67.

Mark 1:22 says of the people in the synagogue, “They were amazed at His teaching.” “The grand effect was that of wonder or astonishment, *they were struck*, literally *struck out*, driven from their normal or customary state of mind by something new and strange. The object or occasion of this wonder was *his doctrine*...”<sup>65</sup> The underlying expression in the original language<sup>66</sup> is a “strong descriptive word for amazement, meaning strictly to strike a person out of his senses by some strong feeling, such as fear, wonder or even joy.”<sup>67</sup> We can imagine the people were shocked and struck with awe. “They were actually dumb with amazement.”<sup>68</sup> The silence was likely palpable. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments on this phenomenon, the reaction to Spirit impregnated authoritative preaching.

What about the people? They sense it at once; they can tell the difference immediately. They are gripped, they become serious, they are convicted, they are moved, they are humbled. Some are convicted of sin, others are lifted up to the heavens, anything may happen to any one of them. They know at once something quite unusual and exceptional is happening. As a result they begin to delight in the things of God and they want more and more teaching. They are like the people in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, they want to ‘continue steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine, and fellowship, and breaking of bread and in prayer’.<sup>69</sup>

This is where changed lives are secured. This is the ordinary ministry of reading and preaching the Word. This is the ministry in which Jesus Christ engaged. He was and is the consummate teaching priest.

The church continues the teaching ministry of the teaching priests, of the synagogue, and of the Jesus Christ, the consummate teaching priest.

The liturgical pattern of the synagogue, in which the public reading of Scripture was followed by preaching, was adopted by the early church. Evidence for this is

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<sup>65</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1980), 19-20.

<sup>66</sup> Gk. ἐξεπλήσσοντο

<sup>67</sup> Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 21.

<sup>68</sup> R. C. N. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 73.

<sup>69</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 324-325.



provided in the instruction in 1 Tim. 4:13: “devote yourself to the public reading [of Scripture], to the exhortation [τῆ παρακλήσει], to teaching.” The definite expression “the exhortation” is a synonymous designation for the sermon. It referred specifically to the exposition and application of the Scripture that had been read aloud to the assembled congregation.<sup>70</sup>

The “exhortation” or “word of exhortation,” describing the teaching of the synagogue, also “appears to be a fixed expression for the sermon in early Christian circles...”<sup>71</sup>

The apostle Paul adds to our understanding. He asks these pertinent questions with regard to preaching. “How shall they believe him whom they have not heard?<sup>72</sup> And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). John Murray exclaims with regard to the first question, “A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by sent messengers.”<sup>73</sup> Jesus Christ speaks in the truth properly set forth from Scripture. Jesus Christ, the consummate teaching priest, fulfills the teaching obligations of the ancient teaching priests and continues those obligations in and through the teaching ministry of the New Testament church. If the traditional position holds, we are heirs of the procedures and means of grace established through Moses over 3500 years ago.

Our challenge is to carry on the ordinary ministry of the public reading and preaching of Scripture under the guidance of Jesus Christ, the consummate teaching priest. Our challenge is to follow Jesus Christ in the ordinary ministry of the Word and to teach with authority and not as the scribes. Lenski indicts the scribes and at the same time warns each of us.

The contrast with the teaching of “their scribes” was pronounced: “at once erudite and foolish, at once contemptuous and mean; never passing a hair’s breadth beyond the careful watchful boundary line of commentary and precedent; full of

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<sup>70</sup> Lane, 568.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> “There is no need to insert the preposition ‘in’ before ‘him’.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 2:58, n. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Murray, 58.

balanced inference, and orthodox hesitancy, and impossible literalism; intricate with legal pettiness and labyrinthine system; elevating mere memory above genius, and repetitions above originality; concerned only about priests and Pharisees, in the Temple and synagogue, or school, or Sanhedrin, and mostly occupied with things infinitely little. It was not indeed wholly devoid of moral significance, nor is it impossible to find here and there among the debris of it a noble thought; and it was occupied a thousandfold more with Levitical minutiae about mint, and anise, and cummin, and the length of fringes, and the breadth of phylacteries, and the washing of cups, and platters, and the particular quarter of a second when the new moons and Sabbaths began.” Farrar. To this day it is hard to conceive the arid dreariness of the teaching of the scribes. Some of the “talks” in the pulpits of today on anything save the διδασκαλίη and λόγοι of Jesus, without a bit of meat for the soul, are a continuation of the deliverances of the old Jewish scribes. How Jesus pitied the people who were getting nothing for their souls....<sup>74</sup>

Yes, we must guard ourselves against standing in the tradition of the scribes. We must guard ourselves against preaching that simply rests on the authority of ordination and office. We must guard ourselves against preaching that rests on the authority of the great doctors of the church.

On the other hand, the true continuation of the biblical teaching priests finds its consummation and example in Jesus Christ. Christ taught as one having authority. Christ’s preaching was truth from Scripture tintured with throbbing zeal pouring from a Spirit anointed heart. Listen to how the Westminster Divines speak of the preacher. Keep in mind the contrast between Christ and the scribes.

In raising doctrines from the text, his care ought to be, *First*, That the matter be the truth of God. *Secondly*, That it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence. *Thirdly*, That he chiefly insist on those doctrines which are principally intended, and make most for the edification of the hearers.

The doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms....

The arguments or reasons are to be solid, and, as much as may be, convincing. The illustrations, of what kind soever, ought to be full of light, and such as may convey the truth to the hearer’s heart with spiritual delight....

He is not to rest in general doctrine...but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty.... [Y]et

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<sup>74</sup> Lenski, 74-75.

he is to endeavor to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart....<sup>75</sup>

Notice the accent on truth derived from Scripture, penetrating illustrations, and the force and power of the word preached. These are elements we find in Christ's teaching in the synagogue.

In discussing the "Properties of Style" in preaching, W. G. T. Shedd speaks of plainness and force.<sup>76</sup> By plainness Shedd means perspicuity, distinctiveness, and vividness.<sup>77</sup> "Sermons should be plain."<sup>78</sup> Why is this so important?

There is a prodigious power in plainness of presentation. It is the power of actual contact. A plain writer, or speaker, makes the truth and the mind impinge upon each other. When the style is plain, the mind of the hearer experiences the sensation of being touched; and this sensation is always impressive, for a man starts when he is touched.<sup>79</sup>

Think again of Jesus. His teaching was clear and plain. The truth touched the mind. The people were startled. We must follow Christ in this ordinary ministry of the Word.

If there is a prodigious power in plainness, "Force is power *manifested*; power streaming out in all directions, and from every pore of the mind."<sup>80</sup> Again, truth is the seat of this power. "It originates in truth itself, it partakes of its nature; it does not spring ultimately from the energy of the human mind, but from the power of ideas and principles."<sup>81</sup> Shedd then links the power of truth and the power of God with this pithy statement. "[M]an's strength is in God, and the mind's strength is in truth."<sup>82</sup> In other words, the anointing of the Spirit is essential in preaching God's truth. As this is the case, "The principal quality in a forcible style, and that which strikes our

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<sup>75</sup> *The Confession of Faith; Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large: together with The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1985), 379-380.

<sup>76</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Company, 1877), 58-105.

<sup>77</sup> Shedd, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Shedd, 63.

<sup>79</sup> Shedd, 64.

<sup>80</sup> Shedd, 73.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Shedd, 74.

attention, is *penetration*. While listening to a speaker of whom this property is characteristic, our minds seem to be pricked as with needles, and pierced as with javelins.”<sup>83</sup> We need only look once again at our Lord teaching in the synagogue and the reaction of the people to realize, “It is this penetrating quality, then, which renders discourse effective.”<sup>84</sup>

Shedd then connects the properties of plainness and force with these words:

The sermon should throb with a robust life. But it will not, until the preacher has inhaled, into his own intellect, the energy and intensity of revealed ideas, and then has dared to strip away from the matter in which this force is embodied, every thing that impedes its working. Powerful writers [and preachers] are plain. The fundamental properties of style are interlinked; and he who has secured plainness will secure force, while a failure to attain the former carries with it the failure to attain the latter.

With these words, Shedd describes Jesus on one hand and the scribes on the other. “*Their* speeches were often dry as dust.”<sup>85</sup> Christ’s preaching was truth from Scripture tintured with throbbing zeal pouring from a Spirit anointed heart. Jesus Christ was the consummate teaching priest. He fulfilled the teaching obligations of the ancient Levitical teaching priests. He seeks to continue these obligations in and through the teaching ministry of the New Testament church today.

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<sup>83</sup> Shedd, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Shedd, 87.

<sup>85</sup> Hendriksen, 63.