

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

A New Teaching With Authority

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Mark 1:21-28

Assistant Pastor Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 1:21; that’s on page 836 in your pew Bibles. In today’s text we find Jesus’ first recorded miracle in the book of Mark. Before we read these verses together I want to remind you of the purpose of Mark’s gospel. This is not merely a biography in that Mark is not simply giving us information for the sake of more information. He writes with a purpose and he makes that purpose clear right from the outset. Do you remember how this book began?

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1 ESV)

Mark is an evangelist and he is writing so that we will come to see and agree that Jesus Christ is the Son of God! And so every paragraph and every story is laid out with intention to help us to see the true identity of Jesus Christ. Just like a good essay, Mark his thesis – the true identity of Jesus – at the beginning and the end of his gospel and he uses all the space in between to prove his case.

At the end of the day, Mark wants us to wrestle with this most important question: Who is Jesus? That’s why scholars refer to the conversation in Mark 8 between Jesus and his disciples as the climax of the first half of this Gospel.

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”²⁸ And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”²⁹ And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:27-29 ESV)

Amen! “Who do you say I am?” That is the most important question that you will ever answer. Is Jesus just another teacher? Perhaps he is raving lunatic... Was he just another good man? Or is Jesus Christ the Son of God sent from Heaven to do for us what we could never do for ourselves so that we could be brought into right relationship with the Holy God of the universe?

“Who do you say I am?” As we look to this morning’s text my hope and prayer is that each and every one of us will be able to answer that question the same way that Peter did. Mark is disclosing another clue for us – another glimpse into the true identity of Jesus Christ. Hear now the word of the Lord.

²¹ And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.

²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,²⁴ “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.”²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.²⁷ 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.”

²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God

The key word that should jump out at us in this text is “authority.” Jesus speaks in such a way that crowds are left in awe and wonder and even the demons tremble at His words. Having witnessed this scene, the crowd disperses and spreads the word about Jesus across the region of Galilee. Whoever this Jesus is, there is something mysterious and powerful about him. He possesses a unique authority. And in today’s text that authority is revealed when Jesus speaks.

This morning I’d like to draw your attention to two wonderful things that take place when Jesus, the One who has authority, speaks.

When Jesus Speaks

The first thing we notice when Jesus speaks with authority is that:

1. People Marvel

In typical Markan fashion we are not told the content of Jesus' sermon. Here's what Mark tells us,

²¹ And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.
²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.
(Mark 1:21-22 ESV)

Mark is brief, but some of the minor details found in this section speak volumes. First, we notice that Jesus is in Capernaum. Capernaum was situated just north of the Sea of Galilee and it became the home base for Jesus and his disciples during his Galilean ministry. Matthew tells us this in his Gospel,

¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,
(Matthew 4:13 ESV)¹

I mention this detail because it actually gives us a bit of insight into the content of Jesus' sermon. Capernaum became Jesus' and his disciples' central hub of ministry *after* Jesus left Nazareth. And the reason Jesus left Nazareth is because the people there wanted to throw him off of cliff after he preached in the synagogue! Do you remember that story? We find it in Luke chapter 4.

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21 ESV)

The after effects of his sermon are found a few verses later. Look with me at verse 28.

¹ See also Matthew 9:1 and Mark 2:1

²⁸When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰But passing through their midst, he went away. ³¹And **he went down to Capernaum**, a city of Galilee. (Luke 4:28-31 ESV)

And so we find Jesus in Capernaum preaching in another synagogue. What is the content of his sermon? I don't think we'd be wrong to speculate that it was something like his earlier sermon in Nazareth. One of the evidences we have available to us is the recorded response of the people.

²²And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and **not as the scribes**. (Mark 1:22 ESV)

“Not as the scribes.” Now, I want to make sure that we understand who these scribes were. If the scribes were simply uneducated fools than this remark would lose something of its punch. Or if the scribes were intellectuals who had no skills in public speaking than that might alter our understanding of this remark. But scribes were neither uneducated nor ill equipped to speak in public. In fact, that's what their job consisted of. James Edwards remarks on the office of scribe in his commentary in this way,

“Scribe thus combined offices of Torah professor, teacher and moralist, and civil lawyer, in that order.”²

These were brilliant men. So when the crowd said, “He speaks with greater authority than the scribes,” they were comparing Jesus to extremely gifted scholars and speakers of their day. Whatever Jesus was saying, it had such an effect on the people that it made the wisdom of the scribes look like foolishness in comparison.

Scribes took pride in the fact that they didn't teach anything new or novel. Their job was to read and explain the text, and so that is what they did. But Jesus came to say a new thing. He came to bring new revelation. We often hear this phrase in Jesus' sermons: “You have heard it said... But I say!” He didn't come simply to explain the Word of God. He is the word of God. And so when Jesus speaks – when the Son of God speaks – when the One who has authority speaks – people marvel! He is not like any earthly teacher we have ever seen. He is so much more!

The second thing we note from this text is that when Jesus speaks:

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 54.

2. Demons Flee

This is the first recorded miracle in Mark's Gospel and it is noteworthy that the first miracle that Mark chooses to include is the story of an exorcism. Remember that Mark is organizing this account with intention. We know of miracles that Jesus performed that happened prior to this exorcism so why does Mark start here? Let's compare this with what Mark tells us about the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We find that a few verses earlier in verse 12.

¹²The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, **being tempted by Satan**. And he was with the wild animals, **and the angels were ministering to him**. (Mark 1:12-13 ESV)

It is undeniable that Mark is highlighting the spiritual realities that are taking place behind the scenes. He wants us to see this battle taking shape. Satan is real, and he is actively at work in this world with the help of his demons or unclean spirits. On the other side we see Jesus, equipped with the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, and helped by his angels. Right in the first chapter of Mark's gospel he shows us the major players who are at work in the spiritual realm and, more importantly, he shows us who has the upper hand. In our text this morning the demons possessing the man exclaim,

²⁴“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” (Mark 1:24a ESV)

This is a grammatical construction that we find in the Old Testament and it has the force of, “Go away and leave us alone!”³ The demons recognize Jesus and are entirely aware that they are fighting for opposite sides. They go on to ask,

“Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” (Mark 1:24b ESV)

One of the ironies of Mark's Gospel is the reality that the demons see what the people who claimed to be God's people could not. If the question of Mark is, “Who is Jesus?” than the demons are clearly a step ahead of the rest of the characters at this stage. They know who he is.

But let's stop right there. At this point we should note that simply “knowing” Jesus' true identity is obviously not enough. The demons know and shudder. Do you have the faith of demons? The

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, Reprint ed. (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2014), 103.

devil KNOWS that Jesus is the Son of God – does that make him a Christian? God is not looking for our intellectual ascent – He is looking for repentance and trust. He beckons us not merely to acknowledge him, but to FOLLOW him. How easy it is for us to exclaim that He is “Lord! Lord!” but to go on living contrary to the way that He called us to live. The faith of demons will not save you.

And the story moves on. The demons ask, “Have you come to destroy us?” and Jesus responds in the next verse:

²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. (Mark 1:25-26 ESV)

Jesus says simply to the demons, “Be quiet and get out.” I love the way that James Edwards summarizes this encounter. He notes,

“The inbreaking of God’s kingdom in Jesus first begins, according to Mark, not in the human arena but in the cosmic arena, in order to bind the “strong man” (3:27) who exercises power over the natural order.”⁴

That phrase “in order to bind the strong man” is a reference to chapter 3 of Mark’s Gospel where Jesus has again cast out a demon. The Pharisees are accusing him of being an agent of Satan and Jesus responds,

But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. (Mark 3:27 ESV)

The strong man is Satan himself. Jesus is arguing here that he must necessarily bind up our enemy so as to save us. Church, do you recognize that there is an enemy who is seeking to destroy you? One cannot read the Bible without seeing that there is a war that is taking place all around us. And when we close our Bibles and open our newspapers we see that this war is waging still and that it is taking place on every corner of this planet. Rioting and racism. Hatred and evil. Things are not now as they should be.

We find the beginning of this war in Genesis three. Adam and Eve were in paradise. They had everything that they could ever need. They had peace with God! But the enemy of our soul

⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 57.

deceived them, and misled them. He convinced them that God was withholding something from them and he encouraged them to reach out and take it. And they did.

As a result, we were cast out of the presence of God. It appeared that the devil had effectively stolen from us that which God had so graciously given. But then, in the midst of our sin and shame, God made this promise to our enemy:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

The fight is not over, God said. Someone is coming. Someone will be born of a woman, and though you will bruise his heel he will defeat you. The Gospel is the message of how God came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He came to pay the penalty for our sinful disobedience on the cross. And in order for us to be rescued our enemy needed to be defeated. Before Jesus could take back all that the devil had plundered he needed to bind up the strong man. And so the first miracle that Mark draws our attention to is a miracle that proclaims, “This is the man before whom demons flee!”

One last observation I’d like to make is the method Jesus employs in this exorcism. Even at the time of Jesus’ ministry there were traditions that suggested that there was a certain technique that needed to be employed during exorcisms. It was thought that, if one could determine the name of a demon than they could use that name to somehow gain a level of authority over the demon. There are people who still believe this today and who write books to teach us how to assert this power. We’re told to cast out “the demon of laziness” or “the spirit of discouragement”. I suspect that these folks are earnestly trying to teach that which they believe is true and helpful. But let’s notice that Jesus does not employ any of those strategies here. Only once in any of the Gospels does Jesus say the name of a demon and in that instance he doesn’t use the name when casting the demon out. One commentator notes,

“There is no incantation, no ritual, no ‘props’ of any kind, simply an authoritative word of command. That seems to settle the matter.”⁵

⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, Reprint ed. (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2014), 104.

Jesus does not need a ritual, or a strategy. Jesus needs only to speak, and the powers of darkness fall in line. Or, as Martin Luther put it in his remarkable hymn,

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

When Jesus speaks, demons flee.

Response

Having considered the text, there were three responses that jumped out at me. First, I would argue that this text calls us to:

1. Trust in the authority of Jesus

I would hope that you go home today remembering this: Jesus has all authority. He showed his authority over mankind in his teaching and he showed his authority over the spiritual realm when he commanded the demons to flee. I want us to go out of this place freshly aware of the fact that when Jesus' speaks the wisdom of man looks like foolishness and the power of darkness crumbles to the floor. Remember that when you share the Gospel with your family and friends.

Christian, you don't need to apologize when your message does not sound like the message of the intellectual elites of our culture. You don't need to add anything to the message of Jesus Christ. Let's pray and proclaim like people who believe that Jesus has all authority! He's stronger than the devil – he came to bind up the strong man. His message is unlike anything the world has ever heard – the people marvelled at his teaching then and they will marvel now. That message will cause some to leave everything to follow Him. That same message will cause others to want to throw you off of a cliff. But in one form or another, the world will marvel at the message of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only solution to mankind's separation from God and we are his chosen messengers so let's go and let's make disciples and let's teach them to obey all that he has commanded because HE IS WITH US and HE IS MIGHTY! Amen?

Secondly, I think that this text requires that we:

2. Remember that we are in a spiritual battle

One of the things that struck me in my study was how foreign I felt writing about exorcisms and evil spirits. Can we agree that the spiritual realm is not something that we as North American Christians tend to major on? By and large, we speak about evil as if it is some faceless idea or some hypothetical philosophy. We seem to think that the spiritual dimension consists of God in the one corner and “sin” in the other. But that is not the picture that the Bible paints. The Devil is a real enemy who hates God’s people. He is standing in the opposite corner of the ring and he prowls about like a roaring lion seeking to steal, kill and destroy. Demons and evil spirits are real forces that bring the world harm and that even possess people.

One of the consequences of deceiving ourselves into believing that we are not in a spiritual war is prayerlessness. Two weeks ago we had a member’s meeting and one of the main topics for discussion was a call to recommit to being a prayerful church. I believe that we will become even more committed to prayer when we come to understand that Satan and his demons are actively working to deceive and destroy the people in our city. That’s why we’re reminded in Ephesians,

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 ESV)

Now, having said all that, I would like to acknowledge that it is easy to overemphasise the spiritual realm. If we were to do a word count to determine how much time is spent in the New Testament instructing believers about the spiritual realm we would find a very small percentage. We should acknowledge the existence of angels and demons but we should not let them become our focus. They exist, but by and large God’s instruction for us is to be prayerful and to proclaim the Gospel. So let’s be mindful of the spiritual realities that exist all around us, but let’s not become obsessed or crippled by fear. James 4:7 tells us,

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and **he will flee from you.** (James 4:7 ESV)

And 1 John 5:18 tells us,

¹⁸We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and **the evil one does not touch him**. (1 John 5:18 ESV)

Jesus is stronger. He wins! So let's be prayerful, and let's be humble, but let's be courageous!

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4 ESV)

This really brings me to our final application and I would argue that it flows more naturally out of the text. I don't think Mark wrote what he wrote so that we would stop and talk about demons, but due to our cultural biases we needed to say a few things. Ultimately, I would argue that Mark wrote this passage so that we would:

3. Submit to the authority of Jesus

I mentioned earlier that Jesus is not merely looking for our intellectual assent. It is not enough this morning to leave this place feeling convinced of the fact that Jesus has authority. The demons knew that. The devil knows that. It is not enough simply to "know that". What we need is to submit to the authority of Christ. We need to repent of our sins and to believe in all that Jesus says. Submitting to Jesus means obeying him. Someone who is submitting to Jesus doesn't waste their life trying to undermine or alter the things he has said. They hear his words and they obey him no matter what the cost.

O that we as a people would be moved to action by seeing afresh the power and authority of Jesus Christ. Notice how this story ends.

²⁷ 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." ²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. (Mark 1:27-28 ESV)

Do you know who the church's best evangelists are? Brand new converts. Without fail, the most passionate evangelists in a church are those folks who are newest to the faith. Why is that? It's because they are freshly aware of the power of Jesus Christ! These folks in Mark 1 are likely not converts. There is nothing in the text that indicates that they went on to become followers of Jesus. But what we see is that these people sat under a sermon unlike anything they had ever

heard before and they watched as Jesus told a demon to be quiet and go away and it did! They witnessed the power and authority of Jesus and they were not going to be silent! The whole region of Galilee heard about the power and authority of Jesus!

Christian, do you remember that first year after you came to Christ? You were a slave to sin but then, as if someone had turned on the lights in a dark room you were suddenly able to see clearly for the first time. You saw a Holy God and you saw your sin. You understood that you were separated from God and that the penalty for your sin was death. But then, with wonder and awe, you saw the Son of God – Jesus Christ – and you understood that he paid for your sin on the cross so that you could be saved. You felt a freedom from the sin that you had just moments ago been enslaved to and you had a peace with God that you didn't even know was possible. A joy filled your heart that was foreign to you and, unbeknownst to you, the Holy Spirit took up residence in your soul to lead you, to guide you and to mark you as a child of God for the days to come.

And you just had to tell people about it! That is the only appropriate response to Jesus Christ. The story immediately before this one recounts how the first disciples left everything when Jesus called them. They left all that they had because they understood that what Jesus was offering was so much more – Peace with God and eternal life.

Submit yourself to Christ, the One who has authority. See the power of God in Jesus Christ and proclaim it! Who can free our neighbours from their sin? Only Jesus! Who is the hope for the pregnant teenage mom who feels trapped? Jesus! Who is the only one who can disarm the powers of darkness that are at work behind the scenes in our city? The Son of God, Jesus Christ! See afresh his power, submit to his authority and proclaim it in your homes, your workplaces and your city! His is the kingdom. His is the power. His is the authority. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.