

The Authority of Jesus: Mark 1:16-28
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One of the pieces of our mission statement here at Grace Church is to proclaim the truth of God's Word. And this is one of the key components of our times of corporate worship. Each Lord's Day as we gather together we want to proclaim the truth of God's Word and receive the truth of God's Word into our hearts. We are Word-centered, Word-focused, because it's in the revealed Word of God that we find the Good News of Jesus Christ our Savior from sin. This Book is all about Christ, and therefore we want to be all about this Book. We want to be a people of the Book. We want to come hungering and thirsting for the truth of God's Word. I hope you've come this morning eager to feed on God's Word. I hope you've been feeding on God's Word all week long in your own personal times in the Word and in prayer, and I hope that as we come together as a body this morning that we will all be edified by our corporate time in the Word.

For this to happen as it ought to, and as we desire it to happen, it does require something of all of us. For the one preaching it requires much study and preparation and prayer and thought in order to preach well. And for all of us it requires focus and discipline to listen well. It's my prayer this morning that I will do my part in proclaiming the truth of God's Word and that we will all do our part in listening attentively and openly and eagerly to receive what God has for us. Let's come to this time eager to experience the power of the Word. And in coming to our passage for this morning in Mark 1, let's listen carefully and with open hearts so that we might encounter together the glorious authority of Jesus. That's what we're going to see in our verses for today: the authority of Jesus.

The authority of Jesus is an awesome thing, and this passage presents His authority in such striking ways. Remember that Jesus has just been baptized by John and affirmed by the Spirit and the Father as He came up out of the water. There has been this divine declaration that this is the Son of God. This is the One. He's the King. He's the Messiah. And then the Spirit sent Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, where Jesus demonstrated that He will be the One to crush Satan. And then Jesus begins to preach, and we get a sound bite from His preaching in verse 15. This was His central message: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Jesus is now on the scene in full force. His public ministry has begun. And Mark now wants to show us the authority of

Jesus. He shows it to us in three ways in the verses that I just read. First, the authority of Jesus is seen in the way that He calls disciples. Second, His authority is seen in the way that He teaches. And third, Jesus exercises His authority by casting out an unclean spirit.

This is our King Jesus. Let's worship Him for His authority. Jesus calls, and men follow. Jesus teaches, and all stand amazed. Jesus commands, and demons flee.

Jesus Calls Disciples (verses 16-20)

Jesus calls two sets of brothers. First, Simon (who is later called Peter) and Andrew. And then James and John. Verses 16-18 tell us about Jesus calling Simon and Andrew. Verse 16, "Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea." The Sea of Galilee is not really what we would think of as a sea. It's more like a big lake—seven miles wide and thirteen miles long. In the first century the fishing business on the Sea of Galilee was huge. There were plenty of fish, and the fishing businesses, like the ones that these men were involved in, distributed fish all around the region. Fish was what everyone ate, and so this was big business.

Simon and Andrew were casting a net into the sea. This is the way people caught fish. They used large circular nets with weights around the edges. And they would cast the net out over the water and as the net sank to the bottom it would trap fish in the net. Then they would pull the net back in.

We read in John 1:35-42 that Simon and Andrew had already met Jesus. They had been connected with the ministry of John the Baptist and then introduced to Jesus through John. And Jesus now comes to them to call them as disciples. The way Mark presents this portrays the authority of Jesus so vividly. In verse 17 Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And then verse 18 says, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him." That is astounding! Especially when we consider that these were businessmen. They were not just sitting around idly looking for a way to pass the time. They were running a profitable business, and they left it. They walked away from it to follow Jesus. They recognized His authority, and therefore they dropped everything at Jesus' call.

The same is true of James and John, who are the sons of Zebedee. In their case it was a family business, and they had people working for them. Verse 20 says, "And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him." For James and John, following Jesus meant not only leaving the family fishing business, but leaving their own father as well. Jesus says it so provocatively in

Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Jesus does not mean for us to literally despise our family members. He does not intend for us to be mean to them. But His point is that every other allegiance and every other love in our lives must pale in comparison to our allegiance to Him and our love for Him. This is radical discipleship. Jesus is calling these men to leave everything in order to follow Him. And that’s just what they do.

The Effectual Call

Now, we have to ask the question: what caused them to do this? What explanation is there for these fishermen dropping their nets, leaving their business, leaving their father, and following after Jesus? Put yourself in the place of an onlooker. Imagine that you are a fisherman running a fishing business that is competing with these guys. You’re on the next spot up along the shore, and you watch this guy stroll up and say, “Follow me.” And these guys drop what they’re doing and follow Him. And they don’t come back! There’s money to be made here—what’s going on? How could you just leave?

This is inexplicable on human terms, and that’s why it is such a glorious portrait of Jesus’ authority. Jesus calls, and these men follow. What we’re seeing here is an effectual call. Jesus has an authority within Him that enables Him to call effectually. When He calls someone in this way, the call guarantees a response. In this way, Jesus’ calling of these disciples is an example of how God calls His elect. It is a sovereign, powerful call that effectively brings about the response that is called for. This is the effectual call.

If you are a follower of Christ, this is why you are a follower of Christ: you were called. It’s not ultimately because you weighed the evidence and decided that following Christ is the most logical thing to do. It’s not ultimately that you made a decision. It’s not ultimately a matter of the will (although the will is involved). But the fundamental cause that we must point to is the effectual call of God. Jesus says to His disciples in John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”

What an awesome thing it is that my identity as a disciple of Jesus does not rest on a decision I made but on a decision that He made! That gives me great hope because my will is fickle, but His will is sure and dependable. If it was ultimately up to these men to decide whether or not they should follow Jesus, they would have remained with their fishing nets. And if it was ultimately up to us whether or not to follow Jesus, we would have remained with

our petty, worldly activities. But we have been called. We were called out of darkness into his marvelous light, as Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:9. This is a glorious reality, something to praise God for.

Fishers of Men

And this is also reason to be excited about the task to which we are called. Jesus calls these disciples to something that is analogous to what they were already doing, but something that was also entirely different. They were fishermen, and Jesus calls them to be fishers of men (verse 17). More precisely, Jesus promises to make them become fishers of men. He says emphatically, “Follow me, and I will *make you become* fishers of men.” So Jesus calls them and promises to make them into something different. And this new occupation that Jesus has for them involves fishing for men rather than fish.

The Old Testament passages that use this fishing analogy are passages that speak of divine judgment. In Jeremiah 16:16 the Lord says that He is going to send out fishers and hunters to gather those whom He is going to judge. William Lane, in his commentary on Mark, links the Old Testament background with the context of Mark 1 in this way, and I think this is very illuminating. Lane writes, “The summons to be fishers of men is a call to the eschatological task of gathering men in view of the forthcoming judgment of God. It extends the demand for repentance in Jesus’ preaching.”¹ Jesus’ preaching, as we just saw in verse 15, includes the declaration that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. And in light of that the call is to repent and believe in the gospel. The imagery of fishing for men is closely linked to that because it’s taking this same message that Jesus preached to the rest of mankind who stand in imminent danger of being judged by God if they do not repent and believe in the gospel.

For those who reject this message, judgment awaits. For those who heed this message, eternal blessing awaits. And you need to know this if you are here this morning as an unbeliever. If you are not repenting of sin and you are not believing in the gospel, then you face the judgment of God. And you don’t know when that judgment may come. You may die this very day, and you will face the Almighty Judge. Or Jesus may return this very day, and you will face the Almighty Judge. Jesus is proclaiming this Good News to you. And we, as disciples of Jesus, are proclaiming this to you, that Jesus has arrived. The King has come, and therefore His Kingdom is at hand. And He is coming

¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 68.

again, soon! Therefore turn away from your sins and trust in Jesus Christ who died for sinners.

What Does It Mean for Us to Follow Him?

Jesus called these disciples. He called them effectually. He called them to be fishers of men. Just one last point on verses 16-20, and that is to ask ourselves, what does it mean for us to follow Him? What will it look like in your life to follow Jesus as one of His disciples? If He has called you effectually, then you will have new desires—desires that cause you to forsake certain things that used to consume you, and desires that draw you to certain things that you used to have no interest in. We’ve already observed how the disciples dropped everything in order to follow Jesus. Notice also that Jesus doesn’t even tell them where they’re going or what they’re going to do. He just says, “Follow me.” It’s like the call of Abram in Genesis 12. The Lord said, “Go” (Gen 12:1). “So Abram went” (Gen 12:4). Jesus said to the disciples, Follow me. And they followed.

What is this looking like in your life right now? God’s call on your life may not mean leaving your country (like Abram) or leaving your occupation or your family of origin (like these disciples). But what *does* it mean for your life? Have you ever considered the possibility that God *may* be calling you to leave your home or your job? Maybe following Jesus *will* take you to a far away place, to a very difficult place, to fish for men. Or maybe following Jesus will mean staying right where you are and becoming a fisher of men within the circles of influence you have right now.

Whether you go or stay, whether you change your vocation or not, I think the key point is that being a disciple of Jesus means giving up any and all “rights” that I may think I’m entitled to and submitting wholly to Jesus’ leading. We must surrender ourselves to Him. We must take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). Let us do as the hymn says,

My heart, my life, my all I bring
To Christ who loves me so;
he is my Master, Lord, and King,
Wherever He leads I’ll go.
I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so,
Wherever He leads I’ll go.²

² “Wherever He Leads I’ll Go” B.B. McKinney, 1936

Jesus Teaches with Authority (verses 21-22)

Moving on to verses 21-22 we see that Jesus teaches with authority. “And they [that is, Jesus along with these 4 disciples He has just called] went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they [everyone in the synagogue] were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” There’s that word “authority,” *exousia*. This is the first place that the word occurs in Mark’s gospel. It is used 9 times total in Mark, 6 times referring to Jesus (1:22, 27; 2:10; 11:28, 29, 33) and 3 times referring to the authority that Jesus gives to the apostles (3:15; 6:7; 13:34). It is a supernatural authority that Jesus possesses. It is the authority that He possesses as the Second Person of the Trinity. He is God, and as God He is omnipotent, all-powerful, sovereign. No other power or authority can compete with His power and authority. No other teacher or leader can hold a candle to Him.

That’s what we see in these verses, first of all in His teaching. Mark doesn’t give us the content of the teaching on this occasion, but we can assume that it had something to do with verses 14-15. Jesus was proclaiming the gospel of God. He was declaring that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. He was telling people to repent and believe in the gospel. And as Jesus taught, the things He was saying and the way in which He was saying it had an enormous impact on everyone who was listening. They were astonished. They had never heard anything like this before. They had listened to scribes teach about various things. But they had never heard someone speak with authority like this man was speaking. The people recognized Jesus’ authority in His teaching.

I hope that as we study the life of Christ and the teaching of Christ that we will be in awe of His authority. I hope that we recognize that the things we read in this Book have an authority that cannot be found anywhere else. The psychologists cannot match this. The politicians cannot match this. The financial advisors cannot match this. Who are you trusting in? Whose teaching are you listening to and following? I hope you recognize, like these folks did, that Jesus is in whole different league. There’s no comparison. He has authority. He speaks with penetrating insight and truth. And it’s His authoritative teaching that we desperately need in our lives on a daily basis. I pray that we will recognize His authority and be drawn to His authoritative teaching.

I also pray that as unbelievers read the Gospels that they will be awestruck with the authenticity and power and authority with which this man speaks and acts. Jesus is a man like no other. If you’re not yet a Christian, I encourage you to simply read

through this gospel of Mark and consider this man Jesus Christ. Consider the things He said and the things He did. And stand amazed at this totally unique individual, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, who came to save sinners like me and you.

Jesus Exercises His Authority (verses 23-28)

Jesus teaches with authority, and next Jesus exercises His authority by casting out an unclean spirit. He demonstrates His authority in word, and then He demonstrates His authority in deed. And in each case, the people are amazed. Look at verses 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.”

This man is possessed by a demon, and he is crying out in opposition to Jesus. His question, “What have you to do with us” is a way of saying, we are diametrically opposed. We are enemies. And yet the demon also knows that Jesus is far more powerful. The demon is no match for the authority of Jesus, and the demon knows it. His concern is that Jesus has come to destroy them. It seems, in the plural pronouns, that the demon is speaking not only for himself but for his fellow demons as well. And then the demon reveals Jesus’ identity. This is what is so fascinating about these encounters that Jesus has with evil spirits. The evil spirits know who He is. When Jesus heals someone who is sick, they call Him “Lord” (7:8), or “Teacher” (9:17), or “Son of David” (10:47-48), or “Rabbi” (10:51). But when Jesus is addressed by a demoniac, they call Him “the Holy One of God” (here in verse 24), or “the Son of God” (3:11), or “Son of the Most high God” (5:7). The demons clearly recognize Jesus’ deity. The demons know a lot about God. James 2:19 says, “Even the demons believe—and shudder.” They know a lot of truth about God. They know who Jesus is. But they hate Him. They shudder at the thought of Him, and they certainly shudder in the presence of Him. 1 John 3:8 says, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” The demons know that, and that’s why they are terrified. That’s why this demon is crying out.

Jesus rebukes the demon in verse 25, and here’s where we see Jesus’ authority. Jesus says, “Be silent, and come out of him!”

And the spirit obeyed. And the focus of the story is on the response of the people to this remarkable scene. Verse 27, “they were all amazed,” just like in verse 22 when “they were astonished at his teaching.” Now they are even more amazed because they have seen the authoritative teaching of Jesus put into action in His authority over this unclean spirit. They say in verse 27, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And then we’re told the result of this amazement. Their amazement translated into telling others about what Jesus had done. Verse 28, “And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.”

Jesus demonstrated His authority in word and in deed, and the people were amazed. But I also want to make the point that we must not mistake this response for saving faith. These folks are amazed at the words and the deeds of Jesus, but do not understand yet who Jesus is. The irony is that the unclean spirit is the one who knows who Jesus is, and his response is fear.

What we need, brothers and sisters, is to experience the amazement that these people had as they heard Jesus teach and watched Him exercise His authority over a demon. But we also need to experience the terror that this demon had in seeing Jesus for who He is and understanding what it means to be the object of His wrath. Because if we don’t first have a sense of that terror, then any sense of amazement will be worthless. We first need to be terrified by the wrath that we deserve as those who have opposed Jesus, and then we can run to Him for grace and be amazed by His goodness.

Do you know who Jesus is, friend? Do you really know Him? Have you ever thought about the fact that He should cast you into hell because of your hideous sins? As we come to realize the weight of our sin and the just punishment we deserve, then we can truly be amazed at our Savior Jesus Christ. He is the One who has the authority to defeat Satan and all His demons, and He is the One who has the authority to save us from sin.

In closing, let’s just think for a moment about how this knowledge of Jesus’ authority ought to be a help to us in our daily battle against sin. I find so much hope in the words of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus begins by citing His authority and then ends by reminding us that He will always be with us. He says, “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.”

When we're struggling with apathy, this should light a passion within us to be fishers of men, to be Great Commission laborers, because as we venture out in ministry and missions the One who has all authority is with us. When we're struggling with fear and anxiety, we should remind ourselves that the One who has all authority is with us. And when we are fighting against the lure of sinful desires, we should remind ourselves of events like these ones we studied this morning and be amazed at the authority of Jesus. There is nothing in this world worthy of our devotion and our praise like Jesus is worthy of our devotion and our praise. Let's not allow our affections to be focused on worldly things when we have a Savior like this. He has all authority, and He is with us! Let's worship Him above all else, and let's trust in Him even when we're tempted to fear.

We've seen this morning in Mark 1 the authority of Jesus. I hope you have listened carefully and that you will continue to think about these things and worship Jesus for His authority. Look back over this passage this afternoon and think about how Jesus showed His authority in calling disciples, how He taught with authority, and how He exercised His authority in casting out the unclean spirit.