

Jason Upchurch - Mark 1:21-39 - The Good News of Jesus's Authority Over the Spiritual World

Alright, I think this is going to be a fascinating section of Mark's gospel to look at this morning. This is the craziest church service in the history of church services. Or more appropriately, synagogue services. Jesus comes in, starts preaching and is immediately confronted by a demon-possessed man. And that kicks off a ministry of casting out demons. Casting out demons - often called exorcism - is really a wild aspect of Jesus's ministry. But an important one that we'll explore more in a little bit.

Let me start by saying that when I go to Cocolalla Lake Bible Camp in the summer there is one topic that kids ask me to explain to them over and over every summer: that is about angels and demons and Satan. Out of all the topics I get asked about, the spiritual world is by far the most interesting to kids and I think all people are interested as well.

People are fascinated by the unseen spiritual world. Back in the 1990s when I was first saved people told me I had to read Frank Peretti's fictional books *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness* because they were supposedly the greatest representation of biblical spiritual warfare money could buy. I bought them but never read them. That's probably for the better.

Let me just say: fictional books are rarely helpful in establishing doctrine. Whether the books are about angels or end times or anything else. They are usually sensationalized and filled with all kinds of error.

For many people they were almost a biblical account of the unseen spiritual world and the spiritual warfare that goes on all around us. And the reality is that there is a supernatural world that operates all around us. There are likely angels here with us every Sunday as we worship - the Bible indicates part of our worship is in conjunction with the spiritual world.

Now when we're talking about the angels and demons I think it's actually more helpful to say "spiritual beings" rather than simply angels and demons.

The reason is that angels are just one type of spiritual being. There are all kinds of spiritual beings.

Cherubim - have 2 wings - these are the creatures depicted on top of the ark of the covenant. They each have 4 faces, feet like calves, and they glow like lightning.

Seraphim - meaning burning ones - have 6 wings and fly around the throne praising the glory of God.

Angels - the word angel literally means messenger. These are usually what we think of when we think of spiritual beings interacting with humans in the Bible - don't seem to have any wings at all. They are always described as men, never women despite what Hallmark tries to tell us.

Hebrews indicates that angels move among us regularly so much that we may have even talked with angels and not known it. They can take human form and interact with humans but they are a different creature than we are.

So within the spiritual world not only are there different types of creatures just like we see different creatures in our physical created order. But we also get the idea that there are different levels of authority amongst the spiritual world and maybe even different locations where angels and demons are assigned to operate.

Look over at **Eph. 1** for a moment. I promise you this gets to Jesus. But here we see there is a spiritual world around us that has authority and power. And operates all around us. This is where Paul is talking about the greatness of the salvation that has been revealed to us. **Read 1:15-21**

When Jesus was raised from the dead he was seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. He was manifestly shown to all the spiritual world his power as the Son of God. **Look at 3:8-13.**

This is Paul talking about how God has made Jews and Gentiles one in Christ. This is was an amazing revelation because it seemed like God only really cared about the Jews. But in Jesus Jews and Gentiles are one through Christ and part of what this does is show the wisdom of God to these spiritual rulers and authorities. **Read 8-13**

So the Church - Jews and Gentiles - was the eternal plan of God to show spiritual rulers and authorities his own wisdom and grace.

One more. **Eph. 6:10-13**. How do we know these rulers and authorities and powers are spiritual? Maybe he's talking about human kings and governors. Nope, he connects all the dots for us here. This is a well known passage on the armor of God. **Read**

So the evil around us: the governmental evil, the societal evil, so on - all has its root in spiritual demonic activity. It's genesis is Satan but it also flows to other rulers, authorities, powers and forces.

Now, a lot of people try to figure out what all that means and create these weird spiritual warfare mapping systems and craziness which is non-biblical at best, superstitious demonic error at worst. So be careful. But this is going on all around us.

And especially in our society we hide this reality because our society hates the idea of anything supernatural. So we call demonic activity mental illness, bipolar disorder, or we give people trash can diagnoses and deem them incurable. I'm not a doctor, so I'm speaking for every situation.

You remember in **1 Sam 16** where God takes his Spirit away from King Saul and torments Saul with an evil spirit? That's wild anyway. But Saul's advisors come to him and are like "Hey, you have demon, we should get a kid to play some music for you so you feel better." Saul isn't offended at the suggestion. He says "You're right, let's get a kid - I have a demon so let's play some music." And wonder of wonders, it works. David comes and plays for him and he's calmed.

But our modern sensibilities are often offended at the notion that demonic spiritual activity is happening. But the mass hysteria over Roe v. Wade being overturned, the unconscionable way government and it's agents have treated people over the last 2 years, the sexual perversion we see on a daily basis - those things don't have their source in Christ. They have their source in Satan.

And Satan is powerful. The demonic forces are powerful. And one of the ways this happens is that their influence happens without us even knowing.

Satan parades as an angel of what? Light. He's deceptive. Tricky.

Now, turn back over to **Mark 1**. What we have to understand here is that Jesus casting out demons isn't just a parlor trick. It's not just a fun thing for him to do. His power over demons establishes his divine authority over all creation.

And that's what we see here. This little story - and the two that follow - seem like interesting and maybe weird stories; kind of an odd transition. But the reason they are here is to show just how much authority Jesus has.

Remember, when we think of Jesus, for the most part we know the whole story. We know he's God in the flesh, we know his power, we know his death and resurrection and reign and second coming. We know he is Lord of all, creator of all, and at his name every knee will bow.

But these guys didn't know that. For them, who Jesus is unfolds little by little. Jesus was baptized - secretly revealing to him and John he was the Christ. He was tempted - something that may have only been known to a few people at the time.

He begins preaching and calls his first few disciples. But who is this guy? So he arrives on the scene in Capernaum. He goes to a synagogue when this whole thing with the demon possessed man goes down.

And the point of all of this is that Jesus has authority over the spiritual world. He's not intimidated, he's not an equal. He commands the demons. He commands the rulers and authorities that are actually at work all around us.

And the first time we see this in Mark is in a synagogue. What's a synagogue? Synagogue is the ancient version of a church building. Normally when we think of worship in Israel, we think of the Tabernacle and the Temple. Obviously those were commanded by God and the place of sacrifice. But the average Jew couldn't make it all the way to Jerusalem so they still wanted to gather together on the Sabbath.

So synagogues were all throughout Israel and acted like local churches of sorts. People would come and pray and study the Scriptures. People didn't have personal Bibles - copying the Word of God was incredibly expensive. From the paper to the ink to the sheer time it took to make an accurate copy of the text - it was out of the question for anyone but the wealthiest people to have even some portion of the Scripture.

But you could go to the local synagogue and maybe read the scroll of Genesis or Isaiah, the Kings or prophets. Probably not all of them but some of them anyway.

Synagogue services were similar in many ways to our own church services. Praying, singing, teaching children the OT. There was also a public teaching time where local lay leaders, usually Pharisees or priests, would teach Bible lessons.

But most synagogues regularly welcomed other leaders to teach the lesson. If you think of Paul going from town to town all throughout Rome stopping in at a synagogue, that's what happened very regularly. The local lay leaders loved someone who could expound the Scripture for them and give them a break from their weekly duties.

That's why Jesus going from synagogue to synagogue wasn't an odd thing. Today, very few pastors would let someone who just showed up that morning preach the sermon. But in Jesus's time that was a common thing.

So Jesus gets up and he blows them all away with his teaching. **Read 21-22**

What distinguished Jesus's teaching from all the other teaching was that Jesus actually believed what he said. There was an authority behind his teaching. Interestingly, John the Baptist preached the same way. The scribes and the Pharisees and local lay people were usually pretty mousy when it came to authority. No one wanted to actually lay down what a passage actually meant.

So if you read some of the ancient documents from the Rabbis at the time of Jesus they say stuff like this concerning a passage: "I think it means this, Rabbi So and So says it means this, Rabbi So and So says it means this." They'd basically catalogue the different ways a passage could be interpreted and just move on. They'd let the people just know the options.

That wasn't very helpful. Jesus preached like he meant it because it could be understood. We believe that God has given us his Word to actually be understood and actually be applied to our lives. Just giving a catalogue of interpretative options isn't helpful.

And when we know the meaning of the passage we are called by God to proclaim as he proclaimed it. That was the other problem of the scribes and Pharisees. They didn't actually act as though they had any authority.

But Jesus did. He knew the Scriptures and he preached the Scriptures like they were intended to be preached.

I have to tell you, the first time I ever heard anyone preach with authority was John MacArthur at the Master's College in 2000. I had been around such lame preaching for so long I didn't even know what I was missing. I heard tips on how to live, and ways to feel better about my prayer life. One of my pastors didn't even stand when he preached, he sat down on a stool to make people feel more comfortable and at ease. I'm not saying a stool is sinful, but the idea is we're just having a little talk, a little chat, a little TED Talk for encouragement.

John MacArthur opened the Word with authority I had never heard before and it changed me. Preaching the Word with authority will change people.

It changed this guy in the synagogue that Saturday. **Read 23-24**

So Jesus comes in teaching with authority. And the people are astonished. That's actually a reaction he gets all the time at his teaching. But here the reaction is from a spiritual being who has control over this man.

We know nothing about this man. We don't know his name. It's likely he's from Capernaum. It's likely he's never heard Jesus before. And he has an unclean spirit. In Jewish time there was a distinction between clean and unclean. When you hear clean and unclean, it's not so much sinful and sinless. More the idea is authorized and not authorized by God. Sometimes it has to do with sin, but not always,

Here the distinction is simply that it's not a good angel controlling this man. It's demonic. It's unclean, not authorized for worship. And where are they sitting? In the synagogue.

And the power of Jesus and the identity is obvious to this unclean spirit. And he says. **Read 24**

That's a loaded statement. The Spirit knows precisely who Jesus is. We're not told that Jesus ever introduced himself. At this point in the development all these people know is that there's a random man named Jesus coming to preach.

But the unclean spirit knows all about Jesus. There's a supernatural knowledge he has that the audience does not. He knows he's from Nazareth, the little village. But more importantly he's the Holy One of God. He's the Christ, the Messiah. The one chosen to redeem. The unclean spirit not only supernaturally knows the human origins of Jesus but he knows the divine nature of Jesus. The unclean spirit is powerful and knowledgeable.

And he knows that Jesus has authority. He doesn't even need the preaching.

And the unclean spirit knows that Jesus will one day cast all demons into hell. That's why he says "Have you come to destroy us?" Matthew's version say "Destroy us before the time." It seems clear that the demons know one day they will all be tossed into hell. They know their end and the judgement that awaits. They know they can't win. And this demon was a little surprised because he thought Jesus would destroy them before that time.

Also interesting about this statement is he says "have you come to destroy us?" Who's the us? Well, it could be that this man has multiple demons - like the guy in **Chap. 5** in the country of the Garasenes. But it seems like it's just one in this man.

More likely he's speaking on behalf of all demons - all of which know their doom is sure.

But the unclean spirit knew Jesus. He knew his authority. And think about it: the whole synagogue is watching this go down in real time. Jesus just got done preaching a lights out sermon - the best sermon ever preached. Jesus never preached a bad sermon. He was the greatest preacher who ever lived ever. Every Sunday the synagogue was floored by his preaching. So they're stunned by the power of the preaching when the demon thing goes down.

Notice Jesus's response. **Read 25**

Why does Jesus tell the demon to be quiet? Maybe it's because he's going bonkers in the middle of the synagogue and that's a little crazy.

But more likely is that Jesus doesn't want people to find out who he is from demons. See, there's this theme in Jesus's ministry that people slowly come to the realization of who he is. We know he's God in the flesh because we're familiar with the story.

But for the most part, it seems like Jesus slowly leads people to understand that. You remember it's in **Matthew 16** that Peter finally confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That's 16 chapters in Peter finally gets that. **And** you remember in Matthew 28 some of the apostles actually doubt that Jesus is standing there raised from the dead.

It seems as though Jesus wants people to come to the slow, obvious realization that he is the God Man. Jesus isn't in a hurry. He preaches truth, he does the Lord's will in healing and exorcism and leaves the rest up to the Father.

What he doesn't seem to want is the demonic spiritual world to be the ones to let the cat out of the bag. **Read 34**

So although he casts out demons, he doesn't want the recognition of demons.

And here's the net result in Capernaum. **Read 25-27**

He teaches with authority. And he commands the spiritual world with authority. Jesus is rebuking this spiritual being - this unclean spirit. There's a war going on with this man's body in front of the whole congregation. Can you imagine that going on here? This crazy back and forth and then this guy is convulsing. And then the spirit comes out of him.

Who's in charge of the spiritual world? Jesus. And I'm guessing people didn't even realize this guy was filled with a demon. We have no indication that this man was brought because he knew Jesus was an exorcist.

But the end result is that Jesus is shown to have authority. He preaches with power. And he subdues the spiritual world with power.

And the people know. It's not a trick. They know Jesus has authority and they tell everyone.

Side: There are a lot of books out on how we should copy Jesus and the apostles on casting out demons. They use these events as some sort of formula we should follow. Get the demon's name, say certain things, do certain things and all of a sudden we have the ability to cast out demons.

I don't believe it works like that. First of all, Jesus has intrinsic authority to do this because he is God. Second, when it comes to the apostles Mark specifically say that the only reason they could cast out demons was because they had been given that authority. **Look at 3:14-15, 6:7. Read**

The apostles only cast out demons because they have been given specific authority to do so. In **1 Cor. 12** we learn that there are some who have the spiritual gift of miracles - literally "powers" - which is likely exorcism. But not everyone has it and we likely don't see that today.

So I would encourage you that if ever you come across something like this you fast and pray for the person and you preach the gospel to them. We are armed with the truth of the gospel and the power of prayer, we're not given a blueprint for exorcisms.

That was for free.

Notice the next two sections - we call these pericopes. They might seem disconnected but actually the point is the the same: Jesus preaches with authority and demonstrates authority over the spiritual world. **Read 29-31**

So Simon Peter is married, he lives with his wife and brother and mother in law. She apparently some sort of fever - we don't know what that is.

But they realize Jesus has this power. And if he could help the guy in the synagogue, why not ask if he could help mom in law? And he does. Immediately she is healed.

In the ancient world fevers could easily be a death sentence. And yet Jesus has power over this as well. He touches her hand and she's immediately healed.

Interestingly, when people are healed of physical maladies in the Bible there is usually a mention of them being touched. Touching and healing is mentioned at least 8 times in Mark's gospel - it seems there is something compassionate and even spiritual to touch sick people.

Jesus's healing here is absolute without any reservation. You'll hear about modern day faith healers - they're all liars. They'll say they have the power to heal people of diseases or ailments. At best they offer essentially a placebo to people. Even those who are very physically limited often can do extraordinary things if given hope and encouragement.

At worst they're absolute charlatans who steal money and hope and prey on sick people who never get better.

This was never the case with Jesus or the apostles. If they had the ability to heal, they did heal and they healed completely. Peter's mother in law is so completely healed that she instantly gets up and starts serving them. There's no recovery time because she's 100% recovered. And the rest of the people want the same thing.

Read 32-34

Why did they wait until evening? Because it's the Sabbath. Jews could only travel so far on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown. No work could be done and even the distance people traveled was regulated by the religious leaders of the day.

But the moment sundown happens, the masses come to Jesus. What started off as one incident in the synagogue has now spread to the whole city. And over and over Jesus's authority to preach and to heal and to cast out demons is authenticated.

Here's the 3rd pericope: same thing. **Read 35-39**

Now, I don't know about you but when I usually hear people preach this passage it has nothing to do with demons and Jesus's authority and everything to do with prayer and waking up early. The idea is we should follow Jesus's pattern: make sure to spend time alone with God, it's good to do that in the morning before the day gets going, if Jesus needed to pray so do we.

And I agree with all those things. I confess I'm not a morning person but when I do get up early I like it and it helps set the tone for my day. But, that's not the point of this passage.

The point of the passage is that Jesus has exhausted himself by working all night casting out demons and healing, he gets up early to pray **in order to** prepare to do the exact same thing in every town in all of Galilee.

And Jesus is clear that his mission is to go preach. **Read 38**

Until he is hung on a cross for our sins, the purpose of our Lord is to go preach. And he preaches like he has authority. How do people know he has authority? Because he casts out demons.

What do we do with this?

Let me give you just one point of application. A lot of people are scared of the spiritual world. They're scared of the notion of angels and demons. They're terrified to ever meet someone who is demon possessed because what would they do?

Let me just encourage you that we have nothing to fear. Our Lord demonstrated his sovereign power over every ruler and authority while he was alive on earth.

And now that he's been crucified and raised, the Bible says in **Col. 2:15**:

He's disarmed all those rulers and authorities by triumphing over them. The demonic world no longer has any damning power against those who by faith are saved by the grace of Christ.

They can attack us, they can tempt us, but they can't sentence us to hell.

Romans 8:38-39: For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height or depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have nothing to fear of the spiritual world because Jesus has authority over all. To him be the glory.

Pray