

The authority of Jesus

Please read Mark 1 v 21-34. Then pray;

Lord, we thank you for the authority, power and purity of your Word. May your Word strengthen our faith and empower us to overcome all evil, in Jesus name, Amen!

Jesus had been baptised by John in the river Jordan! The Spirit of the Lord was now upon him. The same Spirit sent him, in fact *drove him* into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by Satan. (Mark 1:9-13). Now his ministry in the power of God's Spirit is to begin. He has already called 4 fishermen to leave everything and follow him (Mark 1: 14-20). Jesus is to have a growing team of disciples around him. This is all part of the divine plan and the way forward. The Kingdom of God is here and will now begin to grow. (Mark 1:15, Mark 3: 26-32)

As Jesus began his Kingdom ministry, developing a ministry base in Capernaum next to Lake Galilee, what was the most prominent characteristic of his Spirit-filled ministry? In those early days, what especially *stood out* about Jesus and his teaching ministry? What was it that caused the people to be astonished and excited? What became the biggest topic of conversation in Capernaum and the other villages that Jesus would soon visit with his disciples? (Mark 1: 38-39). The answer to these questions is given to us by Mark as he begins to share some of the details and highlights of the early days of Jesus's ministry.

What stood out about Jesus, above all other things, was **his authority**. This was the new, notable and distinctive feature in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. This is what "hit people between the eyes" as Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum and taught on that first occasion – **the authority of Jesus of Nazareth**. Mark deliberately emphasises and highlights this characteristic concerning Jesus. Why? Because this established the foundation and set the tone for all that followed in the ministry of the Son of God. There was in Galilee a new and distinguished **authority** – *the authority of God's Kingdom and God's King*, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. (1:15)

*The people were **amazed** at his teaching, **because** he taught them as one who **had authority**, not as the teachers of the law. (1:22)*

*The people were all **so amazed** that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching - **and with authority!** He even gives orders to evil spirits and they **obey him**. (1:27)*

Over time, Jesus is going to demonstrate **his authority** over ALL THINGS. Immediately, for starters, he displays his clear authority over Satan in the wilderness and evil spirits (v 12, 25, 27 and 34), including this one in the synagogue. We will examine this aspect of his authority over pure evil in a moment. Jesus will go on to demonstrate his authority over all sickness (v 25), his authority to forgive sin (2: 10-11), his authority over the Sabbath (2:28), his authority over the winds and the waves (4:41), and his authority even over death (5:42). This is all in the first 5 chapters of Mark! Mark is basically telling the world to **take note of the unique authority of Jesus**, who is the Son of God. (Mark 1:1) Nothing like this has ever been seen in the past or will ever be seen again in the future. Please note the phrase "**he even**".

He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him (v27). **Even** the winds and waves obey him! (4:41) Everything is under His authority! He is Lord of all! Evil spirits, winds and waves obey him! His word is all powerful and decisive!

Firstly then, let the world note **the authority of Jesus Christ over evil** and the kingdom of darkness! Jesus enters the synagogue in Capernaum and is invited to teach. He speaks with clear divine authority – the authority of the Kingdom of God. The people are amazed! It becomes unbearable for an evil spirit to remain in the shadows. The word of God coming through Jesus unearths and exposes darkness and evil. Jesus’s presence terrorises demons! The presence of the Kingdom of God (light) causes significant unease to opposing spiritual forces. Jesus’s very presence and the power of his teaching flushes out this evil spirit. There is an individual in the synagogue that day who is under the controlling authority of a particular spirit. That wicked spirit manifests itself in the “holy” presence of the Son of God. The spirit speaks. Actually it “cries out” with a combination of scorn, deep distress and fear. Notice what the evil spirit said to Jesus, and notice it spoke only to Jesus!

What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God! (v24)

The evil spirit is spiritually perceptive. This spirit *knows* who is before him, and he is aware that the One before him in this synagogue has the power to destroy him and *all the other* hordes of spirits. *Have you come to destroy us? (plural)*.

The gospel teaches us that this is why Jesus Christ has **come** into the world – to destroy all the works of the evil one. The apostle John states this categorically in his first letter.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to DESTROY the devil’s work. (1 John 3:8)

Jesus had come, amongst other things, to destroy all the devil’s work, all the devil’s deadly activity, all the dominion and power of darkness. The kingdom of darkness, headed by Satan, and full of evil spirits (or demons) is now on the retreat! Christ and **his kingdom** are *now* present to *drive out (v34)* the darkness and establish the light. Christ is here to set the prisoners free! Satan is now on the back foot. His total demise and destruction are now under way. And here, in this synagogue, on this day, prisoner number 1 is about to be released by Jesus Christ! His authority will easily triumph! This is what we see, and what all who were in the synagogue that day witnessed with their own eyes.

So how did Jesus handle this situation suddenly thrust upon him? How did he respond to this evil spirit? How did Jesus demonstrate his **authority and power**? Listen to him. He **only** needs to execute 2 short commands.

- 1) **Be quiet!** (which was spoken **sternly**) to the spirit who exercised control over the man. Jesus actually told the spirit to “Shut up”.
- 2) **Come out of him!** Jesus told the spirit to “Get out”.

So, in summary, with the authority of the Kingdom, Jesus *commanded* the spirit to “Shut up” and “Get out!”

What happened to the spirit after this? Did he respond back? NO! Because Jesus had commanded him to shut up? Silencing evil spirits/demons was part of Jesus’s policy. **(1:34)** The evil spirit had to leave as Jesus had commanded him. The spirit had NO option! But just before leaving the man, in an act of defiance and struggle, he shook the man violently and then left with a horrible piercing shriek. All was then calm and quiet. The Kingdom had come through/by the finger of God in Christ. Evil spirits, like this one, are not happy to go, to vacate “their territory”, but they have to go if Christ commands them to, or if they are commanded to leave *in the name of Jesus* by one of Christ’s disciples who have his kingdom authority.

This was a dramatic encounter between Jesus and his Kingdom – and an evil spirit who belonged to a different, dark and doomed kingdom. There was only going to be one winner! To use contemporary phraseology, Jesus had started to “drain the swamp.” No wonder the gathered congregation were utterly amazed and awe-struck. They were amazed at the **complete authority** of Jesus over evil. Jesus had practically demonstrated the authority of this “new teaching” about the Kingdom of God being “at hand”. As I said earlier, this kingdom authority was actually the most noticeable feature of the ministry of Jesus. Mark will later record another story involving exorcism which is even more startling and powerful (Mark 5 v 1-20). On that occasion Jesus deals decisively with a “legion” of demons., not merely a single wicked spirit, but He does it with just as much ease and with blistering authority!

So how does this now relate to us?

Firstly, this is one of the primary ways we see the authority of Jesus Christ manifested in the gospel of Mark, and it reveals and confirms to us that “Jesus is the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1) Mark has shown us through the retelling of **this story**, that the One we follow is none other than God’s Son who is Lord of all. Our faith is built on this solid rock of Christ and his unique authority! Only Christ has this power and authority over the dark forces of spiritual wickedness that rage around our world; we follow, worship and serve only Him! Jesus is supreme above all things (Colossian 1:18) and He is the One we worship. The crowds in the synagogue were moved to amazement and wonder, but we should be moved to worship and deeper commitment. I hope you are!

Secondly, this story alone should banish from our minds once and forever the idea of a Jesus who was “gentle Jesus meek and mild.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus was not gentle with evil spirits or demons. He spoke sternly, even angrily to them, and ordered them to be gone. Get out! Jesus came to destroy them and their devastating influence. He did not search for them, but when he came across them – **he drove them out**, just like he “drove out” people greedily buying and selling in the temple area. (Mark 11:15) Jesus is the Lion of Judah and like Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia, He is not a tame lion. And when Jesus returns for a second time at the end of this age, and in the fullness of his Kingdom, *all evil* will be destroyed and taken out forever. What has already begun through the presence of his kingdom now in the life of his own people, will be completed at his glorious return. Nothing evil will remain. His authority and light will overcome all darkness! Evil will be totally vanquished! Silenced and banished forever! The story we have before us reveals this victory in microcosm.

Thirdly and finally, we must understand and grasp that *we as his disciples* have been given **his kingdom authority**. We have been given the power of the Holy Spirit, but we have also been given the authority of Jesus’s kingdom. When Jesus sent out the twelve (and the seventy-two) **he gave them authority over evil spirits**. (Mark 6:7) The Church today still has this authority – the authority of the Kingdom given to us by our one and only King and Lord. This is also emphasised at the end of the gospel through the giving of the great commission. Christ’s disciples will “drive out demons” in his name and take the gospels to all nations. (Mark 16:15 ff).

Christians today, including you and I must realise and grasp that we are Christ’s servants and **ambassadors**. (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are the ambassadors of the King of Kings, and as such, Jesus has given us his authority. We go in his name! We represent him! We present his case! We demonstrate his power and love! Those who reject us – reject him and the Father who sent him! Ambassadors always carry the authority of their government and their monarch. We carry the authority of Christ and his kingdom. My dear friends, when I preach, I preach with the authority of Christ and in the power of His Spirit! This is my calling. But we are **all his servants and his chosen ambassadors** and he clothes us with his kingdom power and authority.

I emphasise this today, because so often, in this day and age, the Church of this almighty King comes across as weak, pathetic, timorous and ineffectual. It is as if the Church “wouldn’t say boo to a goose.” The Church far too often appears to be frightened, defeated, lukewarm, constantly apologetic and insipid. Where is the roar of the Lion of Judah in the Church today? According to the New Testament, we are the army of the Lord, we are soldiers of Christ, we have weapons that can and should “demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-6), and we should be marching out equipped with the “armour of God” and standing “strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” (Ephesians 6:10ff). Paul told Timothy not to hold back and be timid, but to live and move and act with “a spirit of power, love and self-discipline”. (2 Timothy 1:7) This is the spirit that God gave to Timothy and gives **to us!** Be bold, be strong for the Lord your God is with you!

This does not mean that the Church today should be arrogant, rude, over-confident or deliberately insensitive. But it does mean that we should “stand up for Jesus” and unfurl and wave the banner of his kingdom. It does mean that we should move out with faith and courage and not be afraid of the powers of the kingdom of darkness. Through Jesus, and in his name, we have the victory. As the apostle John put it; “*Greater is he who is within us than he who is in the world.*” (1 John 4:4) Or as we sang and declared at the beginning of our worship;

Majesty – Kingdom authority – flows from his throne – unto his own (you and I), his anthem raise!

May we understand that Christ calls and equips us – both with the *power*, the baptism of the Spirit, and with the *authority* of the Kingdom of God. We possess *the might* (the power) and *the right* (the authority) of Christ’s kingdom. And so, in the words of Charles Wesley, here is the challenge facing us today and every day;

Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armour on, strong in the strength which God supplies through his eternal Son.

Be of good courage and serve the Lord with joy, humility and love. The kingdom of God is within you!

Amen!

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