

DAY 7: THE AUTHORITY OF THE SON OF GOD

Mark 1:21–2:12

A TEACHER WITH AUTHORITY (MARK 1:21-28) Mark sets the scene in Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus either lived there or made Peter's home there His home base. In this passage, we see Jesus teaching in the local Jewish synagogue. So powerful and convicting is His teaching that the worshipers cannot help but compare it to the scribes' efforts—an unflattering comparison for them. The scribes had been teachers in Israel for at least five centuries. Though laymen, they acted as civil lawyers, religious professors, and moralists. Their prestige was immense; people stood when they entered a room; the best seats in the synagogues were reserved for them. If the scribes paled in comparison to Jesus, it was less a comment on their inadequacy than a marvel at Jesus' authority. This authority was, to the Jews of that time, a sure sign of the Messiah, whom they believed would expound the Torah with the authority of God Himself.

Not only is Jesus' authority revealed in "*new teaching*" (1:27) but also in new life. The demon-possessed man cries out to Jesus, "*What have You to do with us?*" (1:24). The unclean spirit probably used the word "*us*" because a host of evil forces were at work within the man. This is Jesus' first skirmish with Satan's minions following His confrontation with Satan at His temptation. Jesus not only defeats the unclean spirits; more than that, He frees a tortured person from oppression and restores him to wholeness.

THE MAN FOR OTHERS (MARK 1:29-39) After healing Peter's mother-in-law from an illness, Jesus shows similar compassion to the masses. The crowds throng around Jesus after sunset; "*the whole city was gathered together at the door*" (1:33). He heals many and drives out many demons. He forbids the demons—who recognize Him because they, too, are of the spirit world—to speak. Jesus will have no members of the rebellion announcing His identity. The Messianic secret cannot be understood until the Cross, and then only by those willing to take up their own cross and follow Him.

After this draining session, Jesus searches for stillness and solitude in order to pray (1:35). But Simon and the others find for Him, saying everyone had "*searched for Him.*" Seeking refuge from such demands and the constant commotion, the Son had retreated to spend time with the Father, only to have His seclusion violated by the possessive intrusion of disciples and the clamor of the crowds who cried out for more displays of power. Jesus rejects notoriety and states His intention to preach to the outlying villages. "*That is why I came out.*" Jesus then "*went throughout all Galilee, preaching*" (1:38-39).

THINK ABOUT how the disciples went looking for Jesus because they thought He should come back and continue His healing ministry in Capernaum. Jesus cut short their attempt to manage Him with the statement that He came to preach in other villages as well. The demons had tried to control Him, and later His mother and brothers would try to restrain Him, no doubt thinking it was for His own good. It is tempting to think that if we use the right prayer, God will respond to our desires. Or, "if I do this for the Lord, then He will do that for me." Such thinking reverses the order God ordained. We cannot manage or manipulate God; that's not our job. Our job is to obey Him and put ourselves under His management. We cannot compete with or control the sovereign God of the universe. *He is God! We are not!*

RETURN FROM THE LAND OF THE DEAD (MARK 1:40-45) Leprosy, which described a variety of skin diseases, was a widespread problem throughout Israel. The Jews identified it as unclean. Condemned to suffer in isolation, according to Levitical law, a leper were required to give up his names, occupations, and even their community. Knowing this, the action of the leper in this story is remarkable—as

is the action of Jesus! The leper enters Jesus' social space, thus making Jesus unclean. No obstacle, not even the Law, prevents this desperate, determined man from getting to Jesus. And note his words, "*If You will, You can make me clean*" (Mark 1:40). The leper does not question Jesus' *ability* to save, but His *willingness*. The man's longing is, of course, profoundly human: We may not doubt that God *can* do all things; we only wonder if He *will* do them for us.



Jesus responds not with contempt for the diseased man but with compassion—a compassion so vast that it *touches* the untouchable. That touch brings Jesus fully into contact with human wretchedness and revokes any separation, whether social, physical, or spiritual. By the touch of His hand and the word of His mouth, the leper is cleansed. But then, “*Jesus sternly charged him ... ‘See that you say nothing to anyone’*” (1:43-44). Jesus does not want to be sought as a miracle-worker, nor does He want the crowds to restrict His freedom to move and minister. However, the cleansed leper “*began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news*” (Mark 1:45). As a result of His growing fame, “*Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places*” (1:45).

GETTING WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW YOU NEED (MARK 2:1-12) In Capernaum several days later, Jesus is in a house, speaking “*the word*” (2:2). People jam the doorway to see and hear Him. Because of the crowd, the four men begin to dig through the mud and sticks of the roof to lower their friend, a paralytic, down between two rafters, hoping that Jesus will heal him. When Jesus sees *their* faith, he says to the paralytic, “*Son, your sins are forgiven*” (Mark 2:5). Jesus commends not the paralytic’s faith, but the faith of his friends. These four have borne the paralytic not only with their hands but with their faith.

The mention of sins may have struck the people as odd. Has Jesus misunderstood? The man’s problem is *physical*. What does his need for healing have to do with forgiveness of sins? But Jesus addresses the less obvious but even more crippling problem. Worse than paralyzed legs is a paralyzed spirit.

Jesus’ statement has outraged the scribes. “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” they gasp (Mark 2:7). Jesus wordlessly claims equality with God. How close they are to the truth—and yet how far! The emphasis now shifts to conflict between Jesus and the scribes. The religious leaders have no answer to the man’s physical or spiritual needs. Jesus offers to meet both. In their minds what He says is blasphemy—and the punishment for blasphemy is death! Jesus stuns everyone with an ominous choice: He is either God’s Son, or (as the scribes say) a blasphemer of God, but He cannot be both.

Can Jesus forgive sin? More importantly, will the scribes allow Jesus to free them from the paralysis caused by clinging to status, power, and dogma? Jesus wants them to know the truth of which He speaks: “*But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic—‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home’*” (2:10-11). By claiming to forgive sins, Jesus assumes the place of God; and by healing a paralytic, Jesus backs up His claim. The decision is left to them—and to us. Who is He?

PERSONALIZE this lesson. Jesus clearly knew his calling. Sometimes He taught, sometimes He healed, sometimes He cast out demons. But in every situation, He listened to God’s direction. When the crowds in one city sought Him out, He said, “*Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out*” (1:38). What is your calling? Spend some time thinking about how God has equipped, gifted, and led you in terms of ministry. What circumstances or people tend to pull you away from your calling? How can you stay focused on the work God has planned for you? Ask God if there are any adjustments He would like you to make in order to serve Him more faithfully and joyfully.

REVIEW: THE AUTHORITY OF THE SON OF GOD

10. What verse, comment from the Teaching Director’s talk, or Commentary phrase particularly encouraged or challenged you? Why?