

Absolutely Unparalleled Authority – Mark 1:21-28

- Introduction, Outline
- Scripture reading: Mark 1:21-28, Ephesians 6:10-17
- Teaching text: Mark 1:21-28 (NASB1995)
21 They *went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *began* to teach. **22** They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes. **23** Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, **24** saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” **25** And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” **26** Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. **27** They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” **28** Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.
- Today's scripture has Jesus casting out demons. Beware of two errors regarding demons: 1. Indifference. As if demons do not exist at all, as if discussions of the spiritual world were pure superstition. 2. Overzealousness. As if all bad things were the work of evil spirits.
- Outline:
 - Title: Absolutely Unparalleled Authority
 - 1. The Authority of His Teaching (vv 21-22)
 - 2. The Authority of His Identity (vv23-24)
 - 3. The Authority to Command Demons (vv 25-28)

The Authority of His Teaching (vv 21-22)

- “entered the synagogue and began to teach”: After the fall of Israel, the exiled Jews developed the form of worship in synagogues without a temple. In the synagogue, every Sabbath there’d be scribes reading and explaining the law. They not only taught the Old Testament law, but the emphasis was on the oral laws, that is, oral traditions consisting of rules and rituals of which they were proud, something Jesus constantly rebuked them for. But in principle, synagogue is where the Word of God is taught. So Jesus always taught in the synagogue.

The importance of teaching in the ministry of Jesus is clear (cf. 2:13; 4:1; 6:2, 6, 34; 8:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35; 14:49). From beginning to end, the focus of Jesus' ministry was clearly teaching.

- “They were amazed at His teaching”: The original verb means “to strike out, to force out with a blow”. The audience were knocked off their feet by Jesus' teaching. Totally shocked. Never seen anything like it. They were all at loss as to what to do with his teaching.

- “not as the scribes”: The difference between Jesus' teaching and the scribes they're familiar with is not quantity but quality. Scribes would put on an elegant manner, looking very learned, citing and quoting from everywhere, and their language is often vague and hard to follow. Their favorite teaching method is to quote other rabbis. Rabbi Zhang says this, Rabbi Wang says that, and Rabbi Li says that. They are tedious, lifeless, they do not challenge the hearts of their listeners. They focus on external rules, and neglect the sins of the heart. They do not point out sins directly. They never give any strong rebuke.

“having authority”: Authority = right + power. Lacking either one, you don't have authority. Authority is having the right and the power to do things.

Teaching with authority means, first, to teach with a sense of unequaled right. Jesus' teaching is straightforward and doesn't need any justification. In his Sermon on the Mount, he often says, "You have heard...but I say to you...". He doesn't repeat what others say, doesn't beat around the bush. He gets right at the heart issue.

The teaching of Jesus not only gives a sense of right, but also of power. His teachings pierced people's hearts, as he explained God's Word clearly and powerfully, giving people no room to avoid or to refute the clear truth he taught.

"He preaches like He *really* believes the Bible!"—A journalist said, amazedly, of an old pastor

Isaiah 49:2 “He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver.”

Isaiah 50:4 “The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.”

The Authority of His Identity (vv23-24)

- “there was a man in their synagogue...cried out”: As they were all seated nicely listening to Jesus' sermon and shocked by his teaching, a loud scream suddenly came from the crowd.

“with an unclean spirit”: evil spirits go by many different names. "Unclean" emphasizes their filthy moral nature. The term is often used in the New Testament of sexual sin. Usually when we talk about evil spirits, people begin to think bizarre things, but don't forget, the basic truth of evil spirits is their moral filthiness. One of their main works is to create all kinds of filthy things in the world.

True Christians don't have to worry about being possessed by evil spirits, because the Holy Spirit lives in them (1 John 4:4). But we still need to be alert to the work of evil spirits in the world. They are working undercover today. Ephesians 2:2 says that Satan is the "spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience," that is, the unbelievers. In 6:12 Paul calls the evil spirits “the rulers ... the powers ... the world forces of this darkness ... the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Their work has not decreased today. It's just become more hidden.

The preferred method of evil spirits is not to torture people visibly as in today's text; they prefer to work under cover! Their greatest weapon is lies (John 8:44), teaching "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1) that send people to hell. If you want to see the work of evil spirits, you don't need to go to some remote villages to hear some bizarre stories. Just look at the things that are against the Bible in the world today, and you'll know they are everywhere!

"Jesus of Nazareth": The devils couldn't bear the personal presence of Jesus. When He shows up, they immediately panic and blow off their cover. That's why this unclean spirit in the synagogue couldn't help crying out. It is the truth that unclean spirits can't stand the most, for wherever the truth gives light, there they are exposed! Once people are enlightened by the truth and receive the Holy Spirit, there will be no place for unclean spirits. Only the Holy Spirit can really cast out demons. The only thing Christians can do is to spread the truth of the gospel, so that sinners will have the indwelling Holy Spirit through believing in the gospel, and the evil spirits will consequently be driven away.

So, as soon as Jesus started teaching the truth, this demon couldn't hide any longer. Extreme panic forced it to cry out.

"What business do we have with each other": True, they have nothing to do with one another by nature (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). The evil spirit may be opportunistic in thinking that Jesus, being holy, would never come to confront it so directly. But they knew exactly what Jesus was going to do in the end.

1 John **3:8** "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."

Matthew **8:29** "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

"the Holy One of God": The polar opposite of uncleanness is holiness. The most unbearable thing for an unclean spirit is holiness. As soon as you turn on the light in a dark room, all the roaches will quickly run to the nearest shadow to hide. Unclean spirits cannot stand the light of holiness. They cannot stand the presence of Jesus, and His preaching of holy truths.

At the same time, "the Holy One of God" is the title of Messiah in the Old Testament. The demons knew very well who Jesus was.

Psalms **16:10** For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

Jesus' resurrection three days after death is the perfect fulfillment of the prophecy that God would not allow His Holy One to undergo decay (Acts 2:24-36; 13:34-37). The evil spirits know that Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed King, who will come to destroy them.

The Authority to Command Demons (vv 25-28)

- “Be quiet!”: The tone is more like "Shut up!" It is a harsh rebuke, meaning you have no right to declare my identity. I don't need your testimony. The work of the Kingdom of God does not need Satan's support (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).
- “come out of him”: No complicated procedures. Simply a word. In the New Testament, only Jesus and the apostles can cast out demons in this way. No Christian or pastor was told to do so. On the contrary, The Book of Jude severely rebukes false teachers who pretend to have Christ's authority against demons (Jude 8-10). Acts 19:13-16 describes what happens when people try to cast out demons presumptuously.
- “He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him”: It should be obvious that Jesus’ casting out demons is to demonstrate His *unique* authority, not to invite Christians to fantasize that somehow they can do the same! Everyone in this scene understood this. The obedience of the unclean spirit was not willing obedience. Their sinful mind could never willingly submit to God's will, just like every unregenerate unbeliever. But in the end they all had to obey Jesus, however unwillingly, because Jesus' authority is above everything.
- “Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice”: Futile struggles to resist Jesus’ command. The evil spirit knew it couldn’t win, yet still tried to resist. On one hand, it shows how despicable the unclean spirit is; on the other hand, it also highlights the authority and power of Jesus, no matter how much it (the unclean spirit) resists, it is useless.
- “They were all amazed”: But they didn’t believe Jesus. Amazement is useless; it only brings more judgment (Matthew 11:23-24). The people of Capernaum saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears the authority of Jesus, but they were merely amazed, yet did not believe and obey Jesus as God.

Today, some people have been in the church for a long time, saw the work of Jesus in the church with their own eyes, heard Jesus’ powerful teaching in the Bible, and yet they are merely amazed. They don’t have a life of true repentance and faith. Such a person, like these Capernaum people, is in a very dangerous place.

Summary: When the evil spirit saw Jesus, it trembled in fear; when the crowd saw Jesus, they marveled with amazement. Both ended up in eternal punishment of hell. What we need is a combination of both. We need to be awed by Jesus as Judge, and we need to be amazed by Jesus as Redeemer. To know both the severity of Jesus’ judgment and the wonder of Jesus’ salvation, and it is this kind of knowledge that can save sinners.