

Mark 1: 21-28

Jesus goes to 'church'

Jan 2018

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Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Spirit

²¹ And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. ²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ "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." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

Message

Jesus goes to 'church'.

Intro

Mark 1.1

The beginning of the Gospel
of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God

This is the second of three sermons expounding 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' which is the heading Mark gives as he begins his gospel.

We heard that Gospel begin to unfold last week in Jesus' first words when after his baptism and wilderness testing he appeared in Galilee saying: (Mark 1:15) - *if you have your bibles open for this message.*

Mark 1.15

"The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel."

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

This is Jesus saying; "The long awaited presence of God's right-making power has come close enough to reach out and take hold of, so do it!"

I drew attention to the implication here that Jesus himself, standing there in his dusty sandals, was bearing that awaited reign of God's saving righteousness. What Jewish prophets had anticipated Jesus now owned as present reality, "The day of the Lord is here with me, respond to me in repentance and faith as God's saving agent."

Thus Jesus would later say:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

So I noted these first words from Jesus here as being of prime importance if we want to understand him in his own terms rather than fit him into our own vision of him and his gospel. I considered his call to repent and believe as requiring complete reorientation to him and the kingdom he brings. His Kingdom is not something to merely clip-on to our present lifestyle as some general blessing but a new beginning. *If you missed this message please catch it on the church website.*

After this declaration of the Kingdom, Jesus then calls a few disciples from among local fishermen saying: (Vv.17-18)

“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

This first brings Simon-Peter and Andrew, then James and John around Jesus as first disciples.

Clarification

Before we move on there is something to make clear about this ‘kingdom’ Jesus brings and bears.

If we speak about ‘The kingdom of the Netherlands’ or ‘The kingdom of the England’ we are considering a region or a realm as shown on a map. It’s about the place where the power and authority of the monarch rules. If you walk south from here you will meet silver coloured cast-iron border posts embossed with a crown to indicate where The kingdom of Belgium begins.

That physical model is not the way to consider the Kingdom of God present in Jesus.

A better synonym for ‘Kingdom’ is ‘Reign’. ‘Reign’ is about the active dynamic relational authority and power of the King and not just their territory.

This brings us to consider the kingdom of God being wherever the reign of God operates. So when we hear ‘Kingdom of God’ it’s better to think ‘Reign of God’ as the outworking of God’s will. It is possible to say; “I am physically present in the worldly kingdom of King Willem-Alexander but I am actually living in the heavenly reign of God present in Jesus Christ.”

Here is the point: with any reign comes the authority of the king and when we recognise the king in action we experience his reign.

Jesus has declared the presence of the awaited kingdom arriving in the world of time and space. This was good news for people waiting for God’s reign to invade a troubled world.

So: We understand that the Kingdom or reign is in him. We understand that people who take hold of him will therefore take hold of the kingdom he brings and enjoy the king’s reign.

To experience the reign of any king you need to relate to the king and accept his authority.

You may expect to see signs of his power too.

Text

So with that clear, today we are still in Mark chapter 1, verses 21-28 and we may ask, is this talk of kingdom reign heard so far merely poetic or does it have teeth because real kingdoms have power and authority and that goes for God’s Reign too.

This is something Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all spend chapters on early in their gospels. Signs of the Kingdom active in Jesus depict him as God’s Son and illustrate the nature of the kingdom. Today’s story of Jesus going to a Jewish house of prayer will illustrate this.

Mark 1:21-27
 ...on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. 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,

As all God’s people do on Sabbath day, Jesus attends the synagogue, or in our language, Jesus goes to a local ‘church’. As bearer of God’s Kingdom he is probably going to do a bit more than sit in the pews and sing psalms! As a rabbi he takes the opportunity to teach. We are not told what he was teaching but we are told he made an impression and a disturbance arose that people remembered.

As he teaches the God’s kingdom authority Jesus bears is evidenced in two ways.

Firstly it is in his teaching. This is covered in just one verse – v.22

²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

What makes for authority in teaching? I have two clues:

- A. Not relying on the authority of others. The worst sermons I can remember were reviews of the literature. That is ok for essays but not as a personal faith message.
- B. The integrity of the person. When they say 'I' that represents 100% of them - in spirit and truth. It means that they believe and live by what they say.

This was typical of Jesus. In many places he would say either, "Truly, truly I say to you", or, in contrast to whatever else you have heard, "But I say to you." In these saying he was committing his authentic self to what he was about to say.

So in teaching in the synagogue that day, Jesus was experienced as having authority, not like the scripture scholars who quoted others and built a case to support their claims. Jesus stood behind what he said saying it in his own name and it rang solid.

So far so good, but then, while teaching in the synagogue something happened - in v 23.

²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ "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."

Jesus is teaching. On the human plane people are astonished. On the spiritual plane any spirits in rebellion against God and his Kingdom are rattled to the point where some demonized person oppressed by them begins to manifest and disturb the peace.

What to make of this?

The first point to note is that this is a Kingdom event. This is a clash of Kingdoms.

Jesus represents the Reign of Heaven, the Kingdom of God so where he goes the authority of God may be felt. People feel it socially, intellectually and personally and the spiritual realm also feels it. Wherever you have rebellion operating there will be a reaction to authority. Rebellious spirits will begin to rattle. It is that simple, among people and demons. This development now sets up the second example of kingdom authority.

Illustration:

Let's consider this in a human setting. If you have a group of insecure people who have established their way to be together and then introduce a strong secure person into that group what might we expect? Lots can happen but one likely development is for the insecure souls to somehow attack or expel the secure person because they are experience them as a threat to the status quo. This is typical 'people stuff'. The weak do this as a coalition of the timid or alliance of the anxious because they are afraid the secure person's power to bring change and uncertainty.

Jesus turns up in 'church' full of the Holy Spirit and bearing the Reign of God which unclean spirits and demonic powers notice with dread! They are rattled. They can't lie low and hold their breath any longer so they manifest in some way.

The fact that this first happens in synagogue or 'church' is not at all surprising. In psycho-spiritual terms churches are like hot-houses. Spiritual communities are places where the spiritual dynamics of the people are amplified. People who are spiritually active are a bit like teenagers on Red Bull or some other stimulant. So when they come to church you can expect an elevated level of spiritual dynamic, the Holy, the Evil and the very Human often manifest and come out of hiding. As Jesus later said; the wheat and the tares grow together, even in church.

Then every now and then something happens to shift the established balance as if the thermostat is suddenly raised or lowered and some unhappy spirits play up.

Some people barely notice it and many more can't account for it. But there are those who are rattled by the spiritual climate change and act out. This was happening around Jesus all the time as he brings God's Reign into various contexts.

The level of reactive manifestation can be unmissable like this incident, or less obvious. I have seen people suddenly throw things in worship events that were wonderfully alive, things such as chairs or motorcycle helmets. They might have been mentally ill but it happened then? I have seen people breakdown screaming when worship began to take off around them. That's hard to avoid noticing.

More subtle is the person troubled by an unclean spirit who begins to protest at too much talk about Jesus and the Holy Spirit or the intimacy of some worship songs. In my previous parish I pastored an older man who was a proud Freemason. He loved the Church and he loved his Lodge. I think that like many such men he had worked to have lodge and church fit together in his life. Then he came to a supposedly traditional church where the spiritual temperature was a bit higher and he began to rattle. The poor man could not be comfortable. The presence of the Holy Spirit bringing the reign of God among people rattled him and he became a gentleman sniper in the life of the Church.

That's background, about Jesus being confronted by a demonized person in the synagogue. What does he do? His teaching ministry is being disrupted. His mission is being sabotaged. – v.25

²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷

The authority of God's Reign people could hear in his teaching is now exercised in direct conflict with demonic spirits in rebellion against God's Reign as he bears it. Jesus exercises authority with a word of command:

"Be silent, and come out of him!"

In speaking to the demonic spirit there is no consultation. There is no negotiation.

This is the authority of a Son of the King in the Reign of God. Jesus is the first son and he models this for all.

The people there recognize this authority:

²⁷ 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."

I like the 'even the unclean spirits' phrase because that is spiritual reality. Commanding people is one thing, commanding children another but demons only listen to real authority and even then protest.

Conclusion and Application

I commend this passage to you as Mark's first demonstration of the Reign of God having come in Jesus as demonstrated in conflict with the Kingdom of Darkness, a Kingdom that oppresses people, even in 'church' on the Sabbath.

So what might that mean to you today?

We heard John answer that question in his gospel several times over Christmas: (John 1:12)

Take Note

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the authority to become children of God,

John 1.12

¹² But to all who did receive him (*Jesus*), who believed in his name (*Saviour*), he gave the **authority**¹ to become children of God,

In the gospel grace of God, all those who receive Jesus as God's Son, the bearer of God's Kingdom and thus their Lord and Saviour receive the authority of the Kingdom. That is the Gospel.

Jesus exercises the full authority of God's reign as The Son of God perfectly in God's reign. He is the model for us. We do not need to be afraid of evil spirits even when they begin to rattle or manifest in various ways. As sons and daughters of the King in Jesus Christ we have the authority of Jesus to deal with them.

Take Note

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the authority to become children of God,

John 1.12

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4.7

St James says it this way in his epistle:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

That is how it works in the Kingdom of people embracing the reign of God in Jesus. As brothers and sisters of Jesus we share that same authority and may exercise it.

To bring it down to an every day application: if you are filled with the Holy Spirit and following Jesus in His Kingdom you may at times experience strange or even harsh reactions from people. It can even happen in church! The thing to realize is that this is often not about you. Strange things don't happen around you because you are strange. This took me many years to learn. It was for me so natural to assume strange reactions happen because I had somehow elicited or warranted that. There is a level at which strange things happen as spiritual outbreaks of evil in reaction to the authority you may carry as a child of God seeking His kingdom.

Not all that happens around you is about you but may be more about the fragrance of Jesus and his Kingdom living within you.

Be at peace about that but also know that in Christ you have the authority to resist the devil and however he reacts to you, tell him to be silent and gone. In terms of Mark's gospel this is normal kingdom living as modeled by Jesus. For people living deeply in Christ as his followers this is standard experience. The key is receiving the kingdom in Jesus. Allowing God to reign in us through Jesus and living out of that.

¹ The Greek word ἐξουσίαν / *exousian* in Mark 1:22 & 27 is translated 'authority' while in John 1:12 the ESV translates this word as 'the right' and NIV as 'power' Same word- different translations?