

Behold! The Authority of the Nazarene, PART II – Mark 1:21-34

Series: Look and Live #5

Mark 1:21. This is part two of our sermon two weeks ago. We are speaking about the authority of Jesus Christ, about his ability, his power, and his position, where he has ultimate and absolute authority over the Universe.

There is one main aspect of Jesus' authority in this passage that we'll address this morning from Mark 1. It's so wonderfully clear in Mark 1 that Jesus has absolute and irrefutable authority over the kingdom of this fallen world.

Read Mark 1:21-34.

Remember our series title: *Look and Live*. That's what we're doing in the Gospel of Mark, looking at the Christ Mark is picturing in these stories and as we look to him, we are receiving eternal life from Him. So behold Jesus! He has *authority over the kingdom of this fallen world*. (vv. 23-28).

After Jesus has been teaching in the synagogue at least for a few minutes, a *demon-possessed man* shows himself right there, in the midst of the synagogue. This is our first encounter between Jesus and an unclean spirit, so I want to be slow, careful, and thorough here. So we're going to do three things today: first, as obvious as this is, I want to argue that the unclean spirit is a real, honest to goodness demon. Second, we'll show that Jesus Christ has the authority over the demon. And third, we'll see that the demon is representative of something much bigger.

1) So first things first: this unclean spirit was a real demon.

- a) In case someone is inclined to say, "Wait, it doesn't say demon it says 'unclean spirit'", let me take that one head on.
 - i) Check out Mark 5.
 - ii) This is the famous story of the man who lived among the tombs.
 - iii) He had *several unclean spirits* possessing him. Verses 2, 8, and 13 call them "unclean spirits". But when the townspeople come out to see this man because they heard that Jesus cast out the legion of unclean spirits, the man is now called in verse 15 the formerly "demon-possessed man". So having an unclean spirit and being possessed or filled with a demon are the same thing in the NT.
 - iv) The reason the Jews also called them "unclean spirits" is because unclean is the way they referred to everything that separated them from God's presence and from serving God and sacrificing to him. Unclean things are the things that defiled a person. So *evil* and *unclean* are virtually synonymous here.
- b) This is an important point to establish because in our "enlightened" age, we doubt the reality of things like this. Bible critics today say, "Oh they were just dealing with psychological problems, or with infections or diseases, but they just didn't know what was really happening so they invented the idea of 'demons' and 'evil spirits.'" Sadly, this thinking has now infiltrated the church and liberal churches can read the Bible in their Sunday School classes, and they totally dismiss all of this primitive stuff about demons and what-not and they say that they just take away the spiritual value of the story.
- c) Well the New Testament authors thought that the thing afflicting this man was not just *sickness* or *illness*, it wasn't just a brain problem or a chemical imbalance; it was an evil spirit problem.

- d) In the very next paragraph, we see Jesus healing fevers and many sicknesses and illnesses. So Israelites in Jesus' day had categories for being sick, and then there was a totally separate category for being demon-possessed. This isn't just primitive thinking. This isn't just superstition. There *are* demons.
- e) After all, consider what the New Testament says these demons do.
 - i) They can *fill* or *enter* a person. I don't know exactly what that means. They are not physical entities so they don't "fill" a person like water fills a bucket. But people are spiritual as well as physical. So I presume it means that they somehow displace or dispossess the spirit of the person and they replace it with themselves.
 - ii) Not only can they "enter" a person, they can also be forced to "exit" a person and leave them.
 - iii) They can control and influence the person they are in.
 - (1) We see them *speaking* through the person they are possessing. Like right here for instance. The demon uses the man to say, "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." The demon didn't actually say that because it doesn't have a body and vocal chords. But it *caused* this man it had possessed to say these things.
 - (2) Now if this demon formulates ideas and expresses them through words, and if this demon has rejected Christ and hates Jesus, then biblically speaking, demons and evil spirits are not just an old way of speaking about bad and a generic evil in the world, a demon is a personal evil spirit with thoughts and abilities.
 - (3) Later on, we'll see demons causing their hosts to do even physical things like fall down, shake, and things of that sort.
 - iv) So there are godly, Christ-loving spirits who minister, who serve God's purposes. And there are ungodly, unclean, Christ-rejecting spirits called demons who try to thwart God's purposes and are dead-set against him. That is biblical reality.
- f) We cannot say we believe in the Bible and then dismiss the existence of evil spirits, Satan, demons, etc. Jesus spoke to demons. If we reject their existence, then we are forcing Jesus to be either deceitful because he knew the demons weren't real but he pretended to speak to them and cast them out anyway, or we make him something much less than God by saying that he *thought* he was speaking to a demon, just like everybody else did in those days, but really it was just a sick person. Disbelieve the Bible here, and we are rejecting the authority and truthfulness of God's Word. I am not willing to do that. If for no other reason than that God's Word says so, we must believe in the reality of unclean, evil spirits.
- g) That is not to say that we have to believe everything the world and paganism and other false religions teach about evil spirits. We're not to be uncritical. We are to accept their reality as the Bible presents them, and nothing more and nothing less. So, while we acknowledge their existence, we also hold that they were created by God. And, since they were created by him, they are under the sovereign hand of God. And therefore, they themselves are not gods and they are not infinite but finite.

2) Second now, as we think about Christ's authority over the kingdom of this fallen world, let's see that not only is this a real demon, but Christ has authority over this real demon.

- a) You should know something about casting out demons, (also called exorcism): it was not completely unheard of in Jesus' day. It wasn't common but there were a few people who claimed to do what Jesus did here.

- b) But there was one really big difference. They would make a really big show out of it.
 - i) It reminds me of how it is today. People who make a show of casting out demons are so theatrical about all of it. Slapping people on forwards, knocking them over, yelling and sweating and running around on television.
 - ii) In Jesus' day, these so-called exorcists would do similar things like read spells, and use props and they might try to coerce the demons out of folks.
- c) But don't you love what Jesus does? He doesn't use any spells. He doesn't use any tools. He doesn't read any magical formulas. In fact, he doesn't even *ask* the demon. He only speaks commands to this evil spirit. He only *tells it what to do*.
 - i) First, be silent! He would not permit it to speak.
 - ii) And second, get out! Leave this man whom you have possessed at once.
- d) There is no hint of a choice. There is no bartering here. The demon *knows* and *feels* and is *under* the absolute authority of Jesus! He must obey. Immediately the evil spirit makes a violent display of leaving this man. And just like that, just *at the simple command and the word* of Jesus, this man is now demon-free. That's the level of Christ' authority. Even demons are obligated to submit to Christ's direct word of command.

3) Now third, see that this demon is representative of something much bigger.

- a) As Jesus began to teach, it only took a minute for this demon to realize who Jesus truly was.
- b) Immediately he interrupts and cries out in the middle of the meeting, "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."
- c) Notice that, not once, but twice the demon says "us".
- d) This demon is telling us two massive things:
 - i) First, he felt like there was a conflict taking place. That's what that phrase "what have you to do with us" means. It's an expression from the OT which literally says, 'What is there between us and you?' It means *we are enemies!* We are hostile toward each other. We have no reason to be together except to fight.
 - ii) Second, the demon's words tell us that the conflict that day was not just between Jesus and that particular demon. The *conflict* is between Jesus and the whole *fallen, evil kingdom*. In other words, everything in the world that is fallen. The corrupted order of the world, the fallen desires of the world, the fallen people of the world, our sinful desires that still live in us, and especially the fallen, evil spirits in the world. Mark is picturing the demon here as a spokesman of sorts for the entire evil and fallen realm. The demon realizes that the coming of God's Holy One means conflict and ultimately destruction for the kingdom of evil.
- e) Yes, the New Testament speaks of a *kingdom* of evil.
 - i) "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rules, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12)
 - ii) The Jews taught that there was a *hierarchy* of evil powers. Those are the words Paul uses here to say, they are the ones we are really struggling against. And Colossians 1:16 and Colossians 2:15 refer to them as well. Mark 3:22 calls Satan the prince of demons. And Daniel 10:13-14 seems to be saying that the angel Gabriel was fighting with one of the princes of the demonic realm and that Michael, one of God's holy, *angelic princes* (they apparently have ranks as well as the evil spirits), Michael came to assist Gabriel.

- f) So there *is* a whole realm, group, kingdom of demonic powers. They are real and they are powerful. Much more powerful than we are. Those lost and outside of Christ seem *helpless* and *powerless* against them. In fact, the lost world is in some sense participating with them. Ephesians 2 says that we are following the prince of the power of the air and that fallen people are sons of disobedience and children of wrath.
- g) And amazingly, in just a single moment, with a word, without lifting a finger, without reciting secret incantations, without potions or wands or one drop of sweat, Jesus *destroys* the power and hold of this representative of the fallen kingdom.
- h) In casting out this demon, Mark intends for us to see Christ's overthrow of the entire fallen kingdom of this world.
- i) For the rest of his time on this earth, Mark will tell us about Jesus casting out demon after demon. But in Colossians 2:15, we'll actually learn that Jesus' greatest victory over this wicked kingdom was not the casting out of demons, but his greatest victory and his greatest display of authority was **ultimately his cross!**
 - i) It was on the cross that the demons and Satan were put to *open shame*.
 - ii) It was *Satan* who brought Judas to betray Jesus and have him crucified. It was Satan who was at work to stir the crowds saying, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" It was Satan who worked so hard to kill Jesus to keep him from restoring God's people to God and to keep him from freeing them from their guilt and burden and bondage to sin (which is the source of Satan's hold over us).
 - iii) And to the eternal shame of Satan, it was the very death they so badly wanted Jesus to die that actually so gloriously restored God's people to God and freed them from their guilt and burden and bondage to sin. In trying to thwart God's purposes, Satan was actually an *instrument* of carrying out God's purposes.
 - iv) How shameful! So the demons have been publicly shamed by the cross.
 - v) They have been ultimately defeated when Jesus rose from the grave and their greatest instrument of torture, death, was actually defeated.
 - vi) They have been cast off their thrones when Jesus took away our sin and released us from our burden and bondage to sin, which is the very thing that kept us under their sway.
- j) And so we see that even *before* Jesus went to the cross he had complete authority over the fallen kingdom of this world and its entire evil empire. And yet, he actually gets even more authority over them by defeating them on the cross and then by ascending and rising to heaven alive. Not dead, not defeated by death, not defeated by Satan and his purposes, but alive! I don't know how better to say that if there is authority that you can imagine over evil, Christ has it! Your Christ, our King, possesses it to the fullest.

4) **Application: what does any of it matter to us?**

- a) *First* of all, it's a source of joy in Jesus Christ. What a mighty King we have, so able to save and deliver, even from the grips of Hell.
- b) The *second* way this text helps us is by keeping us balanced in how we think about evil.
 - i) There seem to be only two options for American churches: major on Satan and demons and talk about them all the time, or completely forget that they even exist and never pray for protection, victory, or deliverance from them.
 - ii) Neither one of those options are acceptable for HHBC. Evil creatures are real, they are active, and they are powerful. They should be considered a war-time threat, and we should

acknowledge that we are in a war with them, Ephesians 6. It would be silly, foolish, and dangerous for us to ignore their reality or pretend like they do not exist.

- iii) But the Bible does not speak about them as though they are the most important things to talk about, to know about, to pray about, or to worry about. The Bible talks about this war that we are in, as real as it is, as already being decided and won for Jesus Christ.
- iv) So this text helps us stay balanced somewhere in between those two options. There's a third option for us where we acknowledge their existence, where we pray and rely upon God to support us victoriously *against them*, but where, at the same time, we do not walk in fear or trepidation of them because they already stand defeated under the cross of Jesus.
- v) We are not afraid. Satan is not king. And our true Lord knows all, sees all, and has every single ounce of authority over our enemies.

Quote from Martin Luther's hymn A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him...

- vi) That's exactly how this text trains us to think. They are real and powerful. And they are impotent and weak and already shamefully defeated by the single Word of God, Jesus Christ our King. We tremble NOT for them!
- c) Third, Christ's authority over this demon gives us hope that Jesus can deliver us from our sins. He is powerfully able.
- i) What's so amazing about this story is that Jesus' authority extends even to his enemies! It extends even to those who reject his authority. That's what this demon had done some time back. It had rejected God's authority to be God and to be Lord. The demon had rebelled against Him and had decided to serve itself or to serve some other lord. In other words, it said no to and disbelieved the authority of the Son. And yet amazingly, that didn't phase Jesus at all. That didn't make it *hard* for Jesus to cast out the demon. He still maintained perfect authority over it, despite its attempt to get away from his authority.
 - ii) That is a perfect picture of us. In that regard, we are *no different* from this demon. We too have sinned. We too have rebelled. We too have all decided that we do not accept the authority of God and that we do not want him to be God over our lives. And this story teaches us that despite our attempt to get away from God's authority, Jesus yet maintains absolute authority over us. Whether we want him to have authority over us or not does not change the fact that he does.

- iii) That means two things:
- (1) It means, *first*, that Jesus is able to save the most sinful sinner. If there is no demon outside his authority, than there is no sinner too rebellious and too far gone to respond to Christ's authoritative command to repent and believe. He can effectively bring back any sinner to himself.
 - (2) And this means, *second*, that for those of us who have been restored to God in Jesus Christ, even though we still have some rebellion in our hearts, even though we still have sinful pride and sinful pleasures in our hearts, Jesus has authority over them too.
- iv) Here's a truth to remember: **Jesus is able to deal with the most sinful parts of our sinful hearts!** It's not that he has authority just over the parts of us that love him and are obeying him. He is Lord over all, over all people, and over the entire person. He *could* bring everything in my still partially sinful heart into obedience to him.
- v) If you feel hopeless, either because you are a man or woman who has realized that you were born in rebellion against God and deserving of his wrath and you feel too sinful, too wretched, too deserving of that wrath to ever be made right with God, or you feel hopeless because you have repented and trusted in Jesus Christ but you are still so knocked down by the power of reigning sin in your life, fighting and struggling and killing you, either way hopeless one, Look upon Jesus Christ this morning. *Look and Live!* Behold a Savior who has the authority over even the most sinful sinner, who has the authority to give you repentance and faith and to restore you to God. Behold a Savior who has the authority over even the most sinful parts of your sinful heart. Who can take away life-long sinful habits, who can destroy long-time sinful passions and pleasures. Look to him and live.
- d) I can't help but quote another hymn because Charles Wesley so wonderfully captured this point. This song is actually his personal testimony that he wrote on the one-year anniversary of the day God saved him:

O for a thousand tongues to sing
 My great Redeemer's praise,
 The glories of my God and King,
 The triumphs of His grace!

He breaks the power of reigning sin,
 He sets the prisoner free;
 His blood can make the foulest clean,
 His blood availed for me.

So there is a glimpse from Mark 1 into the absolute, sovereign authority of a man born in Nazareth. Perhaps this is not just some man after all. Perhaps this is the God-man, come to save us, to reconcile us to God, and come to be Lord and King over us. Look to him this morning. Look to him and you will have life in his glorious name.

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