

A New Teaching With Authority (Mark 1:21-28)

- 1) Its message of Christ's holy identity is new
- 2) It has God's authority in all it says

There's a saying that declares that "*seeing is believing*" which I tend to agree with. That which I see, I'm much more likely to believe. But I'm willing to guess that there are times when you see something that is beyond belief. There were 2 times in my life when I did not believe what I saw, at least not right away. The first time was when my family went with my dad was on TDY, a military business trip, to San Diego. We toured the USS Kitty Hawk, an aircraft carrier, and I was floored by just how long it was. I wanted to capture its immense length. So I took my disposable camera and used 3 of my 30 shots to take a picture of it from the parking lot. The ship was so long that I had to line up my 3 pictures on a table to form a makeshift panorama. The other time I found it hard to believe what I saw was just a few years ago when the Seminary Choir came to Arizona for its spring choir tour. We had an extra few hours and happened to be in northern Arizona, so we stopped at the Grand Canyon. And I will never forget what it was like to make our way to the overlook. If you've been there, you know what I'm talking about. You see the fence on the edge of the overlook. But the closer you get to the fence, you realize how large the chasm is behind it. It is so wide and so deep that it's until you get to the fence itself and lean over it can you see just how grand the canyon is. It took me awhile to believe what I saw that day. But if you were around the city of Capernaum during the times of Mark chapter 1, you would have seen something even more unbelievable than the USS Kitty Hawk or the Grand Canyon. You would have seen Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior himself, speaking and doing some amazing things. And this morning we see what those things are – a new teaching with the authority of God.

Every Saturday the Jewish believers got together in the synagogue to read and reflect on God's Word. And it was customary for traveling rabbis – traveling teachers – to have the honor of reading, explaining, and applying the appointed section of God's Word to the worshipers for that day.ⁱ On this particular Sabbath day, Jesus was in the synagogue in Capernaum teaching the people God's Word. And as he taught, he wowed the crowd. Mark tells us, **"Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law"** (Mark 1:21b,22). Whereas the teachers of the law talked about God's Word by quoting what other theologians said and finishing with a list of legalistic regulations, Jesus simply preached God's Word on its own authority.ⁱⁱ He didn't have to look back at what Rabbi So-and-So said. He knew what God's Word really meant because it was his Word from the beginning. And so he could speak with authority.

But there was more to Jesus' new teaching than its source for authority. It was new to those sinful ears in Capernaum because its message of Jesus' true identity is found nowhere else. After Mark tells us that Jesus wowed the crowds, we see a demon-possessed man cry out in the synagogue, **"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"** (Mark 1:24)! We'll talk about the demon-possessed man and what happens to him in a little bit. But for now, let's focus how he describes Jesus – the Holy One of God. This is the truth often lost by the teachers of the law. This is the truth around which all of Scripture rotates.

Those synagogue worshipers may not have realized it, but before them was the Holy One of God. Luther's Catechism describes holinessⁱⁱⁱ as having 2 characteristics – pure and set apart for God. To be spiritually pure means to have no taint of sin on you. From the day God became man in Bethlehem to day Jesus died on the cross, our Savior never once sinned.^{iv} Jesus was set apart for God's divine plan in every way. To be the Promised Prophet from our 1st Lesson of Deuteronomy chapter 18. He is the one over all believers in God's house as seen in our 2nd Lesson of Hebrews chapter 3. Jesus is the one set apart from every other living being to fulfill God's plan for salvation. Jesus is the Holy One of God in every sense of the word.

But is that how you identify Jesus? So often our world identifies Jesus as something less than our Savior, less than the Holy One of God. It considers Jesus how the crowds in Capernaum did – as a master teacher, as a great speaker. It's true that Jesus very successful in making the unknown known to many people. But Jesus is more than a teacher or a speaker. He is the Holy One of God, the only one who has always been pure and set apart for God for all time. No one else can claim to be holy before God. Each of has tainted our souls with our own sins. And when we look at God's heavenly holiness and his judgment for sins, we find ourselves shying away from Jesus' new teaching with authority. Because it does not paint us in a favorable light. It shows us that there is no way we can be called holy. And to admit that we are not holy means that we do not deserve to be with God in heaven. Because it is only those who are called holy who can enter heaven and be with the Holy One of God.

But as much as we may want to shy away from Jesus' new teaching about his heavenly holiness, it is in this teaching alone we discover how are made holy. It comes through faith in the Holy One of God, in Jesus as your Savior. Those who believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead as the Holy One of God are in turn given Christ's holiness. Their sins are forgiven and taken away so that they are pure before God – the 1st characteristic of holiness. They are set apart from the rest of the unbelieving world as his beloved children. Do you say that Jesus is your Savior? Do you say that he is the Holy One of God who came to save you from your sins? If your answer is yes, then be assured that Christ's holiness has been given to you. You are considered pure of all your sins from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot. You are set apart for God and considered his child through the blood that Jesus shed on the

cross. That is God's message which is new to this sinful world. And you can trust it because it comes from God himself.

Because every word in the Bible comes from God and has his authority. I told you earlier that we were going to talk about the demon-possessed man. And now we will. After the demon-possessed man told the synagogue worshipers what Jesus' true identity is, the Holy One of God,^v Jesus shows us the authority of God's Word. He orders the impure spirit saying **"Be quiet!...Come out of him" (Mark 1:25)!** And instantly, without any rituals or arcane incantations, **"the impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek" (Mark 1:26).** What a sight that must have been! While you and I write off many occult activities today as hoaxes, here is an account that no one can write off. There really was a demon-possessed man and Jesus really liberated him with the simple command of God's Word. That is the authority of God's Word.

That is the authority we lean on to soothe our guilty consciences. Nothing is more powerful than our Lord or his Word. Not even a fallen angel who can make a man speak against his will and violently shake him in his exit. What our Lord tells us in his Word will happen no matter what the odds say. Including its new teaching that sinners who trust in God's Holy One received Christ's heavenly holiness themselves.

And you can trust in that truth with all your heart because its authority comes from on high. It is not dependent on human wisdom. If anything, human wisdom will lead us away from this new teaching. It doesn't make sense that God would send his holy Son to be punished for all our sins. It doesn't make sense that one person's death thousands of years ago can have blessings today. But push those human thoughts aside and lean on the authority of God's Word. It is true. You have Christ's holiness now through faith in him. When the world insists that Jesus is something less than the Holy One of God, the Savior of the world, don't fall victim to their supposed intelligence. Even the demons know who Jesus truly is. When you fall into temptation and sin against your Lord, come back to this new teaching with authority. Come back to the authoritative truth that Christ's holiness is given to you just as he promises.

In the closing sentence of our verses for this morning we see the effect that Jesus' new teaching with authority had on the synagogue worshipers in Capernaum. They believed what they saw and told everyone what about it. That teaching of Christ's holiness is without equal in terms of its comfort or power. It is new to a world darkened by sin because it only found in the Bible. It tells us the truth that Jesus is the Holy One of God – pure from sin and set apart for God. It assures us that Christ has given his holiness to those who believe in him so that we are pure from sin and set apart for God. Nothing will stop God's Word from coming true as proven when Jesus liberated the demon-possessed man. With all this in mind, may the Lord grant us to take this new teaching with authority to heart so that we may be found holy at all times. Amen.

End Notes

ⁱ There are many similarities between the worship life of the synagogue and a traditional Christian worship service today. For more information on the synagogue's history, function, and other related matters, go to <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/synagogue>.

ⁱⁱ As commentator F. W. Wenzel put it Jesus' "kind of preaching touches the heart, the [teachers' of the law] is merely a proclamation of human wisdom." From my research in various commentaries, I believe this is an apt summary of the differences. The teachers of the law based their authority on conclusions from respected Jewish church fathers. In many ways it would be comparable to a student's research paper or an informed opinion in a courtroom setting. In some cases the teachers of the law strayed too far from biblical teaching and relied too heavily on past theologians. In other cases their sermons were weak because their conclusions were based on human wisdom. Jesus' teaching stood out because of its lack of reliance on past theologians and because of its refocused attention on Christ as the center of all the Bible's teachings.

ⁱⁱⁱ The official definition for "Holy" is: 1. Pure, sinless (Leviticus 19:2); 2. Set apart for the holy God (Exodus 35:2).

^{iv} Neither did Jesus sin before the first Christmas or after his death on Good Friday. I do not mention this in the sermon for sake of time. But the Bible states that Jesus has never once sinned ever in his entire existence because God cannot sin.

^v It is my understanding that the demon publicized Jesus' true identity for 2 reasons: 1) To show the extent of his fear for Jesus' divine majesty. The demon knew he was no match for Jesus' power. He would have to obey what Jesus commanded no matter what. 2) To distract the people from Jesus' message of salvation. This distraction could happen in 2 possible ways. They could disbelieve Jesus' later rightful claims of divinity. An illustration – if a known liar says something, no one will believe him even if it is true. If a demon-possessed man says Jesus is the Holy One of God, people will be less likely to believe that on the basis that the news came from a demon-possessed man. They could also get wrapped up in the false political aspirations they had for the Messiah and thus impede Jesus' path to the cross as the Suffering Servant.