

# With Christ, the Authority of God is *Here*

Mark 1:21-28

Halifax: 11 November 2018, 10:30 AM

## **Introduction**

The whole human race lives in a very unnatural state of affairs.

- We live from day to day with almost no awareness of God.
  - That is unnatural!
- We were created to live in communion with God.
  - It is remarkable how great the distance is between us and our God.

The prophets tell us what the problem is—our sins have separated us from Him.

- Sin has caused us to withdraw from Him and Him to withdraw from us.
- We are left to live as beasts who know nothing of Him...it is a most unnatural state of affairs for us.

But we have been learning from the gospel of Mark how there is good news...

- Mark tells us that the Son of God came into this world to restore us to God.
- God's eternal Son actually became one of us that He might be among us as one who (unlike us) actually does live under the rule of God in communion with God.
- He establishes the kingdom of God, a kingdom of righteousness, for us so that we can be reconciled to God and live under His rule as our God again.

By His coming as God the Son, Jesus revealed God to us.

- By looking at Him, we are able to see God and to learn of Him—to see what He is really like.
- Even though Jesus was in human flesh, He was nevertheless God with us.

What I have in mind for the next sermons in Mark is the following titles, showing how He brings God here among us in ways that He was not here for us to perceive:

- With Christ, the Authority of God is *Here* (Mark 1:21-28).
- With Christ, the Compassion of God is *Here* (Mark 1:29-34).
- With Christ, the Agenda of God is *Here* (Mark 1:35-39).
- With Christ, the Willingness of God to Save is *Here* (Mark 1:40-45).
- With Christ, the Forgiveness of God is *Here* (Mark 2:1-17).
- With Christ, the Presence of God is *Here* (Mark 2:18-22).
- With Christ, the Sabbath Rest of God is *Here* (Mark 2:23-28).

I will not promise to stick to this future schedule exactly, but that is more or less where I am going with Mark.

- The focus will be on seeing how God has come near to us in Christ so that we can see Him better and can know Him as our God and Saviour.

Today in Mark 1:21-28, we see how the people were gripped by the authority of God which they saw in Christ.

- The question for you, as we look at this, is whether you have seen the authority of God in Christ. Have you seen that here, in Him, is the rule of God among men.
- I will begin by reading the passage and then we will look into it more closely.

Here is the holy Word of God. Give appropriate attention to it as the Word of God.

**Mark 1:21-28: Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”**

**<sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. <sup>27</sup> Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” <sup>28</sup> And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.**

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

It was the Sabbath day and the congregation at the synagogue at Capernaum was gathering for the weekly holy convocation that Moses had appointed in all their dwellings.

- These weekly meetings had been neglected along with many other ordinances of God prior to the exile, but during the Babylonian exile the Jews’ synagogue worship had been restored and their synagogues were found all over Palestine and the Diaspora wherever there were ten Jewish men to start one.
- The synagogue at Capernaum was a large one, Capernaum being at the heart of one of the most densely populated areas in Palestine.
  - The foundation of this synagogue has been dug up and it was indeed substantial in size.

As the people gathered they did not know what they were about to encounter on that otherwise ordinary Sabbath day.

- It was the normal practice of the rulers or elders of the synagogue to invite any rabbis who were in the area to read the word and preach to the congregation and today they had invited Jesus of Nazareth to teach.
  - Jesus and a handful of his disciples (the ones he had already called) had just arrived in town, so He was probably not well known yet...certainly not as well known as He would be at the end of this day!
  - Probably many of the people had heard of Him and may have had their interest piqued to hear what he had to say, but they did not know that this day they would be struck with astonishment and awe.
    - They would be confronted with the authority of the eternal God in their midst that would be seen in Jesus the Son of God.
    - They would be struck with His authority in two ways.

### **I. First, the authority of God confronts them in His teaching.**

A. Mark tells us right from the get-go (in v. 22) that they were astonished at His teaching.

1. The word translated *astonished* is a very strong verb.
  - It carries the idea of being stuck with a blow that knocks you out of your normal state of mind.
  - It speaks of a reaction of both fear and alarm.

2. Mark tells us what struck them... it was the authority with which Jesus spoke.
    - All of verse 22 reads: **And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**
    - a. This might be taken in two ways...
      - Was the authority of Jesus striking to them because there was a deficiency in the way that scribes were teaching—something that should have been in their teaching and was not?
        - Or was there an authority in His teaching that would not have been appropriate to be found in the teaching of the scribes even if they were teaching just the way they should?
    - b. I think that Jesus' teaching was distinctive in both ways...
      - There was both an authority in Jesus' teaching that should have been in the teaching of the scribes as well as an authority that should not have been in their teaching.
        - Let's look at these...
- B. Let's look first at the authority that ought to be in preaching that is often not there.
1. First, the word of God is to be preached instead of the word of men.
    - a. Paul emphasises this in Timothy when he tells him to "preach the word" in 2 Timothy 4:1-5.
      - He warns that people will turn away from sound doctrine and want to hear something else... this is always been an issue.
      - As God's people, you need the word of God, not psychology or pep talks, but holy Scripture.
    - b. The scribes would often talk about matters that were not in the word—about various traditions or genealogical questions... Jewish fables and such.
    - c. In our day, preachers will take up a subject such as how to build up your self-esteem or how God wants you to be rich.
      - The subjects can seem important to the congregation, but people go away without hearing a message from God's word.
      - Instead of hearing from God, they hear only from man.
      - There is no encounter with God and His authority, just with human notions.
        - The thing is, we like that because we shy away from a message that has authority—we do not want God telling us what to do and think, but it is the preacher's task to bring forth the message of God by expounding the Scriptures.
          - All that He says should to believe and do should be from the Bible.
  2. And secondly, the word must be preached with urgency as if it is from God.
    - a. It is to be preached with authority as that which must be believed and obeyed.
      - 2 Timothy 4:2 says: **Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**
        - The preacher is seeking to drive the truth home to the hearers to be believed and obeyed...
        - He is not there to set forth curious ideas to contemplate, but truth from God that is to be believed and obeyed.

- b. Preachers should not be ordained or listened to if they don't believe the word.
    - Some of the scribes were Sadducees who did not believe in life after death...
      - They were not able to give people hope beyond this world or warn them about the danger of the judgment.
    - There are many like that today.
      - If they preach about hell at all, it is in an uncertain and doubtful way.
      - They do not preach about it with urgency, warning the people of the judgment to come because they do not believe.
        - Their preaching is weak and ineffectual.
    - They will not preach about the fall of man, his depravity and total inability to save himself.
      - They will not declare that there is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ—that there is no other name by which we must be saved.
      - These things if preached are not preached as if they are true.
  - c. And so with commandments...
    - Many do not press them upon the congregation because they are not gripped by the fact that they are from God.
    - They will not preach against sexual immorality, abortion, homosexuality, Sabbath breaking, abuse of the poor, pride, covetousness, idolatry, role distinctions in male and female...
    - And even if these things are spoken of, they are presented more as good advice than as commandments of the living God.
  - d. A preacher needs to realise that he is appointed as a herald, not to speak for himself, but in God's stead.
    - Paul captures this in 2 Cor 5:20 when he says: **Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.**
    - Preaching with authority often uses the second person imperative—it not only says, “we ought to repent and believe,” but it also says “you repent and believe,” speaking in the name of the LORD.
3. And thirdly, preaching should be with unction...in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- a. In 2 Cor 2:4, Paul says that his speech was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.
    - This is something that cannot be forced but something that ought to be prayed for—it is the effective working of the Spirit through the word.
    - When God is judging His church, He often does not grant this blessing.
      - It can't be worked up by human effort, but is found through earnest repentance and prayer that God would visit us with His Spirit.
  - b. When preaching happens and there is no conviction of sin, no humbling, no trembling before God, no comfort and edification, no sense that God has spoken, the Holy Spirit is not in that preaching.
    - When this is so, get on your knees and pray... both for you as a hearer—and for the preacher.

TRANS> Those are things that ought to be in preaching that often are not.

C. But now let's look at authority that was in Jesus' preaching that sets it apart from even the best preaching of ordinary ministers.

1. First, there was in His preaching prophetic authority.
  - He had the authority that prophets and apostles have to bring forth new truth from God.
  - Ordinary preaches cannot bring forth new revelation from God.
    - The congregation at Capernaum heard the message that Jesus was declaring, that the kingdom of God was at hand.
    - Jesus preached that as a direct revelation from God—not as something He proclaimed from Scripture.
  - When He warned about the coming destruction of Jerusalem that was to come in 70 AD because they reject Him, He was setting forth new revelation.
    - When Isaiah proclaimed in his day that Assyria would conquer all of Israel but be stopped at the gates of Jerusalem, that was prophecy, not the exposition of scripture.
    - When he said that a virgin would conceive and bear a son, that also was prophecy.
    - When Moses gave the pattern of how the tabernacle was to be built, that was prophecy.
2. But Jesus had another kind of authority that was His alone.
  - He had the authority to preach as though He Himself were the very source of the truth.
    - When the prophets gave divine relation, they would say, "Thus says the LORD," and they give their prophetic word from Him...
    - But when Jesus preached, He did not say "Thus says the LORD" because He was the LORD.
      - Instead, He said, "I say to you."
      - He spoke as one who was giving out His own commandments because they were His commandments...
      - He spoke as the one who was going to judge because it was His judgment that was to be executed.
        - At His trial before the high priests, they were offended when He told them that they would see Him coming in the clouds to judge them—they said it was blasphemy because He spoke as if He was the LORD.
        - He did speak as if He was the LORD because He was the LORD.
  - So the congregation at Capernaum heard something of this kind of authority when Jesus taught at the synagogue and they were astonished!
    - It struck them with awe.

D. And I want to tell you that it is important for you to be astonished...struck...with His authority also!

1. Truly, this is what makes all the difference in whether you have had true dealings with Christ and know Him in a saving way or not.

- a. Jesus Himself calls it hearing the voice of the Son of God.
    - In John 10:26-28 He says to some: **“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”**
      - For them, His word has not only authority, but the authority of God.
      - They cannot go on the same as before.
      - God has spoken into their lives and they cannot dismiss it.
  - b. I like the way the LORD describes this in Isa 66:2: **But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.**
    - Here, you see, is the description of someone who has received the word not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.
2. When Jesus came among us, He came to reconcile us to God.
- We had rejected God’s authority, but He came bringing that authority among us again—He Himself speaking as God.
    - In Him, we have God speaking to us and ruling us.
    - That changes everything.
3. Examine yourself.
- Do you receive the word of God as the word of God?
    - Do you see that you must have Christ to be saved?
    - Do you believe that all will go to hell who do not believe?
    - Are you able to go on in your sin without repentance as if what God says about it is of no consequence?
    - Can you hear the promises of God without being encouraged in your soul that God will do as He has spoken and save you if you believe?
  - If not, you need to come to Christ believing that He is God with us.
    - believing that He is God crucified for our sins and raised for our justification.
    - believing that He will reign until all His enemies are put under His feet.
    - believing that whoever believes on Him will not perish but have eternal life.

## II. And look, there is a second way that His authority was revealed on that day.

A. There was someone present who fully recognised the divine authority of our Lord Jesus as He preached that day.

1. It was an unclean spirit who had taken possession of a man that was in the congregation that day.
  - He could not bear to be in the presence of the Son of God and cried out in protest in verses 23-24: **Mark 1:23-24: Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”**
    - Just by being present, Jesus was causing a great disturbance to this demon, who knew that Jesus had come to destroy the Devil and all his hosts.
      - Even though the people, even Jesus’ disciples, were still trying to figure out just who Jesus was, the unclean spirit had no doubt.
        - The spirit knew that it had absolutely nothing in common with Jesus... “What do we have to do with you?” it said.

2. This goes to show that it is not enough merely to recognise the authority of Jesus the Son of God.
  - This unclean spirit's reaction reminds us that there were two very different reactions to Christ's authority in this congregation that day.
  - All were astonished and amazed, all were in awe,
    - but some wanted to run away while others wanted to cautiously and reverently draw near.
    - You were either repulsed or you were attracted.
  - The unclean spirit represents those who were repulsed.
    - The more they saw of the Son of God and of who He really was, the more they would act in revulsion the way this spirit did.
  - The ones who were attracted were those in whom the Holy Spirit was truly at work.
    - They were sweetly drawn to Christ and would grow to love Him more and more as they learned of Him.
  - The unclean spirit saw more fully who Christ was than others, and that is why its reaction was so strong...
    - But as the authority continued to be revealed, the reaction of either attraction or repulsion would become more pronounced in the others.

TRANS> But here we see God's authority revealed in the Son of God in a second way—

B. His authority is seen in commanding this spirit.

1. We are told in Jude 1:9 that even Michael the archangel did not rebuke Satan, but said "The Lord rebuke you."
  - But the preacher at the synagogue on this Sabbath day at Capernaum had no such hesitation because He was the sovereign LORD.
  - As verse 25 says: **But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"**
    - Truly this was a command of God and not man.
2. The demon despised the command, but was constrained to obey against his will.
  - Verse 26: **And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.**
  - It is clear from the terrible shriek that the unclean spirit did not want to obey but had no choice because a divine order had been given.
    - There were no spells, no incantations, no whiffle dust—just a direct order from the Son of God who has all authority in heaven and earth.

C. Be sure that you see the implications of this.

1. The congregation was amazed.
  - Mark tells us their reaction in verse 27: **Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."**
  - There was an authority among them that could command unclean spirits and force them to obey.
    - Such an authority was sovereign and unlimited.

2. This is the authority that is sovereign in all things—that commands all—that commanded even the world to come into being.
  - This is the authority that the Son of God brought back into our purview in our world that had been blinded by sin.
    - Right here in this synagogue, the world was confronted with this authority that they had been suppressing and trying to ignore for so long.
  - By Jesus' presence in the world as the Son of God, the reality of the authority of the eternal God has been brought into our purview.
  - As J. M. Robinson puts it, Jesus' exorcisms affirm that God is gaining control over an estranged and hostile creation which was subject to Satan's invasion and rule.
3. And I say to you that right here in this text, you are confronted with this authority.
  - It is like no other.
    - Here is the one who can crush the head of Satan whenever the time He has appointed has come... as promised in Genesis 3:15.
    - Here is the one who has the authority to cast into hell forever, and the one who has the authority to save all who come to Him.
  - It is an authority that you are utterly foolish—foolish beyond all comprehension—to ignore.
    - Here it is, revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God become flesh, in a way that we can all see and understand.
    - By Him, the rule of God is brought among us so that we can be restored to God again through Him as our Mediator.
      - As God, He is the one who reigns, and as man, He is the One who leads us and brings us under that rule again.
      - What wonderful authority He has!

### III. What is the appropriate response to what is revealed to you here?

#### A. The revelation of such authority calls for worship.

1. We were made to praise God, as we saw last week in Psalm 145, His greatness demands your praise:
  - Psalm 145:1-6: **I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. <sup>2</sup> Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. <sup>3</sup> Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. <sup>4</sup> One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. <sup>5</sup> I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. <sup>6</sup> Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness.**
2. This is God—nothing short of constant praise for all eternity is fitting.
  - Here is the one who called us into being and gave us all that we have.
  - Your life is not right if your life is without praise of our great God.
  - Here is the numinous—the divine otherness—before which all is lost and all is found... the Holy One is all in all... by whom are all things... to whom all glory and honour is due and without whom there is no lasting happiness.



- B. The revelation of such authority calls for a complete reorientation of your life.
1. He is the sovereign one to whom you are to be wholly devoted.
    - Mark 8:34 says: **When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”**
      - Your life is to be entirely for Him.
      - Nothing else is fitting for you.
      - Disobedience is out of the question.
      - Spending and being spent for Him is your calling—lost in His greatness and authority.
  2. All else is empty, all else vanity.
    - Here is all that is excellent and good.
    - There is none other to live for.
    - God, in Christ, has come to take His rightful place as God in our lives.
- C. But you have failed to honour His greatness, so it is for you to plead for His mercy.
1. You have every reason to do this in hope because, even as our text gives us indication, Christ has come to destroy Satan who led us into rebellion.
    - He has come to release us from the bondage and sin into which we fell.
      - As it says in Hebrews 2:14-15 of Him: **Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**
    - He is here, as we have seen, to establish the kingdom of God for us that we, through Him, might enter into it and serve God by grace.
  2. As we saw in Mark 1:15, He calls us to repent and believe this good news of a kingdom for sinners that we can enter by His grace.
    - As our representative, He has established this kingdom and has called us to repent of our sins and believe in Him.
    - And we know that He has been offered to atone for the sins of this kingdom of God so that we who are sinners might be received through His offering.
      - As Hebrews 9:11-12 says: **But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. <sup>12</sup> Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.**
  3. Here the eternal God who has all heaven and earth has made the way of reconciliation and has promised that all who come to Him will be received.
    - **Joh 6:37: All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.**
      - He reveals His authority not just as a show, but to bring us back to God.
      - He enables us to see the glory and God’s sovereignty to which we had been blinded.
        - So see that you come to Him, worshipping, serving, and trusting in the mercy that He has promised.

**The authority of God is here and it calls for your response.**