

He Speaks With Authority

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Mark 1:21-28 ²¹ Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. ²² And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ 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!" ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. ²⁷ Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine *is* this? For with authority¹ He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." ²⁸ And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

A made the star in the back of church for Advent. It is a simple woodworking project and even as simple as that is the angles are off. The one at the back of the church is much better. This chair, however, shows a far greater proficiency with woodworking. This was made by an India carpenter. There are many objects around this church which show an even greater carpentry skill. But what is truly astounding is when you hear of these carpenters that used precisely formed joints so that they never have to use nails or screws.

Similarly, Jesus astounds the crowds with a skill of teaching and preaching that puts him on a level far above anything the Israelites were used to hearing from their Rabbis. What made Jesus' teaching so different and what ought we to learn from it?

Mark's gospel points us to three aspect of his teaching that were astonishing. The first is mentioned directly by the people in our text. He preaches with authority. The other two are the content and power of his preaching but we aren't going to get into those today.

The people are astounded because Jesus speaks "with authority."

The first difference is that Jesus is one who speaks with authority. The authority of the Rabbis was borrowed. They established their authority by quoting older Rabbi's. The more ancient and more prestigious the Rabbi they quoted from the better.

Jesus quotes no authority other than scripture. However, when it comes to scripture, he has mastery of it. He shows a grasp and an understanding of God's word that eludes even the greatest Rabbi's, but which when pointed out they cannot contradict.

When Jesus is a child in the temple, he confounds the teachers with his questions.

When asked about taxes, no one can contradict his simple answer.

When asked about the resurrection he points to one verb from the Pentateuch. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The present tense proving that those three men must be alive.

Jesus answers leave the teachers and scholars of his day speechless.

Probably the greatest demonstration of Jesus mastery of scripture is his confrontation with Satan. Satan quotes scripture and wrongly interprets it, "He shall give his angels charge over you."

Jesus immediately reveals exactly where Satan is misusing God's word, "Do not tempt the Lord God."

The Rabbi's had to establish the authority of their words by showing how it came from this tradition or that tradition. The result was that they became slaves to that tradition. They were meticulous in keeping the law but had no true understanding of its actual purpose.

Jesus' authority came from the fact that he was the great apostle sent from God, and from his mastery of scripture not the writings of the Rabbis. He was not a slave to tradition but was able to judge all things against God's word.

This reminds me of an episode of the Smurfs from when I was kid. It has been a while since I've seen the cartoon but the way I remember it is: One of the Smurfs chisel's words on stone. He claimed he found the stone in the woods. Because the words were written on stone all the Smurfs felt like they had to do what was written.

This is meant as a silly story for kids, but we sometimes act in similar ways. This is the way we have always done it therefore it must be the right way.

Jesus calls us to seek truth rather than become a slave to traditions or to the newest fad.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

Ephesians 5:8-10 Walk as children of light . . . finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

A slavish devotion to custom can easily lead to fear and anger towards anything that is new. While a dismissal of all that is old leads to an unstable vacillating and directionless life. Whatever the new fad is,

whatever the young people are into we must jump on board. This is what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:14 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

You see this attitude in some of our political leaders. Their only goal is to appease the masses. They are incapable of leading, rather they simply follow the vacillating ideology of the masses.

On the other hand, with others you sometimes see a fearful reaction to anything new. Whether it be electric cars, cloning, a new vaccine, or AI. We don't need to fear these things, but we do need to test them against scripture.

Jesus calls us to something better, something greater, not to become like the Israelites slaves to tradition, nor blown about by every new fad. Rather by knowing God's word and testing all things against God's word we have authority over all things.

Romans 12:2 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Test all things against God's word. This is part of what Jesus did that was so astounding about his teaching.

Jesus has authority to make clean.

Into this authoritative teaching, where Jesus measures all things against God's word comes a man with an unclean spirit. The spirit is called not evil, or a demon, but it is called an unclean spirit. I am not suggesting that the spirit was not a demon. It clearly was a demon, and the man was clearly demon possessed, but the vocabulary is important. It is not called an evil spirit but an unclean spirit.

The Israelites lived in a world of clean and unclean. The clean animals they could eat. The unclean they could not. We heard two weeks ago about Mary who had to go to the temple to perform the sacrifice to be made clean again after giving birth to Jesus. The children are going to hear in Sunday School today about ten lepers. These men because of their disease were unclean and cast out of the society and fellowship of God. That which was clean was of God. That which was unclean was separated from God.

Just as Jesus teaches us to test all things against the word of God. So, Jesus came to test all things against the word of God. He came to confront that which is unclean with the authority of God's word. Jesus confronts the unclean spirit and casts it out. Jesus confronts the man who is unclean and makes him clean.

The people see the authority of Christ magnificently displayed here. Their whole lives they had been taught that the only way to make something clean was to take it to the temple, offer the sacrifices and receive the blessing of the priest. Yet here they see Jesus without the temple, and without a sacrifice, cast out that which is unclean and make that man who was unclean clean. Nor can his authority be denied because the spirit obeys his word.

This authority of Jesus is something we ought to ponder carefully as we approach the Lord's supper in a few minutes. By his death and resurrection Jesus has come to make us clean. He accomplishes this by casting out all that is unclean from within us.

As we approach the Lord supper, we would do well to consider those things that are unclean within us. Ponder our angry, lustful, or covetous thoughts. Repent of our hurtful words, contention, strife, jealousy, or dismissive attitude towards Gods word. Whatever unclean thoughts or attitudes we have, whatever unclean actions we have done Jesus has come to cast them out. We are coming into the presence of one who knows our sin and who can cast them out and make us clean.

He does not need the temple or the sacrifices, for he himself was the sacrifice by which all things are made clean including you.

Jesus can, will and does cast out that which is unclean within us to make us clean. He does this by the authority of his word and through his sacraments. We come into his presence so that we may also be clean. Amen.