

Gospel of Mark

Chapter 1 - part 2

Notes:

In the previous part of the chapter we began the ministry of Jesus Christ. The focus was on his arrival, and the message of the coming Kingdom of God – the message that God’s power, authority, and even judgment was very present and with the people. It also focused on the authority that Jesus has, as he has the power of the Holy Spirit of God resting upon him.

Verses 21-28

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,

24 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."

25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Notes:

Verse 21 – His message is first going to the people of the covenant; the people of God that Jesus finds in the synagogues.

Verse 22 – This sets up a separation between the other teachers of the day, and the authority that Jesus speaks with. Jesus is not simply speaking on and from traditions that have been handed down, but speaks as the Holy One of God.

Verses 23-24 – There was a man that was apparently demon possessed, where he had allowed the various aspects of his person and personality to be overrun by demonic forces. However, even the demon understands who Jesus is as the messiah, and the authority that he has.

Verse 24 – “What have you to do with us...?” – The general notion of the phrase isn’t precisely clear in English. The type of phrase is one that is usually associated with judgment or combat and is meant to mean, “What are you doing here? You don’t have any business with us – yet.” But there is the acknowledgement that Jesus can destroy them when the time comes.

Verses 25-26 – Most exorcists of the day relied on the name of some higher power to practice their skill or art. Other exorcists were portrayed as travelling magicians who needed to cast spells (which is why later in the Gospel, some of the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub). Note here that all Jesus does is speak the command, and the demon leaves the man. There is no need to appeal to any other authority.

Verse 27 – The focus is that people acknowledged the authority that he had, even if they were, at this time, not able to understand the source of that authority. They simply understand that Jesus is better than and above the scribes and teachers of the law.

Verse 28 – “fame” – This need not be interpreted as people following his message, his teaching, or any belief in the preaching. His fame spreads because he has done a miraculous thing.

Coming to a better understanding of the text:

What is the difference between Jesus having fame, and people believing in his message?

Why do you think that they were able to see that he had authority, but not be able to discern where that authority comes from?

Verses 29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

33 And the whole city was gathered around the door.

34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Notes:

Verse 29 – “As soon as” – Another way of saying “immediately.”

Verse 32 – “sundown” – It was still on the Sabbath, and so the people were probably afraid of receiving healing until after the sun had set and the Sabbath was over.

Verse 32 – The people came to Jesus, not on account of his teaching about the Kingdom of God, but because they wanted to receive healing.

Verse 35 – The Gospel of Mark only makes three pointed references to Jesus going and praying. This indicates that the prayer at the beginning of his ministry and in this instance is particularly important. It is also important as it carries on the theme of “salvation in the wilderness.” John came “from the wilderness,” Jesus was tested “in the wilderness,” and now he retreats to the wilderness to pray.

Verse 38 – Jesus must go to the other towns because he came to proclaim the message. In Capernaum, the people were gathering for little other reason than what the people could get from Jesus. The message of the Kingdom of God became secondary.

Verse 39 – In the rest of Galilee, he continued doing the good works, but also proclaimed the message of the Kingdom of God.

Coming to a better understanding of the text:

Why do you think that people started putting the healing and the exorcisms first; ahead of the message of the Kingdom of God?

In what ways do we sometimes put first the things that we can get out of Jesus, rather than what we can do for the message of Jesus Christ? What do our prayer lives reflect, what we want from God, or how we can be more Christ-like?

Verses 40-45

40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean."

41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"

42 Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

43 After sternly warning him he sent him away at once.

44 saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Notes:

Verse 40 – Leprosy in the ancient world referred to a very wide range of diseases, not just the bacterial infection we call leprosy today. Such skin afflictions were very hard to cure. Some Rabbi had said that it would be as easy to raise the dead as heal leprosy. It was an exaggeration, but it illustrates the strength of the diseases.

Verse 41 – Lepers had to remain reasonably separate from the rest of society. They had to keep their clothing torn and their hair unkempt so as to easily distinguish them from the rest of society. They also had to declare their condition by declaring, "UNCLEAN! UNCLEAN..." everywhere they went. If someone was to touch a leper, the person would also become unclean until they knew they had not contracted a disease, waited a certain time period, and cleansed themselves.

However, instead of the touch making Jesus unclean, it made the leper clean. (Talk about a divine irony!)

Verse 43 – The disease left the man immediately at the touch and word of Jesus Christ.

Verse 44 – "say nothing to anyone..." Jesus had just been down this road, and he learned something. If cast out one demon and heal a mother-in-law, and then the rest of the town won't listen to a word you say, but will line up for handouts all day long. So, Jesus continues the "Messianic Secret." People will misunderstand what it means for him to come and teach, so he performs the miracle and asks him to keep things quiet.

Verse 44 – "but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing" – The Law of Moses required that for someone to be officially clean of leprosy, they had to make a sacrifice to God, and also be examined by a priest and declared officially clean again. Jesus tells the leper to go through with what was commanded in the Law and show himself to the priest who had the authority to declare him clean, even though the priests had no ability to make him clean. (Again... more irony!)

Verse 44 – "as a testimony to them," – This can be interpreted with a positive or negative intention. The positive connotation could mean that Jesus wanted there to be a testimony to the cleansing power of God poured out onto the man. The negative connotation is that though the priest can accept that the cleansing has happened and accept the sacrifice, if they fail to recognize the power by which it happens, they will stand condemned.

Verse 45 – Jesus' ministry was once again hampered by people wanting handouts, rather than the message of the kingdom of God.

Coming to a better understanding of the text:

What are the major ironies of the text?

Why was Jesus trying to keep "the messianic secret?"

Why did Jesus tell the man that he should show the priest and offer the sacrifice?

This passage also speaks of how Jesus was hampered when people just come to receive, rather than experience the full message of God. What are the dangers of going to a church only "to be fed?"