

## The Real Jesus | Astonishing Authority (Mark 1:21-2:12)

January 16, 2022 | Matthew McNutt

**[Title Slide]** We are in our third week in our series on the book of Mark, trying to dig down on who the real Jesus is and the many pieces that comprise Him. Today, we're looking at His astonishing authority.

Our passage begins with Jesus and his companions arriving at Capernaum, a small town of around a thousand people.<sup>1</sup> In other words, everyone knew everyone. It was the Sabbath and Jesus began teaching in the synagogue, the local place of worship.

*Mark 1:22-27 (NLT) <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.*

It's interesting to note that Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus was teaching – his concern is that we understand the authority Jesus spoke with. It was like nothing people had seen before, to the point of this word “amazed” conveying real alarm in the Greek.<sup>2</sup>

It reminds me of the first time that I saw Michael Jordan playing basketball. These youngsters may think LeBron is great, but he has nothing on Jordan. It was wild. Here's how big Michael Jordan was: in 1992 my parents were missionaries and moved to the Manjui tribe in Paraguay. This was a primitive people group with their own unique language, no tv, no phone, no technology whatsoever, living on the ground in the Paraguayan desert. The tribe was a twelve-hour drive from the nearest town. The Manjui only knew about two things from the outside world: Coca-Cola and Michael Jordan. I kid you not. It doesn't even make sense for them to know about him! That's how amazing he was. When you saw him play, you knew immediately he was beyond anyone else in the game.

That's how it was when Jesus began teaching. It was shocking. Here was this – to their perception – outsider. He wasn't from Capernaum, as a carpenter he was a low-status man,<sup>3</sup> and yet His authority was in stark contrast to the local religious leaders.

The teachers had their authority based on their education, the degree on the wall if it was today.<sup>4</sup> But somehow, even the manner in which Jesus spoke communicated an authority as being direct from God, like the prophets. When they heard Him speak, they knew immediately He was beyond anyone else in the game.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Carter, *Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2019), Kindle location 1817.

<sup>2</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), Kindle location 1478.

<sup>3</sup> Carter, *Mark*, Kindle location 1841.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), Kindle location 1380.

***23 Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 “Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”***

It is no coincidence that the first miracle Mark records is an exorcism.<sup>5</sup> Jesus came to destroy the powers of darkness with the good news. It’s something we need to take seriously; a few years back Barna did research that revealed only a third of American Christians believe Satan exists.<sup>6</sup> It’s alarming given that Jesus talks directly about him and demonic forces – can we believe Jesus is God while not believing He told the truth?

There were already religious leaders intimidated by Jesus’ authority, which makes this interaction a bit suspect. A man possessed by an evil spirit would have been considered unclean and not allowed in the synagogue; the fact that he was there points to someone perhaps setting up a deliberate confrontation to test Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

The demon’s words are telling, he sensed in Jesus’ authority a threat to his very existence.<sup>8</sup> This was a cry of terror; his words would more accurately be translated, “you have no business with us – yet.”<sup>9</sup> He wasn’t questioning Jesus’ intent, it was a declaration, “you have come to destroy us.”<sup>10</sup> And he names Jesus; it was a defensive move intended to gain control of Jesus through a belief at the time that using a precise name would secure mastery over them.<sup>11</sup>

***25 But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. 26 At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.***

***27 Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!”***

Can you imagine being at this scene? Of course they were amazed. There have been moments in my life where I have been confronted by the divine, moments that I just couldn’t explain, where God was clearly at work, that shook me, and they were nothing like this.

They were blown away by the authority Jesus displayed in silencing and simply commanding the demon to leave. Exorcists at the time relied on elaborate spells and incantations to cast out demons – and were not always successful.<sup>12</sup> Jesus did no

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Kindle location 1388.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/>

<sup>7</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1383.

<sup>8</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1492.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Kindle location 1495.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1514.

magic motions, He didn't use elaborate incantations, He simply gave a command, without invoking the name of any deity or power, and the demon obeyed. In other words, His authority left no need for any theatrics and it certainly left no wiggle room.

Jesus left the synagogue and went to Peter's home where He then healed Peter's mother-in-law who was suffering from a fever. The day was packed. Meanwhile, the news about what He did at the synagogue spread everywhere and soon a crowd was at the house.

*Mark 1:32-34 (NLT) <sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus.*

There was tremendous fear around being caught working on a Sabbath – the religious leaders had defined even how many steps you could take over the course of the day. Traveling, carrying a sick person, healing someone – all of these things could have been considered work by the religious leaders. So even in their desperate need, the people waited until after sunset once Sabbath had concluded.<sup>13</sup>

*<sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door to watch. <sup>34</sup> So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.*

Jesus came to proclaim the Good News, as Mark says earlier in the chapter (Mark 1:14), and He has no interest in that news coming from the demonic.

The next morning, Jesus went out into the wilderness to pray, but Peter and the others went to find Him. From their perspective, the previous day had been a success; crowds followed Jesus all day! Why was He hiding when the crowds wanted more? There were still sick people, still miracles to perform. But that wasn't the barometer for success in Jesus' eyes; He came to spread the Good News, and these people just wanted a show. So He answers them in verse 38,

*Mark 1:38 (NLT) "We Must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came."*

He left and traveled all throughout Galilee preaching and casting out demons, bringing us to the next example of authority.

*Mark 1:40-42 (NLT) <sup>40</sup> A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean," he said.*

*<sup>41</sup> Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" <sup>42</sup> Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed.*

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<sup>13</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1571.

Do you get the sense that this region and time was overwhelmed with those who were sick? It's interesting to me; my commentaries all comment on this and add that it's hard for modern Americans to identify with the prevalence of desperate illness and the death sentence it represented, the fear people had of being in contact with those who were unwell. They were all written before 2020.

These passages hit a little differently now. The people were so desperate to be cured they were missing the real reason Jesus had come. In times of desperation we need to be on guard against hearing what we want to hear or reacting in fear instead of Christlikeness.

This man was the walking dead.<sup>14</sup> Leviticus 13 details what his condition demanded; he had to wear torn clothes and let his hair hang loose, his mouth had to be covered, and he had to live isolated, away from the community. When he was around those who were well he had to yell, "unclean, unclean," to warn them off. Not only was he dead socially, he was religiously unclean, a devastating status. His desperation drove him to do the unthinkable, to approach Jesus, to risk making Jesus unclean in his plea for healing. The onlookers would have been horrified.

Jesus' response was far more shocking. He touched him. After such isolation, this contact must have been electric for the man with leprosy. Over and over, we will see Jesus being unworried about becoming unclean or sick in His ministry to those in need.<sup>15</sup> Jesus' authority is far beyond disease or religious expectations.

*Mark 2:1-12 (NLT) <sup>1</sup> When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. <sup>2</sup> Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, <sup>3</sup> four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat.*

It's safe to assume they were at Peter's house.<sup>16</sup>

*<sup>4</sup> They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head.*

The house would have had a flat roof made of mud and straw, or perhaps tiles.<sup>17</sup> Either way, it points to it being an unimpressive house, a poor person's home.<sup>18</sup>

*Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."*

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<sup>14</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1568.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Kindle location 1470.

<sup>16</sup> Carter, *Mark*, Kindle location 2267.

<sup>17</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1715.

<sup>18</sup> Carter, *Mark*, Kindle location 2324.

The dedication of these friends is incredible. The miracle was incredible, but Jesus' words were even more shocking. Notice, though, His forgiveness is somewhat vague; He doesn't say, "I forgive your sins." If He had been that direct, the religious leaders would have stoned Him that day.<sup>19</sup> It's subtle enough to leave the onlookers wondering, is Jesus claiming to forgive the man? Or is He claiming to speak on behalf of God, like a prophet? It wasn't enough to convict Him, but it was enough to anger the religious leaders who suspected He was in fact claiming to forgive.

*<sup>6</sup> But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, <sup>7</sup> "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"*

*<sup>8</sup> Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts?"*

As these teachers sat there outraged at the possibility of Jesus claiming God-hood, Jesus displayed God-power, God-authority, by knowing and addressing their thoughts. I'd love to know what went through their minds at that point! Clearly, Jesus did.

*<sup>9</sup> "Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'? <sup>10</sup> So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins."*

As we go deeper into Mark we'll see that often times Jesus turns the tables on His challengers by asking questions. And at first glance, the answer seems obvious: performing a miracle and healing this paralyzed man – and as I said before, this is a town of a thousand. They all knew him, they knew his condition. This wasn't some actor paid to make an appearance and disappear. This was their neighbor, a member of their community, someone they knew for a fact was paralyzed. Of course it would be harder to tell him to get up and walk than to say the words, "your sins are forgiven." Anyone can say words. The miracle would prove the authority of the words.

*Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, <sup>11</sup> "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" <sup>12</sup> And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"*

Here's the incredible thing: from human wisdom, the healing was the more difficult task, right? But in fact, the granting of forgiveness is the greatest demonstration of authority Jesus has performed yet. The healing is far easier than the forgiveness, and yet, Christ has the authority for both.

Over the course of these verses, Jesus has demonstrated astonishing authority over and over.

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<sup>19</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1808.

**Jesus has authority greater than humanity.** There's no mistaking it. It doesn't matter the education, the work, the wealth, the political status; there is no human with authority even close to that of Jesus'. As important as you may be, in His presence you will be reduced to the alarming amazement displayed here over and over.

**Jesus has authority greater than spirits.** Mark highlights these encounters with the demonic to make this simple point: there is no force, human or spirit, good or evil, that has power of Jesus. Jesus' authority is complete; when He speaks, the conflict is over.

But most importantly,

**Jesus has authority over death.** The crowds kept missing the point; they wanted the show, they wanted the healing from disease. But that wasn't why Christ came; when Jesus healed people of their sickness it was simply a picture of the perfect healing we would one day have in eternity with God. When Jesus healed the man with leprosy, the walking dead, someone who was permanently unclean, Jesus gave him life. He literally displayed authority over death as ancient Jewish audiences would have viewed healing leprosy on the same level as raising someone from the dead.<sup>20</sup>

But far more important was Jesus' authority over spiritual death. His confrontation of the demons was the beginning of His assault on disease, decay, and death.<sup>21</sup> In Christ we find true life through His perfect authority.

Which brings us to our response. What do we do with these incredible opening moments of Mark's gospel?

**Live Under Jesus' Authority.** If we even begin to understand who Jesus is, then we will live under His authority. His authority will impact every aspect of our lives; how we worship, how we treat others, how we prioritize prayer, Bible study, gathering with believers. If we live under Jesus' authority it impacts our reputation at work, how we view and handle money, how we handle conflict.

Part of the challenge in reading these passages is seeing that recognizing Jesus' authority is not the same as living under it. The demons recognized Him, but they didn't have faith. The crowds were impressed and amazed at His authority, but they weren't followers. Living under Jesus' authority transforms our lives into reflections of Him, and until we hand over every area of our lives, we are not truly living under His authority.

And here's the exciting reality of living under Jesus' authority; it means that we can

**Live With Jesus' Authority.** We are called to be like Christ. To be shining lights in a dark world pointing others to Jesus. God has placed each of you in your workplace, your community, your neighborhood, your school, your family, your sports team, your

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<sup>20</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, Kindle location 1565.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Kindle location 1456.



theater club, wherever it is so that you can live with Jesus' authority, so your mission can be the same as Christ's mission: to proclaim the good news, the gospel, to point people to Jesus. What will you do this week to reflect that? Who is someone you can begin praying for right now that you will share good news with this week?

I want to challenge you to write their name down; put it on the connection card. Let us know how you will respond to what this passage is calling us each to.

**Let's pray.**