

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 2: Authority That Astonishes -- Mark 1:21–45

Picture the scene. It is the Sabbath in Capernaum, and the synagogue is full. A young rabbi from Nazareth stands to teach. He does not begin with “Rabbi So-and-so once said.” He does not hedge His words or cite the customary authorities. He speaks as if He wrote the book, because, in fact, He did. The people lean forward. Children stop fidgeting. And in a flash, an unclean spirit shrieks from somewhere in the crowd, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God!” Before anyone can think what to do, Jesus has commanded the demon to be silent and come out. And it obeys.

Mark presses on without pausing. Before the day is over, Jesus has healed Simon’s mother-in-law, and the whole town has gathered at the door with sick and demon-oppressed loved ones. Before sunrise the next morning, He has slipped away to a desolate place to pray. By the end of the chapter, He has walked into a leper’s world, stretched out His hand, and touched a man whose body and life had been off-limits to human touch for years. Every scene shows the same thing from a different angle. This Jesus has authority. Authority over what He teaches. Authority over the spiritual powers of darkness. Authority over disease. Authority over His own schedule. Authority over the boundaries the Law had drawn, boundaries He alone is able to cross without being soiled.

But Mark is not writing a press release about an impressive rabbi. He is writing to people like us, and he is asking a question we would often rather avoid. If Jesus has this kind of authority, why are we so slow to bring our whole lives under it? The crowd was amazed at His teaching, but amazement is not the same as surrender. Demons can recognize Him perfectly and yet remain enemies. The disciples saw all these miracles and would still be slow to understand. What Jesus is looking for in this passage is not impressed spectators. He is looking for transformed disciples.

And notice the shape of that transformation. Simon’s mother-in-law is healed and immediately serves. The crowds bring their broken lives, and Jesus does not turn them away. Jesus Himself, before the next day’s work, withdraws to be with His Father. The leper falls on his knees and asks for the one thing he needs. Mark is showing us, scene by scene, what a life under Jesus’ authority begins to look like: humbly served, deeply prayed, mission-clear, willing to touch what others avoid. The more we let Jesus exercise His authority in us, the more we begin to resemble Him.

Group Discussion: Throughout Mark 1:21–45, people are amazed at Jesus’ authority, but amazement and surrender are not the same thing. Where in your own life have you been

content to be impressed by Jesus without actually bringing that area under His authority? What might it look like to move from amazement to surrender this week?

Personal Reflection: Imagine Jesus walking into the synagogue of your soul, past your routines, your inner conversations, the rooms you keep locked. What “unclean spirit” (what besetting sin, lingering resentment, hidden fear, or persistent lie about yourself) might cry out, “Have you come to destroy us?” Are you willing to let Jesus speak the word that drives it out?

Read Mark 1:21–45

Study Questions

1. The people in the Capernaum synagogue were “astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (v. 22). What was different about the source of Jesus’ teaching authority compared to the scribes, and what does this scene reveal about who Jesus is and how the Word of God ought to be heard today?
2. An unclean spirit cries out, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God!” (v. 24). The demons recognized Jesus with perfect accuracy and yet remained His enemies. Where in your own walk are you tempted to mistake correct knowledge about Jesus for actual surrender to Him?
3. Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit with a simple command, and it obeys instantly (vv. 25–26). What does this scene teach us about the reality of the spiritual realm, the nature of demonic activity, and the absolute authority of Christ in the spiritual battle the church is engaged in (Ephesians 6:10–12)?
4. After leaving the synagogue, Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law, and immediately “she began to serve them” (vv. 29–31). What does her response teach us about why Jesus heals and restores us, and what does it look like for your own experience of His grace to overflow into service?
5. When the crowds gathered at evening, Jesus healed many “and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (vv. 32–34). Why does Jesus silence the demons, even though their testimony was technically accurate, and what does this teach us about how the identity of Jesus is to be revealed?
6. Very early the next morning, “while it was still dark,” Jesus rose and went out to a desolate place to pray (v. 35). If even Jesus needed this kind of unhurried time with the Father, what does that say about your own prayer life, and where in your daily rhythm is the place of quiet with God most likely to get crowded out?
7. When the disciples find Him, Jesus says, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (v. 38). What does this declaration reveal about Jesus’ self-understanding of His Father-given mission, and what does it teach the church today about the priority of preaching the Word?
8. A leper comes to Jesus saying, “If you will, you can make me clean” (v. 40). What kind of faith does that confession reveal, and what does the leper’s willingness to even approach

Jesus teach you about bringing the shameful, embarrassing, or “untouchable” places of your own life to Him?

9. “Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him” (v. 41). Under the Law, touching a leper made a person ceremonially unclean, yet when Jesus touched him, the leper was made clean instead. Then Jesus sends the man to the priest “as Moses commanded” (v. 44). What does this scene teach us about Jesus’ relationship to the Mosaic Law and the unique holiness He brings into a world of uncleanness?
10. Looking at this passage as a whole, every scene shows Jesus’ authority being exercised on behalf of broken people. What kind of person is Jesus shaping His disciples to become through these encounters, and what is one specific way you sense Him forming that kind of life in you this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 11:1–5, the Spirit-anointed Messiah and His authoritative reign; Ephesians 6:10–18, the reality of spiritual warfare and the believer’s armor; Luke 5:12–16, Luke’s account of the cleansing of the leper and Jesus’ habit of withdrawing to pray; James 5:13–16, healing, prayer, and the power of confession among God’s people today