

## Mark 1:21-28 Authority

**Authority** can be very effective in getting things done, and in accomplishing good, but is open to misuse. We often hear stories of both of these in the news, from those in positions of leadership in church and society. Here in the first chapter of his gospel Mark is keen to establish that Jesus is a man of **great authority**, which is God's authority, and it will be used to transform the world for the better.

Jesus first **called fishermen** to leave their nets and follow him, and they obeyed at once. They must have been convinced by what they had seen and heard of Jesus.

In today's gospel we see Jesus' authority in his **teaching**, and then **over evil spirits**, and in next few verses Jesus shows his authority over **all sickness and disease**.

Jesus has returned to Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee, where he made his home during his ministry, staying in Peter's house. On the Sabbath Jesus goes into the synagogue, as was his custom, where the whole community would gather. The usual teachers were priests or scribes, the literate ones, but others were also sometimes invited to teach, as Jesus was here. **Jesus teaches** the people, and they are astounded by his teaching, *'for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'* v22.

You see, the most sacred thing to the Jews was the **Torah, the Law**.

This was the supreme rule of faith and life and contained everything necessary to guide and direct people's lives. So the **priests and scribes** studied it in great detail, drawing out rules and regulations from the principles there, for the people to follow and obey.

So, faith became a keeping of rules rather than living in relationship with God.

Jesus' teaching was in stark contrast to this, as he taught with personal conviction.

Priests and scribes would always quote the Law, and never give a decision of their own.

Jesus spoke as if he needed no authority beyond himself. He spoke with the voice of God.

To the people, the positive certainty of Jesus was the very opposite of the careful quotations of the scribes. Jesus words were compelling, fresh and filled with authority.

The religion in the synagogues had become conventional, often reduced to platitudes, which is still a temptation for the Church today, but Jesus called for repentance and transformation to a living faith in God. Jesus still speaks to us with authority, and if we are to find God's way for our lives and our church, we would do well to listen carefully to him and seek to follow his teaching closely.

If Jesus' **words** astounded the people, then his **actions** were even more impressive!

A **man with an evil spirit** came screaming into the synagogue. **v24**. We might not fully understand this man's condition in today's terms, but he was deeply troubled. Such was a common sight in Jesus' day, and there were exorcists who claimed to be able to deliver people from such suffering, by using elaborate incantations and spells. With one clear simple command, Jesus silences the unclean spirit and restores the man's sanity. **v25-26**.

No one had ever seen anything like this before. Jesus had such power, and people were astonished. **v27**. Even the evil spirits were compelled to cry out in fear, recognising that Jesus was someone sent by God to drive out evil and restore his good creation.

Jesus had come to rescue people, both nations and individuals, from the destructive forces that enslaved them, and to bring in God's kingdom. Mark records the authority of Jesus over those forces, visible and invisible, that account for the world's suffering.

The church must continue, in Jesus' name, to oppose every manifestation of evil, whether by nations or individuals; which raises ethical questions for us at times, such as how much force can be used to resist evil?

There would be times when Jesus authority was **hidden**: when Jesus was on trial, in turmoil in Gethsemane, and hanging on the cross. These reveal the truth of our text for 2021, '*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*' (2 Corinthians 12:9) Here God chooses to work and accomplish his purposes through our human weakness. At such times Jesus suffered for a purpose, to complete the work of gaining our salvation and healing, which was glimpsed that day in the synagogue. In our lives, as Jesus' disciples, it's important to know that Jesus has authority over all things and all peoples, and when that authority is not evident to us (in the way we would like) then it is for a purpose, to further and complete God's work in our lives and in his world. As we daily follow Jesus, let us seek to listen to his voice and trust in his authority over all.