

AMAZED BY GRACE?
Mark 1:21-28
August 27, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

Isaiah 29:13-14 – ¹³ Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, ¹⁴ therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed.

In our text this morning, we see the beginning of God’s promise to “once again deal marvelously, wondrously marvelous” with this people as Jesus begins His public ministry in Galilee. As we will see, His was a ministry that was accepted by some, and denied by others. And how one viewed Jesus was based upon not only what they heard Jesus say, but also in what they saw Jesus do, which was always consistent and never contradictory. Jesus established His authority both in what He said and by what He did. This is a truth that we must learn in our own ministries as well. *Our lives must match our lips.* Our deeds reveal who we really are – not what we think we are. Our works either verify or denounce our words.

I. Amazed by His Words (1:21-22, 27)

Mark tells us that after calling the four disciples (vv. 16-20) Jesus and these men “**went into Capernaum.**” Capernaum served as the headquarters for Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and was “His own city” according to Matthew (9:1). Luke tells us that the cause for Jesus’ coming to this place was His rejection by the people of Nazareth (Luke 4:24-31). Capernaum is described as a prominent place, one of economic prosperity and one of the most populous regions in Palestine. It was also about as far away as Jesus could get from the headquarters of Herod Antipas, who had just had John the Baptist thrown into prison. So Jesus’ purpose in coming to Capernaum was based on His literally being run out of Nazareth and to avoid the political and religious ramifications surrounding the arrest of John. But neither of these events impeded the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus had a specific purpose on this day in Capernaum, and that was “**to teach.**” There are three things we notice about Jesus’ teaching in this text.

1. The setting of Jesus’ teaching (v. 21)

Upon entering Capernaum, “**immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.**” Jesus wasted no time in beginning His public ministry. Jesus, like Paul after Him, chose to go to the religious epicenter of the community to proclaim His message. He went to “**the synagogue.**” “**Synagogue**” can refer either to “a gathering of people assembled for worship” or, as is the case here, “the place where people gathered for worship,” the building itself. These places of worship began to be constructed after the Babylonian captivity wherever ten or more Jewish men of age were present. A ruler of the synagogue was chosen from the group that served as an administrator of all events that took place in the synagogue. During the week it served both as a schoolhouse and as a courtroom. But on the Sabbath it served as the gathering place for worship. The significance of Jesus entering the synagogue “**on the Sabbath**” then is twofold: (1) He kept the righteous demands of the law and (2) it denotes the purpose of Jesus’ visit, which was not to settle a dispute in the courtroom, but “**to teach,**” not those in the schoolhouse, but those who had gathered to worship on the Sabbath.

But how was He able to assume the position of teaching so quickly? The answer is found in Jewish tradition. The Jews had a custom known as “the freedom of the synagogue,” which permitted visiting teachers to preach by the invitation of the ruler [Wessel, *EBC: Mark*, 626]. Again, the ruler of the synagogue served only as an administrator, not as the teacher. Teaching was reserved for those who were recognized by their ability to expound the Law and the Prophets, which typically fell to the scribes. On this occasion, Jesus’ notoriety had evidently preceded Him at Capernaum and He was invited to teach. They had certainly been introduced to the recent events related to the baptism of John, his message of repentance and faith, and now this man Jesus, who came proclaiming these things as well. So, out of curiosity if nothing else, they wanted to hear the claims of this man who they suspected might be the long-awaited Messiah.

2. The difference in Jesus’ teaching (v. 22b, 27)

Mark does not tell us of the content of Jesus’ teaching on this day, he simply says that He “**began to teach.**” As we noted in an earlier sermon, Mark was not as concerned as much about *what* Jesus taught as he was about the effect of His teaching and the works that accompanied Jesus’ teaching, as we will see in a moment. What we notice about Jesus’ message on this day from the reaction of the people is that there was something notably different about what He proclaimed.

The first difference is that Jesus taught them “**as one having authority, not as the scribes.**” In other words, Jesus’ teaching was different *by degree*. His teaching was not on the same level as that of the scribes. It was in stark contrast to what the people were accustomed to hearing. It would be an understatement to say that when these gathered for worship they probably needed a No-Doze to stay awake. Edmond Hiebert describes the typical scene,

The scribes’ teaching was characteristically based on secondhand authority. They habitually established their views by long, learned quotations from other rabbis. At best, they could claim only an authority derived from their understanding of the law. Their teaching was generally pedantic and dull, occupied with minute distinctions concerning Levitical regulations and petty legalistic requirements. [*The Gospel of Mark*, 49]

Jesus Himself noted that these men neglected the commandment of God, holding to the tradition of men or the elders (Mark 7:8).

But for those gathered on that day, who were accustomed to hearing the same things over and over again and were spiritually starved, there was something different about the way Jesus taught. He taught, “**as one having authority.**” His message came as from His inner being, straight from the mind and heart of the Father (Jn. 8:26) and from Scripture. He did not sit and simply borrow from one of the other scribes. He spoke as One who really knew the truth. He did not aimlessly or arrogantly expound the Scriptures. He straightforwardly and systematically spoke these things with a passion they had never seen. He seemed to actually believe what he said.

But Jesus’ teaching was different not only *by degree* as compared to the scribes, but also *in kind*. It was, as we see in v. 27, “**A new teaching.**” He too would have read sections from the Law and the Prophets. Just like He would do later with two men on the road to Emmaus, “Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). You see, that is what made Jesus’ teaching different not only *by degree*, but also *in kind*. While Mark does not share the specifics of Jesus’ teaching

here, he has already told us the content of Jesus preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). Jesus proclaimed that all of the teachings in the Law and the Prophets pointed to Him as Messiah. What was “**new**” on this occasion was that the time was here; the kingdom had arrived in the person of Christ. What would be the people’s reaction to such a claim?

3. The reaction to Jesus’ teaching (v. 22a)

The people were “**amazed at His teaching.**” They were astonished, literally dumbfounded, by the words of Jesus. The word translated “**amazed**” refers to a prolonged amazement. But they missed the real truth of Jesus’ words, as we will see born out in their actions later. The manner and content of Jesus’ teaching caused a real alarm. If what He said was true, then there was a real demand made on their lives that rocked their understanding of the Messiah as handed down by the scribes. William Lane shows the staggering import of Jesus’ message to these at Capernaum,

Jesus’ word, presented with a sovereign authority which permitted neither debate nor theoretical reflection, confronted the congregation with the absolute claim of God upon their whole person. Jesus’ teaching recalled the categorical demand of the prophets rather than scribal tradition. [NICNT: *The Gospel of Mark*, 72]

And what was the “categorical demand of the prophets?” Repent and believe. You see, these people had been awaiting a political Messiah, one who would deliver them from the oppression of Roman rule. They sought a kingdom that would be of this earth, a reign that they as the children of Abraham would have a significant role in by birth. But Jesus seemed to indicate something much more than what they had been told. His message demanded a response, shattering their notions that they were free and clear from the judgment that awaited those that were not of Abraham. While they were amazed at His teaching, we will see that they were not amazed by His person. Because of their preconceived ideas of the role of the Messiah, their excitement on this day was misguided.

II. Amazed by His Works (1:23-28)

But this is not the end of the story that day. There was a rather interesting individual in attendance on this Sabbath. We are not told whether or not this man was a regular attender, but by referring to it as “**their synagogue**” Mark seems to indicate that this man was not a regular. Evidently the man sat relatively unnoticed until Jesus finished teaching. Suddenly, everything changes.

1. The condition of the man (v. 23)

Mark states that this man was possessed by “**an unclean spirit.**” Elsewhere Mark refers to these unclean spirits as “demons,” using these terms interchangeably. “**Unclean**” designated that this spirit made the man both ceremonially and morally impure.

We will discuss the nature and character of these unclean spirits in more detail when we get to Mark 5 and the Gerasene demoniac. For our purposes here, we note a couple of things as it relates to this specific incident. First, the “**unclean spirit**” was not simply some disease, like epilepsy, or a mental disorder or insanity as some claim. While an evil spirit can cause these things, they would merely symptoms and not the actual spirit itself. Diseases can’t talk, as we will notice this spirit does in a moment. And a mental disorder or insanity would not always

manifest itself in opposition to God and Christ, as is always the case in Scripture. We have heard of those with a mental disorder that even claim to be Jesus Christ. Again, while this *might* be an indication of the existence of a wicked spirit within, the disorder is not the spirit itself.

Second, we must make a distinction between being *influenced* by an unclean spirit and being *possessed* by an unclean spirit. Mark is very careful to note, as is Luke who also shares this account (Luke 4:33), “**a man... with an unclean spirit.**” This man was not simply influenced by evil from without, as is the case with all mankind, whether it be Satan, his minions, or the world, but from within. This demon had taken up residence in the very core of the man’s being, not simply influencing but *controlling* him. As William Hendriksen notes, “Fact is that demon-possession describes a condition in which a *distinct* and *evil* being, foreign to the person possessed, has taken control of that person” [NTC: Mark, 64].

Third, we must note that this possession was unrecognizable to others in the synagogue. It was not until the demon spoke that the man was recognized. Perhaps the man himself did not even know he was possessed until this occasion. This is why it is really irrelevant whether the people knew him or not or whether or not he was a regular attendee. We do not know when the unclean spirit entered him. The importance is that the spirit used this man for this specific occasion. However, as we will see in a moment, while the demon had control of the man, Jesus had control and authority over the demon.

2. The confrontation of the demon (v. 24)

Having introduced us to the man, Mark now introduces us to the “**unclean spirit**” itself. Upon hearing the teaching of Jesus that had amazed the people, “**he cried out,**” literally “shrieked.” “**He**” refers to the “**unclean spirit**” who controlled the man, not the man himself. This is supported by the fact that Jesus addresses the demon, not the man, in v. 25.

The spirit opens this confrontation with a question, “**What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth?**” This is in the form of a Hebrew idiom, literally, “What to us and to you.” The unclean spirit seizes the opportunity to try and assert his authority over Jesus. “Why are you bothering us?” he asks. The demon knew there was a battle at hand with enormous consequences at stake. This question is an effort to disarm his opponent, to get Jesus to let His guard down, much like Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. The demon had just heard Jesus’ proclamation that the time had come and the kingdom of God was at hand. This would not bode well for the demon, so he seeks to get Jesus to fall into a trap by answering his question.

His next words, “**Have You come to destroy us?**” are really more of a statement than a question. Stated as a question, it shows an expression of fear that the demon had. This demon knew that one of Jesus’ purposes in coming to this earth was “to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:8). Stated as a positive assertion, the demon recognized the destruction that awaited him. “**Destroy**” does not mean annihilation, but ruination. “**Us**” is in the plural, noting the demon’s understanding that what awaited him awaited all of Satan’s minions.

The demon then clearly states that he knows who Jesus is. He addresses Him both as “**Jesus of Nazareth**” and as “**the Holy One of God.**” Isn’t it interesting that the demon recognized the nature and character of Christ when those in the congregation did not? “**Jesus of Nazareth**” is a testimony of the humanity of Christ, the One who put on flesh and came to this earth and dwelt among us with a specific purpose to accomplish. “**The Holy One of God**” is a reference to the deity of Christ. The demon affirms that He is God. But there is more to this address than meets the eye. In addressing Jesus by name in this way the demon again is trying to gain control over Jesus. As one writer shows, “It was widely believed at that time that if you

knew a person's true identity and could utter his name, you could gain a magic power over him" [quoted by Wessel, *EBC: Mark*, 627].

Perhaps an illustration will reinforce this. If you were to approach me and say, "Hello, Todd," there is no hint of authority. You would be setting yourself on an equal playing field as a friend. But if you were to approach me, "Hello, Todd Wilson," there is more of a boldness that you know who I am in detail and that you have command of the conversation. Or perhaps this might help. When your parents called your name when you were younger, if they called you by your full name, you knew they meant business. You were instantly reminded of their place of authority as your parent.

That is exactly what the demon attempts to do here. He uses these full titles of Jesus in an effort to demonstrate that he, not Jesus, was in command of the situation. However, we see in Jesus' response who was really in charge.

3. The response of Jesus (vv. 25-26)

"And Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet, and come out of him!'" Jesus does not fall into the trap set by the demon. He does not answer his questions nor does He submit that the testimony of the demon was true, which it was. There was nothing that the demon said that was not true of Jesus. As a matter of fact, he showed that he had a greater understanding of the person and work of Christ than the people in the synagogue. Jesus understood what the early church father Ambrose wrote years later, "We are not to believe the demonic powers, even when they tell the truth" [Ambrose, *ACCS: Mark*, 21].

Jesus understood that there was a great temptation here at the hands of this demon. If Jesus had responded to the truth claims made by the demon, those in attendance would have looked at Jesus as being in league with Satan. Even though they accused Jesus of this very thing later in His ministry, they had no basis for doing so. Jesus does not affirm the testimony of the demon, nor does He even enter into dialogue with him. He simply and straightforwardly, with all authority, rebukes the demon on the spot. He does not wait until later and pull him aside in private and point out his downfall. No, there was a battle of cosmic proportion at stake. The souls of men for whom Jesus came to save was at stake, and this public outcry called for a public rebuke.

Jesus commands two things of the demon. First, He tells him to **"be quiet,"** literally, "Be muzzled." Again, the testimony of the demon was instantly refused by Jesus. Jesus does not accept the testimony of liars. He will only accept the testimony of those who truly believe. Further, we must remember the idea of "the messianic secret" that undergirds Jesus' early ministry. We will see that in positive situations where Jesus heals the sick that he immediately tells them to tell no one. The secret was only to be revealed from the Father through the Son in God's time and in God's way. The testimony of this demon did not fit God's plan.

The second command gives the demon no choice to disobey. Jesus commands the demon to **"come out of him!"** Mark gives the report that the demon obeyed, **"Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him."** The demon did not submit willingly, but he submitted. He had no choice in the matter. The exorcism demonstrated the authority of Jesus and the degraded nature of the demon. Just as Jesus demonstrated His authority in His words, he backed up His words by His works. There could be no doubt by His actions that Jesus had all authority over the supernatural realm. We have evidence of this when we see...

4. The result of the confrontation (vv. 27-28)

Just as the people were amazed by Jesus' words, they were also amazed by His works. **“What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”** But were these people amazed by grace, or simply amazed by the events? We have evidence that though they were amazed, many of them did not believe. They may have jumped on the bandwagon here. But as time goes along and Jesus begins to speak of His death, many fall by the wayside. How could their political Messiah deliver them if He were dead? They were amazed, but not amazed enough. They totally missed the grace of God in sending His only Son to deliver them, not from Roman rule, but from His wrath for sin. Edmond Hiebert shows this disturbing truth, “How pathetic it is that they were occupied with the effect and failed to inquire further about the person before them” [*The Gospel of Mark*, 52].

Based on the reaction of the people in the synagogue, it should not surprise us to see the news of this event traveled rather quickly throughout the region (v. 28). But as we will see in the not to distant future, it was not His glory that spread, but a foolhardy notoriety.

Conclusion

1. The most obvious application of this text is that we must be both hearers and doers of the Word. When our words do not match our actions, that is hypocrisy. And when we act without the firm foundation of the Word, that is foolish.

“The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips then walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable” (Brennan Manning).

2. We must guard our hearts in the area of worship. These at Capernaum had become complacent and lethargic in their worship. Granted, the scribes were rather boorish. But the onus lie on the people. The reading of God's Word alone should be a delight to our hearts. We must be careful that our reading, our prayers, our singing, our listening, and our giving does not become “tradition learned by rote” (Is. 29:13).

3. We must remember the unknown man. You might be here this morning and think you are somehow too evil or wicked for Jesus to save. This man was as wicked as you can get, possessed and controlled by a spirit of wickedness. And yet, Jesus was victorious. Cast yourselves upon Him, the only One who has authority to forgive your sins and cleanse your wicked heart.