

# FOLLOWING IN THE WAY:

## The Gospel of Mark

The Authority  
MARK 1:1-21-45  
(9/13/26)



## Human Authority

Position

Power

Status

Today, one of the main themes of this passage is Jesus' authority and it is thrown up against human authority..

Authority has many ideas. The dictionary definition is: Authority is the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.

All authority on earth is human authority. All earthly authority is given to someone either by law or delegation. The problem with the model of human authority is it uses human means and those are unworkable and even wrong in the spiritual realm.

Human authority is based on three things...

Position...in company a CEO has authority.

Power...in the military it can give orders that must be followed

Status...we tend to look at org charts and the higher up you go the more important you are.

But none of these are of the essential nature of the people who hold them. A CEO who is deposed by a board no longer has authority.



## Jewish Authority

We see this coming in to play in the ancient world in two arenas.

In Judaism, the scribes and Pharisees had authority because they held the power of interpretation of scripture. And in that interpretation, they could literally make your life miserable...for instance, what comprised work on the Sabbath? We see this coming into conflict in today's lesson.



## Roman Authority

But also against the backdrop of this passage is Roman authority where the Roman emperor and his stooges could tax you to death, take your home, force you into labor, etc. Their status came from the state. So when the triumvirate assassinated Caesar, they took power and authority, but many of them were eliminated through various civil wars.

Human authority can create a messy world.

“The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had **authority**, not as the teachers of the law.” (Mark 1:22, NIV)

“The people were all so amazed that they asked each other,  
“What is this? A new teaching—and with **authority**! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.””  
(Mark 1:27, NIV)

Yet, in this passage, we see it applied to Jesus. In vs. 22, he has authority which is distinct from the teachers of the law.

When challenged by a demon in vs. 27, he can command it not to speak and the people comment about his authority.

# Mark's Question?

““But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.””  
(Mark 8:29, NIV)

***What kind of authority makes Jesus the Messiah?***

As we showed last week, Mark's question, the fulcrum upon which the gospel revolves comes in Mark 8:29...who do you say that I am?

So in today's lesson, the question is “What kind of authority makes Jesus the Messiah? That has to be answered.



We sometimes dive into a Bible passage with preconceived notions and “right answers” but don’t take time to sit with it, observe it.

There is an instagram site I like. It shows works of art and asks, why do you see? And then, panel by panel, it shows you details you miss by just glancing at it.

Instead of getting to the trees, take a moment to get the big picture of Mark 1:21-45.

Mark wants us to experience it.

# A single week

Sabbath to Sabbath

## In that week...

A synagogue lesson that leaves the audience stunned

A wrestling match with an unclean spirit

In a Galilean home with a woman too sick to even cook Sabbath  
dinner

A growing horde of people with overwhelming physical needs as  
the sun sets

A disappearance at dawn

A leper who is willing to ignore the Jewish regulations

So let's stand back and look at the entire picture before we start to look at the details.

Today's lesson takes in a single week...it occurs Sabbath to Sabbath.

In that week, so much happens:

A synagogue lesson that leaves the audience stunned

A wrestling match with an unclean spirit

In a Galilean home with a woman too sick to even cook Sabbath dinner

A growing horde of people with overwhelming physical needs as the sun sets

A disappearance at dawn

A leper who is willing to ignore the Jewish regulations



So in this lesson, the thread is authority but watch where it goes.

My grandmother was a knitter. I remember she knitted me clothes that I hated because they didn't fit, etc.

But she also did afghans and I probably have half-a-dozen, which have been extremely handy in this heat.

I was fascinated by one thing. How a single skein of yarn made up of one strand could be knitted together to form the whole.

But that is what Mark does...the thread is authority and he weaves it through today's lesson.

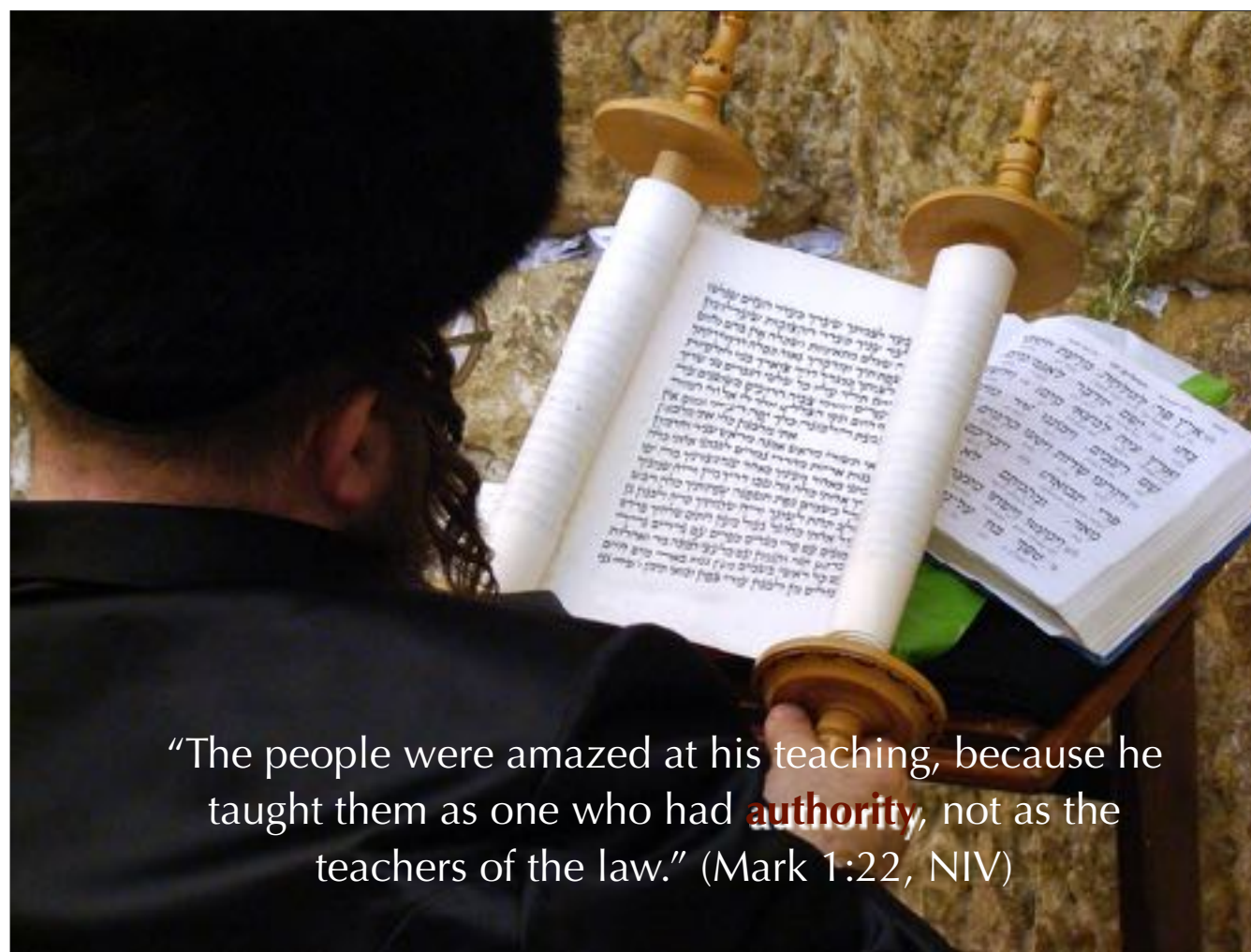


“They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.” (Mark 1:21, NIV)

It starts in Capernaum.

Archeologists have uncovered a synagogue in Capernaum, the large town close to Nazareth. It is from the second century but it probably overlays the original site with the original plan. So in the picture, this is the place where Jesus spoke.

As any good Jew, he went to the synagogue on Sabbath. Understand something about synagogue. Its focus was not on worship, which took place at the Jerusalem temple, but instruction. So it says that Jesus taught.



“The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had **authority**, not as the teachers of the law.” (Mark 1:22, NIV)

As he taught, the people were amazed at his “authority” and commented that it was not like the rabbis teaching.

# Reaction?

Stunned and Unexpected

## What Made It Different?

Not a teachers of the law

It says they were amazed, a word that means stunned and unexpected. When they came to synagogue, they were used to hearing the tradition recited. The lessons were dense recitals of the interpretation called Talmud of what this meant. It was like reading a dry commentary over and over again.

It was different. The rabbis and scribes had been held in bondage by quotation marks.

Jesus did not say this rabbi or this rabbi said. He said, “God said.” The source of this teaching was God himself, not the dusty scrolls of Judaism. The people did not care what men said but what God said and Jesus told them plainly.



One thing we need to remember. Authority that has to announce itself doesn't really have any authority. I am always wary of people who tell me how important they are or their position is because they are trying to bolster themselves. You know someone with authority and he doesn't have to tell you.

“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.””  
(Mark 1:23–27, NIV)

But then, in the midst of that time, Jesus apparently is interrupted.

A demon shouts at him. Jesus tells him to first be quiet and the second to leave the man alone and get out. And it happened.

I can't completely explain demons to you. I know in Western society it has been sanitized into mental illness. I don't know. I can't say. I haven't faced someone like this but I have seen people so overwrought that life became almost impossible...the mother's day suicides.

The man in Nicaragua who put the red thread around baby's wrist to keep the demons away.

Interruptions are difficult to handle...Year ago here there was a bird that flew back and forth in the auditorium while Robert preached. How do you do that. You know what to do in the moment.

# A Challenge

“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”” (Mark 1:23–24, NIV)

When we look at this verse, we typically think of demon cowering before Jesus.

Yet, the language that he uses does not betray that. It basically means get away from me because you have no business here.

But then he says, “I know who you are.” Notice that the demon has the correct information. It knows who Jesus is while people are so confused that they cannot think straight.

If people had one tenth the knowledge of this demon it would change everything.

Evil always tries to bully good and it knows what it is up against.

# Challenge Met

““Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”” (Mark 1:25–27, NIV)

Jesus would not be bullied. Instead, he issues a command, a word. Notice no one else knows what to do but Jesus does. Don't let it stand and speak.

And the spirit could not stand up to that kind of power. It convulsed the man and came out.

It must have been a riveting moment in the synagogue. A voice shouting at Jesus and Jesus responding in kind. If you have ever seen a convulsion, you think a person is going to die. (Our girls had them from fever...never so frightened).

But the man was freed when nothing else, not the rabbis, not the prayers, not the hoping...had worked. It took Jesus.

And the response was shocking. Mark uses a different form of amazed. This is the kind that leaves you speechless, mouth agape, not knowing what to make of it. It is the sense of being there when your children are born or when your parent dies in front of you. Nothing.

What is this? Wrong question but it is a start. The teaching but with authority. Same idea as before but now compounded. He can order around evil spirits and they respond. No one had ever done that.

# Over Sickness

“As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.” (Mark 1:29–31, NIV)

Then, with the excitement over, they go to the house of Peter. But they find Peter’s mother-in-law, who probably would have been the one to make the meal, in bed with a fever. This was important. She had taken to her bed on Sabbath, not something you do to this important day.

Jesus “takes her by the hand”

Jesus reaches down and helps her up

The fever left and she served

In his healing is the compassionate  
touch.

Jesus heals here but it is how that is important.

He takes her by the hand. Notice how gentle that is. He doesn't have the commanding tone as with the spirit. He doesn't just stand on the other side of the room and speak words.

Instead, he “takes her by the hand.” I find it fascinating that the modern day charlatans who call themselves faith healers employ bombastic and sometimes brutal methods such as banging a person's head. That's the show but Jesus had the power to be gentle.

Then, he reached down to help her up. Jesus would later say that the greatest is the servant of all. It is in the going down to help that he elevates himself.

And then, the fever left. It doesn't say she got better. It wasn't take two aspirin and call me in the morning. Instead, it was so instantaneous that the woman resumed her normal activities.

It is important that in his healing he had a compassionate touch. It showed real ability and power.

Dr. Denton Cooley and his brusque and arrogant manner.

# When Pressured

“The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.” (Mark 1:33–34, NIV)

But you see his authority and power when pressed.

When we get pressured, we get irritated. We grow impatient. I really don't have time for this. I am too spent to help these people.

But it said the whole town came to the door. It was an overwhelming moment. Yet, Jesus patiently and calmly drove out the many demons. (Can you imagine what Capernaum was like with that many demons.) He did not allow them to speak because they were interfering in his method.

People need to come to believe Jesus on their own, not be told it by someone else, especially a demon.

And the sick, he healed.

# The Human Condition in a Nutshell

Disease

Suffering

Evil

Helplessness

***He healed them....***

Notice what he did in a single verse. He touched the human condition. Disease. Suffering, Evil. Helplessness.

He healed them. He did not make them better. He made them well.

*“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark,* Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”” (Mark 1:35–37, NIV)

The night passes and he is still in demand. But Mark puts a timeline to this. Very early, while it was dark.

Men’s days without lights started at daybreak. But that is too late. When the sun comes up, people are going to be looking. If Jesus was going to have this moment, it had to be without people.

Jesus cared for people but he could only care for people if he cared for himself, a detail often missed.

He spent this time when others are sleeping to pray. As the sun rose, the needs started their hunt.

***What do you do when you are overwhelmed?***

**The human response?**

Work harder and longer. Clear the desks, get inbox to zero

**Divine Response?**

Withdraw to Recharge

***Jesus knew that his authority and ability was dependent on his connection with his Father.***

What do you do when you are overwhelmed?

Many people have something ingrained by our society. Try harder. Do more. Work longer. Clear the decks, get your inbox to zero. Once you catch up, you can have a moment.

But you never catch up. There was always going to be someone to heal, a demon to cast out, a lesson to teach, a question to answer.

The only way for Jesus to function is his example to us..withdraw to recharge so you can keep doing what God wants you to do.

Lincoln's adage about sharpening the saw.

Jesus knew that his authority and ability was dependent on his connection with his Father. He took the time.



Popularity and calling  
are not the same thing,  
and only one of them  
can be your compass.

It is important, especially as you are engaged with helping others, that Popularity and calling are not the same thing, and only one of them can be your compass.

Gordon McDonald, Ordering Your Private World. (Tell his story.)

“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.” (Mark 1:40–45, NIV)

The lesson ends with another need, a different one.

In these verses all kinds of offenses are committed. A leper who is supposed to be isolated and kept at distance, comes up to Jesus and begged him,

His question seems to be a question of doubt. If you are willing.



Leviticus 13:45–46

But the Talmud added so  
much more.

To touch a leper  
made you  
ceremonially  
unclean

It is no longer your  
body that is unclean  
but your  
personhood.

The law governing the myriad of skin diseases grouped under the heading of leprosy are but two verses. But the Talmud added so much more. How close you could come, how you would have to cry out, what you could and couldn't do, the consequences of contact with others.

But for most of that, no one wants to get near them. It is not a skin disorder as much as a nerve disorder that blocks pain signals. When that happens, the body doesn't send out the signal that something is wrong. (Pain is a blessing.) Instead, damage takes place and soon the damage claims body parts. A broken nose will fall off the face. Fingers hurt fall away. It cause a grotesqueness that is hard to describe.

But for the person who encountered the leper, any contact meant you could not be part of the religious celebrations. So everyone stayed away.

It had a psychological impact as well. When you have to call out unclean, you start to think not of your body as unclean but as yourself is unclean..

# Two Lies Sin Tells

There is nothing wrong with me.

I am beyond help.

Sin tells us two great lies.

One is of pride, that there is nothing wrong with me. Many deny the problem they are in .

The second is of hopelessness. I am so bad, I am beyond help. (The man in the trailer.)

“If you are willing”

Jesus did what others did not

*He was willing when others were resistant*

The leper says if you are willing. He assumed that Jesus could but most were not willing to get that close to a leper. I imagine he believed he would be rebuffed.

Yet, Jesus did what others did not. He would heal the man. He would deal with his problem, not as something to be avoided but as someone who needed him.

# He “touched” him.

Jesus does not have to touch in order to heal.

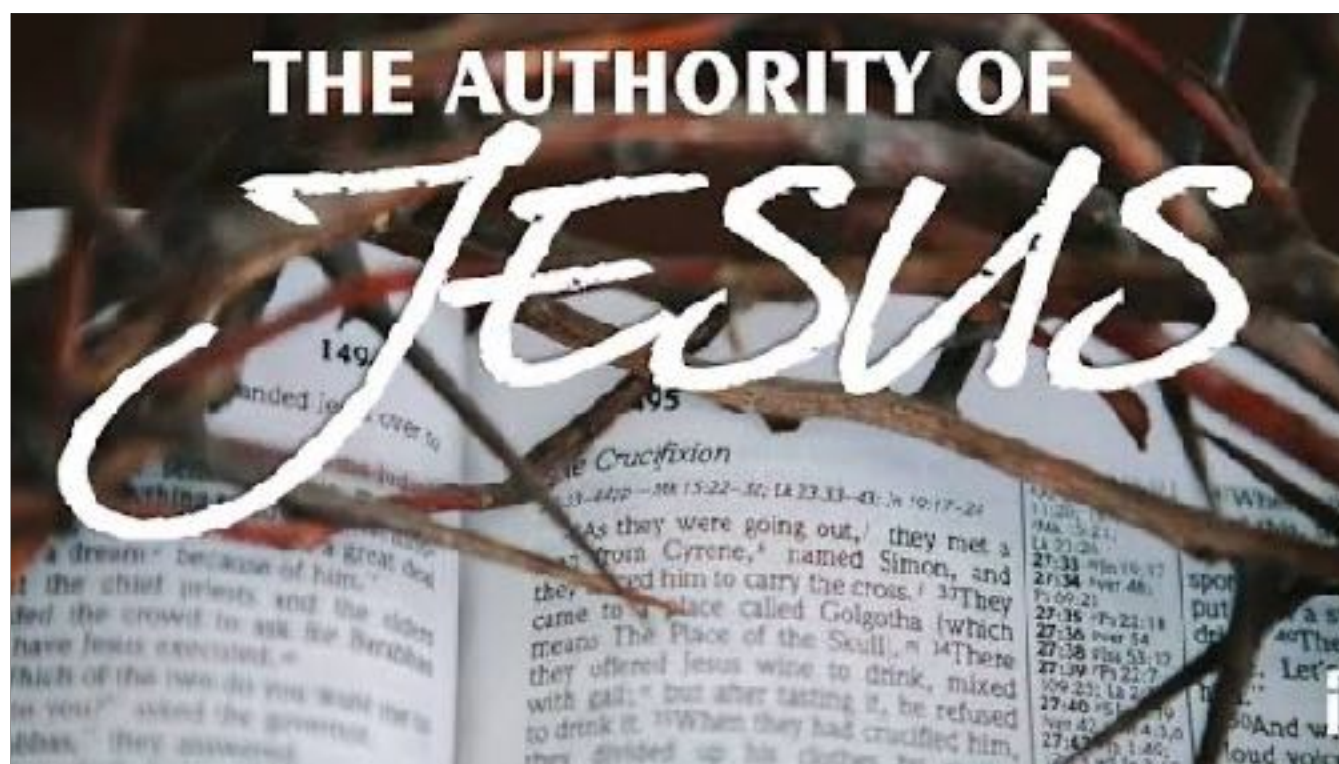
Jesus treated the man as a man, not a leper

It says he “touched him.”

Jesus does not need to touch people to heal them. As the centurion would say, “just speak the word.”

So why did he touch him? Because he treated him as a man, not as leper. One of the great needs of human beings is the human touch. When a spouse dies, a huge issue comes up. There is no one left to touch them, to pat a shoulder, to give a hug.

Our problem with labels. When we label someone according to their problem, we get to keep them at arm’s length. But if you can see the hurt in a man’s eyes, you are more like the master.



Jesus never uses his authority merely to prove that he has it. He uses authority to teach truth, defeat evil, heal suffering, pursue his mission, and restore the excluded.

True authority is never what you have but what you show in service to others.



Authority that serves is the only  
authority worth having.

It is not about how much you know or your reputation or your position. If you are not in the trenches helping and serving you have a false sense of your own importance.



Either prayer sets your priorities or the people will.

Beware of squeaky wheels. The only way you will know what is the most important thing in life is with God, not with people. Don't let the loudest voice drown out the right one.



The measure of your faith is what  
you are willing to touch.

It is never about what you believe intellectually. It is always about the people we don't want to converse with or talk to. We have hard people in our lives that we want to avoid, people that others write off. Faith goes where fear won't.