

## The Gospel Ministry Begins

series - Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 1:21-45

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The Lord be praised. If you are new to Christianity, perhaps that tune [Nothing but the Blood of Jesus] is not familiar to you. And even if it is, if you are new to Christianity it may seem odd. I know it's odd because I hear it. That is, how in the world can we sing a song with a smile on our face and say, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Sounds a very odd thing. It is odd. Christianity is so different than how people perceive it.

I begin this morning's sermon by looking and being reminded of a quote from C.S. Lewis as we prepare to look at the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1, verses 21-45. He says this about Christianity, in his book *Mere Christianity*, when he says this: "I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on out of all of that into something beyond. One begins to have a glimpse of the country where they do not talk about those things, except perhaps as a joke. Everyone there is filled full with what we might call goodness, as a mirror is filled with light. But they do not call it goodness. In fact they do not call it anything. They are not thinking about goodness at all. They are too busy looking at the source from which all goodness comes: Jesus." Why do we sing, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus"? It is because he is the supreme, he is the majestic Savior.

This morning we look—as we begin this Gospel of Mark, just finishing Chapter 1—we're going to look together at indeed how the gospel ministry begins. We're going to see several strains, like seeds being laid upon a path, that are going to come to fuller blossom as the Gospel unfolds. We're going to see several strands of narrative, several things are going to happen—they begin here—that will ultimately reach a crescendo. But we need to understand that there is something that is to be asked of you and of me and indeed, Mark is asking. Who do you think you are? Why are you here? And also who is this Jesus? The beginning of the gospel ministry begins to ask those twin questions. And so I ask you to ask yourself: Why are you here? Not in this room, although some of you may be asking that. But why are you here as a human being? And then second to that: Who is this Jesus? Let's look together at the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1, verses 21-45.

<sup>21</sup> And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

<sup>29</sup> And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. <sup>31</sup> And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup> That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door. <sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

<sup>40</sup> And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." <sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup> And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." <sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Now, our Heavenly Father, we ask by the power of your Holy Spirit who is in our midst, that you may open our eyes that we might see wondrous, glorious Jesus; that we might more greatly understand who we are; and even more importantly, because of this, we might understand who Jesus is. May you help us in the light of Christ know who we are, because of who Jesus is. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So as we look at this passage together you'll see in your outline these three things come out very clearly in this passage: The **Identity** of Jesus, the **Authority** of Jesus, the **Supremacy** of Jesus. The **Identity**, the **Authority**, and the **Supremacy** of Jesus. These three strands will continue to be important throughout the Gospel of Mark. They begin here, and they will grow in importance. They will be challenged in different ways, but again, it is all for the purpose of demonstrating who is this Jesus. So let's look together: **Identity, Authority, Supremacy**.

**Identity.** You'll see in several parts of this passage—because it is a narrative passage, it doesn't just block out in like several progressive ways. These are strands that go throughout. But Jesus's identity comes to the forefront throughout the entire narrative. Verses 24-28, 32-34, 35-39. They all demonstrate—within these individual passages—something that is very clear—that is being brought out by Mark in this Gospel—about Jesus's identity.

First, the irony with regard to Jesus's identity. What do I mean by irony. Well, the text tells us twice that the one group of 'people' who understand exactly who Jesus is are the demons. That's the irony. Nobody else, including his disciples, truly understand who Jesus is. Which is precisely why Jesus silences them. Now that's an interesting evangelistic point of view, that the one group of people who seem to know who you are, you silence them. But we'll get to that in a few

moments. But the irony is meant to be very stark. That in regard to those who we would least expect to speak about who this Jesus is, it's the demons. But indeed, they say: You are the Holy One of God. And it even says later in the passage they know--we know who you are.

But the second part of Jesus' identity is the second side of the irony. It's the confusion. So you have the confusion among all the humans. Consider for just a moment throughout these specific segments of the text. We see what people call him. They call him 'teacher.' They've never heard anything taught like this before with such authority. They're like, *Wow, this is amazing teaching.* He clearly is called a healer, because people are being brought to him over and over again. Thirdly, he's certainly seen as one who has power. It's not been demonstrated in this way before. So you see, he's a teacher, he has power, as I said also he's a healer.

But then there's this other thing where those who are closest to him—this is the one group of people you would think. . . OK, he's called them—now, they haven't been with him very long, but it's not like they went away on a retreat to sort of download to them: *OK, this is who I am. Now let's go.* No, Jesus calls disciples to him and he immediately thrusts them out into ministry right with him. How do we know they are confused about who he is? Because look at how they respond to Jesus's going away to pray. The passage tells us clearly. [Mark] says they saw him—verse 35: "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Verse 36: "And Simon and those who were with him searched for him. . ." And that word 'searched'—they searched intently. It wasn't clear where he was. And then it's said—with particular poignancy they say, "And they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.'" Almost to say: *Whatcha doing? Doncha get it? People want to be around you. This seems to be working for us. You've called us, right? You've called us into ministry. You are demonstrating teaching, power, and healing. People are talking about it. Your fame is spreading. Let's go!*

But what is Jesus's response to their request? Uhn-uh. "Let's go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." The reason that this is here is so important. We see that even the disciples were confused about what Jesus's program was all about. *Let's go!* and Jesus says nope, I'm going to do something else, because I'm coming here to preach, to declare the good news. Yes, I heal. Yes, I've demonstrated power. Yes, I am a teacher. But it's not about my fame.

This is going to be an unfolding narrative throughout the entire Gospel of Mark. And there will come a point—and I'm grateful for the Gospel of Mark for this reason—that those who should know exactly who Jesus is seem to be the last ones to actually get it. And the reason why I'm thankful for that is because the Gospel, therefore, is not written to demonstrate that Jesus is only that which we project on to him. There have been many biblical scholars who say Jesus wasn't a Messiah, it was just [that] the early church had faith in what he was, and they just projected that on to him. Therefore they wrote the Gospels based on what they were projecting on to Jesus, trying to drive a wedge between what we say we believe and who the real historical Jesus was. Except the plain reading of the Gospel—and the other Gospels, by the way—demonstrates if Jesus and what we write about him is merely a projection of what we're putting on to him, he would not have done what he just did. He would have gone out and sought the fame. He would have gone on and simply demonstrated his power. He would not have gone the opposite direction. Jesus is not simply a projection of what we hope him to be. In fact, Jesus comes out and demonstrates and reveals himself—he is exactly the thing we couldn't have imagined.

Which is why we need to next look at his **Authority**. And what we see is his identity as the Holy One of God, as one who, yes, heals as one who teaches, but he's one who has come to demonstrate the authority of God, to bring the good news. And when Jesus brings his authority to bear two things happen that I want you to see in this passage. First, there is a disturbance. Secondly, judgment. Disturbance and judgment are the direct impact of Jesus's authority.

What do I mean by disturbance? Well, we see that before Jesus says a word, as he walks into the synagogue, his mere presence is a disturbance in their midst. Because before Jesus has taught, the demon convulses this man and says: Why are you here? And in fact, what they try to do is they try to call him by name. But what is happening is that no matter what Jesus does—whether he's simply walking into the room—there is a disturbance. But also there is an impact by what he says, and that comes by way of disturbance because people are responding: We've never heard anything like this before. That's the Gospel's—that's Mark's telling us they have no category for Jesus. Meaning there were all kinds of ideas about what the Messiah would be, what he would do. And here Jesus is; he's coming in and he's doing opposite of that which they expect, because he doesn't fit the categories. His authority is not being used to lead a guerrilla rebellion against Rome. He's not about drawing attention to himself. He's teaching about who God is, directing the glory to the Father. And it disturbs them.

But there's also another disturbance. First is the disturbance in the negative, meaning Jesus's mere presence disturbs people. They don't like it. It makes them uncomfortable. And he demonstrates his authority in response to that. They also have no category for it. But there's also a positive. When Jesus comes he brings healing in his hands. Notice: those who stand far off and ask the question, 'Who is this?'—they don't see the true positive side of what Jesus is doing in the Gospel. The demons want nothing to do with him. They want to shut him down. They certainly receive no blessing. But those who come to him—whether they fully understand who he is—they come in their need and they lay themselves before him. What do they receive? They receive healing. That's a disturbance. They are made right. They are made clean. And that is, Jesus's authority first brings disturbance.

But it also brings judgment. It's clear that when he commands the demons to be silent, he's demonstrating his authority as the Son of God. Why? Because these demons, by calling him by name—Jesus of Nazareth, Holy One of God—are trying to get leverage over him. Because if you try to name someone, you try to gain power over them. And Jesus silences them by his mere word. No wrestling, no battle—he simply speaks and he says, 'Be silent.' And that is God's word telling us that is a word of judgment. That Jesus brings healing. He brings the mercy and the grace of God, but he also brings judgment.

The question is this. Why are you here? And who do you say this Jesus is? If Jesus is merely a healer we will not understand the judgment. If we merely see him as judgment we will not understand his love. But what Jesus is demonstrating—his power—he will not be defined by anyone, except who God has called him to be. And who he is is the Holy One of God.

One of my professors from seminary, Hans Bayer, says it this way. There is in the Gospel of Mark—beginning here and through the rest of it—there is the beginning of what he calls the moments of double decision. Who am I? And how am I going to respond to this Jesus? If you stand far off and do not come close, calling in your need for the Lord Jesus, there are more words of judgment here for you than mercy. But all those who come, whether you have Jesus all figured out or not—but if you come to him in your need, recognizing his identity, recognizing his authority, and you submit

to that, there is mercy and grace. The question is what is your decision? We can know a lot about Jesus. We can have walked with him—as one of my brothers in Christ was saying yesterday—we can have walked with him for decades by being in the church; we can know theology A to Z; we can know the historicity and outline of the Bible—and yet not know Jesus. Do you know this Jesus? For he cannot be confined and he cannot be defined by us. He defines himself as the Holy One of God. And I say to you, he brings healing in his wings, but he also brings a word of judgment.

The final point is **Supremacy**. In verses 40-45 something begins to happen with this healing that is going to set out a chain reaction, and Pastor Mayfield will demonstrate that for us next week, but it begins here. And [what] we begin to see come to the forefront is the supremacy of Christ. What do I mean? First look at his actions in verses 40-45. Let me read again. “And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hands and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean.’” We see Jesus’s actions as a demonstration of his supremacy. What do I mean? I mean this. His actions demonstrate in this one healing that what Jesus brings is superior to the law.

Jesus didn't just come to obey the law. He came as one who is the law. He is superior to it. What do I mean? It's this. Jesus's actions are greater than the law. They are greater than also all social conventions. You see, this is how it goes. All the law could do in Leviticus 13 and 14 is tell you that if you were a sufferer with leprosy, you were absolutely unclean and to be distanced from all the society. And all that the law provided for you was the opportunity to receive through sacrifice to be made pure, but not clean—by pure meaning ceremonially pure, but not clean. In other words, all the law could do is demonstrate our uncleanness, our impurity. It could not heal; it could not make new. In addition, if you have leprosy and you were to touch someone else, it made them not only susceptible to contagion, it was believed, but you made them ceremonially impure and unclean. And there were all kinds of laws, because of that reality, that then dictated how you were to interact in society, how you were to interact with the synagogue or with the Temple. All of this was the case. In other words, you didn't want to be unclean.

And what do we see? Jesus comes in his actions to demonstrate he didn't just come to obey the law, he came to be the one who fulfilled it and to do that which the law could never do—to make us clean. And he did that which the law expressly prohibited him from doing. He touched this man. We cannot underestimate the power and the beauty of touch. It's not creepy or untoward. But our God in Christ came to this man and he had pity on him and he laid his hands on him. And we see the superiority of Jesus in his actions.

But also something else in that moment—we see the superiority of Jesus in his advocacy. Verse 41. As I just said generally and specifically he touched this man. And Jesus is demonstrating his supremacy over brokenness, over sin, over ceremony, over convention. Not only was Jesus doing something that the law couldn't have imagined—unless he was the Lord—he does something that their culture could not have imagined. Nobody would have done this, but Jesus does. And he advocates in the assembly on behalf of this one human being.

But he also does something else. He doesn't just heal him and say OK, you're clean. No, he then turns to him and he restores him. He doesn't just make him right with the Lord, he restores this man to society. What does he tell him to do? He tells him: Don't go tell other people, because then my identity will be revealed before its time. So don't do that; you'll hurt my ministry. But he does tell him to go one place: Go and show yourself to the priest. That may seem odd to you. As a pastor it is not odd to me. As a minister of the gospel I have been a witness to and I hear of many

painful stories of people breaking their lives open to me and hearing their pain and watching how at first they feel very ashamed to speak it to someone who is called as a minister. And yet the irony is that's exactly why God has called me. And I see in this moment what Jesus is doing. Go to the very one and to the very community that you feel most ashamed of being in. Offer a sacrifice to demonstrate you haven't just been made pure, you're clean, you are forgiven.

And though it may be lost on you at times when we do a confession of sin and an assurance of pardon, as a minister of the gospel as I stand before you and I say in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Receive this promise of grace and forgiveness," I am calling all authority, all the identity, all the supremacy of Christ in that moment to be laid upon you. And he turns your shame into reconciliation. He turns your brokenness into healing. Because Jesus advocates not just generally, but specifically for you.

And here begins the gospel reversal of all that sin has done. All sin does is make us unclean and impure, and it flows from here outward. And it affects not only us, it affects the world around us. We see it at every level. But when Jesus comes back to the house as the incarnated Son of the Living God, Jesus says Nope, this is done. Sin will not infect me. It will not defeat me. Death will not conquer me. Rather, I will touch you and it will be reversed. I will take your sin and you will receive life. I will receive your ugly mess and you will receive my grace. That is the gospel reversal. But even more than that, Jesus is supreme because he takes on our sin. He takes on our brokenness. And he himself is not infected, but is willing to be ashamed before people and be rejected by his Heavenly Father. That he would go on the cross and be raised on the third day to say: Even then sin and death does not reign supreme. I am the Lord. Jesus is supreme.

And he comes to you this morning. And we celebrate the Supper this morning to be renewed, to be empowered, to be encouraged, and to be brought back to the feet of Jesus. And to say who and why are you here? But more importantly: Who is Jesus? He is the gospel. He is the gospel. He is the supreme Lord. And he comes with healing in his wings.

Can you put up that last verse? I want to end this morning with this which was read to you this morning, and I wanted to read it again. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." [1 Peter 2:24-25] Brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen, young and old: Come to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls, for he is good.

Let's pray. Now Heavenly Father, we ask, prepare us as we celebrate this Supper. Celebrate it, because it is the celebration of the gospel reversal—our sin exchanged for the righteousness of Christ, our sin forgiven, our brokenness healed. Lord, may this be for everyone who can hear my voice. And for those who do not know you, Lord, may you woo them and call them by your love and love them into eternity. And may they begin to experience today the gospel reversal. Our sin has met something greater: Your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.