

Kingdom Authority: The Holy One of God

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is according to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verses 21 to 45.

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

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.

[1 : 27] 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.

News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. 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. That evening, after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 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. Very early in the morning, while it was dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place where he prayed.

[2 : 34] Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed, Everyone is looking for you. Jesus replied, Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so I can preach there also.

That is why I have come. So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. 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 priests and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them.

Instead, he went out and began to talk frequently, freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, but stayed outside in lonely places.

[3 : 50] Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. This is the gospel of the Lord. Father, we thank you for sending your son. As a servant.

As a beloved son. And also as a king. A messiah. The royal one. And a king unlike any other. And I pray, God, that this morning in the preaching of your word, you would open our eyes to the uniqueness of Jesus' royal identity.

And would we behold him? And would our hearts be filled with worship because of the king that he's revealed himself to be? In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. All right.

So I want to test you if you remember, maybe youth in the room, I want to ask you if you can remember, help your third through fifth grade brothers out. Every gospel emphasizes the identity of Jesus in a distinct particular way.

All right? What way does Matthew emphasize Jesus? Jesus as the promised what? Promised Messiah.

[5 : 02] Who is that? Was that you, Dorothy? All right. A plus, Dorothy. All right. Luke. Luke emphasizes Jesus' identity as what? What? If Matthew was the son of David, Luke is the son of...

Son of man. Who said that? All right. Steve Cooglin, you count too. All right. Son of man. Luke emphasizes his humanity. All right? The gospel of John emphasizes what?

Jesus as God. As the son of God. Right? Okay. And now this gospel that we're working on, the gospel of Mark, emphasizes what? Thank you.

Good job, Jack Jack. Jesus as the servant. The servant, son of God. That's what we talked about last week. I just want to give a little bit of a refresher on that. I wish I did this last week, actually.

We talked about Jesus as the servant, son of God. Right? And I wish I just gave this illustration last week. But, you know, now that we have the third and fifth graders, it's a perfect time to do it again.

What does it mean that Jesus is the servant, son of God?

[6 : 07] Well, it means a lot of things. That he's a son, it means that he has a father. Right? And many of you have seen this triangle before and you're rolling your eyes at me, but this is how we create culture, all right?

This is how we get it into the DNA of our church. He's a son, therefore he has a father who loves him. He rips open the heavens and says, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

He gives him that identity. You are my beloved son. You are my beloved son. And we need to remember that that's how everything kicks off. Does Jesus go and heal?

Does Jesus go and teach? Does Jesus go and do anything before this happens? No. His identity is declared from the heavens. You are my beloved son.

With you I am well pleased. And then he goes into the wilderness and triumphs over Satan and the wild animals. And then he goes out and starts to build his squad of disciples. Then he goes out to teach and to heal and do all the things that we read about just now, today.

[7 : 07] His father proclaims his identity as his son from the heavens, beloved. And it's out of that identity that he obeys.

You got this in your notes, Rachel Passman? You got this triangle? All right. And we call this the covenant triangle.

Because it speaks to Jesus' covenant relationship with his father. And it also speaks to, if we understand that Jesus is the way, it speaks to our relationships with our father.

And this order is so important. The order of Jesus' life is so important. His baptism before his works and his teachings. Because the pattern is not that we obey the father to get an identity.

No. That's called self-righteousness. But the pattern is God telling Jesus who he is. And it's out of that identity that he obeys.

[8 : 12] He's a son before he's a servant. He's a son before he's a servant. And the same way with us. Now that's super important that he is a son and a servant. But make no mistake, he is a servant.

There is obedience involved. All right. And what we're getting into today in Mark's gospel is we're getting into how this servant life looked. Okay. And what's important to note is that he's not just a son and a servant.

But he's also a king. Okay. He's also a king. His father's a king. He's a royal son of the king. And I want to show you another triangle that we use.

We call this the kingdom triangle. Okay. His father is also a king. And his identity comes with authority.

And his authority comes with power. That's what we're going to look at today. The unique identity of Jesus. Jesus. Not just as a son and a servant. But as the son of a king.

[9 : 23] With inherent authority from his heavenly father. And who uses that authority in power to obey. To do all the things that God his father has called him to do.

Does that make sense? All right. So we have two triangles. The covenant triangle. And the kingdom triangle. Okay. And what I want to do now is I want to open up our text.

Matthew chapter 21. And I want to show us how he exercises this authority. How he exercises this authority.

So will you turn with me to Mark chapter 1 verse 21. And basically what we're going to do is we're going to ask three questions. We're going to ask what does Jesus exercise his authority over? We're going to ask who does Jesus exercise his authority for? And then we're going to ask how does Jesus exercise his authority? And to sum up the answer to all three questions.

[10:23] Here's the main point. Jesus exercises his authority over illness and evil. For his father. And with compassion.

Jesus exercises his authority over evil and illness. For his father. And with compassion. So let's turn to Mark chapter 1 verse 21.

I think it's on page 812 of your pew Bibles. If you'd like to look at that. Now.

What does Jesus exercise his authority over? I just gave you the answer. We're talking about evil and illness. Alright. We see him do these two things right away. Verse 21. Walk with me. They went to Capernaum.

And when the Sabbath came. Jesus went into the synagogue. And began to teach. So you already see his authority is beginning to be recognized. Even there. They're letting him teach in the synagogue. Verse 22. The people were amazed at his teaching.

[11:26] The people were amazed at his teaching. Because. Why? He taught them as one who had authority. Not as the teachers of the law. Now Mark doesn't give us all the clues about like.

What was so seemingly authoritative about his teaching. But if you look back in the Gospel of Matthew's account. This same language happens right after he gives his famous sermon. The Sermon on the Mount.

Where he's saying things like. You have heard it was said. But I say to you. Truly I tell you this. He's speaking on his own authority. Whereas many of the scribes and the teachers of the law at the time would say.

Well Moses said that. Or Rabbi this said that. And this is what I think. Like Jesus said. This is my authoritative voice. I'm telling you what the truth is. And they noticed that.

There's something different about him. He has authority in his teaching. So from the beginning. There's just something unique about him. Unmistakable. And it's not only the people who recognize this authority.

[12:23] But also the spirits in the room. There are spirits in this room. Verse 23. Just then. So as Jesus is teaching. You know with his amazingly unique authority. 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.

And what does Jesus do? Simply by his authoritative. Powerful word. Jesus removes the demon. He's not afraid. He's not hesitant. He's not startled.

He doesn't stutter. He knows who he is. And he knows what he's there to do. To exercise his authority for the kingdom of God. And he commands the demon to come out. Get out.

Verse 25. Be quiet. Be quiet. Said Jesus sternly. Come out of him. The impure spirit shook the man violently. And came out of him with a shriek.

[13:22] 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. Therefore news about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. News about his authority. And not just his authority over spiritual affliction.

But look with me down at verse 29. Authority over physical affliction as well. He cast out this demon in the synagogue. As soon as they left the synagogue. It says in verse 29. 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. That evening after sunset. The people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door. For when Jesus healed many who had various diseases.

[14:24] He also drove out many demons. But he would not let the demons speak. Because they knew who he was. Okay. What is going on here? He's casting out demons.

He's healing the sick. But he's not letting those unclean spirits. Those unclean mouths proclaim his identity. He doesn't want to be preached by them. And the point Mark is making here is that when

Jesus, the servant, son of God, comes.

He comes again with his father's royal authority and power. He comes to wage war. He comes to wage war on evil and illness. On demons and fevers. And he always wins.

It's easy for him. Just by speaking a word. Just by taking hold of a bedridden woman's hand. He brings life into the situation. Light into the situation.

Mark is showing us how the kingdom of light was breaking into the darkness upon the arrival of Jesus. He's the one we've been waiting for. He's the one we need.

[15 : 25] Now, this might sound kind of strange to you. Just starting off this kingdom authority aspect of Jesus with this demon possession.

This exorcism. Right? Maybe there are some of us here who just feel like to talk about demon possession and the spirits, it seems kind of like superstitious and primitive and ancient.

And even for those of us who do believe that this is possible, that this actually happened, most of us probably have never seen something like this. And we'd be surprised to, probably, in our lifetime, to see something like this.

And we can talk about why that is. Why it was, you know, there seemed to be more demon possession, attacks of the spirits here in Jesus' time. Or maybe in other places in the world compared to the Western world.

We can talk about that. But that's not what I'm going to focus on today. I want to focus on this question of, why is it plausible to believe that this spirit world, demons and the devil, exist?

[16 : 33] Why is it not just some kind of superstitious ancient thing that primitive people held to? And the first thing I want to say is, you know, there's this professor at Columbia University out in New York.

His name is Andrew Del Blanco. He's Harvard educated. He's brilliant. Time magazine called him, you know, the best, America's best social critic. And he's not a Christian.

He considers himself as someone who is secular, a secular liberal. And he would describe himself as pretty much an unbeliever is how he would describe himself.

Even though, actually, in an interview I read with him, he said, yeah, I would characterize myself as an unbeliever. But then as they dug into his writings, they said, okay, maybe I'm like a half believer in something. But basically he considers himself kind of as a non-observant Jewish person.

All right. And he wrote this book. It was all the way in 1996. He wrote this book called The Death of Satan. The Death of Satan, How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil.

[17 : 34] And in that book he writes this. The work of the devil is everywhere. But no one knows where to find him. We live in the most brutal century in human history.

But instead of stepping forward to take the credit, he has rendered himself invisible. We no longer have a conception of evil as an entity with an essence of its own.

And yet something that feels like this force still invades our experience. And we still discover in ourselves the capacity to inflict it on others. We have an inescapable problem.

We feel something that our culture no longer gives us the vocabulary to express. And to him that is devils and demons and the evil spirits of this world.

And I think what he's getting at is he's saying if you don't believe, if you don't believe the spiritual dimension of evil, which demons and the devil point to, then you're left with actually very shallow and simplistic understanding of evil.

[18 : 33] Like unless we acknowledge the spiritual dimension of evil and the demonic entities underlying evil, we won't understand the depth and the power and the pervasiveness of evil.

Evil will only ever be natural and material and just random. And you'll either begin to accept it as inevitable and maybe even not that bad at all, or you'll spend the rest of your life trying to hack evil with psychology and social policies and all these insufficient natural fixes.

Better education is all we need to get rid of evil in this world. More people to think like me. More money. Better policies. Better individual decisions. More scientific and technological advances. More advances. Eventually then we'll eradicate evil. But my question is how long will we modern secular Western people believe this godless lie?

How many world wars and heinous scandals will we endure with such naive optimism? That's what happens when we don't admit the spiritual realm of darkness.

[19 : 41] And the second thing I want to say is to not believe in the spiritual dimension of evil is actually super Western, which is not a bad thing, but we have to acknowledge that it is very, very

Western.

Go to Africa, go to South America, many parts of Asia, and to them it's like no duh, we believe in the spiritual dimension of reality and, you know, in an invisible spiritual war between good and evil. How else could you explain the reality of the dynamics of good and evil in this world, they would say. So what if it's actually super arrogant and even imperialistic for us to think of ourselves as the rational and skeptical ones toward the spirits and then to think of our neighbors across the globe as more primitive and superstitious?

Like, yes, Christianity has very much promoted the scientific endeavor and our understanding of the natural world, and it's even weeded out a lot of harmful and irrational superstition, but it's always at the same time upheld the reality of the spiritual realm.

Just as the Apostle Paul says, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil. And then maybe this makes you feel uncomfortable, because, like, if the problem of evil is not just natural, if the problem of evil is spiritual, and you can't just hack it through techniques or simply natural means, then maybe you feel incredibly vulnerable, right?

[21 : 13] If it's a spiritual problem. But that's exactly the point. We are vulnerable. We are subject to invisible powers, deeper, darker, and deadlier than we know and realize.

But listen, this is why the authority of Jesus is absolutely relevant, even to us modern Western people, to everyone. Do you remember what the demon says here in verse 24?

What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. What does he call him? The Holy One of God. He's recognizing that Jesus has been anointed with the infinite power of the Holy Spirit.

He's the light that expels all darkness, both the darkness outside of us and the darkness inside of us that we need to admit. The world needs a spiritual authority, a spiritual power that will fight for us, that will defend us and heal us inside and out, body, mind, and spirit.

And that's what we see Christ doing here with his authority. Jesus comes as the son of a king who has authority over evil and illness.

[22 : 26] And this is good news. This is good news for the world, better news than we realize. Now, I said Jesus exercises authority over evil and illness, but who does he exercise it for?

Point number two. He exercises it for his father. For his father. Let's move to verse 35. 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.

Now, I want us to think about that for a second. Okay? If your job, if your job was to be the ultimate servant of God, right? Right?

If your job, if your mission was to save the world from evil and suffering and death, and you had the authority, like Jesus does here, to defeat the spirits, to vanquish evil, and to alleviate suffering, as he did for Simon's mother-in-law, and if your popularity and your productivity and all your opportunities just continue to increase and increase, and your platform as well, how would you spend your time?

How would you spend your time? How would you spend your early mornings? Would you spend it alone? In the solitary place? Which here is the same Greek word as wilderness, which we talked about last week.

[23 : 53] Jesus goes out again to the wilderness. Would you spend your time in prayer? If you're like me, I'd be like, prayer? What for? I have stuff to do.

Right? I don't even have that much authority now, and I feel that way already about my prayer life. I remember there's a moment in seminary, I think I've shared this story before, where, you know, I was maybe later, I was third or fourth year, and I was really trying hard to get into a PhD program, working on my grades, and my friend asked me, we had these regular weekly prayer meetings, my friend asked me, hey, you gonna go to prayer meeting?

And I said, I don't have time to pray. And there was a staff member in that lounge area that we were hanging out in, and she said to me, boy, you don't have time not to pray.

And she was right. And she was right. Why did Jesus go and pray? How could Jesus go and pray when he had so much to accomplish? It's because he was keeping the first thing first.

And what is that? It's union and communion with his father. Union and communion with his father. See, he didn't just come to wield his authority, cast out demons, heal sickness.

[25 : 04] The whole point of his kingdom is not shalom for shalom's sake, but shalom as it is experienced in restored relationship with God the Father. The whole point of salvation is not the end of evil and illness, but the reunion of God with his people.

The primary purpose of Jesus' authority was to bring people back to God. And so why would he go about doing that without himself prizing his own relationship with God?

And just like we have trouble understanding this in our own lives, so often wanting to be doing things for God rather than wanting to simply be with God, this is something even Jesus' disciples didn't understand at first.

Look with me at verse 36. So Simon comes. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed, everyone is looking for you.

Everyone's looking for you, man. What are you doing? But they don't realize that this mindset is actually counter to the very authority of Jesus that they're appreciating and benefiting from.

[26 : 10] In the disciples' minds, Jesus' authority is meant to serve them. Jesus' authority is meant to serve the people. It's meant to meet popular demand as their personal miracle worker, right?

But Jesus, prioritizing being alone with his father, he knew who his authority was really meant to serve. First and foremost, his father in heaven.

And he would not be taken captive by the agendas of this population. Jesus came to establish the father's perfect kingdom and not the idealized kingdom of the people's limited imaginations.

And I think that's a word for us. Jesus doesn't come just to serve us. Yes, he has served us in the most beautiful way, but it was ultimately to serve the will of his father.

And we must not manipulate him and use him for our own purposes and agendas. His authority will not allow it. He's the king and we are not. And Jesus here, so what he does is he exercises his authority first for his father's agenda and that's why he was in prayer, okay?

[27 : 20] He's praying, he's meditating, he's reminding himself of who he is and what he came to do. When he's communing with his father, he's reminding himself of his identity and therefore also of his authority.

This is integral to all the things that he accomplishes. It's his prayer life, it's the source. He's coming to his father remembering that his very authority flows from his sonship, his vibrant relationship with his father and resolve to exercise his authority only for his father's kingdom agenda.

Jesus doesn't go back with his disciples to the crowd but he insists on his own authority and tells them where they're going to go next. He can say, okay Simon, let's do it, whatever you say, I could do a couple more today.

No, he says, verse 38, Jesus replied, let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages and again, this is, let's not even go into the big city Capernaum anymore, let's just go to the nearby villages, I don't need to build my platform in the big city so I can preach there also.

That is why I have come, he says. So he traveled throughout Galilee preaching in their synagogues and driving out their demons.

[28 : 31] Jesus exercises his authority not for himself, not for the crowds, but for his father and that's the most important thing.

All right, so Jesus exercises his authority over evil and illness for his father and the final point, how does Jesus exercise his authority? Verse 40, 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 anyone, see that you don't tell this to anyone. All right, unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to cover this, the secret, the secrecy of Jesus here. You can ask Pastor Jonathan about that. Why doesn't Jesus want other people to know?

There's an answer, but we're not going to be able to get there today. But there are a couple things I want to draw out here about how Jesus exercises his authority. Two really, really beautiful things, I think.

[29 : 35] Now, if you don't know anything about lepers, in the Jewish society, they were considered as unclean. They were considered as people who couldn't live and be with the rest of the people. They were outcasts.

And even to associate with them would make you an outcast. There was one rabbinical teaching that said, if there's a leper, standing underneath a tree and someone else comes and the shadow of that tree touches them as well, they become unclean.

So to be a leper was to be just completely outcast, right? No one wanted to even go near them. What does this leper do, though? He comes to Jesus anyway.

He comes even when it's against social custom and with no presumption whatsoever, he recognizes Jesus' authority. And I love how he approaches Jesus. He says, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

He knows he can do it. He knows Jesus has the authority to do it, but he does not presume upon the authority of Jesus. He has the order of authority right in his head about who Jesus is and about who he is.

[30 : 42] And I want you to notice also this word that he uses, you can make me clean. Now, if he wasn't Jewish, he might have used a different word. You can make me well. You can make me healthy. But the word here he uses is the word clean.

Because this is a Jewish leper. And in his mind, he needs a whole cleansing. The cleansing of his body physically. The cleansing of his social status with the rest of the community.

And perhaps most importantly, he needs to be clean enough to enter the temple, to worship once again. He needs to be spiritually clean. That's what he's asking for, a holistic cleansing.

No presumption, just hoping that the authoritative king, Messiah, will show him mercy. And he does. It says Jesus was indignant here.

And, oh man, I wish I had more time. The Greek word here, it's actually contested. Most of the manuscripts actually use the word compassion. But there are also good reasons to believe that is indignant.

[31 : 44] Either way you go, it doesn't make a huge theological difference. And I probably shouldn't have even gotten into that just now. But I actually prefer the reading compassion, which actually goes against the NIV here.

I shouldn't have done. Okay. In most of the manuscripts, there's the word compassion. It's the same word you see when Jesus goes out and he sees the crowds and he's moved in his insides.

That's the word that most of the manuscripts use, at least the best ones. And that's what he feels for this man, even with his authority. And that's how he exercises his authority, with compassion.

With compassion. It's a big deal for this king to be approached by this leper, but he reaches out to him in compassion. He even touches him. He touches him.

You know, every other instance of authority in world history is people asserting their authority for their own agendas. Not for the sake of others.

[32 : 51] Especially not in such a sacrificial way as to come into proximity with someone who can make us unclean. But that's what Jesus does right here.

He comes near. The I am, who only ever had to be I am, says, I am willing. The I am says, I will. And that's the gospel.

The gospel is that we don't deserve healing. We don't deserve God's mercy. We don't deserve, because we've made ourselves unclean, we don't deserve to be made clean and whole and restored to our community or to God.

But Jesus comes near. He doesn't just come near, but he touches us. He comes near to our uncleanness. He exposes himself to us. That's what the incarnation is, him taking on flesh and becoming a curse on a cross.

He comes near to the unclean, and because he is so clean, because he is so filled with the spirit, because he's lived the life we failed to live that we could never live, the perfect life, his cleanness can undo our uncleanness.

[33 : 55] And that's the good news. The I am says, I will. And that's the king that we worship. That's the uniqueness of his authority, wielded in compassion toward others.

So what's his call to us? His call to us, at the end of Matthew chapter 28, what does he say? He says, All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of the nations, teaching them to do everything I have commanded you to do.

If we have a king who's used his authority in that way, how are we to go and make disciples? How are we to teach people to do everything he has commanded us to do? Well, it's with that same compassion.

It's with that same confidence of authority that we have in him. And those are the kinds of disciples we are called to be, Christ's church, as we deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him. This is our king and this is the way we will be his royal children. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this special kind of king that you've sent in your son.

[35 : 09] This king who comes near, who is not afraid to get his hands dirty, his hands pierced for us. Would that change the way we live and exercise our authority in our homes, in our workplaces, in every area of our lives?

Would we demonstrate the kingdom authority of Jesus in our lives? Not with oppression and violence and force, but with gentle, compelling, sacrificial love and compassion that we saw in our Savior.

in his name we pray. Amen. Amen.