

Mark 1:16-39 (PM)

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Date: 18 September 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everybody. It's really nice to see your faces. If you are new, my name is Aaron Roberts, and you've joined us on a great Sunday because we're talking about exorcism.

So just buckle up, just relax, it'll be fine. We're week two, week two, into a series looking at Mark's gospel.

And we have three-ish stories here, wonderful stories, wonderful stories. There is a single thread running through these stories, though.

And that thread or that theme is this. It's the absolute authority of Jesus, the authority of Jesus over everything. That's the main thread.

But each story also has a secondary idea, which is quite helpful to us. So here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna go through each story. We're gonna talk about the main theme, the authority of Jesus.

[1 : 01] We're also gonna talk about the secondary theme in each passage. So, you ready? Yes? Let's go. Story one, the calling of the disciples.

The calling of the disciples. We'll start with a minor point, the secondary point on this one. So Jesus is passing alongside the sea, and he calls four fishermen to be his disciples. And it's odd, isn't it? Because you'd think he would bypass the blue-collar workers and try and recruit the scribes or the religious elite of the day.

So it's strange, isn't it? He didn't go after the Rhodes Scholars. He didn't try and skim the top sort of 5% of society to be his ambassadors. He calls these fishermen.

Later, he calls tax collectors hated people. Later, he calls religious zealots who are these kind of like violent revolutionaries. And so you have to ask, what is Christ's strategy here?

[2 : 07] It seems what differentiated those who he called from the others was not their status at all, but rather, Jesus picked the willing.

Picked the willing. I could summarize this. I could just say this. To be a follower of Jesus, to be a disciple of Jesus, you don't have to be fancy. You just have to be all in.

You just gotta be willing. Look at them in the story, verses 16 to 18. Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them, follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. And immediately, they left their nets and followed him. They just got up, left their boats, and followed him.

Jesus called them, and they followed. No pre-nup. No 30-day trial. They just got up, and they followed him. It's a great challenge to us, I think.

[3 : 11] Digging a little bit deeper here, Jesus says to us, get out of your boat, and follow me. Now, we would probably be more comfortable staying in our boat, and inviting Jesus into it, right?

Come into my home, Jesus. Come into my life, Jesus. I mean, we say these kind of things, right? Just come into my home, and be in my boat.

It'll be nice to have you around in case I need some advice every now and then. Because we like a Jesus who will further our agendas, who won't be too disruptive by coming into our thing.

We like a Jesus who furthers our agenda. Sort of like the folks carrying Jesus signs at the Jan 6 riot. It's, Jesus, get on board with what I'm about. But no, that's not the picture here, is it?

Jesus says, get out of your boat. He says, make my business your business. Jesus says, make my agenda your agenda. And this is hard, isn't it?

[4 : 22] Goodness, this is difficult. Because it's an all-in thing. Jesus is saying, you're all in.

Bonhoeffer said it really succinctly. He said, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

So, let me ask you really directly. Jesus says to you, follow me. Get out of your boat and follow me. If you're the kind of person who doesn't sort of want to drop their nets and just do it, let me ask you this.

What's stopping you? More specifically, what are you trying to save in your life by being all in with Jesus? What are you trying to protect?

What is that thing, that treasure that is more important than Jesus? Or what are you afraid to lose? You know, financial comfort. Perhaps God is calling you into some kind of paid ministry thing, but you're thinking, I've got a pretty sweet gig here with my job.

I don't, you know. Maybe you're afraid that you'll lose respect if you become more public in your faith. What are you afraid to lose? I think it's very helpful to think about that, name it, and bring it to Christ.

[5 : 33] Because folks, this whole discipleship thing, it does not work just dabbling with Jesus. You can't leave half your body behind and follow Christ. You have to be all in.

And this is what the drastic response of these first disciples is trying to communicate to us. It's trying to say, be all in. I love John Wesley on this.

He says this, give me 100 preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God. I cannot astraw whether they be clergy or lay. Such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.

It's great, isn't it? So how do I summarize this? This minor thing. Folks, to be a disciple, you don't have to be fancy.

You just have to be all in. Now, that's a secondary point. The major point, as I said, is all about the authority of Christ.

[6 : 38] Jesus spoke and the fishermen obeyed. That is awesome. I asked my son to pick up his socks the other day and he did it.

And I literally, I literally went into the kitchen to speak to my wife. I explained to her what had happened because I couldn't believe it.

I was racking my brain and brains going, what did I do? What did I do differently? Like, was it my voice? Was I doing like a, was my eyes really open?

Did I, what was the secret at that exact moment? What was the magic formula that garnered such obedience? It was a great day that day.

I'm going to assume you understand that's the exception in our house. Jesus speaks and things happen. I read some, you know, I read some commentaries on this passage and they talk about when Jesus says, you know, follow me.

[7 : 48] They say, oh, it's the most beautiful invitation ever offered. That's beautiful but it's not an invitation. An invitation would be Jesus going up to these people and saying, dear friends, save the date.

I'm going to have a change the world party and you're invited. You'll be killed, probably. I'd love it if you could make it. No, it's not that.

It's a command. He commands them to follow him. It's a royal command. It's coming from the king so they obey because Christ's words have authority. There's more to say on that but we're going to keep going.

Story number two. I love this story. Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit verses 21 to 28. So, Jesus is speaking in a synagogue.

You know, it's like a church sort of scene and he's a man possessed by an evil spirit. Screams at Jesus. Jesus casts out the demon and restores the man.

[8 : 55] I have a vivid memory of being in my, the first church I ever attended. I was a young adult since a long time ago in New Zealand. Do you want me to tell this story?

Okay. So, so a man bursts through, so somebody's speaking, we're doing churchy stuff. A guy bursts through the back doors, like those back doors that burst through those doors, walks down in the middle of the aisle and says, I am Jesus in deathly silence and then somebody says, no you're not.

which, which I think is theologically astute and it went, to be honest, it went downhill after that.

But, back to our story. So, each story has a minor point and a major point. So, let's talk about the secondary issue. The secondary issue, the secondary issue of this story is simply this.

There are spiritual forces of evil. They are real. They exist in spiritual realms. And I know you might be thinking, some of you might be thinking, here, on the internet, some of you might be thinking, I mean, you don't really believe that stuff, do you, Roberts?

[10:16] I mean, aren't we, I mean, aren't we more sophisticated? Aren't we more sophisticated than that? Well, I want to challenge you on this. The idea that there is a real and personal spiritual evil in the world.

It's, people do reject this stuff as, what's the word I'm thinking of? Superstition, right? Superstition. But it's mostly, it's mostly just like us kind of Westerners that reject it.

Like, if you went to, if I, you know, tell the story in Latin America or Asia or Africa, I mean, they don't balk at these stories. The belief in evil forces is quite normal to them.

That's most of the world, friends. And are you willing to sort of say, well, those cultures aren't as developed as us? Are you willing to say that? Of course you're not. Our disbelief in such things is mostly to do with the fact that we think we're quite sophisticated, enlightened types beyond such primitive ideas.

Well, folks, the Hebrews weren't primitives. And see, we can't actually say that, well, actually what was going on with this person was that, you know, they were just really unwell.

[11:33] They weren't demon possessed, they were just really unwell. That's actually not what the passage says. We can't say they didn't know better because later on, it actually differentiates, in verse 34, it differentiates between natural health issues and demonic possession.

Jesus sorted out both of them. But in our culture, we've kind of destroyed this idea of the spiritual world and sort of our minds anyway, so we assign everything to natural causes. The ancients, in fact, and most of the world have a much more subtle view of reality.

Not everything is natural on occasion. On occasion, some people really are influenced by dark forces. So a more comprehensive Christian understanding of the world should include a belief in the existence of evil spirits.

I'll also add this. The main reason for believing in demons is because Jesus believed they were real. So Jesus gets to call the shots on all the spooky stuff, doesn't he? If he says they're real, I think we should probably go with that.

I want to make a few more points on this. So why is it important to believe this stuff? Well, for one reason, it stops us having a sort of a reductionist view of our problems and how to solve them.

[12:50] See, otherwise we'll see every problem in the world, like every big issue in the world, every big problem with somebody will be, well, it's just bad laws, or it's just a lack of education, or it's, you know, we need to be more liberal, or we need to be more conservative, or we need to be more sophisticated, or we need to be more woke, or whatever it is.

So if we think the only solutions to our problems are human solutions, we're not seeing the world exactly for what it is. There were dark forces that work against Jesus, there are dark forces against his work now, and if we don't believe this, folks, we're bringing knives to a gunfight.

right, I want to say a couple more things. I think it's very interesting to ask yourself, what was it that gets this guy started?

It was Jesus preaching. And sometimes, if you sit under preaching regularly, God will cause little bits of stuff to bubble up.

I'm sure you've had that experience of listening to someone, and your heart is fighting it, right?

That's because the enemy hates preaching, the enemy hates truth. And one more final thought, you might ask yourself, why don't we see much of this stuff around here?

[14:06] Well, because the major work of the devil is deception. The Bible calls him the father of lies, lots of scriptures to support that. So you're just as likely now to see the work of demons in, you know, not so much people freaking out in the church service, but, you know, in the falsehoods of the ad industry, on esteem crushing websites, you know, like websites that promote eating disorders, stuff like that, corrupt religions.

You're much more likely to see the work of the devil in that kind of thing than you are at a, you know, like a seance or something. All right. Lots more questions on that, but we've got to keep going.

Let's keep moving. I see that's the secondary point. The big theme here, though, again, is Christ's authority. Let me read, remind you of a few verses. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, be silent and come out of him.

And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him, and they're all amazed, and they question amongst themselves, what is this, a new teaching with authority? He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

You see how Jesus responds to the screaming demon? It's so encouraging. It's very, very encouraging. What's really encouraging is that this is not presented as some clash of the titans.

[15:28] This is some not, what's the Lord of the Rings battle? Battle of the Five Armies. It's not like the Battle of the Five Armies. It's not an epic battle between the forces of evil and the forces of God where finally Jesus claws out a victory right at the ends.

Be silent. Get out. Jesus shuts it down. That's it.

Over. Done. This is the authority of Jesus. It's interesting actually, when the guys are talking about this afterwards, they're not amazed at the exorcism itself, they're amazed at his authority.

They mention it twice, verse 22 and 27. I love these stories in the Bible. Don't let them freak you out. I love these stories. Far from being passages that should embarrass us, bump up against their modern sensibilities, they are very encouraging.

Why are they so encouraging? Because even the things that hate Jesus must obey him. Isn't that comforting? Even the things that hate Jesus must obey him.

[16:36] The things that you fear, fear Jesus and must obey him. They fear him because they know who he is. So Jesus overcomes evil and his victory is a victory for this guy as well because this guy is restored.

So what am I trying to say here? Just don't be naive about the spiritual realities of the world because we need to fight in these realms that Jesus fought in as well.

And what does that look like? I'll give you one example. Let's say this as well. If you're a Christian worrying about being possessed by a demon, Christians have different ideas about this, but I don't think a Christian can be possessed by the devil.

That doesn't mean he can't cause problems for you though. The Bible says resist the devil. The devil will cause you problems. So what's an example of how you fight this?

Sometimes in pastoral care if someone is going through a tough time, I will say listen carefully to what your father in heaven is saying to you. He'll be whispering in one ear. And also listen to what the evil one is saying to you.

[17:42] Because they're both whispering. And learn to recognize and discern both these voices so you can rebuke the devil and reject his lies. I imagine this whole section has created a whole lot of questions for you.

I'm happy to talk about them afterwards with you, but we need to move on. We've got this third story here, verses 29 to 34. This will be quick. Jesus goes to the house of Simon and Andrew.

Simon's mother is sick. She's got a fever and back in the days the fever was real trouble. It's not like she just had the flu. Fever could mean death. Verse 31, and he came and he took her by the hand and lifted her up and the fever left her and she began to serve them.

I want to say a few things about this. First, the minor point. It's a picture of what it means to follow Jesus, isn't it? The fishermen were called to become disciples who serve. This woman is restored and the first thing she does is serve.

Serving is the right response to life touched by Jesus. So, after the service, let's be in the back of that room there looking at all the ways we can serve.

[18:45] Secondly, again, the authority of Jesus. It's such a tender picture, isn't it? It's like the authority of Jesus but this compassionate authority. This is this dude's mom, she's in bed, no one else can really see what's going on.

He doesn't even have to say anything, he just gently lifts her up and she's restored. I love that.

Jesus has power, power over everything, to call somebody into a changed life, to restore somebody who's possessed by the evil one and just to sort out this dude's mom who's sick.

Now, at this point though, the story takes quite a dramatic turn. Verses 32 and 33 say this, that the whole city is gathered outside the house.

They hear about this healing. The whole city is gathered outside the house. Fantastic, you know, great so far. Here's Jesus doing stuff we like, healing people, practical, solving our immediate problems, love it.

Listen to verse 35. And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed, that's Jesus, and went to a desolate place and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him

searched for him and they found him and said to him, everyone's looking for you.

[19 : 58] And he said to them, Jesus said to them, let's go to the next town. Let's just go to the next town that I might preach there. For that is why I came.

So Jesus gets up very early to pray for the Father. You know, Jesus praying is only mentioned a few times in Mark's Gospel and it's often when something difficult is going on. The most famous example is in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And why is Jesus praying so intensely there? It's because he is being tempted to walk away from what God has for him. He prays if you can remove this cup from me, let's do that.

Let's do that plan. So he prays to be in the will of the Father. Here is another temptation. Jesus is being tempted to replicate what he did for Simon's mum for everybody.

And as good as that sounds, Jesus knows that those healings are just band-aids over a much greater problem facing humanity. And at this point he's the only one who can see it.

[21 : 00] I'll say that whole thing again. So imagine the scene. Before the crowds arrive, Jesus gets away on his own. Crowds start turning up, looking for healing. Why not?

Jesus doesn't turn up for breakfast. Simon and his mates start panicking. He doesn't understand.

The whole city is here. All the sick people are here. What a ministry opportunity, right?

We've got something good going on here. We've got ministry going on here. We're going places.

Where's Jesus? Verse 36, they search for him. That search for him phrase, that is a phrase used a lot in Mark.

Always negative. It is always negative. Most famously, it's used for those searching to kill Jesus. So that tells you something. Eventually Simon finds Jesus and says, everyone's looking for you.

It's a rebuke. Everyone's looking for you. What are you doing? You're blowing your big chance. You could really help some people here. And in prayer, Jesus steals his focus and he says to them, I've got to go to this next town to preach because that's why I came.

[22 : 00] This is the twist. This is the shock in the story. Jesus leaves all of these six people. Why? Because he knew in their hearts they didn't want a savior.

They just wanted a miracle maker who could sort out their immediate problems, which is understandable. But what Jesus was offering them was so much more wonderful and infinitely more important.

He was offering them something eternal, not temporary, and they didn't see it. And this is a big theme in Mark. People are generally clueless about why Jesus came. And in prayer, I think Jesus discerned their hearts and he decided the best move was to move on to the next place and get on with the mission, which was not just be this kind of helpful miracle maker.

Jesus' priority was to call people to repentance. Why? Because it's, I mean, it's simple, right? He could make them well, but they're still going to die in 20 years. He wants people to follow them in their life now, but he wants to live with them for eternity more, and that requires repentance, which is why the first words out of his mouth are repent and believe.

And I could go on for that for a while, but I think we need to wrap up here. Folks, here we go. You ready? Be all in for Jesus. Jesus.

[23 : 24] What's stopping you? Bring that thing to Jesus and constantly put yourself before him, reading about him, praying about him.

Secondly, don't let the world flatten your perspective on how things operate. There is a real spiritual realm. Watch for it. Discern its messages. But remember, it's all under God's authority.

And that's wonderful news, isn't it? Amen. Thank you. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.