

The Surprising Authority of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. It's good to see you all here. Thanks for joining us for worship. The sociologist Max Weber wrote in the 1950s an essay called Three Types of Legitimate Rule, talking about different kinds of authority in the world. He talked about charismatic authority, charisma, strength, and charm of an individual's personality. He noted that people who follow a charismatic leader don't do so necessarily based on virtue, tradition, or statute, but because they believe in this person. He then goes on, he says, a second kind of authority is traditional authority.

Legitimacy of traditional authority comes from traditions and customs. The authority of the eternal yesterday is what he called it. The third kind of authority he identified is legal authority. A rational legal authority or bureaucratic authority. With this type of authority, an individual ruling group exerts power based on legal office. Once the person in power leaves their official position, their authority is lost. Those who govern have a legal right to do so, and subordinates accept their legal authority. Regardless of where you come from, authority is something that we often have mixed reactions to. Some of us admire authorities. Some of us fear them. Some of us have an instinct to resist any authority. Some of us find comfort in having an authority over us. When we come to the Bible, we are confronted with an authority of a different sort. How do we respond to that authority? This brings us to our passage this morning. We're in a series in the Gospel of Mark. If you want to turn there in the Pew Bibles, it's page 785.

And in the Gospel of Mark, we're looking at it from the very beginning, this portrait of a person, Jesus. And as we've learned in the first two weeks, Mark is laying out a picture. And the way he does so is often with narratives that move quickly and don't always explain expansively the point that he's making. So we need to learn how to read the narrative in order to understand what it is he's telling us about who Jesus is. And as we look at this passage this morning, we're going to ask our question, what kind of authority did Jesus bring when he came to the world? And I think we will find it as one that surprised both the world that he came to and probably surprises us as well. So we're going to go ahead and read. We're in Mark chapter 1, starting in verse 21. We'll go 21 through 34. Nope, through 39.

Through 39. So let's look at this passage. Let's read it together, and then we'll pray for God's help as we look at it this morning. And they went into Capernaum. And immediately on the Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 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. 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 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. And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. And the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

[4 : 46] And the whole city was gathered together at the door, 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.

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. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him. And they found him and said to him, Everyone is looking for you. 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. And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues, and casting out demons. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we, as we come to your word this morning, we acknowledge that we need your help. Lord, in and of ourselves, Lord, we would misunderstand your revelation over and over again. But by your Spirit, Lord, you were able to open the eyes of our hearts and our minds to know and to understand your word.

So, Lord, we ask for your help this morning. Lord, give us hearts to receive your word. Give me, Lord, your help to speak as I ought. And Lord, together may we sit under your word this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, today, we're going to look at the surprising authority of Jesus. There are lots of threads in this story. And as you can tell, it's actually three different stories. So, we're going to see how they fit together. But what holds them together, I believe, is two themes. Two things about Jesus we're going to see. One is that he came with authority to restore a broken world. And secondly, that he came with an authority to rule by his word. So, we're going to look at those two themes this morning. That's your outline if you're taking notes. So, first, let's look at how he has authority to restore a broken world. This is really obvious, and this jumps out at us as we read this story. Jesus is casting out demons and healing. And we're going to look at those things for a minute because both of them are a little surprising to us. Casting out demons, Jesus shows an authority over evil spiritual powers. Now, we need to stop for a minute, because we don't live in a world that talks about demons and spiritual powers very much. In fact, most of us probably, if you really pushed us, aren't sure we believe that demons are real.

We live in a scientific and materialistic worldview that tends to discount the reality of a spiritual world. There are some cultures in this world that know far better than we do the reality that the world has a spiritual component to it. And the Bible testifies to this over and over and again.

[7 : 49] Not only is everything endowed with a spiritual reality because God has created it to relate to Him who is spirit and is a spiritual being, but we also know throughout the sweep of Scripture that there are angels and demons, that they are real, that human beings are not merely animals with a greater intellect, but they are spiritual beings meant to relate to God. And this is what the Bible testifies to.

And it testifies to the fact that just like all of the rest of the world, the spiritual world was corrupted by sin. And that there are forces in the spiritual world that set themselves up against God and His rule and reign in the world.

We see this at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden when Satan comes to tempt Adam and Eve and to draw them away from trust and faith in God. And we see it all the way through to Revelation where the overthrow of these spiritual powers is one of the great hopes that the book of Revelation puts forward for us.

And though we can talk about, not only does the Bible testify this, but I myself have experienced some of this, just a little bit, not a lot. I've never experienced demon possession, but I have had significant experiences where I felt a sense of spiritual oppression that was so unique that it was surprising.

I felt it in a Hindu temple in Asia. I felt it in an inner city ghetto in America. And I felt it in Ithaca, New York. And I don't pick on Ithaca, just the Christians that I know there talk about it all the time.

[9 : 29] There's a reality of the spiritual warfare there that is palpable. So I want to say that to say it's not just in some places and not others, but it's actually throughout the world that this is true.

And so, Mark comes in and he doesn't explain it. He just assumes this is true because in the first century, people had a greater view that this is true. So in verse 23, we see Jesus in the temple teaching and suddenly there's a man. And this man is possessed with an evil spirit. And the spirit sees Jesus.

And he knows who Jesus is. And he knows that Jesus, from the very start, that Jesus has authority to cast him out and to destroy him. So he speaks in fear. He knows that this one who has come into the synagogue in the presence of the spirit is the one who has the authority to destroy him and overcome him.

So he speaks, have you come to destroy us? And Jesus says, I have come with all authority to command and control you. And so he casts him out. He speaks to him. But he also says, he also says, be silent.

Why does Jesus do this? We see it also in verse 34, that Jesus does this over and over again. Why does he tell the demons to be silent? Because the demons spoke truth about who Jesus was.

[10 : 54] He knew that Jesus was the Holy One of God. He was the one sent to be the Messiah. All the titles that we've seen at the very beginning of Mark, the spirit knew this right from the very beginning, this evil spirit. Why does Jesus silence him? There are a number of good reasons, I think, that we can postulate. One is that although Jesus knows that the spirit is speaking truth, he is not willing to let this evil spirit be the one who testifies to his identity to the world.

He wants that to be his place in this moment in time. He wants to testify to himself, and then he wants to see human beings ultimately testify to him, like the Roman centurion at the end of the book who says, surely this was the Son of God as Jesus hung on the cross.

But the other reason why I think Jesus says, be silent, is because Jesus knows that if people hear and understand what the spirit is saying, they will misunderstand who Jesus is. Jesus comes, and in his ministry, he is painting this picture. He is demonstrating, this is who I am, and he's teaching. And he doesn't want people to misunderstand who he is by these professions. Because the whole book of Mark is shaped to show that it's only going to be in light of Jesus' death and resurrection, that the true understanding of who Jesus is and why he's come will become clear. And so he doesn't want this demon's confession of who he is to trigger a false understanding of who he is. So I think that's why these commands to silence, and we'll see them again in the book of Mark. It's actually one of the things that commentators notice about the book of Mark. And that's why we think he does it.

All right, so Jesus comes and he shows authority over these spiritual powers, right, by casting out demons. Secondly, he has this power, this authority over sickness. This is what we see in verses 29 through 34 as Jesus goes into the house of Simon, and Simon's mother-in-law is sick. And again, we need to step back and just think about this for a minute. Physical sickness and death, according to the Bible, are a result of human rebellion against God. Not as a one-to-one correspondence, not if you're feeling sick today, you don't have to necessarily say, oh, I must have sinned because sin is always the cause. So just be at peace. You may just be living in a fallen world and you're sick today.

Sorry about that. But it's not a one-to-one, but it's a global and historical. The reason why sickness and death exist is because of the rebellion of mankind against God. And one day, all that sickness will be done. But for now, our bodies decay and we die as a part of the curse of the sin. Now, there are some people in the first century who did think that sickness was often related to demon possession.

[14 : 01] And so when Luke tells this story in Luke 4, Jesus actually rebukes the fever, which is a really interesting term. For Bible study scholars, you guys can go explore that and see what it looks like.

But it's really fun to think that, okay, so maybe there was more of a connection in the first century. But here, Mark doesn't include that detail. And so Mark is trying to say something else here other than that. What he's saying, what he's showing is Jesus comes with an authority to heal sickness, to overturn the effects of the fall and the curse in the world. And that he does it in the most dramatic way. Just like his casting out of the demon, he doesn't have great rituals. He doesn't, he doesn't perform magic. He simply speaks words of power. And in doing that, he exerts his authority to overturn the curse. This is the inbreaking of the kingdom. This is what Mark 1:14 says, the kingdom of God is at hand. You're about to see what it looks like. This is what it looks like.

When the kingdom of God comes, the curse is turned over and it's changed. And the response of the crowd is amazement. The news goes out. And what we see in verse 33 and 34 is the crowds come. It says the whole town was at his doorstep looking to be healed, looking to be freed from demon possession. And Jesus exerts his authority over and over and over again. He comes and he says, I have this authority and power to do this. It's like the coming of Aslan in the lion and the witch and the wardrobe. You know, the witch has cast the curse of an eternal winter without ever Christmas coming.

But we see in the story as Aslan comes to the land, the beavers tell the children the prophecy and the story. Wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight. At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more. When he bears his teeth, winter meets its death. When he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again. And Jesus comes like that breath of spring into a broken world, into a world suffering under the weight of the fall. And wherever he went, the sense of the kingdom was bringing life to people, overturning these effects. And things began to change and God's kingdom was breaking through.

So what do we need to say in response to this? As we think about Jesus having authority to overturn the curse and to restore a broken world, what do we need to say? Well, there are two things that I think we need to respond to. One is that we need to understand this rightly. What is Jesus doing and what is he not doing? He does come, but at the end, and we'll talk about this more, he moves on.

[17 : 06] His coming didn't bring the end of all disease to all people everywhere. We know that because we're still here, and we're still suffering those things, right? The kingdom is at hand, but it is coming in stages. And here's a little three F's that'll help you think about. How do we think about? Jesus comes, and in his presence, in his ministry, he is a foretaste of the kingdom. He brings this presence, and wherever he goes, he's healing people. He's overturning the, he's forgiving sins. We'll see all the richness of it in this portrait. Jesus comes, and he's giving a foretaste, a little, a little taste of what that kingdom looks like. And when people encounter it, they experience the joy and the freedom from the curse in powerful ways, right? But we know that, and we know things, the kingdom, through our love, through our service, through seeing people healed, people changed. We see this foretaste of the kingdom, but we know as well that this is not the fullness, right? Because what happens is Jesus comes and does his ministry, and then he goes where? He goes to the cross, and this is where he establishes forever the foundation of his kingdom. Because in his death and in his resurrection, he overcomes the power of sin and death, and he breaks the power of Satan in the world.

Fundamentally, it is no longer true that those things have power in the same way, because Jesus has come and overturned them by rising from the dead to demonstrate his victory over them. But we now live not in the fullness of that outworking, but in the now and the not yet. And if you don't know that phrase, you want to get used to it. We live in the now and the not yet. It is true, but not fully true, that Jesus has overturned the curse. And so we experience it, and yet we still long for more of it. And God will still use the suffering and the hardship of life in a broken world to draw us into our need for this redemption, our hope for the coming redemption, our dependence on God in the midst of a fallen world as we wait and long for him to return, as he waits to rescue more and more people from the curse of sin and the destruction of death and judgment. So the foretaste comes during his ministry, the foundation comes at his death and resurrection, and the fullness is still to come. When Jesus returns, he will make everything right, and the curse will be turned over, and there'll be no more sin, and no more sorrow, and no more sickness, and no more death.

And the powers, the spiritual powers will be thrown into a lake of fire forever. And the fullness of the kingdom will come, and we will know joy and freedom like we've never tasted it.

So we need to be wary of a utopian view that says we can have that now, even as we work to be the church in the world, we need to know our hope is in the future as well as in the present, and to live in that balance. So that's the first thing we need to know in light of that.

The second thing is that in light of our fallenness and the oppression that we feel, don't be afraid, but be amazed and respond in joy.

[20 : 45] Demonic possession, by the few accounts I've read of it, is terrifying for those who have experienced it, and for those who see it. Sickness can feel inexorable and overwhelming and defeating as we live it.

But Jesus has come to say, these will not have the last say in your life. When you come and join yourself to me by faith, I will exert my authority, and I promise you, these things will not have the last say.

They will not have the victory. They will not have the power ultimately to control your life. Though you may die, yet you will be raised to new life. You will be healed of your sickness.

It may be in this life, and it may be in the life to come. You will be freed from spiritual oppression, and it may be at the end of your life, in eternity, and not now. But Jesus has come to say, those things are temporary, and my kingdom is eternal.

So have joy and hope and amazement that Jesus has come. You know, I was struck when we gathered on the green a few weeks ago for I Heart New Haven worship time.

[22 : 05] It was a beautiful worship time. And we sang a song, there's power in the name of Jesus to break every chain. And I'll be honest, I looked around, and the Trinity people were going, yeah, this is good.

And there were other people who were dancing and jumping up and down because they've experienced that power. And some of you may have been dancing and jumping up and down too, and I didn't see you. And I hope we do more of that in this church, to dance up and down in joy, because there are ways in which God does break those chains now in our lives.

And I want us to experience that joy. I want us to believe it and rejoice in it. We live in the now and the not yet, but let us believe in both the now and the not yet as we navigate this.

Let us come to Jesus the way the crowds did, and let us watch Him do amazing things in our lives. So the surprising companion to Jesus' authority in this exorcism and healing power in His life is the second thing.

And that Jesus' teaching and preaching is an expression of His authority to rule the world. That He shows His authority to rule through the Word of God that is His teaching and preaching.

[23 : 24] Why do I say this? Well, Mark has put this set of passages, I believe, together. He has this literary form called a sandwich, where he starts with one theme, then he does something else, and then he goes back to that theme again.

And that's what I see here, because in verses 21 through 28, we see something that's focused actually, even though there's an exorcism in the middle of it, it's about His teaching. He teaches, and they were amazed.

And if you look at verse 27, a new teaching with authority. This is what that is about. And then when he comes back at the end, he's talking about preaching. As he goes about, he's talking about the importance of His preaching.

And the sandwich is that we've got teaching and preaching with healing in the middle of it. And so this is how I think Mark is helping us to put these together as a whole. And what is it about Jesus' authority in light of His teaching?

Well, verse 21 and 22 says that Jesus came and He taught in the synagogues and He taught with authority and not as the scribes.

[24 : 29] Now, what does that mean? This is what I've been wrestling with all week. Because Mark doesn't explain it. He doesn't tell us what he taught. He doesn't tell us how he taught. He just says it and then moves on.

And this is the challenge of reading Mark, is how do we understand this, right? What did scribes do? Well, what scribes did is they were kind of like a Torah professor, a teacher and moral guidance and a civil lawyer.

They had all of these different roles in society. And so they came and they would, with a wealth of knowledge in the history of interpretation of the scriptures, bring together and then teach and rule and make judgments, teach about morality, make judgments about how people ought to live in the world.

They were often called rabbis because of that as they taught in the synagogues. They almost did like case law in the way that they did this. Well, Rabbi so-and-so says this and Rabbi so-and-so says this and Rabbi so-and-so says this.

And as we put these together, we think that this is probably the best way to do it. And this is the way that they would do their teaching, right? All of their authority was based on prior rulings from other people.

[25 : 46] When Jesus comes, he doesn't teach like the scribes. He comes and we don't see it here in Mark, but we see it in Matthew. You have heard it said, but I say to you.

Jesus comes with an authority that is not referential to anything else but the scriptures and to his heavenly father. Jesus comes with an authority that isn't because he's smarter or more competent in interpretation.

Wasn't because, though he probably was, smarter and more competent. But he comes with an inherent authority based in his position.

And he claims that authority and he teaches with authority. And in verse 22, they were astonished by this. And then he casts out a demon. And then in verse 27, they say, what is this?

A new teaching with authority. He even casts out demons by the word of his power. Right? His teaching and his words come out of him are of the same cloth of Jesus expressing his authority, commanding the world to conform to him and to his rule.

[27 : 03] He speaks as one who has authority over all these things. Now, the other thing that Mark has hinted at but isn't saying explicitly, but I think it's important to say, is that though he has not said anything about the content of his teaching.

In Mark 1.14, that's the one place we've seen him teach so far. What did he say? The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. And then when you go back to Mark 1.1, what does he say?

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So if Jesus is coming and saying, believe in the gospel, and Mark is saying the gospel is about Jesus, then whatever Jesus is doing with his teaching, where even though he's giving instruction on how to live and what the kingdom of God is like, at the end of the day, he is at the center of it.

And his teaching is saying, you must come and follow me. And this is unique. And I think this may have been a little bit of what the crowds were seeing as he brought his authority to teach.

He comes not just with teachings on how to know God, but he comes as the teacher. To know God is to know me. So that's what we see out of this first part of the sandwich in verses 21 through 28.

[28 : 35] Then when we look at the end in verses 35 through 39, Jesus surprises us. Right? Jesus did this teaching and healing in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

At the end of that Sabbath day, that's when the crowd showed up because they were free to travel again. They showed up at his doorstep and he was mobbed. And he taught and he cared and he freed and he did his thing.

And then it says he went off into a desolate place. He went off to a quiet place. And there are lots of purposes of this that the other gospel writers talk about. But Mark isn't interested in those things.

All he says is he went off and then the disciples went after him. Because they're like, Jesus, there's a whole more group of people that need you. There's a whole... They're searching for you.

They want you to come and do what you've already done for them as well. He could have stayed longer. He could have helped more people.

[29 : 32] He could have freed people from sickness and from demon oppression. But he didn't. Why? Because Jesus had his eyes set on a clear purpose to preach the gospel.

He left the needs in one place unmet in order to take the gospel to another place. Jesus is saying by this action that his rule would not be extended simply by his instantaneous righting of wrongs in the world.

Even though he had the power to overturn the curse, that's not how he was going to bring his kingdom to the world. His kingdom would come through the preaching, through the word of the gospel.

The news of his kingdom and his coming was more important even than his power to heal and cast out demons. Are you surprised by this?

Wouldn't it make more sense for Jesus to just come and keep going and have more and more influence? And if he could move fast enough, he could heal everybody and cast out all the demons. And then the curse would be overturned, right?

[30 : 45] No, he didn't. He didn't. He knew that that was not it. He knew that that was not God's plan. And part of it was because he had not gone to the cross.

And part of it is because God, as an infinite wisdom, from the beginning of creation, knew that it was going to be through his word that he would bring about his kingdom and his purposes in the world.

And so Jesus himself is called in John, the word of God made flesh who dwelt among us. And Jesus comes to us and he says, it's the word of the gospel, the preaching of the gospel that's most important to me.

And it's how he's built his church so that throughout all of history, since Jesus' life, the way that the church has been built, the way that the kingdom of God has been expressed in the world through the church has been through the preaching of the word of God, the testimony about Jesus, who he is and what he has done.

And in fact, this is the central piece. It is not the fullness of it. There is still the embodiment of the kingdom that we are meant to do and called to do. But the centerpiece of it is this preaching to tell the world that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, that he rose from the dead on the third day, that he ascended into heaven, and that he is returning one day to judge the living and the dead and to bring about the fullness of his kingdom.

[32 : 12] This is what Jesus has come to do. So how do we respond?

How do we think about this? As we think about Jesus' authority expressing his rule through his teaching and preaching. Well, first of all, we need to treasure the words of Jesus.

And by that, I don't simply mean the red ones in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in your Bible. I mean this, the whole thing, the word of God. And if you're wondering, is that really the word of God?

Go to Sunday school for the next seven weeks. It's a great class. You'll figure it all out. But recognize, we need to treasure the words of God.

We are to listen to the word of God because of who Jesus is. We are to submit to his word because it is submitting to his authority. Do you let the words of the Bible rule your life?

[33 : 16] Even when it seems awkward. Even when it seems contrary to what you think would be the right thing to do. Are you engaging with others to understand more deeply?

Are you seeking to learn how to study and to glean and to understand the Bible more clearly? Join a small group.

Go to Sunday school class. Take an online seminary class. There are lots of resources out there. Treasure this. Men and women of God, treasure God's word and become those who steep themselves in it and know it deeply because you love and because you want to submit to Jesus.

Let the word of God dwell richly in you. Second response to this is let us recognize that Jesus is giving us a paradigm that just as he said, I must go to other towns and preach this gospel as well.

So must we live in that spirit. The good news about the gospel of Jesus is something that we must continually be taking to the ends of the earth until the end of this age.

[34 : 36] And yes, we need to embody the kingdom in our calling. We need to love our neighbor. We need to turn the other cheek. We need to care for the poor and the needy and the weak among us.

Because this is what Jesus did as he carried himself out. We are to be like him in all of these ways. But recognize that Jesus' purpose was to preach the good news. And let us see that if whatever we do, we must see this as our first priority to preach the good news of the gospel.

to share that with others. Not because we are great that we know these things. If we understand the gospel right, we must do so humbly.

Knowing that we're just, as I think it was Spurgeon who said, we're just poor, broken, hungry people who found bread telling someone else where to find bread.

We have, by God's grace, come to know who Jesus is. Let us then share that good news with others. And finally, let us be amazed.

[35 : 46] Jesus becomes so common to us. He becomes a comfort in our weakness, a friend who sits next to us. But when we think about how the crowds responded to Jesus in this passage in Mark, they were amazed.

They were astonished. And they sought Him out because He was so surprising in His authority. May we seek Him in a similar way.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we love You and we thank You for this word to us. God, we declare You have authority. Lord, thank You that Your authority is being used for good to overturn the curse.

Thank You that Your authority to rule is through Your Word. Lord, may we this morning know this and respond to You as we ought, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.