

Mark 1:14-39

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[0 : 00] Amen. I had a great conversation with a student the other day who studies over at West London University! He told me he's just become a Christian. He's just started to follow the Lord Jesus and he was reading Mark's Gospel as a new Christian.

He came from an Indian background, from a Hindu background and he'd been converted. And his question was about Mark's Gospel and he wanted to know, how do I read Mark's Gospel? How do I follow this Jesus that I read about here? How does what he did in this Gospel, in this book, apply to my life now? How do I follow him?

But as we chatted I realised that this question was packaged in a popular expectation that Jesus is primarily an example to us.

And what we read him doing in the Bible is a prescription of how we should behave today as individuals. Now lots of people think that about Jesus, don't they? They think Jesus is a good man who sets an incredibly high moral standard.

[1 : 20] He is self-sacrificial, isn't he? He is a loving person and we need to follow his example. What example does he set for my life today? Theologians call that the moral influence model, if you're interested.

How does his behaviour influence my behaviour? So in this passage we can read it that way, can't we?

And we can start asking questions about how does Jesus set me an example? What does he show me about healing? What does he show me about how to pray?

What example does he set about teaching in church? Or even about casting out demons? Now of course, Jesus does influence our behaviour, doesn't he?

He is the most perfect man that ever walked on the face of the earth. He shows us what true humanity really looks like. But I want to say today that Mark writes his gospel, his book, Firstly, as a description of events around Jesus' life, Rather than a prescription of how our lives should be.

[2 : 40] And so once we get the description of Jesus, We can then think about how that affects our lives. So I think what Mark gives us in these verses is a description of Jesus' authority and his priorities as God's king.

If you've been around on a Tuesday lunchtime these past couple of weeks, We've looked at Mark, haven't we? Do you remember verses 14 and 15 just before where we read today?

If we look at those verses. After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, Proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel. They're the verses, aren't they, that Jesus starts his public work with. They're the kind of summary of all that he's come to do and all that he is saying.

Jesus at the very beginning tells us, God's kingdom, God's rule is here. Because I am here.

[3 : 51] So repent, turn from living your own way, And believe because I, your king, am here. So Jesus is not primarily our example, for the most part.

He is our king. He is a king who John the Baptist said, back in verse 7, That is mightier than I. He is a mighty king.

So, two things, two big points this afternoon. First of all, we see Jesus, the mighty king, with authority. The mighty king with authority.

You know, I've never met the queen, even though I've lived in London for a while. You could say the queen has authority, couldn't you? If you look at her CV, she is commander-in-chief of the British Armed Forces.

She is the ultimate formal executive authority over the government of the United Kingdom by royal prerogative. That is something, isn't it, on your CV. She appoints the prime minister.

[4 : 58] She is head of state. She has over £8 billion of public wealth held under trust. You might say that the queen has great authority.

Or maybe the prime minister. Now there's nothing new about people with authority, is there? But do they have the kind of authority over the things that really matter most?

There are four big things that Mark puts to us in this section here, that show us the kind of authority that Jesus has. He wants you to see Jesus' mighty authority.

There are four colossal issues. authority over men. Authority over religion. Authority over sickness. And authority over evil. And there are four events here that Mark puts together in this section. First of all, authority over men. Just glance down at verse 16 to 18 there.

[6 : 02] And 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 fishes of men.

Authority over men. He calls these fishermen, and they follow him. The same thing happens in verse 20, doesn't it, to James and John.

He immediately called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. You know, I heard a true story about somebody who was convinced of Christianity on the basis of these verses alone.

It sounds great, doesn't it? I probably think there was more to it than that. But it was these verses that finally convinced them. Now this person came from the highlands of Scotland.

And they were in a family of fishermen. Their fishing business had been in the family for generations. And it was seeing the fishermen's reaction to Jesus here that convinced him.

[7 : 10] He said, I know fishermen. They're not the kind of people to be taken in by airy-fairy nonsense. Fishermen are not fooled by tricks.

They're very down-to-earth people. They're hardened and unsentimental. And here Jesus commands them. And they immediately leave their nets and follow him.

Just think of the type of guys these were. Think of the guys running the fruit and veg stall on the corner outside Pret, just down the road.

Think of the king's mighty authority to call men like that to himself. It impresses us, doesn't it? It impresses me.

And you know, as Jesus does this, he cuts through the conventions of the day, actually. So any Jewish rabbi of the time, worth his salt, would always have waited for his students to choose him.

[8 : 12] It was a kind of vote of confidence system. But Jesus doesn't do that, does he? He doesn't wait. He is audacious enough to call them, but authoritative enough that they follow.

They leave everything. What sort of man is this, who can do that with down-to-earth fishermen? Surely he is a mighty and authoritative king.

They left their nets and immediately followed him. Secondly, though, is his authority over religion. Now Mark quickly moves us from the seaside into the synagogue.

Look at verse 21 there. 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 their scribes.

Now the authority of Jesus teaching in this synagogue is something that really impacts them. Verse 27, they say the same, don't they? They were amazed. They questioned among themselves, saying, what is this?

[9 : 30] A new teaching with authority. Now Mark makes the comparison here, doesn't he, between Jesus' teaching and the scribes' teaching.

Now the scribes and the Pharisees are the religious leaders, aren't they, of the day. And they feature a lot in Mark's Gospel. And we see more and more as Jesus comes onto the scene how he is at odds with these scribes and Pharisees.

So the comparison is not necessarily the content of the teaching. It is the authority of the teacher. It is one of those awkward moments.

I don't know if you've ever had this at work. Where the manager gets put in place by the boss. So the local manager rules the roost.

But then the boss of the company visits and puts him in his place. They were astonished at his teaching.

[10:34] That's what happens here, isn't it? The religious leaders, the scribes, are the ones that the office looks up to, if you like, in the synagogue. The preachers of the day.

They represent the religion of Israel, as it is widely accepted. But the managers of the religion meet the boss. He doesn't just teach them the word, does he?

He is the word. Jesus cuts through the waffle of religious pundits and scepticism. The word Mark uses about his teaching in verse 22.

He strikes them. Or he smites them with his teaching. So in this synagogue, the norms are broken, aren't they? The norms of religion.

The trappings of religion. There is a sense of alarm here. As he strikes them. His teaching is disturbing. And unsettling.

[11:34] As well as it is wonderful. His teaching cuts through the human religion. That these scribes have evolved. That they're comfortable with.

The managers of religion meet the boss. God himself. They were astonished. At his teaching. But what sort of teaching is it?

Is it just astonishing because it's intellectual. It's really, really clever. Or is Jesus just a really charismatic guy? He's like the new kid.

On the block. On the preaching circuit. Why is it so authoritative? Why is it so authoritative? Well the third thing we see about his authority. Is his authority over evil.

Now we can't help notice can we? The obvious interruption. In the sermon. In the passage. Jesus stands up to give the sermon. The lesson. Verse 23. Immediately there was in the synagogue.

[12:32] In the 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. Now can you see there. The connection. Between Jesus' teaching. His preaching.

And this sudden. Evil demonic activity. Jesus' teaching. Doesn't it? Provokes. The demons. There is a sudden flurry.

Of evil activity. When Jesus' word is heard. His authority. Causes that reaction. He commands evil spirits. And they obey him.

I don't know if you've ever had a splinter. In your finger. Sandra. You have. Haven't you? And if you get a splinter. In your finger. You put it in salty water. This is what they say.

[13:30] And if you put it in salty water. The finger shrivels up. A bit like you've been in the bath. For a long time. And it draws out the splinter. It's a great tip. If you ever get one.

And Jesus' teaching. Has that effect. On evil. It draws out. Evil. Into the open. Now just look for a second.

At what the demon says to Jesus. He makes three statements. Doesn't he? In verse 23 to 24. I know who you are.

The Holy One of God. Jesus is recognised. For who he is. The demons realise. That he has authority. And then he says.

What have you to do with us. Jesus of Nazareth. Now that is a phrase. In the Bible. That is loaded with meaning. In the Old Testament. Is it a phrase. That warring nations.

[14:28] Would have used. As they come together. To battle. There are loads of examples of it. In the Old Testament. It's used to describe. Enmity. Between two groups.

Jesus. So this. This demon. Here's Jesus teach. And comes out. What have you to do with us Jesus. This is war. Isn't it Jesus.

But then he says. Have you come to destroy us. It is war. Between Jesus and evil. But the demon knows.

Who is stronger. Doesn't he. He is under threat. From Jesus. Have you come to destroy us. Evil has met.

It's final match. In Jesus. Who can eradicate evil. And destroy it. And he does that. Doesn't he. In verse 25. Be silent.

[15:23] He rebukes. This evil spirit. Be silent. And come out of him. And the unclean spirit. Convulsed him. And crying out with a loud voice. Came out of him.

He commands evil spirits. And they obey him. His authority. Over evil. But then there's a fourth authority. Isn't there.

His authority. Over illness. Look at verse 29. To 31. And we get this scene. Don't we. Where. The disciples with Jesus.

Leave the synagogue. And they go to the home. Of Simon's. Mother-in-law. Listen. I'll refrain from doing. Mother-in-law jokes. At this point. What we see here.

Is an amazing display. Of Jesus' authority. Over physical illness. Isn't it. So Simon's.

[16:19] Mother-in-law. Is bedridden. And just notice. The immediate effects. That this touch. On the hand. Has. Verse 31. The fever left her.

And she began. To serve her. Serve them. No antibiotics. No recovery time. She got up. Straight away. Put the kettle on.

Sometimes it can be very scary. Can't it. When people have. Too much authority. People worry about. The power of corporations.

The authority of big business. Don't they. Authority. Has become a bit of a dirty word. Isn't it.

Somebody has authority. Over somebody else.

But the authority. That Jesus has. Is quite different. From that. Isn't it. It's the kind of authority. That we. We need. We need it.

[17:14] In our lives. And if you're. Not a Christian. Here today. Let me say. You're really welcome. Maybe you're thinking. This is. This is just myth. This isn't real.

You should. At least. Though. Want to know. Somebody. With authority. Like this. Authority. Over men. Authority.

In teaching. Over religion. Authority. Authority. Over illness. Authority. Over evil. Itself. The mighty king. With authority. One of the things.

That lets me down. As a person. Is how I can. Procrastinate. About almost. Everything. The urgent. Is always. The enemy. Of the most important.

Isn't it. So I can easily. Put important. Things off. On my diary. By doing. Other. More urgent.

Things. First. It kind of. Makes me feel. Good.

[18:11] And a person. With such. Authority. Would naturally. Have that problem. I think. Of maybe. Tempted. To be. To be. A procrastinator. Jesus.

Here. Creates. Lots of interest. Doesn't he? Look at what happens. In verse 32. At sunset. They brought to him. All who were sick. And oppressed. By demons. The whole city.

Was gathered together. At the door. And he healed many. Who were sick. With various diseases. Secondly. We see.

About this. Authoritative king. That he is a king. With priorities. A king. With priorities. Jesus.

Despite his popularity. Doesn't procrastinate.

He knows the difference. Between the urgent jobs. He has to do. And the important job. That he has to do. So there is all this activity.

[19:08] And Jesus is becoming a bit of a celebrity. There are massive crowds. Coming to hear. To be healed by him. And so what we have in verse 35 to 39.

Jesus goes away. He departs. To be on his own. To pray. It reminds us doesn't it. That Jesus is not a one man band here.

He's not a kind of loner. He is God's mighty king. He's concerned with God's will. He converses with God the father.

Doing his will. And so it's this prayer time. That helps Jesus to reaffirm his priorities. As God's king. Now he's faced with a dilemma isn't he.

And look at verse 36. Simon and those who were with him searched for him. And they found him.

And said to him. Everyone is looking for you Jesus. It's a really really tough call at this point.

[20:09] If you can think about it in his shoes. He could stay in the area couldn't he. And help those people with their sickness. Needing healing. Stay with us Lord.

And help us. With these issues. And his heart must break. At that point slightly. We read about his compassion.

A few verses later with the leper. In the next episode in Mark. Surely this is what God would want me to do. He might think. It's the loving thing isn't it.

And then there's the worldly fame. And popularity he would get in Capernaum. But he's got another idea hasn't he. Look at verse 38.

He said to them. Let us go on to the next town. So that I may preach. There also. For that. Is what I came for. Jesus is clear on his priority.

[21 : 06] It is to move on to other towns. And preach. Preach. Why? Why preaching? Well haven't we seen already. That Jesus' authority as king.

Comes through his word. He calls the fishermen. He teaches in the synagogue. He rebukes the evil spirits.

It's been through his word. That the battle is waged with evil. The crowds. Are pushing him towards. A healing ministry.

A healing ministry. Aren't they? But this is his agenda. For his work. He chooses a word ministry. When he preaches.

The demons oppose him. And evil is defeated. Now Mark tells us. That Jesus teaches. 17 times. In Mark's gospel.

[22 : 02] And he is called. The teacher. 11 times. 11 times. It's through his words. That evil will be tackled. At the source.

Rather than just the symptoms. That appear on the outside. And doesn't that challenge us. On what we think. We most need from Jesus. His dealing with our immediate problems.

Or the authority and power of his word. To deal with evil. His priority. Is that we hear his teaching. And accept his authority. As king. He wants people to respond to him. On the basis of his preaching. Rather than lots of miracles.

So he will not coerce people. Into believing through miracles. And power. The message is. If people don't accept me as king.

[23 : 04] Through my word. And through my preaching. Then they will never accept me. Through miracles. Mark has told us.

Hasn't he. From the very beginning. Who Jesus is. And if. Jesus really is. God in the flesh. God's Christ. Then actually.

The amazing events. In these verses. Fit that. Don't they. This is how you'd expect. God to behave. So he's not really.

Somebody that we can. Ignore. Is he. He's not. A safe person. That we can kind of shelf. He is authoritative. And his word.

Is where that authority. Bears down upon us. They left their nets. And immediately. Followed him. They were astonished.

[24 : 01] At his teaching. He commands. Evil spirits. And they even obey him. They were amazed. Saying. What is this.

A new teaching. With authority. The fever left her. And she began to serve them. Let's pray. Let's pray.