

“The Demon Who Talked Too Much”

Mark 1:14-20

²¹ *And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.*
²² *And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*
²³ *And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ “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.”*
²⁵ *But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.*
(ESV)

Four or five years ago when I worked with Eli Lilly, they had a practice that was basically reserved for two kinds of people. If you were a sales representative and you were really struggling, oftentimes your manager would call in a national sales trainer from headquarters to come work with you. Or, if you were a sales representative and you were a shining star, she might call a national training representative to come ride with you and work with you. At some point in my Eli Lilly career, I got the call. My manager said, “Tommy, a national sales trainer is coming to ride with you.” I never asked why. I figured ignorance is bliss. A national sales trainer came to our house, and we talked for quite a while before we went out for a ride. In the process we discovered that we were both Christians. We both believed and we shared some stuff about where we went to church and that kind of stuff. We went to get into my car to leave, to go out for a day of visiting psychiatrists around Washington. As I was getting into the driver’s side and he was getting into the passenger side, I said, “Matt?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Wait one second. When we go out to ride today and visit my doctors, do me a favor. Don’t be a Mexican missionary.” He said, “What are you talking about?” I said, “You know how people live in Kent or Renton or something, and they really never talk to people about Jesus, but then maybe they go on a short-term mission trip to Mexico or some place like that, and they’re really bold because they don’t have to live there after they leave?” I said, “I’ve got to live with these doctors after you leave. So you can watch me sell and critique me after, but I don’t want you to say a word.” He looked over and he said, “Tommy, who’s supposed to be training whom here?” I said, “I’m just saying it.” You see, it’s one thing to be bold somewhere else, but it’s quite a different thing to be bold with the people that you live around all the time, is it not?

We’re going to look at two things in the text today. We’re going to first look at the problem with religion, and the second thing we’re going to look at is the power of Jesus. But before we do that, we have to look at the context, which has to do with the hometown of Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

What’s the context here? Let me read the first couple of verses here.

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Last week we looked at where Jesus called His first four disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Then the very next thing He said, “I will make you fishers of men.” We don’t know how much time transpired between those things, on one hand. On the other hand, they had to be horrified, or at least a little bit anxious when Jesus said to them, “All right, boys, here’s where we’re going first – your hometown.” Capernaum is their hometown. It probably sounded pretty cool. “We’re going to follow Jesus. We’ll follow you wherever you want to go.” “We’re going home.” They probably felt a little nervous. I would have been. It’s one thing to take the national

sales trainer; it's another thing to take Jesus. Right? He's almost by definition going to make some people uncomfortable. On the other hand, remember He said that He was going to call them to be "fishers of men," and the most logical place to go if you're a fisherman is where? Where the fish are.

When I was in college, the guy that discipled me taught us this concept of fishing pools. Fishing pools is basically the people that you know. They're the easiest people to talk to about Jesus. So that's what Jesus does. He takes them straight back to their hometown in Capernaum. He goes to the synagogue, which might have been a little uncomfortable for them as well, but we're not sure. Another side note: I always wondered, too, if Peter and Andrew were competitors of James and John in business. They're all fishermen, but in competing businesses. So you have business competitors following Jesus into their hometown, they don't know what's going on, and He takes them to church which we're guessing they were probably not that comfortable with. He goes right into the synagogue and teaches.

It was pretty common for an itinerant rabbi to be invited into a synagogue. First you have to realize the purpose of the synagogue. The easiest way to understand the synagogue is that they were like satellite campuses of the temple. After the temple was destroyed and Israel was taken into exile in Babylon, the elders thought, "We have to have some place to worship even though we don't have a temple." So they set up synagogues wherever they were. Even to this day wherever Jewish people live there are synagogues. That's the place where they worship. They don't do the sacrifices and things, but they worship and they receive teaching from their rabbis. Jesus goes into the synagogue, which is pretty typical, where itinerant rabbis teach. Everything's copasetic until he begins to talk. It says that as He taught, the people were amazed because He taught as one who has authority, not like the scribes.

The way to understand how dissonant that would have made them feel is to understand what a scribe did. Most of us think of a scribe as someone who just copies manuscripts. They did some of that, but really in the New Testament times the scribes were more akin to what we would call lawyers or law professors. They had three functions as scribes. Besides studying the law, they would adjudicate oftentimes or they would give people advice about this matter of the law or that matter of the law. Also, they taught students of the law. The third thing they did was function as expert witnesses on big cases. What defined their teaching was that it was always derivative. In other words, it always came from some place else. If you walked up to a scribe and you had some portion of the Book of Moses, of the law, and said, "So, scribe, what does this mean when it says 'Thou shalt not kill?'" A scribe would not have given you a straight answer. Almost by definition a scribe would have said, "Rabbi Halal says it means this." Or, "Rabbi Gamaliel says that it means this." Or, "Rabbi Allen says that it means this." But he wouldn't say, "Oh that means you just shouldn't kill." He would always give you someone else's opinion. They were masters of the traditions and the traditions of the commentaries on the law. So no matter what you talked about with a scribe, their teaching would be derivative, they would not give you what they thought.

The difference, of course, is Jesus. Jesus comes in and Jesus doesn't teach them according to what other rabbis have taught, but instead Jesus teaches them and says, "Here's what it means." They would ask, "Don't you care what the other rabbis think?" Jesus, practically speaking, would say, "No. I know what it means and here's what it means." The most perfect example of Jesus teaching this way, or the one you're probably most familiar with, is the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount you hear over and over again a pattern where Jesus said, "You've heard it said don't commit adultery. But I say if you've even thought about it you're guilty. You've heard it said, 'Don't kill.' But I say if you've even become angry at your brother, if you've even said, 'You fool' you're guilty enough for the fires of hell." Jesus didn't appeal to other people; Jesus just simply spoke what the text meant. You can imagine that would frustrate people because they'd be sitting around going, "Does he think he wrote it or something?" He did. But it's bigger than that because when the scribes taught, their teaching was

not authoritative because you always had a way out. If they said, “Rabbi Halal says this,” you could say, “You know, this week I’m going to go by Rabbi Allen’s interpretation because it’s a little easier.” There was always a way to escape authority. But Jesus teaches with authority, and the problem there is that when someone teaches with utter authority it demands a response. It demands obedience. You either had to embrace what Jesus taught as true or you had to reject it as false, but you simply could not ignore it. That was the problem. I told you that over and over again Jesus said, “Love me or hate me, but for God’s sake, don’t just like me.” You can’t ignore Him. Jesus teaches with authority and people are amazed at that. That leads to the problem of religion. Jesus roots it out with the first utterance.

²² . . . he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ “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.” (ESV)

As a side note, remember I’ve said Mark’s the patron saint to those of us with ADHD. Mark is not so concerned about the substance of Jesus’ teaching here. Mark is more concerned with the reaction to it. He is more concerned with seeing how people respond to Jesus. We don’t know exactly what Jesus taught, but in that one verse you see that all the problems of religion are summed up, and you can miss it if you’re not thinking carefully.

Jesus is teaching with authority and in their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit (that’s a Jewish technical term for demon) who became agitated all of a sudden. What’s the problem with religion? If you think about it for awhile, you realize the guy with the unclean spirit, the demon-possessed guy, had been sitting in the synagogue for we don’t know how long, whether it was thirty years, twenty years, ten years, ten days, two weeks, but what we do know is that until Jesus came, everything was cool. The guy had been going to church maybe his whole life and not until Jesus confronted him did anyone know that he had a problem. Did you ever think about that? The guy sitting in church was possessed by a demon and no one knew it. What’s the problem with religion? The problem with religion and the problem with going through the motions is that it can’t help you. The best thing religion can do for you is that it can point to the truth, maybe, but ultimately it tends to mask the truth rather than to reveal it. I’m going to assume that this guy had been in the synagogue for a few days or only a few weeks. He was able to go there and go through the motions while everyone looked at him and thought, “Well, look at that guy. He’s cool. He goes through the motions. He sings well, he prays well. Everything must be okay with him.” Religion might mask your problems, but it can’t help them. The other thing is that religion is just a coping mechanism for sin. Do you feel better when you go to church? Does it make you feel that somehow God is happier with you? If that’s your reason for coming, He’s not. Religion, at some level, going through the motions, being a “good person” without actually having a relationship with Jesus, is like taking cold medicine. Cold and flu season comes, and especially if you have to talk in front of people, you’re caught between taking one that makes you want to fall asleep and forget about your problem, or taking the other one that actually makes you able to breathe, but makes you feel loopy. You’re not right, it masks the symptoms, but it doesn’t heal the disease that underlies your problem. Who knows how long he had been sitting there, but not until Jesus was in there addressing him did anyone know there was a problem. Jesus had to talk to him, so Jesus begins speaking. He’s teaching, and the man cries out.

It’s interesting what the man tries to do here, or at least the demon in the man. It’s totally in keeping with everything we know about the Ancient Near East. In the book of Genesis chapter 32, Jacob wrestles with the angel. If you’re not familiar with it you can read it later. There’s this little go-around between Jacob and the angel. The angel says, “Tell me your name.” Jacob says, “Tell me your name.” “I’m not going to tell you my name.” “What’s your name?” “I’m not going to tell you.” “What’s your name?” “I’m not going to tell you.” Why did they want to know each other’s names? Because in the Ancient Near East they thought if you knew someone’s true name you could control them. Those of you in the Men’s Ministry who came and watched the

movie, “Hell Boy” (I know that was supposed to be our secret), saw that the way the villain at the end constrained the hero was that he knew his true name and he wrote it on shackles and clamped it. Because he knew his true name he had control over him. The demon here throws everything he has at Jesus as a last resort. The first thing he says is, “What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” (He says his human name. Jesus is fully human and fully God.) He thinks, “I’ll start with the bottom and work my way up.” “Jesus of Nazareth, what have you to do with us?” We know from later that there’s only one demon, but apparently he’s speaking for all of the forces of darkness. “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” That doesn’t work apparently, so he says, “I know who you are, Holy One of God.” Nothing. He states Jesus’ names maybe in an attempt to gain control over Him and it doesn’t do a thing. Instead Jesus replies back. You have to love the way Jesus just avoids chitchat here. The demon says, “I know who you are, Holy One of God.” Jesus says, “Shut up.” That’s a valid interpretation of that or a valid translation. He says, “Be silent and come out. Come out of him.” Did you notice how the demon responded to that? It bantered a little bit and said, “Well, maybe I don’t want to come out.” He didn’t say that. Let me read it to you.

²⁵ *But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”* ²⁶ *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. (ESV)*

The problem with religion is that it can’t heal you, it can’t help you, and it can’t save you. It can’t deliver you from your deepest, darkest problems. On the flip side, the power of Jesus is able to do anything. Jesus says to this demon, “Be silent and come out.” The response immediately is that he was silent, he convulsed, cried out and he came out, as simple as that. The people looked at Jesus and they were amazed. They said, “What is this new teaching—and with authority?” They couldn’t believe it. The point of Mark’s whole gospel, the whole thing from the first sentence to the very end, is Mark saying to us, “Believe it.”

Some of you have been sitting in church twenty or thirty years and you wonder, “I don’t feel much better.” Or some of you, I know just by the way you act, wonder. Has Jesus ever confronted you? Have you ever dealt with Jesus? Or some of you have come here this morning and you’re completely broken. If you took twenty minutes with any person in the congregation and just listened to their story, I guarantee you would either cry or laugh or both. If you took an hour, I guarantee you would. Because every person in here has besetting sins in their lives, they have things they have been dealing with all of their lives. There’s abuse in most people’s backgrounds—all of these hard things. The question is, “Is Jesus powerful enough and does He have the authority to deal with it?” What Mark wants us to believe from texts like this is, “Believe it.” Here’s a man who’s possessed by a demon and Jesus simply says to him, “Come out,” and he does.

Are you sick? In the very next passage Peter’s mother-in-law is sick and dying of a fever. Jesus heals her. Are you having trouble? Any trouble Mark says over and over again, “Jesus can take care of that. Jesus can take care of all of these things.” Does Jesus have the power? That’s the question you have to ask yourself. Do you really believe that? If you’re a Christian, do you really believe that? Do you really believe that Jesus has the power to overcome whatever besetting sin or besetting issue that you have in your life? Do you? Most of the time we don’t. I don’t. And yet you look at Jesus and say, “Here’s Jesus who can take someone who is a horrible, rotten sinner and turn him into a pastor. Here’s someone who could take someone who felt helpless and hopeless as a mother and turn her into someone who is an ideal person for the community—for His sake, not for hers. A father who doesn’t know what he’s doing—all of these things. Is Jesus able to do it? What Mark wants us to believe is, “Yes. Look at this. Look at what He’s done with this man with the demon. He simply spoke and it happened.” Is there a guarantee He will? Absolutely not. But you never know until you go to Him. Are you trusting Jesus? What are the issues in your life? I guarantee you that if we had a line of people come down, you could make lists that would make you weep. What are these issues? The question is, “Is Jesus big enough to deal with them?” Think about that.