

And they went into Capernaum,  
and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.

<sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching,  
for he taught them as one who had authority,  
and not as the scribes.

<sup>23</sup> And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.

And he cried out,

<sup>24</sup> "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."

<sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying,  
"Be silent, and come out of him!"

<sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit,  
convulsing him  
and crying out with a loud voice,  
came out of him.

<sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

In this section of the Gospel, we begin to see what I think is the genius of Mark as he puts together this Gospel. Again remember, he has access to a great deal of Jesus' life and ministry through Peter and even seems to know that there are other accounts of Jesus' life written. So the parts of Jesus' story that he picks and the way he puts the story together show the particular emphasis that he wishes his audience to meditate on.

In the preceding section of the Gospel, Jesus calls two sets of brothers to drop everything and follow Him. He tells them that He will change their life completely (from being fishermen to fishers of men). Amazingly, unhesitatingly they do exactly as He says. You have to know this is not the normal thing for anyone to do, either then or now. So why do they do it? What do they know that we do not know? That section implicitly calls on us to ask "Who is this Jesus anyway?" and "Why do people follow His command as if it had such great authority?"

But now Mark changes things a bit. Instead of implicitly asking these questions, they now come to the forefront of the text and are audibly asked by the people who encounter Him both in the synagogues where He taught and after He cast out an unclean spirit from a man.

**They went** – Jesus goes, but in tow are the 2 sets of brothers, Simon and Andrew and James and John. They follow after Jesus just as he told them to do.

**Capernaum** – Capernaum is a city on the northern side of the Sea of Galilee. It functions as the homebase for much of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Though we do not hear about it in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has sort of been run out of His hometown of Nazareth (which was a much smaller town and not immediately on the Sea, like Capernaum was).

**the Sabbath** – For the Jews of this day, the Sabbath (Saturday) remained the day that they would gather together around God's Word. This was their day of rest from their regular schedules to devote themselves to God's Word and worship. Since Jesus called His first followers on a day that they were fishing, we can conclude that the previous events did not take place on a Sabbath. Whether this is the day after that or some other time is unclear. The point is that it's a Sabbath, and yet this will be no ordinary Sabbath.

**Synagogue** – Synagogue in Greek literally meanings "a gathering." This is a close reflection of what we today consider "the church." We all know that the Church is ultimately not the building, but a gathering of God's people around His Word and Sacraments. This is essentially what a synagogue was too. The practice of synagogues seems to have arisen in the period after the Babylonian exile (post 586 B.C.) when Jews who were miles away from the Jerusalem and the ruins of the Temple still found a way to maintain their faith in God through the practice of listening to the Word of God being taught and expounded. But as often happens, the synagogues become not merely religious centers, but centers for all sorts of activity of the Jewish community (much like church buildings hold not just worship events, but all sorts of other fellowship, service, evangelistic, and other such events). In Judaism at this time, you can generally associate Levites and priests with the Temple in Jerusalem, whereas groups like the Scribes and Pharisees are much closely connected to synagogues. It's not necessarily that these two groups were hostile to one another, but they did have different areas where they spent most of their time.

**Was teaching** – In Greek the verb here can have the force of "began to teach," but it also can express habitual action (as expressed in this English translation). Both nuances are quite apt. While Jesus first began with a ministry of proclamation (Mark 1:14ff.), here he also begins His teaching ministry, while both often go hand-in-hand, they are not entirely the same thing. Anyone, anywhere can proclaim a message in an authoritative manner, but here especially Jesus is taking a posture of teaching people to better understand God's Word in a place of authority and where other teachers would normally be found. When we think of Jesus as a teacher, the title of Rabbi would have been most often on the tongues of people in Jesus' day and indeed Jesus is called Rabbi by people in the Gospels as a sign of their recognizing His teaching skill and content. To those who opposed Jesus though, the questions would come to test Him to find out what other teachers He aligned Himself with.

**As one having authority** – The irony is thick here. Jesus HAS authority, His authority is recognized by others by His teaching, but in the end many reject both His teaching and His authority because they see it as a threat to their own thoughts or way of life. Jesus here is showing His authority to others no differently than He showed it to those first disciples by His Word. The question is how will people choose to respond. Will they recognize and believe (and follow) like the first disciples or will they reject Him?

**The Scribes** – The “experts” in the Old Testament in Jesus’ day were scribes. They are called such because they would often have copied the Scriptures by their own hand as they learned it. Their job was not invention or innovation, but instead to preserve the tradition of the Word of God, but also to preserve other teachers and authorities (such as rabbis) and their interpretations of Scripture. Old Testament traditions generally were not mere exposition of Scripture, but a recitation of the other teachers and sources of knowledge that one could profess. The more names you could drop, the more authoritative your own teaching would be. This is very different from our day where innovation and novelty are often prized over traditional wisdom and authority. Jesus’ way of teaching was in stark contrast to both of those options though. While He cited no other authority than Himself and Scripture, He also did not aim for novelty. His teaching was always in line with the original voice of Scripture.

**A man with** – the Greek is a little odd here. Literally it reads, “a man in (the sphere/power of) an unclean spirit.” While this may seem like splitting hairs (like the Holy Spirit descending “on” Jesus vs. “in” Jesus at His Baptism), there may be something to the actual wording of this. First, it distinguishes Jesus and this man. Jesus is the one who is acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit, while this man is operating under a much darker power. Later on in Mark 3:22, allegations will rise against Jesus that He is one “in (the sphere/power of) the ruler of the demons.” The connection that the spiritual world has with the physical world is one that we sometimes overlook, but Paul assures us that the spiritual world really is the ultimate plane on which all conflict lies (Eph 6:12, cf. 2 Kings 6:8-19). Jesus’ ministry will bring this conflict between the two sides of the spiritual world into a head-to-head showdown.

**Unclean spirit** – The spirit is called unclean, as opposed to evil, which means it would make the person whom it possesses ritually unclean as well. One connection that jumps out when referring to this spirit as “unclean” is John’s ministry. John came washing (baptizing) people with water, which is an act of cleansing. This washing, paired with his message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, reminds us that while clean/unclean were categories in Judaism that were not necessarily synonymous with righteous/unrighteous, John’s ministry does bring them in very close proximity. In our terminology, we would refer to such a being as a demon. In fact in later verses, Mark seems to use “unclean spirit” and “demon” synonymously (Mark 3:22 and 3:30 and Mark 7:25-30). One reason perhaps why Mark uses “unclean spirit” here is to draw a strong contrast

between this spirit and Jesus who is the “Holy One.” Just like in the temptation, there is a strong confrontation between God and His kingdom and Satan and his.

**What have you to do with us?** – This construction is very similar to Jesus’ words to His mother at the wedding feast in Cana (“What’s that have to do with me and you?” (John 2:4)). It has the connotation of being a dismissal or rebuff. Here the demon perhaps is pointing out to Jesus that the time for Him to put away all demonic powers has not yet come, so why is He here. The demon knows who Jesus is and knows His ultimate authority and cannot overpower Him, but still acts surprised at this confrontation right then and there.

**Jesus of Nazareth** – The name Jesus (Yeshua or Yehoshua, in English, Joshua) was a fairly common name for boys in Jesus’ day. Identifying him as “Jesus of Nazareth” would have been a typical way to distinguish this Jesus from other Jesuses. Another common way to do the same would be to refer to someone as being the son of so-and-so. Because Joseph seems to have died early on in Jesus’ life and perhaps also because there were rumors about who Jesus’ father really was, He is not often referred to in this way. Joseph is not even mentioned in Mark’s Gospel (cf. with John 1:45; 6:42). Remember that Mark’s Gospel has told us nothing about Jesus’ early life. His story begins with Jesus’ Baptism.

**Have you come to destroy us** – Though only one unclean spirit is depicted in this story, it speaks of “us,” referring perhaps to all other demons, or to Satan and all in his dominion.

**I know** – the knowledge of this unclean spirit is remarkable. While no one else in the synagogue really gets who Jesus does, the forces of evil very clearly see Jesus as He is.

**The Holy One of God** – this is not really a Messianic title, but it does clearly speak Jesus’ identity as God Himself, for no one else is holy besides God and those whom God makes holy (Num 16:7; Pro. 9:10, John 6:69).

**Be silent** – this is the first of many times in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus commands people who show some understanding of who He is to keep silent about it. This instance is slightly different than Jesus giving His commands to people. There is something important to eyewitness testimony and the credibility and reliability of the message. If Jesus’ identity and message is authenticated by demons, it’s really not a very credible or reliable message. It makes perfect sense for Jesus to silence the demon. The reason Jesus silences people is somewhat different. Their witness of Jesus while reliable is incomplete. They do not completely comprehend who Jesus is or what He has come to do, because they have not yet seen and experienced the crucifixion and resurrection. It is after those critical events that Jesus does command people to tell others about Him, because their testimony is now complete.

**What is this?** – One can only imagine how surprising it would have been to go to the synagogue on a Sabbath and witness a demon exorcism. Not only is the synagogue a most

unlikely place for such a thing to happen, simply experiencing a demon exorcism itself is a rather rare event. Yet in Jesus' ministry, it becomes rather pedestrian.

**A new teaching with authority** – It's not merely that Jesus is teaching something new, that is, adding new content of wisdom or knowledge. Novelty for the sake of novelty was not valued among Jews. It's more that Jesus' authority is new to them. They've never seen anyone interact with a demon and command a demon with the authority that Jesus showed such that the demon obeyed Him. Rabbis are known for their wisdom and knowledge, but demon exorcism isn't necessarily a skill a rabbi possesses. But Jesus, who isn't a trained rabbi, speaks simply and clearly to this demon and it obeys.

**He commands even the unclean spirits** – Jesus' teaching and His commanding are joined closely together in these two sentences. Jesus does not simply pass on knowledge for people to decide whether it matters or not. Jesus' words demand a response. One cannot be on the fence with Jesus, either you follow Him or you don't, believe Him or you don't. But you can't be lukewarm about Him. This is reminiscent of C.S. Lewis' famous puzzle that one must either believe Jesus is liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. There are no other options to say, for instance, that He is merely a wise teacher. Though this encounter appears only to be between Jesus and one unclean spirit, the people who witness it make the inference that Jesus' authority extends over all unclean spirits.

**And at once his fame spread everywhere** – "At once" is that famous Markan word "immediately," and I would have preferred it had been translated as such. The word of mouth spread of Jesus is really important for us to take to heart. We live in a digital age where information is nearly instantaneously available worldwide. In Jesus' day, the quickest and most reliable way information was spread was through eyewitness transmission. A person who saw something would tell others what he or she saw and those people would tell others, and so forth. Not everyone immediately came into contact with Jesus, but because of what Jesus was doing word about Him preceded Him into much of the area. Thus when Jesus will arrive at new destinations, there are sometimes already welcoming crowds waiting to see and hear Him. Mark stresses the complete saturation of this message. It should be somewhat convicting to us that people were so wowed about Jesus for this relatively simple demon exorcism that they told everyone about it. What we know about Jesus is far more life-changing, but we very often keep it to ourselves. At this point in time, the only one Jesus forbade from telling others about Him was this demon. As we move on, He will command other people to keep silent too. Part of the reason He would have done that is because the response of the crowds sometimes prevented Him from actually accomplishing all that He wanted to do.

**throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee** – Using geographic terms, this refers to the area around the Sea of Galilee, but especially Capernaum, which serves as Jesus' mission base throughout much of the ministry in Galilee.