

## **Truth and Power United - Mark 1:21-28**

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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### **INTRODUCTION: THE SMART AND THE POWERFUL**

Who would you say is the most influential person in your life?...the one who's most impacted the way you live your life right now and what's important to you? Who have you watched and learned from to figure out how to live your life effectively? I'm certain we could all name a few people, some we've known personally and others through their books or teachings, who've significantly shaped the person we are today... people we've considered smart, wise and effective in their approach to life and from whom we've tried to learn and pattern our lives after. It's simply the nature of human beings that we are constantly seeking to learn from other people how to live our lives, and that we look to people we think are doing it well.

As I was thinking about this I thought it would be fun to see who the world looks to as the smartest and most powerful or significant people from history. So I did a little research. Are you ready for the results?

### **THE TOP TEN SMARTEST according to votes at [www.thetoptens.com](http://www.thetoptens.com):**

10. Aristotle
9. Ben Franklin
8. Charles Darwin
7. Adolf Hitler
6. Galileo
5. Stephen Hawking
4. Isaac Newton
3. Leonardo da Vinci
2. Nikola Tesla
1. Albert Einstein

What about powerful or significant people from history?

**THE TOP 10 MOST SIGNIFICANT according to a data-driven study by Steven Skiena and Charles B. Ward – 12/10/2013:**

10. Thomas Jefferson
9. Alexander the Great
8. Aristotle
7. Adolf Hitler
6. George Washington
5. Abraham Lincoln
4. William Shakespeare
3. Muhammad
2. Napoleon
1. **Jesus**

Well today, as you might expect, I want to put our attention fully on the person who rose to the top of the most significant list and who actually should be at the top of the smartest and wisest lists as well...the one person who unites perfect wisdom with perfect power...the person who really is the smartest human being in history and, hands-down, the most influential and powerful...and who actually lived what he taught in real life, just as we also can do when we fix our eyes on him and follow him.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 1, verses 21 to 28, a passage where we'll see that those who saw Jesus Christ in action and listened to his teaching would readily agree with the bold claim I just made about him. Our passage today takes place near the Sea of Galilee in the town of Capernaum and picks up just after Jesus had called his disciples – Simon, Andrew, James and John – to drop their fishing nets and follow him. Let's read the full passage to begin:

***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.***

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word. Holy Spirit open our hearts and minds to the truth as we study today.

One quick note before we dig into this passage. If you've ever read the book of Mark you've probably noticed that the translated word, "immediately," is used a lot, and it can be confusing because this English word to us always means, "right now," or "the very next second." However, the way it's used in Mark is generally to identify the first thing that happened next in chronological sequence, which didn't necessarily happen in the very next second. So for instance, we see in our verses today that Jesus and his disciples walked into Capernaum and ***"immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue..."*** This translates into: *Jesus and his disciples went into Capernaum on a regular work day, not a Sabbath, and then when the next Sabbath day came the first thing Jesus did was go to the synagogue and begin teaching.* I share this simply because as I've read Mark in the past, I've found that all the "immediately's" have been kind of distracting and confusing since I naturally take that to mean, "right the next instant."

### **ASTONISHING AUTHORITY (Verses 21-22, 27)**

So with that out of the way, let's begin by zeroing in on verses 21 and 22, which I've labeled in your notes: *Astonishing Authority*. The first thing we notice is that Jesus is doing what he always does once a week on the Sabbath day: he's gathering together with God's people for biblical teaching and prayer in the synagogue. This was his custom and he followed it like clockwork. And on this particular day in the synagogue, Jesus is focused on doing some teaching himself. And in fact, at this point in his ministry, teaching in the synagogues is one of three primary activities Jesus is doing everywhere he goes. The other two are

1) proclaiming the good news that God's kingdom had come near; and 2) healing every disease and affliction among the people (Matthew 4:23).

Well, as Jesus taught in the synagogue on this Sabbath day in Capernaum, something about his teaching was unlike anything the people in the synagogue had ever heard before. The way he taught was totally different from what they were used to from the scribes. You see, the teaching of the scribes was characterized by opinions and interpretations and views of various respected Rabbis. They offered their view on what Scripture "might" mean here and they relied heavily on the "traditions of men" Jesus later criticized. In short, the teaching of the scribes lacked authority and had the character of informed opinions that were "probably" true.

In sharp contrast, the teaching of Jesus possessed inherent authority. It had the character of, "Thus saith the Lord." His teaching had the undeniable "ring" of absolute truth – not an opinion or an educated guess or a reasonable conclusion based on extensive research. No. As Jesus taught, the people in the synagogue heard pure and perfect truth as they'd never heard it before. And though many would later reject this perfect truth from Jesus when they understood its implications for their lives, there was no doubt that what Jesus taught was absolute authoritative truth fully removed from the realm of fallible human wisdom. Jesus taught with authority that left everyone in the building astonished...jaws dropping and hearts burning. *Astonishing authority.* That's how different the truth and wisdom coming from the mouth of Jesus was, as compared to the greatest teachings and wisdom offered by men.

Now it's important to remember that this teaching with astonishing authority was something that grew and developed in Jesus over 30 years of walking by the Spirit, studying Scripture, asking questions, communicating with the Father, and immersing himself in true reality as revealed in God's Word. Remember, Jesus ***"increased in wisdom."*** At birth he didn't already have the whole Bible downloaded in his brain. Instead, Jesus lived as an ordinary, though sinless, human being, fully dependent on the Spirit, and he had to learn and grow like we do. Even just comparing Jesus in the temple at age 12 with Jesus at age 30 in the synagogue, we see a remarkable difference. At age 12 he was focused on listening to the priests and asking questions and learning from them. They were amazed at his understanding and comprehension, but he was not yet teaching

them with authority. But now, at age 30, he is teaching them and doing it with *astonishing* authority.

This is why it's so important to not only learn from the teachings of Jesus, but also from the way he lived his life...what was important to him and the practices he engaged in to increase in the knowledge of God and walk in the power and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. While we will never fully possess the astonishing authority Jesus had as he spoke God's truth, God will bring astonishing transformation and growth in Christlikeness within us when we begin living in the priorities and practices of Jesus and actually believe the perfect truth he taught us about life with him in God's kingdom.

### **DISTRACTING DECEPTION (Verses 23-24)**

Well, as you might imagine, someone was not thrilled with the perfect, authoritative truth flowing from the lips of Jesus...someone who specializes in lies and in keeping people from knowing God and walking in his purposes. In verses 23 and 24, we see unfolding what I've called a *Distracting Deception*. As Jesus astonishes people with truth, a loud voice tries to shut him up and interfere with what he's doing. Right there in the synagogue, in the middle of people gathered to worship and learn from God, was a demon-possessed man...a man who had been indwelt and taken over by the spirit of an unclean demon. We're reminded here that demonic activity and demonic possession is real and we should never conclude that it's disappeared in the modern age. We disregard it to our own peril. But as we'll see shortly, in Christ, we need never live in fear of it.

Notice for a moment what the demon said to Jesus. 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."*** We can actually learn a little bit about demons here in just the few things he said here. First, notice that demons are not all-knowing. This demon was quite concerned about figuring out why Jesus was on earth at this particular time in history and what he intended to do to demons as part of his current mission on earth. You see, he was well aware of who he was dealing with, but hadn't yet figured out exactly what Jesus was up to. His knowledge was incomplete.

Secondly, we observe that the devil and demons are very familiar with Scripture. They're very keen on discovering what God is up to and when, and how they can try to de-rail his plans and purposes. Notice that the demon is wondering if Jesus had come to destroy demons. He's evidently aware that destruction of the devil and his demons is part of God's plan for the future and he wonders if the time is now. Jesus is later questioned by a demon who asks him: ***"Have you come to torment us before the time?"*** (Matthew 8:29). In other words, the demon is aware that torment is in his future according to Scripture, but he also knows that certain things still need to happen before that day arrives. Demons definitely know Scripture AND how to twist it.

And finally, notice that demons are deathly afraid of Jesus Christ, and they know he has the upper hand. This demon seems quite stressed out that Jesus might destroy him on the spot. The demons most definitely believe in Jesus – the Holy One of God – and they shudder at the very thought of him. They know their power is utterly inadequate in the face of Jesus Christ and the awesome power of his name. Amen?! But that does not keep them from doing everything they can to try and work against God's purposes and drag as many people as possible with them into their predicted future of destruction and torment. And that's what we see this demon doing here. As Jesus shared life-changing truth in the synagogue, the demon tried to distract people from the truth and use his knowledge of Jesus' true identity against him. We see later how the Pharisees used these demonic pronouncements of Jesus' true identity against him when they claimed Jesus was casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons.

### **POWERFUL PERFECTION (Verses 25-26)**

Well, this demon was afraid of Jesus for good reason, as he was about to experience the *Powerful Perfection* of the One he knew to be *the Holy One of God*. In verses 25 and 26 we see how Jesus responded to the outburst from the demon-possessed man. But before we look at what Jesus DID in response, let's think about what he DIDN'T do. This will help guide us in any encounters we may have with demonic activity. First, notice that Jesus did not answer the questions of the demon. He did not allow the demon to be in the driver's seat, and he did not provide him with the information he was seeking. Secondly, Jesus didn't have a conversation with the demon or debate with him. We remember from his temptation by the devil, that the only thing he did was respond to lies with

statements of biblical truth. We will do well to follow Jesus' example in any demonic activity we encounter.

But now let's look at what Jesus DID do in response to the demonic outburst here in the synagogue. We're told that he first simply REBUKED the unclean spirit by ordering him to stop talking. "Be silent." And then Jesus commanded the demon to COME OUT of the man. Stop talking and get out NOW! The fewer words the better when dealing with demons. And then we see the awesome power of Jesus Christ, the one and only, as the unclean spirit had no choice but to immediately obey his command; though he didn't do it without a tantrum on the way out! Shaking the man violently and throwing him to the ground (according to the Luke account), the demon came out with a loud shriek. And yet Luke also tells us the man was unharmed. You see, the power of Jesus is more than sufficient to defeat the darkest forces of evil and deliver us safely to true freedom! Amen?! With Jesus, we need fear no evil even walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

### **REPORTING REACTIONS (Verses 27-28)**

Well as we turn to our final two verses, verses 27 and 28 – which I've labeled in your notes, *Reporting Reactions* – we remember that the people in the synagogue were already *astonished* at the authority of Jesus even before the demonic outburst. Now they added *amazement* to the emotions they were experiencing on this one-of-a-kind day in the synagogue. Can you imagine watching all this unfold at church one day?! Nobody would be snoozing, would they? Or struggling to pay attention? No. There would be an overwhelming sense that the kingdom of God has come near! Jesus not only spoke authoritative, life-changing truth, he also possessed awesome power that sent even the demons packing at his command. The Luke account says it this way:

***And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!"***

Authority and power united in one amazing and astonishing person. No wonder Jesus Christ tops out the list of the most significant people in history – even when people who haven't surrendered to him are included in the survey!

Well, what do you think this caused the people in the synagogue that day to do? Of course they reacted the way we all would in this situation: by quickly reporting it to others. They headed out immediately to tell everyone they knew about this amazing man named Jesus. That's how Jesus Christ affected the people who encountered him in person, heard his teaching and watched him in action. They couldn't keep him to themselves.

You might say, "Well, what about the Pharisees? They didn't respond to him that way." But in actuality even the Pharisees were just as astonished and amazed by Jesus and his teachings as everyone else. They recognized his unmistakable authority and power and that's why they felt so threatened by him. He was undermining their authority and power, so instead of embracing his teachings and spreading the word, they responded by trying to shut him up. The fact remains that Jesus' grasp of truth and his incredible power was universally recognized by all who saw him in action and heard his teachings. What wasn't universal was the way different people chose to respond to his authority and power. And that has not changed today.

## **APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

My friends, in Jesus perfect truth and perfect power unite, and we find in him the ideal person to walk with, learn from and pattern our lives after. And again we hear his call, "Follow me. Follow me. Follow me." He loves us and longs to share himself with us. But are we following or are we ready to follow? How are we responding to Jesus and his invitation? Are we convinced that far above Albert Einstein, Napoleon, Aristotle, Stephen Hawking, Charles Darwin, Ben Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Ghandi, Buddha, or any other person who may impress us or seem to have a great grasp of life, stands Jesus Christ – the smartest, wisest, most powerful and significant person in history and the only one of those mentioned still alive today? Are we intently looking to him to teach us right now how to live life – at church, at home, at work, on horseback, while hunting, in conversations, alone in deserted places?

He's got perfect truth to teach us about how to function effectively for our good and the glory of God in every one of those places and anywhere else we may go in life. His life, his practices and his teachings are laid out beautifully for us in 4 different accounts in Scripture, and he challenges us to look closely and



meditatively at them and the rest of God's Word. And that as we do, we would begin patterning our lives after him and putting his teachings into practice. He challenges us to not only believe IN HIM, but to BELIEVE HIM as well. "Do I really believe Jesus today?" could be a healthy question for some of us to ask.

And we must never forget that Jesus doesn't leave us unequipped to actually follow him and learn to live life like him. Not only does he provide us with the truth and wisdom we need, he also gives us the perfect power of his indwelling Spirit to provide everything we need for life and godliness and to defeat the power of sin and the enemy in our lives. In Christ, sin is no longer our master and through repentance and faith we can leave it behind whenever it crops up again. We also saw in our passage today that Jesus has complete authority and power over the devil and his demons. They must do what he commands! Other scriptures teach us that he also provides his born again followers with that same power and authority which operates through prayer and the power of his name. Because he is with us and his Spirit is in us at all times, we need fear no evil. We can rebuke the enemy with the power of Jesus' name.

Let's believe Jesus today and let following him be the full focus of our lives. He went to the cross to make this possible and invite each of us into a radically different, eternal kind of life following him and filled up with his power...life in the near kingdom of God. So, let's...***lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the JOY that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God.***" – Hebrews 12:1-2