**The authority of the King is revealed**

Text: Mark 1:16-34

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**Scriptures:** Jeremiah 16:14-21; Mark 1:16-34

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 317, ‘Facing a task unfinished’, 92, 325, 72

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#4)

**Theme:** The sovereign authority of Christ in calling his disciples, teaching the Word and ruling over the spiritual and physical realms.

**Proposition:** Jesus calls you to recognise His supreme authority and to follow Him

**Introduction**

Our New Zealand Government has power to tell us what to do, enforcing the laws by which they govern this country. The Government ultimately controls how fast you can legally drive on any stretch of road, how much tax you are required to pay. During the COVID-19 pandemic, how many people could gather together at any one place and time. The limited power of the New Zealand government only extends as far as the borders of our country. Our civil governing authority exists because ultimately all such localized, temporary powers have been instituted by God (Rom 13:1).

The supreme authority, that of Christ who issues the command to ‘*repent and believe the gospel*’, goes out to the whole world (Acts 17:30). There is no higher power. The authority of the New Zealand Government is seen in the presence of the police force on our streets. The authority of Christ is revealed as the Kingdom of God expands and His rule becomes visible.

Later in His earthly ministry, Jesus would tell the parable of the mustard seed to explain the way in which the Kingdom of God progresses (Mark 4:30-34). Just as a very small seed grows up into a large plant in which birds can make their nests, so the Kingdom of God starts small and is destined to grow very large. The Kingdom of God began with the one man, Jesus Christ, proclaiming the gospel and continues to grow today through the ministry of His many disciples; people like you and me. Let’s look now at the authority of King Jesus under three headings:

1. Jesus calls His first four disciples
2. Jesus uncommonly teaches the truth
3. Jesus commands the broken creation
4. **Jesus calls His first disciples (v16-20)**

A sovereign nation has citizens who are ruled and regulated by a government. A kingdom has subjects who live under the authority of the king. As Jesus calls His first four disciples, we see the kingdom of God begin to grow and be visible to those with eyes to see. Jesus was passing by an inland freshwater lake fed mainly from the Jordan River, known as the ‘Sea of Galilee’, the ‘Lake of Gennesaret’ (Luke 5:1), the ‘Sea of Tiberias’ (John 6:1) and in the Old Testament as ‘Chinnereth’ (Num 34:11). The lakeside settlements of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Tiberias feature in the gospel accounts. Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, was the centre of a flourishing fishing industry. Fish was a major food staple in the area and the Sea of Galilee was the only significant freshwater lake in the region.

It was therefore not surprising that Jesus saw fishermen there. What is remarkable is that the disciples of Jesus, who would later become the Apostles upon whom the New Testament church would be founded (Eph 2:20) were so ordinary. They were everyday people working normal jobs without special status or extraordinary gifts. When we read the account in Mark’s gospel of the calling of the brothers Simon and Andrew, and then of James and John, it appears that Jesus suddenly reached out to those who had never met him before, but this is not the case. In his gospel John records an earlier encounter that Andrew had with Jesus by the Jordan river. Andrew then went to find his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus. It was then that Jesus gave Simon the name Cephas, which means Peter (John 1:42). So when Jesus saw Simon and Andrew casting their net into the Sea of Galilee, he had already met them, and they already knew that He was the long-promised Messiah (John 1:41).

Jesus called these two brothers with the authority of the government of the Kingdom of God using the words ‘follow me’ or literally ‘come behind/after me’. This is the call to discipleship. It is the same call that comes to you and to me. It is a call to follow the pathway that Jesus leads you on and to learn from Him as you go. Jesus then explained the key task that these disciples would have: ‘*to become fishers of men*’. There is more to this metaphor than just the link to the aquatic trade these men were engaged in. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord revealed that he would be ‘*sending for many fishers*’ who would catch His people Israel (Jer 16:16). We find the same fishing-judgement connection in Ezekiel (12:13; 29:4-5), Amos (4:2) and Habakkuk (1:14-17). He would then send for many hunters who would find them; none would be hidden from Him. Here the fishers of men would gather God’s covenant people because of His coming fearsome judgement.

But there is more: This ominous imagery comes together with the prophesy of a new Exodus where God will return His people to the land of promise (Jer 16:15) and that they would know Him by His power and might. The call to be ‘fishers of men’ reflects the two parts of the message that the disciples would proclaim - both of impending judgement and of salvation: ‘*repent and believe the gospel*’ (1:15).

After the calling of Simon Peter and Andrew, two more brothers were called, James and John. They were also fishermen, and they also left their net behind to follow Jesus. Mark notes that they also left their father Zebedee and the ‘hired servants’ in the boat. It would seem that theirs was a prosperous family business of some scale. Following Jesus always requires personal sacrifice.

These four men would ‘become fishers of men’ as they lived close to Jesus over the years of His public ministry, experienced the grief of His death, the joy of His resurrection, and the transformation of their own lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. These men became some of the Apostles – powerful witnesses for Christ. Peter – the impulsive, reckless, impetuous one (Matt 14:28-33; Mark 8:32; 14:29-31; John 18:10) became the leader of the 12 disciples. He is mentioned first in every listing of the disciples (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16 and Acts 1:13).

Andrew, Peter’s brother, was always bringing people to Jesus (John 1:40-42; 6,8,9 cf. Matt 14:18; John 12:22). Church historians believe that he was killed on an X-shaped cross. James, the son of Zebedee would be the first disciple to be martyred. His death is recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 12:1,2). John, the brother of James called himself ‘*the disciple whom Jesus loved*’ (John 13:23; 19:26). There was an especially tender bond of attachment between John and Jesus. After Christ’s resurrection John was active in ministry together with Peter (Acts 1:13; 3:1-11; 4:13,20; 8:14).

Like each one of us, these were not extraordinary people in and of themselves, yet the Lord was pleased to call them and bless them as they served Him. They are like all of us who have responded to Christ’s call to follow Him, experiencing the authority of the Lord. They saw the glory of the Son of God, full of grace and truth (John 1:14), which brings us to our second point:

1. **Jesus uncommonly teaches the truth (21-22)**

Have you ever had the experience of visiting a church when you are away on holiday, and you leave the service feeling empty and sad because you didn’t hear the Word preached and the gospel proclaimed? Perhaps you heard many things said by the person leading the service, and likely at least some of them were true, but the power of the gospel was not unleashed because the words spoken lacked authority. That is how it was in the Jewish synagogues in the first century where the scribes would teach their traditions to the people instead of God’s Word (Mark 7:7-8). We know from the words of Jesus in Matthew 23 that the scribes and the pharisees were ‘blind guides’ (v16). They did not know God from their own personal experience of a relationship with Him. They did not practice what they preached (Matt 23:3), so their teaching lacked authority to convict, to convince, to console and to connect people to God.

Jesus was in the regular habit of attending the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day (Luke 4:16). Throughout His public ministry He taught in local synagogues in Judea (Luke 4:44) and in the temple in Jerusalem (John 18.20). On the occasion Mark records in chapter 1 of his gospel, Jesus was close to Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In those days in synagogues, a pre-prescribed portion of the Old Testament Scripture was read in Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic – the language commonly spoken by the Jewish people from about the 7th century BC until the 7th century AD. After reading the Word of God, the reader would then explain what it meant and apply it to those present. This was what we now call ‘expository preaching’, and it is the central component in our reformed worship services.

When Jesus taught in the synagogue at Capernaum, those who were there were ‘*astonished at his teaching*’ (Mark 1:22). The Greek word translated ‘astonished’ means to be ‘driven out of one’s senses by a sudden shock or strong feeling’. To be astonished here is to be filled with amazement to the point of being overwhelmed and unable to grasp what is happening. Joseph and Mary experienced the same astonishment when they heard their 12-year-old son sitting amongst the teachers in the Jerusalem temple, ‘*listening to them and asking them questions*’ (Luke 2:46).

In Luke’s gospel, we have the account of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth just prior to His teaching in Capernaum. In Nazareth, Jesus read about the promised Messiah from Isaiah 61 and then declared that ‘*today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*’ (Luke 4:21). The teaching of Jesus was like the compelling calling of the Old Testament prophets, not the man-made religious dogma of the scribal tradition. The Old Testament Scriptures pointed forward to the coming of Christ so when He expounded them from the synagogue pulpit, He spoke about Himself, the King whose throne would be established forever (2 Sam 7:13). Notice this important truth: the teaching of Jesus is directly connected to His person.

We have many examples of the uncommonly authoritative teaching of Christ in the gospels. He expressed complex deep truths about the nature of God and mankind and the reality of the Kingdom of God. His teaching is so profound and memorable that many people today, even in our secular society, have heard His Word even though they may well not identify it as His teaching. For example in well-known phrases such as: “*The truth will set you free*” (John 8:32); “*Do to others as you would have them do to you*” (Luke 6:31 - NIV); “*Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Matt 6:34).

Jesus expressed the glory, majesty and ‘otherworldliness’ of the Kingdom of God in many parables; ‘earthly short stories with a heavenly meaning’. In His gospel, Mark includes the parables of the sower, the growing seed and the mustard seed to teach the way in which the Kingdom of God grows as people hear the word, accept it and bear fruit. In His teaching ministry, Jesus was The ultimate Fisher of men.

His preaching was powerful, Word-based, Christ-centred and therefore had an authority unlike any worldly message. Those who heard His teaching were greatly affected; either being drawn to Him, or rejecting Him, as the people of Nazareth did in their synagogue (Luke 4:16-30). Jesus had the authority to compel His hearers to make decisions: Do you believe me to be who I am? Will you repent of your sins and believe in the gospel? Will you follow me as one of my disciples? Teaching the truth of God with authority is uncommon in our society today, just as it was in the synagogues where Jesus taught.

Jesus called his first four disciples with authority to follow Him. He later spoke to the 11 disciples after His resurrection and before He ascended into heaven saying: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*." (Matt 28:18-20).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we who have repented and believed the gospel, we have the authority of Christ to teach the uncommonly heard truth about our Lord and Saviour to all who will listen to us. This is the means by which God is pleased to expand and complete His Kingdom in preparation for the return of the King. The authority of Christ is seen in His calling of His disciples, His compelling teaching and in His powerful healing, which brings us to our third point.

1. **Jesus commands the broken creation (23-28)**

I vividly remember the day a tall Aboriginal man entered the church building in Alice Springs, Australia, where I was leading a worship service. His presence was intimidating, and he threated violence. I thought about going to grab the baseball bat that the missionary I was filling in for kept behind the front door. Instead, I asked everyone to pray, and the situation defused without any physical harm. The man left the building. We later found out that he had just been released from prison and was high on drugs. I wish we could have helped him find relief from the prison of his confused mind and soul.

That day in Capernaum, when Jesus was teaching, there was a disruption to the service when a man with an unclean spirit cried out ‘*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?*’ (Mark 1:23) All unclean, evil, spirits mentioned in Scripture are demons who oppose God. They are lesser beings in the kingdom of Satan. Unclean spirits can possess people, causing them sickness and harm. Evil spirits promote wickedness in human beings, spiritually polluting a person’s thoughts and actions. The unseen spiritual realm is an abiding reality in this world in which the ‘spiritual forces of evil’ wrestle with people like us as they serve Satan’s schemes (Eph 6:12).

It is difficult for us to put any particular illness today into the category of definitely being due to an unclean spirit possessing a person. We need to be careful neither to assume that mental illness is a consequence of demon possession nor that such possession by evil spirits is a phenomenon only of the past. We should therefore expect that there is demon possession taking place in some individual people in the world today and that this will present as evil thoughts, motives and behaviour in the possessed. Any diagnosis we make in a particular situation must necessarily be tentative and uncertain because we do not have the specific insight that the Scriptures reveal in cases like the man in Capernaum.

It is very clear from Mark’s gospel that Jesus cast out many demons from many people during His ministry (e.g. Mark 1:34; 39). It has been suggested that there was much greater demonic activity at the time that the Kingdom of God approached with the public ministry of Christ. It makes sense that the increased opposition to Satan’s work with the coming of Jesus resulted in the Devil’s evil minions being more active than at other stages in history. We know for certain that the man who cried out in the synagogue in Capernaum had an unclean spirit because the Bible, God’s breathed-out Word, tells us so. The demon expressed fear in the presence of the greater power of Jesus asking, “*have you come to destroy us?*’ (1:24). There was a common belief in Bible times that using the precise name of an enemy gave control over that individual or spirit. So when the demon declares “*I know who you are – the Holy One of God*” (1:24) this was not a confession of belief, but rather a defensive strategy to exercise authority over Jesus.

It is very clear from Mark’s gospel that it is Jesus who has authority over the spiritual realm. He rebuked the unclean spirit in the synagogue saying, “*Be silent, and come out of him!*” (1:25). Mark also makes a general observation about the silencing of demons by Christ, writing in v34 “*he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him*”. Jesus has complete authority over the invisible world of spirits, and He also has complete authority over the visible world of people with physical bodies. After leaving the synagogue, he went to Simon’s house and healed his mother from a fever (v29-31). News about this clearly spread rapidly in Capernaum, so that by nightfall many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus, and he healed many.

Mark reveals in the few words of our text today the comprehensive authority of Jesus over the brokenness of creation – both in the spiritual and physical realms. The kingdom of God is the realm where ultimately all sickness will be healed, and all citizens there returned to wholeness, health and harmony. The healing starts in the spiritual realm as God makes His people alive in Christ (Eph 2:5), saving them by grace through faith.

Spiritual and physical sickness abound in the broken world around us – we are confronted by it every day. We cannot ourselves ‘*heal many who are sick with various diseases and cast out many demons*’, but we can show people the Christ who can. The full authority of Christ over the creation is not yet seen on this earth, but will be known by all humanity when He returns and ‘*every knee will bow…and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*’ (Phil 2:10-11)

Regularly listening to the Word of God expounded in the church where the gospel is proclaimed, and all sermons are ‘Christ-centred’, equips us to be able to proclaim the uncommon truth about our Lord to a world desperately in need of the treasure over which we are stewards. The call to discipleship is a costly call (Mark 8:34) as we follow Jesus in His mission to ‘*seek and save the lost*’ (Luke 19:10) by being fishers of men.

Jesus has the authority to compel you and me to make decisions, such as: Do you believe Christ to be who He is? Will you repent of your sins and believe in the gospel? Will you follow Jesus as one of His disciples? Will you be a ‘fisher of men’ proclaiming Christ and calling people to ‘repent and believe the gospel’?

AMEN.