

The one outside the camp.
Mark 1:21

Isaiah 53

Matthew 8:1-17

Responsive. Psalm 46:1-7

So today we are going to be picking up where we left off last week which is the beginning of Jesus teaching and healing ministry after he had gathered his disciples. Picking up here in verse 21 and reading to verse 28. So for those of you keeping notes, last week we wrapped up what could be considered as the Preliminary of Jesus' ministry recorded here in Mark. It was the setup, the preparation for Jesus' ministry here in Galilee. It was in this section that we read about John the Baptist who was the one that Isaiah prophesied about calling him the one crying in the wilderness to make the ways straight for the coming Messiah. It is also here that we saw the baptism of Jesus by John, and the temptation of Christ and the 40 days in the wilderness. Then the calling of his disciples, and now we are moving on to the Beginning of Jesus' Galilean Ministry.

We see here that the first place that Jesus went was to the synagogue on the sabbath. It was here that the Israelite would gather to hear scripture read, and to listen to the scribes teach. On the Sabbath this would be the place to be, this is where many people gathered for they would be observing the Mosaic Law, and Jesus himself, being a Jew would naturally attend such a gathering. But He was not like others who would come and read the scriptures and teach. When Jesus taught, it was not as the scribes, but he taught as one having authority. If we go over to the book of Luke, chapter 4 we can see exactly what Jesus taught here and why they would be so astonished with his teaching. Chapter 4, verse 16. "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah, and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written; The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because HE has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Then HE closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

So it is easy to see why they would be astonished at his teaching. He was claiming that this scripture was written about Him, and they are now witnessing the fulfillment of it. He stood before them claiming to be the messiah. Scribes would stand before the synagogue and quote well known Rabbi's but Jesus' after reading or quoting scripture often said, "But I say to you." Putting himself as the ultimate authority over scripture and superseding all the teachings that had come before him. So it is easy to see why those in religious authority over Israel hated him, for he challenged their authority, corrected their teaching, and rebuked their actions.

But as we see Jesus didn't just teach with authority, but he also acted with authority over both the natural and spiritual realms. Casting out demon's and healing the sick. Mark records Jesus casting out an unclean spirit while at the synagogue, verse 23. "Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, Let us alone! What have we to do with you Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God! Notice this man with an unclean spirit was hanging around at the synagogue, and was known by all the others who were attending.

The reactions of those who witnessed this was not in astonishment at the man with the unclean spirit, but of Christ's power over it. We see their reaction in verse 27, it says “ They were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.

It is interesting to note, and there is a lot of speculation as to why it appears that demonic activity was on the rise during the time of Jesus' ministry. There are more recorded instances of demon possession during this time in the bible than any other. But instead of diving into speculation, and theories we can see what Jesus says about it in Matthew chapter 12. verse 22. “ Then one was brought to him who was demon possessed, blind and mute, and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, Could this be the Son of David? Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. But Jesus knew their thought's and said to them. Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself can not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself, How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, but whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

And I think that is key to understand this question, Why there appears to be more demonic possession during the life of Christ than any other recorded time in scripture. It was for the declaration that the Kingdom of God has come. The Messiah was here, the one who had authority over life and death, who even the demon's recognized and were afraid and trembled asking, “have you come to destroy us?” They knew that their time was limited, and believed that their time was coming to an end. There was a change, something new, the Messiah was here. The purpose of these signs and wonders was the show that what Jesus taught, was from God. The people who saw this were amazed and asked What kind of new doctrine is this?

Up until this point the Torah was taught by the scribes, These were those who were seen as the authority over the interpretation and understanding of scripture. Being the authority on Jewish Law, made them responsible for many different facets, they were teachers, they set the standards for morality, and would act as civil lawyers. Up until studying this I always thought that scribes were note takers, record keepers, and teachers, but it would appear that they were much more than that, with much greater authority not only in the Jewish faith, but also in the community and government. Scribes were highly respected, the best seats in the synagogues were reserved for them, and people would stand when one would enter a room. So when you have this relative nobody, a carpenter from Nazereth, standing and reading scripture and offering teaching and interpretation with authority that I am sure would amaze, and upset a lot of people. The Scribes claimed authority from the tradition of their elders, but here we have Jesus claiming the Authority of God himself.

And we see in Marks recording of this, that the people recognized that there was something different going on here, that this was something new. What was new was what Christ was claiming. The kingdom has come, it is at hand. Throughout the old testament the coming messiah was prophesied, saying that he would be coming to establish a never ending kingdom that we read about last week, one that will stand forever and will not be handed down to another. There was a change, there was something new, the kingdom had come, and it's king was standing before them revealing himself to them. But as we see in the following verses this created some difficulty.

Starting in verse 29. “ Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told him about her at once. So he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them. At evening, when the sun had set they brought to him all who were sick and those who were demon possessed. And the whole city was gathered at his door.”

There are a few things to point out here. 1st off is that Peter was married. It was his wife's mother who was had a fever. This shows that there is no support for the idea of a celibate priesthood. Peter, who became the head of the church in Israel was married. 2Nd, is the effectiveness of Jesus healing ministry. Mark says all the city had gathered and Jesus healed many, Matthew says that he healed all who came. So there is no way for us to really know how many were healed but that is not the important part, what is important is that there were not any he was unable to heal. Also of note is the method that we see Jesus use in his healing. He did not cast a spell, or say an incantation as was popular of the healers of that day. Rather he just commanded the demon's to leave, or the illness to be gone. With Peter's mother in law, he went to her bedside, and helped her up. The healing of her fever, the casting out of demon's relied completely and only on Jesus himself, his touch, and his compassion.

Word spread quickly of his miraculous healing of the demon possessed man and everyone came out bringing with them those who were sick and demon possessed for him to heal. It would seem that people were gathering to see the miraculous signs, which is a typical reaction of mankind. To be enthralled by what we see, these signs and miracles were to be a proof of his authority, yet it became the thing that people sought him for. It would appear that for many it would become a stumbling block, something that was for them a distraction. Everywhere he went there was a crowd follow him asking for signs and waiting to witness more miracles.

But this is not why he had come. It would appear that because of this that Jesus said it was time to move on, realizing that people were seeking him for physical healing and he had come to preach. Looking at verse 36, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight he went out and departed to a solitary place and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him. When they found him they said to him, everyone is looking for you, but he said to them. Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.

An interesting thing about this account of of Simon Peter finding Jesus who had gone off in silence to pray telling him he should come back because everyone is looking for him. The word used that is translated to seeking, or looking for is *zetein*, which every time it is used it brings with it negative connotations. In all the uses of this word it connotes an attempt to control rather than an attempt to submit and follow. I am sure Christ's disciples were excited about everyone who was gathering to see Jesus, but it would appear that their enthusiasm and desire to capitalize on this new found fame actually put them at odds with his ministry. Hence Jesus response, Let us go to other towns so that I may preach there. Jesus accomplished that which he had set to accomplish there for that time and it was time to move on so others could hear his teaching

It would seem the way that Mark has recorded this that they pretty much snuck out of town, away from the crowd of people who were seeking him for more miracles, and they traveled around teaching and preaching in the surrounding synagogues. The teaching of Christ was primary and his healing and miracles were secondary, they served the purpose of showing that he had the authority that he was claiming.

That he had the power over creation, that he truly was the Son of God. Just as it was in his day, so it is today. People gathered around Jesus to be healed, to witness a miracle and we see the same thing today with people looking for a sign, or the so called healing ministries we see today. People gather around and flock to experience a miracle, and there are plenty of people out there who will take advantage of that, and it ends up being the focus, the signs, the miracles, the prophecies, the healings but Jesus said I have not come for that, I came to prepare the way for the kingdom of God, I have come to preach, and to teach.

Those who focus on the charismatic spiritual gifts seem to have the focus wrong, even the very Jesus Christ who's name they invoke was concerned not about the physical ailments of the people, but of the sin sick hearts that need his healing hand. Our focus should always be upon the word of God, upon his teaching. Not that the miraculous is unimportant, but it rather serves a gospel purpose for a gospel message. It is important to keep the main thing the main thing. It is the gospel that saves, it is the word of God that reconciles mankind to himself and that is no less miraculous then any of the sign gifts that we read about in scripture.

And that would be my argument against any such expressions of these sign gifts we see today. They scarcely if at all ever point to a gospel message, but rather it is about invoking the name of God for a physical deliverance. But even what we see here in Christ's ministry that such miracles and healings are secondary to the gospel message he was proclaiming.

Next we see here in verse 40 to the end of the chapter the account of Jesus healing the Leper. "Now a leper came to him, imploring him, kneeling down to him and saying to him, if you are willing you can make me clean. Then Jesus moved with compassion, stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him. I am willing, be cleansed. As soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. And he strictly warned him and send him away at once, and said to him See that you say nothing to anyone but go your way, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded as a testimony to them. However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places and they came to him from every direction."

Leprosy was a widespread disease of the time, and was a term used to cover many different skin diseases. In Leviticus there are 72 different afflictions that were defined as leprosy, from boils, to burns, ringworm, rashes and the like. This type of disease was not just an illness that one would have treated such as others. In the old testament Leprosy was was generally regarded as a divine punishment, to which could only be cured by God. Anyone inflicted with leprosy would be cast out of the camp, away from everyone, he must make himself known by wearing torn clothes and keeping his mouth and nose covered shouting unclean everywhere they went. This was all to facilitate limiting the spread of the disease but it had an effect of those afflicted loosing everything, their jobs, their family, their friends and the ability to worship in the synagogues and temples. They were seen as the walking dead, whose cure was so impossible it was likened to raising one back from the dead.

Yet here, we see this leper approach Jesus, something he was forbidden to do, they were required to stand at a distance of 50 paces. This action would have been very offensive, and against the law. Yet he came, approaching Jesus and asking to be cleansed. This leper risks everything, breaking both the law, and the customs on a chance that he could be healed and restored by Jesus. Even the law of the Torah itself was not going to stop him from coming to Jesus. Notice in the lepers plea, his faith that Jesus can heal him. He does not ask if he is able, but rather if he is willing. And we see Jesus response is not one of repulsion, or anger but of having compassion upon him.

And in fact instead of the normal reaction of retracting away from him, Jesus reaches out his hand and touches him, cleansing him of his affliction, renewing him, and in every sense, bringing him back from the dead, giving him a new life. While in this instance recorded here was a cleansing of a physical ailment, it has gospel truth written all over it. A soul that is sick with sin, that is dead in sin, is much like this leper. Outcast from God, unclean, infectious, but God in his compassion heals, he saves, he brings back to life those who are cast out and dead from trespasses and sin, reconciling them to God.

Notice that Jesus here in verse 44 instructed the leper to seek out a priest and to offer the required sacrifices for cleansing. Jesus did not discount the law, he did not ignore the Torah but instructed him to go through the rituals which Moses commanded. We do not have any record if he did this, but we do see that he did not listen to Jesus instruction to be silent, but rather he went and proclaimed it freely. And just like this leper, or the demon possessed, or the others who were sick and healed, the person whose sin has been forgiven and cleansed can not help but share of their deliverance! The word of Christ is the only thing that has to power to save, and it is Christ who reaches out and heals us much in the same way he did with the leper. Another parallel we can draw here with salvation and the healing of the leper is the effect that it had on Jesus himself.

First off, Jesus when he touched the leper he did not become unclean himself. To quote James Edwards he says, "Jesus compassion replaces contempt. Rather than turning away from the leper, Jesus turns toward him, and indeed touches him, bringing himself into full contact with the physical and ritual untouchable. The outstretched arm of Jesus is a long reach for his day, for any day. It removes the social, physical, and spiritual separations described in the Torah and custom alike. The touch of Jesus speaks more loudly than his words, and the words of Jesus touch the leper more deeply than any act of human love. Jesus is not only able, but desirous, I am willing he says, be cleaned. Unlike the ordinary rabbi, Jesus is not polluted by the leper's disease, rather, the leper is cleansed by the healing of Jesus contagious holiness.

When our sins are forgiven and taken from us and laid on the cross, it does not take away from Christ, he does not become unclean, he remains holy, without blemish and it is his holiness that infects and is imputed toward us. And finally in verse 45 we see the effect that this had on Jesus. It says that because of the leper freely proclaiming what had happened to him, Jesus was no longer able to openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places. The leper lived his life outside the city, outcast, and unwelcome but Jesus came, cleansed him and traded places with him. This is a beautiful picture of the salvific work of Christ, who came to us, from his throne in heaven to be beaten, outcast, and put to death so that his people, his children could be cleansed, reconciled and brought into the very presence of God. Christ went outside the camp, so that we may enter. He traded places with us, dying in our place, taking the disease of our sin and though without blemish, and holy himself took the punishment of that sin for us. Praise be to God for his mercy and love toward us.