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**That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.**

**(Mark 1:29–34)**

### Introduction

I recently spent several days in the what many describe as the most powerful city in the world: Washington D.C. I love visiting that city. It is soaked in history, much of which I am familiar. Many of the streets, buildings, and memorials are very meaningful to me. One of my favourite things to do in D.C. is to run the famous streets and to visit the various monuments and other places of historical note. I always run by the Korean War memorial, giving thanks to God for my father, who served during that conflict. Providentially, the day that I ran there, South and North Korea were apparently taking large strides towards ending that decades long standoff. Again, Washington is being credited with this historic event.

The authority of a nation with a loud economic voice, coupled with influential diplomatic power and a very intimidating military complex, can often move otherwise incalculable nations to bow. We might call this *raw* power rather than true *authority*. But in our passage, true authority is demonstrated by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His authority is innate, not derived. And it is being exercised in our day. I had the privilege of experiencing this on my recent visit to a very significant place in Washington D.C.: the Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC).

On what is considered the most influential hill in the world is a far more influential entity, though thousands merely pass it by without a thought. Capital Hill Baptist Church, under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, is impacting lives for eternity, both in its own community and around the world. In submission to the King of kings, they are exercising kingdom authority to the good of multitudes and to the glory of God.

This congregation consists of people from various walks of life who carry various levels of influence. Young adults are influencing one another to live for Jesus Christ; mothers and

fathers are influencing their children *to* and *for* Christ; politicians are taking Christ into the halls of government; men and women are seeking to impart gospel influence in the workplace; and lawyers are applying biblical principles towards a more just society. And, of course, all this influence is grounded and motivated and nourished by the gospel of God – the gospel that they hear every week from their pastors as they gather to worship.

One Monday morning, I sat with a brother, a member of CHBC, who also works for 9Marks, a ministry of that church. We sat in the church hall and talked about our desire in South Africa for the establishing of the ministry of Ekklessia Afrika. We did so in the context of 9Marks and how God is using that ministry, and particularly that local church, to impact the world.

I commented that it is amazing how, 24 years ago, the Lord began a work of reformation in that church, and the consequences are that thousands of churches around the world are being impacted for much good. This has not come about by Washingtonian raw power but rather by kingdom authority. This is the kind of authority that is available to every local church, including Brackenhurst Baptist Church. It is the kind of authority that we have experienced over the years. I trust that we will experience and exercise more of it for the good of others, to the glory of God.

But two questions remain: how and why? *How* can we experience and exercise this, and *why* should we do so? I trust that our text will help us to answer those questions in such a way that we will experience and exercise this authority. Ultimately, as Edwards notes, “If we want to know what the gospel or teaching of Jesus consists of, we are directed to its embodiment in Jesus the teacher.” We need to be worshippers of the King.

Our exercise of kingdom authority is inseparably dependent upon our relationship with the King, which is inseparably dependent upon our reverence for the King. This means that it is inseparably dependent upon our repentance demanded by the King. All of this is inseparably dependent upon our love for and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we saw previously, Jesus was demonstrating that he is “the Son of God” (v. 1). And he began in the very place that should have understood it, but, sadly, it was the very place where it was the most neglected: the synagogue, the gathering of those who professed to belong to God.

I have recently been reading slowly through the book of Acts, and it is illuminating to see how the synagogue continued to be a problem for those who acknowledged and submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ. The one place where you would think that his authority would be welcomed, it was not. In fact, it was demonically rejected (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1ff). As went the synagogue, so went the nation. And, one assumes, so went the home.

I understand that the synagogue is not an exact parallel to the church, but there are some important and instructive similarities. The synagogue, like the church, was an opportunity for religious gathering. The synagogue, like the church, provided the opportunity for teaching and practical instruction from God's Word. The synagogue, like the church, provided an opportunity for perspective during the challenges of exile. It offered fellowship that encouraged and reminded each other of God's promises and covenantal faithfulness; fellowship that strengthened the faith of the remnant of what God was up to – and what he was up to was his great and glorious commission (Genesis 12:1–3, etc.); fellowship that reminded one another of God's sovereign power/purposes; fellowship that helped one another to remember and to live in the light of God's authority.

The church, of course, functions for many of the same reasons. But it all depends on how seriously she respects and responds to the authority of Jesus Christ. To the degree that she does, she will be a blessing to the home and to the community at large.

### His Authority in the Congregation

In vv. 2–28, we see Christ's authority in the congregation. "Mark is placing an emphasis on the manner rather than the matter of Jesus' teaching" (Witherington). In other words, "a new teaching with authority" (v. 27) probably means, not that the teaching was new, but rather the old teaching that had something "new" – that is, authority.

Without repeating everything we considered previously, we need to note that there is an order to the demonstration of Jesus' authority: first, the church, then the home, and then the wider community (cf. Ephesians 5:18–6:9).

The congregation needs to be reached and reformed before there is much hope for the family and the community to be impacted. Jesus was leading his people on exodus from exile (see 2 Kings 25:21). So often this is the need when it comes to congregations that profess Christ. That is, his authority needs to be re-established, to be recognised.

Jesus has the authority to do as he pleases; he has the sovereign freedom to act. The church needs to recognise this. We need to hear his gospel message and submit to his order and discipline. The kingdom of God must be established among God's people. Only then can it spread, and, of course, it will spread only as people come to believe and then to belong as God's people. It is among God's people that the authority of Christ is first and foremost displayed. He demonstrates his power by delivering us from the domain of darkness to his kingdom.

As the congregation of God reverently and joyfully submits to the authority of Jesus Christ, the homes that are influenced by such a congregation will be so influenced. Then, and probably only then, will the community be so impacted.

### His Authority in the Home

In vv. 29–31, we learn about Jesus' authority in the home.

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

(Mark 1:29–31)

In this passage, we have the beautiful and tender scene of the Lord Jesus Christ exercising his authority over disease. Commanding fevers to leave a person is less dramatic than casting out devils, but no less miraculous. There is much to learn here, but first I want to offer a caveat.

This scene takes place in the home of one of Jesus' disciples. I do believe that this is significant. I do not believe it is an overreach to make the exegetical conclusion that Jesus is demonstrating his authority in the home of his disciples. In fact, this should be expected. God loves to save families. So, keep this in mind as we unpack these verses.

### Urgency

For the fifth of nine times in this opening chapter, Mark uses the word "immediately." After his ministry at the synagogue, he and his new disciples headed for home—for Peter and Andrew's home in Capernaum. Perhaps Jesus often found lodging here, for we know from the other Gospel writers that Capernaum became his home after he left Nazareth. Regardless, they went to their house and discovered that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with fever. She had a particular illness, a particular physical disease. And Jesus graciously healed her. He demonstrated his authority over disease. His authority reached as far as the curse is found.

A few of observations are in order.

### Married

It is hard to maintain the doctrine of the celibacy of the priesthood, including the pope, when the reputed first pope was married! Further, and more importantly, for Peter to follow Jesus would mean some cost in his marriage, in his home. Peter's wife apparently sometimes

travelled with him in his itinerant ministry (1 Corinthians 9:5). But I am sure that his apostolic and shepherding ministry at times put strain on that relationship. There were no doubt times of separation as he ministered – times of a busy schedule. Pastors' homes today are not the first to experience seasons of stress and separation, and they will not be the last.

A book I was reading recently – *A Dangerous Calling* by Paul Tripp – highlights the strain that many pastoral marriages experience. There are many reasons for this, but the point that I want to make is that those who serve the church, and those who serve it well, need to be prepared for their homes, for their family life to be disrupted at times. That includes, but is not limited to, those who are vocationally fulltime in the ministry.

It is so important that each of us who are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ are cognisant of the reality of the cost of following Jesus. Each of us needs to know that to serve Jesus, to follow him as those aspiring to be fishers of men, will be called upon at times to give up some family time: evenings, early mornings, disruptions due to hospitality, and emotional distractions because of burdens, etc. But lest you should be discouraged by this, note the next observation.

### Benefit

Peter's relationship with the Lord brought a benefit to his home and family. This is a legitimate observation and application of this text. It is perhaps not the main point, but a relevant point nonetheless. It might be a bit overstated, but there is truth in this that "the healing accomplished within Peter's home indicates that salvation had come to his house in response to the radical obedience he had manifested" (France).

As we will see again in Mark 5, when Jesus enters our life, there are collateral blessings that often flow to our families. As here. Jesus' authority to deliver, to save, to heal is not exclusively for the times when the congregation gathers. Rather, Jesus can do the same in our homes as well. As in this case. See also 1 Corinthians 7:12–14.

When Jesus comes home with us, the home is in a position to be greatly blessed. I am not suggesting that there is a guarantee that all our relatives will be saved, but I am acknowledging that when, Jesus comes home with us, our families are in a wonderful position to feel his healing influence.

I recently had the opportunity, for the first time since the death of my father, to spend time with my mom and all my siblings. It was wonderful, as we shared meals together, to not be the one asked to pray all the time. My brother prayed, my sisters prayed, and, yes, I sometimes prayed. During our high school years, I certainly would not have prayed with

the family, and I doubt many, if any, of my siblings would have. But, over the years, God has brought healing to the home and salvation to the family.

### Compassion

This account demonstrates not only the authority of Jesus, but also his compassion. This is a tender scene. We are not told if this was the reason for Peter's hospitality, but Jesus was quickly informed that his mother-in-law was sick. We are not told whether they had asked Jesus to do anything for her, but we read that Jesus "came, and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her." It must be noted that the healing was both instantaneous and complete. Today's "faith healers" should take close note of this.

This pericope is filled with compassion. The authority of Jesus is coupled with his compassion. He has a compassionate authority and an authoritative compassion. We should expect nothing less from God in the flesh (see Exodus 34:6; Psalms 78:38; 86:15; 11:4; 135:14; 145:8).

### Service

This woman's response to healing from Jesus is instructive: "She began to serve them." As a side note, remember that in the first century, an "orthodox" rabbi would not have allowed a woman to serve him, or to even be at the same table with him. We can see that the King is turning society upside down (right side up!).

*Serving* is the right response to being saved. Ferguson notes with his pastoral touch, "What Jesus did was to restore her to what she meant to be, a whole and healthy woman. Thus restored, she served Jesus and his disciples." We who have been made whole by the gospel are responsible to do nothing less.

This is the natural response to the grace of God shown to us. It is the biblically expected response to a reverent response to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are obligations to grace. God expects his people to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to him (Romans 12:1–2). These obligations are not *lawful* but *grateful* and *awe-ful*. That is, we serve out of deep gratitude for the kindness of God to us. To have a gratitude attitude is what God expects of us.

If serving is the expected response to a physical deliverance, how much more in response to our spiritual deliverance!

Perhaps one reason we struggle to consistently serve the Lord is because we fail to appreciate the destructive and deadly fever of sin from which we have been so graciously,

compassionately, and powerfully delivered. We need to reflect upon how deadly our condition was, how hopeless our condition was, how selective Jesus was in choosing to come to our house. If we reflected more upon these realities, then worship would arise with our service being more spontaneous. Again, Tripp makes the point, particularly to pastors, that worship of Christ is what is to drive our service. It is all too easy to lose sight of this.

### Home

The norm is for kingdom authority to move from the church to the home. Learn from this to entrust your family to Jesus. He is willing to make a difference in our homes. Trust him and obey him. In fact, make sure that you bring him home. Take him home when you leave the gathered church. Let him have a seat at your table when you gather for lunch. Take him with you when you discipline your children. Take him with you when you pray for those in your family who are not well. Who knows but that he might take them by the hand and lift them up, and the fever of sin, or the fever of a broken relationship, or even the fever of sickness may leave them.

### His Authority in the World

In vv. 32–34, we see Christ's display of kingdom authority in the world:

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

(Mark 1:32–34)

Strange things can happen after sundown. Often sinful things. I once received a text message from an unknown number, asking if I wanted to meet for sundowners "after 6 at Clifton Beach." (The person quickly responded when I informed him that he had the wrong number.) But in the narrative before us, *wonderful* and *supernatural* and *constructive* things happened. The timing is important because it identifies, for a Jewish person, that the Sabbath had passed.

It seems clear that these people had been indoctrinated by the (authority-less) scribes, and therefore they would only come for healing, or would only bring their loved ones for healing, *after* the Sabbath had passed. Very shortly, this would become a serious bone of contention between Jesus and the religious leaders. But let's not miss a very significant revelation. As Witherington notes, "Jesus' beginning his healing work on the Sabbath should be seen as a deliberate attempt to bring in that final Sabbath rest, a time when creation would be relieved not just of the toil and turmoil of a fallen world but of disease,

decay, and death as well...the ultimate Sabbath was coming.” And with that coming Sabbath, the effect will be gloriously good in its scope.

As word spread, and as the town became aware where Jesus was staying, they brought “all who were sick or oppressed by demons.” In fact, Mark writes, perhaps somewhat exaggeratingly, that “the whole city was gathered together at the door.” And Jesus compassionately and authoritatively responded. He exercised kingly authority over that which Satan and sin had brought into God’s good world. It is clear also that he cured or delivered all who came to him for help. What a wonderful truth! We have a glimpse here of God’s extravagant grace.

Yet we should also note that most who came to Jesus for healing did so with less than pure motives. “They come for relief from physical ailments, but Jesus came to preach the dominion of God” (Witherington). And as Hughes notes, “We should not be naïve about what was going on here: most of the people who came simply wanted something from Jesus.”

### Healing in Our Day?

In a recently published article, I mentioned Jack Deere, a fairly well-known theologian, who has undergone a major theological and pastoral shift in his ministry. He has embraced the viewpoint that the events in the Gospels, like the one before us, are repeatable in our day. He goes so far as to say that they *should* be repeated in our day.

He speaks of having healing lines in many of his preaching engagements where he testifies of how God has healed several of those who have participated. He is also frank that many of his friends have gotten sick and were not healed, in spite of much prayer and fasting.

More recently, a well-known and highly respected Reformed theologian, Sam Storms, has written a book arguing for the restoration of all the gifts mentioned in the book of Acts and 1 Corinthians. Included in his appeal is the gift of healing. He actually gives instructions how to go about such healing.

There are many in the Reformed movement who have embraced such a viewpoint. The question, of course, to answer is, should we expect the same kind of large-scale healing as demonstrated by the Lord Jesus and apparently as in the life of the early New Testament church? I believe that we need to tread this ground carefully.

On one hand, we dare not be flippantly dismissive. Many faithful brothers and sisters believe that we should expect such phenomena in our times. And some of these are astute and devoted students of Scripture. They accept the authority and sufficiency of Scripture as you do.



On the other hand, we need to carefully examine whether the New Testament gives us reason to assume that what Jesus did is what we are expected to do. I think not.

It is true that Jesus, shortly before his ascension, told his disciples that they would do greater works than he did (John 14:12–14). But what did he mean? Whatever he meant, it must apply to his disciples in the 21st century.

We need to see that Jesus was not speaking of miracles per se. Rather he was speaking of the miracle of the spread of the gospel and the growth of his church. This is the greatest work. It seems that too often we lose sight of this and so we can become unhealthily focused on physical healing. This is a mistake.

Yes, God heals. But let's be frank: He does not always (rarely, in fact) heal. And when he does, it is only temporary. Eventually, the healing will run its course and death will eventually gain what appears to be a victory. Even those who live well into the twilight years eventually die.

Healing in the book of Acts was rare. Paul left Trophimus sick, unable to effect healing (2 Timothy 4:20). He told Timothy to drink wine for his stomach, but didn't heal him. It is a mistake to assume that healing was widely occurring after Jesus' ascension.

We need to consider why Jesus healed. Yes, as we saw with Peter's mother-in-law, he healed because he was compassionate. But fundamentally, he healed to be *constructive*. That is, there was a higher purpose for healing. As we are seeing, he healed to show his authority over everything, including his authority over disease, the devil and even death. His healing was a foreshadowing of his yet future one day full and final healing.

Jesus will save all who come to him for salvation. And yes, ultimately, he will cure all who come to him—one day. There is coming a day when all who have died in Christ will be resurrected and will receive a new, glorious and sinless body. We will be "saved to sin no more," as the hymn writer put it. We will be saved to never be sick again; saved to never be spiritually oppressed no more. O glorious day!

So, what are our take-aways from this?

When we are sick, or when loved ones are sick, we should pray! James 5 makes this clear. Bring the authority of Jesus to bear on the matter. We can ask for advice from others, but ultimately we are in God's hands.

It is a glorious thing when God heals in answer to our prayers. We should boast in the Lord when he does. I love the observation of A. T. Robertson concerning this scene: "Peter no

doubt watched the beautiful scene with pride and gratitude as Jesus stood in the door and healed the great crowds in the glory of that sunset.”

Don't lose sight of what God is doing miraculously in the midst of his not healing miraculously. Learn from Paul's experience, as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12. There are many faithful saints whom God has chosen not to heal, but who have learned to trust him nevertheless.

Don't be on a crusade—one direction or the other! Keep focused on the promised healing that will cure all our sorrows. When we are confronted with demons and disease, we should think, “Gospel!” That is, we should think beyond the physical, while at the same time not ignoring the physical.

In our world, we continue to face Satan and sickness, devils and diseases, spiritual and physical challenges. Jesus continues to rule over all. What this does not mean is that Jesus will always deliver us in the same way in which he did these. But it does mean that we can rest assured that he is King, and his kingdom is both here and yet to come. The already-not-yet conviction.

Yes, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is King, and his rule and realm are the same today as when Mark recorded these events. But let *him* be King. Submit to his authority to heal, and to his authority not to heal.

### Silenced Spirits

For the second time in our text, we read of Jesus silencing evil spirits. In vv. 24–25, evil spirit testified that “Jesus of Nazareth” was “the Holy One of God.” Jesus silenced—literally, muzzled—him. Note that Jesus *commanded* the unclean spirits. This is what Kings do: They *command*.

There is a close connection between being demonised and being diseased. Both are the result of the fall. The kingdom of God clearly has something (a lot!) to do with turning back what has gone wrong. That is, it has a lot to do with deliverance and restoration. Jesus came to earth to bind the strong man, to defeat him completely. This is no doubt what he referred to when he told the disciples he saw Satan fall from heaven (Luke 10:18).

Contrary to many modern day deliverance ministries, “Jesus' defeat of the ‘strong man’ (3:27) is not at the expense of Satan's victims but on their behalf” (Edwards).

As earlier, Jesus here did “not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.” Of course, the looming question is, why? Note that, when it came to Jesus and the demons, he commanded them repeatedly to silence (vv. 25, 34). There is a sense in which the coming of

the King and kingdom was a secret. This will be fleshed out more when we enter chapter four. I am persuaded that there are perhaps four parts to the answer.

First, Jesus would not permit them to speak because the people were clearly not ready for the kind of King that he is. We have touched on this already. The Messiah they expected was one that would provide them with political deliverance rather with their most needed deliverance—from sin, guilt, and the wrath of God. Therefore, Jesus was avoiding being crowned King prematurely.

Second, it is possible that Jesus did not want an endorsement from the likes of demons. Yes, they believe and tremble (James 2:19), but they do not trust. Jesus desires the recognition of faith, not the recognition of fame. In other words, the kingdom has come, because the King had come, but the King did not allow the devils to be his heralds.

Third, related to the above, Jesus came as the servant of the Lord. In fact, we saw an allusion to this in the opening verse of Mark's first chapter. The servant of the Lord would come in humility, without fanfare. To allow the demons to "make him a star" would be counter to God's design. As Edwards so helpfully observes, "The faith of his disciples must be evoked through humility and ultimately through suffering. If one will not receive Jesus in this form, one will not receive Jesus in all his power and majesty."

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Jesus silenced the demons and forbade them from drawing attention to him because the key to him being crowned as King was the cross. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ was to be the means of the revelation of God as King. It was by his work on the cross that all the enemies of God and his people would be fully and finally defeated (Colossians 2:13–15; etc.).

Jesus came to die, not merely to deliver. Yes, the two are inseparable but the latter requires the former. Without the cross, there could be no ultimate cure. In fact, all of these people who were healed in Capernaum would, and did, eventually die. But because Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, because he then died on the cross for sinners who could not live a perfect life, and because he rose from the dead, those who believe in him ultimately will *never die* (John 11:23–27).

My friend, the purpose of these little narratives is to show us the authority of the person of Jesus Christ. It is not primarily his teaching that we need (though we need it!), and it is not primarily his marvellous miracles of healing that we need (though we are grateful for them!). No, we need *him*! We need the King. We need his authority to say to us, "Your sins are forgiven" (2:8–12). And he has this authority. And the proof is in the empty tomb.

Jesus is the holy One of God. He is the Saviour of the world. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And today he has come to this congregation to seek you, to save you. He has come to deliver you from God's judgement of your sin. He has come today, and is using numerous of his disciples to "fish" for you.

He wants to fish you out of the sea of God's just and impending wrath. He uses the Word to cast the net to rescue you, to bring you to the shore of God's grace and mercy. What will be your response? Will you exercise saving faith or will you, like those in Capernaum, merely be a religiously superficial fan?

Young person, Jesus has come to your home through your believing parents. What will be your response? Do not reject him. Do not merely give him a polite nod. Do not merely try to use him as you pray for your exams or for a spouse or for whatever. Rather, bow to him as Lord and Saviour. Bow to him as King of kings and as Lord of lords – as *your* King and Lord.

Christian, think about our opportunity to fish for men. The one who has all authority in heaven and on earth has sent us with a derived authority to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples. Like Peter and Andrew, may our homes become places where people can meet Jesus. May our homes be places where people sense the presence of the King. May our homes, our workplaces, and wherever we have contact with people be places for us to introduce others to Jesus, the Holy One of God who has come to seek and to save – with all authority – the lost.

### To Save the World

These pericopes are important to the purpose of Mark. He is describing the kingship of Jesus. The King rules, the King establishes his realm. The gospel of God makes a difference spiritually and socially. Jesus Christ came to redeem sinners. This is a holistic mission. The promise of a glorified body and a glorified earth makes this abundantly clear. In the meantime, we should focus on reforming the world – that is, preach the gospel and expect collateral blessings. It is when the gospel is preached and believed that the devil and his devils are defeated.

It is clear from this passage that it is a false dichotomy to say that the church should "just preach the gospel." Clearly there are social, physical, material consequences to repentance and faith (vv. 14–15). We should beware of an unbiblical Gnosticism in which the salvation of the soul somehow minimises the entirety of the person.

If we embrace such Gnosticism, we end up with the nonsense that we evangelicals are embroiled with today: arguing against the importance of social justice as a responsibility of

the church. Clearly, for Jesus, a strong evidence of the arrival of the good news of God's reign included the promise of improved conditions. But this is precisely where we need to be careful. Already-and-not-yet is a biblical principle to keep in mind. Tim Chester helpfully writes, "Repentance is not just moral or spiritual change but a total change of life. It has social implications and these cannot be denied."

This is inseparably connected to the authority of Jesus, the King of kings. Let us submit to him, in our congregation and in our homes, and may the community come to do so as a result.

AMEN