

# **Sermon: Authority of the Holy Spirit**

## **Mark 1:21-28**

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We are all, every now and then, confronted with negative forces beyond our control. That can be sickness, divorce, economic crisis, a gas bottle explosion, gossip, problems at work, political problems, anything. There is no escaping from it. Life is full of pitfalls that are out of our hands

And in such situations, we all, instinctively, yearn for someone with authority to take charge, to make the situation good again. A doctor we can trust, a minister of economy who knows what to do, a strong man who can say to the nation, "This is the way." Or a psychiatrist, who with certainty, can show us the way forward.

Or better yet, imagine that God would grant us the authority to understand our own circumstances and to think and act wisely, to help our own lives and to help others. Wouldn't that be great!

### **1. Teaching with authority**

In Galilee, in the city of Capernaum Jesus strode onto the stage. He preached in the synagogue. With the authority of the Holy Spirit. That is not the same as having done a course in public speaking and learning how to deliver a message skillfully. Jesus had a far different authority. He had true insight and he spoke directly into the hearts and lives of people.

The Jewish synagogue was primarily a teaching institution but it did not have a permanent preacher or teacher. When the people met on the Sabbath the Ruler of the Synagogue was free to call on any competent person there, to preach after the reading of the Scriptures.

When Jesus taught in the Synagogue the whole method and impression of his teaching was a new revelation. Jesus did not teach like the Jewish theologians, the scribes.

These theologians knew the laws of Moses, and they were the keepers of all the orally transmitted explanations of those laws. No scribe would ever dare to teach his own personal views. He would always begin with qualifying statements like, "There is a

teaching from such and such Rabbi that we have to do this and this." So he would only teach and preach what the great theologians of the past had taught in the past.

How different Jesus was! When he spoke, he spoke as if he needed no authority beyond himself. He spoke with utter independence. He cited no authorities and quoted no experts as he explained the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures and he applied it to the people that had true power.

He spoke with the finality of the voice of God. To the people this was like a breeze from heaven, it was the Spirit of God touching them.

We see this, for instance, when Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount. He used the Jewish Scriptures as the basis, but he was different from other teachers, for he spoke in his own name: "The elders have said in the past, but I say to you".

The apostle Mark, in the first 20 verses of his Gospel, shows us from where Jesus had received his authority.

> In verse 1 Jesus is called the Son of God.

> In verse 8, we read that Jesus will baptize those who believe in him with the Holy Spirit. This means that Jesus has the divine power to send that Spirit of God to us, his church.

> We also see, in verse 10-11, that at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus received this Holy Spirit for empowerment, while the voice of God the Father spoke from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.'

> We read in verse 12 that the Spirit of God led Jesus into the desert, where he was tempted by the devil. Jesus knew the power of the Holy Scriptures and quoted from them in order to withstand the temptations of the devil. And Jesus did not sin. Ever.

He was God the Son, living in unison with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and he was a perfect, sinless human being as well.

No wonder he could speak with authority. He knew his true divine identity, and he had a message from God - directly from the Holy Spirit, who filled his mind and his heart as the perfect temple of the Spirit.

The people in the synagogue were thunderstruck. I can imagine their amazement: "He really speaks powerfully into our lives". But I think the people also asked themselves, "Who does this man think he is, to ignore all of our theologians and our theological history. Did he actually go to seminary?"

## **2. Command unclean spirits with authority**

Then, as if Jesus wanted to demonstrate that he was truly entitled to speak with authority, he did something to prove that his authority was not an empty pretension, or merely based on psychological tricks to impress his audience.

Jesus drove an unclean spirit out of a man who was attending the meeting in the synagogue. Not by lengthy incantations and rituals, not with a lot of hocus-pocus, but simply by his powerful command.

The same authority that Jesus showed in his teaching was also seen in his actions.

I do not believe we can reduce this language about unclean spirits, or demons, that we find everywhere in the Old Testament and the New Testament, to what people nowadays often, condescendingly, call a 'primitive worldview'.

The medical doctor, Paul Tournier in *A Doctor's Casebook* writes, "Doubtless there are many doctors who in their struggle against disease have had, like me, the feeling that they were confronting, not something passive, but a clever and resourceful enemy."

The Bible speaks of evil spirits with a personality of their own. Sometimes you stare evil in the eye - take Daesh (Islamic State) or Hitler or those who perpetrated the genocide of Armenia, or other truly wicked people. Then it is not enough to say that these people were pitiful or had no chances in life, or that they suffered from a moral deficit.

Evil has a face, a personality and it seems to be able to hold people in its grip, even against their will.

And if the Lord and his apostles accepted the existence of unclean spirits and acted accordingly, then I have no reason to disbelieve.

However, even if we believe Jesus "only" confronted mental illness like Multiple Personality Disorders and such, then he still did quite a miraculous job to heal those people with just a few powerful words. Modern psychiatrists need decades and lots of pills for helping such people.

If only Jesus did this today! Next week I will focus on this issue of health and healing today. If only we would not need modern psychiatrists or doctors, would that not be nice?

Jesus simply spoke a word of power, "leave". The man went into convulsions, and then he was at peace. No wonder the people were dumbfounded and wonder, "Who is this!?"

It is no wonder that the fame of this Jesus, who spoke and acted with absolute authority, spread so fast. If you knew someone who speaks words from God to your heart, and who heals your diseases, would you not talk about him to family and friends? We all need such a person to make our lives better!

### **3. Our authority**

In Matthew 28, at the end of his time on earth, Jesus reminded his followers, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me", and immediately he told them to go into the world and to teach the nations to follow Him and to obey him.

Jesus tells his church - all of us - to be his mouth and hands in the world. We cannot do this without the same presence of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had. Because only the presence of God gives us power to face life and the deep insight - to know what to say and what to do.

We must be honest however. Often the idea of reaching out to others goes far beyond our abilities. We are so busy fighting the 'demons' inside us. Looking for answers, trying to understand ourselves. Dealing with our misery and our problematic inclinations.

If only this authority of Jesus would help ourselves in the first place.

There are segments of Christianity, especially on the charismatic side, where there is a lot of talk about the Authority of the Holy Spirit. They assume that the authority Jesus had, is also given to us. Often they relate this to spectacular events or experiences. And to shouting.

You gather, that is not my cup of tea. So I decided to give you an example of what such radical charismatics say about the authority given by the Holy Spirit to us, some

really nice fanatical example to make us smile. So in google I typed "Christian authority Holy Spirit". And the top result?

"A Christian's authority comes from the Holy Spirit, not from human wisdom or degrees in theology", said Pope Francis at morning Mass Tuesday, as he explained that Christian identity is having the Spirit of Christ, not the "spirit of the world".

We must not allow extreme views of some to drive us away from this subject that is really important for all of us.

As a church, we are the Temple of the Spirit. As part of this church, you are also, individually, temples of the Spirit. God lives in you. He lives in your life.

And this very fact means that there must be something of the power and wisdom of Jesus in you. Often we do not understand ourselves well, do we? But our starting point can always be: I am a child of God, He will enable me with power and wisdom.

He does this in order for you to live your own life as a Christian and as a balanced human being - - and also for you to mean something special for other people by being the voice and the hand of God for them.

This strength and wisdom - call it authority - is not something you receive at any special moment in time, and then you have it as a sort of deposit in your life. From our first day as a Christian, it is always dependent on our daily relationship with God, because our strength and wisdom comes from Him. The Authority of the Holy Spirit is not a special gifting or miraculous experience, but rather, the power and wisdom that is only received in relationship with Him.

So that is where our focus should be - on knowing God, relating to God, through Jesus Christ. Insofar as we are closely linked to Him, we will understand ourselves better, understand our world better, and be a better friend to those around us.

Being close to the Spirit of God enables us to know ourselves, and to speak with real insight about God and help other people to also move forward in life. This is the authority of the believer.

## **Conclusion**

As we seek to understand the teaching of Christ, and the authority of the Spirit in our lives, there are two important things to remember.

First, Jesus' identity was deeply related to the Word of God. He is the Word of God. We should likewise let our identity be marked by the Word of God. A child of God listens to the Word of his or her Father. So we listen well to the written word, and to Jesus Christ, the living Word himself.

To know your Bible is utterly essential. In the mirror of the Bible we see Jesus and we get to know our own identity. That is why in the time of Lent, I will give you a Bible reading schedule, to read through the four Gospels during that period.

Jesus himself knew his Bible, and it was his Bible that helped him understand better who he was. We see the extent of his knowledge of the Scriptures when the devil tempted him to let go of his divine mission, and Jesus quoted from his Bible and resisted the temptation to disobey God.

And that is the second important aspect in developing our identity as carriers of the Holy Spirit. We will never be perfect as Jesus in this life, but our goal must always be to obey. To live a life of love for God and others.

We stumble much. Every week we receive God's forgiveness here in church, and every moment of the day as we ask God to forgive us our trespasses. Until our dying day.

But our life is also marked by a desire to get closer to God, toward more obedience. Our identity as children of God should become ever more visible.

We are temples of the Spirit who lives in us. If we develop this identity more, we will experience more wisdom and power, enabling us to make the right choices, to give people good advice, to be the voice of God for other people.

And this, friends, is how the Gospel has spread over our world. Through the authority God has given to all Christians. Not just to professional missionaries. It is really through normal Temples of the Spirit, like you and I, normal Christians, who go into the world to love and serve the Lord.

**Amen**