

## Teaching in the Synagogue - Mark 1:21-28

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Our story today takes place very close to our story last week. Mark says it takes place "immediately" after our last story. Jesus and His new full-time disciples (Simon, Andrew, James, and John) go into the city of **Capernaum**. This town was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. There was a **synagogue** here, which is where our story today takes place. Since this is the setting for our story, we will begin by trying to imagine what it was like going to a synagogue in Jesus' day. The word "synagogue" means "a gathering together". It was more like "church" than a temple. There were no sacrifices offered and it was not run by priests. In fact, a synagogue was built by the common Jewish people. Anywhere there were at least 10 adult males, a synagogue could be built. One of these men was chosen to be the "ruler" or "chief officer". This person's responsibility was similar to that of an elder. They coordinated who would be reading the scheduled text from the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as well as who would read a selection from the Prophets. There was also a "chazzan" or "lesser officer" whose role was similar to that of a deacon.

During the service in the **synagogue** the seating was segregated. The men (12 years and older) sat on one side while the women and children sat on the other. Each synagogue had an ark or chest where the rolls of the Law and the Prophets were kept. There was also a desk where the one reading would sit. It was these weekly services that kept the Jews as a distinct people in the Roman Empire. It helped to preserve their heritage. It was after Babylonian captivity that they were begun. After the captivity, the Jews voluntarily scattered throughout the Roman Empire. And wherever they settled, there they built a synagogue. In Paul's missionary journeys he found synagogues throughout Asia Minor in places like Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Cyprus. Each week the Law and Prophets were read and taught. Each service would customarily begin with a recitation of the Shema. The most well-known part of the Shema is **Deut. 6:4-9**. Let us read it together. These are sacred words, full of truth. Surely, they must have kept alive the Jews' realization of who they were as a people.

So now, let's begin with our **story** for today:

*Jesus, along with Simon, Andrew, James, and John, attended the Sabbath service at the synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus was asked to teach. While He was teaching, an unclean spirit interrupted Him. Jesus commanded the spirit to come out of the man. When the people saw the spirit submit to Jesus' command, they were amazed and spread the news throughout Galilee.*

There are several **individuals** in our story. First is Jesus. Simon, Andrew, James, and John are also present. Although not mentioned by name, they are included in "they" of Mark 1:21. Then there were the people who came to the service in the synagogue. One of these is mentioned specifically - the man with the unclean spirit. And last of all, there's the unclean spirit. We do not have time today to consider the experiences of each of these individuals. We will only look at the experiences of Jesus and the man with the unclean spirit. So, you may want to read through this story again this afternoon and try imagining what the others experienced in our story.

So what does **Jesus** experience in our story today? **First**, He experiences an open door. The ruler of the synagogue has invited Him to teach! It's a perfect setting. First, the Law & the Prophets are His choice of material to teach on. These are the writings that testify of Himself. What a perfect opportunity to reveal Himself as the fulfillment of these writings! Second, He has an attentive audience. He's somebody new.

Perhaps people have heard of His recent healing in Capernaum (John 4:46-54). If so, He must have drawn quite a crowd. What a great opportunity for all these people to hear Him reveal from the Law and the Prophets that the "kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). **Second**, Jesus experiences a personal attack. In the middle of His discourse He is interrupted by none other than one of Satan's sidekicks. The same enemy Jesus faced in the wilderness has returned to confront Him in "church"! Like in the wilderness, Satan's goal is to derail Jesus' ministry. He is angered by the "open door" that Jesus has been given, and he acts now in order to slam it shut. His means this time is an "unclean spirit". It seems an interesting way to describe a demon. We might rather say an evil spirit. But in the Jewish culture to be unclean was to be an outcast. According to Leviticus 7:21 if a Jew touched anything unclean, he was cut off from his people. So, an unclean spirit was an alien spirit as opposed to the Spirit from God. You may ask, "What is an unclean spirit doing in church?" The unclean spirit could go anywhere his subject went. There is no physical location where you are automatically safe from the evil one. Only those who have surrendered themselves to the Holy Spirit's control are safe. Notice what the unclean spirit says to Jesus. (Read **Mark 1:24**) This is none other than a personal attack on Jesus by the unclean spirit. Either an imperative directed at Jesus or the word "You" is found in every sentence the spirit makes. He is trying to bring Jesus down. He is trying to derail Jesus' ministry in Galilee just as in Judea.

So, Jesus experiences an open door, but this is quickly followed by a personal attack. What else does Jesus experience in our story? **Third**, He sets a man free. In this story we see the "kingdom of God" vs. the "kingdom of Satan". Jesus is the "kingdom of God". This unclean spirit has set up the "kingdom of Satan". The unclean spirit wants to prevent the entrance of the "kingdom of God". But the unclean spirit is defeated. His kingdom is destroyed. He is forced to leave his subject. Indeed, this is why Jesus has come – to overthrow the "kingdom of Satan" and set up the "kingdom of God". And as a result, He sets a man free. What an awesome experience this must have been for Jesus. Jesus now experiences **popularity**. The people have been astonished by His teaching. They have been amazed by His authority. They can't believe what they have seen. They are so excited, they leave the synagogue and tell everyone they meet what happened. It isn't long before the whole area around Galilee has heard the news. Mark says this happened "immediately" (Mark 1:28). Just a few days before Jesus was rejected in Judea. And now He is riding a wave of popularity in Galilee. But you know what? Neither rejection nor popularity changed Jesus. John talks about this in his gospel (John 2:23-25). Jesus knew the heart of man. One day they would praise Him. But the next day they might be trying to stone Him. Man by nature is very erratic. Anyone who tries to ride the wave of popularity gets dropped sooner or later.

So, this is what Jesus experienced in our story. What about the **man** with the unclean spirit? Well, by way of introduction, it is interesting to see the prevalence of demon possession in these days. In the book Desire of Ages pages 256-257 it says, "The period of Christ's personal ministry among men was the time of greatest activity for the forces of the kingdom of darkness." At this time in history, Satan and his angels were having a hay day. Why was this? It was a result of the absence of God's Word. Oh, it was read every week, but the scribes did not lift it up before the people as their source for truth. Instead they criticized what it said and speculated about this or that. They disregarded different parts as being the final authority. In place of God's Word the elevated their own ideas and traditions. It's no wonder the people were tired of the teaching of the scribes and so moved by Jesus' teaching. He taught the Scriptures as if they were the end of discussion. Everything was clear. Whereas with the scribes it was clear as mud. People left feeling worse than when they came.

So, with that background, let's consider the experience of the unfortunate man with the unclean spirit. Indeed it was a traumatic experience. He had probably come to find some hope. He probably wanted to be free from

this unclean spirit and hoped he might hear something that would help him. Maybe he even hoped Jesus could deliver him. Anyway, he's there behaving himself. He's listening to Jesus. He's not bothering anyone. Then at one point perhaps he is so moved by what Jesus is saying that he tries to voice his thoughts, but instead the unclean spirit speaks. Surely this must have torn him up inside. How could he ever hope to be free if the spirit wouldn't even allow him to talk? Hopelessness must have settled on him like a dark cloud. And then how could he not have been embarrassed? Everyone probably tried to get away from him as fast as they could.

But alas, Someone dares to confront the evil spirit. Someone shows authority over the spirit. An authority he had lost. What hope it must have given him to hear Jesus rebuke the unclean spirit: "Be quiet! And come out of him!" Suddenly, his relief is turned to fear. The spirit begins to violently "convulse" him. This word translated "convulse" was used by medical people to describe the convulsive action of the stomach in retching. Surely this man fear for his life. But then just as quickly as it had begun, the violence ends. Finally, this man experiences peace. He is in control of his own mind. He can think clearly again. Who can doubt that this man loved Jesus for this great deliverance. No one else had been able to help him. Jesus gave him hope. He gave him his life back. Surely, he was never the same again.

So, how does this story reveal Jesus as our perfect example of a healthy and dangerous Christian? First, I believe this story reveals Jesus as our example in that He **attended a Sabbath gathering**. Surely no one knows more about the Sabbath than we do, right? Well, I probably shouldn't assume anything. The word translated Sabbath means "intermission". It is from a root word meaning "to repose". So it's a pause at the end of a work week. The first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible is in Ex. 16:23-30. Exodus 16 is an interesting story. You may want to read it this afternoon. In this story we learn a few things about the Sabbath. First of all the Lord refers to the Sabbath as holy. Second, the Sabbath is the seventh-day. And third, it is a day rest. Notice, though, what the Lord says in **verse 28** (read). Some of the Israelites chose not to rest on the Sabbath. And the Lord is not happy with them. He says, "How long are you guys going to keep breaking the Sabbath?" Which tells us that the Sabbath pre-dates this story. In fact, it's most likely pointing us all the way back to Creation in Genesis 2:1-3, where the Lord rests on the seventh-day.

So, Jesus attends a Sabbath gathering. He doesn't spend the day on His own. He doesn't go off and do His own thing. He joins the present-day services. Certainly there were plenty of things Jesus could have complained about regarding the way the services were conducted. But He didn't. He went there because that's where God's Word was read and taught. I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who attends Sabbath gatherings. They get together with other believers on the seventh-day of the week. There is one main reason for this gathering – to hear God's Word read and taught.

Second, I believe this story reveals Jesus as our example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He **believed God's Word is the final word**. He didn't quote other theologians. His discourse didn't have pages of references. His source for teaching truth was God's Word. He believed God's Word ends the discussion. He believed that it defines truth. This is why people were astonished at His teaching. He spoke with authority. He didn't leave you wondering what God's Word meant. He presented it clearly. And He spoke as if it was THE TRUTH. Period. End of discussion. I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who builds their life on God's Word. There is no gap between my life and what the Bible says. What I read in God's Word directs how I live. Not my culture. Not my opinions. Not my preacher. God's Word directs how I live. I don't believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is filled with doubts and confusion when they read the Bible. The Spirit reveals it clearly so they can build their life on it.

Last of all, I believe this story reveals Jesus as an example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He **was not afraid of the unclean spirit**. In fact, He removed the spirit from his place of reign. He exercised authority over him. I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who is not afraid to engage the enemy. They are free from the fear of evil. Turn with me to **Luke 10:19**. Jesus is speaking to His disciples. (Read) Jesus has set us free from fear of our enemy. Who is our enemy? Satan. (He mentions him by name in verse 18) I praise God for this. I spent so much of my life in fear of Satan. But in Jesus Christ I am free from it. I have mentioned Paul before as an example of a dangerous Christian. In Acts 16 a slave girl is possessed by an unclean spirit (Luke calls it a "spirit of divination".) She has been following Paul and his companions for many days being a real nuisance. Finally, Paul gets tired of it, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says to the spirit in verse 18, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And the spirit left! Praise God! The Spirit of God gave Paul authority over the spirit of divination. And He has given us that same authority. Jude 9 is often used to teach that we shouldn't talk to evil spirits. It says Michael the archangel was contending with the devil over Moses' body. Instead of entering into debate with him, Michael says, "The Lord rebuke you!" This verse isn't saying we shouldn't talk to evil spirits. It's saying we shouldn't enter into dialogue with them. We shouldn't try to reason with or argue with one. I believe God has called us to be bold in engaging our enemy. He has given us authority over him. Praise God!

Our story reveals quite a **church service**, does it not? I don't think anyone there expected this to happen at their synagogue that Sabbath (except Jesus). What happened that day was a supernatural experience. I believe God wants every Sabbath gathering to be a supernatural experience. The ingredients are very simple. There are only two things that made this service a supernatural experience - the Word of God and the Spirit of God. When these two things come together, watch out. There will be an explosion. They are a dangerous combination. It is my prayer that every time we come to church here these two things will come together – the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Every service will be a supernatural experience, like in our story today. I will not leave this place the same person. Something supernatural will have taken place in my heart. I will become a healthy and dangerous Christian. I want this experience more than anything else. If this is your desire, as well, I invite you to stand.