

Exorcisms and Healings

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[0 : 0 0] As weird as it feels to take this off and as good as it feels, there it is. Okay, let me see. You see I'm juggling a lot up here. The reason is, I just wanted to say, my name is Skylar Scholl, as you heard, this is my first full sermon, solo sermon, and live sermon.

Thank you, I appreciate that. So I just wanted to give a shout out to my family that are watching in Cincinnati that I brought the Bible I was given, you know, when I graduated kindergarten. It looks like it's been through a hurricane, but I thought it would be good to bring it.

And the family Bible with the little family trees and such that I was given when years ago I came to D.C. to come here for law school and stayed. So those had some special meanings, so I want to give a shout out to the family.

Where are we? So we're in a series on Mark, and we haven't even left the first chapter, and it's amazing how much is packed and condensed in the first 20 verses, right?

Today we're going to tackle chapter 1, verses 21 through 28. So we've only had, we've had all these great things happen. So let's recap. So Mark, right at the beginning in verse 1, makes this bold announcement of Jesus' arrival.

[1 : 1 5] He references Isaiah, so he pulls in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Scriptures, and, you know, connects and ties that story arc together that we know about. Then John the Baptist prepares the way, right?

He makes the announcement about Jesus and says, one greater than I is coming, repent, all these things that we know and we've heard in recent weeks. Then John baptizes Jesus.

At first, John doesn't know what to think about that. He thinks, I'm not worthy to do that. You should baptize me, but that's the plan. And, of course, God speaks in the form of the dove and, you know, makes it very clear that Jesus is his son and he's well-pleased.

Then Jesus enters the wilderness. He's tempted by Satan. We come through that. Big deal, not to minimize that. And then we've just wrapped up last week with Jesus calling the apostles to a new life and a new mission, as Pastor Richard shared with us last week.

So that's where we're at. Next slide, please. Okay. So we need a little context for today. So basically what we're talking about is Jesus, according to Mark, you know, the first sort of bold maneuver, the first Jesus and the apostles, you know, coming onto the scene in the meeting place in the temple in Capernaum, which you may know is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and one of the bigger, more bustling cities at the time, I believe.

[2 : 3 7] So, you know, a lot happening, a lot going on. And as far as context, it's important to realize that at this time, Jews ideally would all go to Jerusalem to the temple.

There was one temple. But because that wasn't practical, especially when you had to essentially walk everywhere or at best ride a mule or a horse or something, if you live far enough away, your neighborhood might create your own temple.

And I believe the guideline was if there were 10 or more families that were in need or wanted to, they would come together and form their own temple. Now, as you can imagine, the further you got from Jerusalem or a big city, you would tend to have essentially de facto rabbis or guest rabbis or teachers come and stand in and perhaps those traveling maybe on a circuit.

So there was always a lot of people coming through, sharing those duties. And no doubt they were eager to hear from Jesus as other new folks on the scene. And, you know, there's a certain novelty and excitement for what this new person might say.

Little do they know what's coming, right? So that's the context for today. Next slide, please. Okay, so I'll read the scripture.

[3 : 50] And I apologize. Let me back up just a second. Let me pray us in before we go too far. This is a good place to stop for that. Lord, we thank you for this time together to come together, to see each other, for fellowship, to learn, to praise you, to sing.

And we just pray that the message comes out today as you would like it, that I get out of the way of the message and that it can impact and touch those of us gathered here.

We thank you in Jesus' name. Thank you. I heard some amens. That's good. Okay, so here we go. Jesus drives out an impure spirit. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Next slide, please. Okay. Next slide, please.

The people were also amazed that they asked each other, what is this, a new teaching and with authority? He even gives orders to impure spirits, and they obey him.

[5 : 18] News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. So again, you know, another person passing through that's going to guest teach, if you will, guest preach, and boom.

Jesus blows the lid off of things, right? That's what he does. Next slide, please. So there's some takeaways right here in these couple verses. The people were amazed.

They weren't impressed. They weren't intrigued. They were amazed. This was like nothing. This is somebody different teaching because he taught as one who had authority.

And as you might know, at that time, there were people around that had knowledge and would teach, but they would say, well, this teacher, this rabbi greater than I, or perhaps even invoke Moses or Elijah or other prophets say, you know, they said.

So it's a way to back yourself up, right? To give authority to what you're saying because, you know, if you're new on the scene or you're, you know, who are you? But, you know, Moses, Elijah, some renowned rabbi, that's authority, right?

[6 : 21] But Jesus didn't do that. He had authority. He didn't borrow authority. He didn't invoke authority. He was authority. He had authority. Living, breathing authority.

Not as the teachers of law. So Mark goes out of his way here to contrast that, right? He mentions that very specifically. That's a point that I think Mark wants us to really get. And the next we hear at the end of the passage, people were so amazed.

They weren't intrigued. They were amazed. They weren't just amazed. They were so amazed that they asked each other. And I think this is important. The more I thought about this, they didn't seem to run to ask the experts of the day, right?

Jesus had just sort of toasted all these sort of, you know, I don't know that they were pretentious, but these experts that really didn't have this authority. So they asked each other. And my guess is they were so astounded by Jesus and less impressed with the average teacher that rolled through that they started talking amongst each other, perhaps, right?

Instead of going to the experts to figure this out. I think that's interesting. We have to read between the lines a little bit, but I think that might have been what happened. And what is this, right?

[7 : 30] There's a questioning of we're not even sure this is amazing. This is novel. This is great. We're not even really sure exactly what this is. And a new teaching goes along with this, right?

This wasn't just the best or better of some teachers who have been around lately. This was new. We don't even know what this is exactly. And with authority, of course.

Then he gives orders, right? Again, something else to distinguish Jesus from the other folks that had come through and taught. And impure spirits obey him, right?

Orders obeying, amazement, authority. These are all big things. They're new. And Mark really wants us to take these away. Okay. Next slide, please. Okay.

Okay. Some implications and connections of this for us today. So, and I think this is particularly meaningful and timely in a time of such turmoil in the world.

[8 : 29] Not that the world hasn't had its share through history, but between COVID, economic situations, the environment, how underrepresented people are treated. Like, there's so much going on here.

That's why I want us to focus on Jesus is really in charge here. Unlike we are, or, you know, sometimes we pretend to be. But let's be honest. Are we really in charge ever?

Even of our own lives, of our own homes, of our own jobs, of our, sometimes even our own pets. If you have a squirrely dog like we do. So, he has complete clarity.

Jesus answers all the questions, teaches with authority. And if you read between the lines, there's extreme clarity, which is lacking in every other source that we've heard. Because those are purely human sources, right?

And I don't know about you. I'll acknowledge this if it doesn't leave this room and the interwebs that it's being broadcast out to across the world. So, you know, I don't always have 100% clarity on everything in my life.

[9 : 29] I don't know about you. Anybody? An amen? Oh, our first amen. Thank you. Thank you. See, we got it. We're rolling. It's good. Okay. So, I don't. Perhaps you don't. I'm guessing you don't being human.

But Jesus does. The authority, the clarity. He's in charge. He's not rude or boisterous. He's direct when confronted, right? By evil, by the enemy. But, again, clarity is in charge.

And then complete focus. Has anybody had this COVID era or, in general, just brain fog? Does that happen to anybody? Yeah? Amen?

Okay. Yeah. It's just, ah, right? Well, Jesus doesn't. And I think that's worth noting. You know, so there's so many differences from our daily life.

And also, Jesus is bold, of course, as you see up there. But I think this is interesting for us today because, just like they were traveling sort of experts back then, and a lot of people claiming to be the Messiah because everyone was so hopeful for one, right?

[10 : 27] They were desperate for one, you know, with the empire, the Roman Empire, you know, clamping down and just disease, poverty, awful things in ways that we probably haven't experienced as a society here.

That the analog today, I think, is anytime you're on the web, whether it's YouTube or whatever, TV, we're bombarded, and it doesn't have to be late-night infomercials, just with experts, right?

Experts on this diet, on that diet, on how to get smarter, on how to cut brain fog. Like, there's a million experts, right? But we're awash in them, and, you know, there's just, a dime a dozen, and I would compare that somewhat, in some small way, it's analogous to back then, with all the folks claiming they had the solution to all the problems of the Jews in, you know, in Judea at that time.

So I think that's one way to connect it back to today and relate. Next slide, please. Was there anything I forgot, though?

Was there anything else that happened in that passage? It was noteworthy? Anybody see anything else? I think I covered most of it, but anything else? Any ideas, anything maybe I missed? No?

[11 : 39] Okay. Let's see. Next slide, please. Maybe there was one more thing. Next slide, please. Pay off. I don't know.

Maybe there's an exorcism? Anybody miss that? Nobody really missed that, did they? I was toying around with you. A little red herring. Yes, an exorcism.

All caps. There was an exorcism. Oh, gosh. My first sermon, right? What else would I take but an exorcism? A light, simple topic, right? Where all the ancient thinking and modern thinking are completely harmonized.

Simple. Next slide, please. Where would we even start? That's what I've been thinking about for a few weeks. Where would I even start?

Lordy. Lordy. Okay. Let's try it. So, a modern perspective. Demon possession versus mental illness, right? That is terribly interesting.

[12 : 38] It's important. And you can come at that from so many disciplines. Theology, philosophy, neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, pharmacology. The list goes on, right?

But it can be a little bit of a distraction or a red herring because, well, first of all, it occurred to me that even if it was mental illness, as we understand it today, it really afflicted this man.

It was gone. Jesus spoke a few words and it was gone. So, it's a miracle either way. I mean, so at the least we have a miracle.

At a bare minimum, we have a miracle. And perhaps more. So, let's start with a miracle and see what's on top of that. So, I think that's important, right? And then let's think about Mark as the author's perspective and purpose.

Despite what we may or may not think of today, you know, and as C.S. Lewis said, we may have some chronological snobbery, which is this idea that because we come later in time, we must know better.

[13 : 39] We must know more. And that's, you know, not to diss science. I'm very engaged with it and believe in it, but it's something to think about. But anyways, Mark's perspective. Mark, in my opinion, it seems that Mark and commentators, it seems that what Mark did, that to Mark, this wasn't about mental illness merely.

May have been there and there too, because the whole point of this is an identification called out of Jesus. Jesus is being called out by evil that is uncomfortable in Jesus' presence.

It's uncomfortable. This is sort of a defense, an offense being used as a defense, right? Why are you here? What are you going to do? You know, I'm kind of big and bad, but actually, the truth is, I'm terrified. I don't know what your plans are.

They're probably not good for me, is what the spirit's thinking, right? So I think from Mark's perspective, what Mark is trying to get out, I don't think that's what Mark is saying. And like I alluded to earlier, are we missing the point if we focus too much on the exact science of this from our contemporary perspective?

Does the question distract us from deeper meaning? Next slide, please. So here's what I'm getting at. I believe, and here's the message, one of, if not the main takeaway, I think we tend to think of possession and exorcism far too narrowly today, far too dramatically, and far too exotically, right?

[15 : 07] This is something that if it happens, it happens in some exotic place. It happens on a Hollywood soundstage or in CGI. And that's it.

You know, we don't, most of us don't have a connection to that. But I'll tell you, here are some more subtle examples of evil as a contagion, as something, you know, swirling around us at times out in the world.

So one, violence and mob behavior, right? Talk about racial, gender, religions-based violence, violent mobs, like we saw on January 6th. You know, a couple stones throw from here.

Talk about getting real, right? But that's a little more obvious, right? That's a little more obvious. I think what I really want to focus on today is the second point, the day-to-day subtle, less dramatic ways that we can allow evil in that's little and simmers and find ourselves essentially possessed or collaborating, whether we realize it, whether it's conscious, and how that's not dramatic, like the exorcist.

Nobody's head is necessarily spinning. You know, despite that film being based here in town, I hope Noah's is. But every time we give a kernel, a seed, a foothold, a greed, envy, jealousy, obsession of money, fame, anger, addictions, us versus in politics, right?

[16 : 36] This is where it creeps into our lives. And this is where, in subtle ways, we can be possessed, whether we realize it or not. I want you to think, thank you, I want you to think of possession as a continuum, not as binary, not necessarily a switch, like you see in a movie or not, all or nothing.

It's subtle and it's on a continuum, a gradient. Next slide, please. Okay. Okay. In other words, our long journey to be more Christ-like is our acceptance of and trust in a collaboration with God that is like a slow, gradual, non-linear, two steps forward, one back sometimes, exorcism slash healing process.

A healing from all of the evils in life that are big and dramatic, as we see in the movies, perhaps, like what happened at the Capitol. That's pretty big and dramatic.

That's clearly evil. But often in more subtle, small ways that possess us, right? And the opposite is somewhat true. When we give into these things that simmer in us that are evil, those are also something of a collaboration, wittingly or not.

Next slide, please. So let's zoom out to the bigger picture. How does this connect to the story arc of the Bible, to this era that Jesus started by coming here to repair the world, repair the reality that we experience, and maybe others too, to make the world, to make creation right again, right?

[18 : 08] So you'll see this mirrors a statement I just had about each one of us. Each one of us are a microcosm for what's happening with creation and reality as we know it. So it's also creation's long journey to be more as God intended, like a slow, gradual, nonlinear exorcism slash healing process, healing from all the evils in creation in our world that are in big and dramatic ways, and more often in subtle, small ways that possess creation in our world.

There's a parallelism there. Next slide, please. Thank you. Okay. Time for metaphor analogy to drive the point home. Hit the congregation over the head.

And vampires, what else? Right? So to be fair, you know, one example of vampires like 1931, like Bela Lugosi, if you saw that, I mean, you'd be like, are you going to a Halloween party?

What is this? Right? And if you saw somebody doing that, you probably would walk the other way. You'd probably be okay, right? And say, I don't know. But what about more contemporary, more attractive vampires and things that might possess us?

What do we think? Next slide. Okay, great. So the subtle, the mundane, the charming, right? Everyday evil that can possess us. Vampires can seem harmless. They can seem charming like we know them in more modern context.

[19 : 25] I don't know if any of you have seen The Lost Boys, a great movie from the late 80s. It's Kiefer Sutherland, The Quarry. You know, it's a classic. If you haven't seen it, see it. But it's about a gang of bad vampires and some good vampires.

And then there's a leader of the bad vampires. And anyways, the reason I raise that is the, and we had a video clip that for technical reasons didn't work out. But the head vampire, when there's a confrontation and the good people know what's going on, he makes a statement to them about, and I'll play, it's very brief, a statement about vampires and inviting evil into your life and how things can snowball.

So let's see if this will work. Don't ever invite a vampire into your house, you silly boy. It's brief. Let's do it.

Don't ever invite a vampire into your house, you silly boy. So I couldn't have put it better. And the vampire, as he's doing it, he's wearing a suit.

You know, his hair is combed. You know, he's not monstrous. But it just drives home my point I'm trying to make here of there are things that don't seem ugly at first, that seem inviting, that seem enticing, you know, evil, whether it's whether it's a fringe to the left, to the right, or any other direction, some extreme political website, perhaps, or something that, you know, doesn't smell quite right, doesn't smell kosher.

[20 : 51] But, you know, your friend's like, oh, you know, check that out. And then, you know, who knows? So we've got to be on our guard. Let's see. Okay. Next slide, please. Sorry, I just...

Okay. So it's time to get personal. You know, just one of those times I did something foolish and embarrassing and was humbled by it. So I may not have an insightful and witty and brief story, but I'll give you the one I've got.

So to give you an example of how in the not-too-distant past, the last couple years, I felt and can relate to, and perhaps you can, that feeling of anger, jealousy, of essentially evil welling up in you.

And I don't know if any of you have had that where you may not have instantly sort of rebuked it or stepped away from it. You may have let it simmer for a little bit, you know, and by doing so, unwittingly perhaps collaborated.

So my better half, Katie, is in the back. She's given me permission to share the story. So we live in Columbia Heights, and one night we looked out our window, and, you know, we're fairly close to the street, and there was a neighbor of ours who we had known to have some anger issues or perhaps substance abuse, you know, I'm not sure.

[22 : 07] But he was in an argument with what appeared to be a rideshare driver, an older gentleman, and they were arguing. And, of course, we were kind of concerned. And as it got more boisterous and he started, you know, touching him, we called the police.

They didn't seem to be too concerned, interestingly enough. But, you know, we did what we could. But then I started getting, you know, we were both worried, but I started getting sort of agitated about it, like I've got to do something.

Not that I wanted to get in a fight or I'm someone who fights or something, but just like if I go out there and show them like they're on camera or I distract them, I don't know. Like I wasn't thinking straight, but I just felt like this evil is happening right next to me and I've got to try to do something, right?

I don't know what. And Katie said, look, you've called the police. Stay in here. You know, she was kind of the voice of reason. And I got more and more spooled up. And before I knew it, I left this swirling sort of negative energy of this evil going on right outside my window.

It felt like it infected me almost, you know, like I said some harsh things to her. I, of course, apologize and she's forgiven me, but I became like for a few minutes a jerk, not a couple seconds, but a few minutes.

[23 : 12] Now, it doesn't seem like a long time, but it can be an eternity when you're saying awful things to someone you love. So if you've ever felt that feeling where you're not as in control as you want to be with anger, jealousy, et cetera, you might have invited in or maybe unwittingly, at least in some small way, collaborating with that evil.

So it's an example of mine. Next slide, please. Okay, so let's land the plane, as they say. So an invitation. I want you to invite yourself to take comfort in God's, as you saw Jesus demonstrate, authority, clarity, focus to free you from personal everyday demons.

And while you're at it, cut yourself some slack, right? Stuff isn't easy. And the challenge. Next slide, please. Okay, so this is really important. Starting tonight, today, this week, what small steps can you take?

To let evil get a toehold, get a foot in your door, your life, your household? What is it you can work on? How can you find ways to not unwittingly collaborate or give comfort to the enemy, to evil, right?

How can you do that? How can you not let it have a safe place, not let you be a host, for it is a virus analogy? So that's something to think about. What can you do? What can you do? Thank you.