

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
February 1, 2015

Pastor Michael Ewart  
Sermon Text: Mark 1:21-28

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

### **Amazing Authority**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have discovered who Jesus is. He has called us to follow and he makes us his instrument to invite others to follow him. So two weeks ago I challenged you to invite someone to “Come and See.” And I have to tell you that last Sunday night I had a hard time falling asleep because I was so excited at how many of you did invite someone to “Come and See.” I can’t remember the last time we had so many guests at church. I actually had trouble falling asleep last Sunday night I was so excited. Keep looking for those opportunities to invite someone to come and see!

Last week we heard Jesus’ call to follow him with total commitment. Elisha was called to a prophet of God. He burned his farm equipment and followed God calling, leaving everything and everyone behind. God is our creator. God saved us at the greatest personal cost: his own Son on a cross. He connected us to him by faith which the Holy Spirit created. He deserves our total commitment.

Now today we’re going to reinforce these truths. We’re going to work on framing and structure that keeps our faith strong. We’re going to do that by marveling at the amazing authority of Jesus.

My goal today is that you will leave amazed, that is, absolutely astounded by the authority of Jesus. But here’s the challenge:

We have become a people who are very hard to impress. The advent of computer generated graphics and extreme action movies seems to have numbed us to what is truly spectacular and amazing. Watching a trapeze artist in a circus used to keep people at the edge of their seats, now it’s a yawn. Yet there is this paradox. Advertisers are so striving to catch your attention that they overhype their products using superlative, over-the-top positive words to describe their products. And this type of speech has become common in every day usage as well. Pretty much anything we approve of is called “awesome” and incredible. If awesome and incredible are used to describe a flavor of ice cream or ... what words are left to describe the birth of your first child? Or

We have saturated our modern speech with expressions of awe and amazement... to the point that the words are losing their meaning. Bruno Mars sings of a girl who is simply amazing... just the way she is. I suppose that’s possible... I guess I’d have to meet her, but it sounds like an exaggerated use of “amazing.”

So here’s the issue: We are less amazed than ever, yet we use extreme positive words in our everyday language more than ever. That’s what makes it a challenge for us to talk about the *amazing* authority of Jesus today. We have a double whammy. Amazing has lost its amazement, and we have lost our ability to be amazed.

But my goal for today is that you’ll cut through this cultural clutter and you will truly see Jesus’ authority for what it truly is: amazing. And here is why this is so important: Unless we are amazed by his authority, we will be inattentive to his instruction. Passionless about his person.

Neutral about his nature . Faltering about our forgiveness. And calloused to his call. Being amazed as his authority is vital.

For us to be amazed at his authority, we will need to see a demonstration of his authority. Today Jesus will floor us with authority over *demons*.

Just mentioning the words *demons* forces us to make another pause. “Wait a minute, pastor! Are you telling me you believe red, horned spirit-beings that oppose God and tempt us to do evil?” Short answer: yes. Well, minus the red and horned part. That part is the imaginings of artists. But do I absolutely do believe there are spirit-beings created by God who are more powerful than us but less powerful than God. They inhabit the spiritual realm and so we typically do not see them unless God specifically gives them a mission that requires them to be seen. I believe there are good spirit-beings who serve God and do his will. I believe there are evil ones who have rebelled against God and plot, scheme and work to oppose and foil God’s will.

I believe all these things because the Bible specifically talks about everything I just mentioned, and I am convinced that the Bible is the true word of God.

“Well, where is the empirical proof of their existence?” If they are non-corporeal beings that live in a realm beyond our senses and beyond scientific measure, then we would not expect nor find definitive proof of their existence. They by definition dwell outside the realm of observation, and therefore outside the realm of science.

And yet a very high percentage of people today from various cultures around the world have a belief in angels and demons. In fact, in modern day America, nearly 8 out of 10 people believe in the existence of angels. This is a startling number considering only 4 out of 10 believe God created the world as it currently exists within the last 10,000 years. Well, it must be the older crowd skewing the numbers, right?

Another poll questioned 18-29 year-olds asking whether they believe in the notion that invisible, non-corporeal entities called “demons” can take partial or total control of human beings? Survey says: 63% believe in this.

But the bottom line is, believe it or not, spirit beings called angels and demons are real. They do have influence in our world. They do have real power... in fact power well beyond what human beings have. They do not listen to us or submit to us or our commands. We have absolutely no authority over them.

But Jesus does.

Mark 1:21-28. Jesus is just beginning his public ministry. **21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came** [Saturday, the Jewish day of worship], **Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.** [The synagogue was something that developed when the Jewish people were in exile from the promised land. They were somewhat like a congregation: a group of people that met together to worship, read the word of God and be instructed in it, and pray. To form a synagogue there had to be at least 10 men. Synagogues were found in nearly every town and village, including areas outside of Israel where Jews settled. Many towns had multiple synagogues.

It was common that when the scrolls were read at Saturday worship, a rabbi would expound on the reading and teach about it. It was also common to give that honor to a travelling rabbi if he was in the area. This is the situation we have before us at the synagogue in Capernaum.

Listen how the people responded to Jesus’ teaching:

**22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.**

So this is the first time our text will say the people were amazed at Jesus authority... as second is coming up. This first time it was in relation to his teaching. Jesus taught and they sat that

their thinking “Whoa! No one ever taught us like this! His teaching is unique. We’ve never heard anything like it!” And what made it unique? It wasn’t his *engaging storytelling*. It wasn’t his *warmth* that caught their attention. It wasn’t how *dynamic* he was. It wasn’t even that he taught something *new*. What amazed them was the *authority* with which he taught.

When the other rabbis taught, they would quote different rabbis and their opinions about what it really meant and how it should be applied. They would teach their opinion, but they weren’t really sure. They taught as ones NOT having authority. They just gave various opinions, and, well, who really knows?

But when Jesus taught, it was different. Jesus was definitive and unequivocal. When Jesus spoke, he said what God said. Period. The people recognized the difference immediately.

But here’s the question that may have lingered in the minds of the hearers. He is teaching *like* one having authority. But does he *really* have authority? The definitive answer comes next: **23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”**

Is demon possession real? The definitive answer is here. Yes. That said, perhaps we should note that in the Old Testament there are no recorded instances of demon possession. And in the New Testament era, the incidences of demon possession are clustered around the time of Christ and shortly after. It would appear the demons typically prefer to hide and let people pretend that they aren’t real and don’t have power. But with the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, they are in dismay. They are in confusion. They know this is bad news for them, but they don’t know how to stop it. Also, when in the presence of Jesus, it seems they couldn’t keep their presence hidden any longer. They were forced out into the open.

And so this demon, who you will note is actually in church, finds himself in the presence and of the Son of God. And this demon cries out. He screams. That also seems to be characteristic of the demons when confronted by the Son of God. They scream. They are terrified of him. They know he has all authority over them.

And so this demon immediately recognizes and publicly identifies Jesus: **“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”** Note the detail they reveal. See what they *know*. They call him by name: Jesus of Nazareth. They recognize his power to destroy them. They also recognize him as the Holy One of God. Jesus is perfect and pure. All he did lined was good and right and pure, and they knew it. He was the only one on planet earth who never succumbed to a single temptation.

Note how they feel in his presence: Terrified. Apprehensive. Powerless. Helpless. At his whim. Now how does Jesus respond?

**25 “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” 26 The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.**

This would not be the only time Jesus told a demon to be quiet. He did not want the testimony of demons. At his command there was silence. The second command; “Come out of him!” And again the results were instantaneous. The evil spirit shook the man violently... perhaps he went into convulsions... and came out of him with a shriek.

Note the incredible power of Jesus Word. There was no exorcism here as we have seen in the movies. There was no elaborate ritual, the sprinkling of holy water, the prayers repeated again and again. Jesus said the Word, and the demon had no choice but to immediately obey. The poor possessed man had been powerless against the demon. And now Jesus, the greater authority, showed without question that the demon was powerless against him. Jesus spoke. The demon left.

As we sang in the beginning of the service today (v.3) *Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him.*

**27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.**

The people who recognized that Jesus taught as if he had authority. Then they saw that his Word has power over demons, and all doubt was removed. When he gives orders to evil spirits... they have no choice but to obey. Jesus reveals his authority and his identity: He truly is the Son of God in human flesh. He reveals his purpose: to do battle with Satan, demons and all evil forces. He came to destroy them and render them powerless against us.

He completed that work by continuing to be the Holy One to the end. Never sinning. The Accuser wants to bring his charges against us before God. “They are guilty!” But Jesus went to the cross for us and paid our sin debt in full. Sin is atoned for. The demons have no more charge against us. They are impotent and powerless because Jesus kept the law. He paid for sin. He rose from the dead. He assures us of our resurrection. “Our victory is one. The kingdom’s ours forever.”

Do you see the amazing authority of Jesus. It’s amazing in the fullest sense of the word! When Jesus speaks – and all of God’s Word is really Jesus speaking – recognize the authority! When it speaks about the law - God’s will and his commands for your life – understand that this is absolute authority. His law is unchangeable. When he speaks the good news, recognize that the forgiveness of Jesus given to all who repent is real, factual and true.

When we recognize the amazing authority of Jesus, it creates in us a desire to be total dedicated to this one with all authority. It creates in us a desire to bring other to come and see this one with amazing authority. It motivates us to love and to serve this one with amazing authority.

Go today amazed, floored, in awe, wrecked, assured, rejoicing ... knowing and seeing the authority of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.