

Have you ever driven by a construction site and for weeks it seemed like nothing was happening except dirt being pushed around and maybe some concrete being poured, but then all of a sudden you noticed that the building was nearly finished?

Maybe you've also been keeping track of my pace through Mark's gospel, calculating that at around five verses a week, we'll be spending the next three years in Mark! Well, as I read the rest of chapter 1 this morning, hopefully that put your mind at ease! We've laid the foundations; now the building will start to go up more quickly.

That illustration also works not just for how fast we'll get through Mark, but for what we see in today's text, as well. The first two episodes, the exorcism in 21-28, and the healing in 29-31, introduce two new aspects of Jesus' ministry. We've seen that He's a herald, announcing the kingdom, and that He's a prophet, calling disciples to follow Him. And as we see here, he's an *exorcist*, who drives out evil spirits with a word of command, and He's a *healer* who restores physical health to sick bodies.

And as soon as those foundational categories are set, Mark records a massive rush of sick and oppressed people crowding around Jesus, starting in v. 32, and continuing throughout the rest of the gospel. ministry. Jesus' ministry has *taken off*.

As far as structure goes, verses 21-38 cover one day, a Sabbath day, giving us something of "a day in the life of Jesus." Verses 40-45 continue Jesus' healing work, but form a bridge to the next section by introducing the topics of the priests and the law of Moses, changing the tune into a slightly ominous key as Jesus offers up His ministry for official review. The people love him; they're crowding around him for more. But what will the priests and other leaders think of what Jesus is doing? We'll start to see their response and the beginnings of conflict in chapter 2.

But in today's text, we see Jesus' ministry *explode* in popularity. People are clamoring after him, because of what he does on this Sabbath day in Capernaum.

It begins with a sermon. Jesus went to worship in the synagogue, and took the opportunity to read and explain the Scriptures. And as soon as Jesus began to teach, the people were astonished, because Jesus taught from the Bible *as if He wrote it*. This was a very different kind of preaching than they were used to: the scribes, because of the time they spent copying and studying the Scriptures, were the usual preachers, but when they started preaching, it sounded like this: "As Rabbi Joseph said, who learned from his Master Hilkiah, who was taught by the Rabbi Asher," and so on. The scribes very plainly taught with *borrowed* authority. Jesus taught with *His own* authority, as if He got His message *directly* from God Himself.

Now, what happened next was pretty crazy. Since I've been preaching, I've had children go into meltdown mode, I've had forgotten cell phones go off, I've had a tree fall down in the parking lot, I've had medical emergencies, I've heard some pretty impressive sneezes, and of course you all remember the day when we had to chase a mouse around until he met the business end of a Cantus. But I've never had an unclean spirit interrupt me and accuse me of destroying Satan's kingdom! Something to hope for, I guess.

So far, Mark has told us who Jesus is in the introduction, God has spoken from heaven that Jesus is His beloved Son, but the first character *within the story* to know who Jesus is is a demon: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God!" Not only that, but he also has a good idea of Jesus' mission: "Have you come to destroy us?" Jesus responds by rebuking him: "Shut up and get out!" And with a final convulsion and scream, the unclean spirit came out! This is what Mark wants you to know: Jesus has the authority to speak for God, and to cast out Satan. His authority to speak for God is proven by His ability to overcome this evil spirit with a word.

And like the crowd at the synagogue that day, we need to admire Jesus' power: "*What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him!*" Who can do this? What teacher, what leader, what politician, what doctor can do this? The people who were there recognized divine power and authority, and you should, too. And like them, you should spread His fame far and wide.

After the exorcism, Jesus went to Peter's house with the disciples, and healed Peter's mother-in-law from her fever. What He does for her is different, though: Jesus casts out demons with a *word*, but He heals through *touch*. He took Peter's mother by the hand, lifted her up, and the fever left her. And as soon as she was healed, she started serving them, which probably means she made dinner. And so if you're keeping score of applications, here you go: **when you encounter Jesus, spread His fame. When you encounter Jesus, serve Him.** That's discipleship 101.

Well, that evening, when the Sabbath was coming to an end (notice that; it'll be important later), the people of Capernaum brought out all their sick and demon-oppressed, and the whole city (more like a village) showed up to Peter's house, and like I said at the beginning, what started slowly with one exorcism and one healing accelerated to healing *many* diseases and casting out *many* demons. Jesus is now more than a man with a message; He is a man of miracles, and His ministry is fully underway.

Now, the Jewish day went from evening to morning, and so when Jesus gets up before the next sunrise, He's actually finishing His previous day's work *and* beginning the new one at the same time, and He does it with prayer. He sneaks off to a desolate place in the dark to pray, seeking communion with God, but also symbolically still doing His work: He's battling darkness in the wilderness. Mark wants us to see who Jesus is by observing what He does, and here it is: preaching, teaching, making disciples, exorcising demons, healing the sick, and prayer.

But Jesus' time alone didn't last long: Simon and the others found him, and they said: "Everyone is looking for you." That might sound like a ministry triumph, but in Mark, that phrase almost always has a negative twist: when people come "looking for Jesus", they always come for the wrong reasons: more miracles, more food, more distractions from the most important work that Jesus came to do. And so Jesus says, "Let's get out of here, so that I can preach in the next town." Jesus' primary mission is not healing the sick; it is preaching the gospel.

Now, the healings and exorcisms that Jesus does are important, because they are evidences of the mercy and compassion of God, they establish the authority and power of Jesus, and they give people a foretaste of what the coming kingdom is like, but Jesus' most important work is preaching the gospel.

This has huge implications for the life of the church: Good works, mercy ministry, diaconal service; these things are absolutely *essential* to a healthy church, and they are necessary aspects of discipleship. But what the Church is called to do *that no one else can do* is preach the gospel, and so this *must* have priority in the life of the Church, just like it does here in the life of Jesus.

Of course, the answer is not to stop doing good works, but to pray so much and preach so much that people who come looking for Jesus for the wrong reasons either convert or leave! If it's Jesus they want, then preaching and prayer won't drive them away. If it's just a miracle or free food that they want, then Jesus wants us to move on and go to the next town.

And as Jesus moves on through Galilee, we have one more story from Mark before Jesus goes back to Capernaum. A leper implores Jesus to heal Him, and Jesus does, once again healing through touch. This healing is significant, though, for several reasons: *One*, there are many healing that you can fake, as our cruel tv evangelists are constantly teaching us, but healing a leper isn't one of them. The results will be visible to everyone.

Two, leprosy is not just an attack on the body of the individual, but it's an attack on the "body" of God's people – the leper is exiled, can't come and participate in temple worship, and is cut off from his people. Jesus' healing is not only an act of mercy for this man; it's also a picture of

God's kingdom work of breaking down walls that divide people from one another.

Three, touching a leper is enough to make you unclean. Jesus is walking on thin ice by performing exorcisms on the Sabbath and risking becoming unclean through His healing ministry.

And so in verse 44, Jesus sternly charges the man to show himself to the priests and fulfil the law of Moses. Jesus is not working against the law of Moses; He's not trying to lead people away from keeping the law. But His understanding of how to keep the law is going to lead Him into serious clashes with the religious leaders, and so right from the beginning, Mark wants to show you that Jesus is a law-keeper, not a law-breaker.

But Jesus also repeats (for the third time in today's passage!) the command to keep silent. He's trying as hard as He can to keep people from getting the wrong idea about His ministry. Right now, His preaching is His most important work, and it will lead up to His greatest work on the cross, but until it does, Jesus cannot be distracted and pulled away by lesser things, which is exactly what is starting to happen, as we see in verse 45, because the former leper *doesn't* keep silent; he talks freely, and pretty soon, Jesus can't show His face in town without being mobbed.

But can you blame the guy? His body was eating itself alive, he was cut off from worshiping God and fellowship with his people, and he met a man who touched him and healed him! Nothing like this had happened since the days of Elisha and Naaman! Who is this man, who drives out demons with a word and overcomes the worst diseases in the world?

What this man does is actually the mark of someone changed by Jesus. He doesn't have to be *persuaded* to tell others; in fact, Jesus Himself can hardly stop him from telling others! These last several verses are a powerful lesson for our evangelism: If Jesus hasn't made much difference in your life, then you won't tell others about him. But if you know Him as the one who heals you, the one who delivers you from the oppression of the Evil One, the one who preaches the good news of the kingdom of God to you and who shows you what that kingdom is like, then your zeal for telling others about Jesus won't be stopped!

The people you meet this week may have all sorts of interesting things happening in their lives. But you've encountered a man who casts out demons and heals the sick! How can you not spread His fame everywhere?

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*