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Mark Exposition

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How do you think these numbers relate to the passage we're going to study? 10. 35. 600.

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B, Volume 1 (Exegetical Perspective)

Mark's feature attraction is introduced in large capitals in the opening sentence of the Gospel, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1:1). Jesus arrives on the scene with heaven-splitting force (1:10), deals with Satan in the wilderness (1:12–13), announces the impending reign of God on earth (1:15), chooses his first disciples (1:16–20), and shows his power over a demon (1:21–28) before you can blink an eye.

**PRAYER:** Reveal to us the stupendous significance and the ongoing supernatural power which you introduced to the world when you came in human form and walked among us. Speak to us afresh, I pray.

Mark 1:21 "Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught."

Capernaum is a little-known town, not mentioned on the OT, but it seemed to become a centre for Jesus' Galilean ministry.

There was a synagogue there, and there is an existing synagogue there. For a synagogue you needed **ten adult Jewish males**. It's a religious institution. It was a local centre for community and spiritual life.

Witherington says: 'In one sentence Mark moves Jesus from the symbolic margins to the heart of the provincial Jewish social order. The synagogue (a sacred space) on the Sabbath (a sacred time).'

"It can be no accident that Mark chooses to highlight the fact that Jesus' first two miracles (an exorcism and a healing of a disease) both occurred on the Sabbath. Jesus is established as a very controversial figure from the outset." Witherington.

Acts 13:15-16 "And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:"

Capernaum could have been as small as 600 people, a fishing village.

The word 'didache' is clearly showing that Jesus is recognised to have the authority to teach.

Mark 1:22 "And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Mark is saying that there was something new about Jesus' teaching. It's clear that his teaching is powerful. The word 'astonished', *ekplesso*, there means in wonder and amazement.

This word '*exousia*' shows he either has the power to act, or the right to take certain action.

Jesus does not reference other learned rabbis or authorities, which would be the usual scribal tradition: 'As Hillel says', 'According to Gamaliel' - Jesus brings none of that but makes his own pronouncements.

Luke 4:22 "So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."

Luke 4:24 "Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country."

It's 'assuredly' that shows Jesus is telling the truth - no appeal to other authorities or experts.

Mark 1:23-24 "Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

Let's note that the first exorcism that Jesus performs is in a religious institution.

There was no doubt in Jesus' time that demons existed and were a problem. Ben Witherington says there were two main ways that Rabbis and spiritual men would deal with demons: they would stick a smelly root up the nose of the possessed person, to make them want to come out, or they would appeal to a higher demon, a higher authority to get rid of the demon: 'In the name of 'Beelzebub' .

Mark 1:25-26 "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him."

We've got Jesus rebuking the demon, an authoritative voice. Mark's emphasis is on Jesus coming not in word but in power. His teaching is accompanied by demonstration

Acts 10:37-38 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

Mark 1:15 "and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Be quiet. Be muzzled! Come out of him. *Erxerchomai* - the word 'come out'.

This whole section is virtually identical in Luke, with just a couple of variations:

Luke 4:35 "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him."

This word 'convulse' is a strong word that crops up again in Mark 9 with the boy with epilepsy who has a very dramatic exorcism - the method of the demon leaving the boy is very dramatic.

Mark 1:27 "Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.""

That word amazed is 'thambeo' and it means frightened. One description of the meaning is to be caught off guard in 'sudden bewilderment and total shock' (BDAG).

Note that if you put the 'life of Jesus' into some sort of order (we can never be certain!) it's likely that he performed at least four miracles before this one: the water into wine, in John 2, the healing of the nobleman's son, the lame man at Bethesda, and the first miraculous catch of fish - all before the exorcism in the synagogue.

## Purpose of the miracles?

Notable Quote Those who assume that miracles cannot happen are merely wasting their time by looking into the texts: we know in advance what results they will find for they have begun by begging the question.—C. S. Lewis

Sometimes a series of coincidences are unusual enough to be considered miraculous.

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

There are debates about the violation of natural laws, and miracles, and it's fairly straightforward that if God is God then miracles are possible.

Unlike some stories of saints, the miracles that Jesus performs in the gospels don't sound completely incredible - the gospel writers focus on the meaning of the miracles.

In Mark it's clear that the miracles don't help the disciples to fully understand. They're not an open door to faith, but they're a chink, a shaft of light.

But until Jesus' death and resurrection the plan of salvation is not fully revealed. As we're studying through Mark, keep reading ahead and reading back for the fullest appreciation of the gospel!

Ben Witherington has also said this about the miracles in Mark in particular:

1. Create an openness to true faith but don't create faith.

2. A belief that Jesus can perform miracles is true but inadequate.
3. Lack of faith hinders Jesus from doing all he might do
4. Miracles can strengthen faith of those who already believe
5. Miracles aren't the main thrust of his ministry - crisis intervention service. First half of gospel contains most of the miracles - most frequent is exorcism. (cf. 1:32-34; 3:7-12; 6:53-56; 8:14-21). 1

1 Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 93.

Jesus performs four different types of miracles: deliverance, healing, raising from the dead and nature miracles.

We should expect miracles because Jesus said it!

John 14:12 ""Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."

Grudem in his Systematic Theology gives these five reasons for miracles:

1. The miracles are to authenticate the message of the gospel.
2. To show the kingdom of God has come and is among us.

Primarily this exorcism is demonstrating that the kingdom of God has come. What better way to demonstrate it than to send the demons flying? There will be no satanic influence in the eternal state.

Rev 20:10 "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

This is a foretaste of their destiny. God in human form demonstrating his victory. This was all part of salvation's plan.

I love the way the two disciples on the road to Emmaus describe Jesus to whom they thought was totally ignorant of Him:

Luke 24:19 "And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,"

3. To help those who are in need.

Life expectancy was short in Jesus' time - there was often no cure for infection, and family members would be left destitute. Illnesses also created social stigma, purity issues - and it would inhibit their ability to subsist.

4. To remove hindrances to peoples' ministries.

We will see this with the first healing in Mark in a moment.

5. To bring glory to God.

John 9.3 "Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

Matt 9.8 "Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men."

Mark 1:28 "And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee."

Mark 1:29 "Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John."

Jesus would have stayed here, and the fact that Simon's mother-in-law is there shows Peter is married - we also know this from a reference in 1 Cor 9:5 about Peter having a wife, which meant he had commitments. Also that Simon and Andrew shared a house.

Capernaum was a fishing village, something of a headquarters for Jesus' Galilean campaign. It's believable that Jesus was a visitor in the homes of his first four disciples.

Mark 1:30-31 "But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them."

She's sick - 'cast down' is the word in the Matthew account which suggests it's serious.

He takes her by the hand. This resonates with two other healings in Mark - one the raising of Jairus' daughter:

Mark 5:41 "Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise.""

Jesus literally grasps her. It wasn't socially acceptable for a Jewish man to touch an unrelated woman. He's showing disregard for social behaviour. The other taking by the hand

Mark 9:27 "But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose."

Touch is so important: Jesus doesn't only speak but he physically engages with those people. Matthew includes a 'touch' as well. In Luke Jesus enacts the healing slightly differently

Luke 4.39 "So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them."

These aren't mutually exclusive. He might have rebuked the fever, and then reached out and touched her.

In Mark she is the first person to respond to Jesus' healing by serving. It's a keynote

of Mark -

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.""

She's being Christlike in her response.

Mark 1:32-33 "At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door."

We see the division between the sick and the demon-possessed. Both miracles are shown to be repeatable, neither are one-offs.

The whole city was gathered at the door. A hyperbole maybe, but 600 people plus. A mix between private and public. When the religious observance of the day is over, the real work of the kingdom begins.

Mark 1:34 "Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him."

The term *poikilai* ('various') indicates that there was no physical sickness that Jesus did not and could not heal. Mark relates healings of fever (1:29–31), skin disease (1:40–45), paralysis (2:1–12), atrophied muscles (3:1–6) and continual blood loss (5:25–34), and of people who were deaf and dumb (7:32–37), blind (8:22–26; 10:46–52), had epilepsy (9:14–29) or had died (5:21–43).

Are we answering the questions people are currently asking about Jesus? Do we work out what those questions and issues are? And do our actions as Christians meet the felt needs of people? In the same way Jesus did? What would the modern equivalent be of Jesus actions? At individual level? At level of family, society, national, international - showing with authority that the kingdom of God is drawing near?

If God says it, I believe it. Let's ask God for more of that faith today - our first priority is to see souls saved, but there will be miracles accompanying that work.