

AN APPOINTMENT WITH JESUS Mark 1:21-28

Let's return to the synagogue in Capernaum. We have seen the kind of place in which it was situated. It was fairly cosmopolitan for the region, and it dabbled in activities that would have been seriously frowned upon by the religious elite in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it was used by Jesus as the headquarters for His ministry in the area.

Mark describes for us that Jesus is standing in front of the congregation in the synagogue and that *he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*. He was preaching how the Old Testament spoke concerning Him. It was also the same message He shared with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus following His crucifixion and resurrection, *Lk. 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*. ... Here in the synagogue at Capernaum He used the authority of the Word of God to present *the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1)*.

After He had finished speaking, - and notice He had not been interrupted, - a certain man rose in defiance. ... Now, we have looked previously at the area and we had also looked at the demons who were active in this particular man ... but let's look closer at the man himself. Through this one man in this synagogue, there came ...

DISCORD I think it is safe to assume this man knew his way round the synagogues. He strikes me as being the type that made you aware of his presence, - even on an ordinary day. He would have made it difficult for you to ignore him! He would have sat fairly near to the front. I think, too, it is also safe to assume he would have been familiar with every aspect of the service. He would have taken great pleasure in pointing out to you any mistakes he reckoned you might have made, - *he would have had a 'hey-day' with me!*

He would have been brought up in the Law; he would have known the various passages from the Old Testament Torah. He would have been very proper concerning other people. He would have been circumcised on the eighth day. He would have celebrated his bar-mitzvah. This man had not done anything previously for the people of that synagogue to have kept him out. Maybe 'a bit of a weirdo' but ... Nevertheless, he was there that day Jesus was speaking in the synagogue. And notice the particular wording as to how the synagogue is described, *v.23 there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit*. It had belonged to their father, and their father's father, and their father's father's father *ad infinitum*. The worship of God had long-since disappeared and it was nothing much more than a memorial that stretched through the generations.

This verse also makes two further simple points, - firstly, it clarifies this particular man was a ‘roamer’, probably because he had the knack of upsetting people and was not very good at accepting authority, even the authority of the local synagogue ... And, secondly, this man was in pursuit of Jesus for devilish purposes. This, - as we mentioned previously, - was the first occasion in His ministry when the Lord was confronted by a man possessed of a demon.

How does it happen that someone can become demon-possessed? The basic reason is nothing more than choosing the devil over Christ, and the devil entering in. A Christian cannot be demon-possessed because Christ and Satan cannot share the same body, - it is either one or the other (I Cor. 6:19 *your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God*; Mt. 6:24 *No man can serve two masters*).

Now, that is not to say a Christian cannot be troubled by Satanic powers, because they can. In particular, many who have been saved out of occultic practices often have great battles to fight that the rest of us would not understand. The devil never likes to lose a soul, and I have often heard of those who used to dabble in the occult and how he hounded them. But, Christians who have never dabbled in the occult are also constantly in conflict with the enemy, and so Paul instructs us, Eph. 6:11 *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* ¹² *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

We ought not to poke fun at the devil. He is evil, - there is nothing good about him, ... there is nothing to laugh about, and the Word of God tells us to resist him, so that he would flee from us (James 4:7).

And there are some people, - Christians, even, - who don't like talking about the devil. It's as if talking about him makes them sound silly. They can remember how when they were young children being told, if you don't be good the devil will get you! But, he *is* real ... and he has always been busy, but he is busier today than ever he has been ... and he will be getting busier as the approach of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ draws nearer!

One of the most dangerous places to see the devil at work is when he is posing as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14). He portrays his workers as perfectly acceptable in Christian company ... and yet underneath the façade they are nothing more than *false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ* (v.13). They creep in unawares (Jude 4), ... they willingly are

ignorant, wrote Peter (II Pet. 3:5). Like this man in the Capernaum synagogue they will not endure sound doctrine ... and they will turn their ears away from the truth (II Tim. 4:3,4). You can pick them out ... because they often show themselves up! They cause **discord**, discontent, disagreement ... and they hamper the work of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit. ... That was what this man was doing!

How do you know them? One way of identifying them is that they continuously speak contrary to the plain teachings of the Word of God, especially concerning salvation by faith through grace alone. *That* is where the devil began when he spoke through the serpent to Adam and Eve ... He cast doubt on the Word of God! They curtail the preaching of the Word of God, - they put something else in its place. They cannot stand hearing God's Word preached as God's Word. They cannot stand the mention of the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not want to hear anything about Him!

That was also the case in this synagogue. This man came with the one errand to have a confrontation with Christ. ... I'm sure the people in that place were taken back with this man ... because he was in *their* synagogue (v.23). But, when the opposers of Christ take on their work, it does not matter where they are, who is there, or how many ... it is the voice of Christ they want to silence!

However, was it not a work of God's grace that God allowed this man with an unclean spirit into that synagogue? God could have kept him out. God could have made sure he would have gone somewhere else that day, and not bothered Jesus. It would have been 'a lovely meeting' with no disruptions ... with all those 'lovely' people being enthralled with what Jesus was saying and how He said it ... but the Saviour had a purpose behind allowing this man into that meeting because He was about to demonstrate wonderful, saving and sovereign grace in action. ... When we 'jump' to the end of the story we're told this man was freed because Jesus rid of those demons. Was this man saved? Yes, I believe he was because, otherwise, this would have been an empty gesture, - just 'for show' ... and Jesus doesn't do that kind of thing. The Lord Jesus changed this man's life for time and eternity ... and I have no doubts this man, - from that day onwards, - cherished his meeting with Christ.

We look around us today and we see the 'prince of this world' sowing his seeds, and he seems to be reaping a great harvest. Yes, sin is abounding ... but grace is far more powerful than sin could ever hope to be! Yes, there was **discord**, ... but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rom. 5:20) ...

DEFEAT

The Lord went to that place on that day having chosen it and written it into His plan, - formulated from before the foundation of the world, - that this man would be there. This was a battle God intended to win. Yes, throughout the meeting, - when the Saviour was speaking, - the devils in this man had to keep silent. They could not utter a word ... such was Christ's authority over them.

Take a look at the man himself ... Don't look at him and see the devils that were in him ... *look at the man*. He had not a will of his own, - his will was not free ... it was bound by the chains of sin. Don't go hard on the man ... it was the devils that were destroying his life.

When you see them walking down the street drunk and hardly able to stand ... that could be you if it were not for the grace of God. When you see them in the shops with the glaze in their eyes that tells you they are on drugs ... it is not right to look at them as if somehow they are 'unsaveable'. No matter how far down they have journeyed, Christ can lift them up. ... "Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me" ... But for the grace of God, where would you and I be today?!

The devils had pulled this man down. They had clouded his sight and imprisoned him in their grip and yet, he was not beyond the Saviour's reach. Imagine, out of all those people in the synagogue it was this man, in particular, that to Jesus meant the most. ... This was the lost sheep whom He had come to save ... and the man didn't even know it!

But ... looking at him, and listening to what was coming out of his mouth ... where was Jesus to begin? This man was down at the bottom of the pile! There did not seem to be anything the Saviour could do. If you and I had been there, what would we have thought of him? ... He's beyond hope!

Maybe somewhere in his background there might be something to hone in on, - maybe he had good parents, maybe he himself had once lived a good life but circumstances overtook him. Every vagrant in the streets has someone belonging to them, someone perhaps looking for them and missing them ... The young girls standing on the street corners in the cities are someone's daughters ... Where do you start with people so low down?

This man in the synagogue did not cry out, - like Bartimaeus, - for Christ to heal him. He did not cry out for help, or for freedom from the demons. ...

No, instead, the Lord heard from his lips, *Let us alone*. In such dire and hopeless straits, he cried out, *what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?* I guarantee you that if you went out through the doors of this church, and you went along our street, it would not be very long before you would hear someone with a similar note of defiance, *what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?* “Leave us alone, we’re alright the way we are, leave us alone!”

Perhaps you can remember the time when you said those words. You were *dragged* along to church and to the Gospel meetings, and you did not want to be there ... and when you heard the preacher speak about the cross and your need of salvation, all you wanted to do was stand up and shout at him, “Leave me alone, I’m alright the way I am, leave me alone!” ... But aren’t you glad Christ did not listen to you and leave you alone? Aren’t you glad He persisted, and by His irresistible grace, He saved you!

This man was in the synagogue, a place where he would hear about the promise of God’s Messiah ... the place where he would learn from the Old Testament Scriptures, but this man was not there to learn. As he listened to Jesus, his heart was becoming harder and harder ... not softer and softer. What a dangerous and fearful condition he was in! Spurgeon wrote about this man, “The worst man of all is one who can attend the means of grace, and yet remain under the full power of evil”. ... In other words, the word of God has no effect upon their soul.

Satan comes and sits in many a church seat. It is the place, - perhaps more than any other, - where he does his most damage. Either the devil hardens minds, or he blinds eyes, or he hinders sinners from calling for help when they know they need it. But ... aren’t you glad the grace of God brought that man in his demon possession to the synagogue that day? ... Aren’t you glad because that was where he met Jesus!

We keep repeating it for it is true ... The devil is no match for Jesus ... and, - in the will of God, - the devils walked that man into that meeting where Christ would free him from their grip! They thought they would disrupt what Jesus was doing ... right at the start of His ministry. They thought they would show Him up in front of the locals. But no, they were no match for the Saviour.

Do you notice something else here? When this man opened his mouth against Jesus, do you notice what organised religion, - the leaders in the synagogue, - had to say? ...

They had absolutely *nothing* to say! Their religion was powerless to silence the man or to deal with him in any way. This man was ‘out of range’ of dead religion but he was within range of the Gospel ... Organised religion had nothing whatsoever to say to him ... *but Jesus had!*

What was it that cast these demons out? ... It was nothing less than the powerful preaching of the Word of God! ... **Discord** ... **Defeat** ...

DELIVERANCE

The good news is that Christ is able to deliver such as are led captive at the will of Satan. Christ is able to save the worst of sinners. There is none who cannot be saved by God’s grace for that was what Paul said to Timothy how God would *have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth* (I Tim. 2:4). There is not one single soul upon which when the Holy Spirit is working the Lord is not willing to save, and will save.

This was a firmly-entrenched man the Lord was dealing with ... and yet, look at how the Saviour *did* deal with him. This poor soul was bound in chains that could not be seen ... the man called Legion was also bound in chains, but you could have seen his ... but this man in the synagogue was bound nonetheless. He had no freedom. He had been taken over. What brought him into that condition? We’re not told, and it would be worthless to surmise. And yet, this is the very man through whom Christ was glorified! What a testimony of saving grace!

The devils were saying to Jesus, “Go away and don’t trouble us! We don’t want to hear what You have to say!” ... The devils weren’t having a very good time, - Jesus had cast the demons out of Mary Magdalene, the man called Legion ... and these demons in this man were about to be cast out too! That is the kind of God we believe in. That is the Saviour we have!

This man here, the demons had him saying, *what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?* ... They were putting their words into the lips of this man to renounce all interest in Christ, and they caused this man to dread the Saviour, *art thou come to destroy us?* And then, they gave this man an air of freedom in that he recognised Jesus, *I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.* ... Yes, you are Jesus. You are *the Holy One of God.* You are God! ... How many people the devil deludes into seeing and saying the right things, but still he keeps them bound!

You talk to someone about Jesus, and your greatest struggle is to get them to disagree with you, - they will agree with everything you say ... *and yet they don't!* They will agree with you when you tell them they need to be saved ... *and yet, they won't.* ... Satan has such a hold over their understanding. You would love to be able to make them see, but you can't ... II Cor. 4:4 the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

But where did it all start to happen for this man? It started to happen when that man came into that meeting. When Jesus was preaching the devils were rumbling in that man's soul. He was under conviction of sin. Yes, the devils were there ... but they could not hinder the grace of God at work! The presence of Christ and the Word of God are two weapons in the Christian's armoury the devil fears. Wherever Jesus comes in, the devil knows he'll have to leave. The devil knows Jesus has come to destroy his works ... and the very moment you start talking about the Saviour is the very moment the heckles of all the devils in Hell rise.

They know when grace is at work their time will soon be up! It is always good when you hear a sinner alarmed as the Gospel is preached, - you don't want them *not* to be touched, - you want them to be concerned for their soul's condition that they would be saved ... and that is when grace is at work.

This man here did not say, "If you are the Son of God ..." no, he said, *I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.* ... There was not the slightest doubt! *That* actually was a creed ... and the devil was happy for the man to say it because it was only words, at that point. The devil was happy for the man to come into the synagogue, to listen to the sermon, to meet with all those other people ... because, - let's face it, - there is many a similar place in which there is no threat to the devil! He is not afraid of 'church', but he's afraid of the preaching of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, His power to save, ... and he is afraid of the presence of God among His people.

Then the Lord Jesus 'stuck the knife' into those demons, ... *Hold thy peace, and come out of him.* That's enough, I'm finished with you lot ... *Out!* ... And they had to do as He told them! ... Granted, the demons did not leave without a fight, *when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.* ... Yes, but Luke, - the doctor, - tells of this same incident in 4:31-37, and in v. 34 we read, *when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.* The devil tried his worst, but Jesus stopped him. ...

The moment Jesus told the devils to leave the man, their power to harm was gone! The devils were malicious, but fruitless. ... “In the Name of Jesus, we have the victory!”

What about the worshippers watching on? They had never experienced anything like this before. ... Here was a man at the very lowest ... you could not have gotten any lower ... and yet Christ lifted him up. ... Even the very worst of sinners can be saved. The filthiest-tongued, the biggest drunkard, drug-abuser, ... the paedophiles, murderers, the adulterers, the sodomites, the liars, the gamblers ... those who are beyond any decent description ... all of them can be saved when they turn to Christ.

But sometimes it is even more difficult for someone who considers themselves righteous to see their need ... like those other people sitting in that synagogue ... week after week after week, with no stirring in their souls.

When you hear the Gospel, and there is nothing working in your heart ... be concerned lest such a hardening is taking place that you might never believe and be saved. It is a far worse predicament than this man! ... Indeed, it is a work of the devil to hold you back from the Saviour.

I have no power to save you ... You will notice here that Jesus was working entirely on His own. He did not involve the disciples for salvation is all of God. It is only the work of God that saves ... not a church or a pastor ... only Christ. The Gospel is a seed that makes its own soil! That is the marvel of salvation. It is before *Christ* the sinner must repent of their sins and be saved.

CONCLUSION

The **discord** ... the **defeat** ... the **deliverance** ... This man was heading to a lost eternity without Christ *until* in the sovereign work and grace of God, he was led into that place for a life-changing meeting with the Saviour. If you are not saved, I trust God will open your heart to receive this same Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour and Lord.

May His grace and power accompany the study of His Word, to His glory!
Amen.