



As we've been going through the gospel of Mark in our neighborhood Bible study, I've been reminded of what a sneaky writer Mark is. Let's say that Paul, for instance, has four things that he wants to say to you. They might be complicated things, but Paul is going to give them to you straight: here's the first thing, here's the second thing, and so on.

Mark isn't like that. Instead, if he's got four things to say to you, he's going to tell you four stories about Jesus, expect you to see the point of all four stories, and expect you to see the way that those four things fit together. Often, there will only be the tiniest clue that he's up to something.

Let me give you an example. Let's read together from Mark 1:14-15. Here, we learn that Jesus is proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. We might think that this is only a random comment. After all, the word "kingdom" doesn't appear again in the whole first chapter of Mark. However, a closer examination reveals that the kingdom is the theme of much of the rest of the chapter. Let's consider, then, what Mark has to say about the kingdom of Jesus.

First, we see that the kingdom has to do with FISHING FOR MEN. Consider the story of Mark 1:16-20. This story contains a double contrast with the wisdom of the

world. First, this is a kingdom that is going to advance with words, not with swords. Jesus isn't recruiting soldiers. He's recruiting disciples.

Second, these disciples aren't the kind of people that worldly wisdom would expect Jesus to call. These aren't philosophers. These aren't lawyers. These aren't scribes. Instead, they're fishermen, uneducated men from the middle of nowhere who probably never have made a speech in their lives. Yet Jesus says, "These are the people I want telling others about Me."

How heartening this is for all of us! If we want to serve the Lord, we don't have to go kill somebody for Him. We don't have to be experts in the Bible who know every Scripture forward and backward. Instead, we get to be us. We can be ordinary, flawed people because Jesus has chosen ordinary, flawed people from the beginning.

We don't have to do great things. All we have to do is reveal the greatness of Jesus in our words and our lives. All we have to do is follow Him as the people we really are. In Him, that will be enough.

Next, Jesus reveals that the kingdom involves **TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY**. Look at Mark 1:21-22. Remember, Jesus is a Capernaum resident. At this point, He still owns a home in Capernaum. Probably, everybody in town thinks of Him as good old Jesus, the carpenter.

Now, He pops up in the local synagogue one Sabbath, and He starts teaching with authority. The natives react with astonishment, likely both at the authority of His teaching and that a carpenter could be teaching so authoritatively. However, if Jesus' teaching isn't authoritative, He isn't really proclaiming the kingdom. A kingdom with no authority is no kingdom at all.

Today, we still have to remember that the kingdom of Jesus consists of His authoritative teaching. Lots of people want to call that into question. They deny that Jesus and His chosen messengers speak with authority when it comes to the practice of homosexuality, or to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. They deny that Jesus needs to be King in the work and worship of the church. Instead, they claim that we get to do whatever we want, and Jesus—if He even exists—doesn't care much one way or the other. However, denying the authority of Jesus doesn't make it so. Either we hear His authoritative teaching, or we will face His authoritative displeasure.

After this, we see that the kingdom includes **POWER OVER THE SPIRIT WORLD**. Let's keep going in Mark 1:23-28. In this case, the illustration is provided by a demon-possessed man who helpfully shows up in the middle of Jesus' teaching. Jesus immediately demonstrates that His kingly authority isn't limited to teaching. Instead, He sends the demon right back to Hades.

Imagine for a moment that you are in the synagogue on this day and you see Jesus cast out the demon. What are you going to think? Judging from the Scriptures, demon possession was common in Galilee during the Lord's ministry, but there was nothing anybody could do about it. How can a human being fight a demon? Jesus, though, proves that through His power, He can fight demons and win. This one act gave a lot of suffering people hope that they had never had before.

Thankfully, we don't have to deal with unclean spirits today, but it is still true for us that our worst enemies reside in the spirit world. Ephesians mentions rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of darkness. Over them all, of course, is Satan himself.

None of us can see these enemies, though their handiwork is obvious, and if we have to fight them on our own, we will certainly lose. Jesus, though, defeated them. Indeed, through His death He defeated even the devil! We can't fight the evil rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers in the heavenly places, but we don't have to. Once we are in the kingdom of Jesus, we are safe from their hatred.

Finally, Jesus reveals His kingdom in His POWER OVER ILLNESS AND DEATH. Our last story for the evening appears in Mark 1:29-31. I suspect that most brethren pay attention to this story because it proves that rather than being celibate, the supposed first pope was married.

However, once we read it through the lens of the kingdom of Jesus, we see that there's a lot more going on than that. Jesus is not limited to casting out demons. Instead, He also has the power to go to someone with a serious illness and heal them completely and instantaneously. Sickness cannot stand against the authority of Jesus.

Even that, though, is not the final point. As I was studying this, I was struck by Mark saying that Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law by the hand and lifted her up. I thought to myself, "That sounds like a sneak preview of resurrection!" I checked, and in fact, the Greek word translated here as "lift" is the same word used for raising someone from the dead. Mark is implying that Jesus is not merely in the healing business. He's in the resurrection business too.

For now, death has not yet been defeated. Even the faithful still get sick and die. However, the day will come when the final victory of Jesus' kingdom will be revealed. On that day, He will say the word, and everyone who died in Him will rise from the dead in Him. Death will be no match for the authority of King Jesus!

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