

**Mark 1:21-45, Initial Power and Popularity**  
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**Overview**

1. Broader context: Provisionally follow Stenger's observation of geographical introductions before sections
  - a) 1:14-3:6 in Galilee;
  - b) 3:7-10:52 as journeys around Galilee and down to Jerusalem
  - c) 11:1ff in Jerusalem
  
2. 1:14-3:6 has two strong chiastic sections
  - a) 1:21-45, Demonstrated power and growing popularity
  - b) 2:1-3:6, Crystallization of opposition from the religious hierarchy
    - 1) 1:22, in synagogue, "not as the scribes"
    - 2) 2:6,7, forgiving sins
    - 3) 2:24, picking corn
    - 4) 3:6, resolve to destroy
    - 5) 3:22, scribes from Jerusalem
    - 6) 7:1, scribes from Jerusalem, washing hands
    - 7) 10:2, question on divorce (but trap, not challenge)
    - 8) then ch. 11ff, in Jerusalem
  - c) Residue, 1:14-20, is
    - 1) summary introduction, 1:14-15
    - 2) call of disciples, 16-20, cf. opening of subsequent section in 3:13ff.
  
3. Chiastic overview of 1:21-45 (following Dideberg & Moulon Beernaert)

	Capernaum	Galilee
	Sabbath	First Day
a) Teaching & Healing	21-27	40-45
b) "All Galilee"	28	39
c) Intervention of Disciples	29-31	35-38
d) Mass Healings		32-34

**A. 21-27, Teaching & Exorcism in the Synagogue**

Asserts Jesus' authority over the spirits as "Son of God."

1. 21a, Setting: comes into Capernaum. Sets the tone of the first half of the chiasm, and contrasts with the second half and in particular v.45.

Structure of sequel: Two activities by the Lord (teaching and exorcising), each with a comment by the people. The second comment reaches back and summarizes the first as well.

2. 21b-22, Teaching

- a) Note on synagogue practice, which led to early church: Three parts, all of which were usually conducted by various people from the congregation, under the supervision and approval of

the ordained leaders. A participatory worship, not a hierarchical one. 1 Cor. 14 continues this pattern.

- 1) Liturgical section with prescribed prayers
  - 2) Reading of Torah (Law) and Haphtorah (Prophets)
  - 3) Sermon
- b) This openness gave the Lord (in the gospels) and Paul (in Acts) considerable freedom to proclaim the gospel.
- c) People's response: amazement over his authority, in contrast with the scribes.
- 1) Response: "knocked over." Strong word, 13 times in NT: MT 4, LK 3, AC 1, MK 5, always describing people's response to the Lord's teaching (usually) or miracles.
  - 2) Reason: his Authority.
    - a> Scribes liked to cite their authorities: Rabbi X says this, Rabbi Y says that. He stated the truth as truth.
    - b> Compare modern-day impatience with "dogmatism" and "self-righteousness." By modern standards, the Lord was extremely dogmatic!

### 3. 23-27, Exorcising

- a) Context: Big emphasis in Mark on the conflict of the Lord with the evil spirits. *pneuma* in Mark 5x is human or Holy Spirit, but 16x is an unclean spirit. "Unclean spirit" 10x in Mark, cf. 2x in Mt, 5x in Luke, though Mt is 102 pp, Mark 73, Luke 112, John 82.
- b) 23a, the Subject: a possessed man in the synagogue. Note in passing that outward LOCATION says nothing about inward CONDITION. Being in a church does not make you a Christian, any more than being in a garage makes you an automobile. Develop a deep skepticism and suspicion over the outward acoutrements of religion.
- c) The Duel.  
The engagement between the demon and the Lord is presented as a face-off, like two gunslingers in the street, or the shoot-out at the OK-Corral.
- 1) 24, Demon starts first
    - a> Proclaims his knowledge of Jesus: his name, his origin, his mission, his divine title. Compare 5:7; This is a wind-up to an adjuration.
    - b> "adjure" elsewhere only Acts 19:13, how an exorcist addresses a demon. An attempt to bind someone else by spiritual authority.
    - c> Knowledge of information about people is a central technique of the black arts; the demon is trying to use magic or cast a spell against the Lord!
  - 2) 25, The Lord's response: no wind-up, no announcement of names, no spell, just brute spiritual authority:

- a> "Hold thy peace." Curt and abrupt: "silence!" Forbids the spirit even to continue with his spell.
- b> "Come out of him."

- 3) 26, outcome: the man goes into convulsions (usage elsewhere of "tore") and screams as the demon leaves him.
- d) 27, Response: amazement. Again, predominantly Mark's word (3 occurrences out of 4 in the NT). Repunctuate their comments to see how they summarize both events in the Synagogue:
  - 1) "What is this new teaching, for it is with authority?" Back to 21-22.
  - 2) "He casts out the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Back to 24-26.

**B. 28, Fame throughout Galilee**

Prepares for the wider ministry in 35ff. If we take it in strict chronological order, the statement claims that even on the Sabbath day, when long journies were forbidden, the news passed from mouth to mouth throughout the whole of the district.

**C. 29-31, Healing of Simon's Mother in Law**

- 1. Enlarges our understanding of the Lord's power. In the synagogue, he taught, and cast out a demon. Now he can heal disease as well.
- 2. This and the next two sections set up the disciples as intermediaries. Here, they tell the Lord of the need, and he brings healing.
- 3. "She ministered unto them." The verb only occurs 5x in Mark:
  - a) 1:13, the angels in the wilderness, emphasizing his deity.
  - b) 10:45 (2x): "the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Phil. 2, "in the form of God ... took upon him the form of a servant." He did not have a retinue of servants, as would an earthly king. Thus the last two occurrences are all the more noteworthy:
  - c) Here and 15:41, devout women who provided hospitality and sustenance for him. Their offering of domestic ministry found favor in his eyes. It seems humble and insignificant, but it was the one ministry that he was pleased to accept.

**D. 32-34, Mass Healing**

- 1. "They" is likely still the disciples, as in v.30. Surely they are impressed at the events in the synagogue. Now, in their own home, they begin realize what the Lord meant by "fishers of men." They can bring his power to others! Once the Sabbath ends, full of excitement, they run around the village and round up a net full of candidates for further episodes of what they have already seen.
- 2. Compare the candidates they bring in 32b with what we have already seen:
  - a) He healed Peter's mother-in-law, so they bring "all that were diseased."
  - b) He cast out a demon, so they bring "them that were possessed

with devils."

- c) He taught with authority, ... but they bring no one with a heart hungry for heavenly light! The most important ministry of all, the one he came to Galilee to do (1:14,15), the one to which the healings and exorcisms were only adjuncts and ornaments, they have completely neglected! Cf. John 2:23-25; 6:26-27. People are always much quicker to focus on material benefits than on spiritual meaning.

- 3. Graciously, the Lord does not disappoint them or rebuke them directly for their shortsightedness, but ministers to the two categories of need that they have identified. Note the alignment of 34 with the candidates in 32, and the muzzling of the demoniacs just as in the synagogue. But in the next section, he will deal with their problem.

#### **E. 35-38, Withdrawal and Enlargement**

This section shows how the Lord deals with their shortcoming in their initial attempt to bring people to him--their ignorance of the priorities in his ministry.

- 1. 35, begins with prayer. He does not begin with them, but with his heavenly Father. Here's a lesson I need to learn--to greet the failures of God's people first of all not by rebuking them, but by lifting them to the Father.
- 2. 36-37, they seek him out. Full of enthusiasm over the previous evening's activities, they have fished up another netful of people and now want him to come back to town and repeat the performance.
- 3. 38 is his gentle instruction to them:
  - a) Where? "the next towns." Their ministry is to be itinerant, not a local elevation of Capernaum.
  - b) What? "that I may preach ... for therefore came I forth." The purpose is preaching, not healing and not exorcisms. Those authenticate his message and help attract attention, but they need to learn to give priority to the preaching. By the time they go out two by two in 6:12-13, they will be doing all three activities; note also in the Great Commission of 16:15-18 how the miracles are secondary to and supportive of the preaching.
  - c) *Application*: Much emphasis in some quarters on signs and wonders today. I would not challenge the possibility of such events today, but we should always look to see whether they are subordinate to the sound preaching of the gospel and the teaching of God's word.

#### **F. 39, Preaching and Healing in All Galilee**

Follows up the promise of 28. Where his reputation has gone, he must go. The reputation of Jesus is not enough. Without his personal

touch, there is no lasting value. Unfortunately, many today have heard the reputation as in 28, but have not come in personal contact with him as in 39.

#### G. 40-45, Healing of the Leper

1. The chiasm ends as it began, with a cleansing. There, from an unclean spirit; here, from an unclean disease.
2. 40, The leper's initiative.
  - a) Shut out of the cities and villages (Lev. 13:45,46), forced to announce himself so that others can avoid him, he can still accost the Lord as he passes by. A picture of the unworthy sinner seeking out the Lord, contrary to all rational expectation.
  - b) Note the tone of his approach: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Does not presume upon the Lord's grace, but casts himself at his mercy, recognizing his own unworthiness. So in salvation, we do not claim redemption as a foregone conclusion, but acutely aware of our own sinfulness and God's holiness, yet recognizing the absolute sovereignty of his will ("if thou wilt") and the provision he has made for his own ("thou canst make me clean"), we come with the trembling hope that we might be among them. Only then do we enjoy the fruit of his promise, "He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."
3. 41,42, The Lord's response:
  - a) "moved with compassion," lit. "his bowels being moved," or as we would say, "his heart going out to him." Some evangelicals focus unbiblically on the love of the Father for the lost, while some reformed churches equally unbiblically assume an attitude of haughty condemnation of the wicked. The Scriptures rather emphasize the compassion of the Son, a compassion that we are to emulate. It should matter to us that people are lost and dying in sin. Our hearts should grieve for them, and that grief should move us to reach out to them.
  - b) The Lord touches him. Such a touch is defiling and requires a trespass offering in Lev. 5:3; note that Elisha refuses to touch Naaman (2 Kings 5:9-11), and even Moses stays out of contact with Miriam (Num 12:10-15). But this is the one who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. If any other had touched the leper, both would have been impure. Jesus is the only one who, by contracting our impurity, leaves us pure and clean. Matthew actually makes this point explicitly from Isa. 53 (8:1-17).
  - c) Mark emphasizes that the actual healing is done with a word, not just a touch (42). Some were healed with a touch alone (Peter's mother-in-law, 31; the hemorrhaging woman, 5:25-30),

others with only a word. Here, the word serves to emphasize the appropriateness of the leper's humble attitude of approach. Also emphasizes the parallel with the synagogue episode in 21-27 by including authoritative speech as well as miracles. "I will" is a personal claim to be the decision-maker. We would have to say, "If God wills," but the Lord Jesus has all authority.

4. 43,44, the Lord's solemn charge. "Straitly charged him," "sternly enjoined him," "for a testimony to them." Get down to Jerusalem right away so that the religious leaders will know that the Messiah has come. How many lepers do you suppose they had knocking at their doors? The prohibition about speaking is probably to get him down there ASAP, as well as avoid the crowds that kept the Lord out of the synagogues and away from the preaching that was his primary purpose.
5. 45, the leper's disobedience hinders the Lord's ministry. The leper thought he knew best. "Publish" = "preach"; "the matter" = "the word." Intrinsically, these are wonderful activities, and such as one would expect from a person so powerfully delivered. We can understand his enthusiasm, and may even be rebuked by it in our own carelessness, but at the same time he delayed being of greater benefit to the Lord by not following his instructions more closely.

*Application:* The enthusiasm of new salvation is no substitute for obedience to the word of God. The standard must always be, not, "What feels right?" or "What fits with my emotions?", but "What does the Master say?"

6. Summary: Points of comparison between this healing and the events in the synagogue in 1:21-27:
  - a) Each shows the Lord's authority in a specific domain.
    - 1) This healing asserts Jesus' authority among men, as the Christ.
    - 2) The exorcism (1:25) shows his authority among the spirits, as the Son of God.
  - b) Each sets up the approaching conflict with the Jewish hierarchy.
    - 1) By sending the leper to the priests, the Lord is inviting them to come to Galilee and check him out; leads to the inquisition of 3:22 ("the scribes that came down from Jerusalem").
    - 2) The explicit comparison with the scribes in 1:22 sets the stage for a motivation of envy (15:10).
  - c) Each involves both miracle and teaching, unlike the center section, which is only miracle.