

## Mark 1:21-45

### Introduction

Imagine the scene. It's TV. A gang of violent criminals have taken a group of ordinary people captive. They're holding them in a secure location, where they're guarded by menacing and heavily armed thugs. There's no chance of escape. The captives must do as they're told. Their lives are in the hands of their captors. But then a hero enters the story. He's the good guy. He's the one we're rooting for. He isn't one of the captives. He comes from outside. But he's going in. He's going to defeat the baddies and rescue the captives.

It's a familiar storyline. You've probably watched it play out many times in films and on TV. You can probably tell me exactly how it's going to unfold. But as with every story we ever hear, this story contains echoes of the greatest story ever told. God's story. The story of salvation. We're in the story. We're the captives. You may not remember being taken captive. But the Bible says that each one of us has been born into captivity. Here's how it tells the story.

In the very beginning, our great ancestors, Adam and Eve, lived in the perfect happiness of the Garden of Eden. But then Satan entered and took Adam and Eve captive with his lies. He sowed seeds of doubt in their minds about the goodness of God. He told them to ignore God and live as they pleased. And when they listened to him, he enslaved them to sin and disobedience and death. Since then, all their descendants, everyone who's ever lived, including you and me, have been born into that same captivity. From the moment we were born, we have been enslaved to sin and rebellion against God. We don't mind. In fact, most of the time we quite enjoy it. But nonetheless, we are all enslaved. And we can see the results in the disease and death and brokenness in the world around us. That's what life looks like in captivity.

And that's what we need to understand if we're to grasp the good news of Jesus and why the coming of God's kingdom is something to celebrate. Mark's book won't make sense to us if we haven't grasped that we are captives in need of rescue. And that Jesus is the hero, who comes from outside to set us free. As we read about him, in this eyewitness account, handed down to us through Mark, that's what we need to see. And in our passage this morning, there are four things Mark wants to show us. The disturbing authority of Jesus, his supernatural power, his urgent message and his compassionate touch. So firstly then, he wants us to see the disturbing authority of Jesus. That's our first heading.

### Disturbing authority

Jesus is with Simon and Andrew, and James and John, the two pairs of brothers who he has called to follow him. And Mark tells us in verse 21 that: **They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.**

In the synagogue, the scriptures were read in Hebrew, which, by then, was only understood by those who had been trained to read it: the priests and teachers of the law and others like them. Then, it was translated into everyday Aramaic, so that ordinary people could understand what was written. Jesus would have been permitted to teach based on his ability to read and translate the Hebrew. We're not told what he read but, presumably, as on other occasions, he chose a passage of prophecy and proclaimed that it was about to be fulfilled. Remember his message: **'The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near.'**

But what amazed everyone was not so much what he said but the authority with which he said it. The teachers of his day wouldn't claim to speak with an authority of their own. They would quote great rabbis and rely on their authority: 'So-and-so says...'. But Jesus was different. He taught as one who had authority himself: 'Truly I tell you...' And they were amazed. The way Mark describes it implies a sense of fear and alarm. They'd never heard anyone teach like this. It unsettled them. It was disturbing.

And no one was more disturbed than a man among them who was possessed by an evil spirit. Here is someone who embodies the captivity that all humanity is held in. Look at verse 24. He cries out: **'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!'** This demon possessed man is terrified in the presence of Jesus. He knows who Jesus is. He is God's Spirit-anointed King. And he understands all too well the significance of the coming of God's kingdom. It means that the defeat of Satan and his forces is imminent. And with just a few words, Jesus silences the spirit and casts him out. There's no technique, no spell, no incantations. Just a few words. This poor man convulses violently, and the spirit comes out of him with a shriek. It's a dramatic sign that reveals the conflict Jesus has come to enter with Satan. It's a demonstration of his authority over the forces of evil and a foretaste of the rescue that he had come to achieve.

Look at verse 27. **The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.' News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.**

The people had never seen anything like this before. They had nothing to compare it to. It was altogether new. And totally alarming. What is this? What should they make of this man?

C. S. Lewis got it spot on in his book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

If you've read it, you may remember Lucy asking Mr and Mrs Beaver about Aslan, the great lion, who represents Christ.

"Is he—quite safe?" she said. "I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs Beaver. “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he ain’t safe. But he’s good.”

Jesus is not safe. He’s the Holy One of God; God’s Spirit-anointed King. He’s not someone to be trifled with. But the question is what you and I make of him. Can you see that he is good? Can you see that he’s the hero who’s come to rescue you? That’s the question. And that question only intensifies in the next few verses as we read of his power, which is undoubtedly supernatural power. And that’s our next heading.

### Supernatural power

Jesus and the two pairs of brothers leave the synagogue and go to the home of Simon and Andrew. And Mark tells us, in verse 30: **Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.** People have suggested that this is a little hard on Simon’s mother-in-law. She’s only just got over being ill when she’s made to get up and serve a meal. But that’s a particularly superficial reading of the passage. What Mark wants us to see is how complete her healing is. As Jesus takes her hand and helps her up, she is healed instantly and fully. That isn’t normal.

If *I’m* recovering from an illness, it normally takes me a day or two to feel myself again. If someone asks me how I am, I might say, ‘I’m doing okay. I’m still not 100%, but I’m doing okay.’ I might be accused of having ‘man-flu’. But that’s the reality; when we get ill it takes a while to recover.’

But not with Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. With her, there’s no suggestion she’s still feeling weak. There are no aftereffects of her illness. We’re told that the fever has left her. It’s gone. She’s completely better. Fully restored. We might even suspect that she’s feeling better than she’s ever felt before. And her response is one of gratitude.

And it’s just the start. Verse 32. **That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.**

What do you make of Jesus? As he heals the sick and casts out demons, can you see a picture of what he has come to do?

His power – and it can only be supernatural power – is a sign of the supernatural conflict that he's come to enter. As he releases people from disease and demon-possession, it points to what he's come to do. He's the hero who has come from outside. He has come into the world to set captives free. He has come to free completely those who are held in Satan's grasp.

It's possible not to see that. It's possible to look at a painting and enjoy the colours and the scene, while missing the meaning the artist is trying to communicate. That's almost certainly how I look at most paintings. It's possible to watch a film and enjoy the action and the special effects, while missing the underlying message. I must admit, I'm very happy to watch films on that level. But it's also possible to be drawn to Jesus because of the miraculous and the spectacular and miss the rescue they point to. And that is altogether more serious. Perhaps that's why Jesus won't let the demons speak about him, because that would serve to draw people to him for all the wrong reasons. What Jesus wants, above all, is for us to come to him and to listen to his message. And it is an urgent message, which is our next heading.

### Urgent message

Please look down at verse 35. **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'** These brothers aren't impressed by Jesus taking himself off to be alone, somewhere quiet. They want him to be out there ministering to the crowds. What follows is a very significant statement of his purpose. Verse 38. **Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.** Jesus didn't come primarily to heal people's illnesses but to preach a message. He didn't come to end war, or eradicate disease, or save the planet. He came to preach. And we know his message because Mark has already told us. **The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.**

It's an urgent message that requires an urgent response. The healings and exorcisms serve as illustrations of what he preached. They're evidence of his power over Satan. They give added weight to his call to repent of sin and turn back to God. But he won't allow them to distract him from preaching his message. When the crowds seeking healing become a hindrance, he moves on. All of that must make us ask ourselves whether we have paid attention to the message that Jesus proclaims.

A few weeks ago, I was driving one of my daughters home from Eastbourne, and as we were leaving Eastbourne and heading towards Pevensey, we passed a sign. It said: *Road ahead closed. Follow diversion.* 'I'm sure there'll be a way through,' I said to my daughter. And kept driving.

Shortly afterwards, we passed another sign. It said: *Road ahead closed. Turn around.* 'I'm sure there'll be a side street we can use,' I said. And kept driving.

We passed another sign. It said simply: *Road ahead closed.* 'I'm sure we'll be okay,' I said, slightly less confidently. And kept driving.

And then we got to Pevensey and the roadworks. There was no side street. There was no way around. The road was most definitely closed.

Jesus is saying that the road we're on is closed. We may think it's the road that leads to life and happiness. But he's warning us that it's a dead end. It's the road that Satan is leading us on. A road that leads, ultimately, to regret.

But there is a road that leads to life and happiness. It's the road that Jesus leads us on, if we will follow him. His message is that God's kingdom is coming. Everything he said and did is inviting us to come and get in on it. He's calling us to be part of the great rescue he's come to accomplish. To get off the road we're on. And to follow him.

Are you listening?

It's possible to come to church and enjoy the songs, the community, and even the sermons, and yet not to pay attention to the message Jesus proclaims.

Are you listening?

If you are, then his invitation is to come and receive his compassionate touch, which is our final heading.

### Compassionate touch

Please look down again at verse 40. **A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'** And then read the first three words of the next line. **Jesus was indignant.**

Leprosy made someone an outcast. Anyone with a leprous skin disease was considered to be unclean and was excluded from society. And this man is desperate. He begs Jesus on his knees for healing.

Jesus' indignation might surprise us. But his anger isn't directed at the man. He's angry at the man's diseased condition. This isn't how life is meant to be. We often feel that same anger when confronted with illness and disease. We have an instinctive sense that it's wrong. This isn't how life is meant to be. And it isn't. Disease and death are unwelcome intruders in God's perfect world. **Just as a cat might bring fleas into your perfect home, sin has brought disease and death into God's perfect world.** They are symptoms of a fallen world. Disease and death are in the world because sin is in the world. They are the

consequences of Satan's hold on us. Satan doesn't give life, he destroys life. And Jesus is angry at what this man is suffering.

So, he does the unthinkable, something no one else would do. He reaches out his hand and touches the man's diseased skin. And immediately, the man is healed. It's a wonderful picture of what Jesus has come to do. In his love, he doesn't hesitate from stooping to touch the ugliness and stench of our sinful condition. He comes to us in our sinful state, takes our disease upon himself and lifts it from us. He carries it to the cross, where he pays its penalty and secures our healing through the forgiveness of our sins. That's how he breaks Satan's hold on us and releases us from his grasp. It's how he sets captives free. It's through the forgiveness of sins. It's what we'll celebrate a little later as we share bread and wine together.

Then Jesus sends the man to the priest to offer proof of his cleansing, with a warning not to tell anyone. The man pays no attention. And we're told in verse 45: **As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.** The healed leper is welcomed back into society, but Jesus is now the one who is effectively excluded. Do you see how they have exchanged places? Again, we can see a picture of the gospel. Jesus bears the curse of our sin so that we might be released from it. He stands in the place of excluded sinners, so that we might be forgiven and welcomed into God's kingdom.

### Conclusion

What do you make of Jesus? Do you see that the message about him is good news? Can you see that he is the rescuer you need, who has come to free you from captivity to sin and death, and give you life in his kingdom? If so, then heed his call. Repent and believe the good news. Get off the road you're on. And follow him.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he came to release us from the grasp of Satan and bring us into your kingdom. Please help us to trust in him, to follow him, and to delight in him before all else. In his name we pray. Amen.