

Discussion Guide for Mark 1:21–28

By: Pastor Tim Dodson, September 2nd, 2026

Teaching and Authority in Capernaum

- **Observation:** How did Jesus' teaching in the synagogue differ from the way the scribes taught (Mark 1:21–22)? Why do you think the unclean spirit reacted the way it did to Jesus' presence (Mark 1:23–24)?
- **Reflection:** Jesus spoke and acted with real spiritual authority. Where do you look for true authority when navigating confusing cultural values or personal doubts today?
- **Application:** In what specific area of your life do you need to submit to Jesus' authority rather than trying to stay in control?
- What does real authority/control look like? What has God done to confirm the authority of His teachers in the past? Should we expect miracles to confirm the authority of His teachers today? Why, or why not?
- How responsive are you to Jesus' authority over your life?

Mark 1:29–45: Healing, Prayer, and Outreach

- **Observation:** After a busy evening of healing the sick, what did Jesus do early the next morning, and how did He respond when the disciples tracked Him down (Mark 1:35–38)?
- **Reflection:** Jesus made solitude and prayer a priority even when the crowds wanted more from Him. How does your own prayer life reflect or struggle with this kind of intentional quietness?
- **Application:** When the leper approached Jesus with humility (Mark 1:40), Jesus reached out and touched him—crossing social and ritual boundaries. Who is someone in your personal world who feels perhaps marginalized or overlooked that you can show Christ's compassion to?

Mark 2:1–14: The Paralytic and the Call of Levi

- **Observation:** What lengths did the friends go to in order to get the paralytic in front of Jesus (Mark 2:3–4)? Why did Jesus address the man's *sin and forgiveness* before healing his physical body (Mark 2:5)?
- **Reflection:** The religious leaders viewed Jesus' claim to forgive sins as blasphemy. How does recognizing your own need for forgiveness change the way you view the power of Jesus?
- **Application:** Jesus shocked the community by calling Levi (Matthew), a tax collector, to "follow me" (Mark 2:13–14). Is there any area of your life or comfort zone where you feel Jesus calling you to leave behind, or an unexpected person He is inviting you to reach out to?

An Unclean Spirit Cast Out (1:21–28)

Verses 21–34 describe a typical day in the life of the Lord. Miracle followed miracle as the Great Physician healed the demon-possessed and diseased.

The Savior's healing miracles illustrate how He liberates men from the dread results of sin. This is illustrated in the chart above.

Though the preacher of the gospel is not called upon to perform these acts of physical healing today, he is constantly called upon to deal with their spiritual counterparts. Are these not the greater miracles the Lord Jesus mentioned in John 14:12: "He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do?"

1:21, 22 But now let us return to Mark's narrative. At **Capernaum**, Jesus had **entered the synagogue** and had begun to teach **on the Sabbath**. The people realized that here was no ordinary teacher. There was undeniable power connected with His words, unlike **scribes** who droned on mechanically. His sentences were arrows from the Almighty. His lessons were arresting, convicting, challenging. The scribes peddled a second-hand religion. There was no unreality in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. He had the right to say what He did, because He lived what He taught.

Everyone who teaches the Word of God should speak with authority or not speak at all. The Psalmist said, "I believed, therefore I spoke" (Psalm 116:10). Paul echoed the words in 2 Corinthians 4:13. Their message was born of deep conviction.

1:23 In their synagogue there was a man possessed, or inhabited, by a demon. The demon is described as **an unclean spirit**. This probably means that the spirit manifested its

presence by making the man physically or morally unclean. Let no one confuse demon-possession with various forms of insanity. The two are separate and distinct. A demon-possessed person is actually indwelt and controlled by an evil spirit. The person is often able to perform supernatural feats and often becomes violent or blasphemous when confronted with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:24 Notice that the evil spirit recognized **Jesus** and spoke of Him as the Nazarene and **the Holy One of God**. Notice too the change of pronouns from plural to singular: “**What have we to do with You?... Did you come to destroy us?... I know You....**” At first the demon speaks as joined to the man; then he speaks for himself alone.

1:25, 26 **Jesus** would not accept the witness of a demon, even if it was true. So He told the evil spirit to **be quiet**, then commanded him to **come out of** the man. It must have been strange to see the **convulsed** man and to hear the eerie cry of the demon as he left his victim.

1:27, 28 The miracle caused amazement. It was new and startling to the people that with a mere command, a Man could drive out a demon. Was this the beginning of a new school of religious teaching, they wondered? News of the miracle **immediately spread throughout ... Galilee**. Before leaving this portion, let us note three things:

1. The First Advent of Christ apparently aroused a great outburst of demonic activity on the earth.
2. Christ's power over these evil spirits foreshadows His eventual triumph over Satan and all his agents.
3. Wherever God works, Satan opposes. All who set out to serve the Lord can expect to be opposed every step of the way. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

D. Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed (1:29–31)

“Immediately” is one of the characteristic words of this Gospel, and is especially suitable for the Gospel which stresses the servant character of the Lord Jesus.

1:29, 30 From **the synagogue** our Lord went to Simon's house. **As soon as** He arrived, he learned that **Simon's** mother-in-law **lay sick with a fever**. Verse 30 states that **they told Him about her at once**. They wasted no time in bringing her need to the Physician's attention.

1:31 Without a word, Jesus **took her by the hand** and helped her to her feet. She was cured **immediately**. Ordinarily a fever leaves a person in a weakened condition. In this case, the Lord not only cured the fever but gave immediate strength to serve. **And she served them**. J. R. Miller says:

Every sick person who is restored, whether in an ordinary or extraordinary way, should hasten to consecrate to the service of God the life that is given back.... A great many persons are always sighing for opportunities to minister to Christ, imagining some fine and splendid service which they would like to render. Meantime they let slip past their hands the very things in which Christ wants them to serve Him. True ministry to Christ is doing first of all and well one's daily duties.

It is noticeable that in each of the healing miracles, the Savior's procedure is different. This reminds us that no two conversions are exactly alike. Everyone must be dealt with on an individual basis.

That Peter had a mother-in-law shows that the idea of a celibate priesthood was foreign to that day. It is a tradition of men which finds no support in the Word of God and which breeds a host of evils.

E. Healing At Sunset (1:32–34)

News of the Savior's presence had spread during the day. As long as it was the Sabbath, the people dared not bring the needy to Him. But **when the sun had set** and the Sabbath had ended, there was a rush to the door of Peter's house. There **the sick and the demon-possessed** experienced the power that delivers from every phase and form of sin.

F. Preaching Throughout Galilee (1:35–39)

1:35 Jesus rose **a long while before daylight** and **went out** to a **place** where He would be free from distraction and spend time in prayer. The Servant of Jehovah opened His ear each morning to receive instructions for the day from God the Father (Isa. 50:4, 5). If the Lord Jesus felt the need of this early morning quiet time, how much more should we! Notice too that **He prayed** when it cost Him something; He rose and went out **a long while before daylight**. Prayer should not be a matter of personal convenience but of self-discipline and sacrifice. Does this explain why so much of our service is ineffective?

1:36, 37 By the time **Simon** and the others got up, the crowd was gathered outside the house again. The disciples went to tell the Lord of the rising popular sentiment.

1:38 Surprisingly, He did not go back to the city, but took the disciples into the surrounding **towns**, explaining that He must **preach there also**. Why did He not return to Capernaum?

1. First of all, He had just been in prayer and had learned what God wanted Him to do that day.

2. Secondly, He realized that the popular movement in Capernaum was shallow. The Savior was never attracted by large crowds. He looked below the surface to see what was in their hearts.

3. He knew the peril of popularity and taught the disciples by His example to beware when all men spoke well of them.

4. He consistently avoided any superficial, emotional demonstration that would have put the crown before the cross.

5. His great emphasis was on preaching the Word. The healing miracles, while intended to relieve human misery, were also designed to gain attention for the preaching.

1:39 Thus to the **synagogues throughout all Galilee** Jesus went **preaching** and **casting out demons**. He combined preaching and practicing, saying and doing. It is interesting to see how often He cast out demons in synagogues. Would liberal churches today correspond to the synagogues?

G. A Leper Cleansed (1:40–45)

The account of the **leper** gives us an instructive example of the prayer that God answers:

1. It was earnest and desperate—**imploring Him**.
2. It was reverent—**kneeling down to Him**.
3. It was humble and submissive—**“If You are willing.”**
4. It was believing—**“You can.”**
5. It acknowledged need—**“make me clean.”**
6. It was specific—not “bless me” but **“make me clean.”**
7. It was personal—**“make *me* clean.”**
8. It was brief—five words in the original.

Notice what happened!

Jesus was moved with compassion. Let us never read these words without a sense of exultation and gratitude.

He stretched out His hand. Think of it! The hand of God stretched forth in answer to humble, believing prayer.

He **touched him**. Under the law, a person became ceremonially unclean when he touched a leper. Also, there was of course the danger of contracting the disease. But the Holy Son of Man identified Himself with the miseries of mankind, dispelling the ravages of sin without being tainted by them.

He said, **“I am willing.”** He is more willing to heal than we are to be healed. Then **“Be cleansed.”** In an instant the skin of the leper was smooth and clear.

He forbade publicizing the miracle until first the man had appeared before **the priest** and had made the required offering (Lev. 14:2ff). This was a test, first of all, of the man’s obedience. Would he do as he was told? He did not; he publicized his case, and as a result, he hindered the work of the Lord (v. 45). It was also a test of the priest’s discernment. Would he perceive that the long-awaited Messiah had come, performing wonderful miracles of healing? If he was typical of the nation of Israel, he would not.

Again we find that Jesus withdrew from the crowds and ministered **in deserted places**. He did not measure success by numbers.

H. A Paralytic Healed (2:1–12)

2:1–4 Soon after the Lord **entered Capernaum ... many gathered** around **the house** where He was. Word had spread quickly, and people were anxious to see the Miracle-Worker in action. Whenever God moves in power, people are attracted. The Savior faithfully **preached the word to them** as they clustered round the door. At the rear of the crowd was **a paralytic, carried by four** others on an improvised stretcher. The crowd hindered his getting near the Lord Jesus. There usually are hindrances in bringing others to Jesus. But faith is ingenious. The four carriers climbed the outside stairs to the roof, **uncovered** a portion of **the roof**, and lowered **the paralytic** to the ground floor—perhaps to a courtyard in the middle—bringing him near the Son of God. Someone has nicknamed these good friends Sympathy, Cooperation, Originality, and Persistence. We should each strive to be a friend who displays these qualities.

2:5 Jesus, impressed by **their faith, ... said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”** Now this seemed to be a strange thing to say. It was a question of paralysis, not sin, wasn’t it? Yes, but Jesus went beyond the symptoms to the cause. He would not heal the body and neglect the soul. He would not remedy a temporal condition, and leave an eternal condition untouched. So He said, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** It was a wonderful announcement. Now—on this earth—in this life—the man’s **sins** were **forgiven**. He didn’t

have to wait till the Day of Judgment. He had the present assurance of forgiveness. So do all who put their faith in the Lord Jesus.

2:6, 7 The scribes quickly caught on to the significance of the statement. They were well enough trained in Bible doctrine to know that only **God can forgive sins**. Anyone who professed to forgive sins was therefore claiming to be God. Up to this point, their logic was correct. But instead of acknowledging the Lord Jesus to be God, they accused Him in their hearts of speaking **blasphemies**.

2:8, 9 Jesus read their thoughts, a proof in itself of His supernatural power. He asked them this provocative question: “**Is it easier** to pronounce a man’s sins forgiven or his paralysis cured?” Actually it is just as easy to say one as the other. But it is equally impossible, humanly speaking, to *do* the one as it is to *do* the other.

2:10–12 The Lord had already pronounced the man’s sins forgiven. Yes, but had it really taken place? The scribes could not see the man’s sins forgiven, therefore they would not believe. In order to demonstrate that the man’s sins had really been forgiven, the Savior gave the scribes something they could see. He told the paralytic man to get up, to carry his straw pad, **and walk**. The man responded instantly. The people were **amazed**. They had **never** seen **anything like this** before. But the scribes did not believe, in spite of the most overwhelming evidence. Belief involves the will, and they did not want to believe.

I. The Call of Levi (2:13–17)

2:13, 14 It was while He was teaching **by the sea** that Jesus saw **Levi** collecting taxes. We know Levi as Matthew, who later wrote the first Gospel. He was a Jew, but his occupation was very un-Jewish, considering he collected taxes for the despised Roman government! Such men were not always noted for their honesty—in fact, they were looked down upon, like harlots, as the scum of society. Yet it is to Levi’s eternal credit that when he heard the call of Christ, he dropped everything **and followed Him**. May each of us be like him in instant and unquestioning obedience. It might seem like a great sacrifice at the time, but in eternity it will be seen as no sacrifice at all. As the missionary martyr Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”^[1]

^[1] William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1321–1324.