

thoughtful and simple just because people did not have modern science. The Bible gives us plenty of examples of Jesus healing illnesses without any mention of demons, and the evidence is that people of Jesus' day did indeed have a spiritual understanding of what they meant by demon possession and not just a crude misunderstanding of what we think of as mental illness (which people assume too quickly today). Notice the way in which the crowds observe that the spirit troubling the man in our passage today was a ritually 'unclean' spirit (1:27).

There is just one feature of the story which is important and has not as yet been examined. This is the fact that as soon as the spirit shouted out whom Jesus was, Jesus replied with a rebuke and said, 'Silence!' Surely, would Jesus not have been happy for people to know who He was? But as the Gospel unfolds, we will discover that Jesus accepted those who responded to Him by faith, and did not force people into such a confession. He dealt with people individually and carefully, often rejecting open declarations about who He was and the gossip of the crowds. This is all part of an important theme of Mark's Gospel. Jesus undoubtedly declared the Kingdom of God boldly, but He did not force it on people or want them to respond to Him because of any ill-informed popular movement. In the case of our passage, gossip about how he dealt with a demon was not a good basis for a full response to the message of God's 'Good News'.

### Application

What comes across to us today is the simplicity and directness of Jesus' actions, and the authority and control which flowed from this. The anointing of the Holy Spirit at His baptism gave Jesus the power and the authority to handle this extraordinary situation well. Now, with the baptism of the Holy Spirit being available to us all, despite much misunderstanding of it in recent years, we, too, can have confidence to deal with any form of evil, whether it be Satan or evil spirits, in the same way that Jesus did; swiftly and with authority. Jesus did not go looking for evil spirits, it was they who responded to His preaching and we will often come across them in the same way today. If we do God's work of preaching and demonstrating God's Kingdom, then the evil which is in the world will raise itself up and object. There is much more for us to learn from Mark's Gospel about the nature of evil and what Satan does, and reading the Gospels will help us understand and recognise evil, but it is wise not to be too prescriptive about it. Satan's primary work is to object to God's Kingdom and the message of the Gospel, and that is sufficient for us to note from this text.

Apart from this, the main thing we can learn from this passage is that when God acts, He does so with power. There are times and seasons when God does certain things in the world, and we do not always know when they will be. Our task is to be ready to do His will and to respond to what the Lord wishes to do in the world, and we should be careful not to assume that we know what His will is. Just as people did not know when God would send the Messiah into the world, so, today, we do not know when He will come amongst us in revival power, for example, or when He will come to bring His world to its end with the second coming of our Lord. Our task is to be His servants, like Jesus; willing and able to do His will.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. What, for you, is the most amazing thing that Jesus has taught you? Discuss this in your group.
2. Compare what has been stated in this study about the worship of God in a synagogue with what you do on Sunday at church. What is the difference?
3. How do we come across evil spirits today, and how can we best deal with them?

### Discipleship

After considering this passage, you may have any number of thoughts in your mind about evil spirits or the Gospel itself. Some of the issues within this passage are controversial. It is a good practice for all of us who aim to walk in Jesus' pathway, to refuse to let difficult or controversial issues lie unattended. A simple resolution to speak to others or research an issue, for example, will help us grow enormously and show the Lord that we are serious about pursuing what we mean by calling ourselves 'disciples'.

### Final Prayer

Holy Lord, God of power and might; raise up people amongst us who will set high standards of spiritual integrity and godliness. May we have leaders to inspire us, and friends who will work with us to build God's Kingdom in our midst; in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour: AMEN

### Prayer

All glory be to You, O Lord, Maker of heaven and earth.  
Your glory has been shown to us in Jesus Christ Your Son!  
Your glory is shown by us to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit  
Your glory will be completed when Christ comes again to reign!  
And everyone will see that all glory belongs to You O Lord!

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Looking Ahead

Pray in the Spirit to look ahead into the coming year. Wait on the Lord by giving the Spirit space to speak to you or to guide you into using certain scriptures for prayer. In this way, the Lord will guide you into understanding His own will for what lies ahead. Do not be surprised if He does not tell you 'what will happen', but does tell you what you and God's people must do.

### Meditation

The pattern of the day is clear; morning, afternoon and night;  
The pattern of Christ's work is clear; He comes, He calls, He saves.

We use the day to live our lives; to work, to play, to rest;  
We let the Spirit touch some things, but close Him out of everything else.

As time goes by, routine becomes our perpetual driving force;  
As time goes by, the plans our Lord has made for us are left behind, untouched.

Every voice we hear competes for our attention, calling this or that;  
Every voice we hear echoes urgently the call of Christ; 'hear me, and hear me now.'

So, each moment holds a key for change, if we will allow it to be;  
So, each moment can be the time we let our Lord and Master in again.

Our bondage to the world may then be broken, left out for rubbish;  
Our bondage to Jesus Christ will be our liberation and our light for all eternity.

The pattern of our day will then be clear; morning, afternoon and night;  
The pattern of Christ's work is then complete; He came, He called, He saved.

### Bible Study - Mark 1:21-28

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and as soon as the Sabbath came, he went into the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at His teaching, for he taught them as someone with authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Straight away, a man with an unclean spirit was present in their synagogue, and he shouted out, <sup>24</sup> 'What do we have in common, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God!' <sup>25</sup> Jesus rebuked him and said, 'Silence, come out of him!' <sup>26</sup> The unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions, and came out of him after crying out with a loud voice. <sup>27</sup> The people were all amazed, and asked one another, 'What is this? A new teaching, but with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' <sup>28</sup> News about Him spread immediately throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

#### Review

In this startling and dramatic story, Jesus went into the local synagogue at Capernaum where He was undoubtedly known, to worship God with the congregation and contribute to the worship by speaking from the Scriptures, as any man was entitled to do. Then, as He worshipped, two things happened; firstly, His teaching had such a power and authority that the congregation was astonished (1:22)! Secondly, a man described as possessed by an 'unclean spirit' had somehow managed to get into the synagogue. He shouted at Jesus, and Jesus not only mastered the whole scene but also cast the demon out of the man. By making him clean Jesus calmed the sensibilities of those

present and demonstrated His authority as the Messiah. However, these people had only just come across Jesus and discover that something extraordinary was happening in their midst!

This is the first public incident of Jesus' ministry recorded by Mark, and it is also one of the early stories about Jesus in Luke's Gospel, which can help us fill in some of the gaps in Jesus' ministry left out by Mark. This incident took place at Capernaum (1:21), a short time after Jesus had preached at Nazareth (according to Luke 4:16f.) and astonished people by announcing that the words of the prophet Isaiah; 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...' were being fulfilled in their presence. Mark says that the same astonishment greeted Jesus' preaching and teaching in Capernaum as elsewhere, but he immediately went on to illustrate Jesus' authority over the powers of evil by describing His deliverance ministry (123f.). People often misunderstand this story because they have fixed negative views about the whole subject of possession by spirits, which is a major part of the story.

People today are often very cautious about accepting the theory of any understanding of the nature of evil that includes demons, spirits, Satan or the devil. They tend to reject any interpretation of stories about Jesus suggesting that demonic possession is a reality or that deliverance is a genuine ministry either of Jesus or of His followers today. They perceive the talk of demons as evidence of past ages when people did not know the proper meaning of mental illness. This is unfortunate, for we should at least be prepared to understand what this meant to people in Jesus' day before we jump to our conclusions for today. One thing is very clear; in Jesus, God came to establish a Kingdom in which His goodness would prevail over all evil, and however you describe evil, its purpose is to prevent God's work. The coming of Jesus therefore meant that spiritual war broke out between 'good' and 'evil', and it should therefore come as no surprise to us that one of the first things that happened to Jesus when He began to preach was that He was confronted by an evil spirit.

Most detailed research about Jesus suggests that during His ministry He was a man in His mid to late twenties. In His own time, He would have been considered as a man in His prime; young, and with much potential. In addition, we have some indication from Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:41-52) that Jesus had a commanding knowledge of Jewish Law and tradition from an early age, and it is not surprising that he went up to speak in the synagogue on the Sabbath (1:21). Moreover, the synagogue at Capernaum was likely to have been a place Jesus knew well, and the people present would have known about Him and His prodigious knowledge, and it was against this background that the congregation were awestruck by Jesus' authority! His command of evil spirits was a very different thing to mere knowledge!

As Mark has already recorded, Jesus had been commissioned by God as His 'Messiah'. He had been baptised by the Holy Spirit, and He now had a specific ministry for which He was enabled (1:9-11). The commission of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit made the difference between a knowledgeable young man and the Messiah who had authority over evil spirits. People were both amazed and confused (1:27), but that was only to be expected. Jesus ministry had only just begun!

### **Going Deeper**

The question remains, what did Jesus teach which caused such a reaction? Moreover, we can begin to answer the question by looking at the flow of Mark's Gospel. Consequently, Jesus' demonstration of power in casting out the evil spirit is an essential demonstration of Jesus' spiritual power and authority at the beginning of His ministry, and its details are significant. The final response of the crowd then becomes understandable, and we are left in no doubt that Jesus' ministry is now well under way!

#### ***The teaching of Jesus***

Some people think this story gives us evidence that Jesus was already considered a rabbi by the time he began his ministry, simply because he was allowed to go and speak from the Scriptures in the synagogue. However, this is not something we can be sure about. A service in a synagogue would normally consist of praise, blessings, prayers, the reading of Scripture and explanations by a leading man present; normally those skilled in the scribal traditions but not always. Sometimes a person was asked to speak beforehand by local dignitaries responsible for the local synagogue, and this is the most likely reason for what Jesus did, but why was His preaching so different and 'amazing' (1:22).

All we can say is that Mark has already told us that since Jesus' baptism, he preached 'The time has now come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe in the good news!' Now, this may be a generalisation, but whatever method Jesus chose to preach this message, it would

have been quite different from anything He had previously said in the synagogue. In the language of his own day, this message told people that Jesus was the Messiah and that God's Kingdom was coming! It seems therefore that the great uproar of amazement at Jesus' 'authority' was caused by this very message, a word that could only be preached by Jesus after His baptism!

Mark may not have recorded what Jesus said or what Old Testament text he spoke from, but Luke did. In Luke's Gospel (4:14f.) where this same incident is reported, Jesus famously reads from the prophet Isaiah; 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ...' (Isaiah 61:1,2). Even as we read these words, they remind us of exactly what Mark has recorded in his Gospel, which is that Jesus preached with anointed power, and that the Kingdom of God and the Messiah had come! It seems fairly conclusive that this is what Jesus' first message was at Capernaum, and this is what made the congregation respond as they did, both in Luke's Gospel (Luke 4:22f.) and in Mark's Gospel (1:22).

#### ***A demonstration of Jesus' power***

Mark then tells us that 'straight away', a man possessed by an unclean spirit challenged Jesus (1:23). This is the fifth time in the first chapter of Mark that the Greek word 'euthus' meaning 'immediately', or 'straight away' is used, and it is obvious now to any reader of the original text that this word is a characteristic of Mark's Gospel. The point Mark makes is simple enough. Immediately Jesus declared His message and announced His claim as Messiah through this message, He was challenged by an evil spirit. In the days of Jesus, an evil spirit was a demonic spiritual being under the control of Satan, the Prince of demons, so this challenge was a challenge from Satan himself.

Some scholars avoid any discussion of this by observing that Jesus could not have gone straight from calling the disciples whilst they were fishing (1:16-20), to preaching on the Sabbath, because obviously, fishing was not allowed on the Sabbath day! This is true, but Mark's word 'euthus' is not an indicator of time, but a spiritual indicator of what was happening in God's Kingdom, now it had been openly declared by Jesus. Now this message was public, there was an immediate response from the people, and also from demonic forces of evil.

In the course of our study of Mark's Gospel we will have plenty of opportunities to discuss situations in which Jesus deals with evil spirits. This incident, however, is entirely a reflection of the dramatic beginning of Jesus' ministry. The man with the unclean spirit should not have been in the synagogue because he was unclean (though we do not know what observable ailment he had). He shouted out at Jesus, not with any words which a normal person could have spoken, but words which could only have been spoken by a demon or perhaps Satan himself, who had supernatural knowledge of who Jesus was (1:24). Whilst the congregation were still debating about Jesus, the demon was certain; 'I know who You are, the Holy One of God!', and Jesus' response was twofold. Firstly, he silenced the demon and secondly, he cast the demon out of the man, and both of these actions were done with a peremptory command (1:25). The demon made a great fuss about all this but eventually left the man (1:26) after making a great scene. It is worth learning from this that the manifestation of the demonic spirit in terms of convulsions and further 'crying out' was merely evidence that Jesus had already dismissed the demon. His words were sufficient, and He was totally in control.

Yet again, what Jesus did was to demonstrate His own power and authority in a way which was unmistakable to those who saw the event (see also Luke 4:31-37). It was a demonstration of His anointing in power, and the message given Him by God at His baptism (1:9-15)

#### ***The public response to Jesus' ministry***

The response of the people to all this was amazement. They were used to people in their midst who claimed to have powers to dismiss demons and heal people, and the few reports we still have of such happenings indicate that battling with the demonic could be a lengthy and difficult process, not dissimilar to the over-characterisation by Hollywood of such things in films of recent times. The remarkable thing about Jesus' dismissal of the demon both for the people of the day and for us who read about it now is that Jesus was able to deal with the spirit without any fuss and with total control, through a few authoritative words.

The crowds understood the message immediately, which was that Jesus' authority was genuine and effective. Evil spirits stood no chance in front of Him. It is probably true that in those days many types of illnesses were thought of as the result of evil spirits, and it is not surprising that people talked about this and news of Jesus' work spread quickly throughout the area (1:28). However, it is not right for us to assume that the diagnosis of illness in Jesus' day was more un-