

## Discipleship According to Mark

*A Man of Authority* (Mark 1:16-45)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 11, 2026

### Introduction

- ❖ If you weren't here last Sunday, we introduced a new sermon series for the new year. Our plan, Lord-willing, for 2026 is to preach through the Gospel According to Mark. We're going to cover chapters 1-10 by the summer. Then take a short summer break in another series. Before jumping back in, this fall, to finish the book before next December.
  - I'm excited about this series because – at least for the last 15 years – we've preached through whole books of the Bible but never through an entire Gospel. It's a daunting task. Now we chose the shortest of the four Gospel accounts so we can fit it all within a year. **But I won't be surprised if you feel like we're going too fast.** Each sermon will cover a lot of ground. Today's text could honestly be two or three sermons.
- ❖ **But “fast” is the nature of Mark's Gospel.** It's often noted that the one word that appears most frequently is the word “immediately”. It shows up 41 times in Mark. Seven times in our text alone. This is a fast-paced Gospel account. Unlike Matthew or Luke, Mark doesn't spend any time giving us a nativity story. There are no accounts of his childhood. Even the mention of his baptism and introduction to the public is abbreviated compared to other Gospels. In Mark's account, Jesus is immediately presented as a full-formed character already engaged in public ministry. Calling disciples, preaching the Word, and performing signs and wonders.
  - The immediacy forces the other characters in the Gospel – as well as the readers of the Gospel – to ask themselves, “Who then is this?” (Mk 4:41) Who is this man – who can say such things and then back it up by doing such things? Who is this Jesus? That's the constant question being raised throughout Mark's Gospel.
- ❖ Now, on one hand, he's already answered that question. In chapter one, verse one. “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” Jesus is the Christ, which in Greek means the Anointed One. Which is synonymous with the Jewish term, the Messiah.
  - And he is the Son of God. Which is an allusion to that Daniel 7 messianic figure who comes on the clouds and receives from the Ancient of Days dominion and authority. Jesus makes a direct reference to that figure later in chapter 14:62. **The point is that the Son of God is an authoritative figure. He is a man of authority.** And that emphasis is made over and over again in this morning's text.
    - The crowds are amazed by the authority of Jesus's teaching. They say, in v27, “*What is this? A new teaching with authority!*” There's something about this teacher. It's not just that his teaching is authoritative. But he himself possesses an authority unlike any other.
- ❖ **So this morning, I want to introduce you to this man of authority.** Now I realize some of you are just getting to know him, so to hear Jesus described as a “man of authority” might not sound attractive. It might repel you. But I think you'll be pleasantly surprised when you come to see what kind of authority we're talking about and how differs from our general impression of authoritative figures.

- ❖ **And for those who are followers of Jesus – and have been for a while – I hope this text serves as a good reminder that we follow a man of authority who expects his disciples to obey his Word without hesitation.** That’s the impression of Jesus reinforced in these verses. So let’s walk through it together, and I want to show you three things about Jesus.
  - He is (1) a great man who possesses great authority. But in contrast to the spirit of our day, Jesus is (2) a great man who has no interest in being famous. And unlike the great men you may be familiar with, Jesus is (3) a great man who blends great authority with great compassion.

### **A Great Man Who Possesses Great Authority**

- ❖ So the first impression we get of Jesus is that he is a great man who possesses great authority. He displays this authority in three distinct ways. We see it in the way he calls his disciples, in the way he teaches, and in the way he commands spirits and sickness.
- ❖ **Look with me at vv16-20 and Jesus’s first display of authority. He calls his disciples to leave everything to follow him.** At this point, he’s outside the city of Capernaum, passing by the Sea of Galilee, when he encounters Simon (better known to us as Peter) and his brother Andrew. They were fishermen and were in the act of casting their net into the sea, trying to make a living. Jesus approaches. And all we’re told is that he simply said to them, *“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”* <sup>18</sup>*And immediately they left their nets and followed him.* That was it. That’s all it took.
  - And then going a little further along the coast, he sees two more brothers who were also fishermen, James and John the sons of Zebedee, in their boat mending their nets. *“<sup>20</sup>And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”*
- ❖ Now many of us are quite familiar with this story. But we don’t realize how surprising it would’ve been for the original audience, for first-century Jews. **In their culture, rabbis don’t go around recruiting students.** The student would be the one who initiates and asks a rabbi if he can learn the Torah under his tutelage. It’s not normal for the rabbi to initiate and go searching for students.
  - And even if, by chance, a rabbi were to initiate, he would probably *ask* if you wanted to learn at his feet. He wouldn’t command you to do it. The only spiritual figures in the OT who issue commands are the prophets. But prophets would only command you to follow God. They wouldn’t command you to follow them. But here we have Jesus doing the unexpected. **He’s the One taking the initiative, searching for those he wants, and commanding them to follow him.**
- ❖ And they do it without hesitation. That’s the most surprising thing. **Without any explanation, Peter and Andrew, along with James and John, immediately leave their nets, their boat, their profession and follow Jesus.** To us, it sounds unbelievable that anyone would do that. Would just drop everything to follow a man you just met.

- ❖ **John's Gospel account is more believable** (Jn 1:35-37). There we learn that Andrew and Peter at least learned about Jesus from John the Baptist. So in other words, he came highly referred. **Or in Luke's account, Jesus first performed a miracle, impressing them before he issued the call** (Lk 5:1-11). But Mark doesn't give us any of that. No context. No rationale. No explanation for why the disciples would drop everything to follow Jesus.
  - But that's intentional. Mark is emphasizing the authoritative force of Jesus's call. **His call produces its intended effect.** It's an effectual call. Which raises the question of who is this. **Who is this who can produce within you immediate obedience?**
    - Students of Scripture will immediately think of Genesis 1. Where God simply speaks and what he says happens. Let there be light and there is light. In like manner, Jesus says follow me and people follow.
- ❖ **Friends, the implication is clear. The Son of God is God himself.** God in the flesh. And his words carry within them the full weight of divine authority. Which just raises the stakes when it comes to discipleship. Jesus's call of discipleship is not a call to simply adopt a religious lifestyle where – on a few days of the week – you practice your religion.
  - **No, those he has commanded to follow – his disciples – are called to surrender their own authority and to submit their entire lives under his.** Discipleship is a call to repent and believe in the gospel as Jesus said in v15. And now we see that true repentance and true belief are displayed in the act of leaving and following Jesus.
- ❖ I know that sounds daunting. For some of you who are new to church, it seems like Jesus is expecting too much. You feel like you're not ready for all of that. **But take comfort in this – in the fact that Jesus didn't visit the synagogue looking for the best and the brightest to be his disciples.** He wasn't searching for the most influential, the most devout, the most well-read. No, he went to the lake. He was looking for the average man or woman. The fisherman who goes to work each day, trying to make a living, to provide for family. That means you. **And if Jesus is calling you to leave everything and follow, just know that he has the authority to make it happen.** He can create that repentance and faith that's needed.
- ❖ So Jesus's first display of his great authority is seen in the way he calls disciples. **The second display of authority is evident in the way he teaches God's Word.** We're told in v21 that he enters the synagogue at Capernaum in the following Sabbath, and he began teaching. Look at v22, *"And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes."*
  - The scribes were the spiritual leaders in the synagogue who served as experts in the law. They were the teachers of Israel. **But when the scribes taught, they would merely teach by pointing to the authority of revered rabbis.** They could only say things like, "Rabbi Hillel says.... Rabbi Shammai's interpretation is... Rabbi Gamaliel taught..." Theirs was a derivative authority. Derived from other teachers.

- ❖ The same could be said of my teaching or any preacher's. **I try my best to preach with authority, but in the end, it's only with a derivative authority.** And that's assuming that I'm rooting my preaching in the intrinsic authority of God's Word. That's what makes preaching authoritative.
  - But Jesus is different. Unlike the scribes, when he taught, he didn't quote other rabbis. He would just say, "*Truly truly I say unto you...*" He didn't derive his authority from someone else. Famously, in the Sermon on the Mount, his constant refrain was, "*You have heard that it was said....but I say to you.*" **Jesus, in other words, possesses within himself intrinsic authority.**
    - The same intrinsic authority we assign to God's Word. Which makes sense considering how Jesus is described as the Word of God. **Who is this man who teaches as one who has authority within himself?** He is the Word who, in the beginning, was with God and who was God (Jn 1:1). That's who Jesus is.
- ❖ But there's another way in which he reveals his identity by a display of authority. **He displays his great authority by the way he commands spirits and sickness.** He casts out unclean spirits and heals people of their sicknesses.
  - Look back at v23. While he was teaching in the synagogue and displaying his great authority by the way he taught, a man with an unclean spirit interrupted and cried out, "<sup>24</sup>*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.*"
- ❖ Now there's a tinge of irony here. The crowds, the scribes, even the disciples are still uncertain about who Jesus is. **But the unclean spirits, the demons, know *exactly* who he is.** He's the Holy One of God. And not only is this ironic, it's shocking. Shocking that inside the holy space of a synagogue, sitting there all along with the rest of the congregation, was a man with an unclean spirit. Unbeknownst to the worshippers, a demon was in their midst.
  - **Friends, let that serve as a reminder (and warning) that just because you go to church that doesn't make you right with God.** Apparently even demon-possessed people go to church. And apparently even demons believe Jesus is the Holy One of God. They believe he is the Messiah, the Savior. They know that as a true fact. And yet it's clear they're not saved. They're not disciples. Consider that. **Even demons go to church and believe Jesus is the Savior!**
    - But the difference from a disciple is that a demon doesn't love the Church (the Body of Christ). And a demon won't glory in the truth that Jesus is the Holy One of God. **In other words, true disciples don't just go to church and know what's true about Jesus.** They go to church to *worship* him with their hearts, and they *love* Jesus for who he is. Don't be content with anything less. Because anything less could be imitated by a demon.

- ❖ Now look in v25, and you see Jesus rebuke the unclean spirit to be silent and to come out of the man. And with great convulsing and crying, the spirit came out and the man was restored. And the crowd was amazed, questioning among themselves, saying “*What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.*”
  - And then in v29, we’re told that he immediately entered the house of Peter’s mother-in-law who laid ill with a fever. And you have to understand that ancient Jews understood a fever as a form of divine punishment. Because the list of curses for sin found in Deuteronomy 28 (:22) include fevers and their fiery heat. **Fevers were regarded as internal fires within the soul that only God can put out.**
    - Keep that in mind as you read of Jesus, in v31, taking Peter’s mother-in-law by the hand and lifting her up. We’re told the fever left her. He was healing her sickness. But in so doing, Jesus was also displaying his divine authority.
- ❖ So whether by casting out unclean spirits or healing sicknesses, Jesus was revealing who he is. Not just a great man with great authority. **But a God-man with divine authority. Who preaches the good news that his kingdom is at hand.** God’s kingdom come is breaking into this present reality. And we see that actualized in the lives of these individuals who are being delivered and healed. A new king and his benevolent reign is here and is ousting the evil ruler of this world and his malevolent reign. That’s the good news – the gospel Jesus preached.

### A Great Man Who Has No Interest In Being Famous

- ❖ And the preaching of this gospel was at the heart of why he came. Why the Son of God took on flesh and entered his own creation. But, in the beginning of his public ministry, his disciples failed to grasp this. **They were thinking in worldly terms. Borrowing their definition of greatness from the rulers of the Gentiles who lord their authority over others** (Mk 10:42). So as they witness Jesus’s greatness and see his fame greatly spread, the disciples are excited to be in the inner circle of a rising star, of a celebrity. **But Jesus’s actions in v35 make it clear that he’s a great man who has no interest in being famous.**
- ❖ What Jesus does in response to his growing fame is completely counterintuitive to the prevailing wisdom of their age as well as our own. If you suddenly gained a cult following, people would be telling you to hire an agent. To trademark your brand. To get on all the socials (or whatever ancient equivalent there might be). **The main strategy is to find various ways to get yourself in front of the general public.** The more exposure the better.
  - But look at v35 to see what Jesus does. “<sup>35</sup>*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.* <sup>36</sup>*And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,* <sup>37</sup>*and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.”*”
    - The phrase “searched for him” is probably too soft in English. The verb really means to hunt down. **Simon Peter and the other disciples were on a desperate manhunt, searching for Jesus.** They wanted to get him in front of the crowds. Everyone was looking for him.

- ❖ But even that word “*looking*” has a negative connotation. It occurs ten times in Mark and usually in the context of someone or some group looking for Jesus in order to control him or resist him. **Looking for Jesus, in this context, is *not* about looking to submit to him and follow him.** It’s about getting something out of him. It’s about pigeonholing him into the kind of Savior you expect him to be. In this case, one who physically heals me of all my aches and pains, all my illnesses and diseases. That’s what the crowds wanted from him.
  - **To the disciples, that sounded reasonable. Why not? Those who are sick or oppressed by demons have legitimate needs.** And Jesus can clearly meet those needs. Why shouldn’t we set up a base here in Capernaum and minister to them? Jesus can easily amass a huge following centered on miracles and healing.
    - But that’s a failure to grasp his mission as the Messiah and their mission as his disciples. **Jesus didn’t come to draw crowds and be famous. He came to start a movement – a gospel-preaching movement.** Where you go, even to the ends of the earth, preaching a message of salvation. One that calls for people to repent of their sins, to leave everything, and follow him. To renounce your own authority and submit under his. Let’s face it, preaching that kind of message probably won’t make you famous.
- ❖ But that’s not foremost on Jesus’s mind. He’s not trying to be a celebrity. **Because he doesn’t put much stock in a faith that’s based on spectacle. Based on hype.** That’s why you hear him, on more than one occasion, telling people to be silent about who he is or what he’s done. He said it to the unclean spirit in v25. To the demons he casted out in v34. And to the leper he heals in v44. “*See that you say nothing to anyone.*”
  - Now on one hand, not permitting demons to tell people who you are makes sense. Sure, he’s not trying to be famous. But at the same time, Jesus doesn’t want demons to be his publicists. His spokespersons. **Why would he want demons testifying and witnessing on his behalf? That’s the job of his disciples.**
    - But his silencing of the leper he healed reinforces the need for it. Because the consequence of the leper not staying silent is that it hindered Jesus’s gospel-preaching mission. Look at v45. “*But he (the leper) went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.*”
- ❖ **On one hand, you might be wondering: What’s so bad about being famous?** Well, if you just care about being popular and amazing crowds, then there’s nothing bad. If by raising up followers, you mean like followers on your social media – who you barely engage with and occasionally give you a Like or a Heart on something you post – if that’s all you want, then being famous is great. That *is* what you want.
  - But if you’re like Jesus and your mission is to faithfully preach a gospel of repentance and faith. If you’re trying to raise up disciples who are wholeheartedly committed and wholly known – disciples who are willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus (Mk 8:34) – then being famous is not necessary. In fact, it can sometimes be a hindrance.

## A Great Man Who Blends Great Authority With Great Compassion

- ❖ A great man who has no interest in being famous is a rarity in our day. Great people all seem to be clamoring for the limelight. **For someone as great as Jesus to eschew his celebrity status and seek desolate spaces away from the crowds, that's unheard of.** But that's the Messiah we're presented with in Mark's Gospel.
  - In this episode with the leper, starting in v40, he surprises us again. **Because when we think about a man of authority, we tend to picture a stern man.** An austere man. A strict, uncompromising man. Essentially an authoritarian. **But in the person of Jesus, we encounter a perfect blend of great authority with great compassion.** In other words, he is both strong and kind.
- ❖ To understand this, you need to understand how leprosy was viewed in Jesus's day. It was a catch-all term for a variety of skin diseases. Some of them were actually contagious. Many were not. But it didn't matter in the end because the real concern was not about spreading the physical disease but the spiritual uncleanness associated with it.
  - **Lepers were deemed ceremonially unclean and thereby unfit to approach the LORD.** Unfit to enter the temple courts and offer sacrifices of worship. And anyone who touched a leper would "catch" their uncleanness regardless if you caught the disease itself. So understandably, lepers were treated as outcasts in society. Forced to live outside the camp. Outside the city. In desolate places.
- ❖ So surprisingly, a leper boldly approaches Jesus, falls on his knees, and begs him to heal him. *"If you will, you can make me clean."* **Now most first-century Jews would've reacted in horror.** In revulsion. But not Jesus. Look at v41, *"Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean.'"*
  - Look at that. Look at how Jesus stretched out his hand and intentionally touched the leper. Who knows how long it's been since this man last felt the touch of another hand? **And let's be clear, Jesus didn't have to touch the leper in order to heal him.** We've already seen how his divine authority works. He just has to speak and what he says happens. Follow me and they follow. Come out of him and it comes out. So he could've simply said, "Be clean," and he would've been clean. **The touch was extraneous.** It was unnecessary. But that's what made it so compassionate.
- ❖ The text says he was *"moved with pity."* There are some technical challenges when it comes to translating this verse, but I think the ESV got it right in translating it as *pity* or some say *compassion*. The Greek word is related to your gut. **It's based on the ancient belief that the seat of your deepest emotions like pity or love are located in your gut.** In the bowels of compassion. When you experience these emotions, it's like you feel it in your gut.
  - Which, of course, assumes you even have guts to be able to feel it there. Think about it. **Only an Incarnate God can feel and express this kind of compassion.** You need actual guts. And the Son of God had them.

- ❖ He's full of authority. Divine authority. He's the King of kings, the Lord Most High. But he's also one of us. He became a man. He can feel pity, compassion, and sympathy for his fellow man. And he can actually stretch out a hand and touch you.
- ❖ Did you notice, when Jesus touched the man, he didn't catch the man's leprosy or his uncleanness? No, the opposite occurred. **The man caught Jesus's holiness.** He was infected with Jesus's cleanliness. Think about that. **Jesus's holiness is more contagious than leprosy.** When he lays his hands on sinners like us – when he draws near and comes into our lives – we catch his holiness. We get his righteousness.
  - Friends, that's the great news of the gospel. On our own, in our sinfulness, we deserve nothing good from Jesus. Only his judgment. Only his condemnation. But he's merciful and gives us what we don't deserve. **He takes away our sins and unrighteousness and infects us (if you will) with his grace and righteousness.** That's how we're saved and made right with God. And all of that is a free gift. Something to be received by faith alone.
- ❖ **But while salvation is free for you to receive, just remember it was extremely costly for Jesus to secure.** Because the way he secured your salvation was by taking your sins and unrighteousness upon himself and dying on the cross. He essentially swapped roles with you.
  - Just like he swapped roles with the leper. The episode began with Jesus on the inside and the leper on the outside. **But notice how it ends with Jesus on the outside. He's out in desolate places.** But that's the gospel. We are saved by a great man. A divine man. Who's not just strong but kind. **Who possesses not just great authority but great compassion.** Which explains why he took your place. To heal you. To cleanse you of your sins. And to draw you into relationship with God.
    - Friends, this great salvation – secured by Jesus's great compassion – is available for anyone here this morning. For anyone who repents and believes in Jesus, the Holy One of God.