

Mark 1:21-28

15th March 2020, ACC Evening Service

Introduction

There's a really simple idea at the heart of this story...

And it's all about the power of Jesus' words.

Mark wants us to know - right from the start of his book - that what Jesus says **matters**.

Or to put it another way - Jesus' words change things.

Why?

Well because the words of Jesus carry a power and an authority which you and I will not have encountered anywhere else.

Jesus' words matter more than your instagram feed or the latest pronouncements from the White House.

And why is Mark so keen for us to learn that?

Well it's because Mark wants us to LISTEN to Jesus.

You see think about it like this...

Imagine at school a year 7 comes and tells you that school is closed on Monday.

It's the Corona Virus - so they've closed the school.

Do you listen?

Well the Year 7 might or might not be right.

So you'd need to exercise some care.

But what if the head teacher said those SAME words?

"The school is closed on Monday"

What then?

Well of course then you'd listen - why - well because the headteacher is the headteacher - then when they say the SCHOOL IS CLOSED ON MONDAY - it's not only that you can trust them - because it's true.

It's also that those word carry a POWER and an AUTHORITY - which means just them saying them CLOSES the SCHOOL.

And that's a kind of power that's not shared by the year 7 pupil.

Who could say it as many times as they like - and it still wouldn't happen.

Now the same in Mark 1.

Mark wants to show you that JESUS' WORDS CARRY POWER.

BECAUSE Jesus is the Son of God - sent on a mission to bring repentance and forgiveness to his people.

Now in Mark 1:21-28 Jesus is just starting out on his ministry.

He's arrived preaching this message from 1:15 that "the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel".

And having preached that message.

And called the first disciples.

He now finds himself in a synagogue on a Saturday - in Capernaum.

Right on the northern tip of the sea of Galilee.

And he's there teaching.

But says v22 there's something extraordinary about his teaching...

Which is that it's unlike anything they've ever heard from the scribes - not so much it seems in its content - but rather in its authority - or POWER.

I don't think he means the scribes were boring and Jesus was interesting - although that might well have been true.

Nor do I think that Jesus was massively different in style.

Luke tells us that Jesus here just reads from the book of Isaiah. Sits down. And tells the people that it's about him.

Rather it seems that the difference is that Jesus' words matter.

They change people.

Do things.

Now Mark doesn't leave that idea hanging.

He wants to show you what he means by that power.

So on comes a man with an unclean spirit.

And unholy - impure - spirit - literally.

It's not exactly clear what this is - and I'm not going to go right now into a full and detailed discussion of demon possession in the NT.

But what it seems is that this is demonic hostility to Jesus which here takes the form of taking control an individual - who then confronts Jesus.

So this man gives voice to the demon when he calls out in v24...

READ v24

So here it is.

Jesus' identity is out in the open.

The demon is in no doubt about who Jesus is...

But the big question is...

What is the Holy One of God going to do?

Well look at v25.

He rebukes the evil spirit with a few short words.

And v26 the spirit leaves the man.

Evil is defeated with a word.

So much so that by v27 the people are astounded again by the authority of this new teaching of Jesus.

Now again Mark is really clever in the way he puts this story together, just to underline the power of Jesus' words.

Let me try and show you this...

It's called a CHAISM.

Do you know what one of those is?

It's a bit tricky to follow so see if you can keep up...

Notice that v21 and v28 are very similar...

Both are talking about geography.

Capernaum and Galilee.

Then v22 and v27 are both about how astonished people are at the power of Jesus' words.

Next step in and v23 and v26 are both when the demon speaks - crying out in the presence of Jesus.

Which puts v25 slap band in the centre as the most significant verse in the section - the only verse where Jesus' words are spoken - and he says...

READ v25

The powerful words of Jesus.

The Holy One of God - who speaks and defeats evil, driving it away.

So what are the applications of this for us?

What does Mark want us to do in response to this?

Well let me suggest two things...

The first is very simple...

Mark wants us to...

LISTEN TO JESUS' WORDS

Think back to the illustration of the Year 7 and the Headteacher.

How much does it matter if you listen to the year 7?

Well probably not very much...

But if you don't listen to the Headteacher - what happens then?

Well you're right.

You're in trouble.

Not only because you might miss some important information but also because you are MEANT to listen to the headteacher because of who they are.

And the same is true with Jesus.

Listening to the words of Jesus, knowing what he says.

Is what life is meant to be about - what we're supposed to be doing.

Not just because otherwise we might miss out on some vital information - although of course that might be true.

But more because we have a moral obligation to listen to Jesus.

Because of who he is and what his words mean.

If you jump forward to Mark chapter 9 you can see this in action there.

Mark 9 is the transfiguration.

Jesus is up the mountain with Peter, James and John.

And while they are there Jesus is transfigured.

It's like the curtains are drawn back on his real identity and they see the white shining brilliance of the Lord Jesus.

And then a voice comes from heaven...

And look at v7 and hear what it says.

This is God the Father speaking of his Son.

READ 9v7

Do you notice that...?

What are they to do with Jesus?

LISTEN!!

Well let's just try this as a live exercise for a moment.

Look back at Mark 1:15 and let's listen to what Jesus says there...

What does he say...

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

What does it mean if we LISTEN to what Jesus says there?

Well it means that we begin to understand that Jesus is the fulfilment of all that history has been waiting for.

The arrival of the Lord Jesus.

His birth, death and resurrection - is the centre point of history - with everything before it working towards it - and everything since it looking back to it.

And if we listen to that - it means that Jesus is LORD - doesn't it?

It means that he is the centre of everything and not me, and not world politics, and not the 24hour news cycle, and not what my mates think about me, and not what I look like.

Listening to Jesus means listening to this idea that the centre of everything is his work in time space and history.

What about the next bit...

The kingdom of God is at hand.

Well again listening to Jesus here means beginning to understand that God is at work in the world.

He's bringing in a place where he rules and reigns.

A place where Jesus is King.

And that's not far off.

Of course we know more about that from the rest of the NT as Jesus explains that his kingdom comes first INVISIBLY - in the hearts and lives of those who love and trust him - before coming fully and finally when Jesus returns.

And if I listen to that - then I understand that everything else is temporary and passing.

Fragile and not solid.

My life, my family, my name, will pass and be forgotten.

But Jesus' kingdom will not.

So says Jesus REPENT and believe in the gospel.

Interestingly here Jesus' words assume that we don't by nature listen to him or believe in his words.

We need to be called to do that.

So Jesus does that...

REPENT he says - turn from whatever else it was you thought you were meant to be doing or listening to - and listen to me.

Believe in my big news of salvation.

Now all that is really simple.

But it's incredibly important.

Life is all about who we choose to listen to.

And Mark here says that Jesus' words are the most important.

What he says goes, and we should pick up our Bible's and listen to him.

Secondly...

EXPECT JESUS' WORDS TO BE THE SOURCE OF HOPE AND CHANGE

Look again at v25 and see just how effortless this is for Jesus.

Jesus doesn't exert great effort.

He doesn't go through some weird ceremony or have to get to a special place in his mind.

All he does is SPEAK.

And say "BE SILENT AND COME OUT OF HIM" and the demon does exactly what Jesus says.

Even though v26 gives you the impression that he did it reluctantly - still you know that the demon had no choice but to obey.

Jesus effortlessly has complete power over the demons and all the forces of evil.

They have no choice but to do what he says - because of who he is.

If you jump forward just a page - you can see the same happening with the calming of the storm in Mark 4.

What happens in v39?

READ 4:39

Simply by speaking the storm is stilled.

Jesus - the creator and sustainer of the world - is able to calm the storm with a word.

Because of who he is - creation has no choice but to listen to its creator.

So the sea obeys.

And is calm.

Of course then the big surprise in Mark's book is why then with someone who can defeat evil spirits and control waves - just with their words - why does that person find themselves hanging on a cross?

What would be reason for doing that?

Well again Mark explains.

You see Jesus doesn't just have power over EVIL and over CREATION.

He also has power over SIN.

Specifically power to FORGIVE SIN.

So look across at 2:5 and you'll HEAR Jesus saying to a paralytic on a mat that his SINS are forgiven.

And the Jews are wondering why Jesus SPEAKS like that.

How can he forgive sin like that?

Only God can do that?

But of course Jesus can speak like that not because of his great power.

But because of his great love.

Love that lead him to lay down his life on a cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

So that he has the authority not only to defeat evil, control nature but also forgive our sins.

By speaking.

So here's the thing for us.

I listen to Jesus because his word has the power to change me.

His identity as the Holy One of God.

As the self giving sacrifice for sin.

Mean that his words come with a power to change.

To cast out evil and defeat our sin.

So where should I expect to find hope and change and grace and mercy to live every day?

Answer...

In the words of Jesus.

Again think about how this might work out...

What does it look like to find hope and change in the words of Jesus?

Well what is it that I'm struggling with?

Maybe it's the sin of someone else against me.

Someone who is consistently mean to you.

Unkind and has it in for you.

What could you do in that situation?

Well you could try fighting.

You could try answering back.

You could try bitterness.

Or anger.

Or frustration.

Or you could turn to the words of Jesus and listen to him.

And what does he say.

Well for a start he tells you that sin is foremost an offence against him - before it's a problem to us.

And it's a problem he is committed to resolving.

No sin will be left unpunished.

Either on the cross or in eternity.

Trust me - says Jesus.

Or perhaps you're anxious about the future.

Not sure what's going to happen from one day to the next.

What are you going to do with that?

Well you could try just to forget about it.

To pretend that your anxiety isn't there.

To drown it out with other noise.

To find a distraction.

Or you could listen to Jesus.

And hear his power over evil, his control over nature and his cross bought love and grace towards us.

And you could understand that if Jesus' words have that power.

If he can speak like that.

And if I can know that he loves me and he's always with me by his Spirit.

That no power of hell or scheme of man will ever pluck me from his hand.

Then I can hear that. And tell that to my anxieties.

Think of another example.

Perhaps you're sad.

Struggling with just the overwhelming grief and sadness of life in this world.

There's lot to be sad about.

Again what are you going to do with that?

Well you could despair.

You could conclude that the present is so sad that the future must be hopeless.

Or again you could try distracting yourself from it.

Pretending that it's not there.

Entertaining yourself out of it.

Or you could listen to Jesus.

And hear him share your sadness at the lostness and brokenness of our world.

And hear him say that his plan is secure.

That he will not be defeated by evil or overcome by death.

You can listen to the words of his resurrection.

That he is not dead but alive.

And will bring together with him all those who have fallen asleep with him.

And find there comfort - hope and even change.

Because Jesus' words are powerful.

Because when Jesus speaks things change.

Even me and you.

PRAY