

7.30

Mark 1:21–28—Exorcism and Teaching in the Gospel of Mark

The story of an exorcism in Mark 1:21–27 is framed by two references to the teaching of Jesus:

He entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “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.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, **and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority!”**

Immediately before the exorcism, Mark reports that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and that the people were astonished because “he taught as one having authority” (1:22). Immediately after the unclean spirit goes out of the man, the amazed spectators exclaim, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority!” (1:27). On a strictly literal level, this does not seem to make sense. Why call an exorcism a “teaching”?

References to the authority of Jesus's teaching form a frame around the story of the exorcism.

A Authority of Jesus's teaching

B Exorcism

A Authority of Jesus's teaching

Mark wants the story of Jesus's healing of the man who has an unclean spirit to be read in light of his presentation of Jesus as one whose teaching is authoritative.

Why Is the Teaching of Jesus So Important?

Mark's Gospel was written at least thirty-five years after Jesus's death. Few, if any, of his readers had ever met Jesus while he was physically on earth. When Mark tells stories of the wonderful things that Jesus did, his readers may wonder what any of this has to do with them. What difference does it make if Jesus cast an unclean spirit out of a man in Capernaum over three decades ago? Mark's readers might respond, "I wish that I had lived back then. I could have found this powerful man, Jesus, and maybe he would have fixed my problems too."

Mark knows that his readers do not have Jesus with them, at least not in the sense that he was once present on earth. But they still have the teaching of Jesus. Thus Mark tells this story to indicate that the teaching of Jesus overcomes evil in a powerful way. The

teaching of Jesus drives out what is unclean or debilitating in an astonishing manner. It is “teaching with authority.”