ReMARKable: Communicable Authority Memory Verse:

Jan. 26th, 2024 Scripture Reading:

**[SLIDE 1]**

 As we go through our survey of the gospel of Mark, we want to keep in mind certain themes. What are the areas of Jesus life and ministry that Mark is highlighting for us? So far, Jesus actions could be summarized in three words**: [SLIDE 2]** teaching, preaching and healing. And these things are characterized by a specific and, before now, unknown type of authority. He doesn’t teach like the typical scribes, and certainly no one can heal physical maladies like Jesus can. That is why throughout Mark, Jesus is constantly bombarded with crowds. People are clamoring to hear Jesus preach, to receive healing, to go home and tell their friends all about it. Last week, in chapter two, **[SLIDE 3]** we saw Jesus demonstrate his authority to forgive sin, his authority over the rules about who can eat with whom, his authority over when to fast and his authority even over the Sabbath. In any and every sector of life, Jesus rules over the rules. This set up a very palpable tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They are extremely uncomfortable with this kind of authority…they have always held that position!

 Chapter three picks up where two left off; with the theme of the Sabbath. **[SLIDE 4]** Sabbath is simply a word that means rest. It’s meaning is woven into the very fabric of creation. When God created the heaven and the earth and all that is in them, he then rested on the seventh day. Later, this was instituted as the fourth of the 10 Commandments: Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. In the time of Jesus, there were many strict laws in place that ensured no Jew would be performing any work on God’s holy day. This included picking heads of grain out of a field but it also included rendering medical assistance. Now this is a hard concept for us to understand, but let me try to explain. If someone’s life was in danger on the Sabbath, you would be required to perform any work necessary to save them. To save a life was more important than observing the Sabbath. But, if someone was in pain or injured and their life was not in danger, you were taught that you could not assist that person. To do so would be work, and that was not permitted. Their care would have to wait until the following day when Sabbath observances ended.

 We need to know this background as we enter the synagogue with Jesus on the Sabbath in Mark chapter three. Jesus is there, the Pharisees are there. After all, they need to ensure no rules are broken on this holy day. And also present is a man with a withered hand. These local synagogues worked differently than our churches do today. They had no pastor or main teacher. People who attended could speak and comment about whatever passage was being read. Jesus understood the game being played here and decided it would be a good time to teach. So Jesus arises to speak to those in attendance and he invites this man with the withered hand to come up and join him in front of everybody. Jesus asks in verse 4, **[SLIDE 5]** “Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil? To save life or to kill?” Redundant questions right? Of course one cannot kill on the Sabbath or any other day for that matter! Yet, no one responds to Jesus question. **[SLIDE 6]** Verse five says Jesus looked at them with *orge,* with anger. It’s the same word Paul uses when speaking about the wrath of God. Jesus is angry at the hardness of the hearts he sees in this synagogue. They are so afraid of what Jesus might do that they refuse to answer a simple question. But Jesus in not only angry, he is sad. He is grieved about the state of their hearts. To me, this is a very parental stance. You get angry when your child disobeys and sad about it because you want what is best for them. Anger and grief work together because you deeply love the one who is going astray. That is where Jesus is in this moment. Mark doesn’t mention it, but you can kind of feel a disappointed head shake from Jesus as he turns to the man and tells him to stretch out his hand. **[SLIDE 7]** The man is healed! The only reaction Mark records here is that of the pharisees, who get together with the Herodians (a group normally deemed unclean) in order to plot out a way to kill Jesus. Jesus rules over the rules…and for that, he must die.

 Jesus heads out to the lake with his disciples, and once again, a huge crowd is following after him. **[SLIDE 8]** Mark does take a moment to give some description of this crowd. Verse 8: They were from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, even Tyrea and Sidon. In other words, these were not just locals. This crowd was from all over! Word is spreading and coming are coming to see from themselves the things they have heard about Jesus. This man sounds like he is on par with Elijah or Elisha, the great prophets of old who could enact God’s power in amazing ways! There was not security company staffed for Jesus walk to the lake so he was in danger of being crushed by the clamoring crowd. Still, Jesus makes time for them. He heals all those who are sick. Ha casts out demons who declare him to be the Son of God. Jesus is quick to silence them. His Messianic nature is still to be kept a secret. The time is not yet right. The people in this crowd want to be healed…they do not want to bend their knee to a new and eternal king. They do not yet perceive. These people are attracted to Jesus, but they have no real understanding of who he is…at least not yet.

 But there are some who, even if they don’t fully understand, they are willing to step forward in faith and follow after Jesus. In verse 16, Mark lists for us the twelve disciples who answered the call issued by Jesus: “Follow me.” In this section we do not want to miss one life-changing little detail here: **[SLIDE 9]** Verse 14 and 15, “He appointed them to be with him, to be sent out to preach, and to have authority to throw out demons.” Here we see the amazing fact that Jesus’ authority is communicable. He can give it away to those who are with him, to those who are sent out! These twelve ordinary men are given extraordinary authority because they are with Jesus.

 Does this principle apply to us? Are we not with Jesus? Are we not sent out by him? Are we equipped with his authority over demons? Some might say that this was a specific delegation that occurred at a specific point in history. I would have to agree. These twelve apostles were specially equipped in this moment. But I also affirm with every fiber in my being and every drop of faith within me that **[SLIDE 10]** there is power in the name of Jesus. For you and I today, we have access to the authority of God through the name of Jesus, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If the demons feared Jesus while he walked this earth, then they ought to fear me as well because Jesus lives in me! I follow after Jesus, I am with him and he has sent me! If I stand with Christ, demons cannot stand before me because Jesus has the power to route demons.

 In verse 20 we come to a very chaotic scene. **[SLIDE 11]** Jesus is in a house with…a crowd. There are so many people Jesus cannot even eat. Verse 21, Jesus’ own family is there. They think he is out of his mind. Verse 22 Jesus’ opponents, the Jewish legal experts are there. They think Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub, which means “lord of the flies” or the prince of demons. So between his own family and these legal experts, no one understands who Jesus really is. And yet Jesus does not outrightly correct either of these misunderstandings. But he does speak to each of them. To the legal experts, Jesus responds to their accusation in what Mark calls, a parable.

 In verse 23, Jesus asks, **[SLIDE 12]** “How can Satan throw Satan out?” He then says plainly, “If Satan rebels against himself and is divided, then he can’t endure.” Jesus then uses the illustration of a strong man house. **[SLIDE 13]** If you want to steal from the strong man, you must first tie him up. Once he is bound, the thief can then plunder. To us modern readers, people who live on the other side of Easter, we know what Jesus is talking about. Satan may have some amount of strength in this world. He holds sway and can influence events. Satan might even be considered a strong man, but even the strong man cannot defend his own home if he is bound. The point here is that Jesus has come to bind Satan, to render him powerless. All Satan can do at this point is watch his house be completely looted.

 These teachers of the law are witnessing the reality of this parable play out. They are seeing demons cast out of people and diseases being healed. And in light of this grand display of divine strength, these people conclude **[SLIDE 14]** that Jesus is demon possessed?? No wonder when we read Matthew’s gospel, Jesus calls these men blind guides! They witness the miraculous power of God and call it evil. They stand before the giver of life and call him a devil. Such hardness of heart cannot be remedied. Verse 29 has long been referred to as the unforgivable sin. On the surface, it might seem heretical. God is merciful and full of forgiveness. How could there be an unforgivable sin? This is what Jesus says, **[SLIDE 15]** “I assure you that human beings will be forgiven for everything, for all sins and insults of every kind. But whoever insults the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever.”

 The word “insult” here in the Greek is *blasphemeo.* It literally means to speak against. To see God working out good among people, and to call that evil is a sin that cannot be pardoned. **[SLIDE 16]** Isaiah 5:20 says virtually the same thing, “Doom to those who call evil good and good evil, who present darkness and light and light as darkness, who make bitterness sweet and sweet bitter.” Biblical commentator William Barclay writes, “If a man refuses the guidance of God’s Spirit often enough he will become in the end incapable of recognizing that truth when he sees it.” God is at work among us. The kingdom of heaven is in our midst. God does not hold us eternally culpable for missing it. We will make mistakes. He sends signs and we miss them. He speaks and we aren’t listening. But when he moves among us and we call his glory evil, his light darkness, his sweetness bitter, we demonstrate a refusal to bend and we speak against the Holy Spirit. I believe that such a person can be reformed. They might still one day come to Christ and become realigned in their views of good and evil. But, for these teachers in the crowd, on this day that Jesus spoke, they currently find themselves outside of the grace God extends to us.

 There is a willfulness in view here. A firm refusal to repent. A posture in which I stand before Jesus on my own righteousness. That will never work. I could never stand. I must come to Jesus on my hands and knees bowing before him. He is good, I am not. He is light, I am darkness. I need him, not the other way around. Jesus saves me from sin and death, but he also saves me from confusion. He also saves me from deception. I can know the truth, live into the truth and then go on to declare the truth. We call out evil for what it is and we rejoice in the goodness of God.

Finally, Jesus addresses his family members. **[SLIDE 17]** I feel a little bad for these people. They love Jesus, they want what they think is best for him. From their perspective, Jesus should just come back home to Nazareth, open up the old carpentry shop again and just lay low for awhile. He is upsetting all the wrong people and getting himself into real danger. He is bringing shame on the while family for the way he treats the respectable members of their community. He is hanging out with lowlifes and in fact seems to prefer their company even over his own family. It is no wonder they wrote him off as out of his mind!

And Jesus pretty much proves their point. When he is told that his mother and brothers and sisters were looking for him in verse 33, He replied, **[SLIDE 18]** “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” He gestures to those sitting with him listening to him teach, “Look here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God’s will is my brother, sister and mother.” From this passage I think it is safe to say that, contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, Jesus had multiple siblings. And it is important to make this distinction because what Jesus does here is he redefines family. No longer are genetics the tie that binds, but “whoever does God’s will”. **[SLIDE 19]**  True kinship lies in common obedience. How else could a tax-collector, Matthew, who worked for Rome and a zealot, Simon, who vowed to destroy Rome get along? I’m sure they had their differences and squabbles, but the reason both of these extreme men could serve Jesus together is because they both follow Jesus. They both had a shift in allegiance. They are now a former tax-collector and a former zealot. They have become Christians. Their aim is to do God’s will and this common goal, this common obedience binds them together as brothers.

So that is chapter three. **[SLIDE 20]** Another action packed snippet of Jesus’ ministry. We see him staking his ground and digging a hole for himself when it comes to the teachers of the law. We have seen them face off numerous times already in Mark’s gospel, but now the situation has come to a head and already in chapter three we see the Jewish leaders plotting to kill Jesus. But the crowds are bigger than ever, they are coming from far and wide to see Jesus and experience his healing power. As the crowds grow, Jesus appoints twelve disciples to be his representative. He endows them with his authority to cast out demons…we will see what comes of that. We also see Jesus as completely misunderstood. To his family, he is crazy, to the teachers, he is possessed. Many today also misunderstand Jesus, and we must answer the question for ourselves: Who is Jesus? Is he crazy? Is he possessed? Or is he the Messiah, who came to save us from our sins and usher in his eternal kingdom? If we can come to the place of proclaiming Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we can also embrace one another as sister and brother. No matter what our opinions or political leanings, no matter our past or whatever mess we might be in presently, if you are here to do God’s will, then we are full-fledged siblings, bonded together by the Holy Sprit and united in Christ. We are family as Jesus defines it and we work together to accomplish God’s will. Amen.