

## Amazed – but Not Changed

Mark 1:21-34

At the time the events of Mark 1 were unfolding, two of the greatest men who had ever walked upon the earth, were both present in the land of Israel. I am referring to John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ. We all know that Jesus Christ was God the Son, and of course He was and is the greatest of all people to walk the earth. But why am I saying that John the Baptist was so significant? It is because of what Jesus said about John in **Matthew 11:11**, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.” John was so important that his coming was prophesied in the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Malachi. And do any of you know of another person in the Bible who was filled with the Holy Spirit at birth and actually while still in his mother’s womb? Luke 1 verses 15 and 41 tell us that John was.

And so how did the Jewish people respond to someone as great as John? Pastor Ken informed us in Mark 1:5 that “. . . all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” Does this mean that all the people of Israel were genuinely receiving John’s message and were eager to embrace Christ as their Savior, Lord and King? There were many who did, but the vast majority did not. Pastor Jeff reminded you last week that John the Baptist ended up being arrested. By the time Christ began His public ministry – John’s public ministry was done. Mark 6:27 tells us he was beheaded [see also Mark 9:13].

And so we must now ask how the Jewish people respond to Christ – someone so great that John the Baptist said he was not worthy to stoop down and take off His sandals? We will see this morning that the initial response of the Jewish people in Capernaum – upon meeting Jesus, seeing His miracles and hearing what He taught, is that they were **amazed** at Him. Unfortunately, even though they were amazed, the vast majority were not changed. I am telling you this now because we will see this reality over and over again as we proceed through Mark’s Gospel. It is so important to understand this that the Apostle John began his Gospel by telling his readers in **John 1:11**, “He [Christ] came to his own [He was born of the Jews] and his own people did not receive him.” Let’s look at Mark 1:21-28,

“They [referring to Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James and John] went to Capernaum [in Galilee] and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were **amazed at his teaching**, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law [the religious leaders of Israel seldom taught directly from the Old Testament texts. Instead they quoted what other rabbis said about the Old Testament texts. On the other hand, the holy Son of God walked into that synagogue proclaiming the true meaning of God’s Word. And look what happened]. <sup>23</sup> Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> ‘What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!’ <sup>25</sup> ‘Be quiet!’ [in our vernacular – Shut up!] said Jesus sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ <sup>26</sup> The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek [Jesus has authority over demons]. <sup>27</sup> The people were all so **amazed** that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.’ <sup>28</sup> News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.”

What I find **amazing** in this passage is that a demon possessed man was comfortable being in that Jewish Synagogue. It seems to me that if those people were honoring God and submitting themselves to His Word, then that demon should have at least been nervous. But when Christ showed up – speaking truth with God’s authority – the man and the demon inside of him were **terrified**. Holiness had walked into the room.

At this point we need to pause and speak about demons. What are they? When I was a pastor in California, a man who had recently started attending the church, called and made an appointment to see me. He began the conversation in my office by asking me very sincerely, “Pastor, do you really believe there is a devil? Isn’t that a far-fetched notion for people like us, who live in an age of science.”

I decided to do what Jesus often did – and that was to begin to answer a question by asking a question. So I asked him, “Do you believe in angels?” He immediately replied, “Of course I do.” And so I explained to him that Satan and demons are fallen angels. Angels are a separate creation from man. They are spirit beings who do not have flesh and blood bodies. They were created upright, but with a free will. Satan, plus a large number of other angels, used their wills to rebel against God. According to I Timothy 3:6, Satan’s downfall was pride. And without dispute, Satan was an astonishing angel with breathtaking abilities. But then again, what did Satan have that God did not give him? Satan should have been thankful, but not proud.

In **Jude 6** we learn about the consequences of the angelic rebellion,

“And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He [God] has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” Satan and all the other fallen angels have been cast out of God’s presence and now live in spiritual darkness, which does not bring freedom, but bondage. A sobering thought is that this fallen world in which we live, has so much spiritual darkness, that Satan and his demons can roam around here and never escape their darkness and bondage.

My understanding of the Bible is that fallen angels are fixed in wickedness. They will never repent. The majority of angels who stayed true to God, are fixed in righteousness. They will never rebel.

We learn from II Peter 2:11 that angels are greater in might and power than people. A good example of this is found in **Isaiah 37:36**, “Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp.” So should Christians live in terror of Satan and fallen angels since they are greater in power than man? I am thankful that **I John 4:4**, assures Christians, “. . . the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” This is why **James 4:7** tells believers to, “Submit yourselves . . . to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” The way to overcome Satan is to submit to God.

Friends, we are not resisting the devil if we seek out palm readers to tell us our future – or go to seances to try and speak with the dead. We are not to do that kind of stuff. Satan and his demons are like mean dogs on a chain, if you walk inside the length of their chain, you can get badly

chewed up. Let's now read Mark 1:29-34,

“As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon [Peter] and Andrew [it would seem that this was a multi-family house].<sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever [Pastor Jeff told me he was surprised to discover the first Pope had a wife], and they told Jesus about her.<sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her [Jesus has authority over sickness] and she began to wait on them [and I think she did it out of gratitude and not grudgingly].<sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.<sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door,<sup>34</sup> and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out **many demons**, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.”

Jesus did not want people listening to demons testify about Him, because lying is their native language. They may have admitted that He is the holy Son of God, but they would have loved to add many lies and half-truths to that reality. The fact that there were many demon possessed people in Capernaum shows us that a lot of Jewish people were heavily delving into Satan's domain. Friends, a person doesn't become demon possessed by walking past an occult shop. You must willingly open yourself up to the dark side of the spirit world. People who do this live for the here and now and do not think about their future or eternity.

Since we have learned that Jesus was driving out many demons, does this mean that the people delivered from demon possession were turning to Christ and becoming His disciples? No. A number of them did, but most did not. How do I know that? Listen to what Jesus says a number of months later in **Matthew 11:20-24**,

“Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles

had been performed, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon [notoriously wicked cities], they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes . . . <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

The Bible says there is going to be an ultimate, future Day of Judgement – when everyone who has ever lived will stand before God. This when believers will gain our glorified bodies that can live in the very presence of God. It will also be when unbelievers will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. People like Nero, Hitler and Stalin will receive greater judgment on that day than average, run-of- mill sinners. And according to Jesus, the people of Capernaum, who lived at the time of Christ, are going to suffer worse on the Great Day of Judgment than the people of Sodom.

Jesus is declaring that people who hear and see a lot of truth in their lifetimes, but do not embrace it, will be judged more severely than those who did not receive as much truth. This should be sobering for any of us who like to come to church and listen to Biblical teaching, but have no desire or intention to be transformed by it. **James 1:22** says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” To be transformed by truth may be a process, but we must be committed to it.

Let’s go back to all the demons Christ cast out of the people of Israel. Jesus talks specifically about them in **Matthew 12:43-45**,

“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, ‘I will return to the house

I left' [the person it used to possess]. When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order [Because most of the people from which Christ cast out demons – did not repent and embrace Christ as Lord, they were empty houses].<sup>45</sup> Then it [the demon] goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

A man by the name of Josephus became a Jewish general after the Jews revolted against Rome in A.D. 66. He was captured by the Romans and forced to watch the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. Josephus eventually became a historian and wrote about what he saw. And it is quite shocking to read in his history that he considered many of the Jews of his day to be the most wicked people to ever live on the face of the earth. One of the reasons for that reality is because many of them became demon infested. And the reason for that is because they ultimately rejected the message of John the Baptist and Christ.

Some of you are probably thinking, “Thank you very much pastor Mark for brightening my day. It looks like Satan and the demons are going to be the winners.” Friends, Satan only gains victory over people who reject truth and embrace lies. And let’s not forget that the Jewish people who did receive John’s message and went on to embrace Christ as Savior and Lord, became the initial **army of God** – which began its mission at Jerusalem and then spread out to make disciples for Christ in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

As we advance through the Gospel of Mark, Christ’s death and resurrection are going to become more and more prominent. Christ had to

endure the cross if lost people, living in a fallen world, are to have any hope. Listen to Christ's words in **John 12:31-32**, spoken during the last week of His life – with the cross just before Him,

“Now is the time for judgment on this world [He was speaking of judgment upon Satan's false world system, which is in opposition to God]; now the prince of this world [Satan] will be driven out [Satan was about to lose the stronghold he had gained by Adam and Eve's rebellion].<sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth [speaking of His crucifixion], will draw all men to myself” [all men refers to Jews and Gentiles, male and female, rich and poor, young and old].

Because Satan suffered a profound defeat at the cross, people from all the nations of the earth are now being rescued from Satan's domain of darkness and are being transferred into Christ's kingdom of light. How? By the authority of Christ and by the power of the gospel.

This brings us back to something Jesus said concerning John the Baptist – in **Matthew 11:11**,

“Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; **yet** he who is least in the kingdom of heaven [Christ's kingdom] is greater than he.”

John the Baptist did not live to see Christ inaugurate the glorious New Covenant by means of His death and resurrection. And it is under the New Covenant that repentant sinners, who trust in Christ, become temples of God. It is under the New Covenant that Gentiles who believe in Christ become true descendants of Abraham, whom God is using to bless all the nations.

Both John the Baptist and Christ were willing to lay down their earthly lives so that millions upon millions of people could enter into Christ's

kingdom and gain eternal life. Being born again is a supernatural work of God, but the Holy Spirit uses ordinary Christians like us – to help bring it about. Let's Pray.

Heavenly Father, there have always been people who hear truth and reject it. They prefer to live in lies. And there have always been people who hear truth and initially seem to believe it and embrace it – only to later reject it. It is always sad and disappointing to see that. And so Father we pray that by Your grace and mercy, we might be the kind of people who embrace Your truth and have our lives transformed by it. And when we stumble and get off the path, help us to repent and get back on track. May we be society changing Christians – who bless our communities and the nations. We pray in Jesus name.