

At one of the churches, I served as a seminary student I was having some trouble with one of the boys in the fifth grade Sunday School class that I was teaching, so I looked him straight in the eye and asked a question that I felt would show him who's boss: “William, who is in charge here?” He wasn't going to let me get off that easy, so he said, “Jesus is.”

If ever a man spoke with true authority it was Jesus. It has been said that the scribes spoke *from* authority, but that Jesus spoke *with* authority. Remember that last week we talked about the kingdom of God? The word translated “kingdom” comes from the Greek word *basileia*, and it means first, the *authority* to rule as a king and, second, the realm where that king exercises his *authority*. So, when Jesus says, “*The kingdom of God has come near,*” he is really announcing his *authority*. In those days when king so-and-so invaded another land, he dethroned and overthrew the reigning power and released any prisoners the ex-king had captured. King Jesus walks into Galilee and his objective is to dethrone and overthrow the Prince of this world, and to free the people from the power of evil and death.

An important point about Jesus is that Jesus has the *authority* to call us. The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful fresh-water lake. I've been there once. Fed by the head waters of the Jordan, it is seven hundred feet below sea level, fourteen miles long, and six miles wide. As we look out across the water we see as many as 300 fishing boats upon the lake. Among those who fished this lake for a living are Simon and his brother Andrew. A little further down the coast are James and John, sons of Zebedee. Like most fishermen, these men have courage, an ability to work together, patience, energy, stamina, and judging by the calluses on their hands, they were tough.

Jesus has probably met them all before and his preaching grabbed them and virtually compelled them to believe in him as the Messiah. So, on this particular day when Jesus comes walking along the Sea of Galilee, he is able to call these men from their regular occupations and make them his disciples. Usually, a rabbi or teacher waited around some community landmark until

students decided to become his followers. Not Jesus. Jesus goes right up to the water and calls the fishermen out of their boats and away from their nets.

In John's gospel Peter is recorded as calling Jesus the name that the impure spirit gives him here in Mark 1, "*the Holy One of God.*" Philip Yancey once wrote that he feels like he has been lied to by "Hollywood films about Jesus...films where Jesus recites his lines evenly and without emotion. He strides through life as the only calm character among a cast of frustrated and flustered extras. Nothing rattles him. He dispenses wisdom in measured tones. He is, in short, the Prozac Jesus." Then Yancey gives us the real picture by saying that "the Gospels present a man who has such charisma that people will sit three days straight, without food, just to hear his riveting words."

And yet the experience of most American Christians is that it takes every last ounce of our willpower to pull ourselves away from *what we want to do* and follow him. When we finally leave the nets behind, we follow him around the block and then swim right back to our boats. One of the reasons we fail again and again and again is because we have in our minds Philip Yancey's concept of the Prozac Jesus—the mild-mannered Jesus who doesn't really care what we do and will forgive us anything, anyway.

American Christians have this way of thinking that we are all registered voters in the democratic kingdom of God and if we don't like where Jesus is leading us, we can veto his plans. God sometimes lets us get away with that for the time being. But here we see the reality of the situation: that the same fiery and determined Jesus that beat the devil down with the Cross and freed you and me from his autocratic control, has every right to bring the kingdom of God into our lives. He has the right to zap our brain and force us to serve whenever and wherever he calls. Watching *The Fellowship of the Ring* movie last week, I was reminded this is also the goal of the Dark Lord in Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, even though he has no right to make slaves out of free men and women.

Jesus has every right to put us in chains, but even with that right, rather than lording it over us, he invites us, and he calls out to us, "Follow me!" And then he waits for us to obey with all our heart, freely, gratefully, cheerfully, as

though we had no further desire to live life totally for ourselves. I don't know about you, but that makes me want to follow him all the more. His grace to us is even more amazing when we look at the next part of the story where he gives this demon absolutely no options whatsoever.

It's here that Mark gives us a second important lesson about Jesus: When Jesus says something, you can count on it happening. In this next part of the story, we find Jesus teaching in the synagogue. His new disciples are listening to him preach and verse 22 tells us the people were *amazed* at the authority with which he spoke. Mark put this part of the story here knowing that it's *dangerous* to follow Jesus. But he wants us to see Jesus' authority in action, so we won't be so terrified. A demon possessed man is here and we're not sure just how long he had been attending the synagogue without anyone knowing. But on this particular day, he blew his cover as soon as Jesus started teaching.

It must have been Jesus' air of authority that set the demon off. We have no reason to think that the demon recognized Jesus by his physical appearance because as far as we know Jesus was a regular looking guy. But as the demon speaks through the man, you can tell he knows what he's up against. Listen to how he talks in verse 24: "*What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?*" Not "I" and "me", but "we" and "us." This demon has woven himself through this man's being so tightly that there's no way in heaven or hell he's going to let the poor guy get away from him.

Then he hisses at Jesus, "*I know who you are—the Holy One of God!*" To which Jesus sternly says, "*Be quiet!*" literally, "Be muzzled!" You see, Jesus didn't need Satan's help telling the world who he is. He didn't want demonic testimony about himself any more than a political candidate wants the endorsement of a racist or a criminal. So, he tells the demon to shut up and come out of the man, and with that the demon tried one last convulsive attack. But then he had to submit to Jesus' authority and come out of the man.

Verse 27 tells us that everyone there was amazed, buzzing with curiosity. "*What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!*" He shuts up demonic spirits and sends them packing! They were surprised because in those days guys who cast out demons needed some kind of magical formula to make it

come out. They would do some special dance and say, “Abracadabra. In the name of my god, I command you to come out!” And even then, results were hit or miss, almost as if the demons were playing with the exorcist and would sometimes humor them to give a false sense of power. Jesus needed no magical words. He simply said, “*Come out of him!*” and the demon could do nothing but leave the man. You see, as The Holy One of God, Jesus was not “the only calm character among a cast of frustrated and flustered extras—the Prozac Jesus.” He was the one who had AUTHORITY.

The story is told of the military legend Alexander the Great who at the time had conquered nearly the entire known world. One day while on the warpath Alexander and a small company of soldiers approached a strongly fortified and walled city. Alexander raised his voice and demanded to see the king. When the king arrived, Alexander ordered him to surrender the city and everyone inside to Alexander and his little band of fighting men. The king laughed, “Why should I surrender to you? You can’t do us any harm!” But Alexander offered to give the king a demonstration. He ordered his men to line up single file and start marching. He marched them straight toward a sheer cliff.

The townspeople gathered on the wall and watched in shocked silence as, one by one, Alexander’s soldiers marched without hesitation right off the cliff to their deaths! After ten soldiers died, Alexander ordered the rest of the men to return to his side. The townspeople and the king immediately surrendered to Alexander the Great. They realized that if even a small number of men were willing to give their lives for this dynamic leader then nothing could stop his eventual victory.

Jesus Christ is different, unique, and far greater than Alexander. The beauty of our Lord is that unlike Alexander, Jesus loves his followers and wants what’s best for them. He proved this on the Cross, when he allowed himself to be sacrificed. The biblical writers speak of a price to be paid that is sufficient for the release of captives or slaves. God’s enemy had a legal right to all of us, so that the price to free us from sin and death was the blood of *The Holy One of God*. He doesn’t simply give his soldiers orders. The people said, “*He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him*” (v. 27). He is The Holy One. Amen.