

Jesus' Authority

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Mark 3:1–12

A Memory That Restores Perspective

It is good to be here. I think I was here a little while ago, and it is great to see what you have done with the space.

I want to begin with a memory. In the early 1990s my wife and I were part of a large London church, Holy Trinity Brompton. We were leading a small group on our first Alpha course. It was a big course, around 600 people, and our group had about twelve to fifteen.

We came to the talk where Nicky Gumbel was speaking on who Jesus is. Afterwards we gathered as a small group and I asked people what they thought about the talk. When I came to a woman called Sarah Jane, I noticed she looked unsettled.

I asked her what she thought, and she said, "I cannot believe how calm you all are." Then she burst into tears. What had happened was that, while Nicky was speaking, she had realised that Jesus really was who he said he was, God in human form.

Sometimes when we read the stories of Jesus, we lose their impact. Sarah Jane did not. And as Christians, especially after many years, we can lose that sense of awe. It is good to return to it and ask what it was like to be there.

The Man with the Withered Hand

What was it like to be in the synagogue when Jesus touched the man with the withered hand?

That moment is powerful, and it is also a metaphor. All of us have areas of our lives that are withered in some way. We need Jesus to touch us. We need to stretch out the hand of faith and receive what he offers.

The man was restored physically, but restoration goes deeper than that. It speaks to our own lives. Are there areas where things are not as they should be? Areas that need God's touch so that we can step forward in faith?

That image of the outstretched hand matters. We will return to it later.

Learning From Jesus

What do we learn about Jesus from this story?

Jesus acts decisively. He goes straight to the heart of the matter, heals the man, and it causes outrage. By Mark chapter 3 they are already plotting to kill him.

There are two things we see in Jesus here that we are called to follow.

Compassion

The first is compassion. Beneath everything Jesus does is the kindness of God. He did not have to heal that man, but he chose to.

We can suffer from compassion fatigue. I was challenged about this recently. I serve a church in Longwell Green in Bristol. Outside the local Aldi there was a woman who was homeless. That is not something we often see there.

As I shopped, I prayed and asked God to help her. When I came out, two people were already with her, arranging accommodation for the night through a charity. It reminded me that God's compassion is always at work, often before we even act.

Do not lose that motivation. Even small acts of compassion matter. Jesus healing one man may have seemed small compared to other needs around him, but it revealed the heart of God.

Where does God want to show his compassion through you, in your workplace, your street, your community?

Authority

The second thing we see is Jesus' authority.

Jesus heals not only physical sickness but also those with impure spirits. These spirits know who he is, and he silences them. This fits with what is often called the Messianic secret in Mark's Gospel.

What does this show us? Jesus is the coming King. He brings the kingdom of God. The kingdom arrives with the King, breaking into the world and confronting everything that opposes God's rule.

Nothing unsettles Jesus. Disease does not worry him. Evil spirits do not intimidate him. He simply deals with them. All authority belongs to him.

Light in the Darkness

That is inspiring, but it raises a question for us. Jesus brings the kingdom, but he also says that his followers are the light of the world, Matthew 5.

As I walked here, I could see the lights of the church from a distance. That is a picture of what you are meant to be, light in the darkness. Not just then, but now. Not just there, but here.

The kingdom of God is breaking into our communities today. People need healing, freedom, and hope. They need to know who Jesus really is.

Jesus says that all authority belongs to him, and then he sends us out to make disciples, Matthew 28.

Understanding the Task

A passage that struck me recently is 1 John 5:19–20. John says that the whole world is under the control of the evil one, but that the Son of God has come and given us understanding.

That matters. There is darkness over our communities, but Jesus has come so that people can know him. As we live in him, we bring his kingdom into the lives of others.

Church is not the destination. It is where we are equipped. It is the training ground for what God wants to do in the world.

Kingdom Work in the Community

In our own context in Bristol, we have been asking how to reach our community. God has led us in simple but effective ways.

We started a Lego club. It grew quickly and brought families through the doors. We then started a monthly coffee and craft morning, welcoming women, children, and grandparents. Relationships began to form.

We also run Bubble Church, which has opened the door to many families on Sunday mornings. People who would never normally come to church are now engaging.

I spoke this morning with a man called Alex. He said he does not know why, but he keeps ending up in church. God is clearly at work in his life.

I have also been meeting with a man called Ollie, who came to faith after involvement with spiritual practices that led him into darkness. As we pray, we see freedom coming and the light of Christ breaking in.

This is what Jesus showed us how to do. We bring his light into darkness so that people can be set free.

No Nonsense Faith

This is not just about my community. It is about yours. God is on the move across our cities. He has a purpose for you.

There is no need to faff around. Jesus' way is no nonsense. Be involved in what God is doing. Let compassion motivate you. Let people encounter the authority and love of Jesus.

Jesus has a plan for this world, and he invites us to be part of it.