

A Day in the Early Ministry of Jesus

Mark 1:21-45

Background

- Vv. 1:21-34 describe a single day, a Sabbath.
- Jesus, like Paul, took advantage of the custom by which a local synagogue leader could invite a visiting teacher to preach (*NIV Study Bible*).
- *Obligatory leprosy note*: “Biblical leprosy was not the disease now known as leprosy. It was a general term for any ‘repulsive scaly skin disease’ such as psoriasis, favus, and seborrheic dermatitis. Lev 13 describes the various kinds of afflictions and their detection by the priests.”ⁱ

1. Mark’s gospel begins with
 - a. John the Baptist
 - b. Jesus’ baptism
 - c. The calling of the disciples
 - d. Jesus’ authority in teaching and over spirits
 - e. Jesus’ healing
 - f. Jesus’ retreat to a solitary place
 - g. Jesus’ healing of a leper

What do these have in common? Why does Mark begin his gospel with them? How does (f) fit in with the rest? Does it need to?

2. After his baptism, Jesus headed north ~70 miles from the region where John was baptizing, west of the Dead Sea, to Galilee. Galilee was, in the eyes of the Jews of Jerusalem, an unfashionable region to the north, filled with Gentiles. Galileans had a low reputation and a recognizable accent (Mk 14:70). Jesus’ Galilean ministry was centered in the city of Capernaum, near a major north-south road. Why do you think Jesus chose to begin his ministry in Galilee?
3. In this chapter and especially in Jesus’ experience teaching and exorcising in the synagogue (vv. 21-28) there is an interplay between what Mark refers to as Jesus’ power and his authority. How do these two interact in Jesus’ teaching and exorcising in the synagogue? How about in his decision the next morning to leave Capernaum?
4. Jesus promised power to all believers through the Holy Spirit after he had ascended: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Several times in the gospels Jesus commissioned his disciples to ministry under his authority (e.g. Matt 10:8, Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-20, John 20:21). In dealing with the recalcitrant Corinthians, Paul says he came to them “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power...” (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Spirit-empowered ministry is a central concept of the spirit-filled or charismatic traditions. How do you experience the Spirit’s power in ministering to others? Do you find this a useful paradigm?
5. Irenaeusⁱⁱ wrote the following of the recognition of Jesus by the evil spirit in the synagogue (v. 24):

Even the demons cried out, on beholding the Son... All of these thus recognized the Son and the Father, yet without believing. So it was fitting that the truth should receive testimony from all, and should become a means of judgment for the salvation not only of those who believe, but also for the condemnation of those who do not believe. The result is that all should be fairly judged, and that the faith in the Father and Son should be a matter of decision for all, so that one means of salvation should be established for all, receiving testimony from all, both from those who belonging to it were its friends, and by those having no connection with it who were its enemies.ⁱⁱⁱ

Discuss.

6. Why did the citizens of Capernaum wait till sundown to come to Simon and Andrew's for healing?
7. Why did Jesus order the people he healed and the spirits he cast out not to tell anyone about it?
8. Having broken the Law by touching the leper (v. 41), Jesus instructs him to obey the Law and see the priest. Why?
9. The Jewish concept of cleanliness changes radically in the hands of Jesus and the NT writers. Read Matt 23:25, Rom 14:14, James 1:27; 4:7-10. What if anything in your daily life are you aware of as making you unclean? What do you do when made unclean? What should you do?

ⁱ *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Raymond Brown et al. ed. (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ) 1990.

ⁱⁱ Bishop of Lyons who published the most famous and influential refutation of Gnostic thought. His life (c. 135-202) spanned the end of the sub-apostolic period. Coming from Asia Minor, Irenaeus heard the teaching of Polycarp of Smyrna, who he says was one of John's disciples.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. II, Ed. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher Hall (IVP: Downer's Grove) 1998.