

Mark 1:23-28

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/mark/mark-1/mark-123-28/>

While Jesus is teaching in a Capernaum synagogue, a man with an unclean spirit begins crying out, identifying Jesus as the Holy One of God. Jesus swiftly rebukes the spirit to keep quiet and leave the man. It does. The crowd's amazement at Jesus's authority increases because He not only teaches with authority, He even commands unclean spirits and they obey Him. News of this amazing event spread all throughout the district of Galilee.

The parallel gospel account for this event is Luke 4:34-37.

The previous verses (Mark 1:21-22) serve as Mark's introduction to this event. The Gospel writer tells us that on the Sabbath, *Jesus* taught in the *synagogue* of Capernaum and the Jews in attendance were amazed at the authority with which *He* taught.

Mark continues with the action.

Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit (v 23)

A person with an unclean spirit would be a disturbing sight to behold at any time and any place. But for Jews seeing such a possessed *man* on the Sabbath *in their synagogue* likely brought on an extra level of distress. Many Jews at that time believed that some places and/or times were more or less prone to the presence of *unclean* spirits.

The Sabbath was believed to offer some protection from demons. So would a *synagogue*. And yet here was *a man in their synagogue* on the Sabbath who was clearly disturbed by *an unclean spirit*. If *a man* could be plagued by *an unclean spirit* in a synagogue, *he* presumably could be plagued by one just about anywhere or any time. Troubling indeed.

Either as *Jesus* was teaching, or just as *He* finished teaching *a man with an unclean spirit cried out*. This *man* was demon-possessed. The things *he cried out* were from his mouth, but it does not appear that it was the *man* who was speaking, but rather it was *the unclean spirit* who was speaking through his body. The demon-possessed *man cried out*,

"What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (v 24).

The *man with an unclean spirit cried out* two questions and one declaration.

The first question was: *What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth?*

The evil *spirit* also referred to *Jesus* by His human title: *Jesus of Nazareth*. It is not exactly clear why the *unclean spirit* addressed *Jesus* this way. It may have been trying to minimize, or insult,

or blaspheme *God* by speaking to *Him* as *Jesus of Nazareth*, a mortal human instead of almighty and eternal *God*. In any case the *unclean spirit* was clearly speaking to *Jesus*.

The question *he* asked appears to be rhetorical. The expected response was that *Jesus* and the *unclean spirit* have nothing to do with each other. *God* is holy. *The unclean spirit* was evil. It instantly perceived the total contrast of *Jesus*'s righteousness and its own unrighteousness.

Consequently, this *unclean spirit* immediately recognized *Jesus* for who *He* was—the *Holy One of God*. The *unclean spirit* was a member of the kingdom of darkness and was likely a fallen angel who rebelled with Satan before the earth was formed. As *God*, *Jesus* “is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The *unclean spirit*'s first question highlighted the contrast between it and *Jesus*.

The unclean spirit's first question also appears to have a sense of fear and surprise. *What business do we have with each other* could be a way of saying: “What are you doing here?”

The demon's fear and surprise carry over to his second question. The *unclean spirit*'s second question was: *Have You come to destroy us?* (v 24).

This question appears to be genuine (and not rhetorical). The *unclean spirit* recognized the power and purity of *Jesus*. The demon appears to have been startled to see *the Holy One of God* on earth.

Since Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, when he abdicated his divinely assigned authority over creation, the physical world has been under the usurped rule of Satan and his legions (Psalm 8). That is why the devil and his demons are described as the rulers of this age (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). Satan's rule as a usurping tyrant will one day come to an end. When *the Holy One of God* returns and destroys him and his demons (Revelation 19:11-21).

This *unclean spirit* may have understood this. And *the unclean spirit* may have been terrified that *the Holy One of God* had come now to destroy him.

The Holy One of God had indeed come. And the *unclean spirit* correctly recognized *Jesus* for who *He* was as *God's Holy One*. But *Jesus* did not come to earth the first time to destroy Satan once and for all. *God* sent His Son to reclaim and redeem His creation (John 3:16-17). The *business He* came for was to first defeat sin and death and to invite all mankind unto Himself (John 12:31).

Had the Jews recognized *Jesus* as *the Holy One of God* and accepted *Him* and His kingdom when *He* first came, perhaps *Jesus* would also have come to destroy the *unclean spirit* and its ilk. However, *Jesus* was rejected by His own (Matthew 27:22-25; John 1:11) and *He* did not fully inaugurate His kingdom at the end of His first coming.

The next time *Jesus* comes, His *business* will be to destroy Satan and his legions (Revelation 20:10). This *unclean spirit* now seems to fear that this is that time.

After asking these two questions, *the unclean spirit* made a bold declaration: *I know who You are—the Holy One of God!* (v 24).

Once again, the demon instantly recognized *Jesus's* identity as the Messiah and *God*, even if men were slow or unable to see this truth.

When *the unclean spirit* said this, *Jesus rebuked the spirit* by saying, “*Be quiet, and come out of him!*” (v 25).

There were two parts to *Jesus's* stern *rebuke* of *the unclean spirit*.

The first part of His *rebuke* was: *Be quiet*.

Jesus did not want *the unclean spirit* revealing His identity to others for several reasons. *He* wanted to give people the opportunity to come to *Him* and know *Him* by faith. *Jesus* also likely did not want evil spirits vouching for *Him* because it falsely gave the impression that they were working together. They were absolute enemies. They had NO *business with each other*. If *Jesus* allowed the demons to speak for *Him* people might draw the wrong conclusions.

The second part of *Jesus's* *rebuke* of *the unclean spirit* was: *and come out of him!* This part of the *rebuke* was to command *the unclean spirit* to leave and depart the troubled *man* he was controlling.

Instantly, *the unclean spirit* began *throwing the man into convulsions* and *cried out with a loud voice and came out of him* (v 26).

The demon left *him* violently. It was *throwing him into convulsions*. Luke records, “the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people” (Luke 4:35). But with a physician’s concern, Luke adds, how *the unclean spirit* “came out of him without doing him any harm” (Luke 4:35b).

The *man* was healed and free.

The casting *out* of *unclean* spirits at that time was typically left to religious professionals who specialized in exorcisms. Jewish exorcists used elaborate rituals and formulaic incantations to offer protections against evil spirits and exorcize demons.

Jesus, remarkably, neither performs a ritual nor speaks an incantation in this case. *He* simply issues a command and *the unclean spirit* surrenders.

The people in the *synagogue* were all amazed (v 27).

Mark tells us that after *they* witnessed this amazing sight, *they debated among themselves*, saying, “*What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him*” (v 27).

First, *they were all* “amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22).

Now *they were all amazed* at His *authority* to command *even the unclean spirits* who *obey Him*.

Mark concludes his record of this amazing encounter about the rapid and immediate response it had throughout *the district of Galilee*.

Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee (v 28).

The *district of Galilee* was the northernmost Roman *district* of the province of Judea. It included the entire northern and western shoreline of the sea of Galilee. ([See Map](#))

The people who witnessed this event were so amazed that they continued talking about it after they left the synagogue. Word spread fast throughout not only the city of Capernaum, but also throughout the wider district.

The news spread so quickly, that Mark tells us “When evening came, after the sun had set [i.e. when the Sabbath had ended and its work restrictions had expired], they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door” (Mark 1:32-33).

But before this happened *Jesus* performed another miracle in the home of Simon, where he was staying. This miracle is described in the next passage (Mark 1:29-31).

Biblical Text

²³ **Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,** ²⁴ saying, “**What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!**” ²⁵ **And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!”** ²⁶ **Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.** ²⁷ **They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”** ²⁸ **Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.**