

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/30/04 Brad Brandt

Mark 1:21-34 "The Credentials of Jesus" **

Main Idea: Why follow Jesus? The Lord Jesus exhibited two credentials in Mark 1:21-34 which compel us to place our faith in Him and devote our lives to Him.

I. Credential #1: Jesus spoke powerful words (21-22).

A. His teaching was central to His ministry (21).

B. His teaching was authoritative (22).

1. He didn't give human tradition, but divine truth.

2. He didn't speak to entertain, but to transform.

II. Credential #2: Jesus performed powerful works (23-34).

A. He has authority over demons (23-28).

1. He turned a disruption into a display of His supremacy (23-26).

2. He used miracles to call attention to His teaching (27-28).

B. He has authority over diseases (29-34).

1. He healed Simon's mother-in-law (29-31).

2. He healed many others (32-34).

Response: Since Jesus has the credentials...

1. You can trust Him.

2. You must trust Him.

Come. Follow me.

Those are attention getting words. To say them you'd better have the credentials.

Imagine you're standing in the entrance of a fancy restaurant, looking at the brass fixtures and the walnut woodwork, waiting for the moment of opportunity. Then it comes. A man in a black tux glides your way, makes eye contact, and says, "Come. Follow me." And you do what he says, following him to your table and the meal to follow.

Now suppose while at the same restaurant some fellow walked off the street dressed in a jogging suit and tennis shoes, tapped you on the shoulder, and said the identical words, "Come. Follow me." Would you follow him into the dining room? Probably not, and why not? My hunch is you scanned the fellow and made an assessment. "This guy doesn't have the authority to do what he is trying to do. He probably doesn't even work here, let alone know the owner of this dining establishment."

Credentials are vital.

One day a man walking beside a lake approached two brothers in a boat, two professional fishermen, and said to them, "Come. Follow me." And they did. Simon and Andrew left their nets, their very livelihood, and followed the One who gave the instructions. Moments later the same man approached another set of brothers, also professional fishermen, and gave the same command. "Come. Follow me." And they did. James and John left their father in the boat—they left the family business!—and followed the man beside the sea.

Why? He was no ordinary man. He was someone who had the credentials so that when He said, "Come. Follow me," you knew you could do it, indeed, you knew you *should* do it.

The question of the hour is, *Why follow Jesus?* That is what Jesus calls us to do, to follow Him. But if you going to follow someone, I mean follow him your whole life, you should have compelling reasons for doing

so. You'd better make sure that person has the credentials.

Be assured, *He does*. And the gospel writer Mark shows them to us very clearly in his written portrait of Jesus. "Straight Talk about Jesus" is the title of our current series in Mark, and we're in for some more *straight talk* this morning.

Why follow Jesus? Perhaps you've been wrestling with that question. Maybe you're a seeker and you've been considering it. Possibly you've been following Jesus, but the journey's turned out harder than you anticipated and you're wondering if it's worth it. *Why follow Jesus?*

I turn your attention to Mark's gospel. In the very passage that follows Jesus' call to Simon and Andrew, James and John, Mark presents two credentials that Jesus exhibited, credentials that compel us to place our faith in Him and devote our lives to Him, to *follow Him*. Our text is Mark 1:21-34. Here's the first credential and the first reason for following Jesus.

I. Credential #1: Jesus spoke powerful words (21-22).

Let's join the story at verse 21, "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." Mark doesn't define who "they" is. Apparently it includes Jesus, the two sets of brothers that chose to follow Him in the previous passage, and perhaps others who are intrigued by the Master. The new disciples followed Jesus to the lake-side village of Capernaum on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, a town where Jesus spent considerable time in ministry.

Sabbath day came and Jesus led His followers to the synagogue. The synagogue was at the center of life for first century Jews. They went to the temple in Jerusalem a few times a year, but they went to the synagogue in their town every week, without exception, sometimes more than once a week.

The synagogue service consisted of three elements. There was prayer, the reading of God's Word, and the exposition of God's Word. According to Barclay, there was no music, no singing, and no sacrifice, just prayer and teaching. The temple was the place of sacrifice, the synagogue the place of teaching.

Don't miss what may at first seem rather obvious. Teaching was important to Jesus. In fact, Mark here emphasizes two things about Jesus' teaching.

A. His teaching was central to His ministry (21). From the outset Mark emphasizes Jesus *teaching* ministry. He goes to Capernaum and *teaches*. The very next day Simon and the others interrupted Jesus' early morning prayer time, saying, "Everyone is looking for you (38)!" To which Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can *preach* there also. That is why I have come."

Jesus came to change lives and used teaching. No, it wasn't all He did but it was central to what He did, the reason being that sinners will miss the meaning of His actions apart from His teaching. "If you hold to my *teaching*, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32)." His miracles got people's attention, but His words captured their hearts and consequently changed their lives.

"This is why I have come," He announced, "so I can preach." And so He did. We see just how important teaching was to Jesus by scanning Mark's gospel:

Mark 1:39—"So he traveled throughout Galilee, *preaching* in their synagogues and driving out demons."

Mark 2:1-2—"A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and

he preached the word to them."

Mark 2:13—"Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he *began to teach them.*"

Jesus once said, quoting the Torah, "Many does not live on bread alone, but on every living word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4)." We need teaching for we need God's Word. Without it we die of spiritual starvation.

Not only did Jesus teach, but He taught and commissioned twelve of His followers to teach. Mark 3:14 indicates, "He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might *send them out to preach.*" It's truth that changes lives, God's truth. But life-changing-truth changes no one until it's heard, and if it's to be heard it must be taught. Just before returning to heaven Jesus reemphasized the need for teaching in His commission, "Go, make disciples...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matt 28:19-20)."

Answer this. If teaching was central to Jesus' ministry what does that say to us? We need teaching! We need to make teaching and learning God's Word a high priority in our lives—in our church services, in our families, in our personal lives, too. It should be a key factor in choosing a church and in why we go to church—the centrality of teaching.

B. His teaching was authoritative (22). A stranger entered a church in the middle of the sermon and seated himself in the back pew. After a while he began to fidget. Leaning over to a white-haired man at his side, evidently an old member of the congregation, he whispered: "How long has he been preaching?" "Thirty or forty years, I think," the old man answered. "I'll stay then," decided the stranger, "He must be nearly done."

Sadly, that's the way teaching is often viewed today. It's something you *tolerate*. Be assured of this. You didn't merely *tolerate* Jesus' teaching. You embraced it, or hated it, but you didn't sleep through it. Why not? Because His teaching was *authoritative*.

Verse 22—"The people were amazed ['astonished,' AV] at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." When Jesus taught, people took note. They were "amazed," a verb (*exeplesonto*) from the root *plesso* meaning "strike" or "smite." It's a very strong word indicating people were astonished, even stricken by what Jesus said.

And why? There was something compelling about His teaching, something very different from the common teachers of the day. He taught as "one who had authority."

What does that mean? There were a couple of things that set Jesus apart as a teacher.

1. *He didn't give human tradition, but divine truth.* Sadly, then as now people weren't used to that. The teachers of the law in their day constantly cited other rabbis as their authority. "Well, as Rabbi So-and-So says..."

Jesus was different. "You have heard that it was said... *but I say to you,*" the Lord announced over and over in His famous Sermon on the Mount. When He spoke He did so as if He needed no authority beyond Himself, *for He didn't.* He didn't cite supposed experts. He didn't offer people take-it-or-leave-it opinions and options, but rather proclaimed the authoritative speech of God Himself—sometimes by quoting the Scriptures and more often by making direct, divine announcements, "I say to you!"

Jesus possessed what commentator J. D. Jones calls "the authority of character." Jones explains, "The scribes had the kind of authority that comes from office. But it was not that kind of authority Jesus wielded.

He had no office. He had not, as we should say, been trained for the ministry. He had never been ordained. He came straight from the carpenter's shop. And yet when He spoke, men felt there was an authority about His words they never felt in the presence of the scribes, their official teachers. It was the authority of character, of a pure and holy personality. In the presence of Jesus men felt themselves instinctively in the presence of a Holy Person."

2. *He didn't speak to entertain, but to transform.* Yes, He was a brilliant speaker, a master story-teller and illustrator (who can forget the story of the Good Samaritan or miss the point of "I am the bread of life"?). Crowds sat on the ground listening to Him for hours on end, speechless, sometimes forgetting to eat. He knew how to hold an audience, without question.

But His aim wasn't sheer entertainment. It was transformation. That's why sometimes He said things that offended people—and didn't back down.

Theodore Epp, founder of Back to the Bible radio ministry, realized something was wrong when he stopped receiving critical mail. Convicted that he was not challenging the flock enough, he changed his preaching. "I'm afraid that when I'm pleasing everybody, I'm not pleasing the Lord," he later said, "and pleasing the Lord is what counts."

Commenting on this illustration Chuck Colson writes, "This is not to suggest that a pastor is only successful when he is upsetting people! But he must be certain that he is first and foremost faithful to the One he serves. He is fulfilling a divine commission when he preaches. Just as an ambassador is entrusted not with his own message but with his superior's message, so the minister is entrusted with the Word of God. Before it is delivered, therefore, every message should be laid at the foot of His throne with one question: "Is it faithful to You, my Lord?" Or as one German pastor would always pray in the pulpit, "Cause my mind to fear whether my heart means what I say.""

It was obvious to all that Jesus meant what He said. His teaching was authoritative.

I recently read a book by Jim Collins entitled *Good to Great*. It's a book for leaders that assesses the difference between *good* organizations and *great* ones. I found some helpful insights in it. Human teachers can do that, give you helpful insights.

But there's one teacher who is in a category all by Himself. That's why when you hear the Word of God proclaimed you come away thinking, not, "That's interesting. I'll have to think about that," but rather, "That's convicting! I need to do something about that and right now!"

Why follow Jesus? Here's credential #1—He spoke powerful words.

II. Credential #2: Jesus performed powerful works (23-34).

On this particular Sabbath day He did three powerful works and in three places, first in the synagogue in the morning, second at Simon's house in the afternoon, and third in the street in the evening.

Verse 23 begins, "Just then a man in the synagogue...cried out." It's interesting that the immediate result of Jesus' teaching, in addition to amazement, was division and controversy. *Just then* a man cried out, "What do you want with us (24)?"

Sometimes people say, "I want a teacher that makes everybody feel good. I don't want to listen to a controversial teacher." Then you would have concluded Jesus to be a poor teacher.

Not everybody likes to hear God's Word. It convicts as well as comforts. This man cried out. Of course, there's a particular reason this man cried out as verse 23 makes clear. He was "possessed by an evil spirit."

Satan hates it when people hear God's Word, for a couple of reasons. Such teaching exposes him for who he is, the doomed enemy of God. It also brings liberation to the people he holds captive. From the very outset Mark shows Jesus in conflict with Satan. That's important to see for Jesus came to destroy the power of the devil (1 John 3:8).

I wonder how long he'd been there, the demon-controlled man, that is. Mark makes it very clear this man with the evil spirit was *in the synagogue*. How many weeks or months or years has this imposter been going through the motions of praying and listening to sermons right next to the people of God? We tend to associate demonic activity with evil places, like tombs and crack houses, and it's there for sure. But never forget that Satan is a deceiver. He's also a religious being, once a worship leader in heaven before his rebellion and banishment (Isa 14:12-14). Now he is a proponent of religion. He uses religion to get at God. He infiltrates. He imitates.

You say, "Why didn't this man show his true colors before this?" He had no reason to. Apparently, he fit right in. That changed when Jesus came.

Wiersbe said it well, "There are people today just like this demonized man; in a religious meeting, able to tell who Jesus is, and even trembling with fear of judgment—yet lost!"

The works Jesus performed in verses 23-34 illustrate His authority over two realms.

A. He has authority over demons (23-28). Let's walk through the account, noting first of all how...

1. *He turned a disruption into a display of His supremacy (23-26)*. "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?' Notice the demons recognize Jesus' identity. 'Have you come to destroy us?' They also understand the nature of His mission. One of the evil spirits assumed the role of spokesman, saying, 'I know who you are—the Holy One of God!'"

He knew, all right. This wasn't the first time this rebellious creature had stood in the presence of its Creator. He heard that voice the day he was cast out of heaven. And he knew what that voice said that day long ago in the garden when the pronouncement was made to his supervisor (Gen 3:15), "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel." Is it time? Have you come to destroy us?

Verse 25—"Be quiet!" [lit. 'be muzzled'] said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!'" Why did Jesus silence the evil spirit? They were speaking the truth, weren't they? Perhaps this time, but that's the problem. Even a liar speaks the truth some of the time, even much of the time, but since he's a liar you don't know when to believe him. Jesus knew that the witness of evil spirits would only hurt His mission, for it would only confuse His hearers. If Satan can't keep the truth hidden he seeks to make the truth seem so bizarre that people reject it when they hear it.

Verse 26—"The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." I see two things here. One, Satan's forces don't give up without a fight. And two, Satan's forces are no match for Jesus.

Be quiet! Come out of him! With those two brief commands Jesus set a man free from bondage. What power! Jesus here gives a preview of His kingdom-age power, of what He will do when He comes again and destroys the evil one and his hosts once and for all.

Some look at Jesus' life and conclude He died because He underestimated the power of the evil one. No, absolutely not! Mark records incidents like this one to show that the evil one is no match for King Jesus. The reason Jesus died is because He chose to die, for He had come to die in the place of all who would believe in Him.

So Jesus turned a disruption into a display of His supremacy. Furthermore...

2. *He used miracles (like this encounter) to call attention to His teaching (27-28).* "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.' News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."

First they were amazed by His words. Now they are amazed by His works. And notice how His works brought attention to His words. The people saw the miracle He did and said, "What is this? A new *teaching*... When He speaks evil spirits obey Him."

Why did these spirits obey Jesus? You say, "Because He is the King!" Yes, but why then does He give us commands that we refuse to obey? Isn't it because they knew something about Jesus we tend to ignore, that the One who is the Savior will one day be our *Judge*? We would do well to ponder that more often...

So Jesus' works indicate that He has authority over demons. His authority extends to a second realm...

B. He has authority over diseases (29-34). Mark records two miracles of healing in this section, both emphasizing the great compassion of the Savior for those in need.

1. *He healed Simon's mother-in-law (29-31).* Verse 29—"As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew." According to Jewish custom the main Sabbath meal came right after the synagogue service at the sixth hour, that is, noon. Mark says that the group left the synagogue and headed over to the house of the brothers Simon and Andrew. Upon arrival, they encountered a problem.

Verse 30—"Simon's mother-in-law [this indicates Peter was a married man, a detail mentioned also in 1 Cor 9:5] was in bed with a fever [perhaps she was the one who was to fix the meal; now that's a problem, a house full of people and a sick cook], and they told Jesus about her [that's a good thing to do with any predicament; tell Jesus about it]."

Verse 31—"So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them." Note the Master's actions. Jesus *went, took, and helped*. With merely the touch of His hand the fever left, such is His power. In the previous account He *spoke* and the evil spirit came out. Here He uses a touch. There's no pat formula with Jesus.

And once healed, what did the mother of Peter's wife do? Take time to regain her strength? No. Mark says she began to *wait on them* [AV 'she ministered unto them']. Not only was the fever gone but her strength returned. She went from the bed to the kitchen instantly.

The healing led to service. If God heals it's so a person can serve longer or serve more efficiently. If God chooses not to heal it's because He has other purposes in mind.

We can learn from this woman. Serving is one of the best ways to say thank you to the Lord. The fact is, we're saved so we can serve. Indeed, serving [showing love by meeting practical needs] is an evidence of salvation according to 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers."

Such power! One touch and a sick woman was restored. It didn't take long for word to spread. This miracle happened mid-day. Mark records a second that followed hours later.

2. *He healed many others (32-34).* "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, 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."

The multitudes waited until evening because the law said it was illegal to carry any burden through town on the Sabbath day. That would have been work and work was forbidden. The Sabbath ran from sundown on Friday evening to sundown on Saturday evening. Jewish law said the Sabbath day was over when three stars came out in the sky. So the people of Capernaum waited until the sun went down on that Saturday and then converged on Jesus.

In His three years of public ministry Jesus healed literally hundreds and hundreds of people. Here Mark says the *whole town* gathered at the door, and Jesus healed *many* and drove out *many* demons.

About ten years ago *U. S. News & World Report* carried a story about Kevin Carter, a man who encountered human suffering firsthand. For a decade, this photographer captured vivid pictures of repression and strife in his native South Africa. In 1993, he went to famine-racked Sudan and came upon a starving toddler stalked by a vulture. He photographed the scene—an image that won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize—then chased the vulture away. As the child resumed her walk to a feeding station, he lit a cigarette and wept. A few months later, at 33, he killed himself with carbon monoxide pumped into his pickup truck. Explained his father: "Kevin always carried around the horror of the work he did."

It's a hard thing to see people in pain and be able to do nothing about it.

Why did the people in our story bring the hurting to Jesus? For a very simple reason. They knew He could do what they couldn't do. He could do something about their problems. Lots of people can talk about problems, but He made a difference, not only with powerful words but with powerful works.

He still makes a difference. Sometimes He does it by removing the pain, at other times by granting sustaining grace to endure the pain for a season with the assurance that in time, in *His* time, He will remove all pain from His people.

"Come to me," He said, "all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)."

Why should we follow Jesus? Because He makes the difference, and the reason He makes the difference is because of He has the credentials—*powerful words* backed up by *powerful works*. And of course, His greatest work is the one He accomplished on the cross when He gave His life to pay for our sins, a work climaxed by His triumph over the grave three days later.

Hear His words: *Come. Follow Me.*

Response: Since Jesus has the credentials...two things follow.

1. *You can trust Him.* There is none so trustworthy as the One who left the glories of heaven to come to earth on a rescue mission, who died to redeem sinners like us from our hopeless existence. There's none like the One who humbled Himself in order to enter this world and confront demons and diseases and ultimately death itself.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever *believes* in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. Yes, you can *trust* Him. And if you do He will give you life that is abundant and eternal. He can do all this because He has the credentials. You can trust Him. What's more...

2. *You must trust Him.* Since He has the credentials you cannot ignore Him and certainly cannot escape God's wrath apart from Him. Acts 4:12 states, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

My friend, not only can you trust Him, you *must* trust Him. If you care for your soul, I urge you to do so today.