**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MARK-003**. **MIGHTY IN WORD AND DEED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"21.* *And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day He entered into the synagogue, and taught. 22. And they were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. 23. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God. 25. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. 26. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. 27. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him. 28. And immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. 29. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell Him of her. 31. And He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. 32. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. 33. And all the city was gathered together at the door. 34. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew Him."*

*Mark 1:21-34*

None of the incidents in this section are peculiar to Mark, but the special stamp of his Gospel is on them all; and, both in the narration of each and in the swift transition from one to another, the impression of Christ's strength and unpausing diligence in filial service is made. The short hours of that first Sabbath's ministry are crowded with work; and Christ's energy bears Him through exhausting physical labours, and enables Him to turn with unwearied sympathy and marvellous celerity to each new form of misery, and to throw Himself with freshness undiminished into the relief of each. The homely virtue of diligence shines out in this lesson no less clearly than superhuman strength that tames demons and heals all manner of sickness. There are four pictures here, compressed and yet vivid. Mark can condense and keep all the essentials, for his keen eye and sure hand go straight to the heart of his incidents.

**I. The strong Son of God teaching with authority.**

They enter; we see the little group, consisting of Jesus and of the two pairs of brothers, in whose hearts the mighty conviction of His Messiahship had taken root. Simon and Andrew were at home in Capernaum; but we may, perhaps, infer from the manner in which the sickness of Peter's wife's mother is mentioned, that Peter had not been to his house till after the synagogue service. At all events, these four were already detached from ordinary life and bound to Him as disciples. We meet here with our first instance of Mark's favourite straightway, the recurrence of which, in this chapter, so powerfully helps the impression of eager and yet careful swiftness with which Christ ran His course, unhasting, unresting. From the beginning Mark stamps his story with the spirit of our Lord's own words, I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh. And yet there is no hurry, but the calm, equable rapidity with which planets move. The unostentatious manner of Christ's beginning is noteworthy. He seeks to set Himself in the line of the ordinary teaching of the day. He knew all the faults of the synagogue and the rabbis, and He had come to revolutionise the very conception of religious teaching and worship; but He prefers to intertwine the new with the old, and to make as little disturbance as possible. It is easy to get the cheap praise of originalityby brushing aside existing methods. It is harder and nobler to use whatever methods may be going, and to breathe new value and life into them. Drowsy, hair-splitting disputations about nothings and endless casuistry were the staple of the synagogue talk; but when He opened His mouth there, the weary formalism went out of the service, and men's hearts glowed again when they once more heard a Voice that lived, speaking from a Soul that saw the invisible. Mark has no mission to record many of our Lord's sayings. His Gospel deals more with deeds. The sermon he does not give, but the hearer's comment he does. Matthew has the same words at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, from which it would seem that they were part of the oral tradition which underlies the written Gospels; but Mark probably has them in their right place. Very naturally, the first synagogue discourse in Capernaum would surprise. Deeper impressions might be made by its successors, but the first hearing of that voice would be an experience that could never be repeated.

The feature of His teaching which astonished the villagers most was its authority. That fits in with the impression of strength which Mark wishes to make. Another thing that struck them was its unlikeness to the type of synagogue teaching to which they had been accustomed all their lives. They had got so accustomed to the droning dreariness and trivial subtleties of the rabbis, that it had never entered their heads that there could be any other way of teaching religion than boring men with interminable pedantries about trifles of ritual or outward obedience. This new Teacher would startle all, as an eagle suddenly appearing in a sanhedrim of owls. He would shock many; He would fascinate a few. Nor was it only the dissimilarity of His teaching, but also its authority, that was strange. The scribes spoke with authority enough of a sort, lording it over the despised common people--men of the earth, as they called them--and exacting punctilious obedience and much obsequiousness; but authority over the spirit they had none. They pretended to no power but as expositors of a law; and they fortified themselves by citations of what this, that, and the other rabbi had said, which was all their learning. Christ quoted no one. He did not even say, Moses has said. He did not even preface His commands with a Thus saith the Lord. He spoke of His own authority: Verily, I say unto you. Other teachers explained the law; He is a lawgiver. Others drew more or less pure waters from cisterns; He is in Himself a well of water, from which all may draw. To us, as to these rude villagers in the synagogue of the little fishing-town, Christ's teaching is unique in this respect. He does not argue; He affirms. He seeks no support from othersteachings; He alone is sufficient for us. He not only speaks the truth, which needs no other confirmation than His own lips, but He is the truth. We may canvass other men's teachings, and distinguish their insight from their errors; we have but to accept His. The world outgrows all others; it can only grow up towards the fulness of His. Us and all the ages He teaches with authority, and the guarantee for the truth of His teaching is Himself. Verily, verily, I say unto you. No other man has a right to say that to me. But Christ dominates the race, and the strong Son of God is the world's Teacher.

**II. The strong conqueror of demons.**

Again we have straightway. The language seems to imply that this wretched sufferer burst hurriedly into the synagogue and interrupted the utterance of astonishment by giving it new food. Perhaps the double consciousness of the demoniac may be recognised, the humanity being drawn to Jesus by some disturbed longings, the demoniac consciousness, on the other hand, being repelled. It is no part of my purpose to discuss demoniacal possession. I content myself with remarking that I, for one, do not see how Christ's credit as a divine Teacher is to be saved without admitting its reality, nor how such phenomena as the demoniac's knowledge of His nature are to be accounted for on the hypothesis of disease or insanity. It is assuming rather too encyclopedical a knowledge to allege the impossibility of such possession. There are facts enough around us still, which would be at least as satisfactorily accounted for by it as by natural causes; but as to the incident before us, Mark puts it all into three sentences, each of which is pregnant with suggestions. There is, first, the demoniac's shriek of hatred and despair. Christ had said nothing. If, as we suppose, the man had broken in on the worship, drawn to Jesus, he is no sooner in His presence than the other power that darkly lodged in him overpowers him, and pours out fierce passions from his reluctant lips. There is dreadful meaning in the preposition here used, a man in an unclean spirit, as if his human self was immersed in that filthy flood. The words embody three thoughts--the fierce hatred, which disowns all connection with Jesus; the wild terror, which asks or affirms Christ's destructive might over all foul spirits (for the usmeans not the man and the demon, but the demon and his fellows); and the recognition of Christ's holiness, which lashes unholiness into a paroxysm of mingled despair and hate. Does this sound like a madman, or an epileptic, or like a spirit which knew more than men knew, and trembled and hated more than they could do? There is nothing more terrible than the picture, self-drawn in these spasmodic words, of a spirit which, by its very foulness, is made shudderingly sensitive to the disturbing presence of purity, and would fain have nothing to do with Him whom it recognises for the Holy One of God, and therefore its destroyer. Foul things that lurk under stones hurry out of the light when you lift the covering. Spirits that love the darkness are hurt by the light. It is possible to recognise Jesus for what He is, and to hate Him all the more. What a miserable state that is, to hope that we shall have nothing to do with Him! These wild utterances, seething with evil passions and fierce detestation, do point to the possible terminus for men. A black gulf opens in them, from which we are meant to start back with the prayer, Preserve me from going down into that pit!

What a contrast to the tempest of the demoniac's wild and whirling words is the calm speech of Christ! He knows His authority, and His word is imperative, curt, and assured: Hold thy peace!literally, Be muzzled, as if the creature were a dangerous beast, whose raving and snapping must be stopped. Jesus wishes no acknowledgments from such lips. They who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. He had taught with authority, and now He in like manner commands. His teaching rested on His own assurance. His miracle is done by His own power. That power is put forth by His simple word; that is to say, the bare exercise or expression of His will is potent.

The third step in the narrative is the immediate obedience of the demon. Reluctant but compelled, malicious to the last, doing the house which he has to leave all the harm he can, and though no longer venturing to speak, yet venting his rage and mortification, and acknowledging his defeat by one parting howl, he comes out.

Again, we are bid to note the impression produced. The interrupted buzz of talk begins once more, and is vividly reported by the fragmentary sentences of verse 27, and by the remark that it was among themselvesthat they compared notes. Two things startled the people:--first, the new teaching; and second, the authority over demons, into which they naturally generalise the one instance. The busy tongues were not silenced when they left the synagogue. Verse 28 shows what happened, in one direction, when the meeting broke up. With another straightway, Mark paints the swift flight of the rumour over all the district, and somewhat overleaps the strict line of chronology, to let us hear how far the echo of such a blow sounded. This first miracle recorded by him is as a duel between Christ and the strong man armed, who keeps his house. The shield of the great oppressor is first struck in challenge by the champion, and His first essay at arms proves Him mightiest. Such a victory well heads the chronicle.

**III. The tenderness of the strong Son.**

We come back to the strict order of succession with another straightway, which opens a very different scene. The Authorised Version gives three straightwaysin the three verses as to the cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Immediatelythey go to the house; immediatelythey tell Jesus of her; immediatelythe fever leaves her; and even if we omit the third of these, as the Revised Version does, we cannot miss the rapid haste of the narrative, which reflects the unwearied energy of the Master. Peter and Andrew had apparently been ignorant of the sickness till they reached the house, from which the inference is not that it was a slight attack which had come on after they went to the synagogue, but that the two disciples had so really left house and kindred, that though in Capernaum, they had not gone home till they took Jesus there for rest and quiet and food after the toil of the morning. The owners would naturally first know of the sickness, which would interfere with their hospitable purpose; and so Mark's account seems more near the details than Matthew's, inasmuch as the former says that Jesus was toldof the sick woman, while Matthew's version is that He sawher. Luke says that they besought Him for her. No doubt that was the meaning of tellingHim; but Mark's representation brings out very beautifully the confidence already beginning to spring in their hearts that He needed but to know in order to heal, and the reverence which hindered them from direct asking. The instinct of the devout heart is to tell Christ all its troubles, great or small; and He does not need beseeching before He answers. He did not need to be told either, but He would not rob them or us of the solace of confiding all griefs to Him.

Their confidence was not misplaced. No moment intervened unused between the tidings and the cure. He came, as if He had been in some outer room, or not yet in the house, and now passed into the sick chamber. Then comes one of Mark's minute and graphic details, in which we may see the keen eye and faithful memory of Peter. He took her by the hand, and lifted her up. Mark is fond of telling of Christ's taking by the hand; as, for instance, the little child whom He set in the midst, the blind man whom He healed, the child with the dumb spirit. His touch has power. His grasp means sympathy, tenderness, identification of Himself with us, the communication of upholding, restoring strength. It is a picture, in a small matter, of the very heart of the gospel. He layeth not hold of angels, but He layeth hold of the seed of Abraham. It is a lesson for all who would help their fellows, that they must not be too dainty to lay hold of the dirtiest hand, both metaphorically and literally, if they want their sympathy to be believed. His hand banishes not only the disease, but its consequences. Immediate convalescence and restoration to strength follow; and the strength is used, as it should be, in ministering to the Healer who, notwithstanding His power, needed the humble ministration and the poor fare of the fisherman's hut. What a lesson for all Christian homes is here! Let Jesus know all that troubles them, welcome Him as a guest, tell Him everything, and He will cure all diseases and sorrows, or give the light of His presence to make them endurable. Consecrate to Him the strength which He gives, and let deliverances teach trust, and inflame grateful love, which delights in serving Him who needs no service, but delights in all.

**IV. The strong Son, unwearied by toil and sufficient for all the needy.**

Each incident in this lesson has a note appended of the impression it made. Verses 32-34 give the united result of all, on the people of Capernaum. They wait till the Sabbath is past, and then, without thought of His long day of work, crowd round the house with their sick. The sinking sun brought no rest for Him, but the new calls found Him neither exhausted nor unwilling. Capernaum was but a little place, and the whole city might well be gathered together at the door, some sick, some bearing the sick, all curious and eager. There was no depth in the excitement. There was earnestness enough, no doubt, in the wish for healing, but there was no insight into His message. Any travelling European with a medicine chest can get the same kind of cortege round his tent. These people, who hung upon Him thus, were those of whom He had afterwards to say that it would be more tolerable for Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for them. But though He knew the shallowness of the impression, He was not deaf to the misery; and, with power which knew no weariness, and sympathy which had no limit, and a reservoir of healing virtue which the day's draughts had not emptied by a hairs-breadth, He healed them all. Remarkable is the prohibition of the demonsspeech, They knew Him, while men were ignorant; for they had met Him before to-day. He would have no witness from them; not merely, as has been said, because their attestation would hinder, rather than further, His acceptance by the people, nor because they may be supposed to have spoken in malice, but because a divine decorum forbade that He should accept acknowledgments from such tainted sources.

So ended this first of the days of the Son of Man, which our Evangelist records. It was a day of hard toil, of merciful and manifold self-revelation. As teacher and doer, in the synagogue, and in the home, and in the city; as Lord of the dark realms of evil and of disease; as ready to hear hinted and dumb prayers, and able to answer them all; as careless of His own ease, and ready to spend Himself for othershelp,--Jesus showed Himself, on that Sabbath day, strong and tender, the Son of God and the servant of men.