

# OpenTheo

## 1st Sabbath in Capernaum (Part 1)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this session, Steve Gregg provides an in-depth analysis of Mark chapter 1, emphasizing Jesus' reluctance to accept fame and recognition as a prophet in his own town. He explains Jesus' authority in speaking with confidence and clarity, which set him apart from other religious figures of the time. Gregg also stresses the importance of prioritizing love for Jesus and confirms that acts of kindness, coupled with the gospel message, serve to relieve suffering and confirm the truth of the word through accompanying signs.

### **Transcript**

In today's session, we're turning to Mark chapter 1. There are parallels to this both in Matthew and in Luke, but we'll be working from Mark's gospel because it is the fullest account, and we will make reference over to the passages in Matthew and Luke as they are relevant, as they bring in relevant additional information. The chapters in Matthew and Luke that parallel this, the material is found in Matthew chapter 8, and it's also found in Luke chapter 4. We're going to be looking at Mark chapter 1, verses 21 through 34. And I'm not going to read the entire passage without comment.

We'll read first of all through verse 28. Mark 1, verses 21 through 28. Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught.

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying, Let us alone! What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be quiet, and come out of him.

And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. And immediately his fame spread throughout all the region of Galilee.

Perhaps I should read through verse 34, because this will take us through two successive Sabbaths, and we'll talk about these points. Verse 29. Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.

But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told him about her at once. So he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her, and she served them. Now at evening, when the sun had set, they brought to him all that were sick, and those who were demon-possessed.

And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then he healed many that were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons, and he did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew him. Now the main feature of this passage, actually there are two, is the casting out of the demon of the man in the synagogue in Capernaum, and then the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, followed by a great number of sick and demon-possessed people that were brought to him.

The order of events here differs a little bit here than in Luke, in that Luke does not actually describe the call of the four fishermen until after these stories, whereas we've already postulated that they belong as Matthew and Mark put them prior to these stories, because we find Jesus going into the house of Peter and Andrew, along with James and John in verse 29, and it gives the impression that these men already had joined themselves to Jesus, they already were committed to him, and that would suggest the order of events found in Matthew and Mark, rather than in Luke, which for some reason Luke places the call of the four fishermen after these events. We have here one of the early things that Jesus did after he relocated from Nazareth to Capernaum. Jesus actually never did relocate in Nazareth, but shortly into his Galilean ministry he did go to Nazareth, his hometown, and he preached there, as we find in Luke chapter 4, and the people there were nonplussed, they did not appreciate his alleged fame and so forth, when he seemed to them like an ordinary guy, and his comments to them at that time were that a prophet is without honor in his own town, but not other places, and gave examples of both Elijah and Elisha who had healed and helped Gentiles at a time when there were many Jews in need of help, but he pointed out, of course, by that statement, that the Jews often would neglect the prophets that God sent to them, and they would be received by Gentiles who had received mercy from God through their faith, and this enraged the scruples of the local Nazarenes, and they tried to throw him off a cliff, which he somehow managed to escape their plot.

Then he came down to Capernaum, where we find him in these stories, and that apparently is where Peter and Andrew had a house. Now, we are told in the Gospel of John that sometime earlier than this, these fishermen lived in Bethsaida, but they apparently had moved, or they had more than one home, it's possible that some of them lived in Bethsaida, and some lived in Capernaum. In any case, Peter and Andrew, the two brothers, apparently owned a house, it says in verse 29, and Peter was married, he had a

mother-in-law who was sick in one of the stories, and so this house in Capernaum became sort of the main office for what Jesus was doing in terms of outreach throughout Galilee.

For approximately a year or more, Jesus focused his attention on reaching the region of Galilee up in the northern part of the country, making only occasional excursions down into Judea, which he usually went down there during the feast times, because of the requirement of doing so, or because of his hopes of finding crowds there to minister to. But we are now in the early part of what's called the Great Galilean Ministry of Jesus, which is what the three Synoptic Gospels focus on more than any other portion. John's Gospel omits it almost entirely.

There's very little of the Galilean ministry found in John. We do find the feeding of the 5,000, which happened in Galilee, in John chapter 6. Apart from that, most of John is about things that took place in Judea, and there's a reason for that, and that is, of course, that John's Gospel intentionally, I think, supplemented what the other Gospels had already said, so that John's Gospel fills in the gaps. The three Synoptic Gospels, for some reason, decided that focusing on Jesus' activities in Galilee was the most important thing they could aim at, perhaps because we have the most characteristic teaching and actions of Jesus done during this period of time.

It was also what we'd call his year of popularity, and therefore it's more representative of what he was doing when he had a lot of attention and was reaching out to great masses. The first year of his ministry, approximately, was already passed, and that had been somewhat obscure. After this Galilean ministry, there was another year, nearly, of opposition, where he wasn't able to go about as freely and command the masses in Galilee.

He typically was in Paris or some other place. So at the beginning point of the major material that the Synoptic Gospels focus upon in the life of Jesus, which is his great Galilean ministry, his headquarters during that time was apparently Capernaum, and the house of Peter appears to have been the home of Jesus and his disciples, which is an interesting point when you consider that Peter and Andrew, as well as James and John in the previous story, had in fact left everything to follow Jesus. In fact, Peter makes a point of protesting that he had done that very thing at a considerable time later in his contact with Jesus, when Jesus, near the end of his ministry, encountered the rich young ruler.

If you look at Matthew chapter 19, when Jesus told the rich young ruler to forsake everything, and he did not do so and went away sorrowful, Jesus made some comments about that, and then Peter said to him, in Matthew 19 and verse 27, you'll find this also paralleled in Mark and Luke, but in Matthew 19, 27, then Peter answered and said to him, See, we have left all and followed you, therefore what shall we have? Now, they left everything to follow him when he called them from their fishing. And here at this later

point, Peter says that he has in fact left all, just what Jesus had told the rich young ruler to do. And Jesus didn't contest that.

Jesus didn't say, What are you talking about, Peter? You still got a house. What do you mean you've left all? Come on. Although he did tell the rich young ruler to sell what he had and give to the poor, he had not necessarily told his disciples they had to sell everything they had, but they did have to, like every disciple, forsake all.

What, however, does it mean to forsake all? Apparently it doesn't always mean selling what you have and giving it all to the poor, because Peter, who had in fact, he was of that number who had done the required thing, he had forsaken everything, all that he had, nonetheless he had a house. He had a family. He apparently still had his boat, because after this, Jesus was taxied across the lake several times in his ministry on a boat, which was probably Peter's, we don't know that it was for sure, but it could as reasonably have been Peter's as anyone else's.

So I guess what I'm saying is that when the Bible says that these people forsook everything, that we need to ask, What does it mean to forsake everything, if the man still has a house and a boat and a family? And the answer would apparently be that he basically renounces ownership of everything. Everything he has becomes the Lord's, and at the Lord's disposal. And that, I think, is the norm for all discipleship.

I don't think anybody is a disciple unless they have done something comparable to that, genuinely, in their heart. Of course, it's not possible for us to judge whether anyone else has done this in their heart. There's many people who say that in their heart they've surrendered everything to the Lord, and as you look at their lives you wonder, but that's not your business to judge.

The real issue is, you can't know their heart, only God does, but you do need to check your own, because Jesus said in Luke chapter 14, and verse 33, Luke 14, 33, Jesus said, So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple. So it's an impossibility to even be a disciple of Jesus unless you forsake all that you have. But as I've sought to point out here, Peter, who had in fact done that, Peter who had met those conditions, still owned some things, but apparently not in his heart.

His home, which was apparently still under his control, he still had the deed to the property, yet it was now a ministry center. His home was a hospitality center. It became the place not only where Jesus and the apostles lodged, it became also the place of ministry, because by the end of the passage we read, the whole town is crowding into the house in order to get healed and so forth.

So it becomes a meeting house, it becomes a hospitality place for the ministers, and it's quite clear, as you read in the book of Acts, that there were others who possessed houses. Mark's mother had a house, and the only time we ever read of it in the book of

Acts is when a prayer meeting, an all-night prayer meeting was taking place there. It's not inconceivable, but that was one of the main meeting places of the church.

We read of others who had homes, and yet the Bible takes it for granted these are genuine disciples. Priscilla and Aquila had a house in Rome, but see, these things were really in their hearts given up to the Lord. They were not something they were clinging to, they were not something they guarded jealously, their privacy in or anything like that, but it was something that they said, OK, this is God's house, this is God's boat, this is God's car, this is God's stereo, this is God's guitar, these are God's clothes, everything I have I have forsaken, they are now God's.

The question then is, what does God want me to do with them? No doubt, when a person becomes a Christian, many of the things that they surrender must, of necessity, they must divest themselves of them. There are things, even valuable things, that we have acquired, that when we make a serious decision to follow Jesus as a disciple, we realize that we can't really use these things for God. They're just, they're not consistent with his character, not consistent with his plans, and so there are indeed things that we have to perhaps sell or destroy.

We have to get rid of them. And then, the other things that we don't actually get rid of, we just have to say, OK, God, these are yours too, what do you want me to do with them? I'm not one who suggests automatically just going out and selling everything to show how devoted you are to Christianity, just go out and have a yard sale and sell all your furniture and everything, even though you have no specific guidance as to what to do with the money instead. Obviously, if you're leaving the country and going on the mission field, then you may have no need of these things, and selling them would be a reasonable thing to do.

But I have known people in the 70s myself who had a very communal kind of an idea, or ideal, but not a whole lot of practical wisdom, who sold everything they had, and then they had nothing, and they weren't called to do anything in particular, so they ended up having to get some more furniture and get some more kitchen utensils and get some more of everything because they had to live, and ended up spending more on the replacement of the things than they got at the yard sale, so that wasn't really a good economy. What needs to be done is not an automatic selling of everything you have, but there has to be an automatic transaction that takes place. You sign over all that you have to the Lord.

And we know that Peter was an example of one who had done this, and you can see very clearly, the house that he had was signed over to the Lord. I mean, Peter had apparently a family. He had at least a wife, whether he had children, we don't know.

There's a good chance that the child that Jesus held on his lap and made the point about being humble like a little child was probably one of Peter's children. It took place in

Peter's house, and the child was standing by. So Peter probably had wife and children, and we know he had a wife, but by becoming a disciple, he certainly gave up a great deal of his privacy in his home.

It just became one of those things that was to be used, like everything else, for the kingdom of God. Well, now Jesus and his disciples have pretty much settled into Capernaum. From there, they will make forays out around all the villages of Galilee at least three times or more.

They'll make itineraries around Galilee, but Capernaum is the place to which they will always return. Now, the first synagogue service, apparently, that Jesus spoke on the first Sabbath he was in Capernaum, he did something remarkable. The first remarkable thing is he taught.

And that was, in fact, remarkable to the point that it says in verse 22, they were astonished at his teaching, because he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. Now, it's important to note in verse 22 that it says he taught as one having authority. Now, anyone can teach as if they have authority.

The question of whether they really have any is another story. A person can pound the pulpit or be dogmatic or do whatever he wants and speak very authoritatively without any genuine authority. When we talk about authority, we have to understand what we mean.

We're not talking about dynamics or charisma. We're not talking about power of voice or presentation. When we talk about authority, we're talking about the right to be the final word on a thing, the right to be the decider of an issue, the right to settle disputes on a question, the right to rule, the right to decide, to be the arbiter.

That's what authority suggests. It is something that exists whether a person is a dynamic speaker or not, if he possesses it, if he's genuinely authoritative. If a person says, listen folks, the Bible says this, and they correctly represent what the Bible says, they may not be a great speaker, but they've got tremendous authority, because the authority of God's word stands behind their words.

Authority speaks of something, not so much that's noticeable in a presentation, though it may be. It was noticeable in Jesus' presentation. But the presence of real authority is seen in that God backs up what the person says, and God says, that's right, I'm on that wavelength, that's that person saying exactly what I believe and what I want you to know.

That's what real authority would be. Now, Jesus, first of all, spoke as one who has authority. I find that interesting because there's a contrast between that and what astonished them later on in verse 27.

Because in verse 27, it says, after he cast a demon out of a man, it says, they were all amazed again, they were first astonished by his teaching, but now they're amazed by what he had done, so that they question among themselves, saying, what is this? What new teaching or doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. Now, notice the contrast there in their reaction in verse 22 and in verse 27. In verse 22, it was obvious he was speaking as if he had authority to speak.

The question, did he really have authority? Or was he just pretending? Was he just being dogmatic? You know, I mean, was he really authoritative or not? Well, that soon became clear, because he cast a demon out of a man, and then they didn't talk about him speaking as if he was one who had authority. They said, he has authority. With authority he speaks even the demons obey him.

There's authority demonstrated right there. Notice also, if you'll jump with me for a moment to the next chapter in Mark, to chapter 2, another well-known story, where the man who was a paralytic was lowered through the roof, probably in Peter's house, and Jesus told him, son, your sins are forgiven. Well, again, when you say your sins are forgiven, you're speaking as one who has authority.

You've got the authority to forgive sins? He was even questioned on that point. It says in verse 6, some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, why does this man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone? And this question, who can forgive sins, means who has the authority to say you're forgiven? Who can really say that to a person, and it really sticks? Only God can do that, they said, and they were quite correct, of course. But Jesus, it says in verse 8, immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, he said to them, why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven you, or to say, arise, take up your bed and walk? Now look at verse 10.

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth. The word power is there in the New King James, but it's *exousia*. In the Greek it means authority.

That the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins. That's the very thing they were questioning. Who has the authority to do that but God? Well, God and the Son of Man, apparently, both have authority to forgive sins.

And he said to the paralytic, I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go your way into your house. And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went in the presence of them all, so that they were all amazed again, and glorified God. What is amazing, these people, again and again, is the demonstration of Christ's authority.

Now, before he did anything tangible or visible in the Capernaum synagogue, they

already could pick up that he was talking as if he possessed authority. As far as whether he really had that authority or not, it had not yet been demonstrated convincingly of him, but they were astonished that he would be so bold as to speak as if he had authority. Now, I must confess it frustrates me a little bit that the gospel stories like this don't give us more of a specimen of whatever it was he was teaching.

Fortunately, we do have adequate specimens of his teaching in other portions. The Sermon on the Mount may very well be characteristic or representative of the kinds of things he spoke, but it may not either, because he was speaking to his disciples there. Whereas in the synagogues, he was speaking more to the masses, similar to what he would do on the hillsides.

That being the case, we are told, for example, in Mark chapter 4, that when Jesus spoke to the masses, he only used parables. I shouldn't say he only used parables, but he always did use parables, but he explained everything privately to his disciples. It says that in Mark 4.34. Mark 4.34, with reference to Jesus teaching the masses on the hillsides, he says, but without a parable, he did not speak to them.

But when they were alone, he explained all things to his disciples. So he was more explicit with his disciples in private than he was with the masses, generally, on the hillsides. Now, whether that's true in the synagogues as well, we don't know for sure.

However, I don't know that the parables would have astonished the people like this. I mean, a sower went out to sow, some seed fell on the wayside, some fell on stony ground, some fell on the forest, some good ground that produces crops. I mean, that might astonish people that the guy is being so vague about what his point is, and that he's speaking in such homey, ordinary terms about things that who knows what they mean.

But I don't know that teaching like that in itself would necessarily have struck them as so authoritative. So he may have, in fact, in the synagogues, spoken things a little more like what we find in the Sermon on the Mount. You have heard that it was said by those of old, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you, if a man looks a woman to lust after her, he commits adultery with her in his heart. And you've heard that it was said if a man commits murder, he's in danger of the judgment. But I say that if a man is angry at his brother without a cause, he is in danger of the judgment.

And those kinds of statements are particularly representative of Jesus taking authority, even over the law. Now, not to say, not to say that Jesus was saying, it was countermanding the law. He was not in any sense taking away from the command, you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery.



Those commands he would still stand by. What he was doing was saying, as far as the application and interpretation of what God's heart was all about here, let me tell you what God really had in mind. He did, of course, forbid murder and adultery.

But in addition to this, we need to understand that God had a larger concern as well, for the state of your heart as well. Now, see, the Jews in their synagogues would typically hear the scriptures expounded by the rabbis and by the scribes. The scribes were the experts in the law.

But expertise in the law didn't mean they knew really what it meant. They just knew what various rabbis said that it meant. And if you would pick up a copy of the Talmud today, and you can any time, you would see exactly what kind of things the rabbis were working with.

Rabbi Abram says this means so-and-so. Rabbi Bensaira believes that it means such-and-such. Rabbi Joshua says that it means etc., etc.

And basically, the Talmud, which represents the oral teaching of the rabbis, although it was not codified into writing until a few centuries after Christ, but it was present in oral tradition and maintained by the Pharisees and scribes in particular, these men, they just said, well, Rabbi so-and-so thinks it applies this way, and Rabbi so-and-so thinks it applies this way, and Rabbi Benso and so thinks it applies in such-and-such a way. So you get the whole plethora of opinions, a little bit like the way I teach when I don't know what's on my mind. But that's just it.

I don't teach as if I have authority if I don't. The problem is, if I don't know what it means, I'm going to tell you, Rabbi so-and-so thinks it means that, and teacher so-and-so, and commentator so-and-so thinks it means that, and you can work it out yourself because I don't know who's right. But that's where I differ from Jesus.

I can't just say, but here's the answer. It's clearly this, and it can't be anything else. Because I said so, and if I said so, God says so.

Now see, that's how Jesus apparently talked. I mean, that's how he was coming off to them. Instead of saying, well, there's two schools of thought about this, and I really don't want to disrespect either side, I mean, he'd say, well, listen, this is what it means, this is how it applies, this is the verily, when he said verily, verily, he was using a typical rabbinic expression, which was probably in the original Aramaic, it was probably amen, amen, or amen, amen, which is how the rabbis often would preface a statement which they wished to be taken very seriously.

And Jesus, we know, frequently said verily, verily. That's how it reads in the King James. I think in our modern translations it'll say, assuredly I say to you, or something like that, instead of verily, verily.

But in the original, he probably, in his Aramaic tongue, was saying amen, amen, which is a way of saying, this is certainty. By the way, I do believe that we today should speak with authority where we can, where we have authority, where Jesus is explicit, where the scripture is without question. We don't need to be mealy-mouthed, in fact, we shouldn't ever be.

We should boldly proclaim what the Bible says to be true, if it's plainly stated. At the same time, we aren't Jesus himself, in the sense that he knew he could settle every question in a moment. I mean, there were disputes that had raged probably for generations between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And you'll recall that at a later date than this, the Sadducees brought one of their favorite conundrums, which they had used against the Pharisees in debate. I'm sure it was their best one. I'm sure that it was one the Pharisees had never been able to answer.

The reason I believe that is because if the Pharisees had adequately answered it, there'd be no sense bringing it up to Jesus. He could just give the same answer the Pharisees had given. But you know how the difference between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, especially over the resurrection question, was a hot point of contention between those two groups.

And when they came to Jesus and said, well, a brother among us had seven brothers, a guy had seven brothers, there were seven brothers, let's put it that way. And the first one married a woman, died childless. The second one, according to the law of leave-right marriage, married her and died childless.

And all through all the seven, they all died childless, and then she died. And which of them in the resurrection will have her, since she was all of their wives? Well, this no doubt was one of the many things that they'd use frequently in debate against the Pharisees to show the absurdity of believing in the resurrection. And Jesus answered, which no Pharisee could.

Well, I'll tell you, you know, your problem is you don't know the scriptures nor the power of God. You see, in the resurrection, people are going to be like, the angels are not going to marry at all. So it doesn't apply.

Well, who could have told that? You know, who knows what's going to happen in the resurrection? I mean, you couldn't get that out of Daniel or Isaiah or the Psalms teaching on the resurrection. Who would have known that the answer to that problem is, you know, is found in the very nature of the resurrection in a point that had never before been revealed in scripture? I mean, the Pharisees didn't have access to that information. Only Jesus would know that.

And so he could settle the dispute right there. And that's what Jesus typically did. And things that, as I say, we need to be careful at doing.

Because I often hear preachers on the radio and so forth who, they're dealing with something I know to be a sensitive or controversial subject, but they give no indication that there's any other reasonable way to understand it than their own. And they speak as one who has authority. But embarrassingly for them, there are some of us out here who know they don't have the authority they pretend to.

I mean, they may have the right opinion, but it's not at all certain that they do, since there are some other opinions that are every bit as likely as theirs on the same subject. And that's where it was astonishing to people that Jesus didn't act like there's any other opinion that worked. I mean, his opinion was the final word from God.

And that's what it means to speak as if he has authority. But once he spoke as if he had authority, the people, I think, justly, and we should do the same thing when people speak as if they have authority. We say, well, okay, he's speaking as if he knows.

He's speaking as if he has the right to be dogmatic. He's speaking as if he has some kind of special insight, some special authority on this subject. But does he? I mean, is this authority pretended? Is it imaginary? Is it real? Does he really have the last word on this deal or not? And what happened by Jesus casting out the demon proved him, oh, he does speak with authority.

With authority he speaks, and the demons obey him. And in the story in chapter 2 that we read from a moment ago, likewise, when Jesus said, your sins are forgiven, well, I could say that. I can go out to everyone in the world and say, your sins are forgiven.

But do I have any authority to say that? Not exactly. It depends on how you interpret the gospel and message. But I think not.

I don't think I have the right to go up to every unrepentant sinner and say, your sins are forgiven. But Jesus could. But how would they know that he could? I mean, that was a pretty radical thing for a guy to say.

I mean, he was talking as if he had the prerogatives of God himself, that much authority. And Jesus said, I realize that you're not buying this, you guys, and so I want to demonstrate to you that I, the sinner man, do have authority on earth to do this thing, which, of course, you can't verify just by hearing me say it, whether I have the authority or not. So I'll show you that I have the authority.

I'll do the harder thing. I'll say to this man, take up your bed and walk. And having done so, the man did receive healing that proved that Jesus wasn't just whistling through his teeth, that he really had the authority of which he claimed to have.

So this is what we see happening in these stories initially, is that people are beginning to become aware that Jesus is no ordinary man. First of all, his teachings. Primarily his teachings strike them first.

However, his teachings seem audacious, that he would speak as if he has more authority than the scribes and rabbis have, but he does, and he demonstrates it. Now, here's something important, too. In these miracles that we're talking about, there are two reasons, I think, that Jesus did miracles.

One of them is the same reason that you and I would do a miracle. We feel sorry for people. People who are sick, people who are demonized, people who are hungry.

Many times we read in the Gospels that Jesus was moved with compassion, and he fed them. He was moved with compassion, and he reached out and touched them and healed them. He was moved with compassion, and he taught them.

He did whatever it was they needed because of his compassion for them. And many of his miracles can be explained almost entirely in terms of expressions of Jesus being moved by compassion. But there's another aspect that comes out in these passages, too.

And that is that his miracles were intended to confirm the Word. We can see this proclaimed both by those who are not yet disciples and by those who are in several places. If you look at the Gospel of John, which is particularly written in order to establish this point, John's Gospel is written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

That's what John says. And he records only such miracles as help us to believe that. In John 3, if you recall the first thing that Nicodemus said when he came to Jesus, in verse 2 he said, it says, This man, Nicodemus, came to Jesus by night, John 3, 2, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs, that's the miracles he's referred to, that you do unless God is with him.

Now notice, we know that you are a teacher come from God. Well, if you're a teacher come from God, then your teaching is from God, your teaching is true. That means you have the right to speak for God.

And he said, I know that you have such an authority because the signs you do establish that, to my mind, beyond the shadow of a doubt. And likewise, in John chapter 9, in John chapter 9, when the man was healed of his blindness, and the leaders of the synagogue or whoever they were were bugging him about it, trying to give him some grief and get him to trap himself by contradicting himself or whatever they were trying to do, it says, they said to him in verse 29, John 9, 29, We know that God spoke to Moses. As for this fellow, meaning Jesus, we don't know where he's from.

The man answered and said to them, why, this is a marvelous thing, that you don't know

where he's from, and yet he has opened my eyes. Now we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, he hears him. Since the world began, it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not from God, he could not do anything, or he could not do this kind of a thing, obviously, is what he means. So, the man's saying, hey, he's a teacher from God, there's no question about it. I mean, look what he did.

He did what no other man can do. And those signs that Jesus did served to confirm that Jesus was able to do things, because he could say the things he could, because he really had authority, and that authority was demonstrated in authority over sicknesses and demons and all kinds of conditions, that he clearly had the authority of God. If you look at Acts chapter 2, where Peter preached his first sermon, Acts 2 and verse 22, when Jesus first comes up in the preaching here, on the first sermon, in Acts 2.22, Peter says, Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, notice, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

Then he goes on and tells more of the story, but he says, Jesus of Nazareth was attested by God, that means God put his certification on him, his authorization upon him. What was that authorization? Well, the signs and miracles and wonders they did. Now, that was not just to authorize the man, Jesus, personally, but also, since he is authorized as from God, it means that his teachings are confirmed by what he did.

And so also the apostles who carried on and preached the teachings of Jesus, God confirmed the word that they preached. Similarly, if you see it in Mark chapter 16, actually the closing verse in the Gospel of Mark, Mark 16.20, it says, And they went out and preached everywhere, that's the apostles. Notice, Mark 16.20, they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs.

The signs done through the apostles that accompanied their preaching were there to confirm the word. The Lord confirmed their words by the signs. One other passage on this point, and then we'll get back to Mark.

If you look at Hebrews chapter 2, in Hebrews chapter 2, it says in verses 3 and 4, How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will. Now, it's clear here that what Jesus preached first, those who heard him confirmed and conveyed the message beyond the borders of Israel, beyond the sphere of Jesus' actual personal ministry, but God confirmed and bore witness to what they said by signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit. All of these things, all these passages

essentially tell us the same thing, namely that the miracles of Jesus and the miracles Jesus did through the apostles later had a purpose of confirming the word.

Now, I said there were two purposes in the miracles. One was just to relieve misery, relieve people's misery, help them. That's an act of compassion.

But, and this might seem wrong to prioritize it in this way at first, but if you think about it a moment, it's clearly the case, even more important than relieving misery was the confirmation of the word. I mean, nowadays, there's a tremendous emphasis on the need to help the poor before we give them the gospel. Not everybody says that, but I hear people say it all the time.

A man will listen to the gospel a lot better once his stomach's full. He can't hear you if his stomach's grumbling. I disagree with that, although I'm certainly in favor of helping poor people, relieving their misery.

That's important. That is quite important. Jesus showed a real interest in it.

But I think that there's such a thing now that there's been a shift where we think of the church as here to relieve poverty, the church as here to relieve the suffering, to counsel people, to help them through hard times and so forth, and to give them Jesus in the process. You know, I mean, that's really what I'm hearing a lot. In fact, even among some very good evangelicals, and I'm sure they don't mean this the way it sounds, that is to say, I'm sure that their emphasis in their own heart is correct and their priorities are correct, but the way they say it sometimes doesn't sound so.

I heard just yesterday a radio program on a Christian station, something like that. You know, we want to send relief to these hungry children in such and such a place. They desperately need medicine.

They desperately need food. They desperately need clothing, and we want to send, please send gifts so we can send these things to them, and they also, of course, need the love of Jesus, and we're going to give them that too. Now, that may not be their real priorities.

I mean, they may have just realized that they neglected the most important thing to mention, but it really is the most important thing, and they threw it in at the end. But you get the impression, like, the church is here, first of all, as a relief organization to really help relieve people's misery, and secondarily, to give them the message of salvation. I guess I'm of the opinion that eternal matters are more important than temporal.

If a person is saved, they can endure a great deal of misery, because God gives them the grace. I'm not saying that I wish all people would be in misery. I wish everyone was not, and I think God, at one level, wishes everyone was not also.

And when he comes and sets everything right, there won't be any more pain or sorrow or crying or misery of any kind. The fallen world being what it is, however, and sin being in our nature as it is, suffering and misery have a role to play in our sanctification. They have a role to play in our growth, and in strengthening us, and teaching us perseverance and patience and compassion, and a lot of other things.

A lot of value can come from suffering. And what the Christian needs most is not necessarily to get over his pain, to get over his sickness. Now, I believe in healing, and I believe that God and I have compassion on people who are sick and would love to see them healed, but I do believe also there are some things even more important in life than just your physical well-being.

And I'm not sure, really, I don't know, I don't claim to speak with authority on this. I'll just tell you what I don't know, but where I may disagree with some people. I'm not sure that it is the task of the church to go out and feed the hungry at random and hope some of them get saved.

Now, Jesus did feed the multitudes. He did have compassion on them. But he did so without expending much church funds.

He did a miracle and multiplied loaves. It seems like our priorities in giving and working should be to get the gospel into people, and then whatever we can... I mean, there's nothing wrong with praying for them to be well, too. But a lot of times the church has shifted entirely to the mode of helping people get over their personal problems even if they don't come to Christ.

This is a philosophy, and we may seem to be getting far afield of where we started, but I don't think so. Everything's related, but all truth is interrelated. The idea of churches having, say, 12-step programs for the alcoholics and gambling addicts and so forth among them.

Now, without getting into a particular critique of 12-step programs in general, I know that a lot of churches that run them do not insist that people make Jesus be the higher power that they look to. I have other problems with 12-steps besides the question of the vagueness of who is the higher power in most 12-step programs. But I have met people and talked to people about their philosophy about this, who run these programs, and a lot of times they say, well, you know, all these people get helped in some way, or at least most of them get helped.

Some of them even get saved. Now, my concern about this, it's not like I have no compassion whatsoever on believers, but if a person is, let's say, an alcoholic, and it's ruining his life enough that he wants to get better, he enrolls in a 12-step program because he really, you know, his finances, his family, his health is a wreck because of his sin, really. I don't really know that the church is doing him a favor by helping him get

over the consequences of his sin, that is, get control of this thing, if he's still going to be a rebel against God, because it seems to me like the disasters that his sin has brought upon him may very well be God's way of dealing in his life to let him know he is a sinner and needs to get something right at the core of his life.

And a lot of times we can put a band-aid on the situation, and the person forgets that they've got a brain tumor, you know, we give them an aspirin, and they don't know they have a brain tumor, and they die. And so, I mean, I'm not, I have mixed feelings. Again, I'm not being dogmatic about this, but I'm not sure that our focus should be on giving relief to people who will not come to Christ.

I think that we need to make it very clear. Everything that they need comes with being rightly related with God. And the right relationship with God is the only priority.

All the other things are part of that. Our love for God, you know, causes us to be compassionate toward them, and of course we're not going to just stand there and watch some child die of starvation just because they haven't become a Christian. We'll do what we can in many cases, but I guess what I'm saying is, one of the principal reasons Jesus did things that helped people was to confirm the message for the sake of their souls.

And there may be a very good argument that can be made that acts of compassion on the part of Christians can be another way of confirming the word, too. I mean, if we show no, if we show callousness toward unbelievers and their misery, that's not the fruit of the Spirit either. I mean, I frankly have as much compassion on an unbeliever in misery as on a believer in misery.

I really do, and I wish I could do something for them all. But in the wisdom of God, it may not be his purpose to fix all these problems in the life of an unbeliever, because those problems may be the very thing that he's hoping to use to make them discontent in their life of rebellion against him. And if we can sort of give them an aspirin there, if we can do something to make the pain go away, make their life look better, but they're not really better at the core, we may have done them more harm than good in some cases.

And I'm not talking about feeding the hungry in a case like this. Feeding the hungry is always right. I'm talking more about in terms of expending the energies and the finances of the Church on things that are largely just social programs, when in fact the Gospel gets downplayed a great deal in these things.

It's sort of tagged on as an option. I was, when in Canada last week, a friend of mine was telling me about a program. I maybe shouldn't mention the name of the program.

I had never heard of it before, but if you have, I'm not going to mention it. But it's a program that's run by three or four Christians, I think out of Texas. It has a very secular sounding name, and it's for people with relational problems and stuff.



And it's like, I think businesses send their executives to it and their workers to it, because it sounds like a huge encounter group kind of a thing, you know. It's run by Christians, but there's no God talk there. They don't talk about Jesus or the Bible or God.

For this week-long seminar, it costs \$1,000 per person to go through it. And so the guys who are running it make up pretty good, because they have about 50 people in it. So they get about \$50,000 for the week.

Pretty good ministry, huh? And anyway, these people who go through it, they get confronted big time by the whole group. They get insulted. They get confronted.

Their relational skills are, you know, really attacked.