

SHUT UP!!

DEUTERONOMY 18:15-20

MARK 1:21-28

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TO BORROW MARK'S FAVORITE EXPRESSION: "AND IMMEDIATELY", JESUS ATTACKS.

God's "Warrior King", accompanied by a handful of troops, launches an invasion into enemy territory. His beachhead: a house of worship; the time: sundown on the Sabbath. Those men and women who had gathered to pray, sing, and hear preaching, had no idea that they had been caught in the crossfire between the advancing forces of God on the one hand and those of Satan on the other.

Jesus is firing the open shots in a war, the purpose of which is to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The battle is joined between the truth and the lie, between the good and the bad, between life-giving and death-dealing. All appearances to the contrary, God is moving

in force to reclaim His creation from the clutches of the devil.

FIRST, JESUS OPENS FIRE ON IGNORANCE

Not just any kind of ignorance, but rather the kind most hostile to coming Kingdom of God...religious ignorance.

- Ignorance of who God is;
- Ignorance of what God wants for His world;
- Ignorance of what advances and what impedes the coming of God's rule;
- Ignorance of what is central and what is peripheral
- the inability to distinguish the traditions of men from the commandments of God.
- Ignorance of what it means to truly serve God.

For Mark, Jesus is first and foremost a teacher. **This is because ignorance is the principal weapon of the devil.** The first battle takes place in the synagogue, because, ironically, houses of worship often house more ignorance than truth, more darkness than light. Notice

that the evil spirit was quite comfortable being in that house of worship on that day.

What precisely Jesus taught that evening Mark fails to tell us. We can be certain however that it involved the message that those who gathered to worship that day must not just keep on doing what they have been doing; they must change their lives in a radical way. They must like Peter, Andrew, James and John center their lives on the coming Kingdom of God.

**ARE WE SURPRISED THAT JESUS' TEACHING STEPPED
ALL OVER THE TOES OF THE SCRIBES?**

They were quite certain they knew God's will and His ways in the world. They had little interest in hearing the prattling of this carpenter with wood shavings in his beard. At first the experts in the Law merely dismissed Jesus. But when they saw that he was amazing their congregations, they took action-deadly action. In fact they put out a contract on Jesus, hiring the lackeys of Herod Antipas as their hit men. Jesus had made but one

foray into the devil's domain, but he had already aroused the anger of Satan himself.

THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS COUNTERATTACKS.

The so-called unclean spirit Satan dispatched, invading a poor soul who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, confronts the Holy Spirit residing in the one who God dispatched. "You have no jurisdiction here on earth," the demon screams. "You belong up in heaven with God, singing psalms and playing harps. You are, after all, the Holy One of God. Go back where you came from. Go back where you belong!" The earth is mine and the fullness thereof, the world and all who dwell therein.

JESUS LITERALLY TELLS THE DEMON TO SHUT UP!

He demands that the demon leave the man and go back to his master. The junior devil retreats, with his pointy little tail tucked between his legs. His power is no match for the power of God residing in Jesus. The poor un-

named man is liberated. Jesus has put a new and right spirit within him: one small step for the Son of man, one giant step for mankind. Jesus has served notice that God has torn the heavens open and come down. This is His territory, not Satan's. This is where the Holy One of God belongs. The Kingdom of God is at hand, it's army is on the march. Jesus has come to destroy the powers that threaten and demonize human life.

JESUS DISPATCHED THAT DEMON EASILY.

He performed no ritual, used no magic words, and employed no secret potion. His authoritative word sufficed.

Dispatching religious ignorance, however, was a different matter entirely. This is an enemy which dies much harder. Willful ignorance and simple misunderstanding will plague Jesus throughout his ministry. From the beginning of Mark's Gospel to its end, Jesus will be misunderstood by friends and would-be followers as well as misrepresented by enemies and

outsiders. Even Peter, the chief follower of Jesus, will refuse to believe that Jesus must suffer and die and that the coming of the rule of God involves suffering, self-sacrifice and at times, even death. Jesus rebukes Peter, calling him Satan, because he refuses to see things as God sees them.

WHEN JESUS LEFT THE SYNAGOGUE, HE KNEW HE LEFT WITH ONLY A PARTIAL VICTORY.

One man had been rescued from the devil's clutches, but any true repentance was absent. The crowd was amazed but unmoved. They liked what Jesus said and how he said it, but did not join Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

The congregants went home talking about the wonderful experience they had had, but remained unchanged. The "Old Time Religion" was good enough for their grandfather and grandmother, and so it was good enough for them as well.

IT WOULD BE WONDERFUL TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT RELIGIOUS IGNORANCE IS NOW A THING OF THE PAST.

It would be marvelous to report that we Christians have finally *gotten it*, that we no longer misunderstand Jesus as he was misunderstood long ago and far away. But such is not the case.

In culture that can quote the closing Dow Jones average accurately, recite the statistics of the NFC championship game, name the contestants on American Idol, list those recently added to baseball's Hall of Fame, upload videos to U tube, and download apps to smart phones, there are still over 50% of people who can't name the four Gospels and over 40% who believe Joan of Arc married to Noah. In other words, they simply don't care that they are religiously ignorant.

Among congregations of Christians there are still many who fail to see that caring for the poor and the outcast is central to Discipleship, and that the sins of strength, like pride, greed, and arrogance, do more harm

than the sins of weakness, like overindulgence in sex or alcohol.

There are still many Christians who use Jesus' words as hammers to smash those who do not believe as they do. Many who seem unable to remember Jesus' commandments to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

Many who confuse material prosperity with the kingdom of God, and fail to remember Jesus' warning about the danger of riches.

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT SAYING TO US THIS MORNING THROUGH THIS STORY?

That demons possessing a man can be easily exorcised when they are of the variety that does not require the cooperation of the one possessed. But that other demons, such as ignorance are harder to dispatch because overcoming them requires both God's action and our reaction.

And so the war goes on, the battles continue. May God help us powerfully and give us the grace to cooperate with the Holy One of God, who came to set us free of all that chains us to the world of Satan.