

We are pursuing the quest to discover the character and nature of God in the face of Jesus Christ. II Corinthians 4:6 says, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Something we notice in this verse is that God has made His light to shine in our hearts to enable us to see the glory of God in the face of Christ. This verse humbles me and reminds me that if anything good comes of my sermons it is only by God's intervening grace. Unless God shines His light into my heart and into your hearts we will not be able to recognize the image and glory of God in the face of Christ. I can read the Scriptures to you and tell you what they mean and I can be right-on in my explanation, but absolutely nothing will come of it unless God turns the light on in you by the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes I hear people say things in praise of me for my preaching and teaching. Please hear this: If I am positioned for God to use me, praise be to God! If God uses something I say to turn His light on in you to see His glory in the face of Christ, praise be to God! I'm happy to be His instrument, but please remember that I am nothing more than that; I'm just an instrument. To keep it all in perspective for myself I call to mind the story of Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22. I figure that if God can speak through Balaam's ass, it's no big thing on my part that He might speak through me. I just want to remind you that it is God's voice or the voice of the Holy Spirit that we are needing to hear. If we don't hear Him speaking here in our hearts, we haven't yet heard what we need to hear. We are here in search of His voice because only His voice can give us life. I would encourage you and urge you to seek to hear His voice as I seek to present the word this morning.

Our Scripture reading this morning begins in Mark 1:16-20: "As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

What we are looking for in this series of sermons is the nature and character of God as revealed in the life, words and ministry of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15 says, "Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God." And what we see in the verses we have just read from Mark is that when Jesus calls people to follow him and they are compelled to heed His voice. When Jesus speaks (not E. F. Hutton),

people listen.

Does this mean that God's voice in our lives is "irresistible," negating man's free will? No, I don't believe we can't take it that far. Hebrews 3:7-9 say, "So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did." It is possible for people to rebel against God's voice. It is possible for them to rebel against His call in their lives, but they do so at their own great peril. They may condemn themselves to wander aimlessly in the in the wilderness for 40 years and never see the Promised Land. It's a very sad and dangerous thing we do when we rebel against God's voice.

When I was writing this message I was toying with using the word "ignore" along with the word "rebel," but I decided that God's Word cannot be ignored. When God speaks to us He always speaks with authority, and so when we don't obey it always amounts to rebellion. The voices of men can be ignored but the voice of God calls for immediate obedience and anything less is rebellion.

What we learn about God in this passage from Mark is that God calls people to serve Him, and when God speaks, it is always with the voice of authority. Mark 1:21-22 say, "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." **Whenever we hear God's voice, it will be the voice of authority.**

If I can take just a moment from today's message to ask you an annoying question: Is anyone here this morning living in rebellion to God's voice? Have you definitely heard God's voice calling you to forsake a certain sin but you are still practicing it? Have you definitely heard God's voice to begin or to be involved in a certain ministry, but you have been dragging your feet? God will not prosper you in your rebellion. There will be no peace, no blessing until you surrender to His voice. Perhaps that's the exact reason you are here this morning. You are here by God's appointment to repent of your rebellion. You can pray right now and ask God to forgive you. You can turn away from your rebellion right now and say "yes" to God. If anyone is hearing God's voice in his or her heart right now, do not harden your heart. Say "no" to sin and "yes" to God. It is the nature and character of God to speak with authority.

As we continue with our Scripture portions this morning we look next at Mark 1:23-27: "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? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. 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."

Here again we encounter the authority of God's voice. Jesus, speaking what He hears His Father saying, commands evil spirits and they obey Him. There is something we share in common with the people who became followers of Jesus in the first and second centuries like them we live in a world that seems overwhelmed with evil. The earliest Christians came from among the Jews that had been conquered by the Greeks and then the Romans. Their national sovereignty had been overthrown and they found themselves heavily taxed and openly abused by their oppressors. Gentile converts to Christianity struggled against hostility and persecution from the pagan societies out of which God called them.

I don't know about you, but I find the current social and political atmosphere in our nation very, very depressing. Isaiah 5:20 says, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." Watching and listening to the last couple of weeks' news leads me to believe that this is pretty much what we've come to. Marital unfaithfulness reared its head in another state capital. A very weird, albeit talented, pop star dies of a drug overdose and is being mourned as if he were a national hero. The election of another pro-abortion, pro-gay marriage politician was certified so that he can now be seated in the U.S. Senate. We celebrated "Independence Day" even as more and more of our individual liberties were being attacked and stolen from us by a federal government convinced that politicians know better how to manage our lives than we do. The more news I hear the more depressed and frustrated I become. But, this is sinful on my part, and on your part, if we allow these things to depress us.

The thing we are missing here is that God has authority over Satan and all his evil cohorts. Jesus models this for us and promises that those who follow Him will have this authority as well. We can speak to the evil spirits, and when we speak to them in the authority of our God, they must obey--they must yield; and, when we tell them to leave they must leave. Our great sin is to magnify the power of evil and to

minimize the power of our God.

The God we see in the face of Jesus Christ is the God who has ultimate authority over all the powers of the evil one. We need to remember: **If God be on our side, "nothing can separate us from His love; neither death nor life; neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers; neither the present nor the future; neither the world above nor the world below--there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord," Romans 8:38-39, (TEV).**

Our God is the God who speaks with authority in the lives of men and who has authority over all the seen and unseen principalities and powers that govern this world. As we read on in Mark 1, verses 29-34 say, "As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. 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.

Continuing in verses 39-42 we read: "So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured."

Once again we see showcased the authority of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. His disciples hear His voice and they follow Him. The demons hear His voice and they flee from Him. But also in these verses we see God's authority over all manner of illnesses and physical infirmities. At Jesus' touch and at His command healing comes. Destructive, disfiguring, and disabling diseases are cured. No evil thing can stand against God revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

But there is another element added to our understanding and experience of the nature and character of our God. The things we see Him do through the voice and hands of Christ are more than God flexing His muscles of authority. It's not just a matter of showing the devil who's boss. No, the deliverance and healing of people flow from

God's heart of compassion. Mark 1:41 says, "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" God as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ is a God of infinite compassion.

There is a well-known axiom written by English Catholic scholar, Lord John Emerich Acton who taught at Cambridge and died 1902, that says "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." His statement is true in all cases but one. The thing that distinguishes our God above all else is that although He is all-powerful, He is also wholly good and full of compassion. Psalm 103:13 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him." Psalm 116:5 says, "The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion." Psalm 145:9 says, "The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." Isaiah 30:18a says, "Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion." Isaiah 54:10 adds, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

Our God, Who has all authority in heaven and on earth, will show compassion to all who reverence Him and obey His voice.

The good news I bring to you today is this: The God Whom we see in the face of Christ has all authority and is filled with compassion for all He has made. That includes compassion for me and for you. If you know you have rebelled against God's call for repentance from sin in your life or that you have rebelled against God's call to minister in His kingdom, you can experience His forgiveness and restoration in your life this morning. If you will humble yourself before the Lord and surrender to His will, He will have compassion upon you. He will forgive you your sin. He will empower you for the ministry to which He has called you. He has the authority to set you free. He has the compassion to heal and to forgive. Lay your life before Him and receive His grace.

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The Nature of God, Pt. 2

Mark 1:14-17; 21-27; 29-34; 21-27

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