
The Authority of Jesus in Teaching

Matthew 7:28-29

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We are not a people who listen to speeches much. We tend to hear pieces of long speeches, usually in small, 10 minutes of attention when our mind pauses for the advertisements we are used to getting while watching TV. Former President Trump really surprised people with his long, rambling speeches that packed stadiums. He knew how to draw people in with what he said and how he said it.

Jesus' preaching drew large crowds, particularly at the beginning. His preaching was accompanied by miracles, usually healing of the sick. People were drawn to Him. Great crowds followed Him. He often preached at the seashore and on hillsides. His disciples were there. Sometimes His many friends were also there. The scribes and Pharisees were almost compelled to be there, to listen, not because they wanted to follow Him, but to be prepared to resist and ruin Him.

The Sermon on the Mount is one of His sermons. We take up, not Jesus' last words, but Matthew's comment on the effect of the sermon on the hearers. Matthew is not recording this as just a biographer or journalist. His interest is not primarily historical.

Matthew records the response to the teaching of Jesus in order to challenge the church of his day and us as well. He doesn't care to report this for the sake of the Jews who just heard it. He records this in so that we will have to pause and ask ourselves some very important questions.

Two very important questions need to be asked and answered by everyone.

How do you respond to *what Jesus says*?

How do you respond to *who Jesus is*?

Understand this. You cannot separate the two. Your response to Jesus and His teaching is totally intertwined. People want to disengage them. People want to separate them. Matthew will not allow that and his book is intended to drive that home. Listen once again to Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they **worshipped him**, but **some doubted**. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Knowing that is where Matthew will end, listen to our text, Matthew 7:28–29

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

The Response (v.28)

Let's slow down and look at this sentence in some detail. Here is the response of the people...

When...

Matthew records their response with the conclusion of the sermon. Jesus completes His talk. Matthew comments on how it affected the crowd.

There was a sense of the finality in Jesus' words that goes beyond the simple conclusion of His talk. Literally this says that when Jesus completed (etelsen) these words/sayings (logos, not rhema). Matthew uses a word for "sayings" that highlights their divine nature and their connection to Jesus as the divine king. This was not merely the end of a human speech or preacher's sermon. This was the conclusion of the King's sayings, His pronouncements.

This "when" is also a "who". The highlight is on the one who is concluding these words. But the way He speaks and the words He speaks have a powerful effect on them...

How...

It was a growing response throughout the sermon. It reaches its climax at the end with the concluding paragraphs. They are astonished.

The word is hard to convey. Astonishment... Literally, out of their minds. We might say, Jesus' teaching blew their minds..." The word is conveying a growing sense of amazement. Hendriksen points out the word has a durative sense. This was not an explosion of amazement in the moment that rapidly faded away. It was a strong response that continued even as they turned away to other pursuits.

To be frank, when we understand what Jesus said and what the whole Bible is teaching, it often amazes... well, not us. After all, we have heard it all. We are beyond astonishment at what the Bible teaches and what it demands. We are jaded, satiated with Bible teaching and God talk. We want it. We want more of it. But too often we take it in like a boring, but necessary meal. Have we lost the capacity to be astonished, surprise, amazed that Jesus would say these things? That the Bible would speak like this?

To What...

They are amazed at the Lord's teaching. Now they were used to hearing talking from religious leaders. The scribes and Pharisees were well known for their long, rambling, disorganized talks. The ancient Jewish commentary on the Old Testament and guide for Jewish life was called the Talmud. It originally was oral but

then was compiled, written down and added to over the centuries. It was and is in many Orthodox Jewish communities, the reference point and source of how the Old Testament was to be understood and how Jewish people were to live. In the Talmud are large sections of the saying and writings of the Rabbis. In it you get a feel for the how the teaching in Jesus' day was generally conveyed. Certainly, Jesus' longer interaction with the Pharisees highlights the way they tended to think, talk and teach.

Jesus' teaching was very different in form and in content. What He said and how He said it often elicited an astonished, amazed response from people. Matthew picks this idea up again further on his book. Consider the following:

The synagogue attenders were astonished at Jesus' wisdom. (Matthew 13:53-54)

⁵³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, 54 and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"

The disciples were astonished at the hardness of Jesus' ideas. (Matthew 19:23-26)

23 And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The crowd was astonished at Jesus' rhetoric and logic, and the religious liberals were silenced. (Matthew 22:29-34)

29 But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." 33 And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

The Roman governor was astonished at Jesus silence. (Matthew 27:11-14)

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." 12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against

you?" 14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

So then, I must ask you: what is your response to the wisdom, teaching, logic, rhetoric and sometimes silences of Jesus?

Why do you respond the way you do? What do you think of Him, of who He is?

The Reason (v.29)

Look carefully at the sentence. The ESV correctly translates the Greek.

Matthew tells us the real reason for the crowd being amazed.

"for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. "

The Power of His Teaching

It is not the manner of His teaching. The crowd is not amazed that Jesus is teaching *with* authority. He is not using some kind of tone of voice that conveys authority. He is not shouting or filling his sentences with imperatives.

It is the authority of the teacher. The crowd is astonished that Jesus speaks as one who had the authority to say all that He did. It was shocking. He sat and taught. He contradicted the scribes and Pharisees. He overturned centuries of the common reading of the Mosaic Law. He spoke with a matter-of-factness and earnestness while pronouncing a new kind of kingdom. He turned their religion and their nature, down-side-up. He spoke powerfully of the character and the conduct required of those who entered the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, He spoke as a King. He spoke as the One who ruled over the kingdom of heaven. He spoke as one having the authority to say what He did. He spoke as God. He was not interpreting the Word of God; He was giving the Word of God.

The Contrast of His Teaching

In this and many ways, Jesus was different from the scribes. The scribes were famous for filling their teaching with citations from other authorities. In their debates it was often whose citations carried more weight, whose quotes were more timely, whose rhetoric more persuasive that carried the day and persuaded the listener. Their ethics were often a maze of logic, trick questions, double-speak and inconsistencies.

Jesus' teaching, even with the nuance of being between the Old and New Covenants, was still clear, concise, and easily understood, though not easily embraced. Frankly, we know what Jesus was saying - we just tend not to agree with it or want to obey it. That is not a problem with Jesus' teaching. It is a problem with us and our sinful tendency toward selfdom.

~ One great commentator is very interesting in the way he addresses this. This is not an exact quote from him, but I wanted to acknowledge my debt in the following. He suggests:

We might ask the question, "What were some of the reasons for this feeling of wonder and astonishment?" Matthew 13:54, 55 may supply part of the answer. However, based on the Sermon on the Mount itself and Matthew's comment, "not as their scribes", consider the following:

- Jesus spoke the truth. Corrupt and evasive reasoning marked the sermons of many of the scribes.
- Jesus presented issues of great significance, matters of life, death, and eternity. The scribes often wasted their time on trivialities.
- There was system and order in Jesus' preaching. As the Talmud proves, the scribes often rambled on and on, pinballing from subject to subject, topic to topic often without clear direction.
- Jesus excited curiosity by making generous use of illustrations and concrete examples, as the sermon shows from beginning to end. The scribes' speeches were often dry as dust.
- Jesus spoke as the Lover of men, as One concerned with the everlasting welfare of his listeners. Jesus often pointed to the Father and to His Father's love. The scribes lack of love is clear from such passages as Matthew 23:4, 13-15.
- Finally, most importantly, Jesus spoke "with authority". His message came straight from the very heart and mind of the Father. It came also from Jesus' own inner being, and from Scripture. The scribes were constantly borrowing from fallible sources, one scribe quoting another scribe. They were trying to draw water from broken cisterns. Jesus drew from himself, being "the Fountain of living waters" as Jeremiah 2:13 says, speaking of Him.

~ (Hendriksen, p. 380-381)

The listeners, then, were astonished, not just at what Jesus said, but at who Jesus was. He spoke as the King. What He spoke was true. AS the King, what He said compelled belief and obedience. No one ever spoke like Him.

The Trajectory

Where does this take us?

In the Book

Matthew introduces the theme for the next 5 chapters...

The Authority of Jesus over Disease	Matthew 8:1-17
The Authority of Jesus over Followers	Matthew 8:18-22
The Authority of Jesus over Demons	Matthew 8:28-34
The Authority of Jesus to Forgive	Matthew 9:1-17

The Authority of Jesus over Growth (Expansion)	Matthew 9:18-35
The Authority of Jesus in the Mission	Matthew 10:1-42
The Authority of Jesus over the Messenger	Matthew 11:1-18
The Authority of Jesus over the Responses	Matthew 11:19-28
The Authority of Jesus over the Sabbath	Matthew 12:1-14
The Authority of Jesus over all Opposition	Matthew 12:15-50

Over our Lives

~ To follow Jesus demands a totally different way of life. This is vital for the people of God. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus makes it clear. The new age has dawned. The King has come. The Sermon shows how we are to live after repentance and commitment to the King. Life is very different. The command 'Do not be like them' (6:8) captures the tone of the whole Sermon. A sharp contrast is constantly being drawn between the standards of Jesus and those of all others. Here we meet a distinctive lifestyle, with radically different values and pursuits. Life in the kingdom of heaven, life for the followers of Jesus, should be very different life outside the kingdom. ~ (Green, p. 85)

Yet often it is not. Many people claiming to be in the kingdom simply are not. Jesus has made it plain that it is very easy to be self-deceived and to be deceived by others. This is another aspect of the down-side-up kingdom. We tend to speak as though our deciding for, accepting of, knowing God is the decisive factor in being in the kingdom. It is not. It is whether the Lord knows us.

Make no mistake, the Law of Christ laid out in His commands here and in the rest of the New Testament, is about life. It not only commands and commends that way of living, but it actually describes the reality of those who are in the kingdom. Jesus' laws of the kingdom are both prescriptive and descriptive. They are the authority of the King for obedience. They are the power from the King for living. In the hearing of what Jesus commands, the resurrection life in us is "energized" to empower obedience to them.

Again, Michael Green helps us:

~ The life the Sermon indicates is meant to be lived out by citizens of the kingdom, but they cannot even begin to live it until they enter that kingdom. The moral imperative is rooted firmly in the indicative of relationship with God. The standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable nor totally unattainable. To put them beyond anyone's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's Sermon. To put them within everyone's reach is to ignore the reality of human sin. They are attainable, but only by those who have experienced the new birth, which is the indispensable condition of seeing and entering God's kingdom.

The righteousness described in the Sermon is an inner righteousness. It is the very antithesis of the inner evil that mars our hearts. There is only one solution. The tree must be made good if the fruit is to be good. Only belief in the necessity and possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon with foolish optimism or hopeless despair. It is all of a piece with the ethical teaching of the whole of the New Testament, which can be summed up in the phrase, 'Become what you are.' Disciples are called by their Master to become in practice what they already are in the election and calling of God. Christian ethics is inextricably tied to Christian beginnings. You cannot have the fruit of righteousness without the root of relationship with the Righteous One. ~ (Green, p. 86)

And so, following A. M. Hunter suggestions, the ethic of God's kingdom has five main characteristics.

It is a Biblical ethic, because the imperative is based on an indicative. What we do springs from who we are.

It is a kingdom ethic, given to the new people of God – to the church and not to the world. It is how disciples should behave.

It is a prophetic ethic, not a new law. It is a spiritual revolution, not revised legislation. It creates a new kind of rule, not the old kind of Law.

It is an eschatological ethic, not from the old creation. It is the presence of the future, of the new creation being lived out now. It is the kingdom of heaven already, but not yet.

It is a comprehensive ethic, pointing to the working out, in all aspects of life, of that agapē love which has grasped us.

Our King Jesus has placed this ethic before us as a standard of life and living if we are in the kingdom. It is a spur for those who possess the Spirit of Jesus, who laid it down.

Reflect and Respond

So, we have the authority of King Jesus on full display. We are told of His power as He does mighty deeds of miracles. But that is not the focus here. The focus is on His authority as the King, on the power of His words and ways.

This text is stunning in its portrayal of Jesus. It calls for more than amazement. It calls for more than admiration. It calls for more than assent and agreement. It calls for faith and repentance. It demands that you believe and bow to the King.

How do you respond to *what Jesus says*?

Are you ready to believe and bow? Will you follow Him?

Christian, are you submitted to what Jesus says? Do you bow to Him? What is your response to the very hard way that Jesus requires?

How do you respond to *who Jesus is*?

There is no other like Jesus. He is God, Deity, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the Great High King. He made you. He sustains you. He is the sovereign King. He is King whether you acknowledge it or not. And if you never do, you will face Him on a dreadful day.

Christian, is Jesus truly your King? Are you living in your own selfdom or in Jesus' kingdom? Do you actually live out the Sermon on the Mount? Is that a goal, a standard, an aim of your life? Or at the end of the day, do you just give a passing nod to the character and conduct required of true followers of Jesus. Who really sits on the throne of your heart?

We have gone through a kind of storm, of torrential rain and powerful winds during this pandemic season. Many, many people who thought their assurance and confidence was built on Jesus and His words have discovered that it was built on sand. Fear, anger, worry, disobedience, judging, and outright denial of Jesus as King have shaken and destroyed your cardboard shack. If you stay in that place, in that position, being that person... judgment will come.

Ah but there is grace in the moment. Grace to hear and heed. Grace to bend your knee. Grace to believe and bow to the authority of Jesus, the Lord.

Will you?