

August 14, 2016

“The Authority of Jesus”

Matthew 7:28-29

FCF: Our problem with authority (especially Jesus’)

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Jesus speaks to us with a sweeping authority.

(anchor) Our response must be one of submission.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Summer vacations have come to an end. And so too our road trips - those opportunities to see new places and meet new people. Some of whom sit on the roadside with RADAR guns. You know the scenario. You’re cresting the hill, rounding the bend, and there he sits. Or perhaps you’ve been driving along only to look up and see the flashing lights in your rearview mirror.

How do you respond? “*Oh, thank you! I’m glad that the civil authorities are looking out for my well being*”? Or, “*Oh, no!*” Why is that? Deep down, we have a problem with authority.

But actually, as significant as that is, it is really a symptom of a much deeper struggle. It’s not just the civil authorities we resent at times but the One who gave them charge over us.

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 7:28-29

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

It’s the start of Jesus’ ministry (READ Matthew 4:23). His fame had spread, the crowds are gathering. So on a hillside near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus delivered what we call the Sermon on the Mount (READ Matthew 5:1). What does it mean to follow Him, to live as a citizen of the kingdom? That was the message. How then did the crowds respond? It’s worth noting.

We’re in the midst of the Summer Olympic Games. A theme in the stories of success goes like this. Whatever the event or nationality, each athlete has given themselves to their sport and are following the lead of their coaches. They’ve sacrificed their time and all other plans. They’ve entrusted themselves to others. There’s a kind of yielding and submission in this.

Jesus is not speaking as a coach in a competition. There’s a parallel here but so much more. He is speaking with a sweeping authority. And our response must be one of submission. Our response must then be one of submission. Now, in order to unpack that, it will mean looking first at the scope of His authority. And then, second, looking at the problems with astonishment.

I. THE SCOPE OF JESUS’ AUTHORITY

Let’s start with the reason for the crowds’ response (READ Matthew 7:28-29). I’m using John Stott’s outline here, listing seven things that speak to the sweeping scope of Jesus’ authority.

A) As the Teacher

1. Unlike their scribes

Jesus is a teacher unlike any other. The scribes clung to their commentaries and cited their sources. The scribes claimed no authority in themselves. Jesus claimed all authority in Himself.

2. Unlike the prophets

In fact, He was unlike the prophets of old who said, “Thus says the Lord.” Jesus never said that. He never needed to. He used the first person singular twelve times in the Sermon on the Mount.

B) As the Christ

1. Came on a mission

He spoke also as the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, not just born for but come on a mission.

3. To fulfill the law and the prophets

(**READ Matthew 5:17**) He came to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies, the sacrifices and the ceremonies, the key events and figures. It all pointed to Him. It was all ultimately about Him.

C) As the Lord

1. Usage of title

Then there is the title of Lord. In His day, it could be an expression of courtesy or of reverence.

4. Acceptance of title

Jesus clearly assumes and accepts it as one of reverence and reference to God (**READ Matthew 7:21-23**). Jesus readily accepts the title. But then He warns of presumption in using it.

D) As the Savior

1. The Beatitudes

Implicitly, Jesus speaks also as the Savior. In the Beatitudes, He is the One bestowing blessing.

5. Salt and light

And then He says this (**READ Matthew 5:13-16**). How in the world would this odd motley band have such an impact and influence on the world? As they followed Him. It's just astonishing.

E) As the Judge

1. The assumption

Jesus also teaches with the assumption there will be a judgement. And that He will be the Judge.

6. The implication

Think of this. Jesus of Nazareth will hear the evidence, weigh it, and render a decision. Going even further, whether or not we are in relationship with Him is the sole criterion for judgment.

F) As the Son of God

1. God as our Father

Then He speaks as the Son of God. He teaches that God is Creator, Ruler, and also a Father.

7. His exclusive Sonship

And Jesus assures His disciples that God is their Father. But He never includes Himself when He speaks of this. He never includes Himself with them. Why? His is an exclusive Sonship.

G) As God

1. Final beatitude

Finally, we have the references Jesus makes to Himself as God. Note the final beatitude (**READ Matthew 5:10-12**). He likens the disciples to the prophets. And Himself to God. It's stunning.

8. Final warning

This comes out also with the final warning of the Sermon on the Mount (**READ Matthew 7:21, 24**). Doing His words and doing the will of His Father are equated as being the same in weight.

This is the cause of the crowds' response. *"Do you hear what He's saying...of Himself?"*

Application:

What do we make of all this? The Sermon on the Mount is often held up as being a great system of ethics. But when you really read it, you realize how intertwined that system of ethics is with profound theology, a soaring Christology. And these things can't be separated. You pull at one part and the rest collapses. We can't then pick and choose. We have to read it as a whole.

Jesus speaks to us with a sweeping authority. Our response must be one of submission.

II. THE PROBLEMS WITH ASTONISHMENT

Which brings us to this, the problems with astonishment (**READ Matthew 7:28-29**).

A) The Description of the Crowds' Response

1. The meaning

The crowds were amazed and dumfounded. They were stunned, ill-equipped, and unprepared.

9. The focus

The content and manner of Jesus' teaching was unlike anything they had every encountered.

H) A Reflection on the Crowds' Response

1. What is likely

What do we make of this? Some likely went further. But sadly, others just stopped with that.

10. What is certain

I say "sadly" because admiration is not taking in and living from. Astonishment is not faith.

That's the problem with astonishment with Jesus. It's simply not enough.

Application:

And it's the response of many today. Perhaps even some here. We read of C. S. Lewis' "trilemma" earlier in the service. That is, that given the nature of Jesus' claims, He had to have been either a lunatic, a liar, or Lord. Now some have noted there is another option and that being He was a legend and that this was all made up. Well, those who heard Him certainly didn't have that concern. And, if we take the evidence for the historical reliability of the gospels seriously, we won't have that concern either. Which takes us back to the trilemma. So, which is it?

There is no parallel to this among the founders of other world religions. And there is no halfway house in which we can settle. Who is He? The Sermon on the Mount forces a response.

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CONCLUSION:

Here's the story of the fly and the elephant. One day, a young fly was flitting about from dead bodies and dung piles only to look up and see this great grey lumbering beast. It had legs like trees, a nose like a snake, and ears like giant leaves. We would know it as an elephant. The fly flies over to see what he can make of this thing. Again, to see what he can make of it. Now, there are two ways to take that. The fly could be curious, exploring, like a student wanting to add to his understanding. Or he could be imperious, arrogant, like a judge rendering a decision.

C. S. Lewis alluded to such an image in his essay, “*What Do We Make of Jesus?*” Here’s the thing. Given who Jesus is, we should not be concerned with what we make of Him. We should be concerned with what He makes of us. Put another way, given who Jesus is, He is due our submission. Certainly, totally. That is, in every arena of our lives and to the utter depths.

But also gladly. Yes, given who is speaking, we should say, “*This is how we we are to live.*” But given why Jesus has come and what He has done for us, we should say with even more fervency, “*This is how we long to live.*” We’ve been made one with Him in His death and resurrection. Our sins have been paid for. New life has been given, new hope each day forever.

Think back to the scope of His authority, of who Jesus is, in all its rich fullness - as Teacher, Christ, Lord, Savior, Judge, Son of God, and God Himself. What sort of submission should this be then? What is He worth and due? Jesus speaks to us with a sweeping authority. Our response must be one of submission. Not just total but glad, whole-life and whole-hearted.

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