

The Teachings of Jesus

The Life of Blessing

Matthew 5:1-12

Introduction

The teachings of Jesus were simple and yet quite profound and innovative. Especially when you consider the times in which He lived. Jesus began his teaching ministry about 30 AD during a time of ruthless and often brutal Roman occupation of Palestine.

During this time there were four major religious groups among the Jewish people; the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. Each group held a different viewpoint which they tried to promote to the people. The Pharisees were the rabbinical teachers and required strict observance of the Mosaic Law as well as all the Jewish customs and rituals. The Sadducees were a priestly group of Levites associated with the leadership of the temple. They represented the aristocratic group of the Hasmonean High Priests whom Rome appointed to replace the original High Priestly lineage. The Essenes were led by a high priestly leadership, who are thought to be the descendents of the "legitimate" high priestly lineage, which the Hasmoneans ousted. The Essenes awaited a Messiah that would establish a Kingdom on earth and free the Israelis from oppression. The Zealots were a militant Jewish group who wanted to throw of Roman rule and bring freedom to their homeland by force. They were the political activists of their day. Nazareth was located in Galilee which was an important center of Zealot activity.

In the teachings of Jesus came a fresh new approach to the old established traditions. The Ten Commandments, given to Moses on Mount Sinai in the Old Testament Book of Exodus, related a series of "Thou shalt not..." - describing the evils a person must avoid in daily life. In contrast, the message of Jesus was one of humility, charity, and love. He taught about the transforming the inner person. The teachings of Jesus present a series of blessings, or Beatitudes - virtues in life which would ultimately lead to reward. Jesus taught that love becomes the motivation for the Christian.

All of the Beatitudes have a present and future meaning. They promise us salvation - not in this world, but also in the next. These blessings initiate one of the main themes of Matthew's Gospel - that the Kingdom so long awaited in the Old Testament is not of this world, but of the next, the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus offered a way of life that promised eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. He taught that a far better life could be experienced in eternity than the very best life lived here on earth! The eight

Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount introduce us to this better life! In Matthew Chapter 5 Jesus unveils before his disciples a very controversial new view of how a person should live their life. (Read Matthew 5:1-11)

It seems Jesus wanted to spend some time teaching his disciples but there were great multitudes that were following him everywhere he went. So seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up on a mount and prepared to teach His disciples. And when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Jesus wasn't excluding the crowds he just wanted the good seats to go to his most serious disciples. The crowd could listen in, but the teaching was for the disciples. So we see Jesus assuming the customary seat of authority as he prepares to teach the people.

I. Position of Authority

This was the common posture for teaching in that culture. It was customary for the teacher to sit and the hearers to stand. Sitting was the accepted posture of all the rabbis in the synagogue schools. So when Jesus is seated and ready to teach his disciples come and stand around him. But when Jesus speaks it is like God himself is speaking (because he is!). But now the truth of heaven is being spoken by God himself - not through an inspired prophet like Samuel or Isaiah or John the Baptist. The group of disciples that come to Him is probably a group much larger than just the Twelve.

Jesus' teachings are faith-based teachings. The difference between a life based upon reason and a life based upon faith is simple – faith believes in supernatural power based upon a supernatural God. The teaching of Jesus is a life built upon the power and authority of God. Humanism on the other hand is a life based only upon the logical answers that human reason provides. Faith is based upon divine wisdom while humanism relies completely upon human wisdom. Logical reasoning may very well point us to the reality of God but it doesn't allow us to experience the love and community of a supernatural God. In trying times human logic usually fails while those with faith usually prevail.

The teachings of Jesus gave the people new insight regarding authority. The authority of Christ's teaching is simply stated: Be humble, treat others like you want to be treated, if compelled to go a mile go the second mile, don't be angry with your brother, spend your time getting the mote out of your eye and stop judging others, love others as God loves you. Even unbelievers recognize the need to embrace the truth taught in this passage of scripture simply because it is true.

There are probably no other chapters of the Bible that reveal the perfect heart of God and the imperfect human heart with such impact as Matthew does. It seems almost impossible to live up to the standards that Jesus presents —and yet we know the teaching is true.

The master teacher is counseling us from a position of authority. After the resurrection, he will come to his disciples and commission them to carry on his teachings by declaring, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19)

Our faith does not overlook the power of Christ. As we accept his authority, we become empowered to prevail even through persecutions and trials. Christ demonstrated his power by overcoming infirmities and healing diseases. His power as God overcame death, hell and the grave. All suffering and sorrow and grief must surrender to the authority of Christ.

The power of God has established the authority of Christ. But not only does Christ hold a position of authority, He proclaims God's truth with authority.

II. Proclaim with Authority

From the very beginning, Jesus begins to teach with authority. Some people are so boring to listen to that even if they did have something to say you'd miss it because they already put you to sleep. When Jesus opened his mouth and began to teach people wanted to listen to what he had to say. I imagine Jesus used a strong clear voice to teach the crowd. He spoke with energy, projecting His thoughts with earnestness and sincerity. He spoke to them with such freedom and passion that the multitudes crowded in to hear him.

Spurgeon wrote, "... (He) spoke like a man in earnest; he enunciated clearly, and spake loudly. He lifted up his voice like a trumpet, and published salvation far and wide, like a man who had something to say which he desired his audience to hear and feel."

What they heard was a message on ethics. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us how to live. The Sermon on the Mount is sometimes called Jesus' "Declaration of the Kingdom." The American Revolutionaries had their *Declaration of Independence*. Karl Marx had his *Communist Manifesto*.

In the teachings of Jesus we learn what His Kingdom is all about. Jesus presents a radically different agenda than what the nation of Israel expected from the Messiah. He does not present the political or material blessings of the Messiah's reign. Instead, He expresses the spiritual implications of allowing Jesus to rule in our lives. This great teaching tells us how we will live when Jesus is our Lord and Master.

None of the Jewish groups could agree on what the messianic kingdom would be like. Some saw it as spiritual. Some saw it as shaking off the Roman yoke. But Jesus taught that peace was, first of all to be achieved in the heart! Jesus taught that a person's inner attitude dictated his outward behavior and that a person's core beliefs influences their ethics and daily living.

The whole basis of Jesus ministry was built upon these teachings. You might say the Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' "standard" sermon. It was the core of His itinerant message: a simple proclamation of how God expects us to live, in contrast to the common misunderstandings of that life. These teachings of Jesus were preached over and over throughout his ministry. Jesus continually was training the disciples in the message He wanted them to carry to others. It was His message, meant to be passed on through them. In these teachings of Jesus, Matthew shows us Jesus instructing his disciples in a message He knew would change lives forever.

It was a message that had a significant impact on the early church. The early Christians made constant reference to it and their very lives displayed the glory of its truth. They were convinced of Christ's position of authority and they had heard Him proclaim God's truth with authority and they were captivated by that authority.

III. Captivated by Authority

This weekend we have been celebrating the birth of our Nation and our independence from England in 1776. There has always been a tension in American life between equality and authority. Part of the founding idea of this country is that no person is automatically granted authority by virtue of birth, social class, or wealth. We all start out equal. However, it is also part of the American way that we do not finish equal. The old protestant work ethic promoted a belief that we end up with varying amounts of wealth and position because we earn it. This ideal creates a system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead based on their achievement.

But there is a contrasting ideal among Americans that believe human equality translates to human rights especially with respect to social, political, and economic rights and privileges. America is definitely a "house divided". This strain in American society rejects the very idea of authority, because authority implies inequality.

Our Judeo-Christian system is based on authority. A recent movie called, "The Golden Compass." is an atheist's reply to C.S. Lewis' "Narnia" series. "The Golden Compass" series is about a rebellion against God. The rallying cry of that rebellion is to demand a "Republic of Heaven" rather than a "Kingdom of Heaven." It is an absurd notion because there are no elections in the Kingdom of Heaven. If we are dissatisfied with God, we cannot vote him out of office. God's authority is absolute, unshakeable, and unchangeable. We can deny his authority, but we cannot decrease it any way. God's power is unlimited and therefore his authority is unlimited. The Jews saw all human authority as deriving from God's authority. In the Book of Genesis, God exercises his authority directly in the world through his actions and through his relationship with ordinary people like Adam and Noah and Abraham.

In the Book of Exodus, we see God exercising his authority through his prophets. In Deuteronomy Chapter 18 the people ask God not to speak to them directly any more. "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die."

This made the role of the prophet, the one who received the word of God for the nation a crucial figure. This is why false prophets were viewed as so dangerous. Not only were prophets crucial to the religious life of the community, but they were essential to the success of the nation. Their political leaders, their Judges and Kings, received their authority because God chose them. God chose some leaders through his prophets. Other leaders were chosen by human means by election or by inheritance, but these leaders' authority was only legitimate if God endorsed it through his prophets. If a leader lost God's favor they would have little success trying to govern on human authority alone.

However, by Jesus' time, things had changed. The voice of prophecy had gone silent. God was believed to still be acting in the world, but his voice was no longer heard. God's authority had taken up residence in the written scriptures, the Torah, or teaching, what we now call the Old Testament. Because the people no longer had prophets to guide them, they turned to the scribes and the teachers, the experts in the scriptures, for guidance in spiritual matters and daily life. The way to live a Godly and righteous life

was through studying the Torah and carrying out its commandments and regulations.

When we think of prophets, we think of prophetic speech, speech inspired by God, which predicts the future. However, if we read the Old Testament, we find that most of the prophets were people of action, not just big talkers. Elijah and Elisha were miracle workers, raising the dead, causing ax heads to float, and calling down fire from heaven. The power of God was shown not just in the Words of the Prophets, but also in their deeds. Many of the scribes and teachers were good people. They were also wise people.

However, they were not powerful people. Their authority came from God's scriptures, but they had very little of this authority in themselves. In the days of the prophets, the prophets were the point of the spear. Now, however, the scribes and teachers watched from the sidelines.

Compared with the Roman Emperor and the military and political leaders of the day, they seemed so small and powerless. That's what makes Jesus so amazing to the listeners in the synagogue in the little town of Capernaum. Jesus spoke not with the borrowed authority of scripture but with an authority even greater than that of the prophets of old. Even when Jesus read the scriptures, it was as if they were being heard for the first time. Jesus was not just interpreting and repeating the old words of God in the scriptures, he was giving a new teaching with the same authority as the scriptures. This was just what they did not expect, a new teaching with authority, because they did not expect a new teaching to come from God.

The people in the synagogue immediately realize that Jesus was someone special, even though they do not fully understand who he is. The people must learn for themselves that Jesus is a prophet like Moses, one raised up from among the people to speak the words of God and a prophet like Elijah and Elisha, able to heal, to raise the dead, and command the forces of nature. And yet much more than a prophet: the Son of the Living God. And they were captivated by his teachings for he taught as one having authority!

Conclusion

Christian authority comes from one source only, from the Truth. And that Truth is a person, Jesus Christ the son of God. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. His words and deeds of power are written down for us the Gospels. Yet we are not to be like the scribes and teachers of the law, only able to hear God in the words of long-dead prophets. Our Truth, Jesus, is alive this very day, and through his gift of the Holy Spirit, he is able to bring the Gospel to life in his body the Church.

And Just as Jesus not only preached but healed and forgave, it is not just through fine words that the Church shows it is the living Body of Christ, but through its ministry and missions of healing, mercy, and prayer.

Remember what Jesus said to us when he commissioned the Church:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-19)