

The Authority of Jesus

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] In the Pew Bibles, it's on page 972, and there's an outline inside the notice sheet, whether you'd like to take notes or just know how long is left as I get going.

Do have a look at that. And much more important than what I say about Matthew 8 is that we all have an encounter with God as we hear his words.

So let me pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to the Bible together. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who kept your promise, who promised a saving king, and then sent your Messiah into our world.

And so we pray that as we turn to your word now, you would fill us with reverence and awe, that you would vanquish unbelief from our hearts, that you will help us to see Jesus as if for the first time, and respond to him rightly, for our good and for your glory. Amen.

Great, I just had a photo to start us off, just get us thinking. This is, do you know who this is? This is Shane Ward from The X Factor in 2005.

[1 : 2 3] He won The X Factor. And that year he got the Christmas number one as well with the hit. Next one is perhaps more famous, Leona Lewis.

The following year from The X Factor, a moment like this, stirred the nation, Christmas number one, 2006. Next year, Leon Jackson, When You Believe, won The X Factor, and was Christmas number one in 2007.

Then it was, Hallelujah, Alexandra Burke. And again, won The X Factor, and was Christmas number one in 2008. 2009, Christmas number one was a bit more of a shock.

The X Factor winner didn't make it. Instead, Rage Against the Machine had had quite enough of this X Factor run. And Killing in the Name of was Christmas number one.

If you remember the song, I don't know how many people remember this song, it's completely inappropriate to play in a church, or indeed anywhere actually. So I can't play you an excerpt. But the singer was very adamant that no one was going to tell him what to do.

[2 : 3 6] He wouldn't do what people told him. It was actually a song, though, about a revolution in America because of institutional racism and police brutality.

It was released six months after the LA riots originally. And so there were reasons why Rage Against the Machine had an authority problem. They were seeing people in authority in America, and what they were perceiving was that that authority was being abused and misused.

It wasn't being used for the good of people. So they thought the solution was anarchy, kind of let's rebel, let's not have authority anymore. So I wonder what about us this morning?

What comes into your mind when you hear the word authority? Lots of us have grown cynical about authority because we see it misused, don't we? So we think of MPs who we entrust with authority, and there's been the expenses scandals, and still they drip through, as we learn, about the ways that MPs spend money that they're entitled to use legally, but we consider not in the spirit of what we give it to them for.

We think of the media who have a degree of authority in a country where there's free press, and yet the phone tapping and harassment that they do has led to the Leveson inquiry and a lot of mistrust of them.

[3 : 57] Thinking of the police, and very sadly, especially for the police who so diligently serve us, there are policemen and women who abuse their authority. We hear of people abusing their authority in churches, in care homes, in households and families, and it makes us negative about the whole idea of authority.

We've got an authority problem. But when you think about it, we need there to be authority. You see, if there's no authority, then there's nobody who decides what's right and wrong.

We can all just make up our own ideas, what's right and wrong. Now that might sound attractive to us initially, because we think, yeah, I can just choose how to live my life. But that would be true of everybody.

And of course, it's worth thinking ourselves, isn't there anybody, anywhere in the world today, doing something that you know is wrong, even if they think that what they're doing is right.

Of course there is. Of course there is. See, if Robert Mugabe rigs elections in Zimbabwe and thinks that he's doing the right thing for the good of the people, we still want to be able to say that's wrong.

[5 : 07] A more trivial example, but for those who enjoy football, FIFA and the corruption that's going on with Sepp Blatter, and we're finding out that kind of, it doesn't really matter how good your bid was for a World Cup, you just had to put the right money in the right places.

And there are people within the countries who joined in with that corruption and within Sepp Blatter's cronies who won't think they've done anything wrong. But we want to say, even internationally, that was wrong, what happened there.

Much more seriously, if Vladimir Putin and his followers think that it is right for Russia to reclaim parts of the Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic states, if he thinks it was right to approve the murder of Litvinenko on British soil, we want a way to work out what's right and wrong and be able to say, well, no, that's not right.

That's not right. So we need an external standard to appeal to. But who says so? Is the human race just like children in a playground so that if somebody does something that upsets us and we say, you can't do that, they say, says who?

Says who? We need someone to step in and be our authority but not abuse and misuse that authority. And what Matthew tells us as he follows Jesus around Galilee in these early chapters of his gospel is that the man we all need has arrived.

[6 : 35] Jesus has proved his authority by his teaching and now he's going to prove it through miraculous power. The teaching came in the Sermon on the Mount. That's just finished as we pick up Matthew's gospel in chapter 8.

And Matthew told us this at the end of chapter 7. When Jesus had finished saying these things, that whole great teaching, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

Now those crowds, they don't just stay behind on the mountain, they follow him into these scenes. And for us today, the challenge of Jesus' authority becomes sharply personal. He appealed to us in chapter 7 to choose him, to choose the narrow path and not the broad path that leads to destruction.

He said to build your house on the rock, that is to put his teaching into practice. In other words, will you accept the authority of Jesus over your own lifestyle and your own decisions?

Well this morning we see a series of three encounters with Jesus that help us understand his authority more clearly. So through them we see the aim of his authority, the extent of his authority and thirdly the exercise of his authority.

[7 : 53] So firstly, the aim of his authority. The aim is restoration. In verse 2 we get a stark reminder of the brokenness of our world.

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean. Well, we already thought about it, didn't we?

But this skin disease would have cut the man off from the community. He would have had to ring a bell to warn people to stay away. If you touched him you were at risk of getting the disease but also you were religiously unclean.

Leprosy was like a death sentence. But in desperation the man seems to throw off social convention as he falls to the ground in front of Jesus prostrate before him.

And do you notice his faith in what he said? He calls Jesus Lord. He knows Jesus' power. The only question is is Jesus willing?

[8 : 57] And if you just pause between verse 2 and verse 3 I wonder if at that moment it's not just this man's future that hangs in the balance the future of the whole of humanity the whole universe hangs in the balance.

Is Jesus willing? Does he have the compassion to save this man? For if he does he can save all of us. Verse 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man I am willing he said be clean.

Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. Literally Matthew says his leprosy was cleansed. Jesus doesn't become unclean the leper is made clean by him.

And what Jesus demonstrates here is not just his authority of course there's that but what is he using his authority for? You see if Jesus just wanted to show his authority he could have behaved like Superman.

He could have said follow me I can fly. Follow me I can destroy this mountain with lasers coming from my eyes. You know Jesus could have done that and he never does that. Why is that?

[10 : 03] It's because of this. Through his miraculous healing Jesus is teaching us about the kind of work that he's come to do. Jesus has come to bring in a kingdom where the unclean will be made clean again.

He's come to restore. We love stories don't we about a hero coming to put things right. On Friday it was on the BBC News that there's a football team in England called Longford AFC and I don't know whether you saw this but something has gone horribly wrong at Longford AFC.

They've played 18 games this season lost 18 scored 1 and let in 179. So what's happened?

Well why are they in the news? Not just because they've done so badly but because Stuart Pearce former England international who's played in a World Cup semi-final has signed up for Longford. He's 53 he's come out of retirement to help a team who lost one of their games 17-0 and he's got to pay subs to play and we love that don't we?

We love that. Could this man be the one who restores the fortunes of Longford AFC? Well look even Stuart Pearce might not manage that but we love the story and maybe that's because there's something inside us deep inside our souls that means we were made for this story.

[11 : 30] We know the world is broken. We know that we can't put it right and we long for a man to come who we can put our hope in to restore the world.

So there was a time when our world didn't have sickness and death and human beings lived in harmony with each other and with God and sin our rebellion against God has wrecked all of that catastrophically.

So the reason the world isn't the way it should be is that we are not the way we should be and God promised through the Old Testament prophets that his rescuing king would come and one day put the world right.

So when they speak of it they use the language of Eden restored you know the wolf lying down with the lamb the child putting his hand inside the viper's nest these pictures of things being put right again and then picture Jesus in a dry dusty marketplace under the burning sun stooping down to touch a leper who has not been touched for years.

Here is God come to restore his broken people and his broken world. So the leper is healed and he's brought from being an unclean exile right back into the heart of God's new community.

[12 : 50] In verse 4 Jesus sends him to the priest so the priest will see it's a testimony to him it's a testimony that the man is restored it's also what does it show the priest the Messiah is here.

So that's the aim of Jesus authority. Secondly let's see the scope of Jesus authority the scope is boundless the next person who comes to see Jesus isn't even Jewish.

Now that might not sound so surprising to us today because probably most of us looking around are not Jewish background but at the time the Jews were God's chosen people the Messiah was a Jewish Messiah surely he's come for them.

Jewish people to separate themselves off from Gentiles from non-Jews they wouldn't even go into their houses it wasn't allowed and yet this centurion this Gentile man he comes to Jesus and he begs in verse five just have a look at that again when Jesus had entered Capernaum a centurion came to him asking for help Lord he said my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering now verse seven the next thing that comes it's hard to tell from the original Greek whether it's a statement or a question from Jesus I'm pretty certain that it's a question that Jesus asks next if you've got the new NIV 2011 if you happen to have that with you that's how that translates it now it's much more likely Jesus says am I to come and heal him either way what's happening here is Jesus is testing the man's faith am I to come into a Gentile house to heal his servant what is this to do with me and what follows astonishes

Jesus this is the only time in Matthew's gospel that Jesus is amazed by something he amazes people all the time Jesus here is amazed why well look at the centurion's faith in verse 8 the centurion replied Lord I do not deserve to have you come under my roof but just say the word and my servant will be healed for I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me I tell this one go and he goes and that one come and he comes I say to my servant do this and he does it the centurion understands that he's been given a sphere of authority and when he speaks to any one of his hundred men it's as though Caesar is speaking through him but the centurion has an insight here about Jesus he's recognised that the sphere of authority isn't just a hundred men it's not even just the room that

[15 : 38] Jesus is in or can see there's no limit to the authority of Jesus his sphere of authority given to him by God the father is everywhere he doesn't need to go to the Gentiles house and break convention he can heal a servant from far away you see when you've got all authority which Jesus has there are no degrees of difficulty anymore you don't look at a challenge and think well that's going to take it out of me this is going to be a bit hard there are no degrees of difficulty you can do anything and what Jesus says next is very confronting but it's the natural follow on from what we've learned about him it's that your eternal destiny depends on how you respond to him look with me what he says in verse 10 when Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him I tell you the truth I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven but the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth then Jesus said to the centurion go it will be done just as you believed it would and his servant was healed at that very hour well again when Jesus speaks here he's pointing us back to the prophets for hundreds of years they had messages from God and they painted a picture of the world put right by God's Messiah and they described it as like a banquet some words from Isaiah 25 on the screen on this mountain the Lord almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples a banquet of aged wine the best of meats and the finest of wines on this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples the sheet that covers up all nations he will swallow up death forever the sovereign

Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth the Lord has spoken now the Jews were looking forward to that day when they would get to take their seats with their ancestors Abraham Isaac and Jacob and yet in verse 10 Jesus says as he points to the centurion I've not found anyone in Israel with such great faith you don't get to the messianic banquet because you're born into the right family it's about how you respond to God's king you have to turn to him you have to repent and you have to put your trust in Jesus and if you do that you'll be there it's amazing isn't it we're all invited but where does that leave Israel well Jesus says the subject of the kingdom will be thrown outside so in other words the people you'd expect to be there some of them if they don't have faith they'll be left out and it's this place that he describes in terms of awful regret this is a very interesting moment in

Matthew's gospel as Jesus confronts the world we're going to see that in the coming weeks he keeps confronting the world and the battle lines are being drawn his authority is being rejected by some of the Jewish people Matthew warned us of that when Jesus was born if you just think back we've just had Christmas haven't we the wise men who come to worship they come from the east but the king in Israel Herod he wants to kill Jesus and there's a great irony because Joseph Jesus father has to take Jesus away to protect him where does he take him he takes him to Egypt well when God's people first started to be a nation they were in Egypt in the exodus and the children were being killed and so God brought them out now Jesus God's own son has had to flee from Israel because the children were being killed

Israel has become the new Egypt and the nations can now come back to God through this Jewish Messiah if only they accept his boundless authority and put their faith in him he's come to welcome all of us to his heavenly feast the unclean leper has realized the Gentile soldier has got it and let me ask you are you willing to accept Jesus authority and his invitation to his banquet like the Jews here let's be warned not to place our confidence in our spiritual heritage who are the equivalent today of the Jewish religious people at the time surely it's it's us guys it's people in church the people who might expect to be there well Jesus doesn't assess us on the basis of whether we have Christian parents or whether we were baptized or how many times we had the

[21 : 06] Lord's supper or went to church the only question in terms of whether you'll be at the banquet is like this leper have you bowed the knee to Jesus like this centurion have you recognized Jesus authority and asked him to save you so we've seen the aim of Jesus authority we've seen the scope of Jesus authority thirdly and more briefly let's look at the exercise of his authority Jesus exercises his authority through substitution the next encounter is over a fever and fever to us perhaps isn't very serious in the first century fever was death a fever could very quickly lead to death so verse 14 is very serious when Jesus came into Peter's house he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever he touched her hand and the fever left her and she got up and began to wait on him again

Jesus cuts across the barriers of society a leper who you don't touch a gentile you don't go near now a woman goes from the specific to the general in verse 16 when evening came many who were demon possessed were brought to him and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick and then Matthew gives us this breathtaking glimpse of how Jesus is able to put right all these things in verse 17 have a look this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah he took now the verse Matthew quotes there is part of what's called a servant song by Isaiah written about 700 BC there were four servant songs they were songs about the cross about God sending his servant to die on the cross for us punished for our sins in our place just reading further on in that same chapter in

Isaiah he was pierced for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was upon him this verse is about substitution Jesus can take can clean us from our sin because he takes that sin on himself in Charles Dickens novel a tale of two cities there are two men Charles Darnier and Sidney Carton and they both love the same woman Lucy Magnette and Lucy chooses to marry Charles the aristocrat and later on during the French Revolution Charles though he's a good man relative to other aristocrats he is an aristocrat so he's thrown into prison and he's facing the guillotine and Sidney knows so Sidney visits Charles in prison and he drugs him and he has him carried out so that Sidney can take his place and Charles can live it's just a picture of what

Jesus has done for us on the cross and the substitution that Matthew describes here using Isaiah it doesn't happen straight away it's not that when Jesus touched Peter's mother-in-law he suddenly got a fever but Matthew is he's pointing us ahead to Jesus overall mission the reason there is any disease and sickness in our world is because sin has entered our world and Jesus has come to die on the cross to bear the curse that's on the world that's how he has the authority to take sickness away he can only heal our sickness and be the great healer because he's going to be the great sin bearer he cleanses an unclean leper by becoming unclean on the cross he rescues a suffering servant because he is the suffering servant who will die in his place it's the ultimate act of love in fact in that story a tale of two cities when there's a young seamstress on death row and she realises what

Sidney has done for Charles that he shouldn't be on death row with her but he's given his life in the place of another she asks him to hold her hand for courage she's so moved by this act of sacrifice and love and it wasn't even for her but as Christians we read Matthew 8 and we look at the cross and we see that wonderful story is true for you and me Jesus takes the punishment we deserve so that we can have the peace that he surrendered and our response is exemplified by Peter's mother-in-law in verse 15 she got up and began to wait on him well it's literally she got up and began to serve him why do I find it hard to give my time and my money to Jesus to resist temptation to become a more loving and selfless person for him why do I find that hard it's because I stop looking at the cross where he took up my infirmities and carried my diseases maybe you're here this morning and you feel you're serving

[26 : 26] God wholeheartedly but you're fed up of it maybe why aren't they pulling their weight and I'm doing all this stuff well don't look at them look at the cross where Jesus took up your infirmities and carried your diseases maybe you're here and life's so busy and you don't really feel that you are serving God very much and you feel quite guilty about it and you think I just don't really want to when I feel I'm too busy well don't look at your diary look at the cross Matthew wants us to see that Jesus took up our infirmities so that we would get up and gladly serve him we began by thinking about how we need an authority figure today well just consider the ways that Jesus is the authority figure we all need the aim of his authority is restoration he will put this world right so that ever happens again the scope of his authority is boundless our response to him affects our eternal destiny and the exercise of authority is substitution you come to him on your knees and you leave restored look at these healings and see his compassion and authority look at the cross and you see him healing you at immense personal cost to himself because he wants you to serve him with joy let me read some words from

John Stott the Christian minister we may speak if we will about Alexander the great and Charles the great and Napoleon the great but not Jesus the great he is not the great he is Jesus the only there is nobody like him he has no peers he has no rivals and he has no successes so our place is on our faces prostrate before him in humble adoration and praise let's have a moment of quiet and then I'll lead us in a prayer I am willing he said be clean Lord Jesus we praise you for your compassion for your mercy that you came into the world to walk the lonely road to the cross that we might be cleansed and healed we recognize your authority that you determine our future and so we resolve to respond rightly to that authority and live lives that give you glory getting up and serving you for you are our rescuer and our

Lord Amen we're going to sing again the band would like to come up let's stand and sing together