



Sermon

28th January 2024

Authority when Ministering

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Mark 1:21-28

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Authority

When you were at school, there were teachers who had a natural authority, I am sure and others who just could not command respect however well they knew their subject. Some just could not get children to obey them, while others inspired respect and attention.

I remember a teacher who stood out. Mr Canning was always courteous and polite to us. He was impeccably dressed - not a hair out of place. He was a teacher we wanted to please. While some masters would use the cane, the only punishment I can recall him giving was for a boy to leave the classroom and stand in the quadrangle for the rest of the lesson. We were horrified at the shame of having caused him such displeasure. That is a natural authority!

As we pick up today's passage starting in Mark 1:21, Jesus has called some disciples to follow him and next Sabbath, they went to the synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus was invited to speak. The people were amazed at his teaching. Why were they amazed? "Because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."¹

The Rabbis taught from the scriptures and from tradition. They applied the law to current life situations. Since they were dealing with a legal system, they used the precedent just as our lawyers do. Rabbi X ruled thus on that situation, however, on other occasion Rabbi Y said so. Thus and so shall it be.

But Jesus didn't talk like that. There were lots of stories, but not citing Rabbis. Often not even citing scriptural authority. Matthew gives us a glimpse in the Sermon of the Mount:

- ◆ You have heard it said, "Do not murder." But I tell you, "Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."
- ◆ You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

The Old Testament passage was being fulfilled before their eyes. Deuteronomy 18:18-19: Moses told the people that God would send another Prophet after him:

"I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I, myself, will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name."

And this is what Jesus said about himself in John 12:49:

"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ... So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

That is how the Prophet was expected to act.

Demonic Manifestation

As he was teaching and the people were marvelling, there was a disturbance – a challenge. The Kingdom of God is at war with the Kingdom of Darkness. Darkness reared up as a man with an unclean spirit in the

¹ Mark 1:22

synagogue who cried out naming Jesus as the Holy One of God. The demon spoke through the man and asked if Jesus intended to destroy them. At this stage, no one else recognised who Jesus was. But the demons understood and were terrified at his presence. However, Jesus would not have this broadcast around. He would not accept such testimony and he commanded it to be quiet and to leave the man.

Don't think of this is just ancient superstition. Demonic activity is not uncommon in our society.

You may have heard of the psychiatrist, Dr Scott Peck, who was famous for his book, "The Road Less travelled." He wrote another book, "People of the Lie", about evil affecting people in which he stated that he had come to believe there is a power of evil called Satan and that people can be influenced and driven by evil spiritual forces.

Professor Richard Gallagher wrote a book called "Demonic Foes." Gallagher was professor of psychiatry at New York Medical College and a psychoanalyst on the faculty of Columbia University. For at least 25 years, he worked alongside Roman Catholic exorcists to examine patients for psychosis before deliverance was attempted. He became utterly convinced of the reality of demonic oppression.

Dr Derek Prince told of an episode in the life of his first wife, Lydia:²

In the 1970s she and I ministered to hundreds of people needing deliverance, and we saw many glorious victories.

One time after a particularly powerful session, we were returning to the apartment the church had made available to us, but Lydia refused to take the elevator. Instead, she chose to walk up four flights of stairs. When I questioned her about this, she replied, "I don't feel comfortable in an elevator."

We talked a little more, and she recalled an incident in Denmark when she was five. She had been playing in a cupboard under the stairs in her aunt's house, and the aunt, seeing the door open, closed and latched it. Finding herself a prisoner in the dark, Lydia became hysterical. She began to scream and pound on the door. The aunt came to her rescue quickly, but in those few moments a demon of claustrophobia—a fear of confined spaces—had apparently entered Lydia.

As soon as Lydia's problem was brought out into the open and identified as a spirit of fear, we prayed together and she was completely delivered. She never again had a problem with elevators.

We were both astonished that Lydia herself could need deliverance after helping set so many others free. But it taught me that we need to be ready to respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting even if it does not suit our theology! If Lydia and I had not prayed that evening, she would never have come to full victory in that area.

So I am no longer taken aback by demonic conflict even in mature Christians.

I don't want to focus on the demonic, rather simply to make a couple of observations:

- ◆ The New International Version says "a man who was possessed by an evil spirit." This is a unfortunate translation. The Greek says "a man with an unclean spirit." The Bible does not use the term possession. Demons do not possess humans but they can influence and oppress.
- ◆ Please do not be informed by Hollywood in this area – it is sensational fantasy – dramatic, unrealistic and ill-informed.
- ◆ It is usually subtle and hidden. That is what occult means – hidden. But I have seen quite obvious examples of demons acting on people – not only in Africa but also right here in Whangaparaoa.

² Derek Prince, "They Shall Expel Demons"

- ◆ It is not an equal contest - God is infinitely more powerful - God is creator, all other beings are created. God could destroy Satan and all evil with a breath, just a word, but he chooses to win the victory through his people.

If the people were astounded before at the authority of his teaching, now they are startled and astonished! This is like nothing they have ever seen before. There is a flurry of discussion and debate as they wonder about this new teacher and his authoritative teaching.

The Greek word translated authority also means “supernatural power; ruling power.” That is what they were seeing. Not just academic authority but ruling, supernatural power. As we go forward in this account of his ministry by Mark, we will be shown more of his authority:

- Over sickness: “Jesus healed many who had various diseases.” (1:34)
- Over sin: ‘He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”’ (2:5)
- Over nature: ‘He rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.’ (4:39)
- Over death “Little girl, get up!” (5:41)
- Over the Law: ‘Jesus declared all foods clean.’ (7:19)

Delegated Authority

We can be like the crowd in Capernaum and simply wonder at Jesus. But it does not end there; he gave authority to his followers. First to the twelve apostles when he sent them out on mission telling them to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.³ Luke records, “... he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.”⁴ Then he did the same for the seventy:

“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”⁵

After the resurrection, he gave the apostles authority to forgive⁶ and at his ascension, he commanded them to teach their followers all that he had commanded them.⁷

There is a delegation of authority from Jesus to his followers. God intended from the beginning for mankind to be his representative rulers (governors general if you will) on earth. We messed that up by disobedience. When Jesus said the Kingdom of God was at hand, he re-appointed his followers as ambassadors on earth with delegated authority.

We see in the Book of Acts the disciples are doing it: they heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead.

We are intended not just to get saved and endure until we go to glory. Rather we are to be his representatives on earth, extending his kingdom.

That affects the way we pray for healing and deliverance. It is with authority not pleading for an answer hoping God might be kind enough to answer. Jesus said he has all authority in heaven and earth and therefore (in that knowledge and truth) we are to go and make disciples of all nations.

I know some of you have been uncomfortable when I command healing. I am not ordering God. I am using the authority we all have as Christians to command the body or nature to obey God. My words have no power in themselves. But Paul says we are to be co-workers with God.⁸ As we command, the Holy Spirit backs us up.

³ Matthew 10:8

⁴ Luke 9:1

⁵ Luke 10:19

⁶ John 20:21

⁷ Matthew 28:20

⁸ 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1; 1 Thess 3:2

I used to pray for healing by asking but as I asked God how to pray, I so often heard, "Command it," that I came to realise that was the norm. I remember once coaching a small group who had prayed without result for a woman's frozen shoulder to be released. I asked a man to repeat a prayer of command after me. Having repeated my words, he turned to me to argue about the language of command. I simply said, "Look at her." She was lifting her arm above horizontal until she was able to windmill it around.

I was teaching on this in Carlisle. Someone had a son in American who had badly wounded his hand in an industrial accident. He couldn't work and was in severe pain uncontrolled by the medication he had been given. There was concern that in USA there is no social security. Waiting on God we had two words: "Command" and a picture of a Santa sack! We commanded the pain to reduce and provision for the family. The next day, he reported the pain was tolerable and a hamper had been delivered to the door anonymously!

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is still King. His Spirit is still active. As disciples of Jesus we should expect to see the Kingdom of God near because we are indwelt by His Spirit.