

Matthew 8 sermon Tregear – 16.5.2021

Jesus – the one with authority; the one to put our faith in

I was at a friend's house a couple of months ago and the police came knocking at the door. There had been a disturbance and a neighbour had rung the police to register a complaint against someone in the street. As the police interviewed people they were assessing what action should be taken. They could arrest someone, take them into custody or just leave it. But they had the authority to act accordingly. Whatever action they took they had the authority. And we all knew it.

We finished the sermon on the mount with the words that everyone was amazed at the authority with which Jesus spoke. He was really different to the religious leaders and their sermons. He spoke with authority.

Jesus had no uniform like the policeman, no structure to back him up. So Matthew's next section, chapter 8 & 9 are about what Jesus' authority looked like on the street. In these two chapters Matthew has crammed in 9 healings of specific people and 2 miracles. In the next 18 chapters of Matthew there will only be 4 more healings and 4 more miracles. Matthew wants us to know very clearly that **Jesus was the one with authority and he was and is the one to put our faith in.**

Jesus – the one with authority

There are 6 stories here. We won't look at all of them in the same detail. So let's begin. v.1-4 Jesus heals this man with leprosy. Here is a man who is unclean yet he recognises the authority of Jesus – he kneels before him, in effect, he worships him. Leprosy meant not only sickness and disfigurement, but also social banishment. Leprosy was highly contagious. Sufferers had to stay well away from everybody else. Nobody would go near them; nobody would dream of touching them. You could almost hear the gasp as people watched Jesus not only allow this man near him, but then to actually touch him. Doesn't he know what he is doing? If he gets leprosy it's a lifetime sentence – no one recovers from leprosy. But Jesus, with compassion, reaches out and touches the man, "Yes I am willing to heal you." And then with utmost authority, his own authority, he simply says, "Be clean." It's an order, he's in control. Immediately he's made clean. Just a word of authority.

What would that man have felt that day. Nobody had touched him for a long time, perhaps many years. The one he called "Lord" had touched him and restored him. This man had suddenly been caught up in God's renewal movement, God's restoration of his people. But Jesus knows this man also needs to be reintegrated into society; he needed the official authorization from the priest. So he is to show himself and offer the gift of a sacrifice "as a

testimony to them". But the testimony would actually be to the authority of Jesus. Because the question would be, "How have you been made clean?"

The second story highlights not just Jesus' authority but also what it means to have faith in Jesus. v. 5-13 a centurion, a Roman soldier in charge of 100 men, a Gentile, comes to Jesus. It's remarkable that he is addressing Jesus as "Lord". He has obviously recognised an authority in Jesus which others such as the Pharisees and religious leaders have not recognized.

At this point I want you to put down your pens.

We're going to go on a journey. I want you to close your eyes. Just picture the scene. You're in Capernaum, a small town next to Galilee Lake. People are coming and going. The Roman centurion stands out in his uniform. You watch as he approaches Jesus. You hear him call Jesus, "Lord". You hear him say he doesn't deserve to have Jesus come under his roof. What! He's the boss. Jesus has no official rank, he's a nobody. And then you hear Jesus' words of authority – "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would". And you hear that the servant is healed.

Now we go into Peter's house. His mother-in-law is not well. Jesus touches her and she is immediately well enough to get up and make afternoon tea. And then more people come to the door. Jesus just says a word and evil spirits are sent flying out of people, people are healed. A word of authority.

Now we are down by the edge of the lake. We are one of the disciples. We get into the boat. A storm comes up. We're scared and we wake Jesus. Again he just speaks to the storm. There's calm.

And now we're on the other side of the lake, 2 demon possessed men charging at us. Quick Jesus, get back in the boat. You don't know what those men might do. But Jesus calmly waits for them. They stop in front of Jesus. They address him as "Son of God". Jesus then says one word again, "Go", and the demons are sent away into a herd of pigs. Again a word of authority. Who is this man?

You can open your eyes now. Jesus has authority to do anything.

Jesus – the one to put our faith in

The leper and the centurion are both outsiders in the Jewish world; they would be the last ones thought likely to enter the kingdom. Matthew includes them – they are just the people who WILL enter the kingdom. What do we notice about their faith?

The leper acknowledges Jesus' authority and appeals to his compassion. He says in v.2 – "If you are willing". The centurion recognises that Jesus has the same authority over diseases that he as a centurion has over his men. He tells his men to do something and they immediately obey – he is the one with authority. Well, the centurion says, Jesus has this authority too. He just says the word and the disease is taken away. Jesus exclaims that this man has a faith that he hasn't seen even among his own people. So what is this faith? It's not some religious attitude to life. Faith is not being religious. Faith is something far more specific: it's recognising that Jesus has authority and trusting this truth.

What about the disciples in the boat in v. 23-27. What is it about their faith that Jesus highlights? It seems quite reasonable that the disciples are worried. This is a big storm. But we only get some of the story in Matthew's account. In Mark's account (Mark 4:35 – 5:21), you remember last year Rob Colacino spoke about this, Jesus had said "we are going to the other side." It wasn't "look out for the storm that's coming and wake me." No, we're going to the other side. Trust me. Jesus had a task over there – to heal 2 demon-possessed men. So when the storm comes is Jesus going to get them to the other side? Yes, of course he is. He's obviously exhausted and he's asleep. But he WILL GET THEM TO THE OTHER SIDE. Yes, there may be some difficult things on the way, but he will get them to the other side. So when Jesus says, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Jesus is commenting on their lack of trust in his authority. In this situation the proper response is "faith". Do you trust me? Jesus isn't asking for a religious response to the storm. A religious response to a great storm at sea might be awe and terror, or frightened prayer to the sea-god. No: this *faith* is quite simply a trust that Jesus is the sovereign one who has authority over the elements., over nature. And the disciples didn't have much of this faith. We now start to realise something which Matthew is telling us bit by bit: that other people (like the centurion) had a sharply focused and quite striking faith, and that Jesus' followers, despite seeing all that he had done, weren't in the same league.

There is one other example of faith that is very interesting. The demons recognise that Jesus is the Son of God. No one else addresses Jesus like this. But their attitude is one of fear. Look at v.29 – "What do you want with us, Son of God?" We know who you are and we know you have authority. They're thinking their time of freedom has come to an end, because the Messiah is here. They have no desire though to trust Jesus. They want nothing to do with him. They know that Jesus disapproves of their torturing of these two men and they will be cast out.

My friends, Matthew hasn't put these accounts of Jesus in here just to interest us. These are true accounts of the authority of Jesus and why we should act like the centurion and put our faith or trust in this person, Jesus, who has the authority of God. And as Jesus says in v. 11 & 12 there will be many people from the east and west, non-Jews who will be joining Abraham

and Isaac and Jacob at the feast when Jesus returns. There will be some just like he warned last week in chap.7. There will be some who are Jews who think that they're in the Kingdom simply because they are Jews. They'll say, "Lord, didn't we do this that and the other as your people. And Jesus will say, "I never knew you. You didn't trust in me. You didn't accept my authority. You did not ask or seek or knock."

Jesus – the one to follow

So we've seen that Jesus has all kinds of authority – well it's pretty much of anything and everything. It's looking a lot like he's got the same authority as..as...as God. So how do you regard Jesus? *It's all very well to say in church, or in private devotion, that he's the Son of God, the Lord, the Messiah. Or whatever. Do we actually treat him as if he's got authority over every aspect of our lives and our world? Second, are we as his followers acting in such a way, in our confrontations with evil, our bold announcements of the Kingdom, that other people say of us, What sort of people can they be?*

And we've seen a bit about what it means to have faith in Jesus – it means to trust in his authority; he really is the one who has all authority.

But Jesus has some other words to say to those who want to follow him in v.18 – 22. Two people come to Jesus who want to follow him. It sounds very promising. v.19 – "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." It sounds like a good line for a song. Ah Sister Act!! I almost forgot I'm not supposed to sing.

But what is Jesus' response, "The animals have places to lie down but I don't have anywhere to lay down my head." He's saying Do you really know what you're letting yourself in for? This isn't just an exciting and triumphant march, following the one who has God's authority, watching him do mighty and powerful things all over the place. This is a commitment to one whose authority is given in order that he can go to the places where the world is in its deepest pain, and be there with people who are suffering it.

And as we continue on our journey through Matthew's gospel, Jesus will spell out clearly that following him will be costly. Do you remember back on Palm Sunday when we were in Matthew 20 and the mother of Zebedee's sons was asking for the best places in the Kingdom. Jesus said , "Can you experience the sufferings that I will suffer?" And in Mark 10:39 Jesus says that you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. The baptism is his suffering on the cross, his humiliation. Jesus says that there will be people who will hate you just because you are my followers. Yes, follow Jesus because he is the one with authority. Yes, put your faith or trust in Jesus because he has this authority. But remember that there will be a cost.

And Jesus emphasizes this as he talks to the second disciple who says, “Lord let me first go and bury my father”. Jesus says, “No, come now, leave the dead to bury the dead.” What are you doing Jesus? don’t you want these guys to follow you? You don’t have to make it harder than it already seems. In this case Jesus is emphasizing the urgency of the call. If this is the truth, if Jesus has all authority. Don’t wait until tomorrow. Put your faith in Jesus now.

Yes, it will mean a change in your life. You’re going to give up your small ambitions; but your ambitions now are to make Jesus’ name great.

How can I live in such a way that he is honoured and lifted up? It might mean that I get an influential position in society, it might mean that I am poor and dishonoured.

But I am now free; free to be the person God created me to be; being changed more and more into God’s image; and God will do that.

Conclusion.

There is still one more thing that God is going to do. He will give the disciples and all his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will confirm in our hearts the truth about Jesus. If you are thinking to yourself yes, this is true. Jesus does have authority. Then the Holy Spirit is confirming this truth in your heart. Many will not respond but some will. The Holy Spirit is at work in them.

And that’s where we end today. Yes recognise that Jesus has authority; yes have faith in his authority; but remember that following Jesus will not be a cakewalk; it will be difficult. But come ask, seek and knock and the one who has all authority will welcome you into the Kingdom; to join him at the feast, to join him in his suffering. And like Jim Elliott we’ll be saying, **He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**