

Logan Smith

March 7th, 2021

Matt. 8:1 - 9:34

The Authority of Christ

We don't typically like it when people tell us what to do, do we? Especially when they tell us that the way we're doing something or thinking about something is wrong; that we need to live or think differently. When someone confronts us in this way, we might respond by saying something like: "*On what grounds? Why should I listen to you? **What authority** gives your words weight and significance?*" After all, it is possible that a person might make demands on our minds or our lives *without* any sense of clear authority to back up their claims. Sometimes we hear this reflected in the derogatory responses of, "*Who died and made you King?*" or "*Who made you the boss?*" However, at other times, there are people that *do indeed* have legitimate authority to tell us what to do, even how to think, in certain areas of our lives - even if we don't like it! Parents, for example, have legitimate over their young children. The CEO of a company has legitimate levels of authority over the employees when it comes to hiring, firing, and the like.

Clearly, the issue of *authority* is a very important one. If someone demands that we must live or think differently, then they must *clearly have the legitimate authority to do so* in that particular area of our lives. The greater the demands, the greater the authority required. And this is exactly the issue that **Matthew 8:1 - 9:34** addresses.

Last week, we ended the section of *Matthew* known as the "**Sermon on the Mount,**" *Matthew 5-7*. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are, on the one hand, *basic and fundamental*; they are thick summary of the basics of Christian discipleship - a handbook, if you will, for that kind of righteous life you and I are called to strive to live as Christians, followers of Christ. And yet, on the other hand, Jesus's teachings are incredibly challenging and pervasive, to a *provocative degree*. We saw that Christ demands to be the *ultimate authority* for how we are to think, feel, and live our lives- even setting the priorities of our hearts! He demands not only that we *outwardly live* in specific ways, but even that we *inwardly do so* for the right reasons! And he made clear that the *righteous standard* for a holy, righteous, godly life is nothing short then that standard he sets for us in Himself - the very *righteousness of God, moral perfection*. In our day and age, these teachings have been around for thousands of years, now; we may have even grown hearing about them. Yet they are *no less daunting, pervasive, or demanding* for anyone

that actually strives to take them seriously! And Jesus's original disciples and audience would have clearly felt that as well! We see that in their response in **Matt. 7:28-29**: "*And when Jesus finished these saying, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching as one who had authority, not as their scribes.*"

Clearly, Jesus makes incredible demands of anyone who takes his message seriously, follows him as his disciple, and truly *believes in him*. The obvious question is: **by what authority can he demand that people think and live differently?** Why should we listen to him? The short answer is: **because he is God. and our only Savior!** And this is exactly what **Matt. 8:1-9:34** shows us. Immediately after the Sermon on the Mount closes, Matthew gives us a quick succession of *9 stories of different miracles* that Jesus performed, put into *3 groups of 3*; and in between each of those 3 sections are *two sections* about *Jesus's call for people to follow him as His disciples*. So we see the *first group 3 miracle stories* in **8:1-17**, followed by a section on the *costliness of Christ's call to follow Him* in **8:18-22**; followed by the *second group of three miracles stories* in **8:23-9:8**; that section is then followed by *another section on Christ's call to follow Him* in **9:9-17**, and finally the *last section of three miracle stories* in **9:18-32**. We know very clearly, both from the way Matthew presents these accounts and the way they match up with the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, that *Matthew is not presenting this in the chronological order* in which they happened historically, and he doesn't claim to; don't misunderstand me, they *did all happen historically!* But Matthew changes up the chronological order here and groups them together *thematically* for us, to drive home a theological point and application for us (which is why we're looking at the bulk of these two chapters in one sermon today). And his purpose in doing this is clear: these chapters show us the **1. Authority of Christ** and the **2. Response that Christ's authority demands of us: that we completely trust, obey, and follow him completely, in every area of our lives!**

These passages show us the **authority of Christ over sickness, the physical world, the spiritual world, death, even the authority to forgive us our sin** if we respond to His authority by faith! And he also has the authority to **demand obedience in every area of our life, as he calls us to follow him completely!** *There is a cost to following Jesus.* We're called to evaluate the demand Christ places on our lives by evaluating the **power and authority he demonstrates**, proving that he has every right to demand all of who we are - **and it is infinitely worth it!** So this

morning, let us walk through each of these examples of the *authority of Christ* and the *call to discipleship* he gives to us.

1. Jesus Has Authority over All of the Physical World.

Jesus's authority over nature and the physical world is *implied* in all of these miracle accounts. But this point is *explicitly highlighted and emphasized* in **chapter 8:23-27**. In this narrative, Jesus and his disciples got into a boat to cross the sea of Galilee to the other side; but while they are crossing, a "*great storm*" arose. The waves were crashing over the boat; the disciples panicked, showing that this was *clearly* a life-threatening situation! And yet Jesus was sleeping through it! The frightened disciples woke him up, urging him, "*Save us, Lord; we are perishing.*" (**8:25**). But before Jesus saves them, he responds with a mild rebuke: "*Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?*" And then, Jesus stands up and miraculously "*rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*" (**8:26**). He simply *spoke the word*, and nature itself *obeyed*; the powerful winds ceased, and the tumultuous waters stilled. Jesus powerfully demonstrated his authority over the physical world - over Nature, all of Creation, itself!

And the disciples, after witnessing this incredible display of Jesus's ***authority and power***, are *awestruck*. They say to one another, "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*" To put it simply: their response reveals why Jesus rebuked their lack of faith; they should know that *Jesus has all authority over Nature* because He has the very *authority of God, the very author sustainer of all of Creation itself!*

Jesus has such authority because *He is God*. Jesus Christ is fully man, yet also *fully God*; he can control the physical world with but a word because He is the very Word of God, through whom *all of Creation was created!* And the only proper response for us to have, in the face of such wondrous, glorious power and authority, is reverent *awe, faith, and worship*.

Secondly, we see specific displays of His authority over *disease and death*.

2. Jesus Has Authority over Disease and Death

The bulk of the miracles recorded in chapters 8 and 9 revolve around *miraculous healing and restoration*. Jesus heals a "leper" in the opening passage, **8:1-4**. Next, Jesus heals a Centurion's servant from afar with but a word in **8:5-13**. He heals Peter's mother-in-law with but a touch, and then we're given a quick summary of how he healed "*many,*" indeed, that he

“healed all who were sick” in **8:14-17**. In the second group of three miracle stories, Jesus heals a paralytic (**9:1-8**). In the third group, we see four more miraculous healings: he heals a woman who “*had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years,*” who simply believes, touches his clothes, and is healed by his power (**9:20-22**). He heals two blind men in **9:27-31** and a mute man in **9:32-34**. We see story after story, account after account of how Christ *miraculously* healed every kind of sickness, disease, and physical ailment. And as if this wasn’t enough, we see in **chapter 9:18-26** that he even *raises a dead girl back to life!*

So let us ask: **why did the Holy Spirit inspire Matthew to record each of these miraculous healings for us, and to group all together like this?** The main answer is very clear: **to demonstrate Christ’s authority.** - This is spelled out for us perhaps most clearly and explicitly in the passage about the Centurion in **8:5-13**. This Centurion is not a Jew, but a Gentile - a foreigner, associated with Rome, not part of Israel. Yet he demonstrates *incredible faith in the power and authority of Christ* here. He came to Jesus and asked him to heal his “servant” who lay “paralyzed at home.” Jesus offered to go to his house and heal it, but the Centurion stops him, confessing faith that Jesus can heal his servant from a distance, with just a word. And he explains the reason for his faith in **v.9**: “*For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.*” As a Roman Centurion, he has a legitimate sphere of authority; he represents the very power and authority of Rome, the Roman emperor, and the Roman army; acting underneath that authority, he can give orders to those who are rightly under *his* authority, knowing that it will be carried out. And he is confessing faith here that Jesus, too, represents a very real, legitimate authority, though on a much *grander and more powerful scale* than the government of Rome - Jesus represents and commands the *very authority of God!* He can speak and His Word will be accomplished. And Jesus *commends* the Centurion’s faith, saying, “*Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.*” (**v.10**). We’re clearly meant to grasp Christ’s authority on display; and we’re also meant to grasp that such divine authority *gives us every reason we need to put complete faith and trust in Christ!*

In fact, Jesus’s authority and power to heal disease and sickness displays for us that we can trust him to have the authority and power to *deliver us and bring us salvation from our sins!* **V.17** is a summary statement, telling us the *purpose* of Jesus’s healing miracles by showing us how it *fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy*. Matthew quotes **Isaiah 53:4**, “*He took our illnesses*

and bore our diseases.” This verse comes in the context of the “Suffering Servant” passage, Isaiah 53; and in fact, in the original context, refers to the Suffering Servant, Jesus, actually *assuming those illnesses and diseases upon his own body!* Matthew is showing us that Christ fulfills this, in part, by bringing *restoration and healing* to our brokenness, to the corruption of our bodies and creation because of the Fall and our sin. Ever since the first sin, all of creation is broken; sin brings sickness, physical brokenness, and even death itself; every physical affliction, every sickness and disease, all of it is a result of sin - either *directly* or *indirectly*. Matthew is showing us that Christ fulfills this, in part, by bringing *restoration and healing* to our brokenness, to the corruption of our bodies and creation because of the Fall and our sin. And this ultimately is all pointing us to the **cross** - Jesus’s death and resurrection, through which he is overturning all of the effects of **sin** - even death itself! And if we truly believe in Christ and follow Him, then we will be *raised with Him to eternal life* - He will *raise us* from death and *deliver us*, healing us completely from the brokenness of our bodies, so that we will live in glorified, sinless bodies, free from every stain and symptom of sin, every disease and affliction, forevermore!

Therefore, we can *trust Christ and follow Him completely* because He has the authority and power to *deal with our brokenness, all of the consequences of Sin, and even take away death*; He has the authority to usher us into eternal life!

[*Transition*] So then, He doesn’t just have authority over the physical world, but also *the spiritual and unseen...*

3. Jesus Has Authority over Demonic Powers

We’re given a brief report of Jesus casting out many demons in **8:16**; he delivered “*many who were oppressed by demons*” and “*cast out the spirits with a word.*” It’s no contest; he tells them to leave, and they do. At the very end of our text, **chapter 9:32-34**, when Jesus heals the mute man, it actually says that the man was mute - unable to speak - because he was “*demon-oppressed,*” or “*demonized,*” under the influence and power of a demon. Just a passing note, not all sicknesses and diseases are attributed to demons in scripture, but some definitely are, being just as true today as it was back then. And so, Jesus healed the man by *casting out* the demon that oppressed him.

And in **chapter 8:28-34**, we're given a detailed encounter between Jesus and two men who are "*demon possessed*," or again, "demonized" (the same word used for the mute man) - under the power and influence of demons. And yet the demonic power influencing and oppressing these two men was to a much more *extreme, visible, and violent level*, so that everyone in the region was afraid of them, and would not pass near the tombs where they lived. This is reminder for us that *the spiritual world* is raging all around us, even if we are blind to it; yet even if we try to ignore it, *it's there*; and we encounter the effects of spiritual warfare and demonic attacks and influence all the time, to varying degrees and different ways.

Yet this passage is also a *powerful reminder* that the power and authority of Christ **vastly outweighs** the power and influence of anything or anyone else, whether *physical or spiritual, whether of flesh or the devil!* These demons immediately recognize who Jesus is in **v.29**, crying out, "*What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*" They are not humbly submitting to him; they are still speaking with rebellious resentment. And yet, they acknowledge that Jesus is the *eternal Son of God*, who will one day pronounce their judgment and end their temporary freedom on the earth. Jesus casts them out into a herd of pigs, whom the demons drown; though the pigs die, these two men *are delivered and set free!*

It's a beautiful picture of the spiritual deliverance, restoration, and salvation Christ brings to His people! And it is a glimpse of the victory Christ won over Satan on the Cross; in His death and resurrection, Christ conquered over and defeated the powers of Hell, as a part of bringing about our salvation and deliverance! We don't have to live in fear; we simply *rest in Christ by faith*. There is no power greater; there is no other place to turn to. There is only one God - and no power or authority can come close to rivalling His!

[*Transition*] But Jesus's greatest, most impressive authority is that *he has authority to forgive us for our sins*.

4. Jesus Has Authority to Graciously Forgive Sins

In **9:1-8**, a group of friends bring a paralyzed man to Jesus to be healed. Jesus commends them for their faith; but before healing him, he does something even more remarkable: he declares, "*Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.*" The religious leaders who hear this are appalled - they take such a declaration as nothing less than **blasphemy!**

Why would they think that? Because *only God* has the authority to forgive us from our sins. All sin is, ultimately, directed *against God*; all sin is *rebellion against God's perfect love, justice, holiness, and righteous authority over all things*. Therefore, since all sin is against God and deserves His just wrath, *only God can declare someone forgiven from their sin against Him*. And Jesus has that exact authority - because He is God! And that is exactly why He came - to deal with our sin and satisfy His own wrath against it.

This is what Christ's miracles over nature, demons, disease, even death, have been pointing to all along, just as we have seen. Christ came to *overturn the power and effects of sin* by dealing with the *actual root: our sin itself!* This is the beautiful *power* displayed in the gospel of Christ! Jesus lives a perfect life in our place, assumed our own sin, and all the effects of pain, suffering, and brokenness our sin brings upon himself - he even entered into *our death!* He assumed the very wrath of God against our sin; and He was *raised from the grave, crushing the power of Sin, Satan, and Death!* And if we respond to this good news by *faith*, then we receive *forgiveness and salvation in Him*, wholly by His grace.

[Transition] And true, saving faith means truly *following Christ as His Disciples*.

5. Jesus Has Authority Over our Lives

- In between the three groups of miracles, Matthew gives us two sections on how we are to respond to Christ's authority: by *responding to Christ's call to follow him with an obedient faith*. Strikingly, we see that such discipleship Christ calls us to is both *severely costly* and *beautifully gracious*.

A. Costly Discipleship

Make no mistake: to truly respond in faith, to truly believe in Christ's authority, means striving to *follow Jesus completely, with all of our lives!* This is the Christian life that Christ calls us to; and such discipleship is *costly*. This is shown by the *two examples* of men who ask to follow Jesus in **8:18-22**.

The first man that comes, in **v. 19**, is a *scribe* - a teacher of the Law, often associated with the Pharisees. Yet here, he expresses absolute willingness to follow Christ: "*Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.*" But Jesus's response may strike us a bit odd: "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" He is not rebuking the scribe; but this isn't exactly a hearty encouragement of approval either. Instead,

Christ gives him a *word of caution, a warning*. Yes, it is absolutely good that the man wants to follow Christ! But he must also *count the cost* - for it is no light thing to follow Christ absolutely.

A second man comes up in **21**: “*Lord, let me first go and bury my father.*” This is a little different; here the man expresses willingness to follow, but gives a reason why he cannot follow *immediately* or *absolutely*. Again, Jesus responds unexpectedly: “*Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead.*” It is highly doubtful that Jesus is telling the man not honor his father; instead, Jesus seems to be making the point that we must be willing to lose all things - *even relationships with those we deeply love and care about!* - if that is what it takes to follow Christ absolutely, with our whole life.

Jesus’s answers are startling, but the point is that we must *count the cost* that true Christian discipleship places on our lives; to truly **repent, believe, and follow Christ** as a Christian is not something we do once, or every now and then; to believe the gospel and follow Christ is not something we merely *add on* to our lives, such as picking up a new hobby or joining a club. To become a Christian - to truly *repent and believe* - is to *embrace an entirely new life*, to surrender ourselves completely under the ***authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ*** - over the entirety of our lives!

This may mean *giving up* things that are important to us - our idols, our favorite sins, perhaps even our reputation or certain relationships. To follow Christ is to leave our former way of life *for a new one* - one of *faith, truly trusting in Christ and following after Him as Lord!*

But we must also understand that such a life of discipleship *is purely based on God’s glorious grace.*

B. **The beautiful grace of Christ’s call to follow him**

Immediately after forgiving the paralytic for his sins, he *calls a tax collector* to follow him as his disciple in **9:9**. This disciple is Matthew - one of the *twelve disciples*, the one who wrote this book of the Bible. But he is also a *tax collector* - a group notoriously considered *traitorous sinners*. The paragraph continues, in **9:10-13**, to show Jesus having dinner - hanging out - with more *tax collectors and sinners*.

The Pharisees who are present respond with **self-righteous indignation**. But Christ’s response is beautiful: “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.... For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*” Christ makes clear that He calls

imperfect, messy, broken sinners to follow Him as His disciples! Not people who think they have it all together (because no one really does), but those of us who are messed up *and know it!* Christ reinforces this with the paragraph that follows in **9:14-17**; this section basically says that Christ has the authority to usher in the promises of **grace** and new ways of living as God's people. In short, Christ has the *authority to claim all of our lives* as His disciples, making His call to follow Him *costly*; but He also has the *authority to graciously call sinners to follow Him, supplying the grace we need to follow* - making it simultaneously *costly and free!*

Christ's call to *follow him* is for **every single one of us**; and it comes to us *while we are sinners*. Christ does not call us to him *after we have cleaned ourselves up, gotten our lives together, and started living a righteous life*. That is the path of the *self-righteous, legalistic pharisee* - the path of thinking that *we have to earn God's favor before he wants us to follow him*. We can never truly believe and follow Christ as Christians if that is our starting point. Instead, we must start by *recognizing our sin and our sorry state - recognizing our need for God's grace* - and then *responding to Christ's call to follow him by faith!* The good news of the gospel is that Christ calls *sinful men and women* - just like you and me! - to follow after him, to become his followers, Christians, and be saved! We answer the call *by truly believing that it is all of His grace alone!* We follow him *by truly believing that the life, work, death, and resurrection of Christ* is sufficient to save all who truly repent and believe in Him! We believe in His authority - even over our lives - and so respond *in faith!* And no matter how sinful you are - no matter how messed up your life is right now, no matter what you've done or how many regrets you have - *Christ's call is for you today!*

So let us each respond to Christ's authority by submitting to Him with a *true, obedient, repentant faith!*

If you have any questions about this - about how to become a Christian, about baptism, or about church membership, I would love to speak with you. You can come now, or find me after the service. Let us pray.