

"Listen to Jesus Who Has All Authority"

Matt. 8-12

As Jesus concluded His message from the Mt. of Olives, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, we read that *"the crowds were amazed at His teaching because He taught as one having authority not as their teachers of the Law."*

This was early on in Jesus' ministry. We could think of it as His manifesto. Jesus challenged the religious authorities of the day while becoming a champion to the poor, the disabled, diseased and demon-possessed. 'Jesus says we can be blessed?' many of these would have said to their companions. This was amazing in itself because they had been taught all their life God had cursed them if there was something wrong with them (John 7:49). So, what happened after this? Who decided to follow Jesus? Who struggled to follow Jesus because not everyone did? And who refused to follow Jesus in spite of all He said and the miracles He performed? We'll answer those questions as we survey Ch.'s 8-12 but the answers we find to those 3 questions are the same answers we find today. Who follows Jesus today? Who hesitates to trust Him? What kind of people reject Jesus altogether? Hopefully as we answer these questions it will help us understand ourselves as to why we chose Jesus. It will help us relate to those who are not sure yet what to do with Jesus. And it will help us understand the anger and disregard so many have towards Jesus and Lord-willing make us wiser prayer warriors and witnesses to them.

Matthew takes this "authority" of Jesus and builds on it in the next few chapters. In Ch. 8 Jesus has authority over disease, demons and disasters and expects would be disciples to believe in and trust His authority over their lives. In Ch. 9 we see that authority extend to forgiveness of sins and even the dead as He brings Jairus' daughter back to life. In Ch. 10 Jesus gives His disciples authority to do the same things He did. In Ch. 11 Jesus has authority over John the Baptist and the Kingdom of God and invites the harassed shepherdless sheep of Israel to take His yoke upon them because His burden is light. In Ch. 12 Jesus shows he has authority over disease, the Sabbath and even the devil Himself as He answers the Pharisees' charge that Jesus was performing miracles by the power of Satan not God.

The people were so amazed at Jesus' authoritative teaching at the end of Ch. 7 that instead of crowds following Him as we read in Ch. 5, *"large crowds"* begin to follow Him in ch.8. But don't be fooled. Just because people are impressed by the authority of His teaching or the power of His miracles doesn't mean they all listened to Him and believed in Him. Not everyone acted wisely and built their life on Him as their foundation. But first, let's look at those who did believe in Jesus.

What Kind of People Followed Jesus?

Ch. 8 opens with Jesus touching and healing a leper. The leper believed Jesus could do it; he only asked if Jesus was willing to do it - wow! No less impressive than the next story, the Roman centurion who believed Jesus could heal his servant miles away only by speaking it so. Jesus commended him for his faith. He heals the demon-possessed and sick in 8:16-17. He casts out the demons from two men in The Gadarenes across the Galilee where He cast the demons into the pigs.

In Ch. 9 He calls a tax-collector named Matthew (Levi) to follow Him and he does. And Jesus has a meal with his tax-collector friends. What do lepers, Gentiles, demon-possessed and tax-collectors all have in common? They were ...

The outcasts of society (8:1-13, 28-33; 9:9-10)

... in Jesus' day. The lepers were not allowed to live in towns and villages. They had to announce "unclean" if anyone came near them. No one would touch them for fear of becoming lepers themselves. But Jesus touched him and then healed him.

Gentiles were generally despised although this one liked the Jews and did things for them. But he too was an outsider. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. And no one could deal with the demon-possessed until Jesus showed up. These guys were hanging out in tombs and were often chained. No one wanted to be near them. And everyone despised the tax-collectors. These people were the friendless, the unloved and the ones you put away from the rest of society. But they had heard that Jesus was healing people like them. They chose to believe He could do the same for them. People who are ostracised from their local culture are looking for a friend, looking for hope, looking for someone to make them feel accepted and loved for who they are. And, hoping He can change their life.

Jesus heals – and forgives the sins of – the man paralyzed whose 4 friends lowered him down from the roof. Later on, in the chapter, Jairus the synagogue ruler asks Jesus to come bring his 12-year-old daughter (Matthew short cuts the story a little and says she was dead already) back to life. Meanwhile, as the crowd is following Jesus to Jairus' house a woman with a constant blood flow issue for 12 years believes by faith if she touches the prayer tassels hanging from Jesus' cloak that she can be healed. What do all these 3 people have in common? They were . . .

The desperate (9:1-8, 18-33)

They had heard about Jesus' power to heal and give life. They had no where else to turn. Could the impossible become possible? They had tried other remedies for sure but in desperation they cried out to Jesus who they believed could do the impossible. What did they have to lose? A father would do anything to save his child. The woman had tried many ways to heal her body. The 4 friends no doubt were willing to destroy a roof to get their friend to Jesus. And their faith was rewarded. Jesus answered their prayers and met their needs. The desperate can find hope in Jesus.

Yet, some might argue, what about the average person, the people who go to work, come home and barely make a living. Their health is fine, they have friends and family and a home. These are the 12 disciples we see mentioned in Ch. 10. Jesus chose these guys. Who were they? Most were fishermen, one a former tax-collector. There was nothing wrong with a trade. It was quite common for young men to work in the family business, especially for those who didn't become a Rabbi. Young men began Torah school at an early age. They learned the Scripture. They recited the Scriptures and at their Bar Mitzvah their skills were tested and they applied to follow a Rabbi. But only a few – the brightest – were chosen. The rest often went to work with their fathers.

When Jesus called these 12 why did they leave their jobs and their families to follow Jesus? They were . . .

The dreamers and unsatisfied (Ch. 10)

The people who finished second; the people who got cut last from the team, the people whose marks were just not high enough. And they dreamed of 'if only's' and were not satisfied with the humdrum of life. They wanted more. They wanted purpose. And Jesus comes along and makes everyone feel honoured and loved. And then He said to 12 of them 'Follow Me' and they went. Better

late than never. If we have any doubts that this was not a Rabbi/ disciple relationship look at 10:24-25,

²⁴ "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master.²⁵ It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters.

Many of the people who choose to follow Jesus were the outcasts in their culture, the desperate who had turned everywhere else for hope and meaning and the 'there's got to be more to life than this' people. I would say the majority of us fit somewhere in there that we saw in Jesus real hope and real meaning that we had been looking for a long time. And someone shared the gospel with us and it clicked and we realized Jesus was the answer.

Now think about the people you work with, live around, go to school with. Know any social outcasts? Know people who are desperate for hope and meaning? Know people dissatisfied with their life, hoping they could find joy and purpose in it? Point them to Jesus. Show them He can offer them the things they are looking if they choose to believe in Him. Many of us were social outcasts or desperately looking for hope or people who knew there was something more to this life – and we found it in Jesus. There are others like us who we need to point to Jesus.

But as we know not everyone is there yet. You've shared the gospel with others and they seemed genuinely interested but not enough to make that decision. Jesus encountered the same thing.

What Kind of People Hesitate to Follow Jesus?

In the middle of these testimonies of people who trusted Jesus to change their life we have two men who approach Jesus and both say they want to follow Him. In v.18 we read,

¹⁸ When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹ Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

²⁰ Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Jesus doesn't hide the fact that to follow Him means you may not experience the comforts of this world. There may not be the earthly securities that we're used to enjoying. While its encouraging to see one of the teachers of the law wanting to follow Jesus, Jesus essentially says 'Are you willing to make sacrifices?' The teacher hesitates and in doing so doesn't choose to follow Jesus. He's not willing to make lifestyle sacrifices.

²¹ Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

²² But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

While from our perspective Jesus sounds very harsh, we have to understand the man is using a common expression of his day. 'I have to bury my father' means I am responsible for my parents' welfare. When I am done with that obligation I will be free to follow you.' But Jesus doesn't accept conditional discipleship,

Those with misplaced priorities (8:18-22)

... hesitated to follow Jesus. Jesus is Lord of the world. We owe Him our existence and our worship. As Lord of everyone His purposes come first. We already read '*Seek first the Kingdom of*

God and all these things will be given to you as well' (6:33) The 'all these things' were the staples of life; food, water and clothing. Surely Jesus would also look after our families if we have to choose between Him and our parents or children. Did He not say if we love our family more than Him we are not worthy to be His disciples? Does not Jesus love our parents, siblings and children and grandchildren more than us?

This man hesitates and he doesn't follow Jesus. People with misplaced priorities hesitate to follow Jesus and unless they reorient their priorities they will find everlasting destruction.

Who else hesitated to follow Jesus? Look at Ch. 9:14-17. Jesus is attending the monthly tax-collectors and sinners' potluck and there were all kinds of people including Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples. John has been imprisoned at this point. Listen to John's disciples as they approach Jesus;

¹⁴ Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁵ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

¹⁶ "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. ¹⁷ Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

I've never noticed this before but did you catch who John's disciples seem to identify with more than Jesus? 'We and the Pharisees'. John's followers were unsure about Jesus because John, their leader seems to doubt (as we'll see next). But John's followers are also unsure because the Pharisees held so much sway for so long. John's followers are hesitant to follow Jesus because . . .

They are insecure (9:14-17)

They are insecure because they have not fully believed Jesus is the Messiah since things haven't changed in Israel yet (from their perspective). But also, because they seem to think that they have more in common with the Pharisees at the moment than Jesus. Shouldn't we be fasting? Shouldn't we be following the Law? Surely the Pharisees can't be that far off. Haven't they been around for a long time? Have they really been misleading us all these years? Are they really that bad?

So, Jesus gives them a word picture about putting new unshrunk cloth on an old stretched out garment or new wine in old wine skins. They don't mix. You'll ruin both. Stop mixing with the wrong, old teaching of the Pharisees, they are misleading you. Don't be intimidated by their power and false authority. Jesus has all authority. He is Lord. He is pointing you to a new way of living, free from legalism and oppression.

Many people hesitate to follow Jesus because they've followed another religion or approach to Jesus all their life and so they have doubts. Can these people who I listened to all my life be wrong? What does the Word of God say? This is where insecurity usually happens because people don't see for themselves what God's Word says. John's disciples will turn around and follow Jesus because of Ch. 11.

John himself is now imprisoned. He's disillusioned. Jesus didn't set up the kingdom yet. The Pharisees and the Romans are still in power. He sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus in 11:3

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see:⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Jesus is referring to Scripture, predictions about what the Messiah would do when He comes. Like, John some people hesitate to follow Jesus because of

False expectations (11:1-15)

Many people hesitated to follow Jesus because they had false expectations about what He would do for them. Jesus assured His disciples many times that he was going to be crucified but rise on the 3rd day. He talked about His future coming back. But many people were disappointed that He didn't get rid of the Romans or the Pharisees or all suffering. Jesus even warned people in the parable of the soils that like the seed scattered where thorns and thistles grow; the thistles and weeds representing the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word. People misread Jesus' words today and have false expectations of what following Him means and many shrink away because Jesus didn't give them what they wanted.

Some of those who hesitated to follow Jesus eventually did trust Him. But some hesitated and turned away from Him. Same today. Perhaps that was your story. Initially reluctant, unsure. Your past upbringing was religious and comfortable and so you struggled to accept that it was not based on the Word. Or you wrestled with priorities for a bit until you finally gave Jesus control. There are many others like that out there who are unsure, who have had bad teaching and false expectations or a religious background who need to hear the truth of God's Word.

And then there's those who just reject Jesus outright,

What Kind of People Refuse to Follow Jesus?

There's a sad response by the town where the two demon-possessed men were healed, on the east side of Galilee. Jesus changes these two men completely. These formerly chained, slashing, naked lunatics were now dressed, quiet and in their right minds. Mark's account reports that the towns people were afraid when they saw this? Afraid?? Afraid of what?

Afraid to change (8:34; 9:14-17)

They saw what Jesus did and they didn't want it. They don't want change like that.

³⁴ *Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.*

People like that tell us they are glad for us that "we found religion" but that's too much for them. All this Jesus talk makes them uncomfortable. It scares them because they don't want to change. Even though their life may be full of problems or very discouraging they strangely find comfort in the routine they've made for themselves. Sure they'd love to improve their life but not if it means following Jesus. That's a little much.

The classic Jesus rejecters were the religious leaders. Why do people like that reject Jesus and the gospel?

Because they think they are better (11:16-19)

As Jesus was defending who John the Baptist was – the Elijah who came before the Messiah – He rebukes the religious leaders of the day who would not accept John’s ministry or Jesus as Messiah. He said in 11:16

16 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17 "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

We know Jesus is referring to the religious leaders here because they were the ones discrediting John and Jesus to the crowds. Jesus’ says they are like children who refuse to play games with everyone else. Why? Because they are above that. That’s why, as the religious “authorities” they felt they needed to discredit John and Jesus so that the people would continue to listen to them. Then in Ch. 12 they say the same for Jesus.

Saying someone had a demon was pretty drastic. That’s essentially saying ‘they are of Satan.’ But in Ch. 12:25-32 Jesus said that doesn’t make sense. Why would He be doing good things if we were Satan? Wouldn’t that be counterproductive? He accused the religious leaders of blasphemy of the Spirit which is to see the clear evidence of Jesus’ deity by the miracles He performed and reject them outright, saying it is of Satan and not of God. People refuse to follow Jesus

Because they reject the truth (11:20-24; Ch. 12)

We see this many times in Ch. 12 when Jesus picks heads of grain on the Sabbath or heals a man on the Sabbath and the religious leaders jump all over Him. And then they have the audacity of asking Him to perform a miracle in 12:38.

In Matthew 8-12 Jesus’ authority is affirmed. We see some response, others doubt and the religious leaders call Jesus a son of the devil. At this point Jesus changes His approach. He speaks to His disciples in parables more to hide things from the leaders who don’t want to listen anyway. He takes them aside more to teach them what He wants them to know. He spends more time with those who believe in Him.

As we’ve surveyed these chapters we get a better feel for how people respond to Jesus. Who around you are the outcasts, the desperate and the unsatisfied with where their life is? Perhaps they are ripe to receive Jesus. They may just need to hear the gospel. And who are people who are open to Jesus but are insecure, misplaced their priorities or have false expectations? They need a clearer picture of Jesus. And what do we do with the supposed rejectors of Jesus? We pray for them and stand up humbly yet firmly for the truth praying that God may open their hearts toward Jesus like God did with the apostle Paul who called himself a violent man and blasphemer before Jesus changed His life. Jesus loves everyone and makes the same invitation to all to come to Him and take His yoke so you can find rest for your soul.

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If you have any comments or questions about this sermon please contact us at olivet@rideau.net