

Pastor Jim Lincoln

August 2, 2009

Jesus' Authority Cont.: Jesus' First Sunday in Ministry (Mark.1:32-45)

Instead of using His authority to advance His status, intimidate and subjugate others, Jesus used His authority to serve, liberate, honor and love others. We saw this last Sunday with the way Jesus used His authority with the man who had the unclean spirit in the synagogue service at Capernaum. As created beings we have all been authored and that means that we were made for authority. You will always be serving someone or some thing. Here's the question: "Who or what is authoring your life?" or "Who do you submit to?" The man with the unclean spirit was so obsessed and possessed by the unclean spirit that he no longer even had a voice. Whatever it was: ambition, passion, some goal, or cause, ruled his life. The obsession was scripting his life not the Lord or himself. And Jesus set the man free because any other authority would use him for its own ends and not for God's nor for his good. When we become driven by anything other than Jesus, our lives become distorted and that thing begins to author our lives. To prove that He has authority over unclean spirits, Jesus expelled that uncleanness from the man's life.

Later that afternoon, Jesus used His authority to heal Peter's mother-in-law. These are the first of many acts where Jesus demonstrated His authority over all things and how God exercises His authority, which is to heal, liberate, honor and serve. As news spread around Capernaum of this new kind of authority people rushed to Peter's house, bringing the sick and deranged to Jesus. The law said the Sabbath ended when three stars came out in the night sky. So when the sun had set and the stars were blinking above, people started coming. Mark says, "That evening, after sunset, the people brought all the sick and demon-possessed." The whole town gathered there and stood at the door of Peter's house. As they did, Jesus healed many and many who were harassed by demons. Try to picture the mounds of bandages, cots, and medicines piled up everywhere. Imagine the gladness and joy that replaced grief and sadness. Picture in your mind how their faces were transformed. The bed-ridden were tossing their mattresses, the lame were throwing their crutches into the air, the comatose became lucid chatterboxes, and the deranged were calmed with sound minds. The events of that Saturday and Sunday in Capernaum would never be forgotten. Here we are over two thousand years later talking about the day that sleepy, obscure dinky fishing village was visited by the Messiah, the Son of God revealing to the world what God's authority is really like. We don't know how long into the night Jesus served the large crowd. But we do know, beginning in verse 35, what happened early on Sunday morning. Jesus' authority or His power is still the major theme here and I see three additional characteristics of that authority.

First, *What is the source of Jesus' authority or where does it come from?*

Second, *How does it show up on this first Sunday of his ministry?*

Third, *How do we lay hold of it?*

The Source of Jesus' Authority

First, Let's look at the source of Jesus' power and authority (1:35-39).

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went of to a solitary place, where he prayed." 1:35

What does Jesus do at the time of peak demand when He has the opportunity to increase His popularity, productivity, and the opportunity to make His mark? He gets up before dawn, leaves the crowds behind, and seeks a place of quiet solitude and prayer. The phrase translated, "solitary place" (erhmos) uses the word from

which we get our English word *arid*. Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and left the village surrounded by the comfort and amenities of life and put Himself in an arid or desert place to be alone with God the Father and He prayed. The source of His authority, which was an authority that serves, honors, heals, and liberates, was anchored and *tied to the vitality of His fellowship and communion with His heavenly Father*. For Jesus, nothing was more satisfying, motivating, necessary, and invigorating than to be with and nurture His conversation with the Father. The only way Jesus was able *to exercise the right kind of authority* was to sear His mind and heart daily with the white-hot fact that God is His Father and that He is the Father's Son. Jesus ran to and pulled His chair up to that banquet table every day.

Why does He get up so early and miss out on much needed sleep? Why does He get away from His friends? Why does He remove himself from the moment of His greatest opportunity for fame, success, and popularity? He does so because He wants to and because He is free to do so. Unlike Jesus we're often bound up by a thousand other ambitions that seem more important to us. Jesus wanted to be with the One He knows to be the greatest source of love, righteousness, justice, wisdom, truth, love, and service and that is His heavenly Father.

Charlie Drew once quoted his mother-in-law about parenting. She said, "When you become a parent, for a lifetime, you are only as happy as your happiest child." A parent's happiness is bound up with the happiness of her children. Now, if this is true with selfish, flawed, and broken human parents, how much more must it be true for the flawless and perfect love of God for those He calls his children? The reason Jesus prayed was because He is the Son of God. Remember the love of the triune God made audible and visible at Jesus' baptism where the Father *covered* the Son with words of love and affection, "*This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*" Remember the Holy Spirit who envelops Jesus with His power and presence confirming that *Jesus would not be doing His ministry alone.*

Mark is once again telling us about the real Jesus and the real gospel. The source of Jesus' authority flows out of the love that has always been exploding in the interior of the Triune God from all eternity. Mark is showing us that this new authority we see in Jesus is also the projection of love that fills and defines the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Why did Jesus pray? He did so because the authority of the gospel has its origins and source in the *community* of love not in an individual display of raw power. To hear and savor every word of the Father and to do the will of His heavenly Father—this is Jesus' food and drink. To live by every word that proceeds from the Father—this is His life. I suppose you could say that He prayed because *He ought to have prayed* and that prayer is *the right thing* to do. And if Jesus *needed* to pray, then how much more ought we to *need* to pray. Yes, of course prayer is what we ought and need to do. Yet, Jesus was never more alive than when hearing the Father's words and doing His will. How about you? When are you most alive?

When we read about the authority of Christ we are reading about the very interior of God from all eternity that is absolutely exploding with love, honor, humility, and selfless service. And this triune God, this fountainhead of perfect love, has determined to put in motion that which will draw us into the circle of that love forever and ever. This is the source and passion of Jesus' authority. Jesus said, "Father, I want them to be one just as you and I are one. I pray that the love you have for me will be in them."¹[1]

We asked several weeks ago how you would feel if you find someone you adore and you think more of this person than anyone else in the world and you would do anything for that person, and you discover that

¹[1] Alvin Plantinga writes this about God, "The persons within the Godhead, exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to each other. Each harbors the others' at the center of God's being in constant movement and overture and full acceptance each person envelops and encircles the other."

person feels the same way about you? That would be heaven because that's what heaven is like. This is what God feels all the time in God's self. Jesus is compelled by that love to pray. This is what calls, inspires, and drives Him to pray. And when we fail to pray, we're revealing that we must not yet be hearing and laying hold of that love. Because when you really feel loved, honored, healed, resurrected, and liberated, cherished, treasured, and prized by someone, you don't run away from that person for very long.

I'm always mystified when someone says, "Prayer works!" What does that mean? Jesus prayed, "Father let this cup pass, but not my will but Yours." Much of what I hear about prayer today turns God into some kind of heavenly vending machine. You put in your request pull the knob and out comes your answer. People say, "Prayer works." I guess I'm saying that to be like Jesus you ought to pray and we often even receive what we have asked for. However, the mere obligation or expectation of getting what we want is insufficient without laying hold of the love that drove Jesus to make prayer such a priority in His life. To tell you that prayer will work for you might also cause you to miss the communion of love that Jesus sought in prayer. Do you know you are a child of God? Do you have a good idea of what that means? Do you know that God has committed Himself to you to be your Heavenly Father forever with perfect and eternal love, care, and support? This was the source of Jesus' authority. Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing by Himself." (Jn.5:19). He said, "The words I say are not my own. Rather it is the Father living in me who is doing His work." (John 14:10). Jesus' authority was not in the raw display of power. Rather, compelled by the Father's love, Jesus found the source of His authority in a daily prayer and conversation with the Father. How about us?

Second, How did Jesus' authority show up?

Notice that Jesus' authority showed up in both word and deed. Now, the disciples soon figured out where Jesus was and they began to hunt everywhere for Him. When they found Him, they exhorted Him saying, "*Everyone is looking for you!*" (37) Their way is still very different from His. They are good fishermen. You cast the net while the fish are biting; you strike when the iron is hot. They want Jesus to capitalize on His popularity. It's a mild rebuke, "What are you doing out here taking a break when all the action is in town? Let's get back to the village." Luke adds that they, "tried to keep him from going away." They were urging Jesus, "Please don't leave us!" Meet our needs through your miracles! Let's get back to work now." Jesus in essence said, "Look, I'll meet both the needs that you know you have and I'm also going to meet the needs that you don't yet know you have. I'm not just going to call people to be healed, fed, and delivered. I'm also going to preach the word of the kingdom."2[2]

Our need for physical healing from sickness, disease, poverty, injustice, and hunger is apparent and universally acknowledged. However, our need to repent, trust Christ as Savior, and to be converted is not so apparent nor universal. Jesus says here, "Let us go elsewhere that I may preach for *this is what I came for.*" In other words, the miraculous signs pointed to a greater miracle of eternal health, reconciliation with God, justice, peace, and healing with God and others. The greatest need people have is the need—as sinners, to be reconciled to God, liberated from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and to be restored to eternal life over eternal death and eternal separation from God. Jesus calls people to repent, believe in Him, and live forever in heaven instead of hell. Now that's a message that people will not readily acknowledge without a preacher. So, He says, I must preach for that is why I have come.

Jesus uses His power and authority differently than most. He doesn't use His power to satisfy all the felt needs of people. He's not naïve. He knows what people want. He knows that they are running after Him only because of the miracles and what He will mean to their personal and nationalistic hopes and dreams. The signs

2[2]I first heard this explanation from Rev. Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York.

of His authority became ends in themselves. Although Jesus healed many in Capernaum, He refused to let His disciples or the people of Capernaum author Him or own Him as their miracle worker and faith healer.

How does Jesus authority show up? He uses His authority to both preach and to heal. He will meet needs that we know we have and He will meet needs that we as yet don't know we have through preaching. Even though He names preaching as His priority, notice that He continues to heal. With Jesus there were no words without deeds and no deeds without words. He brings relief to those who suffer and He calls all to repentance. He brings relief and He calls sinners to repent. Is this how we minister to the world? It's so easy to fall off the horse on one side of the other in this respect. Some ministries are only about offering relief. Others are only about preaching repentance. Any time we find ourselves calling others to repent is that call matched by our best efforts to be compassionate and to bring relief? Do others sense this in us? His ministry is a perfect balance of evangelism and care. Jesus' authority showed up in the perfect balance of bringing relief to suffering and calling sinners to repent. So, the source of Jesus ministry is His interior love relationship with the Father. The outcome of His ministry is to meet needs that are obvious through miracles and to meet needs that are not so apparent through preaching.

How We Lay Hold of Jesus' Authority

Finally, the leper shows us how a person lays hold of Jesus' authority.

“And there came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and falling on his knees before Him and saying to Him, If you are willing, you can make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out [His] hand, and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed. And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.” (1:40-42)

Now, leprosy was much more than just a disease. Leprosy was a total condition that affected your body, psychological health, your relationships, and your legal and religious privileges. Leprosy gradually destroyed the body. Socially you were a pariah. Because it was thought to be contagious, lepers were quarantined and isolated from others. When coming near people lepers were required to cry out, “Leper coming! Leper coming!” Lepers were punished if they came into a crowded place. Religiously, they were excluded from worship. One of the rabbinical judgments of the day declared that if a leper was under a tree and a clean person passed stepping within the shadow circle of that tree, then the clean person became unclean. Anyone who came near lepers was punished. Leprosy meant that you were never touched, hugged, held, kissed, or intimate with your loved ones in any physical way.

What did Jesus do? Jesus stretched out His hand, touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed, and immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.” We know that Jesus didn't need to touch him for the man to be clean. Jesus has the authority to speak healing and it will be done. However, Jesus, “filled with compassion,” touched a man who has been deprived of affection perhaps all of his life. Jesus reached out and said, “Let's get close.” Jesus was moved within the depths of His being by love. What do you think that touch meant to this man emotionally? To be touched righteously and tenderly from a heart of deep love is a precious and powerful thing.

One of the Nazi experiments during WWII was to see what would happen to babies if they were taken from their parents and left to survive on food and drink but without any touch or affection. Every infant died of marasmas or a failure to thrive. Beloved, there is much unrighteous touching in the world; so I want to be careful. But there is a great need for righteous touching out of compassion for the need to be loved. I'm thinking primarily within families, spouses, parents, children, and siblings. Growing up I watched family members who owned pets. And it was amazing to me how tender and affectionate a parent, husband, or wife

could be toward a family pet and yet routinely withhold that same affection from a wife, husband, or a child. I saw parents stroking and petting the family dog and yet withhold that affection from their spouses and children. Why not try a little tenderness. What are you afraid of? Is there any compassion, tenderness, or affection? Jesus used His authority to demonstrate tender affection.

But, how did the man lay hold of Jesus' healing authority? Two things: First, He did so by offering unconditional acknowledgment to Jesus' lordship. Notice how the man approached Jesus. He did so saying, "If you are willing?" He didn't say, "I claim it by faith so you must heal me." He didn't say, "If you heal me I will serve you." He said, "If you are willing, if you think it is best, I trust you to know what is best. I trust you to know what I need. You do what *you* see fit and not what I demand to be fit. If you are willing I respectfully ask that you make me clean." The man with leprosy drops all conditions. To come to the real Jesus is to give up my right to decide, to tell God what to do, what I need, or even know what is best for me. I can only come to Jesus with what my heart desires and say, "if you are willing, if you think it is wise, if you choose to do this, Him. I put myself unconditionally at your will, mercy, and service." What is this man doing? He is acknowledging Jesus as Lord without any conditions. No bargaining. No deals. Just, if you are willing. He is believing on Jesus as Jesus really is: The Christ, the Son of God.

Second, notice what Jesus doesn't do. Up to this point in history whenever clean and unclean came in contact with each other the clean became unclean. That's why if you came into contact with a leper you had to fulfill ceremonial regulations to become clean again. But notice what Jesus doesn't do. He tells the leper to go to the priests, who can certify that he didn't have leprosy. But Jesus doesn't go Himself! By every rule and regulation Jesus was supposed to go and do His own ceremonial washings. By not going, Jesus was distinguishes Himself from every other person who has ever lived. He was saying that He doesn't need what every other person needs. If this is not true of Jesus, nothing could be more arrogant. It's a claim no sane Jew had ever made. For the first time in human history *the unclean became clean but the clean did not become unclean*. By not going through any cleansing ceremony Jesus was saying that he is CLEANNES personified.

Listen, it doesn't matter who you are, what you have done, how bad it is or what's been done to you, how inadequate you feel, or how ashamed you are, if you come into a saving connection with Jesus you are clean! You are clean forever! It doesn't matter how stained or how tainted you are, Jesus is cleanness personified without the possibility of ever being stained. The scribes had a method for getting clean, but Jesus is cleanness; Jesus is the answer to which all the methods pointed to; He is the cleanness, the righteousness, the holiness, the goodness of God, and this distinguishes Him and His authority from all others.

Notice that the leper couldn't keep a secret. Even though Jesus told him not to tell anyone, he told everyone he saw. As a result and after a manner, Jesus and the leper changed places. Jesus now takes his place. Now, Jesus can't go into the cities and inhabited places anymore and the leper gets to go right in the heart of the inhabited places. Because Jesus is now considered a pariah by the religious authorities, they will use their authority to kill Him. This pictures what was to come. For Jesus was crucified outside the city gates on the garbage heap at the place of lepers. Jesus became unclean. He was excluded as a sinner so that we can be taken in as clean. God made Him to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God. Our uncleanness does go to Him but not because He is sinful, but because He is loving and takes our sin on Himself so that we can be forever clean. This is how you get to that prayer life and this is how you lay hold of Jesus' authority to make you clean. You lay hold of a love that that makes you want to be with someone who loves you more than you can possibly imagine.

So, make the offer of unconditional surrender to King Jesus and know and receive the amazing offer of His unconditional love and be clean forever.