

When Jesus began teaching in Capernaum, the crowds immediately recognized that there was something different about the way Jesus spoke. They were amazed because He taught them as one who had authority, and not as one of the Scribes.

What was the authority Jesus possessed that other teachers of the law did not have? The word that Mark used for authority means two things. First, authority is the right to speak. I cannot negotiate a trade between the Cleveland Browns and the Pittsburgh Steelers. I do not have the right to speak for either team. General Manager Mike Holmgren could call General Manager Kevin Colbert and work out a trade because they have been employed to speak on behalf of their teams. They have the authority to speak for their teams.

The second aspect of authority is the ability to bring to pass what is spoken. In 1962, President Kennedy committed the nation to go to the moon within the decade. The leader of any nation could have made that same statement, but President Kennedy led the only nation that at the time had the money and the technology to reach that goal. President Kennedy's authority was more than just the right to speak for the nation. He also spoke knowing that those who invested that authority in him could make it happen. The authority the people of Capernaum recognized in Jesus was the right to speak, and the power to bring to pass the things that He said.

The people were used to the way the Scribes taught. The Scribes knew the law backward and forward. They knew how the law had been interpreted by the great teachers who had come before them. They would recite the law, and then the commentaries on the law, then they might draw a conclusion based on the law and the interpretation of the law by respected scholars of previous generations, but the teachers of the law in Jesus' time had no authority of their own. They could talk about the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven, but could do nothing to bring the Kingdom. They could talk about the problem of sin, but could not deliver people from the guilt of sin. They could talk about the results of evil, but could do nothing to overcome the forces of evil.

The crowds noticed that Jesus was very different. He interpreted the law in ways that it had not been interpreted before. Jesus once taught, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you." When Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, He showed that He had the authority to explain what the Sabbath was all

about. When Jesus healed the people whose sins He had forgiven, He demonstrated that He had the authority to say, “Your sins are forgiven.” On that day in Capernaum, when Jesus cast the demon out of the man in the synagogue, He demonstrated that He had the authority to say that the Kingdom of Heaven had come. By what authority did Jesus say and do these things? He did not cite any precedent. He said and did these things by His own authority.

Jesus changed the way that the Sabbath should be interpreted. He made pronouncements about unclean foods. He even assumed the authority to forgive those who had committed sins. Anyone could have said they had that kind of authority, but Jesus demonstrated that He indeed had the authority by bringing to pass the things that He said.

This was exactly what the people of Israel needed. They needed someone who could cut through centuries of precedent and get them to the heart of the law. They were burdened by their corporate and individual guilt over having broken their covenant with God. They needed someone who had the authority to forgive their sins. They were oppressed by demonic forces of anger, fear, greed, doubt, and ultimately death. They needed someone who could defeat the forces that oppressed them. They needed someone who could not only speak about the Kingdom of Heaven, they needed someone who could bring the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus was the one who could do that. Those who embraced His authority were delivered from guilt and fear and anger and hopelessness. He had the authority they were looking for, and He has the authority so many in our own world are looking for. If we will receive His authority, Jesus will bring the Kingdom of Heaven to our lives.

We live in a world that still needs someone to speak with that authority. World renown psychologist Alice Miller wrote, “Many people suffer all their lives from this oppressive feeling of guilt . . . stronger than any intellectual insight, no argument can overcome these guilt feelings, for they have their beginnings in life's earliest period . . . ” We live in a world that needs someone to authoritatively say, “Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more.” Jesus has that authority.

We live in a world that needs someone with the authority to speak to morally ambiguous situations. Science has made many wonderful advances, but it has presented just as many questions about how far we should take those advances. What are the appropriate uses for our advances in genetics? What treatments do we

stop when death is imminent? When do we stop them? Sometimes the answers are clear. Sometimes they are not as clear as we would like.

With all of this moral ambiguity, it's no wonder there are conflicting voices in our society and in the church. Sometimes these conflicting voices rise from a rejection of the clear moral teachings of scripture. Sometimes they rise from an honest disagreement that cannot easily be solved by a clear reading of scripture. We need someone who can speak with authority. Jesus can speak with the authority to lead us to the truth.

We live in a world that needs someone who can speak with authority to the forces of evil. Many theologians and biblical scholars in the 20th Century rejected the existence of demonic forces. They tried to explain it away as mental illness or epilepsy, or some other natural affliction. At the end of the 20th Century, and in the first decade of this century, some are coming to the conclusion that we cannot dismiss the idea that there are true forces of evil that work to destroy God's good creation. I have seen irrational fears, unreasonable anger, or intense temptation rise in too many lives at just the wrong time to think that it is a matter of coincidence. We need someone with the authority to drive these demonic forces away before they destroy God given dreams, and godly lives. Jesus has the authority to overcome the forces of evil that plague so many lives today.

Jesus is the one who has the authority to speak to our lives, and He still speaks. He speaks through the pages of scripture. If you read scripture with the desire and openness to hear His voice, you cannot read very far before a passage takes hold of you and Jesus speaks. He speaks through His Holy Spirit given to all believers and to the church as a whole when we are open to the Spirit's voice. Jesus is still speaking, and we can hear Him if we are ready to allow Him to have authority over our lives. We can hear Him if we are willing to accept His authority. If we are ready to recognize His authority, He can bring forgiveness when we are plagued by guilt. He can bring peace and clarity to overcome our sense of ambiguity. He can cut through the competing voices telling us what is right. Most of all, He can take control over the forces of evil that seek to destroy us. He can cast out irrational fear and uncontrolled anger. He can provide strength to overcome intense temptations. As the Son of God, He has the right to speak to us. As the Son of God, He has the power to bring the Kingdom He promises.