

The Authority of Jesus

Jesus was, and is, both kind and compassionate. But we would be wrong to think him simply a sentimental philanthropist. His kindness arose out of strength. When he spoke, there was a decisiveness in his tones and words that revealed power and authority. We read that:

The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Matthew 7:28–29).

Authority in Teaching

It is important to consider Jesus' authority, for if his claims are well founded we can accept his teaching with confidence.

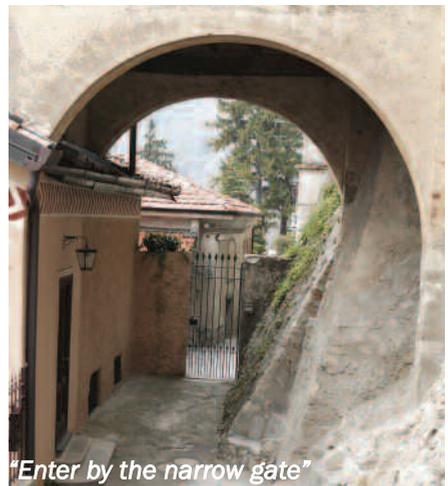
His authority was not the sort that comes from having just learned a great deal: the authority of Jesus was essentially a personal one, an authority that came because of who he was. This comes out clearly in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), where Jesus teaches very clearly about how men and women should live, and about God's purpose with them. Jesus implicitly makes profound claims about himself, as well as definite pronouncements concerning future things as they affect his hearers.

When Jesus begins by saying who are 'blessed', he does so with finality; there is no argument, but a simple statement of fact that the poor in spirit, the meek, the seekers after righteousness, the merciful and the poor in heart are blessed. He tells us why. He says these qualities of life are

good because those who possess them have qualities that belong to a future life. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (that is, God's kingdom, as the parallels in the other gospels show); and they shall see God. An ordinary teacher cannot make such statements: these are based on God's purpose. Yet Jesus always speaks with the assurance of one with full knowledge on the subject. The same knowledge of God's purpose is seen in his saying that the Father knows the needs of His children, and that those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness will have all they need (Matthew 6:32–3).

Authority Over the Future Life

Some of his sayings in these chapters specifically refer to the conditions upon which men and women can enter a future life. He indicates that the conditions will not be easy and will not evoke a popular response.



“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

Perhaps the most astonishing of his claims concern his own relationship to man’s destiny.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Jesus does not accept anyone claiming to follow him, who does not live obediently in the way he instructs. It is God’s will that must be done; however Jesus is clearly personally involved in judging the issue. He is involved directly as the means by which God makes, communicates and carries out His decisions. Not only this, but Jesus explains that his words are the basis upon which men and women’s future will be determined.

Introducing the story of the two builders, Jesus says:

“Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock... But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand” (Matthew 7:24–26).

It is no wonder then, that the men and women who heard Jesus recognized the authority with which he taught them. This was not man-made or self-acclaimed authority, this was the authority from association with God.

Explaining His Authority

So what was the ultimate source of this authority? He tells us himself – he is the Son of God, sent by God with a message to give and a work to do. Both the message and the work are fundamental to the fact that, in Jesus, God offers men and women everlasting life. Take a selection of statements from John’s gospel on this subject:

Speaking of himself, Jesus said: *“For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:34–36).*

Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28).

The tremendous importance of such a message is confirmed, as is the effect of rejecting it: *“He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).*

Jesus claimed a ‘double’ authority for his message:

- ❖ Since it was given to him by God, it has the authority of the Almighty Himself;
- ❖ As the Son of God, his words have importance, coming from one so great.

The Evidence

The authority of Jesus was shown throughout his teaching and life amongst the people of Israel. We will consider two examples, which resonate with the 'double authority' described above.

Jesus demonstrated his authority in the miracles that he performed. These are called 'signs' in John 20:30, and this is exactly what they were.

The miracles or signs that Jesus carried out were clearly beyond human power and could only come from God. Consider him raising Lazarus from the dead, feeding 5000 people with five loaves and two fishes, and stilling the storm on Lake Galilee. In these, God was showing that He had sent Jesus, confirming his authority. The apostle Peter confirms this to those listening in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' ascension to heaven:

"Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst" (Acts 2:22).

The second example is also used by Peter in Acts 2, and is Jesus' resurrection. In verses 25–36 he uses connections to Psalms 16 and 110 to show that by raising Jesus from the dead, and by afterwards receiving him into heaven, God was showing Jesus to be *'both Lord and Christ'*.

Jesus did rise from the dead, a fact which was witnessed by well over 500 people, some of whom wrote down their testimony which we can read today in 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. In this God was demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah, or Anointed). Not only that, but the resurrection,



epitomised by the empty tomb, was also an assurance that Jesus is the coming king of the world. It was another apostle, Paul, who proclaimed in Athens:

"He [God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

The authority of Jesus was clear to his listeners and to those who read his words in the Bible today. This authority came from who he was – the Son of God, and from the things he said – the message and word of God. The things he said were borne out by the things he did and his resurrection from the dead. We can accept his teaching and build our lives around it with confidence.

John Carter

*From 'The Call Of Christ: His Offer Of
Life Beyond The Grave'*