



“Teaching Which Has Authority”
(Matthew 7:28-29)

Introduction: You can always tell the quality of someone’s preaching by the effect it has on its hearers. George Whitefield, commenting in his *Journals* about the first time he preached, wrote, “Last Sunday, in the afternoon, I preached my first sermon in the church of St. Mary-le-Crypt, where I was baptized, and also first received the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Curiosity, as you may easily guess, drew a large congregation together upon this occasion. The sight at first a little awed me. But I was comforted with a heartfelt sense of the divine presence, and soon found the unspeakable advantage of having been accustomed to public speaking when a boy at school, and of exhorting the prisoners and poor people at their private houses while at the university. By these means I was kept from being daunted overmuch. As I proceeded I perceived the fire kindled, till at last, though so young and amidst a crowd of those who knew me in my childish days, I trust I was enabled to speak with some degree of gospel authority. Some few mocked, but most seemed for the present struck; and I have since heard that a complaint was made to the bishop that I drove fifteen mad the first sermon! The worthy prelate wished that the madness might not be forgotten before next Sunday.” Poor preaching doesn’t affect people. It doesn’t stir their minds or their emotions. It neither causes them to think nor to feel. But good preaching does both. It makes them think and feel, whether they accept what the preacher says or not. Tonight, I want us to look at the effect which Christ’s preaching had on those who heard Him and why it had this effect. Matthew tells us,

Those who heard it were astonished, because He spoke with authority.

I. First, let’s look at their reaction. Matthew writes, “The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching.”

- A. They didn’t respond to Christ’s preaching with indifference, but with amazement.
 - 1. They didn’t walk away thinking that they had heard the same message a year ago from their Rabbi. These weren’t simply the same ideas that were being rehashed. Certainly, the things Jesus said were not said to tickle ears, but to reveal the truth.
 - a. So much of the preaching that goes on today is just a lot of nice ideas and stories strung together to make people feel good. It can hardly be said to create astonishment. Most people leave their churches today unchallenged and unchanged.
 - b. But there was something radically different about Christ’s preaching. Matthew tells us that the crowds were astonished. John tells us on another occasion that some soldiers, when they were asked by the chief priests and Pharisees to bring Jesus to them, but then showed up empty-handed, said, “Never did a man speak the way this man speaks” (John 7:46).
 - 2. There was something different about Jesus, which created amazement, something that caused them to wonder.
 - a. Typically, people don’t stop to think about the ordinary, mundane things of life. An ordinary person walking down the street in ordinary clothes is very unlikely to draw much attention. An ordinarily gifted speaker, who speaks about something we hear all the time, is sure not to leave a lasting impression.
 - b. But there was something about Jesus which was not ordinary. Something that made people stop and pay attention.
- B. But what was it?
 - 1. It wasn’t the way Jesus looked, for their culture was not driven by appearance as our is. I once saw a T-shirt that had a picture of Jesus on it just coming up from the waters of His baptism, where He made out to look like a muscular surfer. Some believe that there had to be something outstanding about the way He looked, since this is what is so important to us. But the Bible really makes no reference at all to His appearance, except in His sufferings.
 - 2. It wasn’t His education, for Christ had not been to Rabbanic School. He was the Son of the carpenter.

3. But it was what He taught. It was His doctrine, His teaching.
 - a. I think that this can be very instructive for us today, for how often are we affected by public teaching?
 - b. For years public speaking was one of the most important forms of entertainment, from the Roman and Greek orators, down to the greatest speakers of the earlier part of this century. I don't mean by entertaining that it was funny, but it was pleasurable. It was enjoyable.
 - c. This is one of the reasons so many turned out to hear George Whitefield when he came to America to preach during the Great Awakening. This is why so many people walked, ran or rode for miles to hear him. This is why even Benjamin Franklin went out to hear him. He wanted to see if this Whitefield was as powerful and persuasive an orator as he had heard. This is also why there were so many who would sit and listen to someone like Jonathan Edwards preach a very searching sermon that sometimes took upwards of three hours to deliver. They didn't have to be torn away from their sports games, their magazines, their televisions and computer games. They didn't have anything like this. Most people owned a Bible, and perhaps a few religious books, and maybe some local newspapers. This was one of the reasons why going to the church meetings was so important. Not only were they there to hear what God was speaking to them in His Word -- which was by far the most important reason --, they were also there to be stirred and moved by the preacher. They wanted to be taught, encouraged, admonished and challenged to do what the Lord wanted them to do. At least they did if their hearts were right.
 - d. But how entertaining is public speaking today? Very few find much pleasure in it anymore. For the most part, it is used only to convey information to interested parties. Now that there are so many forms of entertainment to compete with, it is difficult to get people to listen and enjoy it. This is why so many churches today have added so many forms of entertainment to the worship services, hoping that this will attract the people long enough to be able to get their fifteen minute sermon in, which is usually watered down so that it won't offend anyone and send them back to their TVs.

5. The point here is that these people turned out because they wanted to hear Jesus. And what they heard Him preach was one of the greatest sermons of all time (since Jesus preached more than one), by the greatest preacher of all time (for who could preach better than Christ?), and were amazed at what they heard.

II. Matthew also goes a little further to tell us what it was about His teaching that they were amazed at. He writes, "For He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." His teaching was qualitatively different from that of the scribes.

- A. Now who were these scribes, and how did they teach?
 1. Originally the scribes were the secretaries of state, who prepared and issued decrees in the name of the king.
 - a. There were lesser scribes as well who were also writers on a more personal level. Baruch, for instance, wrote down the words which Jeremiah spoke to him, so that he could deliver them to the king.
 - b. During the time of the captivity, since there were no longer any kings to write for, they began to turn their attention to the Law, and began to copy it. And of course as they did, they came to know it pretty well. They became experts. And they also began to teach it.
 2. And how did they teach the Law?
 - a. We're not really given any examples, but we can say with some certainty that they probably taught it as well as an unconverted seminary professor teaches his subject.
 - b. They knew their subject well and could speak with a great deal of authority. But they were strangers to its power, because they were strangers to the grace of God.

- B. So what was different about Christ's teaching? Matthew says that it was different in that He was teaching them as having authority, which implies that the scribes didn't. This probably doesn't mean that their pontifications were simply cold and lifeless. Even the unconverted can sometimes

speak very movingly. Matthew is probably pointing to something else.

1. Some have suggested that the difference was in the content, and this certainly would have been true.
 - a. As I said, the more you know about something, the more you can speak with authority about it.
 - b. Christ certainly spoke with more authority about His subject and with greater depth, because He had a deeper knowledge than that of the scribes. He had a divine knowledge, a knowledge communicated to Him by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Now remember, Christ as a man did not have access to the knowledge He possessed as God. If He did, then He would have been a man who had infinite knowledge, the knowledge of the divine Being. But this can't be true. Christ became a man in every sense of the word. He had the same limitations we had. The only exception was that He had no sin. He still possessed that limitless knowledge in His divine nature. But He didn't have access to it in His human nature.
 - d. What knowledge He did have beyond that of His human nature was communicated to Him by the Spirit of God, in probably the same way, although with more power and glory, as He did with the prophets of old.
 - e. Certainly, we would have to say the content of Christ's teaching was different than that of the scribes. But this is not primarily what Matthew had in mind.

2. Others have suggested that the difference was the way in which Jesus spoke, that He spoke with the authoritative dogmatism of a king.
 - a. Now this is also certainly true. Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the supreme Lawgiver and Judge, the One whom all men must one day bow the knee to, and receive a just sentence from, in His court of law. Certainly, having this kind of authority, He could teach much more dogmatically than the scribes could.
 - b. However, Matthew probably didn't have this first in his mind either.

3. Still others have suggested that the difference was the power with which Christ delivered His words, that He spoke with the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. This is what Luther taught concerning Christ's authority here.
 - b. Now certainly there is a power which comes from the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
 - (i) Paul had it. He wrote to the Corinthians, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5). And he wrote to the Thessalonians, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thes. 1:5).
 - (ii) Certainly all of the prophets also possessed this power and authority when they spoke on behalf of God.
 - (iii) This is also, by the way, the same power, although not in the same degree, that God gives to His ministers today to preach His Word, or at least this is the power they should be seeking, for if the Spirit does not anoint, if He is not at work in the preaching of the Word, all the preaching in the world won't do anything more than communicate ideas to the mind, and that with little effect.
 - (iv) This is something which we should all be praying for in the preaching of God's Word here and elsewhere, that His Spirit might anoint His ministers and His Word that it might have the impact on our lives that the Lord intends for it to have.
 - c. But if anyone had this anointing, the Lord Jesus certainly did. He was the One, as I already said, who was anointed with the Spirit above measure. He is the greatest prophet who ever lived. He, as a matter of fact, is the archetype, or pattern, of every prophet that the Lord has ever sent into the world. They were all pointing to Him, to the One who was to bring us the greatest revelation of God that has ever been given, since He is God in human flesh.
 - d. But yet admitting that all this is true, this is still not primarily what Matthew had in mind. Yes, Christ's message had a greater and more authoritative content than the scribes'

message. Yes, it had more authority, because His words are the words of the King of the universe. Yes, He spoke with greater power, since He spoke by the Spirit of God, being anointed with Him above measure. But there is one other way this can be understood, which is most probably what Matthew meant.

4. The most likely difference is that Christ spoke with greater authority because He spoke as though the Law was His.
 - a. The scribes were only expounders of the Law. Yes, they did have authority as teachers of the Law. Yes, they did speak words that carried authority, since what they taught was God's Word. And yes, the people did respect them as teachers and submitted to what they said. But they were only explaining the words as those who had studied them. Jesus spoke as the One who authored them.
 - b. Jesus is the Word of God. This is what John calls Him at the opening of his Gospel. It was His Spirit who brought His inspired message to the prophets. It was His Spirit who delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai and who later gave a fuller explanation of it in Moses' writings. It is His Law. He is the One who authored it. He is the One who owns it. The Law is an expression of His own holy nature. He is therefore the One who can tell us what it means with more authority than any other teacher.
 - (i) What man can speak like Jesus spoke?
 - (ii) He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:3, 5). Now we can say this and know it's true because Jesus said it first. But before He did, how could anyone presume to do so?
 - (iii) He said, "You have heard that it was said . . . , but I say to you" (5:27-28). "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven" (6:1). "Pray, then, in this way" (6:9). "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (7:7). Again, we can say these things based upon the word of Christ. But Jesus can say these things based on His own authority. He does not need to appeal to the Word of God for His authority, as we must. He speaks on His own authority, as neither we nor the scribes of old can.
 - (iv) Jesus has a greater authority. His is the highest. Of all the reasons we have heard to this point as to why we should listen to the words of His sermon, this is the greatest. His words are the very words of God. They come to us with all the authority of God, with all the authority of the One who has been given rulership over heaven and earth, with all the authority of the One who will judge us on the last day. We must listen to them. We must marvel at them. We must stand in amazement at them. We must never presume to put our words into His mouth, or allow our ideas to shape His truth. We must simply listen and submit.
 - (v) Let us learn then to reverence the words of Christ, as we read them here and as we hear them expounded from week to week. You may let the words of man go in one ear and out the other without losing too much, but you can't afford to do the same with Christ's Words. As we saw this morning, to listen to them and do them is life. To turn away from them is certain death. Let His words -- not only those which He spoke in the Sermon on the Mount, but also the whole of Scripture -- sink deeply into your mind and heart. These words above all others are the things you need to know. These above all others are the things you need to do. And these above all others are the words you will be judged by. Listen to Jesus, and do what He says, and you will be blessed. Amen.