

The Teachings of Jesus

Jesus and the Life of Blessing

Matthew 5:1-12

Introduction

The teachings of Jesus were quite profound and yet simple and innovative. Jesus began his teaching ministry about 30 AD during the brutal Roman occupation of Palestine.

There were four major religious groups in Israel at that time; the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the Zealots. Each group promoted their viewpoint as the correct and most important one. The Pharisees were the rabbinical teachers. They maintained a strict observance of the Mosaic Law and all the Jewish customs and rituals. Sadducees were wealthy merchants, aristocratic families, and Hasmonean Priests whom Rome appointed to replace the original High Priestly lineage. They adapted to Greek culture and generally had good relations with the Roman rulers of Palestine. The Essenes were also a religious group. They referred to themselves as "Sons of Zadok" from the former High Priest, Zadok. They lived a communal life apart from Judaism and were devoted to personal purity and preparation for a final war between the "Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness." They awaited a Messiah that would establish a Kingdom on earth and free the Israelis from oppression. The Zealots were a religious militant group who wanted to overthrow Roman rule and bring freedom to the homeland by force. They were political activists. Nazareth, located in Galilee, was one of the important centers of Zealot activity.

When Jesus came, He brought a fresh new approach through his teachings. He taught that this earthly life was our opportunity to receive eternal life. The Ten Commandments, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, related the "Thou shalt nots" that revealed the evils a person must avoid. But the message of Jesus was one of humility, charity, and love.

Jesus taught about the transformation of the inner life and soul of a person. He taught that positive virtues in life lead to positive rewards. He taught that God's love becomes the motivation for living the Christian life. His teachings promised salvation not only in this world but also in the next.

The blessings Jesus taught about were one of the main themes of Matthew's Gospel. The "message of the Kingdom" (so long-awaited in the Old Testament) was not of this world but of the next. Jesus called it the Kingdom of Heaven. He offered a way of life that guaranteed eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. He taught that life in eternity was far better than the very best life lived here on earth.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduced this better life in a series of Beatitudes. Matthew Chapter 5 records this very controversial view of how a person should live their life.

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God. Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:1-12 NKJV)

It seems Jesus wanted to take some time to teach his disciples, but there were great multitudes following him everywhere he went. Seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up on a mount and prepared to teach His followers. And when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Jesus didn't exclude the crowds from his teachings, but He did want to make sure his most serious disciples got front row seats. The crowds could listen in, but the teaching was for the disciples.

Jesus assumes the customary seat of authority as he prepares to teach the people.

I. Position of Authority

Sitting was the common posture for teaching in that culture. It was customary for the teacher and his disciples to sit and the rest of the hearers to stand. It was the accepted posture of all the rabbis in the synagogue schools.

When Jesus was seated and ready to teach, and his disciples were sitting around him, the crowds came and stood around them. But when Jesus speaks, it's like God himself is talking. The message of Heaven is spoken not through inspired human personalities like Samuel or Isaiah or John the Baptist but by God himself. The group of disciples that come to Him on this occasion is probably much larger than just the Twelve. He taught that the difference between a life based on reason and a life based on faith is simple. One is natural, and the other is supernatural - natural wisdom based on human understanding versus supernatural wisdom received from Almighty God.

Jesus taught that your life needed to be built on the power and authority of God. Faith is provided by the divine wisdom of God, while humanism relies entirely upon information gathered from other humans. Logical reasoning may very well point us to the reality of God, but it doesn't always lead us to experience the love and community of a supernatural God. In trying times, human logic will often fail us, while those with faith usually prevail.

The teachings of Jesus gave the people new insight into authority. His views on authority were simple to understand, "Be humble, treat others like you want to be treated; if compelled to go a mile go the second mile, don't be angry with your

brother, spend your time getting the mote out of your own eye, stop judging others, and love others as God loves you.

Even non-Christians recognize the need to embrace the truth taught in this passage of scripture simply because it is true. It seems almost impossible to live up to the standards that Jesus presents—and yet we know the teaching is true. The master teacher is counseling us from a position of authority.

Matthew writes that after the resurrection, Jesus comes to his disciples and commissions them to carry on his teachings. In Matthew 28:19, he declares, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, **All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV)

Our faith relies upon the power of Christ. As we accept his authority, He empowers us to prevail even through persecutions and trials. Christ teaches that God has the power to deliver and heal and then demonstrates this power by overcoming infirmities and healing diseases. Christ's ultimate authority and power as God is what overcomes death, hell, and the grave. All suffering and sorrow and grief will one day soon surrender to the authority of Christ.

But not only does Christ hold a position of authority, but He also proclaims God's truth with authority.

II. Proclaim with Authority

From the very beginning, Jesus taught with authority. When He spoke, people wanted to listen to what he had to say. He spoke with such freedom and passion that the multitudes crowded in to hear him.

Spurgeon wrote, "... (He) spoke like a man in earnest; he enunciated clearly, and spake loudly. He lifted up his voice like a trumpet and published salvation far and wide, like a man who had something to say which he desired his audience to hear and feel."

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us how to live. What they heard was a message on ethics. He instructs the people about the Kingdom of Heaven and presents a radically different future than what the nation of Israel expected from the Messiah. He didn't promise political or material blessings of the Messiah's reign. Instead, He promised God's love and eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

None of the Jewish groups agreed on what the messianic kingdom would be like. Some saw it as spiritual. Some saw it as shaking off the Roman yoke.

But Jesus taught that the Messianic Kingdom was a kingdom of peace to be achieved, first of all, in the heart! He taught that a person's inner attitude dictated their outward behavior and that their core beliefs influenced their ethics and daily living. It was the basis of all His teachings. It was a simple proclamation of how God expects us to live, in contrast to the total Jewish misunderstandings of that life.

Jesus continually trained the disciples with this message because He wanted them to carry it to others. In Chapter 5, Matthew shows Jesus instructing his disciples with a message He knew would change lives forever. It was a message that had a significant impact on the early church.

The disciples believed in Christ's position of authority. They marveled at how He proclaimed God's truth with authority. And they were captivated and motivated by that authority.

III. Captivated by Authority

For many, the very idea of authority implies inequality. Our Judeo-Christian system is based on God's supreme authority. If we are dissatisfied with God, we cannot vote him out of office. God's authority is absolute, unshakeable, and unchangeable. We can deny his authority, but we cannot decrease it any way. God's power and authority are unlimited, and all human authority is derived from God's sovereignty.

The Book of Genesis details God's authority directly through his actions and his relationship with ordinary people like Adam and Noah, and Abraham. In the Book of Exodus, we see God exercising his authority through his prophets. In Deuteronomy chapter 18, the people ask God not to speak to them directly again. They said, "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die."

It made the role of the prophet a central figure and the one who received the word of God for the nation. It's why they viewed false prophets as so dangerous. Not only were prophets crucial to the community's religious life, but they were essential to the success of the nation.

Their political leaders, their Judges, and Kings received their authority because God chose them. A leader's authority was only legitimate if God endorsed it through his prophets. If a leader lost God's favor, they would have little success trying to govern by human means alone.

By Jesus' time, however, things had changed. The voice of the prophet had gone silent. The people believed God was still actively at work in the world, but his voice was no longer heard. God's authority had taken up residence in the written scriptures called the Tanakh, or teachings; what we now call the Old Testament. Because the people no longer had prophets to guide them in spiritual matters and daily life, they turned to the scribes and rabbis for guidance.

The Rabbis developed a way to live a Godly and righteous life which they detailed in the Torah. The Torah was comprised of the Jewish civil and ceremonial laws. The Rabbis taught that the people could fulfill God's requirements by studying the Torah and carrying out its commandments and regulations.

This transference was significant. The prophets had been the voice of God, reminding the people of God's plan for them. God used the prophets as the point of the spear; declaring his plans and demonstrating His will through action. Their words were God-inspired and often had a predictive and future focus. Elijah and Elisha were miracle workers, raising the dead, causing ax heads to float, and calling down fire from heaven.

Many of the scribes and teachers were wise people, but their words lacked divine power and authority. God continued to act in the world, but the scribes and teachers watched from the sidelines. When compared to Rome's military and political leaders, Jewish rabbis seemed small and powerless. That's what made Jesus so unique to those in the synagogue in the small town of Capernaum.

Jesus didn't speak with the borrowed authority of the rabbis. He spoke with an authority even greater than that of the prophets. When He read the scriptures, it was as if they were hearing them for the first time. He wasn't replacing the old words of God in the scriptures; He was giving them new life with the same authority that inspired them as holy scripture in the first place.

It was a teaching they didn't expect to hear because they didn't think God had anything new to say. But the common people immediately realize that Jesus was someone special, even though they didn't fully understand his mission. The truly spiritual and even the unclean spirits recognized Jesus as "the Holy One of God."

The people believed that Jesus was a prophet like Moses, raised up from among the people to speak the words of God. They saw Jesus as a prophet like Elijah and Elisha, able to heal, raise the dead, and command the forces of nature. But many would realize that He was much more than a prophet: they would come to believe He was the Son of the Living God, the long-awaited Messiah sent by God to redeem the world.

And they were captivated by his teachings, for he taught as one having authority!

Conclusion

Christian authority comes from one source only, from the Truth. That Truth is a person, Jesus Christ, the son of God, the Creator of all things. He is the living Word of God made flesh. His words and deeds were spoken and performed with authority and power. And they are written down for us the Gospels.

His words don't need to be reinterpreted by modern scribes and teachers; they are God-breathed by the Holy Spirit to be proclaimed and heard as the living words of God. The New Testament truth is that Jesus is alive this very day, bringing the

Gospel to life in his body, the Church, and in the heart of every believer. Jesus taught and preached the true purpose and meaning of the scriptures. But He also healed and fed and forgave people of their sins.

When it comes to our mission as the Church, we need to remember that it is not just through eloquent words and church programs that we show we are the living Body of Christ, but through our ministry and mission of healing, mercy, and prayer. Our purpose is to introduce people to the living Christ, who heals, forgives, provides for, helps, and gives eternal life to all those who receive Him as Savior and Lord.

Jesus is the only one who can give us a life with this kind of blessing.