

Authority in the Spiritual Realm

Mark 1:21-28; Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Sunday, January 28, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

4th Sunday after Epiphany

- Opening Remarks

Authority—who belongs on the church board

"There will be a meeting of the Church Board immediately after the service," announced the pastor. After the close of the service, the Church Board gathered at the back of the sanctuary for the announced meeting. But there was a stranger in their midst — a visitor who had never attended their church before. "My friend," said the pastor, "Didn't you understand that this is a meeting of the Board?" "Yes," said the visitor, "and after today's sermon, I suppose I'm just about as bored as anyone else who came to this meeting."

He didn't quite understand the meaning of the church board but it does beg the question of authority. Who is supposed to be in charge of what? The question of authority in church should always, I believe, start with the authority of Jesus Himself. He is the final authority in the spiritual realm, and by that, I mean He has authority over all beings seen and unseen by human eyes. The spirits of the departed are not visible to us, but they are under His authority. Angelic beings, both benevolent and malevolent, are under His authority, according to the Scriptures. But let's look a little bit and what it means for Jesus to have authority.

- Set the Stage

Main Point: Jesus has authority. Authority in His teaching, and in His commands

To set the stage, we begin with the passage from Deuteronomy, in which God admits that the encounter on Mt Sinai that led to the Ten Commandments frightened the people and that they would not be able to withstand such an encounter again. So God said that He would raise up a prophet like Moses who will speak all that God commands. Christians believe Jesus fulfilled that prophecy and demonstrates it in the Gospels. In Mark, Jesus comes to the synagogue in Capernaum (the ruins of which still exist), encounters and dispatches an unclean spirit right away. But most notably, He speaks with authority. Mark's Gospel is not very long, but it mentions the authority with which Jesus spoke nine times. His words had impact.

- The applications, for today at least, involve the feelings of the people in the congregation and the makeup of the word here translated "authority." Sometimes the way a word is put together is revealing. First, let's take a look at the impact Jesus had on the congregation.

"They were astonished." The authority of Jesus demonstrated by the impact He had on the congregation.

Verse 22 indicates that the people of the synagogue were astonished at his teaching. The word indicates that there was a visceral, emotional reaction to what Jesus said. It reached their hearts. It may have overwhelmed, angered them or caused them to rejoice, but He spoke in a fashion that impacted them so deeply that could not avoid a reaction to what He said. That indicates the power of His authority, but let's look at what the word itself reveals about the nature of the authority of Jesus.

"From oneself." Jesus' authority comes from His transparency. Be transparent. Know that what is inside you can be discerned by others.

- Here is where we reach the heart of the message. Jesus spoke with authority, and the word for “authority” is a combination of the prefix “ex-” with the verb “I am.” You put it together and it reveals authority comes out of oneself. In other words, Jesus as transparent, and when people found His true self, they were overwhelmed because of the wisdom and power that He had. There is both warning and opportunity in this. The warning is that what is inside of us emotionally and spiritually, can be discerned by others, whether good or bad. Our true selves show up sooner or later. How much impact we have on people will depend on what they find in us, so be careful of what you watch or read. The opportunity is that the Holy Spirit can speak through people who are transparent and conversations in such settings can be very powerful for everyone involved.

I recently found a LinkedIn thread by a man named John McCormick who was in the habit of having coffee with every fellow employee where he worked and asking them a question: what was the one thing that led them to who they are today. He hoped to have deep, transparent conversations. This is what he wrote about one of them.

“This takes me to coffee #5. I am omitting the name of coffee #5 intentionally because I do not think it is my place to force this person to share their story publicly. The story was a true illustration of raw transparency. An incredible example of how a 30-minute conversation can be inspirational and encouraging. I asked my standard question about one “thing” that has influenced their life and led them to where/who they are today. *I was not ready for the response.* It’s actually taken me over a week to reflect upon the response and write this article. This individual shared their darkest moment in life. This individual shared their difficult journey through debilitating panic attacks. This individual shared how, at one point in their life, it was a “win” to be able to successfully enjoy dinner in public without having a panic attack. Several years later, after a difficult road to recovery, this individual was having coffee with a stranger sharing their story. “*

- Conclusion

The transparency in response to a deep question led to a powerful conversation. I would suggest that the Holy Spirit uses the transparency of Christians to speak to people with the same authority that Jesus has. Be aware of what is inside you. Be aware of your thoughts and emotions. Be aware of your spiritual condition, because sooner or later others will discern it. Ask the Lord to speak with authority through your transparency. Jesus has authority because of who He is and what is His true self. They experienced it in Mark, and people still experience it today.

* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/coffee-5-52-life-changing-story-transparency-raw-john-mccormick>