

Sunday Morning Family Worship

Christ Church Woodley - 31st January 2021 – Led by Mr Neil Graham

Introduction - Authority

What is it about Jesus' words and actions that show us his authority? What is it we look for when trying to decide if someone's words have authority?

Today we will be looking at the first act of Jesus in Mark's Gospel. By first act I mean his first act after taking his disciples. We will be looking at Mark chapter 1 verses 21 to 28 and we shall see that this first healing that Jesus performs where he removes an unclean spirit is dramatic and shows that he is someone different and plans to make a real impact, one that makes a substantive difference.

It is my intent this week that we will explore how to recognise authority.

Please note if you're on zoom and also have a copy of this script there may be times I deviate and there will certainly be times I say stuff that is meant for those whom cannot join us physically on zoom, but are still part of our fellowship, and this is my way of reminding us of them and them of us.

Call to Worship

We are called to recognise God's authority and to submit to it in every area of our lives. Let us invite God to direct our thinking and our prayers. Let us give God the highest place in our lives. Let us worship the living God.

Almighty God, we recognise that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to you. We pray that you draw near to us today, to impart your truth and show us your way.

Amen.

Prayer of approach

I will be inviting us to all unmute and to say this prayer as one fellowship prepared to be as one in the presence of God.

Let us pray, please unmute if you are on zoom. If you're reading this and partaking with our fellowship at a time that suits you, please remember and hear in your heart and mind the voices of your brothers and sisters from our little community of worshipers and of those brothers and sisters past, present and future from around our Lord's Kingdom.

Pause

Loving God we have come to worship you.

Help us to remember that you are here with us.

May we pray to you in faith, sing your praise with gratitude, and listen to your word with eagerness; through Christ our Lord.

Amen

1st hymn – At the name of Jesus (StF 317)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6AHbO29lpg>

- At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.
- 2 Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed :
- 3 Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast ;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.
- 4 In your hearts enthrone him ;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true ;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour :
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.
- 5 For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train ;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

A prayer reflecting on God's Greatness

(taken from 500 prayers for all occasions by David Clowes, very minor changes, and additions, by Neil Graham)

Heavenly father, we come to praise you for your majesty, your power, and your authority. When we try to think of the vastness of space, or we look at the world in which you have placed us, we remember that everything belongs to you. You are our Creator, our Sustainer, our Lord, and Lover of all that you have made. Father we praise and thank you that you have not left us alone, but you have given us our brothers and sisters, our families, friends, and complete strangers to love and to care for. We praise you for all the skills, the things we are good at, our work, our studies, our hobbies, games and fun. We praise you for all the experiences of life, our tears of joy and tears of sadness, our new births, and new beginnings. Father we praise you for sharing our experiences of life.

We praise you for the family of your church. It is with that family that we are here today. We praise you that even in these strange times of Covid-19 we can meet with that family, some here live with us on Zoom, others with us in our hearts as we know they will be reading this service, maybe not now but sometime today or this coming week and, in doing so, they are with us here now as we are all gathered to praise you. We have come with all our successes and failures, and hopes and our fears, our strengths, and our weaknesses.

We praise you for Jesus Christ. We thank you that by his coming he has proved that we can know that you love us, and through his dying and rising he has enabled us to love you in return.

We are sorry that often we love only those we like and those who like us. We are sorry that though we are happy to receive your love, we often try to keep it for ourselves. We are sorry for the unkind words and thoughts that spoil your world and betray your love. Help us to overcome our selfishness and love others as Christ loved us.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ and for his Glory.

Amen.

Talk for all – Activity number one.

Hello, this morning I am going to tell you that...

Jesus did more than just preach a good message. When He taught, He did so with authority. His messages carried meaning because He was who He said He was (God!). In the Bible, Jesus proved His authority and strength. We can still rely on that today, trusting that He takes care of us and provides for us. Jesus is stronger and more reliable than anything we can imagine. In that we can take hope and comfort. Now forget I just told you all that and let us start at the beginning.

Who (other than God) has power over you?.....

(pause for an answer; if you are at home feel free to list a few.)

Who gives you instructions? (pause for an answer)

Personally, I look to various sources for instructions, let's see, to start with I look to my wife for instructions for she knows all things and should be always obeyed. But really if I want to know about what is happening in the world around me, I might look to the BBC news app, and if I want to know about history, I can look at a history book and if I wish to know about all things and get to the font of all knowledge I can go to Wikipedia. Now my dad when he was young would have had to use a newspaper and an encyclopaedia. Some of the boys in Juniors this week were looking to Alexa for their quiz answers.

If I want to know how to cook, I might read a cookbook. To fix my car I might turn to the Haynes manual, and there are other instruction books to teach me how to do lots of things. I know that I can rely on sources like these because the people who wrote them have been given that ability. They might have degrees from school, or be experts on topics, or maybe they have been recommended by someone else I trust.

Now, I also might have to take directions from other people in my life. My parents, my teachers (you may not all be at school but often we have teachers at various stages of our lives), my Minister, might all have rules and instructions that they ask me to follow. I know that they have the power to ask or tell me things to do, because their authority comes from God Himself.

Do you know what it means to have authority? (pause for answers). Authority means someone or something in charge. It means that for some reason, they can tell you what to do. For instance, the police have authority to make sure we obey the laws. A teacher has authority to give you a grade, and to communicate the information you need to know in school. Someone who writes an important book or article might have authority to tell you information because they have studied and know a lot about a topic.

Well, what about Jesus? How can we know that He has authority, and where does His authority come from? In the Gospel lesson today, people noticed the power of Christ and how He taught with authority. He was not just saying fancy words, but seemed to really know what He was talking about, and the people were impressed. But they became even more impressed when Jesus put action behind His words. There was a man that had an unclean spirit inside him. That means there was some sort of evil that he had in him, maybe even a demon. Well, even that evil demon recognized Jesus, because it cried out asking what He was going to do. Jesus told the spirit to be quiet, and made it come right out of the man, restoring him to health and sanity. The people who saw the event take place were amazed. They realized that Jesus did have true authority. He taught like He knew what He was saying, because He really did know what He was saying. He had control even over the powers of evil and darkness. He had the strength to control and teach anyone and anything...not everyone who saw Jesus believed this. But those who recognized His authority also recognized His love and saw that He had authority from God.

And what do we take from this? Well, we know that Jesus still does have strength and authority. His words are true and reliable, more so than anything else we could read or hear or imagine. His authority comes from the Lord. And where do we get His words? From the Bible.

This is our source of information, and we know it is the true word of God. We know that Jesus has power, and that we can trust what He says. We can pray to Him, knowing He cares for us and loves us and hears us. When we rely upon Him, we can have confidence He will provide. We can listen to Him and know that He is in control!

Prayer

Dear God, we know that you have all power and authority. You are stronger than anything we can imagine. Help us to trust in you and make you the authority in our lives. Thank you for your love, we love you, God!

Thank you for Jesus. In His name,

Amen!

Let us say the Lord's Prayer together, but today as I have at times in the past, I would like to explore this prayer and change how we say it.

The Lord's Prayer is part of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon is good news to the impoverished peasant class that comprised Jesus' Galilean audience – farmers and fishermen. And as such, it is packed full of practical teaching and illustrations lifted right out of his listeners' daily lives. He talks about relationships, lust, money, worrying about the future and more.

And right in the middle (Matthew 6:5-13) of this practical, relevant sermon, Jesus talks about prayer. He says (in verse 7-8):

When you pray, do not babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Do not be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

In other words, Jesus is inviting his listeners into a prayer life that is as concrete and practical as his Sermon.

More accurately, Jesus wants the religion we experience when we gather to worship to be the same life we live when we are working, enjoying our friends or at home with our families. Jesus wants our religion to be integrated into the whole of our lives, not sectioned off into special days with special language.

Let us say his words in a re imagined way, that is, I hope, true to what he taught us.

*Our father, who created and rules the universe,
show us your perfect love so that we may emulate you.
May the world run the way you want it to now – just like it will when you return. The same as it does in heaven right now
Provide us, today, with everything we need to sustain us.
And forgive the wrongs we have done the same way we forgive the people who've wronged us.
Keep us safe – from ourselves and from the evils in the world.
All the political power and authority and fame belong to you, from now until the end of time.*

Amen.

JC prayer and hymn intro – Led by James Allen

Today in Zoom Junior Church we will be hearing about God's rules for living – the Ten Commandments. Let us pray....

Dear God, help us to reflect your love into the world in what we do and say. Amen.

2nd hymn – A New Commandment (StF 242)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jT0ygUgPvPO>

A new commandment I give unto you :
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this the world shall know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.
By this the world shall know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.

Anonymous

Prayer for young people going to their Zoom session.

Lord, as our young people go off to their own session, we ask that you let your spirit guide them and their teachers, that your authority is upon the teachers and your love shines through the adults and is radiated back from their charges.

Amen

Deuteronomy 18.15-20 True and False Prophets

¹⁵ Moses continued, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.'

¹⁷ "Then the Lord said to me, 'What they have said is right. ¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. ¹⁹ I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. ²⁰ But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.'"

Mark 1.21-28 Jesus Casts Out an Evil Spirit

²¹ Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

²³ Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out,

²⁴ "Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ But Jesus reprimanded him. "Be quiet! Come out of the man," he ordered. ²⁶ At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.

²⁷ Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened.

"What sort of new teaching is this?" they asked excitedly. "It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!" ²⁸ The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.

Bible Notes

Deuteronomy 18.15-20

The speaker here is Moses – nearly all of Deuteronomy is presented as his parting speech to the people.

Moses carried enormous authority as the leader who had taken his people out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and through the wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land. He was understood as a prophet because he spoke the word of the Lord to the people, including the foundational text of the Ten Commandments.

Here, Moses anticipates God's gift of another prophet like him. He recalls the people's fear at the manifestations of God's presence on Sinai (Deuteronomy 5.25-27) and reassures them that this new prophet will be able to approach God for them fearlessly. The prophet's authority, like his, will come from God; he will speak the words God gives him. This expectation continued to be influential, right up to Jesus' own time – John the Baptist denies that he is this prophet (John 1.21). Christians have understood it as a prophecy of Jesus himself, able to stand fearlessly before God on our behalf, and speaking the words God has given him.

Mark 1.21-28

Mark has described how Jesus drew his team together, and now he tells us about the beginning of his active ministry. Jesus' first act is, in some respects, very traditional. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and teaches in the rabbinic tradition. Mark tells us nothing of what he said, but he does record the great impression he made on the congregation. Scribes often presented a range of opinions from earlier scholars, then left the congregations to make up their own minds. Jesus' teaching is clearly much more authoritative. It carries conviction and leaves people feeling that they had heard the 'Word of the Lord'.

Jesus' words chime with his actions. His powerful words lead to a word of power as he overcomes the unclean spirit that is tormenting the man. The story reflects a battle of wills as the spirit attempts to gain control over Jesus by using his name and identifying him as 'the Holy One of God' (v.24). In many forms of magic, knowing a name is a source of power. In the face of this, Jesus can defeat the spirit with one word (in Greek): Silence! And the spirit can no longer speak, only scream, as it leaves the man (v.26). Jesus shares God's power to create order simply through his words (Genesis 1.3). There is no possibility of survival for the evil spirit in the presence of the Messiah, and its attempt to name Jesus only serves to reinforce his true identity.

Mark again emphasises the impact this has on the congregation – they are amazed and there is a hubbub of conversation as they discuss what they have just witnessed. In a society where much illness was put down to 'unclean spirits', the power to control them was astonishing, and it's not surprising that Jesus' reputation spreads rapidly. But his hearers have not forgotten his teaching, and they recognise the link between his teaching

and his broader authority (v.27). It is perhaps ironic, though, that the unclean spirit knows perfectly well who Jesus is, while the congregation is left guessing.

Bibles notes taken from Roots on the web resources

We are now going to have a whole group discussion and I really do hope all will feel able to join in, but if you can not then please do not feel pressured, it is ok to sit and listen, and it is ok to continue this chat in smaller groups later, either in the breakout rooms or however you can later in the week.

I only ask one thing of us all, and that is that we show love and grace to all, and if we disagree with a statement, we are constructive and loving in how we show that disagreement.

If you are reading this at home, I am sorry that you will not be able to immediately join in the conversation, but please do ask me if you wish a copy of what people said and I am sure we can get it to you either on paper or some other medium. I cannot even list the questions here for you, as I am planning to ask them fluidly depending on how the conversation goes and where it takes us.

I offer below some words that form a thought for the day that I may use on Sunday if time allows.

Whether it is climate change, life-changing diets, or dealing with the economic fallout from the Coronavirus pandemic, we are surrounded by experts who speak authoritatively on their given subject. This is often followed, especially in the news media, by another expert speaking authoritatively on the same subject – but with a completely different view! On social media, it is even worse; often you have no idea whether the person speaking authoritatively is an expert or not – but you can probably guarantee there will be a lot of people shouting at each other!

This does not look like changing any time soon, but it can leave us longing for genuine authority. This was why Jesus' teaching received the reaction that it did. He not only spoke with certainty and confidence, but he backed up his teaching with actions that confirmed his authenticity and authority. He really did hold power! An unclean spirit looked to heckle him but was firmly rebuked and sent packing.

As Christians, we recognise God's authority, and we look to both the words and actions of Jesus to reveal it. If someone claims to have authority today, we are right to ask: do their actions match their words? And what is the fruit of those words?

Summing up –final thoughts I would like us to consider.

It is said that people get a new job based on the first 30 seconds of their interview. We form opinions of one another very quickly and this sets the tone for ongoing relationships. So, the impact Jesus made on that Sabbath in Capernaum was vital to the flourishing of his ministry later. The impression of authority and integrity would have stayed in people's minds and attracted them to listen to him again. Does our church

create a striking first impression? This is not just about the physical surroundings, though they matter. Rather, will visitors get a sense of Jesus' presence, his authority, his passion for good, when they come into our church?

You are 'the Holy One of God' – the unclean spirit shouts these words at Jesus, rejecting him and everything he stands for. In doing so, Mark's hearers gain a new way of understanding Jesus – he is the Holy One of God. What are the attributes of holiness? The story tells us that holiness and uncleanness cannot coexist, and that holiness drives out evil. Lived experience may lead us to query this. We know that often evil seems to come out on top, and that the line between holiness and uncleanness can seem blurred and messy. This story helps us see that, in Christ, it is possible to distinguish clearly between good and evil, right and wrong, and so there is hope that for us too, a genuinely good life will be possible in Christ.

Imagine there has been a traffic accident. The road is impassable, and someone is trying to direct traffic the other way. How much difference would it make if that person were wearing a hi-vis jacket? Are there other things that would make a difference – e.g., age, gender, disability? Do we attribute authority more readily to some people than to others, especially if there is a close fit with our stereotypes of authority figures? On this basis, would we attribute authority to Jesus?

3rd hymn - Will you come and follow me? (StF 673)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_KR9f-7a7o

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| <p>1 Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?</p> <p>2 Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?</p> <p>3 Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?</p> | <p>4 Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?</p> <p>5 Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.</p> |
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John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

Prayers of Intercession

God of our impressionable world,
we pray for the leaders of the nations,
that they would be wise, just, and compassionate.
as they exercise their authority.

We remember especially those in power in Russia –
and those protesting at the imprisonment of Alexei Navalny.
We remember the governments in the Netherlands,
in the United States, and here in the UK,
praying for all leaders as they discern the way forward.
amid the difficult social and economic challenges of the pandemic.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for a smooth and just rolling out of vaccine programmes,
for those who are vulnerable,
for those who mistrust the vaccine,
for those for whom it has come too late.
We pray for the families, and friends of those that we are about to name
(please name those we need to prayer for)
and all ministering to them and
the dying and the bereaved.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for those who feel overwhelmed
by the additional pressures of home schooling,
for those whose relationships are at breaking point.
We pray for those who have lost their lives to depression,
and for their families and friends.
We pray too for those whose lives are blighted by anxiety and stress.
We pray for the health services and charities trying to support them.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for your church – around the world and in our own community,
we pray for creative ways to serve and to share,
for courage and integrity as we listen and pray,
for urgency and daring as we respond to the needs around us.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

The congregation will now get to give the names and details of others we should be praying for

We pray, in a moment of silence,
for all those on our hearts
and for all those who have no one to name them in prayer.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.
Amen

4th Hymn – Praise my soul the King of heaven (StF 83)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzRk2T0l8js>

<p>1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven ; to his feet thy tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like thee his praise should sing ? Praise him ! Praise him ! Praise the everlasting King !</p> <p>2 Praise him for his grace and favour to his people in distress ; praise him, still the same for ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless. Praise him ! Praise him ! Glorious in his faithfulness.</p>	<p>3 Father-like, he tends and spares us ; well our feeble frame he knows ; in his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes. Praise him ! Praise him ! Widely as his mercy flows.</p> <p>4 Angels in the height, adore him ; ye behold him face to face ; sun and moon, bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space. Praise him ! Praise him ! Praise with us the God of grace !</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)</p>
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Closing Prayer

Almighty God be with us this week.
Meet with us each morning,
and in every situation throughout the day,
whoever we are with,
help us to draw on your strength and wisdom,
that we may be faithful and true
in following the example and pattern
given to us by Jesus.
Amen.