

One Who Has Authority

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- [0 : 00] Well, given just how much gets said, how many interviews and speeches and press conferences are given, how much is recorded and written down, it's shocking, isn't it, to think how very, very little of it will ever be remembered.
- Just a fraction of the words ever spoken go down in history, don't they? I think I could count on one hand the number of speeches that I could quote from the last 50 years.
- I might need two hands for the last 100 years, but even then, it's just a soundbite. We will never surrender. I have a dream.
- Education, education, education. Education, but this morning, we're coming to a speech given 2,000 years ago, but which is stuck in the hearts and minds of generations.
- Turn the other cheek. Love your enemies. Tomorrow has enough worry of its own. Do to others what you would have them do to you.
- [1 : 14] Of course, the Lord's Prayer. This speech has gripped humanity for thousands of years. To put it into perspective, our own king, King Charles, quoted from this speech in his own speech on Christmas Day.
- Think how incredible that is. That's how deeply these words have touched our world, that the kings of nations still quote these words to their people 2,000 years and 2,500 miles from when they were first spoken.
- If we measure important speeches by their impact, then this is surely the most important speech ever given in the history of the world. They're words that have changed the world.
- And at the start of this year, we're coming back to their source in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. Before Christmas, if you were with us, we got up to chapter 4, the end of chapter 4 in Matthew's Gospel.
- And up to Easter, we're going to be in these chapters, which we know better as the Sermon on the Mount. But the challenge for us, I think, is in those words, we know better.
- [2 : 37] We know better. If you're here today and Jesus' teaching is brand new to you, you've never heard it before, that is a great place to start.
- To hear these words for the first time, not to think that we know what he's going to say would be wonderful. But I suspect most of us do think we know what this sermon is saying, and I suspect we think, we think that we don't need to hear it.
- Part of the power of this sermon is that it is very difficult to disagree with. Very few people would say that they don't follow Jesus because his teaching was bad or wrong.
- People say, perhaps you've said yourself, it would be wonderful if the world lived as Jesus taught, but it doesn't. Or what Jesus said is great, but really what's the difference from any world religion?
- Or it just comes down, doesn't it, to trying to be a good person, right? But here's the challenge, have you read it? Have you read it?
- [3 : 54] Or do you think you know what Jesus says? I think that's a challenge for us as Christians too. How well do we know this sermon?

How gripped are we by the Lord's teaching, really? Just flip over with me to the end of the sermon, chapter 7, verse 28.

And see what the people who were there then went home saying that day. When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.

Because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law. They went home not having had their own values and thoughts repeated back to them.

Or feeling better about themselves or trying to be good people. They went home speechless. Stunned. In awe.

[5 : 0 0] Of the authority of Jesus. They didn't say, that sounds like what everyone says. They said, we've never heard somebody speak like this before.

Who speaks as one who has authority and not as the teachers of the law. They went home blown away. Not just by what he'd said, but who he was that had said it.

And so friends, if we hear this sermon over these next 10 weeks and we're not blown away by the authority of Jesus. Then we have heard him wrong. And so to help us hear him rightly.

I want us to take this morning to show us some context. So that when we begin in a couple of weeks, we know two things. Who it is we're listening to.

And why it is we're listening. Who we're listening to. And why we're listening. And knowing those things, I want to give us two prayers to pray. Through our series, as we come to this sermon.

[6 : 0 9] Speak, Lord. For your servants are listening. That's who we're listening to. Teach, Lord. For your people are following.

That's why we're listening. Firstly then, speak, Lord. For your servants are listening. Turn back with me to 5 verse 1.

It would be really easy to skip over these verses. But they give us really vital clues about who we're listening to. Jesus has drawn a huge crowd by this point. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan.

Followed him. And we're told when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them.

Now the location is not coincidental. Or even natural. When you think about it, going up on a mountain. Lots of people could see him, I guess.

[7 : 1 4] But could they hear him? Especially when he was sitting down. No, going up a mountain to teach. It's a really significant thing to do.

The location itself says something. Because when have God's people gathered before around a mountain to be taught?

That didn't happen every Sabbath. It had happened one great big time in history. And we read about it earlier.

When God brought his people to the mountain. The mountain. Mount Sinai. And God came down on the mountain. And he spoke to them.

But they couldn't bear to hear God's voice. And so they begged Moses. Moses, you go up. And you listen to God. And come back down and tell us what he says.

[8 : 0 6] Bring God's law to us. That is the Torah. Or the teaching. And so in the history of God's people. The mountain is God's pulpit.

The mountain is where God speaks. And commentators point out that Jesus is doing here what Moses did in going up the mountain.

That's true. But I think what they miss is that on the mountain, Jesus is doing what God did. Speaking.

Teaching. In a way, it shouldn't surprise us by this point that he's playing both parts. Matthew's told us he is God with us. The word becomes flesh.

So the fact he's doing the work of both God and prophet shouldn't surprise us. That he is the fullest and most perfect communication of God to us.

[9 : 06] And he goes to God's pulpit. And he speaks as only God gets to speak. You have heard it was said to the people long ago.

But I say to you. You have heard that it was said. But I say to you. It has been said.

But I say to you. We shouldn't be able to read those words without our mouths dropping open. Because he is quoting from the Torah what God said from the mountain.

But Jesus says, this is what I say. You friends, if he is not God, that is outrageous blasphemy.

We do not get to speak like that. But he does. Because he is one and the same God who spoke from the mountain so long ago.

[10 : 11] You understand in this sermon we are listening to Yahweh, God incarnate, speak. It is not good advice. It is not a guide to better living.

This is our creator and redeemer speaking. His is the mouth that spoke the universe into being. That spoke through the prophets.

That came and dwelt among us. And yes, the whole Bible is God's word. We know that. But listening to his son incarnate teaching on earth.

It brought the people who were there to their knees. They were overwhelmed. They were speechless. They were stunned.

Because he spoke with an immediacy and an authority that they had never heard before. And so as we hear the words of Jesus, we fall before him and tremble at his word.

[11 : 18] God with us. Because he is speaking from the pulpit of God. And there he takes the position of a teacher. The position of a teacher.

That is, he sat down. Now today normally it's the teacher who stands. And the people who sit. As demonstrated now.

But back then, it was the teacher who sat. And the people who stood. Sitting was seen as a sign of respect. You didn't wear your legs out.

If you wanted to listen, you had to go and stand and listen. I'd love to know when that got changed. And so when Jesus sat down and his disciples came to him, he's taking the position of a teacher.

Again, a really deliberate choice. Because that's how he wants us to see him. Right? And we're so quick to say, well, he's not only a teacher.

[12 : 23] Well, yes, but he is the teacher. Yes, he's not one among many. But he is the one that we listen to. Because what does a teacher want most?

You who are teachers. What do you want when you go to school and teach? Surely you want those who listen to you to learn. To learn. To learn.

And so his words are not general truths spoken into the void. They're not good sayings or nice things to print on mugs and stickers and notebooks.

They are lessons we need to learn. Training we need to go on. Points that we need to get. Because he's not a teacher who's only interested in whether we've remembered what he says.

That's a start. But whether we live as he has instructed us to. You football managers, they spend their whole week, don't they, drilling the team in the game plan.

[13 : 24] Until they could recite the game plan in their sleep. It's meant to come instinctively, naturally. But at half time, the manager isn't judging the players, is he, by whether or not they've remembered what he said.

He wants to see them do what he said. He wants to see them play the game as he has taught them to play. All the more so with Jesus. Moses says of him back in Deuteronomy 18, The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.

From your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. You must listen to him. Like a teacher we love and want to please.

So we sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching because we want to learn from him. He speaks from the pulpit of God in the position of a teacher and with the prerogative of a king.

The prerogative of a king. Have you ever wondered what is it that ties this sermon all together? If you were to have a go, what is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount?

[14 : 42] Does it have a theme? It covers so much ground. There's lots in it. But it's been said the theme of the sermon is the kingdom of heaven.

Right from the start, even just glancing down at the first and the last of the beatitudes or the blessings. In verses 3 to 10. Verse 3. Verse 10.

In fact, Jesus refers to the kingdom of heaven eight times in the sermon.

He covers a lot of ground. It's true. That's why we're going to get nine sermons out of his one sermon. But what ties it all together is the kingdom.

And who is it who gets to say who the kingdom belongs to? And what happens in the kingdom? Surely it is the king. So that everything that Jesus teaches here is teaching how to be part of and how then to live in the kingdom of heaven.

[15 : 58] He is giving the law of the land. This is what governs life in God's kingdom. In the old covenant, that is part of what the kings were commanded to do.

Each one of them would painstakingly write out their own copy of God's law and have it on them and study it day and night. This is what governs me and my land.

It's part of the king's job to keep the law, to live it and breathe it. And when the kingdom fell into sin, it was the king's job to set it right. Think of Josiah finding the book of the law in the temple.

God's word had been completely forgotten and lost and neglected. But then we read in 2 Kings 23, the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and all the prophets, all the people from the least to the greatest. And he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord.

[17 : 12] That's what the king does. So now, the great king comes to his kingdom that has fallen into darkness and sin and delivers again in the hearing of a great crowd the law of God, the covenant that they had broken to renew and to restore his kingdom.

That's why Charles could only quote from this sermon on Christmas Day, because Jesus is not a watered-down head of state.

He is the king of God's eternal kingdom, the king of kings and the Lord of lords. And these words are the charter and constitution and covenant that we live by if we are part of his kingdom.

And so as we hear his words, this sermon together, we need to know, don't we, who it is we're listening to. We need to know who's speaking, that he is the one who has authority to tell us who we are, to teach us how to live, to shape and to mold our lives under his loving rule.

He is our God, our teacher and our king. And whether we have heard him teach for the first time today or the thousandth time, my prayer is that over the next 10 weeks, we together would be blown away by what we hear from him, in awe of his majesty, stunned by his authority, as we hear the words of the Lord Jesus as he speaks to us.

[19 : 02] And so we pray, speak, Lord, speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. That's who we're listening to.

So next, why are we listening? Or I should say, actually, what are we listening for? You know, knowing who we're listening to is enough to know why we're listening, isn't it?

But what do we want to get from it? What are we listening out for? Well, our second point and prayer then, teach, Lord, for your people are following.

Because there are really, I think, three main ways of hearing this sermon. I think we start off firstly hearing the sermon as saying to us, you need to do more and try harder and work to be a better person.

You know, I think that is how most people we know hear this. You do better, buck up. But then, once we've actually read it and come to our senses, then we think to ourselves, I can't possibly do enough.

[20 : 16] However hard that I try, this teaching is beyond me. Jesus says in this sermon, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

How can I? How can we? And I think that is where a lot of us get with this sermon as Christians. And it should get us there.

It should bring us to the very end of our own moral fiber. It should bring us to depend on Jesus. Not only to give us a standard of righteousness, but to give us a righteousness, not our own, to cover and to clothe us.

If it doesn't bring us to the end of ourselves, we haven't grasped the immensity of what he is saying. Be as good as God is, he says. Be as good as God.

Be perfect. And if you're here and you don't yet see that your ability to be a good person ends a long way behind the line that Jesus is drawing, please, please take a Bible away with you.

[21 : 30] Take it with you and read these chapters. And please come back and spend time with us in this sermon, and listening to it, learning from it.

If you think that Jesus is only going to tell you what you already think about yourself and your life and how to live, you've got to actually read it.

See that he's not. Because we find in this sermon that he blows our attempts to be a good person out of the water. The only person who has lived the Sermon on the Mount and not failed is the speaker.

It is Jesus himself. And it is only his perfect, unspoiled obedience that can get us into his kingdom.

And not our incomplete and stained record of failure and outright resistance. It won't do it. But that, I think, is still only the first tremors of the sermon.

[22 : 38] It is not yet the earth-shattering epicenter of the earthquake. Because notice, Luke, that Jesus didn't deliver the sermon to the crowds generally.

Just have a look there at verses 1 and 2. Who was it? His disciples came to him. And he began to teach them.

Now, the crowd certainly overheard him. We know that. But it was his followers, his learners, his disciples, that he was teaching first.

Now, just look at that list from verse 3. Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed. Then, Luke, verse 11.

Blessed are you. Blessed are you. Then, verse 13. You are.

[23 : 37] And, verse 14. You are. Who is he speaking to? He's speaking to people of whom verses 3 to 10 are already true.

That they are the poor in spirit who have come to the end of themselves and have declared themselves spiritually bankrupt. And to their eternal amazement, come to Jesus with empty hands and receive the kingdom of heaven.

These are the poor in spirit. And theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Because they have come to Jesus the king.

You know, I love this quote this week by a Bible teacher called David Jackman. He says, In other words, you can't draw God's kingdom on a map.

It's not about place and space. It is about a relationship with the king. And so, Jesus is speaking to those here who have put their trust in him and begun to follow him.

[24 : 58] Who have come under his rule and come into his kingdom. That is to say, he is speaking firstly to Christians. People who are part of his kingdom.

His followers. And he is teaching us who we are now. And how we live now. That we are his people. This is the new covenant of his kingdom.

See, this whole sermon, it follows the same pattern. As God's sermon from Mount Sinai, it is a covenant. As God said long ago, he says now, this is who I am.

God, teacher and king. This is who you are to me. Blessed. Blessed. Persecuted. Poor in spirit. This is therefore how now you live.

Now that I have saved you and gathered you to myself. And there are blessings if you do. And there are curses if you don't.

[26 : 00] Again, the very end of the sermon gives it away, doesn't it? These earth-shattering words. Therefore, says Jesus, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Is it any wonder people were shocked by his authority?

What is he saying? What's the difference between eternal safety and eternal ruin? Brothers and sisters, we cannot possibly do enough in our own power to get into his kingdom.

But once he has brought us in by his grace, he gives us all the power we need to live in his kingdom, to keep his word. So what's he saying?

[27 : 26] If we hear his words and don't respond with a desire and a will to obey, the truth is that we have never really come in.

We have never really built our house in the right place. It was only ever on the sand and not on the rock, which is Christ. Brothers and sisters, Jesus' desire and intention for us is that we genuinely outstrip the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the righteous standard of our living.

His purpose is that we genuinely share his heart and will and instincts towards anger and lust and lying and love. He wants us genuinely to seek his kingdom first and put aside the riches of this world and let go of other things to have the inheritance that is kept for us in heaven.

He wants us genuinely to have a closeness and intimacy with our Father in heaven in prayer, a freedom to speak with him and ask him for what we need.

He wants us genuinely to hear these words of his and put them into practice. Not so that God will accept us because we've tried, but because he has already welcomed us on the basis of the perfect life of his Son, our King Jesus Christ.

[28 : 57] Because he knows that we can only grow in genuine godliness and genuine goodness if we are following him. Because it is only by being right with him and being with him that we can ever be like him.

For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

So here is our prayer. Teach, Lord, for your people are following. That is what we're listening for. That's what we want to get out of it.

Teach us, Lord, who we are now. Teach us, Lord, how to live now that we are your people. Teach us how to be like you because we love you. Remember, Matthew's gospel is a discipleship manual.

He's teaching us how to be a follower of Jesus. There are five lessons, five blocks of teaching. And lesson one, he says, is how to live under his loving rule.

[30 : 03] And it doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, whether you became a Christian last year and started following Jesus or you've been following Jesus all of your life and you've never thought of yourself as being other than a Christian.

We never get past lesson one, do we? We never stop needing Jesus himself to teach us how to live as his treasured possession. And a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the world.

We never stop needing to learn how to be part of his kingdom. And so let these simple prayers be our prayers and your prayers.

These next few months, as we read and study and hear these words of Jesus and sit at his feet and listen to his teaching. Let's pray that together now.

Let's pray. Lord, we are amazed at your authority.

[31 : 17] Lord, we have never heard anyone speak like you have spoken. Lord, we pray. And Lord, we pray by your spirit that if there is a numbness and a familiarity, and dare we say it, even a boredom of your words.

Oh, Lord, how we pray that you would take it away, that you would let us hear you with the freshness and immediacy and urgency with which you first spoke.

Lord, that your authority over us would extend. Deep into our hearts. And so we pray these simple prayers. Speak, Lord, for we, your servants, are listening.

Teach, Lord, for we, your people, are following. Amen. Amen.