

Speaking with authority is difficult in our world today. Who has the authority to speak with authority? What parent in a moment of exasperation has not claimed their authority with something like, “Because I said so, that’s why.” Or, “As long as you live under my roof you will follow my rules.” Authority has always come under attack – from Eden to the present we have questioned and question authority. Even Jesus was questioned by the religious leaders of his day, “*By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do them?*” (Mark 11:28).

A common response to those who try to have authority over us is, “Yeah, so what?” This is not only the response of teen-agers but by all in general, or so it seems. So what if I do this or that? What are you going to do about it? Or, who gave you authority over me? Unless you can prove to me that you have authority to stop me I will continue my actions.

I remember as a child growing up we were taught to respect and obey all adults. In our neighborhood the word of our misdeeds got home before we did. We knew better than to question what another adult in our world said. However, today people even question the authority of those who have authority over us. A recent Supreme Court decision has limited the right of the police to search cars after traffic stops; their authority has been restricted by the courts. Now I am not commenting on the right or wrong of this action – it is just a recent example of rights being limited – one authority limiting another.

Now questioning authority is not always a bad thing. Authorities do make mistakes. Actions need to be appropriate for the good of all. We need to examine the why behind some of the decisions made. Who gains in the making of the decision? Does the decision follow Biblical principles of justice, equality, etc.?

And what is authority? Our text in Matthew says that Jesus “*taught them as one having authority.*” What does it mean to teach with authority? Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says, “*It was apparent he was living everything he was saying.*” Reflect for a moment on Peterson’s words, “*he was living everything he was saying.*” His teaching was more than words – it was a lifestyle that people could actually see. His teachings were not some theory imposed from some authority but were lived out among the people. The image of authority is that of one who comes and walks beside us living out their faith. He came demonstrating to us how life should be lived under God’s authority.

What are your images of authority? Someone who has the authority over you? We were driving a few weeks ago and a police car pulled up beside us (You know your heart beats a little faster. You are sure you have done nothing wrong but there is an authority beside you.). He was talking on his cell phone! Now, isn’t that against the law – if I was talking on mine what would he have done? Maybe your image is of someone who can make life miserable for you. We watched the movie “*Doubt*” at the minister’s retreat on Monday night – the Mother Superior was able to bring fear into any room she entered. She had the authority to make life miserable for teachers, students, etc. Authority was not pictured as something to be happy with.

Jesus comes with a different type of authority. He taught not as one of the religious teachers of his day. He lives out the life he taught and his life was an example of faith. He comes as God who walks beside us.

The plea of the author of Lamentations is, “*Restore us to yourself, O Lord.*” (5:21). Another authority has come upon them and they are under the heavy hand of an oppressor. They no longer have the freedom they once had under God. The authority has the power to make them submissive and to place heavy burdens on them. The NRSV translates it this way, “*With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven*” (5:5). Do you get the powerful imagery of the Lamentator? The writer sees God’s burden as lighter than the one their oppressors have placed on them. He longs to again be under the authority of God.

Why do we so often respond to authority with, “Yeah, so what?” Our rebellion really began in Eden. Creation was ours to enjoy. There was only one restriction. All the rest of creation was under our dominion. Yet, there is this one tree – do not eat its fruit. Along comes the tempter with the words, “Yeah, so what?” “What harm will come?” “Why should you not eat of this one tree?” It is a crisis of authority. The relationship is destroyed. Christ now comes to restore our lost relationship. How? By living out his authority, God’s authority, in our midst.

He lived out what he taught. As we continue in Matthew we see his authority. The winds and waves obey his voice. The blind see, the lame walk and the dead are restored back to life. His authority is demonstrated in love. He moves outside the accepted circles of his day and even does miracles among the Gentiles. There is even a wedding banquet and some parties along the way. The response of the people is, “*This is the best teaching they have ever heard*” (7:28b *The Message*). Wow! What a powerful statement.

It is also an interesting statement from the perspective of what he has just taught. Reread Matthew five, six and seven. There is some tough teaching in these chapters. We are told to love our enemies. To do good to those who would hurt us. To feed our enemies. To go an extra mile. To give away our second cloak. And, it is not just doing but even contemplating a thought could bring God’s judgment. How can one applaud such teaching?

The standard is one of love. They saw God’s authority over them lived out in love. **Jesus came having the authority to love us!** Their response, “*This is the best teaching they have ever heard.*”

Don’t tell me you love me – show me you love. The prayer in Lamentations, “*Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored*” (5:21). Is this not a prayer seeking again the love of God on the people of God?

Listen again to the ending of the Sermon on the Mount from *The Message*:

When Jesus concluded his address the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers. This was the best teaching they had ever heard.

Why? Because Jesus lived it out in their midst. Can we be expected to do any less?

Peterson, Eugene, *The Message*, Navipress, 202
Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989