



AUTHORITY.

“... HE WAS EVEN CALLING GOD HIS OWN FATHER,
MAKING HIMSELF EQUAL WITH GOD.”

JOHN 5:19b

AUTHORITY.

My wife and I just got back from vacation in New York City. It was amazing. I'd never been to the city and it'd been a while since Ashley and I got to go somewhere just the two of us, so I was really looking forward to it. I loved it from the moment we landed. I made a running tally of the things I loved while I was there, and we were constantly ranking our favorites as they were happening. Here are a few of my top things: walking Central Park, seeing the World Trade Center Memorial, and eating. Some things that I did not enjoy: Ubering in NYC and entrusting my life to some of the craziest drivers I've ever seen, trying to walk across the street with taxi cabs coming everywhere, no one obeying the white lines dividing traffic, and just the constant honk of the horn.

About midway through the trip, I had the thought of just writing some traffic tickets and handing them out to people. It was crazy and I just thought I could enforce the law better. But I had no right to write tickets. I don't have that type of authority. Last night, we were stuck on the tarmac at LaGuardia for like an hour waiting for our plane to take off, and I literally don't think a single plane was taking off in clear skies. I wanted to just go tell the pilots it's cool to go, but I don't have that type of authority. And last night, I picked a private Uber driver to take us to the airport, but he was gaming the system and picked two people up and dropped two people off on our way to the airport. I wanted to say, "Listen man, I need to get to the airport and I think you're cheating the Uber system right now, so let's just go!" But I wanted to make it home alive and not get dropped off in the wrong neighborhood in NYC so I just stayed quiet. I didn't have the right. I didn't have the authority.

Authority. That's an important word for these next sections of John. The dictionary defines it as the "power or right to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior." Our dictionary highlights the power side of the authority. The word the Bible uses in this section when speaking of the authority of Jesus is the Greek word ἐξουσίαν (exousian) which speaks more directly to the Jesus' right as God to exercise his power. He holds the right to command and control things in this world because he is the "author" of this world. He is the authority.

Tonight, we'll look at Jesus' authority in action.

AUTHORITY IN ACTION.

1. Compassionate authority or compassion for the needy.

The Bible talks about Jesus' ability to empathize with us by reminding us that he, God, became man. He felt the effects of sickness and brokenness in his life. He knows the discomfort of sickness, the pain of social hurt, and the sadness of the death of a loved one. And he cares for us when we feel those too.

One of the clearest pictures we get of Jesus in the Scripture is his loving care for the needy. We constantly see him engaging in conversation with people who have a physical need (i.e. blindness, paralysis, leprosy, or family members' sicknesses and death), a spiritual need (i.e. the rich young ruler, the sinful woman), and those with social "needs" (i.e. tax collectors, prostitutes, criminals). He loves and cares for the broken. That's what John is teaching us about him in John 4 and 5. He is teaching us about the extent and depth of Jesus' compassion for the hurting. And he does this by giving us two different stories of two very different men with very different postures. Jesus' compassion knows no limits.

- He shows compassion to those who recognize their need and turn to him (vv. 46-54)

This man, who may have even worked in Herod's guard, heard of Jesus and his works and sought him out

because his son was dying. He went to Jesus and “begged” (v. 47 - NIV) him to come to see his son. The depth of his concern and urgency of his request can get lost in our reading, but this man was at his last wit. he knew Jesus was his only hope. His “little boy” (term of affection in v. 49) needed help before he died!

And how does Jesus respond? He has compassion on the man. He sees him in his need, he recognizes his pain, and he loves him. He does more for the man than the man even asks. Jesus doesn't go to the house with him. He heals him from a distance. Life was given to the boy at the very word of Jesus.

- He shows compassion to those who don't know where to turn (vv 1-15)

The next scene we enter is very different. There is no recognition of Jesus and dire plea. Instead of being approached, Jesus does the approaching. He approaches a man at the pool of Bethesda. This pool was famous because it had been the place of healing before and there was probably some well-known stories that kept people having hope that this pool could mean healing if they could only get in at the right time.

The man who Jesus approached had been lying there for 38 years, unable to get into the water at the right time. Jesus saw this man, he recognized his pain, and he loved him. He approaches the man and says to him, “Do you want to be healed?” Of course the man wanted to be healed, and he thought he knew the way of healing, but that's not what Jesus was talking about. Jesus does more for the man than the man even thought was possible. He healed him by the power of his word.

Notice that there was no pre-requisite to this man's healing. He actually has no clue who Jesus was as we read in verse 13. Jesus had compassion and healed a seemingly obstinate, ordinary man who didn't even know he could or should look to him for healing. Jesus had compassion on the man's physical brokenness.

And then see Jesus' care for the man's spiritual brokenness. Jesus approaches the man once more in verse 14 and reveals himself to the man. He tells him of the consequences of sin and tells him to stop that way of living.

2. Rightful authority or the right to heal.

You might have expected that the normal response to healing would be excitement! But the Jewish leaders were notorious party poopers. Instead of praising God at the man's healing and instead of inquiring with joy into Jesus, they questioned him with the air of a threat. They were especially ticked off because this healing had occurred on the Sabbath, something that was forbidden by tradition. So they come to Jesus with this question: *What gives you the right?*

John 5:17-18 – “Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because... he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

He angers them even more with his answer... They ask him what right he has to do these things and he claims divine right. More pointedly, they are asking what right does he have to do any work on the day set aside for rest and worship of God. And he answers, “I am God.”

This wasn't the first time that Jesus made the claim of divine authority, either. Here are a few examples:

The Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:21-22; 27-28; 31-32; 33-34; 38-39; 43-44 – “You have heard that it was said... But I say unto you...”

Matthew 7:24 – “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock...”

Matthew 7:28-29 – “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

Luke 7:48-49 – “And [Jesus] said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Then those who were at table with him

began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?'"

John 14:6 - "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Mark 13:31 - "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Luke 9:23-24 - "And [Jesus] said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.'"

And again, in our passage, Jesus continues to escalate the tension by clarifying what his authority entails. He moves from authority over this physical life that we saw in the two miracles to his authority over the spiritual. He does so with a precision.

John 5:21-29 - "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

It's fair to assume that the Jewish leaders got more than they bargained for when they went to talk to Jesus. He escalated their question about healing on the Sabbath to a claim of authority over spiritual life and death. And this is good news for us, because it means that Jesus' purpose in showing compassion to and healing the official's son and the paralyzed man wasn't just to make a good story; it is meant to signal to us the extent of Jesus' compassion for us and the authority that he has to heal us from a far greater need.

3. Heavenly authority or healing from a far greater need.

There's another question that some will ask when reading these stories, especially the one about the man at the pool of Bethesda. If faith wasn't the reason that Jesus healed the man, why didn't Jesus heal everyone there? Why just one man?

What if physical healing wasn't the thing those people and us need most? Jesus' miracles of physical healing in these passages tonight are meant to escalate our hearts to see our need for a miracle of spiritual healing! They are meant to expose our need as far more dire than physical ailment or death and reveal Jesus' authority as greater than meeting physical needs only. Apart from Christ, we are dead spiritually, and Jesus, God, is able to give spiritual life. This is what he meant in his prayer in John 17.

John 17:1-5 - "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, **since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.** And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, **having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.** And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

And a spiritual miracle is exactly what Paul is writing about **2 Corinthians 4:6**, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

AIM FOR THE HEART.

1. To the one like the official who sees his/her need and believes in Jesus: rejoice at Christ's work!
2. To the one like the man at the pool who sees the need but isn't looking to Jesus: turn to Christ and recognize that he is the only one who can give you true satisfaction and healing.
3. To the one like the Jewish leaders who is arguing with Christ's revelation of himself as God: accept Jesus or hate him.

"[Jesus] must have known that to speak like this was to court death. It is His claim to be King; and he knew well that the man who listened to words like this had only two alternatives-the listener must either accept Jesus as the Son of God, or he must hate Him as a blasphemer and seek to destroy Him."¹ - **William Barclay**

¹ Footnote by William Barclay in Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 276.