

“When He Speaks, We Listen”

Matthew 7:28, 29

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“When E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen.” During the 1970’s that was an iconic commercial for the investment firm, E. F. Hutton. It was a bit of an exaggeration. Though some in the investment community no doubt listened to E. F. Hutton, there were plenty of people who did not. And when E. F. Hutton was charged with 2000 counts of wire and mail fraud in 1985 for “check kiting” scheme, pretty much everyone stopped listening to E. F. Hutton.

In our society today, there is really no authority to whom everyone listens. Almost any expert, any authority, has a counterpart who will contradict what he/she says. One economist talks about how great the U.S. economy is doing and another explains how bad things really are.

One consumer website says Hondas and Toyotas offer the best car for your money, while another one recommends Fords and Chevys. Some people trust only what they hear on CNN, others only what they hear on FOX, and some only what they hear on NewsMax. I had a conversation with someone recently who explained why NPR was the most objective news source. Let’s just say I was not persuaded.

The lack of universally respected authority contributes to our post-modern quagmire. Most people believe there is no such thing as absolute truth, only opinions, perspectives, and beliefs.

Someone might say, “Pastor Dan, you think same-sex marriage is wrong, but I think it is okay. You like strawberry shakes, I like chocolate. There is no difference. There is no sense arguing about either topic because our opinions are just a matter of taste. There is no authority to tell us whether strawberry shakes are better than chocolate one, and no authority to tell us whether or not same-sex marriage is wrong.”

The lack of authority affects religious circles as well. The Roman Catholic church is a denomination that claims the Pope is their ultimate, absolute authority. Yet over 80% of American Catholics feel free to ignore his teachings with which they disagree. Folks, there

is no one on the planet to whom everyone, or even almost everyone, listens.

No one currently, that is. Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ lived on this earth. When He spoke, people listened. No, they didn’t all accept His authority, or agree with what He said. Yet they knew He was different from any other politician, scholar, or religious leader they had ever heard. Most of us are here in this room because 2000 years later we still acknowledge His authority. We believe that when Jesus speaks, we need to listen. Let’s pray the Lord would help us develop a greater realization of what Jesus’ authority means for our lives today.

Our text today is Matthew 7:28, 29 Just two verses. This, I think, is the 20th Sunday we have explored Matthew, Jesus’ Sermon of the Mount 5-7. This is Matthew’s conclusion to this remarkable passage. **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 teachers of the law.**

The crowds were astonished or amazed at His teaching. Now, almost 2000 years later, we are amazed as well, amazed that anyone still cares about what He said, amazed at His authority.

Jesus’ authority is evident through both in the manner and content of His teaching. What was Jesus’ style as He taught the crowds? We don’t have video footage or even audio recordings of Jesus speaking, and films like “Jesus of Nazareth” of “The Chosen” contain quite a bit of speculation. Yet, if we look at the text carefully, we gain some insight.

In his commentary, John Stott writes, “*As a teacher, Jesus was neither tentative or apologetic, nor on the other hand was He ever bombastic or flamboyant. Instead, with quiet and unassuming assurance, He laid down the law for the citizens of God’s kingdom.*”

Charles Spurgeon said that Jesus taught with “royal assurance.” He knew what was true. His

analogies were creative and colorful. His style is down to earth and very clear. Yet, what really marks His teaching is His confidence, His authority.

To the first century listener, there was a clear contrast between Jesus and the Jewish scribes or teachers of the law. The Jewish teachers believed their task was to pass on the traditions they had been taught. They claimed no authority of their own. They would search through commentaries of the Old Testament, sighting opinions of various Rabbis.

In explaining what it meant to be a faithful Jew, they often left their hearers with as many questions as answers. Jesus raises a few questions as well, but His answers are striking for the clarity. With complete confidence He declares who will inherit the kingdom of God, who will obtain mercy, see God, be called God's children.

What is most important for us, and most shocking to many, is that Jesus was not just speaking to the first century Jews. Yes, He focuses on the law of Moses, but does so in such a way that it is clear He sees it as God's law.

And as God's law it is universal and absolute in its application. It doesn't matter where or when one lives. The rules and instructions for living as citizens of God's kingdom apply across the board. When He speaks, He expects people from every time and culture, including 21st century Northern Minnesota, to listen. He expects me and you to listen and obey.

So, what is the basis for His authority? Who is this Jesus that He thinks He can tell everyone else how they should live? Now, I think it is good when someone asks that question, because it gets at the heart of what Jesus' message is about. Many non-Christian, read the Sermon of the Mount, pick out a few verses such as the beatitudes, and say, "My, what a marvelous teacher He was. If all of us, Christian and non-Christian, would just live by His teachings, everyone would get along fine."

That is what Ghandi thought. Yet, these folks totally miss the point. Yes, Jesus tells us to get along with others, but He teaches so much more as well.

The main point that comes out of these three chapters is the one highlighted by Matthew in these two verses. The authority of Jesus. Who is this man who dares to speak with such absolute authority? Who is this man that expects everyone else to listen to Him?

Well, folks, the answer to that question is implicitly stated throughout the Sermon on the Mount, and explicitly stated throughout the New Testament. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In fact, He is the eternal Son of God, God the Son, the second person of the divine trinity who, as John says, "In the beginning was with God and was God." He is (John 1:9) the true light that gives light to every man. He is the source of all truth and knowledge.

In fact, He is the creator of the universe.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones of dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.

He is the redeemer and Savior.

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

And He is the Lord of the Universe.

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If Jesus is whom He and the New Testament writers say He is, then it is not surprising He speaks with absolute authority. He speaks as God. I cannot tell you what the weather in Helsinki is like right now because I'm not there. I can only be at one place at one time.

God, of course, has no such limitations and is able to give an absolutely accurate report of weather conditions at any spot on the planet. I cannot tell you what team will win the NCAA basketball tournament next month or even what teams will be in the tournament. I, like you, am bound by time and don't know the outcome of future

events. Again, God doesn't have that limitation. He has complete knowledge of the future. If He chose, He could tell us not only who will win the NCAA men's basketball championship this year, but who will win the Super Bowl in the year 2036.

It is true, that while Jesus was here on earth, He voluntarily gave up some of His divine prerogatives, assumed the limits of space and time. But when He teaches, He speak with the authority that belongs to Him as God. Because He is who He is, when He speaks, we all must listen.

But some will ask, how do we know that Jesus is who He claims to be? His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount is valuable at this point. Read these three chapters carefully and ask yourself, are these the words of a lunatic? Are these the words of someone who belongs in a psych ward because He has delusions of being God?

Or are these the words of a religious huckster? Is this a man who is trying to deceive and defraud others? If your answers to these questions are "no," Jesus is not a lunatic, He is not a liar, then the only reasonable option is to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. He is who He claims to be. He can speak as God with absolute authority. He cannot be merely a good human teacher.

Throughout the gospel accounts He claims to be able to do thing only God can do, like forgive sins, rightly receive worship, and judge the world. If these claims are not true, He is either a liar or lunatic. If they are true, He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the absolute authority.

And friends, if you are not sure who Jesus is, I encourage you to sit down later today or sometime this week and read Matthew chapters 5-7. If you have questions, feel free to give me a call. You need to come to grips with who Jesus was and is.

Folks, I have just presented what C. S. Lewis called the trilemma of Jesus Christ. Is He a liar, lunatic, or Lord? Some have pointed out that there is another option, legend. Maybe Jesus didn't really say or do the things the Bible says. Maybe He didn't even really exist. Yes, that is theoretically possible, but to claim Jesus was merely a legend flies in the face of all the evidence.

Even the idea that the New Testament does not provide an accurate account of Jesus words and actions is contrary to the evidence. A few years ago, a group known as the "Jesus seminary" claimed Jesus didn't actually say 80% of the things attributed to Him in the gospels. They assumed the words reportedly spoken by Jesus, but also found in the Old Testament or repeated somewhere else in the New Testament, were put in Jesus' mouth by the early Christians, not words he actually spoke.

Yet, that methodology can lead to some pretty warped conclusions. If 20 years from now you took a written copy of this sermon and applied that test you might decide that at least 80% of the sermon was created by Erin when she typed up the manuscript.

The conclusions of people like the Jesus Seminary are really fanciful speculations. There is every reason to believe the four gospels are accurate accounts of Jesus' life and teaching. Thus, when we read the Sermon on the Mount, we hear Jesus speaking. We listen to Jesus through this book, the Bible. Through its pages, Jesus speaks to us. And because of who He is, the eternal Son of God, when He speaks, we must listen.

Now we need to remember that the entire New Testament speaks with Jesus' authority. Some Bibles have the words of Jesus in red print. A few years ago, that was quite common. Sometimes these red-letter editions of the New Testament can be kind of confusing. They may give the impression that what Jesus says is more important and authoritative than what other New Testament writers say. That is not the case.

Peter, John, Matthew, Luke, and Paul, write as Jesus' representatives. They were commissioned to speak for Him. Their words, as recorded in the New Testament, carry the same authority as the red-letter words. It is wrong to ever play Jesus off against Paul or one of the other apostles. To say, "Well, I know the apostle Paul says that, but Jesus says this," means you either misunderstand Paul or Jesus. They don't contradict each other. When any of the New Testament writers speak, we all must listen.

As I think about it, however, maybe having the words spoken by Jesus in red is not such a bad

idea. Not that Jesus' words are more important, but it is good to be reminded of the wonder and glory of the incarnation. God becoming a human being, living on this earth, speaking words in a human language, likely Aramaic, is not something that happens every day.

There is nothing wrong with feeling a sense of awe when I read a certain verse and think, "These are words actually spoken by the Lord Jesus." Despite what some claim, Jesus' words are clearly for Christians today, because He is the Lord of the church. He speaks with absolute and universal authority. Though we live almost 2000 years after Jesus visited this planet, through His word, especially the New Testament, and by His Holy Spirit, Jesus still speaks to us today.

How exactly do we listen to Jesus? Through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Like John Calvin, I believe the word and spirit should never be separated. Rarely, if ever, does the Holy Spirit speak to us independently of the Bible. Oh, some people claim the Lord tells them things that have nothing to do with anything the Bible says, but I suspect those words have nothing to do with what the Lord is actually saying. These folks are likely listening to their own thoughts and desires, not to Jesus.

At the same time, just reading the Bible, thinking about the words in their historical context, without desiring to hear the Lord speak to you, without prayerfully pondering how Jesus wants you to respond, is not listening to Jesus.

Yes, I can read the Bible and learn that Jesus expects His followers to share their financial resources with folks who are in need. But I also need to listen for Jesus to tell me, through His Spirit, with whom I should be sharing the money I have. No, I am not going to find the name of that person in the Bible. Yet, if I prayerfully ponder, utilizing both intuition and logic, I believe the Holy Spirit will bring a name or names to my mind.

Or maybe I need to ask some of my friends, "Hey, do you know anyone who is in financial need right now that I might be able to help out?" The Holy Spirit often uses good, godly counsel, to help us hear the voice of the Lord Jesus.

So, what is our response when Jesus speaks to us? When Jesus speaks, we must listen, and then believe and obey. As He said, **Matthew 7:24a, 26a** "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man... And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man. Or as **James 1:22** puts it, **Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

Years ago, Sir Leonard Wood received an invitation to dinner from the King of France. Wood never responded to the invitation, but simply showed up for the dinner. When the Chief of Staff asked Wood why he had not let them know he was coming, he replied, "A king's invitation is not to be answered, but only to be obeyed." In other words, he believed the invitation was a command to come, not a question of whether he would like to come. Indeed folks, when Jesus puts a period after a command, we must not change it to a question mark.

What are Jesus' commands we need to obey? The most basic is the one given in **Mark 1:15**, "**Repent and believe in the gospel.**" In other words, Jesus says, "Turn away from your sin and self-reliance, and trust in me as Savior and Lord."

Those who don't do that and continue to trust in their own righteousness are not doing what Jesus says. They are not respecting His authority, nor putting His words into practice. If you are listening today and have not done that, now is the time. If you are not sure what I mean, make sure you talk to me or one of our other pastors.

What about those of us who are Christians? What commands does Jesus expect us to hear and obey? Well, we could make a long, long list. There are a couple dozen just in Matthew 5 – 7. Yet, Jesus makes it rather simple for us. He says all the commands are summed up in just two, **Matthew 22:37, 39** **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

In other words, love God, love other people. Treat the Lord and treat others the way they ought to be treated. Don't neglect to express worship, praise, and prayer to the Lord. Forgive those who wrong

you. Apologize to those who you wrong. Treat your spouse with respect and love. Honor your parents. Tell the truth. Be generous with your money and time. Visit the sick and lonely. Control your temper. Avoid pornography. Stand up for what is good and right in the political sphere. Try to encourage those who are discouraged. We must listen and obey.

And don't forget, He commands us to make disciples **Matthew 28:18-21 Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (When He speaks, we must listen) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Friends, even though the world in which we live seems rather chaotic and confused, the Lord Jesus continues to speak His truth, with authority. This is truth we so desperately need, and it is truth He speaks through His word and by His Spirit. When Jesus speaks, may the Lord enable us to listen, believe, and obey His words.