

<b>Series:</b> Lent: The Power of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> Matthew 8:5-13	<b>Title:</b> The Authority of Trust	<b>Date:</b> 03.06.2022
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
By healing the centurion's servant, Jesus establishes His power over the material world, but it's the spiritual reality of faith to which Jesus draws our attention. We give witness to Jesus's authority in our lives by our obedience to His teachings & our willingness to live in submission to God's Word.			

### COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Read with me from p662 in your pew Bibles, Matthew 8:5-13 which is the story of the faith of the centurion. A story where we will see the authority of trust...

*When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. <sup>6</sup>“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.” <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, “Shall I come & heal him?” <sup>8</sup>The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup>For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” <sup>10</sup>When Jesus heard this, he was amazed & said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. <sup>11</sup>I say to you that many will come from the east & the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac & Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup>But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth.” <sup>13</sup>Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.*

By healing the centurion's servant, Jesus establishes His power over the material world, but it's the spiritual reality of faith to which Jesus draws our attention. We give witness to Jesus's authority in our lives by our obedience to His teachings & our willingness to live in submission to His Word.

In this instance, Jesus demonstrates His power with an act of healing. This story's remembered for the healing of the centurion's servant. But the attention's really focused on the faith of the centurion. Since Jesus immediately said yes to the centurion's request (Matthew 8:7) when he made it. But the centurion continues (8:8-9) & Jesus marvels (*thaumazō*) at his faith.<sup>1</sup> Later, others will marvel as Jesus walks on water (Matthew 8:27) and at the healing of a paralyzed man...but what impresses Jesus is our faith.

A real focus on the faith of the people with whom Jesus interacts is a pattern we see often. This episode is one of Jesus's first public acts of ministry following the Sermon on the Mount. **It continues “a major shifting of the goal-posts, because inward faith, not**

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<sup>1</sup> Strong's Greek Lexicon [KJV], s.v. “G2296, *thaumazō*,” <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G2296&t=KJV>

external characteristics, is now the sole membership requirement for the kingdom.”<sup>2</sup> It’s the centurion’s inward faith which initiates the encounter with Jesus & opens up the opportunity for Jesus to heal the servant.

The initial dialogue between Jesus & the centurion is significant. The centurion requests healing for his servant. Jesus replies, “*I will come & heal him*” (Matthew 8:6). The centurion, though, dismisses Jesus’s intended action by replying all Jesus need do is “*say the word*” (8:8) and the healing will be accomplished.

We find in this statement a play on words. Jesus is, after all, the Word (*logos*) we’re told in John 1:1 & 1:14. In this context, however, coming from a centurion, “speak” also carries the connotation of “command”.<sup>3</sup> The centurion was a professional officer in the Roman army whose title originated from the number of one hundred (or a “century”) legionaries (soldiers) in his command.<sup>4</sup> The number of soldiers expanded over time, as did the reputation & honor attached to their commander. The centurion is accustomed to having his words obeyed, so he assumes rightly Jesus’s words will also be obeyed. In the exercise of & obedience to authority, we find here a model of faith commended by Jesus Himself (Matthew 8:10-12).

Most of us are acquainted with formal & informal authority. Formal authority is attached to a title or position. More often, though, people have informal authority over us. We’ll listen to the people we trust & do what they ask because we trust them. If we don’t trust leaders, even if they have formal authority over us, we often do everything we can to avoid doing what they tell us to do. We don’t understand intention of heart without trust. We don’t ‘hear’ someone clearly, let alone their intentions, or recognize the greater need for their requests if we’re just looking at them with a crooked eye, waiting for them to say something wrong, or something we can use against them. You may be doing that to me right now as I preach :)

In his classic book, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz defines authority as “conferred power to perform a service.” He notes all authority, ultimately, is conferred, or bestowed. It’s given, if even subconsciously by one or many to another. Authority’s conferred to some more easily than to others. “Not all authority relationships are the product of a conscious & deliberate conferring of power. Often, they’re produced by habitual deference.”<sup>5</sup> The centurion possesses formal authority & recognizes it in Jesus. That’s why the centurion can say with confidence Jesus’s word will be obeyed (Matthew 8:9). Nevertheless, Jesus also wants the people to trust Him.

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<sup>2</sup> David Jackman and William Philip, *Teaching Matthew: Unlocking the Gospel of Matthew for the Bible Teacher* [Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2003], 70

<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, A Select Library of the Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers 10, ed. Philip Schaff [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888], quoted in Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 1, *The Christbook: Matthew 1–12*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 380

<sup>4</sup> Mark Cartwright, “Centurion,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, July 4, 2014, <https://www.ancient.eu/Centurion/>

<sup>5</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994], 57–58

They must confer authority on Him. Only then will obedience flow out of awe & love, from Jesus's formal & informal authority.

Matthew 17 is the account of the Transfiguration & in v5, God the Father says, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* In other words, choose to confer authority on Jesus, giving Him the right to speak & the honor of obeying His directives, commands & requests. Even when we don't understand or agree, trusting He knows best for us - understanding often comes later & agreement eventually follows experience. We often think we know best, but don't, which is why obedience even when we don't understand is important. Without conferred authority, the relationship we have with Jesus doesn't work - it's not a peer-to-peer relationship. It's king/vassal relationship - we steward all that is His. Any relationship is hindered by distrust.

Remember Jesus said in John 14:21...*"Whoever has my commands & keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them & show myself to them."* This says love is not a prerequisite to relationship, but a sign of it. So, when Romans 10:9 says, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,"* it's saying we confer authority to Jesus by confession - a sign that we've placed our trust in Him & a sign of love in this relationship we have with Him.

In Malcolm Gladwell's book *David & Goliath*, he tells the story of the Brownsville neighborhood in New York City, where Joanne Jaffe took over as head of the city's Housing Bureau, with responsibility for the projects. She created the Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program, but the people didn't trust her, since they didn't trust cops. No progress was made until Thanksgiving 2007, when Jaffe begged for & received \$2,000 to buy a turkey for every family in her program. She delivered five turkeys herself. In all five apartments, she later described in "Every family, there was hugging & crying." To each, she said the same thing: "I know sometimes you can hate police. I understand... But I just want you to know, as much as it seems that we're harassing you by knocking on your door, we really do care & we really do want you to have a Happy Thanksgiving." Ultimately, between 2006 & 2011, robberies in the Brownsville neighborhood dropped by 80 percent. Joanne Jaffe did what she said she was going to do, so the families trusted her. She earned their respect. She earned authority in their eyes.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, the centurion trusts Jesus, and that trust is evidence of love. That trust enables a relationship of authority & obedience which saves the life of the man's servant & transforms the people around them.

Another really meaningful illustration of a leader who earned the trust of his followers comes in the 2015 film *McFarland USA*, about cross-country coach Jim White, who led his boys' team to the state championship in 1987. As an outsider to the rural, Latino

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<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* [New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013], 209-16

community, White had to earn the trust of the boys & their parents. The film shows him earning the families' trust by visiting their homes, eating with them, and thanking them for the privilege.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, he shows that he can be one of them, just as Jesus showed solidarity with humanity by entering our reality & living as we do enduring the suffering of life even to death for us.

How do we submit to authority? Or do we? There are few public authorities who enjoy any measure of trust at all. In the US, for instance, polls show a continued distrust in government & most public institutions.<sup>8</sup> If we're not in the habit of submitting to authority in our day-to-day lives, then how are we to begin to live in submission to God's authority?

As a simple exercise, consider the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. What is the hardest commandment to obey? That passage begins...*And God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup>"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* Notice, there's a defining of relationship: God is god, we're not. Then a reminder of His goodness to Israel in that He brought about their salvation before giving the 10 Commandments. Then it launches into the list. I'm only listing the commandments & not all the descriptors which follow some...

1. <sup>3</sup>*"You shall have no other gods before me.*
2. <sup>4</sup>*"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them...*
3. <sup>7</sup>*"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God...*
4. <sup>8</sup>*"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy...*
5. <sup>12</sup>*"Honor your father & your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*
6. <sup>13</sup>*"You shall not murder.*
7. <sup>14</sup>*"You shall not commit adultery.*
8. <sup>15</sup>*"You shall not steal.*
9. <sup>16</sup>*"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*
10. <sup>17</sup>*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

The Hebrew expression for the 10 commandments occurring 3 times in the Old Testament (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4), literally means 'ten words'. So, we refer to Ex 20 as the Decalogue, *deka*, the Greek word for 'ten' & *logos* meaning "word." Commandments 1-4 teach love for God & 5-10, love for others. **Augustine said, "Love**

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<sup>7</sup> *McFarland USA*, directed by Niki Caro, written by Christopher Cleveland, Bettina Gilois, and Grant Thompson [Hollywood, CA: Mayhem/Walt Disney Picture, 2015]

<sup>8</sup> Alia E. Dastagir, "Trust No One? Americans Lack Faith in the Government, the Media and Each Other, Survey Finds," *USA Today*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/07/23/pew-study-american-trust-declines-government-media-and-each-other/1798963001/>

God & do as you please.” Since when you love the Lord with all of your heart, mind & strength, you naturally want to do what’s good. In other words, if you follow the 1st commandment, everything else falls into place with God & others. There are 9 things I’d like to point out about the Decalogue...

**They reveal God’s heart & who He is...**They’re an expression of the Lawgiver’s heart & character. We typically don’t like do’s & don’ts. But the commandments not only show us what God wants; they show us what God’s like - His honor, worth & majesty. They tell us what matters to God. We can’t disdain the Law without disrespecting the Lawgiver.

**They set us apart.** We’re a kingdom of priests & a holy nation as it says in 1 Pet. 2:9. We are God’s people, set apart to live according to God’s ways.

**They don’t constrain rather they provide freedom.** God means to give us abundant life (John 10:10) and true freedom (John 8:32). 1 John 5:3 tells us His laws aren’t burdensome. When you’re driving you appreciate the traffic laws because they provide order & safety. What would sports be if there were no boundaries? **Take a look at this Alpha Video clip from episode 6.** We live with good boundaries in many areas of life, why would we have disdain for the boundaries which God places on us? They’re there for our own good, not that He’s some cosmic killjoy.

**They’re not given to earn salvation.** The Christian message isn’t that God has rules & if I follow the rules, God will love me & save me. That’s not what happened in Exodus. The Israelites were oppressed & God said, “I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free & forgiven, I’m going to give you a new way to live.” Salvation isn’t the *reward for obedience*; salvation is the *reason for obedience*. Jesus doesn’t say, “If you obey my commandments, I will love you.” Instead, he first washes the feet of the disciples, then says, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). All of our doing is only because of what He’s first done for us.

**They’re more trustworthy than our intuition or cultural code.** We live in a paradoxical age where many will say, “Right & wrong are what you decide for yourself.” Yet these same people will rebuke others for violating any number of assumed commands. As a culture, we may be quite free & liberal when it comes to sex, but we can be absolutely fundamentalist when it comes to the moral claims of the sexual revolution. Old swear words may not scandalize us any longer, but now there are other words, offensive slurs & insults, that’ll quickly put someone out of polite company. We’re still a society with a moral code. But, the Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). The way to find moral instruction isn’t by listening to your gut but by listening to God. If we want to know right from wrong, how to live the good life, how to live in a way that blesses friends & neighbors, we do things God’s way.

**The church’s most important instruction has been based on them.** The church has historically put the Ten Commandments at the center of its teaching ministry, especially for children & new believers. For centuries, catechetical instruction

was based on three things: the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer & the Ten Commandments. In other words, when people asked, "How do we do discipleship? Teach our kids about the Bible? What do new Christians need to know about Christianity?" their answers always included an emphasis on the Ten Commandments.

**They are critical to our understanding of the rest of the Old Testament law.** They came from God as He spoke to the people face-to-face (Deut. 5:1–5), and they came from Mount Sinai amidst fire, cloud, thick darkness & a loud voice (Deut. 5:22–27). Exodus 20 marks a literal & spiritual high point in the life of Israel. It's no wonder the tablets of the Law, along with the manna & Aaron's staff, were placed inside the Ark of the Covenant (Heb. 9:4). There are many more laws in the Old Testament. But these first ten are foundational for the rest. The Ten Commandments are like the constitution for Israel, and what follows are regulatory statutes.

**They're central to the ethics of the New Testament.** Think of Mark 10:17, for example. This is where the rich young ruler comes to Jesus & asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus says to him, "You know the commandments." Then lists the second table of the Law, the commandments which relate to neighbors: "Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father & mother" (v. 19). Jesus isn't laying out a path for earning eternal life. We know from the rest of the story Jesus is setting the young man up for a fall, because the one command he obviously hasn't obeyed is the one command Jesus skips - do not covet (vv. 20–22). But it's noteworthy when Jesus has to give a convenient summary of our neighborly duties, He goes straight to the Ten Commandments.

**They're relevant today.** Can we keep the commandments fully or perfectly? No. Do they serve to show us our sin & lead us to the cross? Absolutely. But the Commandments also show us the way to live, the way to love our neighbor, and the way to love God with all heart, soul, mind & strength. We still need these Ten Words. Have they been changed in some respects by the coming of Christ? For sure - transformed, but not trashed. We can't keep the Ten Commandments rightly unless we keep them in Christ, through Christ, and with a view to the all-surpassing greatness of Christ. As new creations in Christ, the law isn't only our duty, but our delight. If we want to love Christ as He deserves & desires, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15).<sup>9</sup>

By healing the centurion's servant, Jesus establishes His power over the material world, but it's the spiritual reality of faith to which Jesus draws our attention. We give witness to Jesus's authority in our lives by our obedience to His teachings & our willingness to live in submission to God's Word. **The question is do you live in the authority of trust in Jesus? Whatever your most challenging commandment is, make an intentional effort to live in obedience to it in the weeks leading up to Easter. A simple act of obedience to God's most well-known Commandments proclaims to ourselves & to the world around us that Jesus is the Son of God, worthy of our ultimate faith.**

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-ten-commandments/>