

Intro

This morning we return to Matthew. To recap, we've explored the infancy narratives. The one born in a manger was God with us, God in human flesh. The one who came to save his people from their sins. Jumping ahead about 30 years, John the Baptist came on the scene, preaching a baptism for the forgiveness of sins to prepare the way for Jesus' public ministry. Having passed Satan's test where Adam failed, Jesus gathered his early followers.

Then we spent some time in the Sermon on the Mount. We learned about kingdom righteousness. Faith in God is more than outward conformity to a set of written laws. God cares about our heart. Our humility, our love, our motives, our trust in God.

This morning we shift from Jesus teaching to Jesus in action. As we examine several narratives, we want to ask this question:

CRUCIAL QUESTION: What authority does Jesus have?

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

These episodes are arranged to teach us Jesus is God, so that we'll follow him. Our problem is a lack of faith. The solution to our lack of faith is confidence in Jesus. This morning we'll encounter four aspects of Jesus' authority.

Point 1: Authority over sickness and disease

READ Matthew 8:1-17

8:1-4

Three episodes illustrate the authority of Jesus over sickness and disease. First, leprosy...

Leprosy was a dreaded and repulsive disease much like AIDs. Leprosy could spread so quarantine was necessary. Lepers had to be isolated from family and neighbors as long as the condition persisted.

Leviticus 13:45-46 "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' ⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

If they were to re-enter society, the condition had to subside. If the disease didn't go away, they were a hopeless people.

A desperate person in a desperate situation. Nowhere to turn. But he's heard about Jesus. Reports have spread and the leper believes in Jesus' healing power. So he approaches Jesus.

In doing this, the leper is breaking the law. And normally touching a leper would make a man unclean. But not Jesus. Jesus purifies the leper, making him clean. Jesus transcends the law by touching a leper (Num 5:1-4), but he instructs the leper to comply with the law (8:4).

Note the leper's faith: he believes in Jesus' ability to heal and entrusts himself to Jesus' will. Jesus' will is decisive.

8:5-13

Jesus comes to the aid of another outcast, a centurion.

A centurion was a Gentile (Roman or Syrian) military leader who commanded one hundred men. Animosity existed between Jews and Roman occupiers. A despised Roman authority was approaching a Jewish religious teacher in desperation. This was odd.

The centurion simply mentions his servant's paralysis, and Jesus declares his servant will be healed. The centurion affirms Jesus and declares his faith. He is unworthy of having Jesus in his home and has faith that all Jesus has to do is say it and his servant will be healed. Like the centurion has authority to command his soldiers, Jesus has authority to heal human bodies. A Roman centurion declaring his unworthiness to have a Jew in his home. Quite radical.

So Jesus affirms the man's faith:

"Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Evidently word had traveled to the centurion about what Jesus was doing. And the centurion believed. In a swipe at unbelieving Israel, Jesus declares that Gentiles will enter the kingdom of heaven while the Jewish people are excluded (= believing Gentiles like the centurion and unbelieving Jews).

Note the centurion's faith: full confidence that Jesus can heal a paralyzed man by simply saying a word. Yet the centurion approaches Jesus with respect and honor. Jesus isn't obligated to heal the servant, but he is able if he chooses.

8:13-17

In the third healing episode, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. He touches her hand and the effect is immediate. Jesus has power over illness and disease. On the same night, everyone sick was healed.

This directly fulfilled OT prophecy:

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Matthew is pointing out the fact that Jesus did what Isaiah 53:4 prophesied. Jesus' healings fulfilled OT prophecy. Jesus is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who will die for the sins of his people. Jesus is the Messiah.

Matthew's translation of Isaiah 53:4 reads illnesses and diseases, but the ESV translates the two words with griefs and sorrows. Griefs should be translated sickness and sorrows can be translated physical pain. Matthew translates the Hebrew more literally than the ESV. The NIV is closer to Matthew.

Application

These healings reveal Jesus' concern for societal outcasts, Jesus' power over sickness and disease, and the faith that pleases Jesus.

Faith trusts in God's ability. Faith humbly asks of God. And faith submits to God's will. The leper says, "if you will." The centurion says I'm not worthy to have you enter my home. Both believe Jesus can heal immediately if he wills.

We pray a lot in this church for illnesses and diseases. In our prayers we should declare our trust in God's ability, our status as servants (we can't make demands on God), and our submission to God's will. God answers as he chooses.

What if God chooses not to heal us?

- 1) God is still good → he died for us
- 2) God cares → he is with you in your suffering standing with you and strengthening your spirit in the midst of it & he sends others to help with your needs, whether believers or those outside the church
- 3) God will one day end all suffering → in the new heavens and new earth death, sickness, and disease will be gone forever
- 4) God has a good purpose for your suffering → like when God intended good from Joseph being sold into slavery (Gen 50:20)

Jesus helps those who come to him.

Point 2: Authority over his disciples

READ Matthew 8:18-22

Explanation

A scribe comes up to Jesus declaring his allegiance:

"Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Scribes were in the religious establishment that opposed Jesus. Jesus responds:

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

In other words, do you really want to follow me? Do you know what you're getting yourself into? Have you counted the cost? The Christian won't be a comfortable ride. Jesus himself is always on the road.

Jesus' isn't a salesman looking to close a deal. He isn't desperate for commitments. He's looking for wholehearted commitment.

Another follower says, *"Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

Jesus responds, *"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."*

A word of caution. Jesus isn't saying don't honor your father and mother. Loving our neighbor, or our parents, is one way we love God. Jesus isn't excusing neglect of family responsibilities. Jesus' intent is priorities. Jesus must have our undivided allegiance. Jesus demands that we prioritize him over family. We can't value family more than Jesus. But in the normal flow of life, love for Jesus leads us to care for our family.

Application

I'm sure you're familiar with the "total surrender" concept. Like the hymn, "I Surrender All." We must place our lives at God's disposal. We'll do whatever God wants of us.

It sounds simple. One act of dedication and my spiritual life will take off. It's not that easy. We're still battling sin. We still lack in character. Sometimes we don't want to do what God wants of us. We still lack in wisdom. Sometimes we don't have the discernment to know what God wants of us.

But we do need to determine that we'll live for Jesus. Like Bible commands to tell the truth, keep our word, and love our enemies. We must settle the matter in our own minds. God's word is clear. But we still struggle with the want to because of sin in our hearts. Surrender's a struggle so recognize our need for God's help in doing God's will. My willpower isn't enough. God needs to change my desires. We also need each other. We need fellow believers to encourage, challenge, and hold us accountable. Jesus demands "total surrender," but he doesn't demand we do it by ourselves. And surrender is a process. As God develops character and wisdom our desires change and we surrender more.

But we surrender because we realize Jesus is good and we're not. It's we that have to change. So Jesus says, "follow me."

Point 3: Authority over nature

READ Matthew 8:23-27

Explanation

The disciples have encountered Jesus. They've seen signs and wonders. They've heard Jesus teach. So you might think they've got kingdom living down. Not so fast.

As Jesus and his disciples are out for a boat ride, a dangerous storm emerges. This wouldn't have been uncommon in that region where the air created waves up to eight or nine feet that would easily fill a boat. While a storm threatens their lives, Jesus is sleeping.

Put yourself in their shoes. How would you respond? You've seen healings and demons cast out, but you've never seen a man control a storm. Would you think stilling a storm was possible? Maybe they believed Jesus could fix this. But why is he sleeping? Doesn't he care? They're about to die. Whatever the case, they're fearful. So they wake Jesus up. Jesus responds:

"Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"

Then he ends the storm. Threat averted. All is well. They were shocked:

"What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Evidently healings they could comprehend, but stilling a storm was unimaginable. What kind of man is Jesus? Not a normal man. God the Son in human flesh.

Application

What's the problem here? Shouldn't they have been scared? After all, a storm threatened their lives. This story illustrates a spiritual truth: when we know who Jesus is, we replace fear with faith. Faith is the antidote to fear.

We might not be on a boat in the middle of a storm while Jesus is sleeping, but we face storms that make us afraid. What is it for you?

- cancer
- the health of a loved one
- unstable economy and loss of income
- stock market crash
- unexpected, catastrophic expenses
- difficult relationship

We face real threats. But Jesus tells us not to fear. He says have faith. Not faith that everything will be easy. But faith that God sees. That God cares. That as we go about life, making the best choices we can, God is guiding our lives. If you don't trust God cares and he's in control, you'll be paralyzed. Faith is the antidote to fear. God is big enough to help us in our troubles. God is big enough to carry us through life until he wills to take us home.

We surrender our lives to Jesus because we trust him.

Point 4: Authority over demons

READ 8:28-34

Explanation

As Jesus and his disciples got off the boat, they encountered two demon-possessed men *"so fierce that no one could pass that way."* Mark describes the demon possession as being too strong to be subdued, able to break shackles and chains, crying out loud, and cutting oneself with stones (Mark 5:1-20). No one was able to pass through, yet the demons that possess these men are afraid of Jesus:

"What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

Again, there's something unique about this man Jesus. The time is the final judgment when Satan and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10).

The demons are afraid, so they beg Jesus to send them into pigs. They're afraid of something. Luke calls it the abyss (Luke 8:31). 2 Peter 2:4 speaks of chained angels in the underworld, kept until the judgment. Jesus grants their request and casts them into pigs. The pigs subsequently drown themselves. Demons destroy. They ruined men. Now they've ruined pigs. The city comes out to meet Jesus, and shockingly, they ask Jesus to leave. Shouldn't they be happy the demon possessed men have been set free and the way of passage is no longer blocked? Luke says the people were seized with great fear because of what had occurred (Luke 8:37). The fact that demon-possessed men were restored to normal and demons drove pigs to drown creeped them out. It was easier to avoid the way of passage and leave the demon-possessed men alone. And who was this Jesus? A man who could send demons out of humans and into pigs. That type of man is a little scary.

Application

What should we make of this episode?

- 1) Demons are real
 - Demon-possession still happens today
 - Demonic effects include destructive influence (cutting, isolation, ferocity) or physical ailments (e.g., seizures, inability to hear) → sometimes physical effects result from demons
 - Demon-possession isn't always this severe → Scripture presents several episodes, but doesn't catalog everything we could possibly know about demons

2) Protection from demons is found in Jesus

The men were ruled by demons, but after encountering Jesus they were restored to sanity (Mark 5:15). If we're followers of Jesus, we shouldn't be afraid of demon possession. As those who've repented and believed, we've been born of the Spirit and we can't be controlled by Satan. When we're born again, we escape the snare of Satan (see 2 Tim 2:24-26). However, we can be influenced and affected by Satan:

- 1) Susceptible to false teaching and deception (2 Cor 11:12-15; Gal 1:6-7; Eph 6:11-12)
- 2) Susceptible to division (Jas 3:14-16)

To non-Christians

If you're not a follower of Jesus, you're susceptible to demon-possession. I don't say this to scare you to believe. I say this for your good. Satan destroys lives. Jesus restores lives. We're ruined by Satan's influence and we're ruined by our own hearts. So we sin = break God's law. Like Jesus rescued these men from demon-possession, he wants to rescue you from your sin. Maybe God's working on your heart. Maybe you feel the weight of your sin. You want to believe. Jesus died on the cross so that sinners could be forgiven and be set free from the power of sin. So trust in Jesus and follow him. We'll help.

Conclusion

This morning we've seen who Jesus is: he's God the Son in human flesh. His disciples were shocked when he stilled a storm. He is a man, but he isn't merely a man. He's God.

This morning we've seen what Jesus does. As God, he exercised authority over sickness and disease, over nature, and over demons. His authority was compassionate. He healed the outcasts, he protected his people, and he set people free from Satan's torment.

This morning we've seen what Jesus demands. As God, he demands our total allegiance and calls us to place our faith in him, not in ourselves. We follow Jesus because we trust him.