

*What Christians do should verify what they say,  
and what they say should be spoken with authority:  
"Thus saith the Lord."*

## THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

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The Miracle of the Healing of the Demoniac

(Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37)

AUTHORITARIANISM is a concept with many connotations. Roman Catholicism has attached to it with a vengeance its doctrine of the church. Barthianism has made every attempt to detach it in its absolute sense from the written Word. Evangelicals sometimes apparently do not seem to know what to do with it, though we recognize that in certain respects authority is related both to Christ, the written Word, the church, and even leaders in the church. And yet authoritarianism is a good word, for Christianity is an authoritarian religion. Here is a miracle which points up this authority of Christianity which is ultimately the authority of Christ.

The city was Capernaum, the Jewish capital of Galilee.<sup>1</sup> The occasion was our Lord's customary practice of attending synagogue worship. The custom began in Nazareth (Luke 4:16) as a part of His childhood training and continued during His public ministry in Capernaum. Our Lord evi-

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<sup>1</sup>Notice that Luke's account adds the fact that this is a city of Galilee, for the simple reason that Theophilus would not be conversant with the cities of Galilee.

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dently considered it no compromise to attend or even to take part in the services of Judaism, though they were far removed in practice from God's original intention and pattern. Neither did our Lord consider the inadequacy of the preacher or the ritualism of the service sufficient reason to excuse Him from regular attendance at the synagogue.

The synagogue was not a biblically ordained institution. Synagogues sprang up after the captivity in every place where Jews were scattered among Gentiles, but there is no word in the Old Testament authorizing their establishment or directing their organization. But that they were carefully organized is a well-established fact. There was a council of elders with its president or *archisynagogos*. There were also rulers and shepherds, as well as a minister who kept the building and often served also as schoolmaster. Qualifications for these officials were detailed and strict.<sup>2</sup>

This is the background of the miracle and the situation in which the Master's authority was declared and demonstrated that Sabbath day.

#### 1. Authoritative Declaration—the Doctrine

The perfect simplicity of the narratives could be misleading, for one should not think that the Lord just appeared at the synagogue and began immediately to teach. Discourtesy did not characterize His uncompromising teaching or life, and on this occasion we may certainly assume that our Lord observed the conventionalities of the synagogue service. If this is so, then the procedure may have been something like this. As He entered the synagogue the chief ruler asked Him to be the messenger for that day. As a part of His duties, then, He would have begun the service with two formal prayers, which were followed by the repetition of the *Shema*. Certain prayers of benediction, followed by blessing by the priests, concluded the liturgical part of the service. Then the Law and Prophets were read and the sermon followed.<sup>3</sup> It was the sermon that gave the Lord Jesus His opportunity for the authoritative declaration of His doctrine.

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<sup>2</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, 438-39.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 439-445.

(a) *The Content of His Doctrine.* As to the exact content of His teaching on this as well as on other occasions, we can only guess. An important clue to the right answer is found in the earliest recorded sermon of Christ, in Matthew 5-7. Evidently our Lord's teaching was far removed from the conventionalities of the times and known for its originality. It unfolded the love of God; it emphasized the necessity of inward reality in contrast to externals; it put real religion above ritual; it exhorted men to look at their hearts, for it emphasized the fact that God requires truth in the inward parts. Our Lord always applied His message to His hearers, and yet in it all He was ever the gentle One (Isa. 42:3).

(b) *The Characteristic of His Doctrine.* Whatever the exact content, it is abundantly clear that the chief characteristic of His teaching was its authority. The Lord's teaching struck home to the hearts of His hearers. The scribes, who were the Jewish teachers of the Law in that day, were more like guardians than teachers, for they merely guarded the Old Testament with its rabbinic explanations rather than putting forth a personal opinion. But here was One who said: "Ye have heard it said to those of old . . . but I say unto you . . ." Little wonder that the people were astonished with the authority of His teaching. Here was not simply personal opinion; here was truth—God's truth.

(c) *The Consequences of His Doctrine.* Authority astonishes, and so it did in Capernaum. As our Lord was teaching, the people were being continually astonished.<sup>4</sup> The word "astonish" literally means *to strike with a blow*, and that kind of astonishment was going on while He was teaching—not just after He finished. What a lesson to ministers today! While we speak, not merely afterward at the so-called invitation time, men should be astonished at what we are saying; and it will be like that if we speak with authority as He did.

## 2. Authoritative Denunciation—the Demon

This authoritative teaching brought further results in the

<sup>4</sup>In both accounts both verbs are in the imperfect which indicates continuousness.

synagogue. It aroused a demon within one of those present in that service; and, once aroused, the demon spoke and, having spoken, he was denounced by the Lord with the same authority with which He taught the people.

(a) *The Description of the Demon.* The accounts of the deliverance of those who were demonized, as well as of other miracles in the Bible, have been called into question by some. Some have said that the Lord actually did not perform any healing of those who were believed to be possessed, but, the evangelists have erroneously attributed it to Him. Others have stated that the Lord did go through the form of casting out demons, although in reality He knew that there were no demons there to be cast out. Still others declare that He went through the form of casting out demons because He believed that there were demons there but in that belief, He was mistaken and merely shared the erroneous belief of His contemporaries. In other words, these three explanations boil down to this: (1) either the evangelists lied; or (2) Jesus acted out a lie, though He knew better; or (3) Jesus was deceived in His beliefs. The first explanation, if true, opens the doors for denying the historicity of all of the Scriptures, which are actually being substantiated in every way today. The second, deceiving accommodation, is unworthy of any great person, certainly of the Son of God, and such accommodation concerning demons actually goes too far, because our Lord had much to say about the reality of demons in His commission (Matt. 10:8, 17-18). Accommodation to that extent also undermines the historicity of the records. The third is an outright denial of Christ's Deity. Impartial examination can only conclude that demons, including this one possessing the man at Capernaum, are real—a fact attested to by the Son of God.

Demons are not only real beings but they are also ruling beings. This demon had usurped authority of the man's own spirit. He was an intruder, even speaking through the man's own organs. Demon influence is the attempt of the ruler of the kingdom of darkness to rule, if only temporarily, in the bodies of human beings.

(b) *The Declaration of the Demon.* The demon said three things. He first asked, "*Ti hemin kai soi?*" ("What have we

in common?"). This is the same phrase spoken by our Lord to His mother at Cana (John 2:4; cf. Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:28). It does not mean, "What have we to contend about?"; rather, it is a statement of the recognized antithesis between darkness and light. After this the demon asked if Christ had come to destroy him. The destroying would probably not be a reference to any final casting of the demon into the place of doom but, rather, an expression of fear at being driven out of the man. Embodiment seemed to be the purpose of demons; thus disembodiment their fear. And finally, the demon gives testimony to the character of Christ: "Thou Holy One of God." Though the source of this declaration is satanic the substance is truth; He is the Holy One of God, for He is the divine One who is absolutely consecrated to and by God. This is what struck terror into all demons, and it should do likewise to God's people today; for a perfectly proper reaction to the consciousness of who He is is fear (Acts 5:1-11; II Cor. 5:11).

(c) *The Denunciation of the Demon.* Although the demon's testimony was true, it was unacceptable, and the Saviour told him to be silent (literally, *be muzzled*; cf. I Cor. 9:9; I Tim. 5:18). Mere knowledge of who Jesus is is not enough for acceptance before God (cf. James 2:19); for without faith it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6). Bishop Ryle calls this "unsanctified knowledge of Christianity," and says: "It is a dangerous possession, but a fearfully common one in these latter days. We may know the Bible intellectually, and have no doubt about the truth of its contents. We may have our memories well stored with its leading texts, and be able to talk glibly about its leading doctrines. And all this time the Bible may have no influence over our hearts, and wills, and consciences. We may, in reality, be nothing better than the devils."<sup>5</sup> Our Lord does not need the testimony of demons, but He does need the testimony of believers.

### 3. Authoritative Demonstration—the Deliverance

(a) *The Command.* Immediately the Lord commanded the demon to come out of the man. This would be clear

<sup>5</sup> *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Luke, I, 125.*

proof of the authority and truth of His teaching. Here our Lord was practicing authority as He had preached it.

(b) *The Cure.* The command was obeyed and the demon came out of the man immediately. This was no gradual cure made possible by the gradual realization on the part of the man that he, after all, was not really demonized. This was real demon control and real and immediate deliverance. However, the deliverance was contested as one would expect when Satan is being challenged in his own realm. The demon tore the man for the last time, and although there was an actual spasm, it was without any permanent harm to the man. The lesson is plain: when Satan is losing his hold on a man he fights the hardest. Witness how true this was in this case which concerned the physical; how much more true it is in the realm of the spiritual! The minds of men are satanically blinded (II Cor. 4:4). Winning them to Christ takes more than the cleverness or attractiveness of the preacher. It takes prayer to the only One who is greater than Satan.

(c) *The Consequences.* In relation to the people there was amazement; in relation to Christ's fame, aggrandizement. Both the amazement of the people and the aggrandizement of Christ's fame centered in His authoritative doctrine. It should be noted well that the reaction of the people was not merely to the miracle but to the doctrine (Mark 1:27). What He did and what He said were connected in the minds of the people. And so should it always be. It was at Paphos when Paul rebuked Elymas, and Sergius Paulus was astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:12). So should it be with our actions today as servants of Christ. All that we do should verify all that we say, and all that we say should be spoken with authority. What is the secret of such a life and witness? Holiness. We have an authoritative Word, but to speak and to live it authoritatively demands personal holiness. May this miracle be a constant reminder of the way of the authoritative life.

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Do not be mistaken—the life that you live will tell  
its own story.