

AUTHORITY

Luke 4:31-44

Authority—it is what gets peoples' attention. Years ago, several riots took place during the annual spring festival that used to take place at Iowa State—They called it VEISHEA after the letters for what was once the 7 colleges at ISU. Several riots took place on Welch Avenue. The police and the university officials couldn't stop it. But they got then basketball coach Johnny Orr and football coach Jim Walden to come out with bull horns and get the crowd to go home.

No one really cared about the WNBA until last year when Caitlyn Clark was done at the University of Iowa and was drafted by the Indiana Fever. Her entrance into the WNBA has both crowds and controversy.

Someone else could get peoples' attention. Jesus began preaching in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. He got peoples' attention; He got them to listen. He had authority. What if He could just come today into our presence, kick me down from here, and do the preaching? Wouldn't that be authority?

Mao Tse-tung said that authority depends upon which end of the gun you are on. People drive the speed limit not because they are good citizens or to save gas or to be safer, they do it so they don't have to see the flashing light of a police car in their rear-view mirrors and know that they will have to pay a ticket. We pay our taxes not because we are patriots, but because we don't want the IRS ruining our lives. We go to class, not because it is interesting, but because we need the grades to get a good job. In all those situations, the "gun" is pointed at us. Where is Jesus' "gun?" Is it just the fear that we will go to hell if we don't listen to Him?

We could say that Jesus drew crowds. He had charisma. There was something about Him that made people want to follow Him. NFL games involving the San Francisco 49ers are shown in this area because of the interest in Brock Purdy. Show-biz personalities are rated by the number of those who follow them online. They can seem a lot more interesting than reading about someone who lived 2,000 years ago. Christianity only seems to be interesting when people come up with strange theories like those who say that Jesus married Mary Magdalene or that Jesus was actually an alien from outer space.

We could think that Jesus is different from that. He gets people to move ahead in life. He inspires us to make ourselves winners. That's authority. But is it that inspiration that makes things happen? Are the Chiefs in the Super Bowl because of inspiration or is it because they have the money to get and maintain good players? Why do colleges promote football and basketball? Is it just school pride? Or is it because of all the revenue schools can receive from successful programs? Are professors chosen because they are good teachers, or is it because they can get grant money for the university? Listen to the news. Politicians do things based on what will get the votes. That way they can be reelected and get more money from companies that lobby them. Again and again we find out that things come down to whether you have the money or not.

We could reply that Jesus appeals to the good in people. He gets them to do good things. Look at all the people that now crowd into big churches. Isn't that authority? But why do they come? They hear the message, "Believe in Jesus, and you will be happy. You will prosper and be successful. If you have the positive, confident spirit of Jesus in you, you can overcome negative ways and live a good life." Why not believe? If I do, I will go to heaven. I know the Bible warns of "itchy ears" that want to hear what they want to hear. Politicians are good at that. A snake oil salesman had the "authority" to draw crowds and get people to buy his stuff like Harold Hill in the "Music Man." Is that authority?

And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."

Jesus had authority. It wasn't that He was more interesting. It wasn't that He had military or political power to back what He said. It wasn't that He promised people what they wanted to have. It wasn't any wealth He had. His authority was God's Word, the power that gave Him the authority to cast out demons.

But where is that power today? Can God's Word give me an "A" on my next test or get that girl to notice me, or stop the next wildfire or hurricane from devastating places where people live?

God's Word does what it says. He can't get you an "A" or make that girl like you or prevent earthquakes. But what He says to us is:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That sounds all well and nice, but how do I see that? The government says it will raise taxes, and I see more money taken out of my paycheck. The university says I will get a degree, and then hands me a diploma. The state says the highway is closed because of winter weather, and the gates close so I can't get on the highway. How can we see God's Word doing what it says?

Look around you. Why are we here? Why are people all over the world gathered in churches today? Yes, some may just be seeing what they can get out of it, but why do people who face persecution gather for church? Why do students get out of bed when they could sleep in? Why do parents struggle to get their children ready for church when they could just relax at

home? Why have people for almost 2,000 years gone up to altars like this to receive bread and wine? Why do they go to a font like the one up here to have water splashed on them? Why are they quiet now as we speak? It is because of authority—God’s authority.

Why did the people listen to Jesus? Yes, He did cast out the demon, but it says that the people were amazed at His teaching even before that possessed man came into the picture. It was not that He was more interesting, but that He had authority, the authority of God’s Word. People can try to prove the Scriptures using science or history, but they end up finding as much to disprove as prove the Scriptures. The Scriptures, God’s Word, don’t need that proof. It stands by itself. It proves itself, because it is God’s Word. That Word made the universe and you and me. That Word condemns evil. That Word is Jesus sent to our world. That Word is the Gospel, the good news of what Jesus did for us on the cross. That Word forgives us from our sins, gives us new life, and makes us God’s.