

The Authority of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Hi everyone, we're going to read the Bible now. We're going to be reading from Matthew chapter 8 verses 1 to 17. When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I will be clean.

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for proof to them.

When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. And he said to him, I will come and heal him. But the centurion replied, Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes, and to my servant, do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

[1 : 30] I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the out of darkness, in that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And to the centurion, Jesus said, go, let it be done for you as you have believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment. And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.

He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Well, good morning, everyone. Have you ever noticed how several people, well, all of us will have noticed how several people can hear or read the same words, the same evidence, and yet come to massively different conclusions?

How does that happen? Well, there's actually a thing called confirmation bias. It's quantifiable. Confirmation bias is our tendency to cherry-pick information that confirms our existing beliefs or ideas, while at the very same time rejecting anything that disconfirms or challenges and threatens our existing ideas and practices.

[3 : 09] I think we're seeing a lot in social media discussions on pandemic issues at the moment. And it drives people to really extreme positions.

It drives people to be really aggressive in themselves. And it drives them to be really dismissive of others. Now, in frustration, I think we've all said along the line, somewhere along, something like this, I just don't know why Freddie can't see sense.

Well, I think that's because the more ingrained, the more ideological, the more emotionally charged a belief or discussion is, then the greater the confirmation bias that impacts on that discussion. And so a person's validation, a person's personal security, the desire to be right, the desire to be seen to be right, makes us inclined naturally, and sometimes without even realizing it, to look for evidence that supports our beliefs, supports our opinions about the world, but rejects anything which challenges them.

It's a very real problem for us. It appears that one of the things people do best is to see or interpret all new information so that prior existing conclusions remain intact.

[4 : 34] Now, I think Jesus had to deal with confirmation bias too. As we move into Matthew's gospel this morning again, we see that from the earliest days of Jesus' public ministry, the crowds very quickly picked up key words, key ideas that were being promoted by Jesus, things like the kingdom of God, the authority of Jesus, the priority of King Jesus.

We see that particularly in the sections chapter 4 through chapter 9. But here's the confirmation bias. It quickly becomes clear that many in the crowd were just hearing and seeing the things which allowed them to continue comfortably in their existing beliefs and conclusions, even while Jesus was saying things that were absolutely radical and totally contrary to their existing positions and beliefs.

Confirmation bias. And so as we move into Matthew's gospel ourselves, we need to be aware of our confirmation bias when we come to the scriptures. How do we do that?

Well, it's hard, but understanding context and structure around Jesus' teaching helps ensure that we form the right conclusions. We don't just read the words, but we actually form the conclusions that Jesus wants us to form because we're actually reading the words in context.

So let's do a little bit of revision again. And we see that Jesus has taught the kingdom. Now, if you go back to chapter 4, verses 14 to 17, you'll see that the very start of Jesus' ministry, from the very start of Jesus' ministry, Jesus taught that he was the Messiah.

[6 : 20] The Messiah was God's savior king, promised by Isaiah. You see there, chapter 4, verses 12 to 16, the context of Isaiah. And the Messiah has come to reestablish the kingdom or the rule of God.

And immediately after he says, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, then Jesus calls his first disciples. He demonstrates his kingdom authority, calling people to repent, to radical new attitudes, to radical new thinking, to radical new actions.

And then he calls a bunch of uneducated, rough fishermen. And his impact on them as King Jesus brought new obedience.

It brought radically new orientation in life for these guys who were fishermen. It brought a radically new purpose in life for these guys. And his priorities in ministry then were revealed in chapter 4, verse 23.

And I'll read that verse to you. And also chapter 9, verse 35. And those two verses are almost identical and form bookends. So here's chapter 4, verse 23. And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel or the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

[7 : 44] And chapter 9, verse 35. Verses repeated.

His kingdom priorities are revealed. Teaching the good news of his kingdom rule and healing every disease and illness among the people. And these two verses bookend chapters 5 to 9.

And it makes that one single unit displaying his kingdom authority. Within that unit then we see the Sermon on the Mount. And that's Jesus' detailed teaching on the righteousness demanded by God. A standard no sinner can achieve by their own efforts. But King Jesus promises to give his righteousness to his people, making them acceptable to God.

And at the end of his teaching, chapter 7, verse 29, the crowds recognize both the radical teaching of Jesus, and they're overwhelmed by it, and the radical authority of Jesus.

[9 : 00] He was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes. This Jesus was one out of the box. They didn't really understand what he was about, but they could see that he was radically different from anything else they'd ever heard.

Now, that then links inseparably into chapters 8 and 9, where the kingdom is now illustrated. So it's taught, now it's illustrated, as Jesus shows his authority and priority in nine separate powerful miracles of healing.

These are arranged in groups of healing.

That he is also their savior, whose priority is to serve, to die, to deliver them from their sins, to renew, to transform, to cleanse, and so on.

We could go with listing more words. So let's jump into the three actual incidents of healing here we have in chapter 8, verses 1 to 17. With the heading here, Jesus is saying, I'm willing to make dirty people clean and acceptable to God.

[10 : 39] Now, we have a man with an incurable skin disease. Now, that puts him in the most marginalized group in Jewish society.

And he comes to Jesus, wanting healing. Now, as we have already heard this morning from Ian, not only did the disease physically disfigure this man and make such a person absolutely repulsive to look at, but it brought total shame because the person was cut off from society, actually cut off from all human contact, forced to call out unclean.

The humiliation would have just been unending when people came near. Unclean, unclean. Even worse than all of that, the disease was considered to be evidence, very clear evidence, of God's particular curse on the person who was suffering it.

Well, this man dared to ask Jesus to do the impossible. Jesus, make me clean. Didn't doubt, for whatever reason, we don't know the background, but he didn't doubt Jesus' power or authority to make him clean.

The only thing he wasn't sure about was Jesus' willingness to associate with him. And he says, if you're willing, you can make me clean.

[12:17] And immediately, Jesus affirms, in such a warm, tender moment, immediately Jesus affirms, I am willing.

I'm keen. And with that, he moves towards this man in all his awfulness, in all his shame, in all his hopelessness, and actually touches him, perhaps the first human contact this man has had in years.

And instantly, Jesus makes the man clean. But that's not even the most amazing part of this story, because even more amazing, in my eyes anyway, Jesus actually fulfills the demands of God's law in terms of cleanness for this man.

So as soon as he's made clean, Jesus says to him, go and show yourself to the priest. In other words, you'll see that all the cleanness I brought to you actually satisfies the law.

It removes his shame. And ultimately then, not only is he clean and restored physically, but he's restored to full access to God.

[13:28] That's what it was to be cut off from the temple, cut off from access to God. Now he's restored to full access to God and full enjoyment of the community of God's people.

How clean is clean? Well, it's clean inside and out. Now, I don't suppose we have to spend too much time thinking about how amazed this guy would have been, how amazed the crowd would have been, how thankful that man would be to learn that as one of the most marginalized people in Jewish society, that God's rule, God's king, God's kingdom is not about a person's position in society.

Because that meant he was done for. But it's about relationship with King Jesus, who happily reverses the effects of sin and welcomes the marginalized, the repulsive, the dirty into full acceptance and relationship with God.

What a wonderful, wonderful story. But we move on to the next incident. Jesus says to the centurion, I'm powerful to give, sorry, Jesus says through the centurion, I am powerful to give life to any who will take me at my word.

Now, the Roman centurion is a Gentile. And that means he's another despised and marginalized group in Jewish society, perhaps only slightly better than the leper, maybe even in the eyes of some Jews, worse than a leper.

[15:16] But this was a man whose military authority, he would probably have been the local, the commander of the local Roman garrison in Capernaum or somewhere like that. This man's military authority gave him power over life and death.

But when it came to his servant's illness, he knew that he was powerless. And in asking for Jesus' help and expressing his unworthiness before Jesus, he was stating publicly Jesus' superior authority and power in the matter of life and death.

How did he work this out? We're not told, but it's just a fact of the story. And even more amazing than that was his reasoning. And he tells Jesus his reasoning.

And it goes something like this in summary. He recognized that his words had the same authority and power as if the Roman emperor spoke them himself.

That's what it was to be the Roman emperor's representative in Capernaum. So he recognized then that Jesus' words had the same authority and power as if God had spoke them himself.

[16:38] And that means in his equation, Jesus just needs to say the word and it would be done. Say the word, Jesus, and that's enough to give life.

You don't have to come to my house. Just say the word. That is your orbit of power and authority, which I'm recognizing publicly and bowing before you.

This is so out of the box that Jesus makes special note of this man's almost matter-of-fact belief and trust. He was prepared to accept what was obvious in both Jesus' teaching and actions.

Perhaps he didn't fully understand it, but he was prepared to accept what was obvious. And as a result, this despised Gentile overlord would be welcomed into Jesus' kingdom.

So amazed is Jesus that he says something else in respect to this sabbath.

[17:48] He contrasts this Jewish, this Gentile, despised Gentile Roman with so many Jews who will not take Jesus at face value, who will not accept what is obvious from his teaching and actions.

And Jesus says the contrast can be greater. This despised Gentile will be welcomed into my kingdom. And these sons of the kingdom, that is people who are Jews by birth and part of the covenant inheritance by birth, they're actually going to be sent away by King Jesus.

Radical illustration. And then the third episode is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law.

Jesus is saying to her, I am Messiah. Committed to making whole those who don't know how broken they are. Verses 14 to 17.

Now, this is a trifecta. For the third time, Jesus shows himself, his commitment to the most marginalized groups in Jewish society. The defiled.

[19:05] The Roman Gentile. And now a woman. He heals Peter's mother-in-law. Now, it's very interesting the way this is recorded by Matthew.

It's quite different in the way he's recorded. It seems like the leper and the centurion each showed some understanding of Jesus' power and authority.

Each, in turn, requested healing. But when we read the story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, there's no mention of either in that case.

Now, of course, it may just be a recording of the text, but I tend to take the text seriously. And so there's a reason why that's not there. Possibly because she didn't ask.

She didn't show any understanding. And so what that means then is that it appears that Jesus simply came to her house, saw she was seriously ill, and healed her.

[20:08] And again, if that's the case, the compassion of Jesus, King Jesus, and the priority of Jesus' kingdom authority and power is on show.

And that's put beyond doubt by verse 16. That evening, so I presume he had gone to stay there for the night, thinking that his day was done.

But that evening, he brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

Hordes of people with all sorts of illnesses and disorders turned up, and Jesus healed everyone.

Again, it would appear that he healed them simply on the basis that they craved wholeness.

Now, the emphasis is clear. Jesus healed all who came to him. The question is why? What's happening here? Well, I think we get a clue in verse 17.

[21:16] And verse 17 is a summary of this particular paragraph, 14 to 17. But I think it's also a summary of verses 1 to 17. And I think it also links right back to chapter 4, verses 12 to 16, the start of Jesus' ministry.

And it goes something like this, I think. Matthew wants to put Jesus' display of teaching and healing into the context of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, particularly chapter 42.

That's what he quotes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And this verse from Isaiah chapter 53.

Why would he do that? Well, that context demonstrates both that Jesus was Messiah, that he's God's suffering servant, God's king and savior, and that his priority was to make whole his broken people, even when they didn't realize how broken they were.

Now, these people were coming to Jesus that evening just strangely. And they all recognized their physical illness.

They all recognized the awfulness of disease and pending death. They all craved wholeness, cleanness, freedom from shame. They all craved life, a better life than what they're experiencing now.

[22:42] But when Jesus looks at them, behind all of that, he sees the indirect consequences of sin or rebellion against God.

He sees that they're broken at a much, much deeper level than even they realize their brokenness. And I think it's not too much to say, we know from other scriptures especially, that it grieved Jesus

to see people caught in this awful situation.

Spiritually dead. Cut off from God. Cut off from the good life they were created to enjoy. And all because of sin. And unable to do anything to relieve their predicament.

Yeah, their brokenness was much, much deeper, much, much more dreadful than what even these sick people coming to Jesus, craving life, understood.

And Jesus, Matthew wants us to understand from you, Jesus' kingdom authority and power was prioritized to making people whole.

[23 : 54] This was the promised work of Messiah. The prophets spoke about it, looked forward to it, yearned for it. This was the promised work of Messiah.

Reversing the effects of sin. Restoring wholeness. Giving spiritual life. And here it is. In Jesus, it was happening before their eyes.

The kingdom of God is at hand. It's actually now, chapter 4. It's all around you. It's open your eyes and say it. Radical stuff.

That God promised centuries before. But how does Jesus make us whole? Well, verse 17.

And the context of Isaiah is clear. It's the suffering servant passage. It is his substitutionary work for us that makes us whole.

[24 : 55] Jesus takes the consequences of our sin, our illness, the symbols of which are our illness and our diseases. Jesus takes the consequences of our sin.

And he is crushed under God's wrath instead of us. He was broken in a way that will never be broken in order to make us whole.

He gave himself up to death and being cut off from God so that we might enjoy new life, complete relationship with God forever.

And how whole is whole? Well, just as there is no physical illness or disease beyond his ability to heal.

We're told here that when he healed Peter's mother-in-law, she immediately got up, full strength restored, and started to serve him. Get him his evening meal or whatever it was.

[25 : 57] Just as there is no physical illness or disease beyond his ability to heal, so there is no sin that is beyond his ability to deal with and therefore make his people completely whole spiritually.

When it comes to Jesus healing, there's no such thing as remission. There's no possibility of a relapse in the future.

Whole is whole. Dirty is made clean. Dead is made alive. Broken is made whole. But is it only spiritual wholeness?

Is it only spiritual healing that we're talking about here? Or can we expect physical healing from this verse as well? Since the sin, which is the root cause of illness and death, is healed.

Well, can we expect physical healing? The answer has to be yes. We can expect physical healing. But not until we go to heaven to be with Christ forever.

[27 : 11] Scriptures are pretty clear on that. Jesus restores us to good relationship now. Good relationship with God now. But the natural consequences of living in a sinful world remain with us until we go to be with the Lord forever in heaven.

Then we will experience physically what we now enjoy spiritually. Being exactly as Christ made us to be.

So, as I conclude then, let me return to the idea of confirmation bias. Jesus' words and actions are not a blueprint for teaching that Jesus intends all Christians to be free from physical illness.

To find that in these incidents would both ignore the context of the healings, as I've tried to set it out to you today, and also claim something that people cannot make real in practice.

Or, Jesus' words and actions show clearly that in our natural born state, sin has left us spiritually disfigured, unclean, broken, lifeless.

[28 : 37] Now, people generally sense that we're meant for something better. People crave real life, good life. Well, Jesus says with authority and power that he is the life that people everywhere crave.

And in his compassion and power, he delivers us into that good life by gifting us his righteousness and making us acceptable to God.

All we need to do is ask him to make us whole, to take him at his word. So, what's your confirmation bias going to do with those two things?

Jesus' words and actions encourages that his priority and deep desire is still to remove shame and guilt and transform and renew and make whole anybody who asks.

Friends, don't keep looking for these things in places or people which, to this point in your life, have failed to deliver.

[29 : 48] That would be confirmation bias. And another point that comes out of these passages is that Jesus' words and actions make clear that the world's assumptions about who will go to heaven and who will miss out are wrong.

It's not good people who go to heaven. It's not the religious people who go to heaven because they deserve to, but bad people who've been renewed by Jesus, who seek to live with him as their king, struggling to reflect the values of his kingdom in every aspect of life, as taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

And yet our confirmation bias in so many people continues to believe that we will be more secure if we can convince Jesus that we're good people.

If we can convince our fellow brothers and sisters that we're performing well as Christians. Friends, I said to you, if you haven't yet done business with King Jesus, that is, if you haven't actually come to him and submitted to King Jesus, determined to give up being your own king and live under the rule and authority and power of King Jesus, then why not act this morning?

I know there are people in our church who have not yet done business with King Jesus. So why not act this morning? Recognize your spiritual disfigurement.

[31 : 25] Come clean with your shame. Feel it in all its awfulness. Feel your uncleanness before God. Don't try to hide it. But then take Jesus at his word as the one who has the authority, the desire, the power and the priority to give you the life you crave, to free you from your shame.

To turn you from your uncleanness to cleanness. To take away your spiritual disfigurement and make you whole. All those things, your powers to build for yourself.

I say to you this morning, come to Jesus in your brokenness and be made whole. It's that simple. But it's also that urgent.

So join with me as I pray now. Lord, we thank you for the meticulous detail in which you've caused the story of Jesus to be recorded for us, particularly here through Matthew.

We thank you for the structure that he's built into it so that we might actually be certain of the conclusions we're meant to see.

[32 : 43] We thank you for the compassion of Jesus, the power and the authority of Jesus. We thank you that his desire has always been and continues to be to make broken people whole.

To take the dirty and make them clean. To take spiritual disfigurement and the grotesqueness that has fallen upon us as image bearers because of sin.

And remove it and make us those beautiful image bearers that you always wanted us to be. Pray, Lord, that we might hear Jesus and take him at his word.

And be blessed in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.