

“He taught them as one having authority”

Dennis M Elliott

IN WHAT WAS the greatest sermon ever uttered upon the earth, Jesus so impressed the mass of people who heard him speak that the Gospel of Matthew says: “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (7:28,29).

Jesus taught the people Biblical principles that they had never heard before. They were new standards of personal conduct long ignored by the scribes and Pharisees, the self-appointed custodians of the Mosaic Law who had neglected the spiritual welfare of the people. Jesus pointedly reminded them, saying: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (23:23).

The things taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were for the edification and refinement of the human character. He commanded his hearers, “hunger and thirst after righteousness”, “Love your enemies”, “do good to them that hate you”, be “peacemakers”. They were to “Judge not, that ye be not judged”, they were not to exact “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” in retaliation, but were to “love thy neighbour” and to be merciful, forgiving, gentle, prayerful, pure of heart and ever aiming to do God’s will in their daily lives.

The teachings of Jesus were unforgettable, for he taught the people with the authority of God’s Word, the very Scriptures which the scribes and Pharisees should have made known to them. They taught instead the inflexible letter of the Law, while Jesus, in sharp contrast, conveyed to all his hearers the warm spirit of the Word. Note the reaction of those in Capernaum who listened intently to what Jesus taught them: “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power” (Lk. 4:32). He spoke with the unique power and authority given to him by his heavenly Father, and the people sensed the force of his teaching. Again, the people in the synagogue at Capernaum felt the power and author-

ity of his words, for the record in Luke’s Gospel says: “And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out” (v. 36).

Jesus, with his incisive perception of character, was able to rebuke the falsity of the scribes and Pharisees with the words: “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men . . . ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer” (Mt. 23:13,14). Ellicott’s commentary makes this revealing comment about the scribes and Pharisees devouring widows’ houses: “The avarice thus described may have attained its end either (1) by using the advantages which they possessed as the jurists and notaries of the time, to press unjust claims against wealthy widows or to become their heirs, or (2) by leading devout widows, under the show of piety, to bestow upon them their estates or houses. To minister to the maintenance of a scribe was, they taught, the best use of wealth”. They exercised the mechanics of power and self-aggrandisement with their authoritarian attitudes that entrenched them in their position of influence in the community, brooking no opposition.

One of the most striking tributes to the authority with which Jesus spoke came from what we might have thought to be a highly unlikely source. It was the occasion when the temple “officers”, sent by the Jewish religious leaders to apprehend Jesus, returned empty-handed. They had been overawed and overwhelmed by the authority and power shown in what Jesus had said to them, and, when demanded by the chief priests and Pharisees, “Why have ye not brought him?”, answered with conviction: “Never man spake like this man” (Jno. 7:45,46).

The words speak for themselves. The hardened temple officers, used to the routine of arresting those of whom the Jewish leaders disapproved, and fully expecting to do the same with Jesus, suddenly, when in his presence, could not bring themselves to lay a hand upon him. The Divine authority with which he spoke to

them turned them completely away from what they had done so many times to others at the behest of the scribes and Pharisees. It is a truly remarkable example of how Jesus was able to melt the hearts of even the hardest of men.

Consider now the heartwarming occasion in a crowded house in Capernaum where “one sick of the palsy” had been let down through the roof and lay on his bed in the presence of Jesus. He was a person stricken with paralysis and, in our modern terminology, terminally ill. It was a close, intimate situation, and every eye in the house was upon Jesus, who then said with the clear voice of authority and power: “Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (Mk. 2:11). In spite of the presence among the people of some of the carping scribes, ever watching Jesus and seeking to find fault with him, the people in the house reacted with incredulity and astonishment at what happened next: “And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion” (v. 12).

They were amazed at the authority with which Jesus said, “Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house”, and at the power of

Jesus to heal that enabled the bedridden man to stand up, completely cured of his paralysis, moving freely, and then with great relief and joy take his leave of all the astounded onlookers. The marvel of it all was that all those in the house saw with their own eyes the incredible, never-to-be-forgotten miracle in which a person with a dread, crippling disease was healed in a moment, and then walked away unassisted to his own home. There are many other examples in the absorbing Gospel accounts that also convey wonderfully the way in which so many people came to believe in him.

In these momentous last days, when the clouds of spiritual darkness and the spectre of war hang ominously over a troubled world, with “the sea and the waves roaring” (Lk. 21:25), we have had the privilege and joy of being enlightened and strengthened by the authority and power of the incomparable teachings and life of our Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ has shown us “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jno. 14:6), and we journey together towards the Kingdom with his words of love and encouragement ever ringing in our hearts: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (8:12).



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

F. The first nine plagues (Exodus 7–10)

Part 5: The third three plagues – Exodus 9:13–10:29 (ii)

Mark Vincent

THIS ARTICLE concludes the consideration of the final cycle of three plagues, looking at plagues eight and nine, the plagues of locusts and of darkness.

Plague 8: Locusts

10:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart,

and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these My signs before him:

10:2 And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought¹ in Egypt, and My signs which I have done² among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD.

10:3 And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the