

The Foundation of Mission - Authority

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[0 : 0 0] Right, everybody, we're in Matthew's Gospel. The Church Bible's, your page number 813, 813, should be Matthew chapter 8.

Now, for those who know their way around Matthew's Gospel, this is just after the end of the Sermon on the Mount. But Jesus has been teaching in great detail his disciples in the presence of the crowd.

And I'm going to begin from verse 1 of chapter 8 and read the first 17 verses. And then this will be our passage later on for our study this morning.

When Jesus 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.

[1 : 1 9] 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 reproof to them.

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him. That is, a Roman soldier. A centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.

And Jesus said, I will come and heal him. But the centurion replied, Lord, I am 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.

[2 : 3 8] 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 outer 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 Peter's 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. And that evening they brought to Jesus 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.

[3 : 4 8] He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Great. Well, let's turn back to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8, page 813.

And let's pray together.

Amen. Almighty God, we thank you for the privilege of an open Bible.

We thank you for this opportunity to meet together around your word. And we ask indeed that it may be meat and drink for us today.

Give us, we pray, good appetites and feed us what we need for your great namesake. Amen.

[5 : 18] Well, I mean it when I say it's a great joy to be with you. I was here just about exactly a year ago, I think, when we were in another place, as they say.

We have been rooting for you. We have followed your news closely. I bring you warm greetings from everybody in Crosslinks. I was with Dick Lucas on Friday.

He explicitly asked me to convey his greetings and support to everybody here who would know him and recognize his name. And I want to say at the outset that we applaud your stand and we are praying for your sustaining strength and wisdom.

And it's a great joy, therefore, to be with you still. And our passage today takes us to the very heart of something that Matthew's Gospel continually touches upon.

Now, we've got the title of the foundation for mission. But actually, our theme today is all to do with a single word. And that word is authority.

[6 : 32] Authority. It's to do with the authority of the Lord Jesus during his time here on earth. And that authority which the Lord Jesus has now been given after his resurrection from the dead.

So it's authority. And the foundation for mission turns out to be Jesus' authority. But we're going to get there a little later on.

So come with me to Matthew's Gospel. We're at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. You possibly know that Matthew includes a number of extended teaching discourses by the Lord Jesus.

And the Sermon on the Mount begins in chapter 5, continues through chapter 6, and chapter 7. And at the end of it, we read something rather interesting.

Just cast your eye down to verse 28 and 29 of chapter 7. When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowd were astonished at his teaching.

[7 : 50] For he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as the scribes. Now, the people of first century Palestine were used to living under a number of authorities.

There was the authority of the state. Ultimately, the Roman state. And authority exercised through occupation forces, through the army, and through officers of Rome.

They were used also to religious authority. The authority of the temple, of the priest, of the teacher, of the law. And so they were used to recognizing authority.

Now, we in our day have a slightly ambivalent attitude to authority, don't we? Particularly in this country. You know, we're sort of in favor of the police when they're out fighting criminals.

But when a policeman spends his time catching motorists who are speeding, and we happen to be that motorist, then we're not entirely sure what we think of authority.

[9 : 04] You know, the man who, caught by the traffic officer, complains that he ought to be spending his time catching those who are breaking the law, rather than operating speed traps.

Jesus' day, people were used to dealing with authorities. Now, if you read the Sermon on the Mount, it is astonishing teaching. If you've not sat down and done that for a while, it's a great thing just to sit down and do.

But what struck them was not only the content of what Jesus had said, but the style, the manner, the feel of it.

They were astonished at his authority. And it contrasted with their teachers, with the scribes and the Pharisees. He was teaching as one who had authority.

And Matthew makes a great deal of Jesus' authority. And in the immediate aftermath of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew relates three incidents, three miracles, actually, in which Jesus' authority is demonstrated.

[10 : 16] There's a leper, a man sick with leprosy. There is a Roman soldier, a centurion, a man who has a command over a hundred soldiers, hence a centurion, and who is part of all of that army authority structure of Rome.

And then there is the house of Simon Peter, with Simon Peter's mother-in-law having fallen sick. And in each of these, Jesus demonstrates his authority.

Let's have a look and notice how this happens. So the first paragraph. When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him, and behold, a leper came to him, a man with this skin disease.

A leper came to him and knelt down and said, well, actually what he said is quite remarkable. Now, if you've ever been sick and gone to a GP, or perhaps you've gone to a hospital A&E unit, the question in your mind, I imagine, as it would be in my mind, is, doctor, can you make me well?

Here are my symptoms. This is what is wrong with me. Can you make me better? That's the key question to ask, isn't it? Is that right? Okay, now notice what this chap asks Jesus.

[11 : 44] He doesn't say, can you make me clean, does he? He says, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

The question in this man's mind is not whether Jesus can, but whether he will. Now, when you go to your doctor, you don't doubt that the doctor will.

Yes? I mean, the whole point of having a doctor is that he's willing to make you better. The question is, can he do it? But the question to Jesus was not, can you? The question was, will you?

Because he could. He had the authority with a word to heal the sick, with a word to cast out the evil spirit. And as Matthew's account develops, it is that authority of Jesus that lies right at the heart of the portrait that Matthew gives.

Well, what happens here is wonderful. Jesus stretches out his hand, he touches the man, and he says, I will be clean. And we read immediately, his leprosy was cleansed.

[12 : 55] Now, he's told not to go blabbing about it, to keep it quiet, to do the right thing, according to the Jewish law, as a proof that this is done with the authority and in the name of the Lord God.

Now, the next little incident Matthew relates concerns a Roman centurion. Jesus goes into the town called Capernaum, we're in the north, we're by Lake Galilee, and a centurion comes to him, and the centurion has a problem, not himself, but with a servant, a servant who the centurion depends on, and this particular servant has fallen horribly ill.

He is paralyzed and suffering terribly, we read verse 6. And the centurion comes and appeals to Jesus, Lord, he calls him, and then presents this situation, to which Jesus agrees immediately to go to the centurion's home and to heal the servant.

But what happens next is interesting, because the centurion says, whoa, whoa, whoa, no, no, no, no, you don't need to do that. Actually, look, I'm a Roman, I'm a Gentile, I'm a soldier, I am not worthy to have one who others are calling Rabbi, one who he has called Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Besides, I'm used to authority, I mean, I have soldiers under my command, I tell them, do this, or go there, and they do it, just as my servant, again, follows my commands.

[14 : 41] And I'm part of an authority structure, I know how to follow commands. No, no, no, you don't have to come to my house. All you have to do is to give the word, and my servant will be healed.

The Roman centurion recognizes Jesus' authority. He recognizes that it's analogous to his own authority within a military structure.

That such is Jesus' authority that with a word, even at a distance, he can heal this servant whom he has never met.

Well, what happens in verse 13 is that Jesus says to the centurion, okay, go, let it be done for you as you have believed.

And, says Matthew, at that very moment, the servant was healed. you with it?

[15 : 49] The theme is clear, isn't it? It's the authority theme. Well, it's picked up again in the final paragraph. Here, Jesus enters Peter's house. This is Simon, Peter, the former fisherman, now the disciple, and Peter's mother-in-law, Peter already married, Peter's mother-in-law is lying sick with a fever in the house.

And, what happens is that Jesus touches this woman's hand, the fever leaves her, and up she gets, and like any good mother-in-law, begins to serve.

That was a joke, actually, so you're, you're, you're, there we are. Right. I have a very smitten mother-in-law, and if she hears the recording, I hope she will enjoy that.

Right. That, that evening, that evening, they then brought to Jesus many others, some oppressed by demons, others sick, and with a word, he healed them all.

All three of these people, the leper, the Roman centurion, and the woman, all three, would have been regarded as on the very margins of Jewish society.

[17 : 10] None would have been permitted, for example, into the temple. But each of them came within the scope of Jesus' compassion, and benefited from his astonishing authority.

When we speak of the authority of Jesus, we are speaking of something very good. It is for our great benefit that he has great authority.

So, Jesus demonstrates his authority. Now, in the middle of this, Jesus does something else. Have a look with me in the very heart of the account of the Roman centurion.

So, have a look particularly from verse 10 down to verse 12. In this little section, as well as demonstrating his authority, Jesus discloses his agenda.

And his agenda is a mission. Agenda. Now, to begin with, Matthew tells us that Jesus marvels at this Roman centurion.

[18 : 31] And he says to the disciples, truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. You know in the Bible, don't you, that what faith does is to believe God's word.

It's a great thing Abraham did, wasn't it? He believed God's word and acted on it. So God's word, if you like, is like a little ring and faith is the hook that links into the ring.

What faith does is to take God at his word. That is the mark of genuine faith. Faith isn't working yourself up to believe something that you suspect probably isn't true.

Faith isn't pretending that you can believe something when actually you can't. Faith isn't wishful thinking. Faith is trusting God's word.

Actually, you and I exercise faith time and again, don't we? I exercise faith this morning. I was in Edinburgh on Friday and yesterday. I got on a train this morning with a ticket and the ticket said it would take me to Glasgow and get me here in time to preach this morning.

[19 : 46] Now, faith was trusting the ticket. when I got on the train, that's exercising faith, isn't it? It's taking their word for it. I didn't interview the driver.

I didn't sit alongside him and check that he was taking the right turnings. Yes? I simply trusted the ticket. Faith takes God's word at face value.

And Jesus marvels at the willingness of this Roman soldier to take his word for it. And then look at what happens in verse 11.

Now, when the teaching authority of Jesus is emphasized in Matthew's gospel, it's introduced by this little phrase, I tell you. It means will you please sit up and listen.

All right? The old Bible would say, verily, verily, say I unto thee, or something like that. All right? Truly, truly, I say to you. Yes? Just check your neighbor, right? You know about the fellowship of the sharp elbow?

[20 : 46] Do you know that? Just check your neighbors awake. If they're not, give them a little nudge. All right? What it means is, will you please sit up and listen? I tell you, Jesus is about to disclose something quite important.

We actually get it twice, don't we? We get an I tell you in verse 10, and then another I tell you in verse 11. I tell you, said Jesus, 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 outer darkness.

Now, these are serious words. Jesus discloses God's big agenda for mission. Many will come. There is no doubt about it.

Many will come. God is not about building a church of the few. He's about building a church of many. many will come. It is inevitable because that is God's big plan and purpose.

And many will come from where? Well, they'll come from east and west. That is, they'll come from all around the world. They'll come from all the different nations, speaking all those different languages, having been raised in many different cultures.

[22 : 05] They will come from east and west, but they will come to the one table. They will recline at the table. You know that in Jesus' day they weren't chairs, but the way you act was you lay down on your side, reclining at the table.

They will come and recline at the table alongside the great heroes of faith from the Old Testament scriptures. They will be there with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, and they will recline at that great future feast in the future kingdom of heaven.

Jesus has just taught his disciples to pray, hasn't he? Your kingdom come in the Lord's prayer there in the Sermon on the Mount. So many will come, they will come from all over the world, they will come to the one table, and it is the future kingdom of heaven of which Jesus is speaking.

It will be quite a guest list, but that guest list is going to include even an unlikely person like that Roman centurion, but sadly there are also going to be some people missing.

There will be some who you would expect to be there, some who were born sons of the kingdom, that is of Jewish birth physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and yet who are missing.

[23 : 42] And why? Because they are not men or women of faith. And so Jesus speaks a serious warning, and it's a warning that is repeated time and again in Matthew's gospel.

It is the warning of the existence of what is called here an outer darkness, of a place in which men and women will be in deep anguish, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It will be too late, and there will be no escape. it is that eternal punishment of which we speak sometimes when we speak of hell or Gehenna.

Now, all of that is to disclose, then, God's big mission agenda. Jesus is encountering a leper, he's encountering a Roman centurion, he's encountering a sick woman, but in his mind, the big picture is of God's mission agenda.

And so Jesus explains that to the disciples. He lets them in on God's plan and purpose. He demonstrates his authority in the miracles, but he discloses God's agenda, God's mission agenda, in his teaching.

[25 : 14] And it's a reminder to us, isn't it, of the urgent necessity of keeping mission at the very heart of all that we are doing.

Crosslinks has a little strapline, which goes like this, God's word to God's world. It's just a little reminder to us to keep the main thing as the main thing.

How are you doing on that? I imagine that your vestry, your elders, must have a huge number of things that are pressing in on them at the moment. Serious questions, and some knotty ones at that.

How are you going to manage as a church, in the midst of all of those other issues, to do with buildings and denominations and institutions and finance and all the rest, how are you going to manage as a church to keep the main thing the main thing?

It's a key question, isn't it? It's a key question. We've got to help each other. You know, ask each other when you turn up on church on Sunday morning, you know, what's the main thing? You know, when you go to a commission meeting, a vestry meeting, a finance meeting, you know, brethren, ask one another, what's the main thing?

[26 : 37] Maybe on your agenda, you know, item four, the main thing. We must keep the main, Jesus kept the main thing, the main thing, and the main thing is God's mission agenda.

So, Jesus demonstrates his authority, he discloses God's mission agenda, and thirdly and finally, and this comes in the last verse here in our passage, Jesus fulfills Isaiah's promise.

It's very interesting. What Matthew does is to identify Jesus as the one about whom Isaiah spoke. Now, if you've been reading Matthew's gospel from the beginning, you would have come across this right at his birth.

Matthew tells us that his birth fulfills a prophecy of Isaiah. You'd have understood that John the Baptist ministry fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah.

You'd have understood as you read on that Jesus is the servant, the promised servant who suffers for the sins of the world, about whom Isaiah wrote.

[27 : 44] And here in this verse, Matthew goes to the last of those promises about the servant.

The passage in Isaiah 53, where we read about the servant taking upon himself the sins of many suffering on behalf of others.

Now, the apostle Peter later on picks up this same prophecy. He applies it spiritually.

It is true here in the miracles physically that Jesus physically healed those who were sick. It is wonderfully true spiritually. It is the heart of the gospel, isn't it?

The gospel teaches us that we are sick in heart and mind. It's called sin. And that Jesus came to bring the forgiveness of sins by his death and cross for us.

[28 : 51] Amen? It's the heart of the gospel. And Matthew says that Jesus is fulfilling the Old Testament prophet Isaiah's prophecies.

He is the one about whom Isaiah spoke and therefore it's not surprising that he has that authority because he is God's anointed servant.

He is the savior king. He is the one who will rule the world. His kingdom will have no end. He is the one who comes to be the savior of the world.

So what? The so what question is always important isn't it? It's always important on a Sunday when we have a Bible passage in front of us. It's important when we read a Bible passage ourselves.

So what? Well let's try to think about that as we finish. Matthew in his gospel doesn't leave us to guess the answer to the so what question.

[30 : 00] Now Matthew is very keen to give his reader access to the teaching of Jesus. On five different occasions we get an extended account of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew's gospel.

Matthew tells us how Jesus was understood by the disciples to be the Christ the Son of the living God.

Matthew tells us how Jesus taught the disciples that he would be betrayed and crucified and rise again. And then Matthew tells the account of those things which I imagine you remembered clearly and well over Easter.

Come with me to the very end of Matthew's gospel. And after the resurrection just before the ascension at the end of Matthew chapter 28 Matthew returns to this key theme of authority.

Let me read to you from verse 16. Now the eleven disciples that is the twelve minus Judas the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

[31 : 26] We're back at the mountain where we started this morning. And when they saw him they worshipped him but some doubted and Jesus came and said to them and here's our theme again all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age.

Now those words are very significant on the lips of Jesus. All authority has been given to me says Jesus. It was another Old Testament prophet the prophet Daniel who envisioned the Son of Man receiving from the ancient of days the throne of almighty God dominion and power that would never end.

All authority is given to me. Jesus is saying that those great words of Daniel 7 have come true in him and it leads him into what is sometimes called the great commission.

This is the commission for the church age. Earlier in Matthew's gospel the disciples go out on a little sort of trial commission and Jesus gives them some authority.

[32 : 57] But here in the church's commission Jesus has all authority. Then they are told just to go to the house of Israel. Here they are sent to all nations.

Then they were told to go and heal and cast out demons. Now they are told to go and proclaim the gospel baptizing and teaching that is instructing those disciples.

Then they were told to go for a little while and report back. Now they are told to go until the end of the age that is until Christ shall return.

And there's the great promise isn't there? That as they do that they will not be alone. Behold I am with you always to the end of the age.

All authority is given to me. Therefore what? Well there's no shortage of guesses or proposals. Some people say well therefore we should save the planet.

[34 : 02] You know sort of rescue the whale or at least the polar bear. others say well what we should do is establish a new world order. You know let's establish a bigger and better version of world government or something.

There are lots of proposals about what this means that Jesus has all authority. There's no ambiguity here is there? Do you notice what he says? The therefore you know when you see a therefore you need to ask what it's there for.

Therefore what? Therefore go and save the whale. Is that what your Bible says?

Have a look down with me just check. No it doesn't say that does it? Therefore go and make disciples. That's the key verb here that's the doing word.

It is because Jesus has been given all authority that there is the mandate to go and evangelize. To bring people from east and west from all nations to repentance and faith.

- [35 : 15] That they may be baptized washed from their sin and given new life and teach them to observe all that I have commanded. Not teaching our own ideas not teaching the latest fad or fashion but teaching what Jesus has taught.

Evangelism and instruction for which the authority of Jesus is the foundation. And that's the thought I want us to latch onto as we finish together this morning.

It is the authority of Jesus that is the foundation for mission as much as it is the foundation for the church's ability to teach and instruct.

Let's ponder that for a moment. You see Jesus' authority is the only reason we can take a stand on disputed issues, isn't it?

I mean, issues of human sexuality or the nature of marriage or issues on any other ethical or moral question. Issues of faith, of right belief, of the nature and character of God, for example, of the reality of heaven and the seriousness of hell, of the death of the Lord Jesus and the importance of faith.

- [36 : 47] Things that are a matter of debate or dispute in society are settled for the Christian who is confident in Jesus' authority.

It's not for nothing that Matthew is the gospel that contains Jesus' most detailed teaching on marriage. Matthew 5, Matthew 19. It's remarkable.

Jesus goes right back to early Genesis and explains God's plan and purpose in marriage. For the Christian who knows that and for the Christian who understands the authority of Jesus, we know where the truth lies.

And so we are emboldened to stand on truth. Likewise, the authority of Jesus is the foundation for mission.

How else, how else would we have the temerity to call people from east and west to repentance and faith in Jesus?

- [37 : 50] Jesus? How can we call people to this one table if he is not the one to whom has been given all authority, all power, and all dominion for all time?

Now that word all is not too complicated, is it? Yes? I mean, all means not 90%, not 98%, not 99.9%, yes?

All is not complicated. Jesus says, all authority has been given to me, and just to make you absolutely sure we haven't missed the point, he says, in heaven and on earth. There's not a lot missed out, is there?

If you've got all authority in heaven and on earth, yes? There's not a lot you haven't got. It is the foundation for mission.

It is because of that authority that we can call men and women from east and west, whatever their language, their culture, or their background, to put their faith in this one, for he is their king and savior as much as ours.

- [39 : 02] Thirdly and lastly, it is this authority of Jesus that is the platform for prayer. Very delighted to hear that you have maintained your weekly prayer meeting.

I hope that in these days you are making a double and a triple effort to be there. We must be men and women who pray. Why? Well, do you remember the ancient Greek scientist Archimedes?

Archimedes? Archimedes did lots of work on levers. He was very keen on levers. Archimedes once said this, give me somewhere to stand and I will move the world.

When we stand on the authority of the Lord Jesus, when we pray to the one who has all authority in heaven and earth, that is the platform for moving the world.

When we pray, we bring our requests to the one who has all authority, who had all authority when he walked this earth, and who now is the risen son of man, has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

[40 : 21] No wonder James says that prayer, the prayer of a righteous man, is powerful and effective. It's a big incentive to pray. Don't ever let anybody tell you, you don't need to pray because Jesus has got all authority, he will just do what he wants and therefore prayer is not important.

It is because he has all authority that prayer is worth praying. We must be men and women of prayer. Let me conclude.

The authority of Jesus is our theme in this passage in Matthew chapter 8. That authority is the very grounds of our confidence that we know where truth lies.

That authority is the very foundation for mission. And we must keep the main thing as the main thing. Please God, that Tron Church will keep mission as its main thing.

And it is the platform for prayer. My friends, we need to help each other. Keep clearly in mind the authority of Jesus. We need to teach that to others, particularly to our young people, people, particularly to those who are growing up with all sorts of views of authority.

[41 : 40] We need to teach them that this authority is good, that this brings blessing and benefit, that this authority will eventually bring God's kingdom.

kingdom. And we must never be ashamed of maintaining it or intimidated into compromising it.

For all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. Let's pray. our father, we thank you so much that the Lord Jesus demonstrated his authority.

Thank you that he did so to those who are on the very margins of society. Lord, you know our hearts. Forgive us if we've ever felt that we are too small or too insignificant to matter to you.

Thank you that every person matters to you. Pray, Lord, that you would help us today to acknowledge Jesus' authority, to come in repentance and faith to him if we haven't.

[43 : 08] that we may be those who rejoice in that authority. And then, our father, we pray that you would help us to be those who join in with your great mission agenda.

Thank you that Jesus disclosed that so clearly. Help us to keep the main thing as the main thing. people. And last, we pray, make us humble, keep us humble.

Make us men and women who pray, and who pray because we know that the authority doesn't belong with us or lie with us, but that all authority lies in his hands.

us. So we thank you for your word. We thank you for feeding us through it. Send us on our way rejoicing, we pray, for his great namesake.

Amen.