

Sermon 49, Jesus Rules!, Matthew 7:28-29

“Measure the efficacy of His power, by the might of His words.” — Hilary

“Note, It is possible for people to admire good preaching, and yet to remain in ignorance and unbelief; to be astonished, and yet not sanctified. . . . Christ delivered his discourse, as a judge gives his charge. He did indeed, *dominari in conscionibus*--deliver his discourses with a tone of authority; his lessons were law; his word a word of command. Christ, upon the mountain, showed more true authority, than the scribes in Moses's seat. Thus when Christ teaches by his Spirit in the soul, he teaches with authority. He says, Let there be light, and there is light.” — Matthew Henry
Jesus was “a legislator, not a commentator.” John Stott in Doriani, *Sermon on the Mount*, 223
Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount “so that the authority people *recognized* in his preaching might be *realised* in their lives.” — Sinclair Ferguson

“And what He is saying in this Sermon is that He has come in order to give us this new life. . . . The Sermon is a description of Christian people, people who have received the Holy Spirit; not of natural man striving to make himself right with God, but God making His people anew.” — Martyn Lloyd-Jones

- I. The Sermon’s Position, v. 28a
 - A. It Is a Block of Teaching
 - B. It Is the First of Five Blocks of Teaching in Matthew
 - 1. The Sermon on the Mount: A Description of Discipleship
 - 2. The Twelve’s Mission Trip, 11:1
 - 3. Parables of the Kingdom, 13:53
 - 4. Teaching on Forgiveness, 19:1
 - 5. The Olivet Discourse, 26:1
 - C. In Short, There’s More Where This Came From!
- II. The Sermon’s Impact: It Astonished People, v. 28
 - A. It Demands Our Assent
 - B. It Surpasses Our Abilities
- III. The Sermon’s Preacher, v. 29
 - A. He Taught Them, v. 29a
 - B. He Demonstrated Authority, v. 29b
 - 1. He Cited Himself, 5:20, 28, etc.
 - 2. He Preached About Himself, 5:11, 17; 7:21-23
 - 3. He Expected People to Build Their Lives on Him, 7:24-27
 - C. He Differed from the Scribes, v. 29c
- IV. The Sermon’s Impact
 - A. Does It Astonish You?
 - B. Does It Describe You?
 - C. Is Your Life Founded on Hearing and Obeying Jesus?

Proposition: The Sermon on the Mount is not only an astonishing part of Matthew's Gospel, but an authoritative one too.

My first sermon to you all as your pastor was delivered on Sunday, February 7, 2016. I would ask you to summarize its points, but I suppose I can't do that myself. We are forgetful creatures, are we not? Well, that sermon was titled "An Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount." Here we are, fourteen months and forty-eight sermons later, and I am preaching to you on the last two verses of Matthew 7. We've looked at this Sermon in depth; I believe the largest single chunk I tried to cover was the six verses of Matthew 5:43-48, but many sermons have been on a single verse and some verses have received multiple sermons. One thing, I hope, is clear: this Sermon is amazing, but it demands doing. Matthew highlights that here at the end by telling us not only that the Sermon was astonishing to its first audience, but that it is authoritative because it was preached by an authoritative preacher. That's right: Jesus was an authoritative preacher. That means that you need to listen to Him and obey Him. Don't just be astonished; start obeying.

I. The Sermon's Position, v. 28a

Matthew's first comment is this little formula: "And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings. . ." If you keep reading Matthew from this point forward, you'll see this formula recur four more times. What does this tell us?

A. It Is a Block of Teaching

Well, first of all, it tells us that this Sermon is designed by Matthew to be a coherent, unified block of teaching. "These sayings" are things Jesus said that belong together. We can see this by looking quickly at the other four blocks of teaching that the evangelist gives us.

B. It Is the First of Five Blocks of Teaching in Matthew

1. The Sermon on the Mount: A Description of Discipleship

This sermon describes discipleship and demands obedience, as I said on my first Sunday here. It sketches the character of a Christian and contains commands for a Christian. Its commands are based on the Father's character.

So if you want to know what Jesus is all about, read this Sermon. It will tell you what He thought most important to communicate up front.

2. The Twelve's Mission Trip, 11:1

The second block of teaching, found in chapter 10, describes how the 12 were to behave on their mission trip to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They were supposed to not only preach, but do miraculous works to validate their credentials. Jesus in this teaching envisions future intense persecutions, when His followers will be called before governors and kings and have to answer for their commitment to Jesus. Nonetheless, He teaches that the reward of following Him is far greater than the difficulties and hazards of doing so.

3. Parables of the Kingdom, 13:53

The third discourse is a series of parables in chapter 13. Jesus tells the parable of the sower, the parable of the dragnet, the parable of the wheat and tares, and the parable of the pearl of great price. All of these little stories illuminate one or another aspect of the kingdom. If you want to know what the Kingdom of God is like, read Matthew 13!

4. Teaching on Forgiveness, 19:1

Matthew 18 describes the joy in Heaven over the repentance of one sinner, and the absolute necessity of repentance and forgiveness in the church. God is a forgiving God, and if you want to be like Him, then you must forgive your brother every time he sins against you. Jesus allows no ifs, ands, or buts. He insists that forgiveness is required for Christians.

5. The Olivet Discourse, 26:1

The final discourse is vivid material on the end times, the destruction of the world, and the final judgment. Here Jesus speaks of separating the sheep from the goats; here, too, we see once again the truth that Jesus spoke about Hell twice as often as He spoke about Heaven. Most of the Bible's teaching on Hell comes from Jesus Himself.

A final note: some scholars think that the sixth discourse is left open-ended. This Gospel ends with the Great Commission, and the implication may be that the disciples will deliver the sixth discourse on Christ's behalf as they go and make disciples. This is somewhat speculative, of course, but I think it has a kernel of truth. Every section of the Gospel ends with Jesus finishing His sayings, except for the last section. That's because Jesus is still speaking to the world through His people as they go and make disciples of all nations!

C. In Short, There's More Where This Came From!

So what do we take away from the presence of five discourses in the Gospel of Matthew? At least this much: If you liked this Sermon, there's more where it came from!

II. The Sermon's Impact: It Astonished People, v. 28

Not only is there more where this Sermon came from; it stunned the original audience. The word is something like "dumbfounded" or "overwhelmed." Jesus' contemporaries had just heard the best sermon ever preached in the history of the world, and it amazed them. Certainly its literary genius and its stylistic beauty should be enough to amaze anybody. Even in translation, the words just sound beautiful, rich, and deep. G.K. Chesterton, a journalist and literary critic of the last century, had this to say about it:

There is perhaps nothing so perfect in all language or literature as the use of these three degrees in the parable of the lilies of the field; in which he seems first to take one small flower in his hand and note its simplicity and even its impotence; then suddenly expands it in flamboyant colours into all the palaces and pavilions full of a great name in national legend and national glory; and then, by yet a third overturn, shrivels into nothing once more with a gesture as if flinging it away 'and if God so clothes the grass that today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven-- how much more.' It is like the building of a good

Babel tower by white magic in a moment and in the movement of a hand; a tower heaved suddenly up to heaven on the top of which can be seen afar off, higher than we had fancied possible, the figure of man; lifted by three infinities above all other things, on a starry ladder of light logic and swift imagination. Merely in a literary sense it would be more of a masterpiece than most of the masterpieces in the libraries; yet it seems to have been uttered almost at random while a man might pull a flower.¹

This is the glory of Jesus Christ, the greatest preacher in history. But His sermon is not simply spoken to be a literary masterpiece. It has two further qualities.

A. It Demands Our Assent

First, it is designed to get us to say “Yes, that’s right.” You have to agree with this Sermon. It is not merely something to look at and say “That’s beautiful.” It’s not primarily an aesthetic object or an aesthetic experience. It is a set of propositions, truth-claims, and these propositions demand your assent. “Agree with me. Admit that I’m right!” Jesus demands.

B. It Surpasses Our Abilities

But even in the act of agreeing with this Sermon that it is good, you must admit that you have not and cannot perfectly do all that it requires. What man in the room can say that he has never cast one lustful glance? What woman in the room can say that she has never said “I would never!” and so attempted to escape the necessity of the Golden Rule? Who among us can say, “Yes, I love my neighbor as myself”?

This Sermon surpasses our abilities. No fallen human being can live like this from his own resources. Even if by some miracle you could perfectly obey this Sermon from today onward, you have disobeyed it in the past and so you’re forever marked as a Sermon-disobeyer.

The Sermon was astonishing surely in part for this reason. The first audience was stunned because Jesus was asking of them far more than they could give, and they knew it. He wanted them to be much better than they were, or ever had been. And we should be astonished for the same reason.

Yet Jesus’ point was not to cruelly mock people, either His contemporaries or us. He seriously proposes this sermon as the portrait of a person who is poor in spirit and who trusts in something outside himself. This sermon is the picture of what you will become when you get to know Jesus Christ. This is the portrait of a Christ-follower. Its demands are good — but they are unattainable outside of Jesus Christ. Only when you’ve been forgiven by Jesus’ grace, cleansed by His promises, accepted in His righteousness and empowered by His Spirit can you live like this, can you be this person.

So let’s focus on this Jesus. Who is the one who preached the Sermon on the Mount? Paul said “We preach not ourselves.” But this man preached Himself.

¹ Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, Pt. 2., ch. 3

III. The Sermon's Preacher, v. 29

The sermon was preached by Jesus of Nazareth. We learn three things about Him from this verse.

A. He Taught Them, v. 29a

First, He taught. He did not come to Earth for the purpose of teaching, but He did teach while He was here. Any church that claims to perpetuate the mission and message of Jesus Christ needs to have a large component of *teaching* — that is, transmitting knowledge and the skills to apply it. Jesus taught. And any organization which claims to say, “I exist for the purpose of disseminating knowledge about Jesus” also needs to teach. That’s not all Jesus did, and that’s not all the church should do. But it must be a major part of what the church does, as it was a major part of what Jesus did.

So after spending the last year looking at this sermon, you should have learned something from these teachings of Jesus. You should know more than you did about the character and destiny of a Christian. You should know more about the authority of the Old Testament and its laws, and the broad spiritual applications they require. You should know more about hypocrisy in three key areas (prayer, giving, and fasting) and you should know how to pray, how to evaluate righteously, and how to not worry. These are all things that Jesus taught and that I have attempted with God’s help to pass on and to amplify to you.

B. He Demonstrated Authority, v. 29b

But more than teaching and saying, “Here is the truth,” Jesus demonstrated authority. He spoke as one who had the right to declare. Other teachers speak according to what they’ve learned, or at best what they’ve experienced themselves. I can tell you what I see here in the text. Tim as a track coach can tell you what he knows about how to run and what he’s seen over his years of coaching. But Jesus didn’t say what He had gotten from someone else.

1. He Cited Himself, 5:20, 28, etc.

No — one of the most amazing parts of this Sermon is how Jesus repeatedly cites Himself. “They said . . . but *I* say” — He uses this formula over and over in the second part of chapter 5. Jesus simply declares based on His own authority exactly what you need to think and do. He interprets the law authoritatively. It’s almost as if He was the one who made the law in the first place . . . in fact, He did make the law in the first place! Just as a parent can say “Do it because I said so,” so Jesus can say, with far more authority, “Do it because I said so.”

If you haven’t noticed, I don’t preach that way. Probably you’ve never attended a church where the preacher preached that way. Or if you have, you didn’t stay there. Such an attitude is very off-putting most of the time. But from Jesus, it sounds completely natural. He has full assurance that He has every right to command.

2. He Preached About Himself, 5:11, 17; 7:21-23

But not only did He cite Himself; He preached Himself. He first mentions Himself in 5:11, where He declares blessed those people who suffer for His sake. That’s astonishing. Can you imagine Aristotle or Stephen Hawking or Albert Einstein or some other merely human genius saying such a thing? It’s not “You’re blessed if you suffer for the truth, which I’m merely the

messenger declaring to you.” No. It’s “You’re blessed if you suffer *for me*.” Jesus declared that He was the one who should be the most important in our lives. Think about the people who are important to you. You would stick by your wife, wouldn’t you, even if everyone was saying nasty things about her and her family on TV and the Internet? But would you feel blessed to be experience such a thing? Of course not. The *Wall Street Journal* recently ran a story on a man who spent years and millions of dollars tracking down a false story about himself that someone had published online. It didn’t sound like he felt very blessed to undergo this slander.

But Jesus says, “If you suffer for me, you’re blessed!” What a claim! Who does this guy think He is? Clearly, He expects us to think that He is more important than anyone else we know and love, and that any way of demonstrating loyalty to Him turns out to be a blessing to those who do it. Wow. Do you believe that? Do you think that’s true? You see, believing this is one of the core requirements of Christian faith. You have to believe that Jesus is so wonderful and so important that you’re better off close to Him and hated and attacked by all the world besides than you would be to be the friend of all the world and ignorant of Jesus Christ. What an incredible claim!

Well, Jesus mentions Himself again in 5:17. This time, He represents Himself as a man on a mission. He has a goal, and that goal is to fulfill the law.

Now, every human being was created to fulfill the law. That is our purpose: to find fulfillment in God by obeying the law that governs us. But Jesus clearly sees His purpose as standing out from the purpose of other human beings. His goal is to do everything the law requires — and as the rest of the New Testament makes clear, to do it in our place.

But notice as well that He doesn’t say “I was born to fulfill the law.” He was born; Matthew is very clear on that. But totally unlike any mere human being, He doesn’t say He was born. He says He came.

I came!

What kind of a claim is that? It’s claim that He lived elsewhere before He lived on earth. It’s a statement that He left His previous place of residence and came to Earth to do a particular job here, a job He describes as fulfilling the law.

Where did He live before? Again, the rest of the NT makes it clear that He lived in Heaven before He lived on Earth, that He lived in Heaven with God His Father from all eternity, that in the beginning *was* the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. At the best, a mere human being making a bold claim can say “I was born for this.” Or we can say that we came to a certain place on Earth to do a particular thing. Those of you from Sheridan or Wright can say “For this purpose I have come to Gillette, to go to church this morning.” But that’s not what Jesus is saying. He’s not talking about coming to Galilee, or coming to Jerusalem. He’s talking about coming into this world. He’s talking about coming to this planet for a particular mission.

Again, what a claim! He speaks on His own authority. He says that to know Him is the greatest possible privilege. He says that He is not an “earthling,” but that His native place is somewhere else.

And then, at the end of the Sermon, He mentions Himself one more time. This time, it is as the judge who will decide on the final fate of every human being. He will make the final decision as to whether to accept or reject the people who stand before His judgment seat and claim the credentials necessary to get into Heaven.

So this is the one who preached the Sermon on the Mount. He says that knowing Him is the most valuable relationship you can ever have, to the point that you’re still a net winner if you have Jesus Christ and the entire world hates you. He says that He has the right to tell you what the law says and what it means. He says that He didn’t get His start here on planet Earth like the rest of us, but that He came from elsewhere. He says that His mission is to obey the law. And He says that He will be the final arbiter on whether you’re acceptable to Him.

Do you believe these claims? Is your trust in Jesus Christ, who is the man from Heaven and the ruler over the kings of the earth?

3. He Expected People to Build their Lives on Him, 7:24-27

If so, then you can show it by doing what He says. He clearly expected people to build their entire lives around hearing and doing whatever He said.

You don’t get that from other figures. Aristotle doesn’t demand that you build your life on Aristotle. Oprah doesn’t demand that you build your life on Oprah, or claim that she will be the final arbiter who accepts or rejects you based on whether you built your life on listening to and obeying her. But Jesus clearly says that your life will collapse unless it’s built on hearing Him and doing what He says.

Is your life built on that? Is hearing from Jesus a regular part of your schedule? I’m talking about Bible reading, personally and with your family. I’m talking about being present at church to listen to Jesus’ words. Is that a non-negotiable part of your daily and weekly routine? If not, then your life is hardly built around it, now is it? But Jesus says that listening is just step one. You must do more than listen. You must implement what you hear. When you hear “Love your enemies,” you need to take practical steps to do good for those who want to hurt you. When you hear, “Do all things without murmuring or complaining,” you need to make a serious effort to control your tongue

Is your life built on Jesus Christ? If it’s not, please come talk to me afterwards. I would love to share more with you about how to build on Him. But if it is, then keep building. Keep listening. Keep actively implementing what you hear.

C. He Differed from the Scribes, v. 29c

Well, Jesus isn’t like the scribes. You all might have heard of other brilliant Jewish teachers — men like Moses Maimonides or Rabbi David Kimchi. Going further back, you have Rabbis Hillel and Shammai. If you read their teachings, you will see that they don’t teach with authority. They teach by embroidering together what previous commentators have said. Jesus didn’t teach

like that. He gave His own commands, His own interpretations, His own position. If you've never studied the Talmud, then you don't realize just how different Jesus' teaching is! Here's a sample of Talmudic literature:

The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the Book of Psalms, Job, Prophets, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles. Now on the view that Job lived in the days of Moses, should not the book of Job come first? — We do not begin with a record of suffering. But Ruth also is a record of suffering? — It is a suffering with a sequel [of happiness], as R. Johanan said: Why was her name called Ruth? — Because there issued from her David who replenished the Holy One, blessed be He, with hymns and praises. (*Baba Bathra* 14b)

In general, in studying Talmud the most important phrase is “And another opinion is . . .” But Jesus doesn't allow for another opinion. His opinion is the right opinion.

Don't listen to Jewish fables. Listen to Jesus Christ, the authoritative teacher.

IV. The Sermon's Impact

So I leave you with a question.

A. Does It Astonish You?

Are you going to do no more than the original hearers with this message that you've heard? Will you merely be astonished? Matthew doesn't say that they obeyed. He simply says that they were astonished.

B. Does It Describe You?

But this Sermon ought to describe you. Do you see yourself portrayed in the Beatitudes? Do you see yourself as salt and light? Do you actively build your life on hearing and obeying Jesus Christ? This Sermon is not a manifesto which you can simply obey in your own strength. Far from it. It is rather a description of what the person whose life is given to Jesus looks like.

C. Is Your Life Founded on Hearing and Obeying Jesus?

So that's the question this sermon leaves us with: now that we know how amazing Jesus is, how bold His claims are, is your life founded on hearing and obeying Him? He is God's beloved Son. *Listen to Him. Amen.*