

# The Authority of Jesus

Good to see you guys this morning. If you have a bible, go ahead and **take it out**—I'll let you know where to turn here in a second. **But before I tell you where to turn, I wanted to acknowledge and offer a quick word on the events this week at Austin-East High School, here in Knoxville. Most of you have probably heard by now that there was a shooting involving both police and students, there at the school. A student, Anthony Thompson Jr., was killed. And a police officer, named Adam Wilson, was injured.**

Obviously, there's **a lot we don't know** right now about what happened, as the investigation is ongoing and the body cam footage has not been released. But a few **things we do know**: 1) **a family is grieving**. That family did not expect that morning to be the last time they saw Anthony alive. They thought they had years left to love, laugh and enjoy Anthony's presence. Now he's gone. And regardless of what exactly took place at the school that day, **Scripture calls us** to mourn with those who mourn, and grieve with those who grieve.

**2) A community is hurting**. Many of you probably know that this is the **fifth Austin-East student** to be killed in the past four months. If you aren't directly a part of that community, just try to *imagine* the cumulative pain, hurt, and fear that many there are experiencing right now. It's honestly hard for me to fathom. But again, we as God's people are called to hurt with them. Not *argue* with their hurt, not respond to their hurt with "but what about..."-type statements, but hurt *with* them.

**3) There is work to be done**. Regardless of what details end up revealing this situation, here's the reality both in our community and our nation as a whole: there is a deep distrust and skepticism towards the police by some in the black community, and there seems to be a deep distrust and skepticism towards the black community by some police. And something needs to be done about that. There's a lot of different things that could be done—and here is not the place to debate or propagate those things. But I think we all can agree that there is work to be done. And as followers of Jesus, we are called to be agents of justice and reconciliation, so we have a significant role to play *in* that work.

So I'd love it if we could spend just a bit praying for the Austin-East community, as well as praying and asking God what he might be calling us to do for and in that community. *Let's pray. //*

Thanks for doing that with me. If you do have your bibles, turn with me to **Matthew 8**. If you're new around here, we're currently in **one part of a multiple year series** walking through the book of Matthew and learning from the life of Jesus that it records. And specifically, in this part of the series, we are learning mainly from the interactions Jesus has with various types of people. Last week, we looked at three separate stories of Jesus interacting with people that need *healing*, and we saw him heal every one of them.

Today, we're going to look at **three more stories**, but each of these is about slightly *different* things. In fact, on the surface, *these* three stories may not sound like they have much *at all* to do with each other, but what we'll find out is that they actually *do*. I think there's actually one theme that runs straight through all of them, and honestly through a lot of chapters 8-10, that has incredible *relevance* for our lives today as followers of Jesus. But before we get to what that is, we're just going to start off by trying to wrap our minds around the stories themselves.

**Pick it up** with me in Matthew 8, starting in v. 18:

*[18] Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. [19] And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." [20] And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." [21] Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." [22] And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."*

So picking up **where we left off** last week, people are coming out to Jesus in droves to be healed and to interact with him. Jesus, who never was big on crowds just *for the sake* of crowds, tells the disciples to head over to the other side of the lake. But as they do that, **two would-be disciples** come up to Jesus and ask to follow him. I say "*would-be*" because Jesus sure doesn't sound like he's exactly *eager* for them to come along. In fact, his reaction to them could probably be described as more *discouraging* than it is *eager* or *excited*.

The first man who approaches him is a **scribe**. A scribe would've been an expert in the Mosaic law, and likely smart as a whip, especially as it related to what you and I call the Old Testament. In other words, as a disciple, he was a *catch* by most people's standards. Most rabbis at the time would *jump* at the opportunity to have someone so well-versed in the Law come join their team. *First round draft pick*, so to speak. And chances are this guy would've *known* he was a first round draft pick. He probably approaches Jesus expecting that *Jesus* would be glad and eager to have him aboard.

**Jesus doesn't** quite see it that way though. Instead, he responds with this statement about how foxes have holes and birds have nests, but how he himself ("the son of man") has nowhere to lay his head. Generally, when you apprenticed yourself to a rabbi (like Jesus), there were some decent benefits that came along with that. You were either put up in nicer accommodations or in the homes of other well-off people as you "followed" whoever you followed. But **Jesus makes very clear to this guy that he will not enjoy any such accommodations as Jesus' disciple.** Jesus clarifies that even *Jesus* doesn't get that kind of treatment, so certainly his disciples shouldn't expect them either. **Jesus says essentially, "if you want to follow me, you need to follow because of who I am and because I am worthy of being followed—not because of how you will tangibly benefit from it."**

The **next person that approaches** Jesus says that he wants to follow, but needs to first go "**bury his father.**" That honestly could be read a few different ways. It could mean his father has recently died and he needs to be there for the burial. It was also common for Jewish people at the time to have *two* burials. One immediately after the person died, and the next one a year later when they transferred the remains to a different location. So he could mean that *second* burial. Or, he could just mean "my father is approaching old age, and I want to stick around until he passes." It honestly could be any of those situations.

But regardless of what *exactly he* means, **Jesus' response** is very clear. He says "follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." **Jesus calls this man to have a greater allegiance to Jesus and his kingdom than he does to his own flesh-and-blood family.** And as intense as that might sound to us *today*, it would've sounded exponentially more that way to a first-century Jewish audience. Family was quite literally *everything* to them. And here, Jesus seems to be calling his disciples to *detach* themselves, on some level, to the strongest human relationship they had, and *re-attach* themselves to a heavenly family and purpose. **Jesus says that following him looks like giving him your complete allegiance; that his authority supersedes even the strongest human authority there is.** That's our *first* story.

Let's take a look at the next one, hopping back in with v. 23:

*[23] And when he Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him. [24] And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he (Jesus) was asleep.* Storm raging on the sea, Jesus is snoozin'. I read that as telling us that Jesus is *serious* about his naps. Man after my own heart. *[25] And they the disciples went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing."* *[26] And he said to them* (I love this question),

*“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” “Uhhhh...because of the storm that is about to drown us all? Did we leave out that part?” But look at this... **Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.** So not just “it stopped storming,” but the sea immediately went *calm*. Like a lake in the early morning hours when not a thing has been out on the water. [27] **And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”**”*

Okay, so on this one, you need to know that for many ancient people at the time, **the sea** (or the ocean) was seen as the *epitome* of chaos, destruction, and unpredictability. **Even today, there are books and movies about how large boats with all their modern technology are capsized by a storm on the high seas.** So you can imagine how *intimidating* the sea was to people back *then*. But that’s also why, **throughout the bible, particularly in the Old Testament, the bible talks about how Yahweh, the God of Israel, has authority over the wind and the waves, and particularly over the sea.** I’ll give you just a few examples of what I mean:

**Psalm 65:7**

*(God) who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.*

**Psalm 89:9**

*(Talking to God) You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.*

**Psalm 107:29**

*He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.*

And we could go on from there—there are plenty more where those came from. For people at the time, **claiming that God could tame the sea was to say he was more powerful and authoritative than anything else in creation.** If the *raging sea* listens to you, you win. Always. You’re the biggest and baddest there is. So **by Jesus calming the raging seas in this story, he is trying to make a (fairly obvious) claim to be the God of Israel.** He is trying to show them, clearly, what his true identity is. “Those psalms?” Jesus is saying, “they are written about *me*.”

And yet, at the end of the story, the **disciples miss it.** Their response to this unbelievable show of power and authority is “what sort of *man* is this?” So they marvel at what Jesus did, but conclude that he is simply some sort of superhuman, rather than the more *obvious* conclusion (at least to us today): that he is God himself. They miss what Jesus is trying to say.

Okay, on to **story #3**. You guys doing alright? Okay, pick it up with me in v. 28:

*[28] And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, a predominantly Gentile region, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.* Well *that's* pretty much a scene straight out of a horror movie, isn't it? Can you imagine going for a stroll, passing by a cemetery, and two demon-possessed men just come trotting out towards you? That's straight out of the plot of every bad zombie movie ever.

*[29] And behold, they* (the demon-possessed men) *cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"* Interesting response. *[30] Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. [31] And the demons begged him (they pleaded with Jesus), saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs."* *[32] And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. [33] The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. [34] And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.*

Okay. In this last story, Jesus **casts demons out** of two men who are possessed by them. But **the interaction he has** with these men before all that, I think, is telling. Upon seeing Jesus, these men (or presumably the demons speaking *through* these men) say "what have you to do with us, O Son of God?" That **title, "the son of God,"** is an undeniable recognition of Jesus' divine identity. So finally we have a character in the story who recognizes who Jesus is, and what type of character is it? *Demons. Evil* itself. So *that's* a little unexpected, isn't it? **Some of the first people in the story to recognize Jesus' true identity are the ones most opposed to him?**

And then, these demons in the story—**apparently terrified of Jesus** and his authority over them—"beg" him to, if he casts them out, to cast them into a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus agrees to it, and the pigs then run off of a cliff and drown. Raising pigs was a lucrative business in this region, so after people in the region hear that Jesus has destroyed some of their livelihood, they come out to Jesus and (also) "beg him" to leave their region. Jesus takes care of two men haunting a graveyard and terrorizing a region, and then gets run out of town for doing so. What a story, right? So there are our three stories for today.

//

Now here's **our question**: what do these three, seemingly random stories, have to do with each other? We have Jesus discouraging two people from following him, Jesus calming the storm on the sea, and Jesus exorcising demons and getting run out of town. What *theme* could we possibly find in all three of these narratives?

Well here's at least one **theme I see**, and I've hinted at it some already: **I think these stories are meant to demonstrate to us the authority of Jesus.** These are stories about Jesus' *authority*. In the first story, Jesus is insisting that he has the *authority to override a person's loyalties to possessions and comfort, and to even their own family*. In the second story, Jesus displays *clearly his authority over nature* by commanding the wind and the waves to immediately be stilled, and they do. In the third story, Jesus displays his *authority over the demonic and demon-possessed, such that they shudder and beg before him, and do precisely what he says*. In all three stories, there is a clear display of Jesus' *absolute authority*.

And yet **simultaneously**, there are *people* in these stories who reject—or at least *fail to recognize*—his authority. The disciples on the boat marvel at what sort of “*man*” Jesus is, but fail to see him as the God that his actions clearly prove he is. And the people in the village would rather Jesus leave their region altogether than reckon with a man who has more *power* and *authority* than the men terrorizing their village. So it's hard to miss **the irony**: in these stories, ***nature and evil itself recognize Jesus' authority, but the people in the story don't.***

These are stories all about Jesus' *authority*, and about how various people and things *respond to* that authority. And I think **the main question** these stories are meant to leave us with is actually very simple. It's this: **will you accept the authority of Jesus?** I think that's what we're left to answer. Will we be those who *recognize* Jesus' authority and respond appropriately to it? Or will we be those who *deny* Jesus' authority (either directly, or by failing to recognize who he truly is)?

You know, a lot of **people today like Jesus**. A lot of people think he's *interesting*. Or *intriguing*. Or *intelligent*. A lot of people think he said some insightful things about humanity or taught some decent ethical principles. **Plenty of people find Jesus to be an interesting person.** That's one thing. **But followers of Jesus don't just think Jesus is interesting—they think Jesus is king.** They think he is the name above every name. He's the king above all kings. And he's the authority above every other authority. **To be a follower of Jesus isn't just to find him interesting or helpful, but to give him absolute authority over your life.**

Now I do *realize* that **authority can be a difficult subject** to discuss in the 21st century. That word probably registers quite *negatively* for a lot of us, because we have plenty of examples in our world of *bad* authority. **All you have to do is turn on the news for five minutes and you'll see that. CEOs who exploit cheap labor while they become multi-billionaires. Parents who mistreat and manipulate their kids. Pastors commit and/or cover up abuse in the church. Or maybe for you, you don't even have to turn on the news to see it—you have people in your life personally who are examples of bad authority.**

And **because of all that**, for a lot of us our immediate, **gut-level reaction** to *anyone* claiming authority over us is to find fault. “Well I’m not going to give this person authority over me because of this character flaw that they have.” “I’m not going to give that person authority over me because of something they said or did in the past.” “I’m not going to give that person authority over me because they associate themselves with this belief or this movement or this policy.” And the reality is that sometimes those are legitimate, *good* reasons to reject authority over us...and sometimes it's just a game we play to try and dismiss even *good* authority.

But either way, **here's the thing about the authority of Jesus: there are no faults to find in him.** Jesus is the one and only *perfect* authority. **There is no sin in him, there is no bias in him, there are no skeletons in his closet to uncover.** Which puts us in a place similar to the two *would-be* disciples in the story—we can either give him absolute authority, or not give him authority at all. He's either worthy of it, or not worthy of it. There's no re-directing or changing the subject; just a question. *Will you accept* his authority or not accept it?

**Put another way**, will you engage in **actual discipleship** to Jesus, or attempt some form of **fake discipleship** to Jesus? To help us answer that question in our own lives, I want to give you **two versions of fake discipleship** we see in the passage. Two ways that we often approach Jesus, *thinking* that we are giving him authority, without *actually* giving him authority. And these come directly from the story of those *would-be* disciples at the beginning of our passage. You ready?

### **Version #1: I'll follow Jesus...as long as I benefit from it.**

So this first one we see in the first *would-be* disciple. He is ready to follow Jesus “wherever he goes.” But Jesus indicates in his response that this guy might be in it for the benefits, not for the discipleship itself. He makes sure this scribe understands that there will be no five-star accommodations for being a disciple of Jesus. If he follows

Jesus, it needs to be because Jesus is worthy of following—not because it's some sort of exclusive club with benefits to gain.

I've seen this posture often in people **today**. For some people there's a tendency towards saying "I will follow Jesus...*if life goes the way I thought it would go as a result of following him.*" Or maybe "I will follow Jesus...*for as long as life goes the way I thought it would go as a result of following him.* I will follow Jesus, as long as he gives me the **job** that I want. The **lifestyle** that I want. The career with the **standard of living** I want. The **spouse** that I want...preferably a *hot* one. The **kids** *with the type of behavior and interests that I want them to have.*" Have you seen any of this in you or others? These are all iterations of what the scribe said.

And listen: I'm **not saying** that any of those things are **necessarily bad** things to desire. They might be fine. *But* I am saying that if your posture towards Jesus and desire to *follow* Jesus starts to *turn* the moment any of those things don't pan out like you wanted, we have a problem. Because that might *reveal* that **you've been following Jesus for the benefits, not because of who he is**. That's the first form of fake discipleship. The *second* is...

## **Version #2: I'll follow Jesus in everything...except this thing.**

This one we see in the **second would-be disciple**. He *qualifies* his discipleship with his loyalty to his family. He places his allegiance to Jesus right *after* his allegiance to his family. And Jesus' response indicates that a discipleship to Jesus won't actually work as a secondary allegiance. Discipleship to Jesus actually requires a *primary* allegiance—an acknowledgement of *his* authority above all other authority. Because here's the thing: **partial allegiance...is not allegiance at all**. Do you know what the word "allegiance" means? It means *undivided devotion*. *Undivided*. So if your allegiance is to Jesus in every area except one, your allegiance is actually not to Jesus at all. Your allegiance is to whatever *that* thing is.

And here *in* the **Bible Belt**, we have almost **made a sport out of this**: following Jesus in everything...except *this one* thing. Sometimes we even sound *strikingly* similar to this second would-be disciple. "Jesus you have *complete* authority over my life...except when following you might make life less ideal for my family or my kids, then obviously it's "family first." "Jesus you can have every part of my life, as long as you don't start trying to tell me what to do with my money or my time." "Jesus, you can have *complete* authority over my life...except for who I sleep with. And also *how* I sleep with people and *when* and sleep with people and how *many* people I sleep with. Everything *except* my sexuality." "Jesus, you can have complete authority over my life...as long as I can keep



my current preference for materialism and my current standard of living.” We do this, don’t we?

We come in here on Sundays and sing things like “make way for the king...kings and kingdoms will *bow down* before the *Lion* and the *Lamb*.” And yet as we do that, we hold significant portions of our lives and our identities behind our back just hoping the king won’t notice. Are we serious? Do we really think the *conquering king of the world* who is gonna make every king and kingdom bow down to him one day is fooled by the thing we’re holding behind our backs?

And here’s the **absolute insanity about** us trying to live that way: **every single bit of Jesus’ authority happens to be for our good. There’s not a single thing that you are withholding from him right now, that wouldn’t be better for you if you gave it to him.** Maybe not “better” by our narrow definition, but *truly* better. What Jesus desires to give us is hope, and life, and freedom *from* the things that rule over us. But how often do we forfeit that because we would rather cling to the things that destroy us?

I’ve had **friends who held onto their sexuality**—who they slept with and *when* and *how*—for years and years of their life. And putting *that part* of their life under Jesus’ authority was the most difficult, most complicated thing they ever had to do. They would’ve said at the time that it felt like part of them was *dying* by doing it—and yet on the other side of it all there was *life*. I’ve had friends **hold onto their money**—they wanted to spend every bit of cash they had on bigger and nicer and flashier things for themselves. And they would’ve said that giving Jesus authority over their finances was the most difficult thing they’ve ever had to do—that they *hated* it. And yet on the other side of it all they found *freedom*. **There is not a single thing that you give to Jesus that you won’t be better off for having given over to him. It’s just a question of whether or not he’s worth it for you.**

// So what I think **both of these versions** of fake discipleship reveal is that **while we may all acknowledge the authority of Jesus in theory, sometimes we really struggle to implement it in specifics.** But again, I’ll just remind you: **Jesus did not come on the scene to *partially* disciple you into his image. He came to disciple *all of you* into his image.** He came with *complete* authority.

To put it another way, Jesus is **not applying to be your consultant**. You guys know how consulting works, right? If you hire a consultant for you or your business, they are *at your disposal*. There is no issue whatsoever with *accepting some* of what they say, and completely *rejecting other* things they say. That’s just how consulting works. It’s pick-and-choose. **But Jesus is not your consultant. He’s the king.** Now you can

choose to accept him as king, or *reject* him as king. But the one thing you can't do is treat him like a consultant.

And **yet, here is what's amazing** to me about Jesus. *Still*, Jesus **does not force anyone** to live under his authority. He doesn't use threats or intimidation to scare people onto his team. *After he calms the storm and the disciples don't quite get it, he doesn't say "but guys—did you see what just happened?! Did you see what I did!?! Come on, you have to follow me now! You have to recognize me now!"* When the people ask him to *leave their village* because of the pigs, he doesn't say "oh if you're gonna treat me like *that*, I'll just bring the demons back so that you're forced to bring *me* back." That's not who God is. He doesn't *trick* people into being under his authority. He doesn't coerce, he doesn't intimidate, he doesn't manipulate. He *offers*. He says "**either follow me, or don't. Either give me complete authority over your life, or give me no authority over your life. But I will not do partial authority.**"

Now with all that said I will make this **one caveat**. If you're here and you're in the early, early stages of trusting in Jesus, and you're still wrestling with who Jesus is and if he was who he says he is, I want you to know there's room for that. There's room for being in process. There's room for doubts and hesitations as you're coming to discover who he is. Sometimes it takes time. But I am saying that the question you have to answer eventually, and the question *all* of us have to answer is this: **just like the would-be disciples**, can Jesus be *trusted* as *our* authority? Is his authority *trustworthy*?

Now I would argue that **Jesus has proved that his authority is trustworthy**, precisely because of how *different* it is from other types of authority. There's a passage we'll cover later in Matthew, and it's in Luke too, where Jesus states explicitly the **difference between his brand** of authority, and the *world's* brand of authority. Because they're *different*. He says essentially, "this is the way the world does authority: they lord it over you, they try to control you, and then they say they're doing it for your good. That's how the world does authority."

But then he says, "**authority isn't like that** in my kingdom. In my kingdom, the greatest among you—the one in a position of authority? They *serve*. Authority is lived out not by how high and mighty and superior you are, but in how you take the posture of a *servant* to all. And he directly connects it to himself by saying "I—Jesus—am among you as the one who *serves*."

And **as Jesus delivers** that line he is literally hours away from his execution, and he chooses to spend it *serving* the last supper to his disciples. What he is communicating, both through his words and his actions, is that he is an *altogether different* type of

authority. Jesus—the one who commands the wind and the waves, the one who terrifies demons with his presence—chooses to display his authority by *serv*ing others. He chooses to express his highness through lowness.

And then **he takes it further** by saying “the son of man came not to be served but to *serve*, and to *give his life* as a ransom for many.” Jesus’ life was marked, not by lording authority over people, not by *ascending* the ladder of power—but by *descending* it. And that posture would culminate in giving up his very life for humanity. As he was murdered, he asked the Father to *forgive* those doing the killing. **Jesus is a type of authority that the world had never seen before**: the type of authority that endures *death* for the ones he is in authority over.

Jesus **says to the people of his day** and ours: “Here is who I am. Here is the authority I model. It’s the authority that commands the wind and the waves, the authority that makes demons and darkness cower in fear. And simultaneously, the authority that lays down my life for the good of my people.” The question for *you* is will *you* live under that authority, or set yourself against it? In heaven there will be *one* throne for *one* person. And the best thing possible for all of us is that Jesus is on that throne and *we* aren’t. Because *we* belong in the multitudes gathered *around* the throne, singing that “glory and honor and power” belong to *him* forever. And I’m telling you that that posture begins here and now, yielding every bit of our lives to the good and loving authority of the king.

Let’s pray.