

## Authoritative Direction

### Deuteronomy 18:15-20

#### Intro

Every now and again you hear a passage from the Old Testament that sounds so much like Jesus that you really have to take a moment of pause. This, for me, is absolutely one of those spots.

I know, I absolutely know that the way that the Jewish religion views this passage is through the lens of King David, or the prophets Isaiah or Jeremiah, or maybe even some still to be born voice.

But through the eyes and ears of faith that I have been led to, these words not only describe a prophet who will speak the truth of God, a voice that will provide the direction that we and all people have longed to have; but they are speaking about the Prophet who also became our priest and king.

I hear these words, and I absolutely hear the Almighty pointing to Jesus.

The question is, will we hear the message that is being declared? Will we listen to the direction that is provided to us through the prophet who has come? The scripture reads this way.

### Deuteronomy 18:15-20

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. <sup>16</sup>This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: 'If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.' <sup>17</sup>Then the Lord replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. <sup>18</sup>I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. <sup>19</sup>Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. <sup>20</sup>But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.'

### Mark 1:21-28

#### Intro

This morning's second passage picks up at a point in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus has just called the first of his disciples. Jesus, as we know, called fishermen who worked along the Sea of Galilee (we assume the southern portion). He and his disciples have now ventured to Capernaum, a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is here that we first hear of Jesus entering the synagogue and teaching.

We quickly hear that the experience of listening to this man from Nazareth was something to behold. It was not like the way that the scribes taught. (The scribes were those men who learned to read and write and had extensive knowledge of the law and had learned argument about the law from the generations that had preceded them. The scribes were people who taught on the basis of those that came before them. It was upon their predecessors that their authority and wisdom was derived.)

Jesus taught in a different way. He taught from a position of authority. He did not cite those who had come before him as his basis for argumentation.

Instead, his words emerged from within, from his mind and his heart. Does that sound at all like the prophet that we heard of in our first passage?

Well, it was this authority that faced a very public and intense test when a person with an unclean spirit, a demon, came forward and confronted this new teacher. The suspense does not last all that long as the demon is dispatched.

As we hear about Jesus authority, especially in the context of the message that we just heard about the prophetic voice that we are told was going to come, a voice who will speak 'everything that God commands', we must ask ourselves, "are we trusting our lives, including all of its warts, to this person who speaks from within? Are we willing to trust the direction that is provided by the one who teaches and heals with authority?" The scripture reads this way.

### **Mark 1:21-28**

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

### **"Authoritative Direction"**

There are so many moments when we are searching for an authority, someone who will be able to provide us direction in those times when we do not know which road to take or how to get to the road that we want to venture upon. It seems rather obvious that even though the disciples may not have been specifically searching for an authority in how to live with one another and with God, they knew one when they were in the presence of one. Mark's understated way of writing, as I mentioned last week, sometimes leaves a lot up to the reader to surmise, but Mark lays it out there in this case and says that the disciples "were astounded" at Jesus teaching because he taught with authority.

In Greek, the word authority, in its masculine form, literally means, "out from himself." Unlike the scribes, he didn't need some previous expert's interpretation of scripture as a foundation upon which his line of thought began.

Instead, he was the expert; he was that prophetic voice that would speak the truth of God. He laid a new foundation that was able to guide those who would listen to a new and broader understanding of God and humanity. In those moments of teaching, the realization that you were in the presence of someone who would be able to guide you to where you were called to serve became increasingly obvious, both to the disciples, and if we are willing to listen, to us as well.

This authority, which began to exhibit itself as a guide through the teachings of Christ, was then taken to a different level when he came into contact with this man with the unclean spirit. I mean talk about a tough first day in the pulpit.

Think about it, as you would envision a perfect first day before a new congregation: would having a person who is possessed with an unclean spirit showing up be included in what we were hoping for? Seriously, picture someone standing in this pulpit for the first time when a voice from an individual in the back of the narthex comes forward decrying the truth that through God, all is able to be made well.

Picture that. Does that sound like a fun first day? Short answer: NO.

However, Jesus, calm and collected as ever, flexes the authority that was already being exhibited through his teaching style in a new way, and causes the unclean spirit to leave this person who had come before him. In a few short verses we quickly know that this person, Jesus, the Son of God, is someone who can guide us to where we have been called to go and heal us of all that holds us back from being in a closer communion with God and God's people. The question is, are we going to seek out the authority of Jesus, the guidance of the Almighty, or are we going to try and do it on our own?

As a driver, one of the things that I am a firm believer in, is knowing where you are headed. I remember as a kid pouring over the maps that were supplied by AAA. Twenty years ago, that morphed into using internet maps that I would print off (which always had to be taken with a grain of salt because every now and again the map would say that you would have arrived at the address, only to realize that it was someone's backyard (and yes, that literally happened to a former colleague of mine!).

But over the last few years, I have begun to lean upon the Google maps app on my phone. You plug in an address, the line shows up and you are able to not only get the fastest route by distance, but figure out where that pesky reality of traffic is rearing its ugly head.

Well, I really appreciate them...but what happens when the sun flairs and all of a sudden your map has the vehicle you're in all but doing donuts at the exit of the Holland Tunnel and you are looking to make your way up to midtown? Because that was what happened a few weeks and all of a sudden the tool which I leaned upon in so many authoritative ways couldn't figure out where I was, let alone how to get me to where I was looking to go.

Now, thankfully, Manhattan is an island and I know that the West Side Highway runs north and south, so we were able to figure it out, but as I think back on that experience what we really needed was an authority on the area. We needed someone or something to direct us in the way that we should go. We needed someone or something who would be able to guide us to the destination that we were so desperately searching for.

To pull this out of the google map example, we need an authority to help us grow beyond and be healed of the prideful belief that we can find what we need to do next in our lives in and of ourselves by following, 'what the (cultural) map says'. If this can occur, then maybe we could actually get to the place of peace that we are looking for, instead of grumbling about how we are unable to find, let alone dwell in that space.

Simply put, there are so many moments when we are in need of an authority. The self-help section at the local bookstore wouldn't be as big as it is if we weren't looking for answers that we believe that we

can't think of. We want guidance in our families (how do I talk with my kids, how do I make my parents understand what I'm feeling), at our jobs (why can't I get along with my co-workers, am I as fulfilled as I could possibly be?), in our social obligations (should I help out at church as I am being asked to do, do I have the time to take on another responsibility).

We desired to be healed. We want to be freed of our demons of addiction (whether they be alcohol, drugs, work), our demons of difficulty in relationships (Why won't she understand where I'm coming from, why did he leave me), and our personal demons that even we don't like to acknowledge that come in so many shapes and forms (sometimes its pride, sometimes its self-doubt, sometimes its longing for the wrong things).

We are looking guidance. We are longing for healing. That guidance, that healing authority can be found in Christ if we allow God to enter into our lives. Are you listening? Are you trusting? Are you willing to actually have the faith to say, "God, I give this (whatever this is) all to you, because I know that in all things, in all circumstances, you will carry me." That's what our scripture guides us to live out; and that is what the direction markers throughout our lives (if we are willing to see them) scream out.

We need to listen to the guidance that is given and realize that when we are in need of healing, we should offer that up to God. There is an authority waiting to step up in our times of need (if we are wondering how this might be done, think back to how we should pray, always, on every occasion, at all times).

This authority has been such an advocate on our behalf that he gave his life so that we might have the opportunity to be blessed with the gift of eternal life. We have an authority in Jesus Christ and it will be through his authoritative and healing guidance that we will be able to live as God has called us to live. Trust in this authority and the direction you long for will be provided.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

God, there are so many ways that we are lacking the direction that we need. There are times when it feels as if we are driving aimlessly searching for a destination that will never be found. We know that through Your authority, You can provide that direction and allow us to be healed of all of the demons that possess us. Work in us God, through Your Spirit, so that we might be able to ask for Your guiding hand and healing touch. God, thank You for all the ways that You are reaching out to us so that we might be the disciples you have called us to be. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.