

The days of the autocratic leader are long gone. No-one wants those days back. I don't. I'm sure you don't. So how do I lead? It's a journey we are exploring together. And what about you? You also have authority in Christ. You may not think so. In the Wednesday service we pray for forgiveness of sin and "all other benefits of his passion." Jesus imparted authority as one of those benefits. So how do we use Jesus' authority effectively in our daily lives?

Some years ago, there was a very badly behaved boy named Robert. All the professionals dreaded a visit from this boy. During one traumatic examination it was discovered the boy had bad tooth decay and needed dental treatment. Who to send him to was the question. Eventually he was sent to an older dentist who had the reputation for understanding children.

At the appointed time Robert arrives in the dental office ready for battle.

"Sit in the chair young man" said the dentist.

"No chance!" replied the boy.

"Son, I told you to climb onto the chair, and that's what I intend you to do," said the dentist.

Robert stared at him for a while then said "If you make me get in that chair, I will take off all my clothes."

The dentist calmly stared back. "Son, take them off."

So Robert took off his shirt, singlet, shoes and socks. Then he looks up defiantly.

"All right son, now get in the chair" says the dentist.

"You didn't hear me," retorted Robert. "I said if you make me get on that chair I will take off all my clothes."

"Take them off then son," replied the dentist.

Robert took off his pants and undies, standing stark naked in front of the dentist and his assistant.

"Now son, get in the chair," said the dentist again.

This time Robert did as he was told. He sat through the procedure. When treatment was completed, he was told to get down from the chair.

"Give me my clothes now, said the boy.

"I'm sorry," said the dentist. "Tell your mother that we're going to keep the clothes tonight. She can pick them up tomorrow."

Imagine the mother's shock as the waiting room door opens and there stands her little boy – naked as a jay bird. The room was filled with patients but there was nothing for it but to walk past them all. They carried on down in a public lift and into the parking area in the basement.

The next day, Robert's mother arrives back at the dentist and asks to have a word with him. The dentist expected an ear bashing but no.

The mother went on to express her appreciation to the dentist. She told him that Robert had been using the "I'll take my clothes off" blackmail for years. "Whenever we are in a public place,

he makes unreasonable demands of me. If I don't buy immediately what he wants, he threatens to take all his clothes off. You are the first person who has called his bluff and the impact on Robert has been incredible."¹

The dentist called Robert's bluff just like Jesus called the demon's bluff. The dentist had authority. Jesus had then, and continues to have now, the authority of Almighty God.

Imagine if we really understood Jesus' authority. Imagine if we were able to access Jesus' authority in our daily lives.

Well we can do just that. Jesus has the same authority he always has. Jesus has that authority through you, when you are deliberately involved in ministry like Jesus was with the demon. Jesus will use his authority through you when you are going about your everyday lives at home like he did with Peter's mother in law.

You have far more authority than you have believed possible. You have that authority in and through Jesus the Christ.

If you have been feeling defeated and powerless, you don't need to stay that way. As we encounter the living Lord Jesus today and through this series of Mark, we will all come to understand more of the power and love he offers us on a daily basis.

Let's consider the First Testament reading for a bit. It's an odd reading to choose. Here are the Jewish people stuffing up yet again. They have persistently ignored the commands of God.

The preceding verses describe their deliberate sins. They are 5 "woes":

Greed – they want bigger houses to impress others v8

Self indulgence – they love pleasure above all else vv11 – 17

Cynicism towards God – they dare him to step in vv18 – 19

Moral failure – Up yours God, we choose their own morals thanks very much vv 20 – 21

Social injustice – they ignore the needs of the marginalised vv 22 – 24

So after they have repeatedly disobeyed God he has to intervene. Judgement comes. Btw notice how similar the "woes" are to the hallmarks of our culture today.

God chooses to destroy Israel (not totally, a remnant is always left). His chosen vessels are the enemy nations – the pagans. And he chooses to do this through Assyria and Babylon. God has the authority to use whoever he chooses. He whistles for those at the end of the earth. And here they come. Not only do they come but they come speedily.

¹ This story was originally told by James Dobson and printed in Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes, Charles R. Swindoll, 42 - 43

The Sovereign Lord's authority is limitless. This is the authority he has invested in his Son Jesus. In the gospel story we see the Father's authority unveiled in Jesus.

Jesus has been anointed and called by the Father. He has called his own followers, at least some of them, there are more to come.

Now he reveals the authority in his own actions and ministry.

So here we are

The passage is all about the emerging authority of Jesus. It's not emerging in the sense of growing but rather in the sense of being revealed. The disciples and the others are beginning to see the authority and power that Jesus has. They see it in practical ways; Jesus' authority sets people free as never before.

As Jesus faces the demon's bluff we see Mark's first miracle story.

Let's just pause for a moment to see it in our mind's eye. All is calm and reverent. Here is Jesus in a synagogue in Capernaum – it's a place of prayer, of worship, used very much like we use our churches today. The Sabbath is a holy day and the synagogue is a holy place. Just as we do in church, the people will most likely have sung songs of praise, prayers will have been said and the Scriptures read. Now Jesus unpacks what was read. He explains God's word in a way that blows everyone away.

V22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

The word "authority" is used for the first time in v22. Jesus taught them as one who had authority. Jesus will not be drawn in; he will not be distracted or delayed. Instead he uses his authority to deal to the demon, just as he uses his authority in teaching. The original literally means "out of the original stuff." It comes from the same root as "author". Mark wants the readers to understand that Jesus isn't teaching with authority given by someone else. Jesus has authority in his own right. He didn't clarify something they already knew. He didn't teach like others did. Tim Keller puts it like this:

His listeners somehow sensed that he was explaining the story of their lives as the author, and it left them dumbfounded.²

You can imagine them sitting or standing, with their mouths open – absolutely stunned at the power in Jesus word's and manner.

And then mayhem! Suddenly crazy, random shouting. What's this? They all turn to stare at the one who cries out. What's he saying? "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" What's

² King's Cross, Timothy Keller 21

that about? Perhaps the demon is trying to lure Jesus into dialogue. Or maybe he wants to trick the people into believing that Jesus has come with evil intent himself.

Notice how defiance quickly turns to fear. “Have you come to destroy us?”

And then a dreadful recognition. Whatever the motive, the demon recognises Jesus; spiritual authority. “I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” And then of course it’s all over. Jesus won’t be sucked in and he sternly casts the demon out.

Just as the spiritual powers recognise Jesus authority; so do the people. Again Mark tells us, this time in v27: The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”

Jesus authority is clearly recognised in the spiritual realm. But it would be a mistake to think that Jesus authority is purely spiritual. Jesus also has authority in the physical realm.

When he goes home, supposedly away from the crowds to rest, eat and be refreshed, he finds Pete’s Mum in law is feeling pretty crook. She is the first woman to appear in Mark’s gospel. No dramas; no theatrical performance; Jesus simply takes her hand. We’re not told if he says anything or not. Maybe he did. Maybe he didn’t. What Mark tells us is that he took her by the hand. What a gentlemanly thing to do. How tender and kind. Jesus took her by the hand and helped her up. Again no dramatics. No theatricals. Just the clear expectation on Jesus part that Pete’s Mum in law would be well enough now to get up.

So she did get up. As an aside, commonly we think she then got them a meal. The CEV, our pew Bible, even says that. I understand though, that the original language for “served them” is not about waiting on them like a waiter or a cook. Rather it is more like sitting at Jesus’ feet like Mary did when Jesus said she had chosen the better part than Martha did by rushing around. Jesus healed Pete’s Mum in law so she could be with him, learn from him and enjoy his company, not so she could get out of her bed and “cook him up some bacon and some beans”, I mentioned the Diocesan camp earlier. The main speaker is a dynamic young Scottish man by the name of Howard. 6 foot 7 inches! He told us lots of wonderful stories. His passion is to see people learning about Jesus and then putting what they learn into practice.

He told us a story about some of the ways he had learned to use Jesus authority in praying for others. One day he was preaching in a very traditional, quite ‘high’ church, I think he said in Aberdeen. He told them about how Jesus heals. Howard believes you teach and then you put what you have been teaching about into practice. That sounds very sensible to me.

Because it was a traditional church and he didn’t know the people, he didn’t want to make a big deal about it, but he did want to do something practical. So, as you do, he asked God what to do. He felt God say there was someone in the church with tennis elbow. So after his sermon, Howard

gently thanked God for showing him that someone had tennis elbow. Then he quietly commanded the pain to go from the person's elbow. That was it. No dramatics or theatrics.

Then after the final hymn and blessing Howard processed up the aisle to shake people's hands farewell. He told us how a young woman bounded up to him. "How did you know? This is my first time in church. No-one knows me. I've had such pain. I felt a heat in my elbow and there's no pain. Does this happen often here?" Apparently her boyfriend who was with her was stunned by the whole thing too. Howard simply said "Well I don't know what usually happens here but God loves you and he is near to you."

Later that week he got a formal email from one of the leaders of the church. This man had been in agony with tennis elbow for years. He politely thanked Howard for healing him. He was now pain free several days later.

Howard didn't heal him of course. Jesus did. But Howard did use the authority that he has, as a Christ-follower, a disciple, an apprentice, whatever you want to call him. He used Jesus' authority to bring healing to that man and woman. Jesus has authority over all things. He is one with the creator and commands the nations. He has spiritual authority in the political and religious arena. He has authority in our daily lives and homes in the physical and practical realm.

And so do we. So do we. If we are Christ followers, we too have the authority of Jesus' not in our own right like Jesus does, but because he has delegated it to us.

So how do we use that authority? How do we receive and live in all the benefits of Jesus' passion? I want us to spend a few moments listening to God. I invite you to ask God two questions:
What are you saying to me about Jesus' authority? And
What do you want me to do about it?