

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
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Something Greater Epilogue

Matthew 7:28-29; John 1:1-5, 9-14

Introduction

I was so tempted to conclude my sermon last week with a poem that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote while in prison one month before his execution, which was ordered by Adolf Hitler for Bonhoeffer's involvement in a failed assassination attempt on Hitler's life. In light of the time we have spent in the Sermon on the Mount, I would like to share Bonhoeffer's poem with you:

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectations of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the Other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!

Throughout our time in the Sermon on the Mount, many of you have asked questions not unlike the ones Bonhoeffer asked in his poem. I trust that you have concluded, “Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!” It is my hope that by the end of this sermon, your heart will soar over what that final statement in Bonhoeffer’s poem really means for you.

Although I preached on the last paragraph in the Sermon on the Mount last week, this sermon is my final sermon in the series even though I will not be preaching on Jesus’ sermon itself. Instead, I would like you to think of this sermon as an epilogue to this sermon series I have called, “Something Greater.” As a springboard into my epilogue, consider the response of those who heard the Sermon on the Mount when it was first preached: **“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes”** (Matthew 7:28–29).

We will spend most of our time in John 1:1-5, 9-14, but before we can get there, I want to reflect upon what it was about Jesus that astonished those who heard him. In the two chapters that follow the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demonstrates why he was able to teach as one who had authority. In Matthew 8:1-4, Jesus healed a leper with a single touch demonstrating his authority over disease. In the same chapter, Jesus calmed a great storm with the word of his mouth demonstrating his authority over nature (vv. 23-27). In Matthew 8:28-34, we read of how Jesus was confronted by two demon possessed men who cried out: **“What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”** Jesus cast the demons out of the two men and into some pigs who then ran off a steep bank and drown into the sea; in doing so, Jesus demonstrated his authority over demons. Jesus also demonstrates his authority over death after raising Jairus’s daughter from death to life (see Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56).

The Authority of Jesus as the Word of God

Where did Jesus’ authority come from? It obviously came from within his own person. This is why the apostle John began his gospel with these words to describe Jesus:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5, 9-14)

What John states about Jesus in the first chapter of his gospel reveals that Jesus' authority flowed from his divinity. According to John, Jesus was there when the universe and the millions of galaxies it contains were created. The opening words of John's gospel should immediately take us back to Genesis 1:1, **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."** God spoke, and Jesus, as the Word of God and the second person of the Trinity, took the anvil of his omnipotent power and struck that which did not exist to make something that did. According to John, Jesus was there when, as the Psalmist states, **"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts"** (Psalm 33:6). The one who delivered the greatest sermon ever preached was and is the Word made flesh! As the Word of God, **"All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."**

In Colossians 1, the apostle Paul said of Jesus something not at all dissimilar than that of the apostle John: **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities—all things were created through him and for him"** (Col. 1:15-16). To be the **"firstborn of all creation"** is not a statement of origin, but a statement of preeminence and honor. Jesus is preeminently above all kings that he is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16). This is the reason his authority superseded that of the scribes, it is the reason he could cure disease, rebuke storms, make demons tremble, and raise the dead.

The Authority of Jesus as the Kinsmen Redeemer

Jesus as the Word of God also **"...became flesh and dwelt among us"** (John 1:14). There was nothing that men saw that seemed extraordinary about Jesus with the exception of those who witnessed him do the extraordinary. From a distance, he seemed just like everyone else. As the ancient creed that so many generations have recited in the Church states: "He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary."

The one of whom holy scripture testifies, **"...is before all things, and in him all things hold together"** (Col. 1:17) grew up like any other child, learned language like any other human, attended school, worked a job for the first part of his life, lived a life without once violating God's Holy law, while remaining perfect we are told in Hebrews 4:15, **"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."** However, as the apostle testifies: **"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him"** (John 1:10-11). Oh, do not miss the point, that although they did not know him, they were amazed by him. They marveled over his authority to teach, but as we have seen in Jesus' final four statements, amazement is not enough.

Jesus came not to be amazed or marveled at, but to be received! This is why John continues: **"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"** (John 1:12-13). Later on, in the gospel of John, Jesus said of himself: **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"** (John 3:16-17). The Word

of God took on flesh to fulfill the role of Kinsmen-redeemer to redeem what was lost due to Adam's sinful rebellion that resulted in the curse of creation.

In the Old Testament, a Kinsmen-redeemer had to meet three requirements in order to purchase property that has been taken from a family. First, a kinsmen-redeemer had to be a relative of the affected family; second, a kinsmen-redeemer had to have the means to purchase the property back for the affected family; thirdly, a kinsmen-redeemer had to be willing to restore the lost property back to the affected family. Jesus meets all three requirements to serve as our kinsmen redeemer to reverse the curse of sin and restore what was once taken from creation... because of his virgin birth. Jesus met the requirement of serving as our kinsmen redeemer in the following ways:

1. By being born of a virgin, the second person of the Trinity became a member of humanity.
2. By being the Word of God, he had the means to pay the price to redeem what was lost through Adam's sin.
3. Because, **"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."** Jesus demonstrated that he was willing to meet the requirements of kinsman-redeemer.

Amazement at Jesus' words and life only is the way those on the wide road respond, the expression of the unfruitful diseased tree, the words of those whom Jesus does not know, and only fixtures that hang inside of the foolish builder's house.

Jesus came to redeem a people. As I stated last week, he was forsaken on the cross so that you would never be turned away by God. The axe of God's wrath came upon him while he hung on that tree so that it would not come upon you (Gal. 3:13). If you cling to His cross, you are safe. How again are you safe if your hope and trust rests in Jesus as the kinsmen-redeemer? Oh, my dear Christian brothers and sisters, listen to Philippians 2:8-11,

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)

What many did not realize when our Savior preached his sermon on the mount, The one before them that was the One promised long ago who would be **"pierced for our transgressions"** and **"crushed for our iniquities"** on a roman cross of wood (Isaiah 53:5), and every Hebrew man and woman who would see him on that cross on the day of his execution would have rightly understood that the one who preached the greatest sermon ever preached, the one whose authority amazed them, was now cursed. What most of them did not realize in those moments as he hung dying was that he who hung there, hung for them: **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree...'"** (Gal. 3:13).

What is our hope in life and death
Christ alone Christ alone
What is our only confidence

That our souls to Him belong
Who holds our days within His hand
What comes apart from His command
And what will keep us to the end
The love of Christ in which we stand¹

The Authority of Christ as Head of the Church

How is it that we come to Jesus Christ? We come with empty hands as those who are poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3), we come as those who mourn over our sin (v. 4), we come surrendering our pride before the foot of his cross (v. 5), and in doing so, Jesus proclaims to his redeemed: **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”** (v. 6). This is a theme that runs throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Again, this is the point of John 1:12-13; it is worth considering the words of these verses again: **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”**

In his book, *The Loveliest Place*, Dustin Bengé writes something beautifully stunning that is at the heart of why Jesus became a curse upon the cross for you dear Christian: “The cross, with all of its blood flowing, lacerated flesh, and the stench of death, becomes the epicenter of cleansing for sinners, where Christ looks lovingly upon his darling bride and declares, ‘My love... you are beautiful. (Song 1:15)’”² Jesus is not an abusive husband, he is not a demeaning husband, he is not a conniving husband, he is not a manipulative husband, he is One who models love in its purest form from which all husbands who identify in Christ are commanded to model: **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ...”** (Ephesians 5:25). It is in this vein the Bible declares:

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven.... (Colossians 1:18–23)

Conclusion

This is why it is not enough to be amazed at Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount or to marvel and be amazed at Jesus only. He is worthy of much more than your amazement! Skye Jethani wrote in the conclusion of his little book, *What if Jesus Was Serious?* something we are now forced to consider:

Our problem, I think, is that pop Christianity has emphasized Jesus’ love but ignored His intelligence. We treat Him like a benevolent old uncle who gives us advice because He

¹ Keith & Kristyn Getty, Matt Boswell, and Matt Papa. *Christ Our Hope in Life and Death*, (Getty Music Hymns and Songs; 2021).

² Dustin Bengé. *The Loveliest Place* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2022); p. 52.

truly cares for us, but deep down we suspect He doesn't understand how the modern world really works. So, we dismiss His well-meaning input.

Jesus is smart. Jesus is serious. Imagine how your life would be different if you took Him at His word. And imagine how our world would be different if those who claimed to follow Jesus actually did.³

So, I ask you, what are you going to do with Jesus? What idols in your life need to be replaced with the Christ to whom belongs, “...**power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing**” (Rev. 5:12)? You who say that Jesus is “Lord” and “Savior” how long will you dismiss what he has said? How long will you live as though his commands do not apply to you? We are now finished with the sermon series, Something Greater. But the question I want to leave with you is the same one Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked: “Who are you... really?” I also leave you with a second question: “Who is Jesus to you... truly?”

We will be singing a modern hymn written not long ago, appropriately titled, “Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me.” I think it is fitting that I conclude this sermon with four verses from that hymn for reasons I believe will be clear:

What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer
There is no more for heaven now to give
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
For my life is wholly bound to His
Oh how strange and divine, I can sing, "All is mine"
Yet not I, but through Christ in me

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven
The future sure, the price it has been paid
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon
And He was raised to overthrow the grave

To this I hold, my sin has been defeated
Jesus now and ever is my plea
Oh the chains are released, I can sing, "I am free"
Yet not I, but through Christ in me.⁴

³ Skye Jethani. *What If Jesus Was Serious?* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers; 2020), pp. 180-81.

⁴ Michael Farren, Rich Thompson, Jonny Robinson. *Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me* (Farren Love And War Publishing, Integrity's Alleluia! Music, Cityalight Music).