

Lesson 8 - Lecture  
"Power Displayed"  
Matthew 8:5-13, 11:1-30; Luke 7:1-50

This week's study highlighted a popular time in Jesus' ministry. He traveled from town to town declaring the Good News, performing miracles and demonstrating great compassion everywhere He went. Compassion has been defined as *your* pain in *my* heart. What pain He must have felt as He encountered a sick servant, a mourning mother, a perplexed prophet, condemned cities, a scorned sinner, people with prideful hearts and those who bear crushing burdens.

As we move through these events, we'll learn of Jesus Christ's unequaled authority over illness, death, doubt and sin as He brought astonishment to the living, life to the dead and an invitation for soul rest. Before we travel with Him, let's pray.

Our first stop this lesson is Capernaum. Rome had stationed centurions throughout Israel to maintain peace and one such centurion was stationed in Capernaum. While Jews despised most Roman officers for occupying their land, many were good men who lived peaceably among the Jews. This story was of such an officer.

He wasn't a Jew, yet he loved the Jewish nation. He'd built the local synagogue, and in doing so, earned respect from the community.

The centurion had a servant, or more accurately translated, a slave. Under Roman law, a master had the right to kill his slave if he became ill. However, this centurion "highly valued" his servant, who was paralyzed, suffering, and about to die. The centurion sent town leaders to ask Jesus to heal his servant. He sought help from the only One he believed had authority to heal.

On the way to the centurion's home, the centurion's friends met Jesus and told Him the centurion felt he didn't deserve to have Jesus in his home. He knew Jews would be considered *defiled* if they entered a Gentile home. The irony of that is Jesus, the sinless Son of God, could *never* become defiled.

Here's where we see this military man's mighty faith. The centurion saw a parallel between the way *he* commanded soldiers and the way *Jesus* commanded diseases. He reasoned that if *his* authority required *his* orders to be obeyed, *Jesus'* authority over sickness would heal his servant. Furthermore, the centurion reasoned that because *he* didn't need to be physically present for *his* orders to be

carried out, neither did *Jesus* have to be physically present to heal. The centurion believed in Jesus' power and authority to heal, *and to heal from a distance*.

Jesus expressed *amazement* at the centurion's faith, which He said was unequaled in Israel. The divine Son of God, Who knows *all* things, was amazed! How I wish *I* had the kind of faith that would *amaze* Jesus!

Jesus told the messengers to return to the centurion and tell him that just as he had believed, his servant would be healed, which he was - at that very moment.

Where did the centurion get his faith? Luke wrote he had *heard* about Jesus. Romans 10:17 says, "*Faith comes from hearing the Good News about Christ.*"

Then Jesus made two *radical* announcements to the crowd. First, Gentiles will be in heaven! WhooHoo! Second, Jews *could* end up in hell! Uh-oh. That must have knocked the Pharisees on their haughty haunches! How is it *possible* that morally deficient Gentiles dine at the great Messianic Banquet!

It's because Christ brought Jews and Gentiles together. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:14, that, "*Christ united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.*" The kingdom of heaven is for the Gentile and the Jew who accept Christ's salvation. *Hell* is for the Gentile and the Jew who do *not* accept Christ's salvation.

Another stop on Jesus' ministry tour was the city of Nain. If walking from Capernaum, it would have taken about day to reach Nain. Traveling with Jesus was a large group of His followers, all anxiously wondering what Jesus would do next because wherever He went, miracles happened. His group may have arrived at Nain just about dusk - a common time for funerals.

As they approached the town gate, a hush fell on them as they came upon a funeral procession. Wailing and weeping, expressions of immense grief overshadowed Jesus' joyous group. It was no coincidence for Jesus and His followers to have encountered the mourners at that specific time and place. Something miraculous was about to happen.

A stretcher with a cloth-covered body on it was being carried to the cemetery followed by a weeping woman and townspeople grieving with her. Jewish funerals involved the entire community and they were noisy and emotional. The death likely occurred that day because Jews buried their dead on the day of the death.

These poignant words told the sad story: "*The dead man was the only son of his mother and she was a widow*"(Luke 7:12). The woman had already lost her husband. Now her only son was gone. She was alone and would be destitute

without her son's support. In those days, the only social security for a widow was for a son to provide for her and without him she faced a bleak future.

Jesus felt great compassion for her. He approached the widowed mother and spoke only two words to her: "Don't cry". Only *He* had the power to give this woman a reason to stop crying. He was the only one present who had authority over the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:3 says God is the "*Father of compassion and the God of all comfort*". Isn't it reassuring to know that when we need Him, God is our Father of compassion and comfort?

Jesus reached out and touched the stretcher the dead man was on. The crowds around Him must have gasped and this brought the funeral procession to a halt. Jewish law said touching the dead made a person ceremonially unclean but the Son of God could not be unclean no matter what He touched. Jesus' voice was clear and authoritative. "*Young man, I say to you, get up!*" The *dead* son heard Jesus' words. The *living* son obeyed.

I'm sure the pallbearers probably became a little unsteady when the corpse sat up on the stretcher! – *and* spoke! Wouldn't it have been interesting to know what he said?

I think the Author of Life smiled as He saw the mother's tears turn to joy. Things are never quite the same when a restoration to life occurs. We apply all sorts of medications to our hurts but Christ took this woman's grief and applied Himself.

Jesus reversed the curse of death - the result of human sin. Our worst enemy – death – is part of our fallen world and Satan revels in it. Christ could sneeze on Satan and blow him into oblivion, but for now, that's not God's plan. There *will* be a time for Satan's disposal and death will go with him. For now, we must trust in the sovereignty of God and be utterly convinced His perfect plans exist.

We leave the uncompleted funeral for a dark, dank prison. John the Baptizer had been languishing there more than a year for denouncing King Herod's illicit escapades.

Dare we even think it? Did John the Baptizer doubt who Jesus was? John, chosen by God to announce the Messiah, who called Jesus "*God's Chosen One*" (John 1:34), the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29), and who saw the Holy Spirit alight upon Jesus at His baptism and heard the voice of God proclaim, "*This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased*"

(Matthew 3:17) - how could John question the identity of Jesus? Beth Moore wrote, "John knew with his head that Jesus was the Messiah but John was having a little trouble knowing it with his heart."

Has *your* faith ever been even a *little* shaky? What are we to do with a bout of doubt? Turn to Scripture. Find out who Jesus is. Learn about His authority and power by reading Messianic prophecies and the Gospels. Take doubts to Jesus in prayer. I can relate to what the man with the demon-possessed son said to Jesus, "*Help me overcome my unbelief!*" (Mark 9:24.)

John's disciples had been telling him about Jesus' preaching and miracles. But Jesus just did *not* conform to *John's* concept of the Messiah. Let's consider the circumstances that caused John to send his disciples to ask Jesus, "*Are you really the Messiah we've been expecting or should we keep looking for someone else?*"

John was accustomed to a life in the wilderness but now he was confined in prison. He was given a divine mandate to *preach*, but now he was silenced. The physical and emotional strain had taken their toll.

John knew prophecy. He thought when the Messiah came, He would bring freedom to the prisoners and bring the day of vengeance. He would rescue Israel from Roman oppression. Where was the judgment? When would God's kingdom of righteousness and peace be established? Basically, when would Jesus clean up the place? Had John misunderstood? No. John's perspective was limited.

You and I have all the Scriptures available to us and they tell us about Christ's ministry, His death, resurrection, the future of this world and His Kingdom but John didn't have that advantage. He didn't know that miracles, the good news of salvation and Jesus' teaching about life with Him, must come first, separated by thousands of years, *before* the judgment at the end of the age.

Jesus told John's disciples to tell him what they were seeing and hearing Jesus do. Jesus gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, the lame were leaping. He proclaimed the good news and bound up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1; Isaiah 35:5,6). Jesus was redirecting John's expectations to see that Jesus *was* fulfilling prophecy.

Jesus wasn't doing what John *expected*, but He was doing what God *promised*. Jesus said, don't let your expectations of what I'm doing lead you to miss that I AM the Messiah. John's disciples watched the Great Physician in action and returned to tell John.

To the crowds, Jesus honored John. John wasn't a fragile blade of grass, bending back and forth, easily swayed from his convictions. Not John. He didn't wear fine clothing or live a life of luxury. Not hardly. He dressed like a desert hermit. Surely he didn't get many hugs wearing his scratchy camel's hair tunic *and* he had locusts on his breath.

Jesus called John the greatest prophet ever born. His ministry marked a dividing line in history. What greater honor could a man have than to prepare the way for the Messiah? Yet that honor is insignificant to the honor *we're* given as believers grafted into God's family, co-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

The conclusion of passages about John the Baptizer included truths applicable to *his* generation as well as ours. People who didn't want to believe in John or Jesus' ministries elevated excuse-making to an art. Let's just call this Jesus' "Parable of the Brats." The people were like bratty children who complained and pouted and used excuses not to participate in either John or Jesus' ministries. They didn't like John's message to repent and they didn't want the joy Jesus offered from believing in Him.

John wasn't liberal enough for the critics and Jesus was too liberal. Instead of being child-*like* and humbling themselves, the people were child-*ish* and stubborn, pouting because they wanted a "have it your way" Messiah. Jesus challenged His critics to judge Him based on the effects of His ministry - meaning, changed lives were proof.

Following Mathew's account of John, Jesus continued to denounce unbelief because Jesus has authority to judge unrighteousness. He did so on three unrepentant cities. Woe to Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. These cities would be destroyed even though they were near and dear to Jesus' rather sizeable heart. They had been given the greatest contact with Him and were where He performed most of his miracles. Oh sure, the people there were glad to listen to Him; delighted in His healings; satisfied to be fed when He multiplied food, but even with His miracles and teachings staring them in the face, they did not turn from their sin.

The prophesied destruction of these cities would eclipse the destruction that befell three Old Testament cities – full of pagan worship and prideful arrogance – Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. Jesus said that if the people in *those* cities, as wicked as they were, had witnessed His miracles, even *they* would have repented of their wickedness. The consequence for unforgiven sin because of unrepentance will be

hell, where there will be "*darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matthew 8:12). To be sure, hell is a place to be avoided.

Following Jesus' judgment of the unbelieving towns, we got a glimpse of the intimate relationship between God the Father and God the Son. We listened in on Jesus' prayer to His Father. "*I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth*" (Matthew 11:25). Such *joy* in Jesus' communication with His Father! In His prayer we learned God will reveal His Son to those willing to trust in Him like a child; not to those who refuse to believe. We learned that God gave His Son authority for all things and Jesus made one of the clearest references to His deity in Scripture. He said God is His Father. As far as the religious leaders were concerned, Jesus signed His death warrant. Father and Son share a divine nature and are in essence - one. Jesus made it very clear we can't know God without faith in Him as the Son of God. The world may *think* they know God, but it isn't possible if they have nothing to do with Jesus.

Jesus turned to the crowd and uttered perhaps the sweetest words ever heard by mortal ears. "Come to Me." Whoever coined the cliché "There is no rest for the weary" apparently never read Matthew, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30) These words are a profound example of Jesus' calling us to believe in Him. His invitation has a promise: come to Him and find rest - notice the rest is "for our souls" - rest from yokes that burden us.

In that culture everyone knew about yokes. Yokes were wooden harnesses that fit across oxen enabling them to pull heavy loads. Yokes were burdensome. But to the Jews, yokes were living under 613 never-ending rules the Pharisees said were sins. These rules dictated every aspect of their lives and they lived with endless guilt because they couldn't keep them.

As was true for the Israelites, so it is today – spiritual rest is needed from legalism and only a relationship with Jesus will provide that rest. Following Jesus is not a religious obligation. It's an intimate relationship with the One who calls "Come to Me". Why would anyone turn down such a gracious invitation?

In the last travel with Jesus this week, we'll observe a drama. I like to watch reruns of the drama, *Highway to Heaven*. Most of the episodes are a bit cheesy but the stories have positive references to God's existence and His involvement in our

lives. I also like the moral messages of the drama. But the Apostle Luke created an even *better* screenplay about a woman who crashed a dinner party. It's one of the most moving accounts of a love story in the New Testament.

The drama is called *Simon and the Sinner and the Savior*.

Simon represented the unloving character. He was a Pharisee - a self-appointed judge of what sin was and considered common people ignorant rabble. His thoughts betrayed his holier-than-thou attitude.

The second character was a woman - likely a prostitute - known in town for her sinful way of life. She represented all sinners. She was the recipient of our Lord's forgiveness.

Jesus is the third character – the star of this drama. He represented the personification of unconditional forgiveness and love.

The setting is a dinner party at Simon the Pharisee's home. These dinners were social events for the community. Although only invited guests ate, townspeople could come in, stand by the walls, and listen to the dinner conversation. The Pharisee invited Jesus probably because townspeople thought He was a prophet. Jesus accepted invites from sinners *as well as* religious elite who thought they *weren't* sinners.

In that culture, dinner guests reclined on couches - their heads toward the table, their feet, sandals removed, extended out behind them. As Jesus and the other guests reclined and ate, the "sinful" woman entered the dining area carrying a jar of perfume. She approached Jesus, and overcome with emotion, stood at His feet weeping. Her tears fell onto His feet. She wiped the streaks of dust made by her tears and dried his feet with her hair. She then kissed his feet and poured perfume on them. This scene was a dramatic expression of gratitude that symbolized this woman's joy over Jesus' acceptance of people like her.

Perhaps she had heard Jesus preach, "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*"(Luke 5:32); or heard of greedy tax collectors being transformed because of Him; or heard of another sinful woman to whom Jesus said, "*Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on, sin no more*"(John 8:11).

Her worship of Jesus was at a great cost to her. The perfume and the alabaster jar in which it was stored were expensive, but it also cost her scorn from the Pharisee and his guests. The sinful woman was not welcome in the pious

Pharisee's pad; yet, her desire to worship Jesus was greater than what the guests thought of her.

Have you ever witnessed a baptism when the new believer comes out of the water and begins to cry? Perhaps the woman in the story felt this same emotion. She knew her past but she believed the words Jesus spoke about forgiveness. Her great expression of love was *evidence* of the forgiveness she had - not the *reason* for it.

The disgusted Pharisee thought, "If Jesus were truly a prophet He would have known what kind of woman was touching His feet". From the Greek "what kind" meant "what soil". The Pharisee thought Jesus had no idea the dirt she came from. Dirt is dirt, right? We've all got it. But because of God's grace and forgiveness, Christ's blood bleaches any stain left by any kind of dirt.

Jesus must have read the Pharisee's thoughts because He posed a parable to his host. It was a simple one. Two people borrowed money. One borrowed ten times more money than the other. Neither could repay. The moneylender forgave the debts of both. Each person went from bankruptcy to a new start in life. Jesus asked the Pharisee which of these two people loved the moneylender more.

Reluctantly, the Pharisee answered, "The one who owed the most would love the most." The Pharisee stepped into the trap! Well, to put it more graciously, Jesus revealed Simon's unloving heart through his answer.

The Pharisee did *not* see himself as a sinner, yet the woman knew *she* was! Jesus compared what she did for Him to what Simon *didn't* do. Simon extended none of the common courtesies for a guest - a kiss of greeting, feet washing, oil to refresh the body. The woman, by contrast, honored Jesus. With the parable, Jesus showed that the woman loved God more than the Pharisee. Simon saw the woman's *past* but Jesus saw her *future*.

Jesus has the authority to forgive our debts of sin but we have to admit that we are *in* debt. Romans 6:23 says, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" and Romans 3:10 says, "*There is none righteous, not even one*".

Jesus then packed a punch by telling the woman her sins were forgiven. Simon and his guests must have choked on their lentils as they wondered, "*Who is this who even forgives sins?*"

The forgiven woman, rather than the Pharisee, observed the most important commandment. "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*

*and with all your mind and with all your strength.”* (Mark 12:30). How can sinners like us *not* love Him that much?

As did the sinful woman, hopefully we will express our love and gratitude for Jesus, in spite of what the world thinks.

This lesson was bursting with examples of how Jesus displayed His:

<u>Authority to</u>	<u>Event in Lesson</u>
Heal from a distance	Centurion's Servant
Restore life	Widow's Son
Fulfill Messianic prophecies	John the Baptizer's Expectations
Condemn unbelief	Tale of Three Cities
Share divine nature with God	Jesus' Prayer to His Father
Give rest to our souls	Jesus' Invitation to Come to Him
Forgive sins	Simon and the Sinful Woman

In continuing with Dan Leppo's challenge in this year's study, here's my list of what Jesus' life taught me about God in this lesson:

God reveals His Son to those with child-like faith	Matthew 11:25
God delights in demonstrations of our love	Luke 7:47
God wants to unburden us from guilt	Matthew 11:28
God can be amazed!	Matt 8:10, Luke 7:9

Let's close in prayer.