

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Living under authority

Presented by John Edmondstone

Matt. 28:19-20; John 21:15-19

There's a philosophy about today that can best be described as the do-your-own thing philosophy. It's the emphasis upon individual freedom and personal rights that seems to have gone from the sublime to the ridiculous.

A recent report tells us that some aspects of crime are on the increase. Some have indicated a fear of being on the streets at night or traveling on public transport outside of peak hours, a loss of confidence in law enforcement exists and morality is on a downward spiral.

There are proponents of what has been called "religion a la carte". People pick and choose only the parts of the menu that suits their liking. They choose only the comfort and not the challenge. The cost of discipleship is frequently glossed over. What is the reason for this? The reason is that so many people have cut themselves off from God. As a flower cut from its roots will wither and die so will we if we cut ourselves off from God. A bleak picture?

Have I exaggerated the situation? Let's examine that this morning and come up with something positive for living with meaning.

(Music break)

Ultimately, the supreme authority for our lives is the person of Jesus Christ and He is revealed to us through God's word, the Bible. We must acknowledge and accept the authority of Jesus Christ over our lives if we want to bring order out of chaos. Those who are spiritually perceptive always recognize the unique authority of Jesus over their lives and that's the only way to bring order out of chaos.

There is a moving record in the Gospel of Luke Chapter 7. A Roman centurion had a servant who was near death. Feeling he unworthy to approach Jesus personally, he sent a delegation to ask Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus responded by going to the man's house. When the Centurion saw Jesus coming from a distance he sent another delegation to tell Him that he did not feel worthy enough for Jesus to come under his roof. He felt all that Jesus needed to do was to speak a word and his servant would be healed. That man had a marvelous understanding of the truth. He believed that Jesus had complete and unlimited authority. What he basically meant was, "Lord, you don't have to come to my house, just say the word." He recognized that just as he, a centurion, had authority from Rome so Jesus had authority vested in him by God. He needed only to speak and things would happen. The authority of Jesus is a challenge to all of us today and if we want to reverse chaos in society we must first do it personally.

When Jesus announced the great commission in Matthew Chapter 28, He said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples from all nations."

What does that mean? Well, allow me to illustrate. Greenwich mean time is the international universal time standard. By it all clocks are ultimately set. Can you imagine what would happen if suddenly Moscow claimed their central clock was standard? Then every other nation would protest and say their time was right. There would be international pandemonium. Or if musicians disagreed on concert A as their standard. Concert A is always 440 vibrations per second. Imagine the disharmony in music if there were no international standards.

In matters of faith and practice we must also have an authority. We have, Jesus Christ God's Son. God has not left us groping in a fog not knowing what to believe and how to live. He has not set us adrift on uncharted seas without a compass. When men were sent out to arrest him, they returned and said "We've never heard a man speak like this man" Add to that the report "He speaks with authority not as the scribes do". If we don't accept Jesus as our authority chaos will continue. We'll return to our theme of authority in a moment.

(Music break)

We've been discussing the authority of Jesus in a chaotic world. Not only did Jesus teach with authority but He acted with authority. Words need always to be accompanied by actions. When we claim to be Christians our actions must demonstrate our claims. We'll fail from time to time - there's no question about that - but let's not forget scripture reminds us "by their fruit you shall know them" and I'm challenged by the record in Acts Chapter 4 - "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled and ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus." They warned them to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. But they replied that they could not, for they **had** to speak about what they had seen and heard. They spoke under the authority of Jesus.

It's only a short while ago, when we celebrated the start of a new century, that the word "Eternity" lit up the Harbour Bridge and we were reminded of the story of Arthur Stace. He was born in a Balmain slum in 1884. His parents were alcoholics. His sisters operated brothels. At age 12 he was made a State ward. His schooling was practically non-existent. At 14 he began work in a coal mine. He became a drunk living in a fog of alcohol. He enlisted in the First World War and returned home half blind in one eye. To get free food he attended a men's meeting at St. Barnabas' Church on Broadway. There were 300 men present, mostly down and outs. It was at that meeting his heart turned toward God. Some months later he heard John Ridley in Burton Street Baptist Church. He heard Ridley say "I wish I could shout **Eternity** through the streets of Sydney."

Stace, recalling that day said, "He repeated himself and kept on shouting '**Eternity, Eternity**'. The word kept ringing through his brain and he felt a powerful call from the Lord to write *Eternity*. And the man who could barely write his own name wrote that word in beautiful copperplate half a million times through the streets of Sydney. This man lived his life to the end under the authority of Jesus. And so must we whether we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated. We all need to live life under the authority of Jesus. *Jesus is Lord*."

(Music break)

I want to return to the Scripture I used earlier this morning when we began thinking about how we live. I have been seeking to establish the authority of Jesus in all that we are and do. The Bible faithfully records the words of Jesus and we must take serious note of them. It is clear that once we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ, life takes on new meaning and new purpose. We cease being self-centred and begin looking outward to discover where we can best serve our Master. Unfortunately some Christian people give the impression that life is all gloom and doom. You may remember in the Charles Shultz comic strip Peanuts, Charlie Brown, declares he wants to be a medico. Lucy scoffs at him and says "You a medico Charlie Brown! You don't love humanity"

"I do," replies Charlie Brown, "It's people I can't stand"

Well when we live under the authority of Jesus we find a new love for people. I remember a lady who impressed me greatly. I interviewed her and reviewed her book here on 2CH. Her name is Dr. Catherine Hamlin and the book *The Hospital by the River* which tells the story of the work she and her late husband did in Ethiopia among women with fistula problems. The work of Catherine and Reg Hamlin has won recognition in many parts of the world and awards have been bestowed upon them. I want to read a passage from the book. She wrote:

“When I was in my fifth year of university I had one of the most defining experiences of my life. I went to a big Presbyterian Church in Sydney to hear a famous missionary speaker, Rev. Hugh Paton. He chose as his subject the passage towards the end of John’s gospel where Jesus reinstates Peter in his love, despite being betrayed by him. At the time of Jesus’ trial Peter had denied him three times. After He had been crucified and had risen, Jesus again met Peter and asked the question, ‘Do you love me?’ Three times Peter said that he did, and he was then commissioned by Jesus to feed his lambs and sheep. Paton was a powerful speaker and as he preached this message of Jesus’ love, his words touched me deeply. I went home and read the part of John’s gospel that Paton had referred to. It describes the lakeside scene with a fire cooking fish for breakfast and Jesus calling the disciples to join him from their boat. I put myself in Peter’s place and felt Jesus saying to me ‘Do you love me? Feed my lambs’. Like Peter, I had been a self centred Christian and had often denied Him. I knelt down and prayed, ‘Jesus I am going to give you my life. I really want to follow you and live for you’.”

That is the answer isn’t it? For life to have meaning and purpose, we must live under the authority of Jesus.

Following the recent disaster with the space shuttle Columbia when tribute was being paid to crew members there was this reference to the pilot. “Pilot Rick Husband was a man of deep and abiding faith in the Lord Jesus. One of Rick’s favourite hymns was “How Great Thou Art” which offers these words of praise - “I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder / Thy power throughout the universe displayed.” He led a life of praise and worship and now he is in eternity joining the saints of the ages and the angels of all eternity in the worship of his risen Lord.”

*Father, help us to know how greatly you love us and in knowing that, enable us to love you in return and to live under the authority of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen***