

ROOTED IN CHRIST'S LOVE
Authority
Matthew 28:18-20 & 16:17-19
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We're in the 4th week of a series we're calling, "Rooted in Christ's Love," and the goal in this series is to inspire each of us to grow in our relationship with Jesus—to deepen our intimacy with Him. Our focus in this series is intimacy, but we're convinced that a deepening relationship with Jesus results in followers of Jesus more fully embracing his mission. As Jesus said in John's Gospel chapter 15, "*Abide in me and you will bear much fruit.*" **Intimacy and Mission** go hand in hand. Two weeks ago Cody Sherry preached a message on "Friendship with Jesus." Last Sunday Doris Barr preached on the topic of "Rest in Christ." Today I'll be preaching on our authority in Christ. The move from friendship with Jesus and resting in Him to authority may strike you as an abrupt transition, but these themes do complement each other. Just as intimacy and mission are connected, authority in Christ flows out of walking closely with Him and resting in Him.

To help us unpack this idea that our authority in Christ flows out of resting in Him, I want us to look again at Matthew chapter 11 verses 28-30. Doris Barr preached on these verses last week and she noted that these are "go to verses" for me. I didn't intend to mention this passage this week, but I was reading our "Rooted in Christ's Love" devotional early last week and Matthew 11:28-30 was the text. I read these verses and was prayerfully reflecting on them: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" Then I came to these words in verse 29, "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...*" And it hit me. **The starting point for exercising Jesus' authority is accepting his yoke, not pursuing what seems best to me.** A **wooden yoke** was placed by the farmer over the neck of an ox or a team of oxen to pull farm equipment, like plows or discs. The farmer fitted the yoke to his oxen so they would have maximum pulling power. If the yoke was too loose or too tight it would affect the animal's ability to do his work, so it was important that the yoke fit well. Jesus uses what was a very common image in that farming culture to remind his hearers that the yoke He had for them wasn't burdensome or wearying; it fit them well.

Friendship with Jesus and resting in Him are the essential starting place for walking in Jesus' authority. If we try and start with authority and neglect friendship and rest, we end up lugging around yokes that don't fit us well and those yokes become heavy and burdensome and lead to exhaustion, fatigue and burn-out. I'll say it again; **the starting point for exercising Jesus' authority is accepting his yoke, not pursuing what seems best to me.**

Several times during this series we've looked back to Genesis and the Garden of Eden where God emphasizes his desire for relationship with us—as human beings, we were uniquely created in his image. At Creation God commissioned us to rule for Him by exercising his authority over creation, and in the New Testament Jesus also called his followers to exercise his authority. I want us to focus on two of those passages this morning. Let's look first at Matthew chapter 28 verses 18-20. These were some of the last words Jesus spoke to his disciples. They occurred after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He had instructed his disciples to meet Him on a mountain, and when they were all gathered Jesus said,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus transferred the authority his Father had given Him to his disciples, and He called them to use that authority to go and make disciples of people from every nation by baptizing and teaching. But He also made it clear to them that He wasn't leaving them on their own. He would always be with them.

Another place where Jesus emphasized the transfer of authority to his disciples and to all his followers is found in Matthew chapter 16—a pivotal chapter in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus directly asked his disciples, "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*" And after they replied with a variety of answers, He asked, "*But what about you? Who do you say I am?*" Peter—who was kind of the spokesman for the group—responded, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.*" And then Jesus said this,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:17-19

This is the first time Jesus mentioned his Church and after this exchange with his disciples Jesus began to tell them about his upcoming death. This event seemed to accelerate Jesus' journey to the cross. The Catholic Church views Jesus' words to Peter as the establishment of the Church and of the Pope as God's representative on earth. *"I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church..."* The branch of Christianity we're in views Jesus' words here as words to all believers and views "the rock on which Jesus would build his church" not as Peter himself, but rather, Peter's declaration of faith in Jesus.

I want us to focus specifically on Jesus' last sentence: *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* There's much discussion (and disagreement) over what exactly the "binding" and "loosing" mentioned here refers to. Ideas range from prayer to offering salvation to church discipline and combinations of those.

I view Jesus' words here as linked to what He prayed in The Lord's Prayer when He said, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* As followers of Jesus whom He has given authority to bind and to loose, our actions, thoughts, attitudes and prayers bring to reality on earth what God has already established in heaven. Whatever Jesus may have meant specifically, I think we can all agree He is pointing to the authority He gives us as his followers to advance his Church.

I began the sermon today by emphasizing the authority we have as followers of Jesus flows out of our friendship with Him and through resting in Him, but **what's the nature of the authority we have in Christ? The nature of our authority in Christ can best be summed up with the word Presence.**

Notice that I've capitalized the word Presence. It's capitalized because it represents a person, the Spirit of Jesus. I encourage you to find John chapters 14-16 in your Bibles or electronic devices. In these 3 chapters we find the most comprehensive teaching of Jesus on the Holy Spirit. John places this teaching in the context of the Lord's Supper—some of Jesus' last hours with his disciples whom He had been with for the past 3 years. There is way too much contained in these chapters for us to do justice to in the time that we have this morning. But I'll list some of the highlights:

- Jesus began this section by telling his disciples He would be leaving them, but He would also be preparing a place for them. 14:1-6
- Remarkably, He told them that when He went to the Father they would do even greater things than He'd been doing. 14:11 & 12
- At the beginning of chapter 15 Jesus spoke the well-known words, *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.”* 15:4
- In chapter 16 Jesus makes another incredible claim, *“Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you.”* 16:7
- At the end of this section Jesus explains why He was telling his disciples these things, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* 16:33

Do you see it? As followers of Jesus, his Spirit lives in us. His Presence lives in us, works through us and is evident to those who interact with us. His Presence is ultimately what gives us authority. We have no authority in and of ourselves. Our authority flows from the Spirit of Jesus—the Holy Spirit—who lives inside of us.

That all sounds great, but I've noticed two things in my life and in the lives of others who follow Jesus. **First, we're easily distracted and routinely miss opportunities to shine Jesus' light and share his love. Secondly, we often fail to see how Jesus' Presence in us naturally impacts others.** The end result is that **Many of us**—though Jesus' Spirit lives in us—**don't take advantage of opportunities that are all around us to exercise our authority in Christ, and when we do impact others, we often fail to recognize it.** The authority that has been given to us by Jesus Himself is too often neutralized by our enemy, Satan, because he fully understands the authority you and I have in Christ.

As a pastor, I'm guilty at times of failing to exercise the authority I've been given in Christ, but I'm learning and I'd like to share two examples with you of times I was surprised by the Presence of Jesus others saw in me. I share these examples not so you pat me on the back and say what a saint I am, but because these examples illustrate that carrying Jesus' Presence and exercising our authority in Him isn't difficult; it's natural—*“his yoke is easy and his burden is light.”*

I was an assistant coach on my son's Little League Baseball team. We were playing in the finals of a double elimination tournament and our team was undefeated, so the other team needed to beat us twice to win. I couldn't be at the game due to a wedding rehearsal for a wedding I was officiating. I hurried back after the rehearsal and came to the field late in the game. I looked at the scoreboard and saw we were losing. As I walked into the dugout I saw several coaches arguing with each other and the kids were hanging their heads. We rallied a bit in the last inning or two, but ended up losing the game. It wasn't a good night. After the game I was talking with the head coach—a friend of mine—and he was lamenting about how badly things had gone and then he said, *"You know. We really missed you tonight. You're our spiritual rock."* His comment caught me off guard, because I can assure you he wasn't talking about missing my extensive baseball knowledge. What I believe he noticed was the Fruit of the Spirit in my life, the Presence of Jesus, and the impact his Presence had on our coaches and players and team as a whole.

The other example is more recent. The week after Thanksgiving a 7th grade student at Mechanicsburg Middle School died from a terminal illness she had since birth. Two pastors from West Shore Free and I were scheduled to meet that day with several school administrators to discuss how we might partner together in ministering to students and families who are on the margins in our community. When the death occurred one of the school administrators contacted me and told me we'd need to reschedule the meeting, but he said, *"If you're free. We'd love to have you come and hang out at the school as we communicate the news of this student's death to the middle schoolers."* He went on to mention how much it meant to students, teachers and administrators when several pastors from McBIC and the community hung out with students in the lunchroom at the high school last January following the suicide of a freshman student. He said, *"Your presence meant so much to us during that situation."* He spelled presence with a small "p", but I interpreted it with a capital "P." His words were very encouraging, because I remember feeling extremely awkward and self-conscious that day. What was I doing hanging out in a high school cafeteria with a bunch of 14-18 year olds? Most of the conversations I had with students felt forced and I'm really not a very

good counselor. I felt uncomfortable and wasn't convinced I was having an impact, but the Presence of Jesus had an impact on others that was noticed.

I'm not unique in having the Presence of Jesus inside me. The Presence of Jesus in us is the authority you and I have been given in Christ. The term "Christian" was first used in mockery of followers of Jesus. It means, "**Little Christs.**" Early followers of Jesus were made of with the term "Christian," but they took it as a badge of honor to be called, "Little Christs." It's a fitting term for us, because with the Spirit of Jesus living in us, we are "little Christs. This is what the Jewish religious leaders saw in Peter in John in Acts chapter 4 verse 13 where we read, *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."* Resting in Jesus and growing in intimacy with Him releases his authority in our lives with the end result that those who interact with us encounter his Presence. They're encountering "little Christs." I encourage all of us to embrace Jesus' call to ***"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*** Jesus in Matthew 11:29 & 30