

“A NEW TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY”
Deuteronomy 18:14-20, Psalm 111, Mark 1:21-28
January 31, 2021

“In the old days, ponies and mules were used to haul out the coal in the mining camps. A man asked a little boy why there were so many ponies and mules out in the fields on Sunday. The little boy answered, ‘They work all week in the mines. We bring them up on Sundays **so they won’t go blind.**’¹

The same question could be asked about Christians attending church on Sundays, not that we’re mules or ponies but why do we show up here? And of course, the answer would be similar to the little boy’s answer, “They work in the darkness of this world all week. We bring them together at church on Sundays so they won’t go blind in the darkness of the world.”

Darkness has an effect on the things and people of this world. Unless we are exposed to the Light of God, we grow so accustomed to the darkness around us that we become blind to the ways of God that bring us life. If we grow blind to the things of God, then we lose our desire for more than what this world provides, and we fail to look beyond this world for the promised King, the Messiah of God, who brings true light into our lives. Being exposed to the Light of God on a weekly basis, if not even on a daily basis, gives us the hope and endurance we need as we work and live in this world of darkness.

Our Old Testament lesson of Deuteronomy 18 (14-20) today shows us how **God Provides The Light** for the world. Here, Moses lays out the difference between the world of darkness and the world of light. As the people are about to enter into the land promised them by God, even as they left Egypt, God sees the evil and wicked ways of those living in the land the people are about to enter. They practice pagan rituals that do not bring light, but darkness.

So Moses lays out what is going on in order to warn the people about the darkness they are about to enter into. He says, “*When you come into the land that the Lord Your God is giving you, don’t follow the disgusting practices of the nations that are there. Don’t sacrifice your children in the fires of your altars; and don’t let your people practice divination or look for omens or use spells or charms, and*

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 721)

don't let them consult the spirits of the dead. The Lord your God hates people who do these disgusting things, and that is why He is driving those nations out of the land as you advance. Be completely faithful to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:9-13). **The world practices things that are contrary to God's desires**, killing children as sacrifices to the god of convenience, following satanic practices of divination, looking for guidance from horoscopes or Ouija boards, practicing witchcraft with spells and charms, or participating in séances to get wisdom from the dead. None of these things bring light to the world – only darkness, since they are from the dark lord Satan. They are contrary to the things of God, so they do not bring us hope, but death. Since the pagans practice them, we are not to participate in them at all; in fact we are to completely reject them as having any value at all in our lives.

Moses' warnings to the people of Israel are that anyone who practices these things become hated by God. These things are disgusting to the Lord our God, so **we are not to participate in them or practice them**, AT ALL! They only bring death to us, and they separate us from God.

Instead, Moses tells the people that God will "*send you a prophet like me from among your people, and you are to obey Him*" (Deut. 18:15). **God provides a Prophet** who speaks God's Word, and does as God instructs Him (Deut. 18:18). He will reinforce the laws and commandments of the Lord our God and He will live His life completely committed to all of God's ways. There will not be any wavering away from God's laws, no manipulating the teachings to accommodate sinful practices or harmful lifestyles. This "prophet" will live as a witness to all of God's ways, and He will speak in the name of God and God "*will punish those who refuse to obey Him*" (18:19) because He is the Light from the Lord God for the people of God in order that they might find hope and endurance in the darkness. Those who follow the ways of the world are detestable to God, and He will have nothing to do with them. But those who follow the Light in the world from this "prophet" will be blessed by Him.

You see, God desires that we prosper, that we live abundant lives, and that we love and support those around us. We can't do that by killing our children and heaping curses upon our neighbors! We don't prosper if we are stepping on the lives of others just to get ahead of them financially, or politically,

or corporately. When we follow the ways of the world (which follow Satan's guidelines) we are looking out only for ourselves, and not showing the love of God to others. We are to follow the ways of the Lord if we expect to find His blessings among us.

Psalm 111 lifts up the drastic difference between God and the world. The world's ways are always darkness, and God's ways are always light. Verse 2 states it well, saying "***How wonderful are the things the Lord does! All who are delighted with them want to understand them.***" As we seek to understand God's wonderful works, we readily see the beauty and glory attached to them. We see the magnificence of the Lord all around us, the intricacy of His craftsmanship, and the wonder of all He has made. We begin to understand the relationship of each part of nature, we start to comprehend the vastness of the universe, and we begin to appreciate the details that provide life here on the earth.

God's ways are "full of honor and majesty" (111:3). Who can look upon the snow covered mountains and not be impressed by the work of God's hands? Who can see the breaching of a whale in the ocean, searching for another breath of air, and not become fascinated by the beauty of each life? Who can stand upon the shore of Lake Michigan and not be in awe of the power of the waves crashing in before a storm? Who doesn't marvel at the beauty of a sunrise or a sunset? God reveals Himself to us in so many ways, and they are all glorious, if we have eyes to see them.

God reminds us of His great work and awesome power in the blast of a winter wind, His beauty in the snow storm, His greatness in the cold, clear, starry sky, and His love in the warm embrace of a little child's arms (111:4). He "*does not let us forget His wonderful actions...*"

God provides all our needs as we honor Him and praise Him (111:5). He delights to give us all good things, especially when we honor Him by being obedient to Him. He loves all of us, but to those who make Him first in their life and live with Him in their hearts, He enjoys providing their every need and desire. He is careful to provide us with all good things as we keep His covenant and stay true to Him.

God provides victory to us from our enemies when we trust in Him and follow Him (111:6).

With His power, He crushes the oppressor, and sets the captives free so that we may rejoice in Him and praise His great and mighty works. As we recognize and respect and honor the Lord our God, He is quick to release us from the bondage of those who would enslave us.

And God demonstrates His difference from the world in that “*All He Does is Faithful and just*” (111:7). When God promises something to us, He is dependable to bring it to completion and fulfill His promises. We can count on Him always being true to His Word and being righteous in everything He does. When things don’t make sense to us, we can be sure that if God is orchestrating the events, they will come out the best way possible for our benefit. Again, He is faithful in everything He does!

And we see that in the ways that He has set His people free. Throughout history, God has worked in miraculous and marvelous ways to free His people from their enemies. Numerous accounts in the Old and New Testaments show miraculous deliverance from overwhelming odds from the enemy.

In more recent times, I am reminded of an incident right after Israel became a recognized nation in 1948, when the surrounding countries were joining forces to invade, occupy and annihilate the people, God used a few American pilots flying retired P-51 Mustangs to attack and turn back the approaching armies until Israel could muster up an army to protect herself. Through the daring courage of these few men who sacrificed themselves to raise doubt in the enemy armies, and cause enough havoc among them to cause them to retreat, the new-born country of Israel was saved. God loves those who follow Him that much to bring deliverance, and setting free His own.

You see, God has made an eternal covenant with us who follow His ways (111:9). And as we heard just a moment ago, He is faithful to fulfill His covenant with all who will seek Him and follow His commands. Not just for the living here in this world, but beyond this life as we go on into eternity. God provides the Light of His Son for us to receive and stay committed to all His ways.

So Psalm 111 tells us that “*the way to become wise is to honor the Lord...*” (v. 10). The Light of the Lord provides wisdom to those who delight to honor the name and the ways of the Lord our God. It is not those who practice the dark, disgusting ways of the world who find favor with the Lord. It is

those who trust the Lord, who respect His commands, and who obey His will. Why should God delight in those who are against Him? No, it is those who seek Him with all their hearts who are blessed by the Lord and receive the eternal life that He promises.

And sound judgement is given to all those who obey God's commands (111:10). Those who delight in the Lord and desire to follow His ways are given the ability to see the darkness of the world and to avoid falling into the traps of that darkness. God provides His guidance and understanding to the ones who seek Him, enabling them to exude His light into the world and attract others to Him.

So when **Jesus Goes To The Temple** in Capernaum early in His ministry, He demonstrates a stark contrast to the darkness of the world around Him. He went as the fulfillment of the Promised Prophet that Moses talked about, full of all the goodness of God. So on that Sabbath day, Jesus began to teach about God in the Temple, instructing them of all that God expects of those who follow Him, and all the **people were amazed at the difference in His teachings**. He brought the Light of the Lord to the Temple, and that Light shone out drastically different than the darkness of the wisdom of men. **He taught with the authority of God** to the people so that they might receive the Light of the Lord into their own lives. Listen to the account as it is recorded in Mark 1:21-28. (READ Mark 1:21-28)

When light comes into the midst of darkness, everything becomes exposed. On that particular day, a man, possessed by an evil spirit, entered the Temple. Imagine, even the demons going to temple! But on that day, with the Light of God shining brightly through Jesus, **the Demon Within The Man Immediately Recognized His Authority** (Mark 1:23-24). The demons know who the Son of God is, and they are subject to His authority because He is God, and they are not.

As the demon possessed man comes into the Temple, he was immediately aware of the glory of God in Jesus, and therefore questioned Jesus about His intentions toward him. The demon screams at Jesus because Jesus has the power and the authority to immediately destroy that demon by sending him into the fires of hell, created for Satan and his followers. There is instant fear in the demon who has come face to face with God, and the darkness within him cannot stand the glory of the Light of Christ

Jesus. To the amazement of the people, the man involved exposes the darkness within him as the demon is revealed.

And the demon knows exactly who Jesus is! And he reveals that in his words, “*What do You want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are You here to destroy us? I know who You are – You are God’s Holy Messenger!*” (Mk. 1:24).

Think about this for a moment. This could have been one of the Board of Trustees. It could have been one of the faithful Sabbath school classes within the Temple. This could have been one of the prominent men in the Temple there at Capernaum, and the Light of Jesus Christ exposes the darkness of the demon within him. That demon thought he was safe within that man, even if he went into the Temple, because obviously, there was little to do about God there at that time. But THAT DAY Jesus was there, and the demon recognized the presence of God in Jesus, and it sent that demon into a panic.

People of God, understand this clearly – the darkness of Hell cannot withstand the glory of God. The servants of Satan must flee from the presence of the Lord Jesus, because they have no power over Him. In order for them to think about continuing to live, they must escape the presence of the Lord from the life of that human, else they are destined to destruction before the Lord. Jesus’ new teaching with authority is for us to claim so that we, too, might put out the demons from the lives of those, even those who are within the life of the church. The Light of Jesus must live in us so brilliantly that the darkness cannot bear to remain within the one who is in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

But notice that Jesus does not destroy the demon right there on the spot, even though He had the power and authority to do so. It was not yet Jesus’ time to present Himself as the Messiah of God, so Jesus commands the evil spirit to be silent (1:25). It was enough for the people within the Temple that day to hear that He was God’s Holy Messenger. It was too soon for them to confess that He was the Christ, so Jesus commands Him to stop talking.

However, there was the need for Jesus also to call this demon out of the man. Jesus saw the agony that the man was in having the demon in possession of him, so Jesus desired to set the man free

from the oppression of the demon. Therefore, Jesus commanded, “...come out of the man!” The demon had built a stronghold within that man in order to rule over him.

So when Jesus commanded the demon to come out, there was great agony in the demon who realized that all he had done to establish himself within the man was now at an end. His fortress of strength to rule over that man came crashing down around the demon as he was forced to relinquish control of the man at the authority of Jesus. In order to obey Jesus, the demon had to shake the body of the man away from him so that he could flee from Jesus.

The scream from the demon came as he not only recognized Jesus as the Son of God, but because he had to obey Jesus’ command. Even Satan himself must obey Jesus. No darkness can ever stand up to the power of the glorious Light of the Lord our God! This evil creature screamed out of fear at the presence of the Holy Son of God, much like a child screams in fear from a bully much bigger than he is.

Coming out of the man, the demon made a hasty retreat away from his former home within the man, going back to the safety of the forces of evil at a distance from the presence of the Lord. Darkness cannot repel or even triumph over the Light of the Lord. It must depart. And this left the man completely clean of any presence of evil and wickedness, for the moment, anyway.

Now, no priest or scribe or Pharisee at Capernaum had ever set a man free from the possession of a demon. The people had never witnessed an exorcism of a demon from a person before. I can only imagine their own surprise: 1) because they may not have ever known that this man was possessed by the demon, and 2) they had never witnessed the power and authority of God to remove evil from the life of a person in such a way. So they are completely flabbergasted at the event. They begin to **Recognize Jesus As The One Of God** whom Moses had talked about, the Prophet who would bring God’s presence back among the people.

And since they had never experienced something like this before, they quickly claim that this is a new teaching, one with authority (Mk 1:27). But it wasn’t a new teaching; it was the fulfillment of the

prophecy that God had promised so long ago. Jesus was bringing the Light of the Lord God back into the life of the Temple so that all within it could begin to trust in that light and find God's eternal covenant for those who obeyed His commands. The darkness of the world was being invaded by the glory of the Lord, and the battle was only short lived – the Light had come to conquer the world and to renounce the power of Hell.

Jesus has command over the demons in the world, even today. They know Him and they must obey Him or be destroyed. That fact brings hope to all the people as they begin to see Jesus as the King of God, come to set the world free from the ravages of Satan. The people begin to recognize that God has fulfilled His promise and sent His Messiah, His Redeemer, His Christ.

And when people recognize Jesus as the Christ, the news travels quickly everywhere. When people who are living in the darkness of this world, possessed by the demons of hell, tortured and oppressed by the evil of the enemy, when they come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah of God, the Light in the world with the authority to free them from their agony, there is great rejoicing within them. When the light of Jesus dispels the darkness of demonic possession, hope and life come into that person unlike anything they have ever known.

While we are not told of the response of the man when the demon left him, the burden lifted from him would have given him a new life. He would have had a new purpose. He would have been a new man, and oh, what a testimony he would have to tell those around him. Imagine his wife and children seeing him at home! A completely different man, all because of the love of Jesus Christ lifted the darkness from him and brought the Light of the Lord into him.

People, it still happens today. It is happening in countries dominated by other religions. It is happening in the lives of the rich and poor, the famous and the unknown, and it is even happening within the church. People are recognizing Jesus as the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, and they are humbling themselves to Him, and they are finding new life. As we humble ourselves to the Lord Jesus, He makes all things new, to the glory of God.

Let's pray: Father, we have been oppressed so much by the darkness of this world. We have been beaten up, abused and mutilated by the demons who have made themselves at home within us. Help us, O Lord, Jesus! Come into us, abide in us and set us free from the wages of sin and death. Bring us Your wonderful Light so that we might be totally free of all darkness and evil. Create us into brand new people, through Your great work of salvation and redemption. Make us Your brand new people who willingly receive You into our lives as Savior and Lord. This we pray in Your precious and Holy Name, Jesus. Amen.