

## Chapter 4

### Authority and Command

*For there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever more*

The final command came. “At the halt, on the left... foooooorrrrm... company!

As the section commander of number Two Section, I marched smartly round and took my place behind the whole company. There was not a movement from the thirty-nine members of that drill company. The two ranks looked perfectly straight as the applause thundered around the Royal Albert Hall in London.

No, I was not in the forces. Conscription had been abolished, much to my relief. This was the Boys’ Brigade! With activities at our hall every day it was the centre of my life as a teenager. I took part in everything, the sport, although I did not shine in this, the gym, the brass and bugle bands, and the badge work. Our parade night was compulsory, as was the Bible Class. On parade, we were about one hundred teenage boys mostly from the local council housing estates. We had a good drill officer, although we did play him up from time to time. However, when the company captain came in to the hall every back straightened and every arm swung to the correct height. Between them, they instilled enough team spirit into us that we competed successfully in many spheres. There are still many strong friendships in existence today that came out of that organisation.

Here was the climax of our winter session. “The 14<sup>th</sup> West Kent Company (our keenest and closest rivals)... seventy four and three quarter points. The 2<sup>nd</sup> West Kent Company...” he seemed to pause deliberately... “Seventy... five and a half points.” We had pipped them. It was, at that time, the proudest moment of my life when, as the senior NCO, I marched forward to collect the Daily Telegraph Drill Shield. It was a team effort made possible by the drill commander and the authority of the company captain. They have both died, but I owe a great debt to them both. Between them they instilled into me, not only discipline and a team spirit, but also a respect for authority and the necessity for order in our lives.

I am not suggesting that there was never any trouble amongst one hundred such teenagers. Far from it! We had our share of scrapes, fights and trouble but on that night in May 1965 there was a purpose in us that took us to the top. When thirty-nine boys heard the commands no one asked for clarification or questioned the order. No! To a man, (or at least to a boy), we followed the command to the letter. We had a unity of purpose and that was to win. The unity brought us the blessing of victory and a free trip to the Royal Military Tournament at Earls Court!

I often think back to those days. I still meet regularly in that same hall. My local church congregation meets there now and there are several past members of the ‘2<sup>nd</sup>’ that play a full and active part in the life of the church. I think of those drill commands as I have meditated and taught from Psalm 133.

*For there the Lord has commanded the blessing – life forever more.* Wonderful! When brothers dwell together in unity there is a command from Him who, not only has all authority in heaven and on earth, but who IS the authority. The boys in that drill company had a choice that night. We could obey the command or disobey. Had one boy decided to disobey and turn right when everyone else turned left our unity would have been broken and the blessing of victory lost.

But the Lord has commanded! He has said if brothers, if Christians, if believers, if churches, would learn to live together in unity a command would come forth from heaven:

***“Let there be blessing!”***

The command is there. We do not have to jump up and down and shout and hold special ‘receiving’ meetings. We would simply be blessed. We could not stop the blessing. When God commands, things begin to happen and happen quickly!

I am glad that we have a wise God. His wisdom is seen in every page of the Bible. I love the creation story. It is so simple it has to be true. It is so simple that man could not have invented it. I know what the scientists say, but the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of men - all men. The Gospel message, likewise, is so simple that it could not have come from the mind of man.

*‘God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life’.*

It is too simple, too perfect to have been made up by man. Not our efforts or good works but a loving God saying ‘Here I am. My son died for you. Believe in Him and you shall have eternal life.’ Awesome! I have often been accused of making the Gospel too simple. It wasn’t me! God did it!

The earth was formless and it was darker than night. In fact at that time there was neither day nor night! Not a sign of light anywhere, not even the twinkling of a single star. It is good that God prepared a place for man in advance. He made the earth to be a perfect place before putting the crown of His creation and His joy - man - in the middle of His garden.

God commanded. “Let there be light!” Suddenly, from nowhere, there it was - light. 186,000 miles per second! Wow! That’s a command! A good day’s work! For the next five days God commanded and things happened - instantly. The sun and moon, the stars were put into place at the command of God. No big bang! Just the power of the authority of the voice of God. One second, an empty sky, the next the sun shining and warming the surface of earth. Instantly the stars were there. It would have been exciting to be there – but too dangerous. You could never be sure where the next tree might sprout up!

For six days God commanded, and the earth was transformed from a formless void into the most beautiful garden that could be imagined. The flood changed the appearance of the earth but its beauty remains. Dinosaurs were there; mammoths; dodos; maybe the yeti did exist! All in harmony and ready to submit to the rule and

authority of man once God had made him. Man was not made at God's command, but we shall look at that in chapter 5. (The Power of Our Words)

No command has power unless there is authority to empower it.

I mentioned my first trip to Kenya. It was the first of many times I have driven in Africa and the first of many times that the policemen at the side of the road have stepped in front of me with an upraised arm to stop me. There have been many other people hoping for a free ride, who foolishly stand in the road with their hand raised to stop me. However, I only stop for the police. Why for them? Is it because I particularly like policemen? No more, no less than any other person at the side of the road. But they are wearing the uniform of the Kenya Police. I can see the blue of their shirt from some distance. I do not know the man or his name but I recognise the uniform. It tells me that he is employed by the government of Kenya and that he is not stopping me on his own authority alone, but on the authority of the government. When he puts on his uniform at the start of the day it is as if he is putting on the authority of the country that employs him. Technically I have been stopped by the government of Kenya. It is that government that wants to see that my driving documents are in order.

Jesus had an encounter with a Roman soldier. His servant was lying paralysed and he presented his problem to Jesus. Jesus said that He would go and heal him. The soldier told Jesus there was no need for Him to trouble Himself by going to his home. Besides, not being a follower of Jesus, he did not feel worthy for Him to enter his home at that time. He said,

*“I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Matthew 8:9)*

It says that Jesus marvelled at his faith. The soldier had heard the stories of Jesus. Maybe he had stood on duty when the large crowds gathered in Capernaum to listen to Jesus teach, and had seen the miracles that He performed. One thing is certain. He recognised that Jesus, like himself, acted under authority. For the soldier it was the authority of Rome. When he gave a command it was given with all the power of the authority of Rome behind him. When he said to a soldier under him ‘Go,’ the soldier went because the order was given under the authority of Rome.

This soldier recognised that Jesus was truly a man of God. At that time he probably did not know that He was the Son of God. He did see the healings, signs and miracles which were performed under the authority of God. Jesus said *“The Son can do nothing of Himself, but only what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”* Jesus did not act on his own authority but was submitted to the will and authority of His Father. Even at the point of crucifixion He prayed *‘Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.’* Jesus, as the Son of Man, limited himself to only do and speak according to the will of God. This is what the Roman soldier recognised.

“Lord, you do not have to come. The power is greater than your presence. You need just speak the healing word according to the will and authority of God and my servant will be healed.”

He got what he wanted!

A young man, Marcus, was travelling with me. Staying in rural Africa people often came to us with prayer needs. One morning we were asked to pray by a school teacher for her mother and father. Her mother was unable to walk and her father was in bed with a serious fever. Several days later we drove past their village. Passing the teacher’s home we were surprised to find all three leaping and waving to catch our attention. We stopped. What a story. The teacher told us that she had gone home after that prayer to find her father healed and waiting to greet her. Her mother was among the three who were leaping and jumping that morning! The power is in the Word of God. If He had not written it, it would not carry His authority.

The word of Jesus is powerful. He came as the Son of Man and people marvelled and said, “What a word this is! For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out.” Power and authority.

We saw that God created the heavens and earth through the spoken word. “Let there be!” Hebrews 1: 2-3 tells us that the Father made the worlds through the Son and that even today He is upholding all things by the **word of His power**. Everything that exists does so because of the power in the creating and sustaining word of God. The whole universe is held together by the power of the word of God.

One thing that the Roman soldier and those who heard the teaching of Jesus did not understand at that time is the truth revealed to us by the Apostle John at the beginning of his Gospel.

*‘In the beginning was the Word.’*

The spoken word of God and the incarnate Word of God are one and are inseparable. The Word is Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, the living incarnate Word of God. No wonder when He spoke things happened. No wonder He spoke as one with authority. He spoke as the Son of Man with all the authority of the Son of God. As Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man, He came to take back the God-given authority lost by the first man, Adam, in the Garden of Eden. Satan stole it from him through deception. The reason the Son of God was made manifest (as the Son of Man) was to destroy all the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8).

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil. (Hebrews 2:14)*

At the cross He finished the work that He came to do. As He was about to return to the Father He said to the disciples “*All authority in heaven (as the Son of God) and all authority on earth (as the Son of Man) is given to me.*”

*“Therefore, go!”*

Disciples, church, believers, Christians ‘Go!’ I send you with all My authority into all the world to make disciples and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. You have the backing of My authority.

When a Christian, who is properly submitted and under the authority of his local church speaks according to the will of God, “In the Name of Jesus!” all authority in heaven and earth backs his word. Just as the policeman speaks on behalf of the authority of his government so we also speak on behalf of the authority of Jesus – all authority.

Notice I have put two qualifications into my statement in the last paragraph.

Firstly I said we must be properly submitted and under the authority of a local church. Many times I have met people who tell me they are an apostle or a prophet or have some other ministry. Often, my first question will be to ask them who is their pastor. Many times they look at me as if I have two heads and they repeat their statement, telling me again about their ministry and again I ask them as to who is their pastor.

To protect His word, I believe that God has given His authority to be exercised through the church. In the Bible, we do not read of individuals roaming the countryside exercising their ministry with no reference to the church or the elders. The Apostle Peter was called to give an account as to why he had visited the home of the gentile Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18). Paul did not go travelling around Asia independently setting up churches. He too was called to give an account to the Council of Jerusalem. After this ‘it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church’ to send chosen men with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:21). It was prophets submitted to the church at Antioch who heard the Holy Spirit tell them to separate Barnabas and Paul for the ministry. It was after the church had laid hands upon them that they sent them out. (Acts 13:1-3)

Paul was concerned that grievous wolves would enter in among the Ephesian church who would not spare the flock. (Acts 20:28) He wrote to the Thessalonian church to ‘know those that labour among you.’ (1 Thessalonians 5:12). Today too many Christians and ministries are independent of any part of the body of Christ. Many times Christians have been hurt by other Christians and stay away from the church and say they are under the direct authority of God. This is not a biblical pattern. Too many become ‘loose cannons’ and can do great damage to the kingdom of God. Whether a man is an apostle, a bishop, a pastor or Christian he should himself have a pastor – a man to whom he makes himself accountable. He should also be in fellowship with and under the authority of a local church congregation. I see this as the biblical position. The authority is given through the church.

Secondly, I said that the authority of heaven and earth backs a Christian when he speaks according to the will of God. Much teaching in the church tells us that we can ask God for anything in the name of Jesus and He will give it. If that were the case, most western Christians would be living in large houses with no mortgage, would have a vehicle for every member of the family and would get a promotion in their job

three times a year! I am exaggerating (a little!) but you get my point. My African pastor friends would all have the latest sound systems with the maximum possible output, four by four land cruisers and free air tickets to the west at least once a year!

When I was a boy, I am sure there were days when my mother was tired of me asking for things. Everything a small child sees it wants. With hindsight, I am thankful she did not give me everything I asked for even if she could have afforded it. I would have been sick most days. Parents, for the most part, know what is best for their children.

We have been taught to treat God like this. Whatever we want He will give us in the name of Jesus. Wrong! Martha at the tomb of Lazarus said 'I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.' Correct! Because Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing. He said "I have come to do **Your will**, O God."

We can pray for healing (1 Peter 2:24); for souls to be saved (2 Peter 3:9); for wisdom (James 1:5); for daily bread (Matthew 6:11) etc. because we know this is God's will. Too many Christians have been encouraged to ask for their greeds and not their needs and become discouraged when they do not receive from God. They stop praying because they think God has not answered 'their' prayers. He answers all prayers – but often, like my mother when I was a boy, the answer is 'No!'

To conclude and bring us back to unity, let me summarise;

When brothers dwell together in unity, God commands blessing. We will be blessed because God is able to do everything that He says He will do. He will say to our church, to our community, to our lives, 'Let there be blessing!'" and just as light came on the first day of creation, so blessing will speed its way to us.

I have not yet met a Christian who does not want to be blessed. Unity is a major key.