ASTONISHED

It happened that when Jesus finished speaking these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching. For he was teaching them as one having authority (within) himself, and not as their professional Torah scholars.
Matthew 7:28-29

Here at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew gives a brief but effective response from the crowd to the sermon teaching. We could expand this astonishment to cover the ethical teaching of Jesus' entire ministry in general following the Sermon.

Remember, this is the first teaching presentation in Matthew's Gospel from Jesus and as such it serves as to the rounding out effect his teaching was going to have. Following this brief passage, Matthew will move on to some of the miraculous signs Jesus performs.

Thus far we can look at the structure Matthew has used and see that some of his language in setting the scene is intentional, even repetitive for the purpose of *inclusion*.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
Matthew 4:25 – 5:1

When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.
Matthew 8:1

Note the underscored symmetry before the Sermon, then after.

It happened that when Jesus finished speaking these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching. For he was teaching them as one having authority (within) himself, and not as their professional Torah scholars.

This is obviously a significant statement since all three Synoptic writers include this in their narratives. Note, however, that unlike Matthew, both Mark and Luke mention the crowds being *astonished at his teaching but* give no reference to *any specific* teaching Jesus did before their reaction. Mark and Luke also mention the crowd's reaction to the authority of Jesus.

And they went to Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.
Mark 1:21-22

And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his words possessed authority.
Luke 31-32

Another structural element Matthew uses is the phrase: *"It happened that when Jesus finished speaking"* which he repeats in various forms to conclude each of his five teaching discourses.

It happened that <u>when Jesus finished speaking</u> these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching.
Matthew 7:28

<u>When Jesus had finished instructing</u> his twelve disciples, he went up from there to teach and preach in their cities.
Matthew 11:1

And <u>when Jesus had finished these parables</u>, he went away from there.
Matthew 13:53

Now <u>when Jesus had finished these saying, he went away from Galilee</u>.
Matthew 19:1

<u>When Jesus had finished all these sayings</u>, he said to his disciples,
Matthew 26:1

Finally, what Matthew also focuses on here is the impact on those hearing Jesus and on the reason for that impact.

Despite Matthew using the above phrase five times throughout his narrative, only here does he reveal the impact of the teaching by the crowd.

"*the crowds were astonished at his teaching* – seems like a completed event but carries the meaning in the imperfect tense which suggests an ongoing effect.

Matthew uses the same verb elsewhere only with reference to the impact of Jesus' teaching:

and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that <u>they were astonished</u>, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"
Matthew 13:54

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly <u>astonished</u>, saying, "Who then can be saved?"
Matthew 19:25

And when the crowd heard it, they were <u>astonished</u> at his teaching.
Matthew 22:33

Matthew also uses this idea of the teaching of Jesus to offset the very same word when he mentions the disciples to be aware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of <u>the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees</u>.
Matthew 16:12

What this tells us is that since Matthew clearly favors the use of this phrase *"astonished"* when regarding the crowd's reaction to Jesus, the preceding teaching of the Sermon on the Mount must be suitable in his mind for this *astonished* reaction.

For he was teaching them as one having authority (within) himself, and not as their professional Torah scholars.
Matthew 7:29

The phrase *"he was teaching"* draws our attention to the repeated teaching that so astonished the listeners. And the element that caused this *"astonishment"* was the *"authority"* the teaching presupposed.

Unlike the scribes of Judaism who did not teach with their own authority but depended heavily upon the traditions of earlier teachers, Jesus set forth his teaching with unique conviction and authority.

The teaching of Jesus also does not mainly consist of the text of Torah. With Jesus, it is his *"own"* words that are authoritative.
"But I say to you." – Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 39, 44.
"These, my words." – Matthew 7:24, 26.

What Matthew is doing with this is setting Jesus apart and giveing us his true identity.

But that you may know <u>that the Son of Man has authority</u> on earth to forgive sins – he then said to the paralytic – "Rise, take up your bed and go home."
Matthew 9:6

When the crowd saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, <u>who had given such authority</u> to men.
Matthew 9:8

The Greek for the word *"authority"* is "ἐξουσίαν" (ex-oo-see-an) conveys more than just mere authority and perhaps this is why Matthew chooses it. The word refers to *power of choice, the liberty of one to do as they please,* or even to *privilege.* It can carry the idea of *force, competency,* and *jurisdiction.*

With these concepts in mind, we gain a fuller picture in Matthew's mind as to how Jesus may have appeared to the crowd.

Jesus then turns this "ἐξουσίαν" or authority over to the disciples, and later, to the Body of Christ of every age where the risen Lord commissions his disciples to make disciples of all nations.

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.
Matthew 10:1

And Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:18-20

and not as their professional Torah scholars – Matthew's addition of *"their"* reveals a present and growing distance between the Jewish community following Jesus and rabbinic Judaism and their authority in the synagogue.

This creates a narrative with a polemical tone which reflects the growing hostility between the synagogue and the Body of Christ at the time of this writing.

The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was radical both in content and in the unique authority that undergirded its forthright, confident delivery. Matthew will not miss the opportunity here at the end of a masterful distillation of the teaching of Jesus to call his readers attention to the supreme authority of this Teacher. Jesus is not one among other rabbinic teachers; his authority centers not on the tradition of the Fathers, nor even on the Torah, but somehow, mysteriously and remarkably, it centers in himself. As the final and authoritative exposition of the meaning of the righteousness of the Torah, this teacher has an incomparable authority that can be accounted for by one fact: the unique person of Jesus, the one teacher, the one master, the Christ.

But you are not to be called rabbis; for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven. Neither be called instructor, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

Matthew 23:8-10

Only such personal authority can support the radical and surprising teaching and its exclusive claims.

The officer answered, "No one ever spoke like this man.
John 7:46

This authority is in fact, inseparable from the newness of the gospel and the presence of the Agent of that Gospel.
Hagner – Matthew, page 194