

The Authority of the Apostles, #1

The Authority of the Apostles

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This morning, I invite you to turn to 1 John as we open up God's word this morning and from time to time as I'm preaching I'll say that I'm about to go on a tangent, usually that's in the middle of a message and it's a five minute tangent. I'm just going to tell you right now that we're going to go on a two week tangent here in order to touch on something that is just incredibly important to understanding the nature of the Christian faith.

Let's go to 1 John 4:6 as we open here this morning. I don't know if there's anything more foundational than what we're going to talk about today and I would venture to say that some of the things that we're going to say may be new to you but you're going to see how important and clear that they are from Scripture. 1 John 4:6 says this, it says, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Now, when I was last in the pulpit two weeks ago after our guest speaker, Roger Ng, was here last Sunday, we taught on the entire passage, 1 John 4:1-6 and we talked about the whole issue of developing biblical discernment, and if you haven't heard that message, I'd encourage you to download it from our website. At the end of that passage in verse 6, is one of the foundational statements about discerning truth from error and it's important for us to delve into this a little bit more. Actually, I had part of the reason that I'm going on a two week tangent is that I had a couple of questions afterward about the understanding of that verse and I kind of have a rule in my mind that I try to follow that if one or two people are asking a question, that means that others are having the same question as well. So when there are questions of such significance like what we had a couple of weeks ago after the service, I want to deal with it all for the benefit of everyone that is here.

What we have here in verse 6 is a specific element of biblical discernment and it is tied in directly with the principle of apostolic authority. When the Apostle John is speaking here in verse 6, he is not speaking using the term "we" in the broadest sense of including everyone in the Christian church; he is narrowing what he is stating to the narrow circle of the 12 apostles and the Apostle Paul, as being the ones who are authorized to speak from God, and as soon as you start to touch on that issue, you realize that you're touching on something that is profoundly important. When the Christian church is operating as it should, when a man in a pulpit is speaking as he should, he is speaking from the authority of the Bible. He is speaking from the authority of the New Testament when he proclaims Christ and him crucified for the salvation of sinners. There is no other authority by which

we carry that message to the world. It is based on the authority of the apostles and what John is saying here in verse 6, is that, "We the apostles are from God and whoever is from God listens to us." There is no revelation of Jesus Christ, as we're going to see, apart from the apostles. There is no understanding of the Gospel apart from the apostles and so if we are going to have the truth, then we must be a people and we must be individuals that heed the teaching of the apostles.

Now, let me show you why he is referring to the apostles and not anyone else in verse 6 and then we'll go into this two week tangent that we're about to enjoy together and I'm very, very excited to be able to show these things to you. In 1 John 1, he opens up with a statement of his apostolic experience. Turn back to the very beginning of 1 John, this is material that we covered probably sometime in the summer. But John opens up this letter by emphasizing his direct personal apostolic experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at what he says, he says in verse 1, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life - and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us." And he picks up the theme again and he says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us." We'll stop there for now. What I want you to see in this is that from the very beginning of the letter, he is distinguishing between the "we" that had seen and heard and touched the Lord Jesus Christ and the "you," the people who did not have that personal experience but were the recipients of this letter. John was writing this in about A.D. 90, 60 years after Christ had been crucified. Most of the direct witnesses of Christ's ministry had died and gone to heaven since that time and John was left alone as the remaining representative of the apostolic circle who had the direct personal experience to be able to speak of the things that he was talking about when he opened the letter and you can see that he says, "We are proclaiming these things to you so that you may share in the joy and the fellowship of what we know." So you see right from the beginning that there is this distinction between John as the author and the representative of the apostolic experience of having seen and heard and witnessed the ministry of Christ during his earthly life and saw him as the resurrected one, and his audience who did not have that experience. So he's emphasizing the fact that, "I have authority to speak these things to you. You didn't hear Jesus with your own ears. You didn't see him with your own eyes. You didn't hold him with your own hands like we did," the apostles did, "and so based on my apostolic authority, I am communicating to you that which is necessary for your fellowship, for your joy, for your holiness, and for your assurance of eternal life." So all of that simply to say that from the very beginning of the letter, there was this distinction between the apostolic "we" and the Christian "you" who was receiving the letter. If you're with me on this, this is really, really important.

So, now, carrying that thought and that understanding into chapter 4, going to verse 4 now. This is all introduction to a tangent. I've never done that before. I've never introduced a tangent at such length but this is very, very enjoyable and fun for me. Now, notice here in verse 4 from that introduction, chapter 4, verse 4, he's speaking to true Christians and he says, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them;

because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world," speaking to true Christians who had overcome the teaching of the false teachers and were now established in the true life in Christ. He says in verse 5, he distinguishes the false teachers out of the group and he says in verse 5, "They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them." John is basically dividing the world into two camps: those who are true Christians, verse 4, and those who are not in verse 5. The world led by its ringleaders of false teachers and the world being constituted by those who follow false teachers, false philosophies that are orchestrated by the devil and have nothing to do with biblical truth and so John says, "You're from God. You are in Christ. They are false teachers. The world listens to them and follows them."

Now, who is left to discuss? Verse 6, he uses "we" to refer to a small circle referring to himself and his fellow apostles when he says, "We are from God." Who "we"? The "we" from the very beginning of the letter: we who have seen; we who have heard; we who have held with our hands; we the apostles; we who have the authority to speak. And he says, "he who knows God listens to us." Well, of course. True Christians must listen to the apostles because it's alone through the apostles that we have received the message of the Gospel. So that is why we understand verse 6 as John speaking as, "We the apostles are from God. True Christians must listen to the apostles." You can be a true Christian and most every true Christian in the world does, you can perfectly be a true Christian without ever hearing the name Don Green. You can be a true Christian without hearing the name of other prominent Bible pastors. You cannot be a true Christian without hearing and heeding and believing the testimony of the apostles. So it's utterly illegitimate, utterly illegitimate for a man in a position of spiritual authority to take chapter 4, verse 6, and say, "This is talking about me." It's not talking about any living man now. It's talking about the unique group of the apostles who were uniquely commissioned to speak the Gospel and to lay it down in an authoritative way.

So that's the introduction to the tangent. Now let's get into the tangent itself, and that's not part of the structure of the message at all. You don't have to write any of that down but we've said throughout this letter as we've been preaching through it, we've said from time to time that John is writing to give Christians spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. Christians live in the midst of a world that is hostile to Christ. John says, "Don't be surprised if the world hates you." The world tempts us to sin. The world is filled with false teachers. We are living in an alien hostile environment and we do not have the spiritual capacity on our own to successfully navigate our way through that unless we have outside help from God, and what God has given us is he has given us the Scriptures and he has given us this particular letter to help us so that we would live out the victory that Christ achieved for us with his death and resurrection and his ascension into heaven. We are meant to overcome that hostility, meant to overcome the temptations and live a life that glorifies God by being joyful, being holy and being confident in our spiritual life. That is spiritual victory as John defines it in chapter 1, verse 4, chapter 2, verse 1, and chapter 5, verse 13.

Now, with all of that said, here's the question, this is the question that it is fair to ask; we can ask the question at a very fundamental, almost presuppositional level: why is it that

we should believe what the Apostle John says? Why is it that we should believe what John says? Why should this letter be a defining guiding light to us as we walk in this world as Christians? Why is it that the Apostle John can authoritatively interpret Christ for us? Why is it that he has an authority that no one else does, that no other living man has? We utterly reject those who claim apostolic succession to this day. That's an utter fallacy that we'll especially destroy next week if you want to be here for that. Why is it that John speaks with authority? Why is it that John can say that, "He who knows God listens to us"? Here's your answer, it's simple: John was one of the apostles. That makes all the difference in the world. Martyn Lloyd Jones said this and what we're talking about here today is the authority of the apostles; if you're not familiar with his books, you need to be. Martyn Lloyd Jones said this, he said, "Do we always realize that the apostles claimed for themselves a unique authority? They asserted it constantly. We need to reconsider the New Testament teaching about the apostles. It was not their own authority, it was the authority they had derived and received from Christ. They did not speak as ordinary men, they spoke as apostles." This whole issue, everything that we stake our eternal destiny on, comes down ultimately to this ultimate question of who has authority? Who has the authority to speak about the realities of God and what it takes to go to heaven when you die? That is the foundational question.

Now, we realize that there are all kinds of men and foolish women that want to speak about revelations that they have had, revelations of how God has spoken to them and they draw men after them with their crazy stories about visions that they've seen or how they went to heaven or had a near-death experience and, "Let me tell you what God says." It's all a bunch of bunk. It's not worth the oxygen that they spend talking. It's meaningless. It has no authority whatsoever. By contrast, by contrast, the men who were apostles had real authority and what we're going to do today is we are going to outline an understanding of how we can understand this. Who is it that has the right and the power to declare truth about God, Christ, and salvation? The New Testament answer to that question is this: the apostles do. The apostles do. Our Lord Jesus Christ uniquely commissioned the apostles to preach the Gospel after he ascended into heaven. He gave a unique commission to the apostles that was not repeatable, that could not be delegated, and was unique to them during their lives in the first century, and it is based on the teaching of the apostles that everything about Christianity now flows. There is nothing else that we have other than the apostles' teaching to base the New Testament church on.

Now, follow me here: the word "apostle" comes from a Greek verb that means "to send." The verb stresses the fact that the sender has commissioned the one who is sent and so an apostle is someone who is sent by someone else that has authority. Now, as a brief aside, the New Testament applies the term primarily to the 12 disciples of Christ and also to the Apostle Paul. There are places where "the apostle" is used to describe other people but when it is used in connection with the 12 and the Apostle Paul, it is being used in a technical sense to refer to their unique authority as those commissioned by Christ and it's that technical sense that we are considering today.

Now, what we're going to do today is really simple and is really just kind of laying the foundation for what happens next week and this is going to be really simple. The points

here are very, very simple. I want to give you three simple principles to understand the apostles' authority so that you can have a clear understanding of why there is a unique authority in the apostles that enables John to say, "He who knows God must listen to us." We're going to see the authority and next week we'll work out some other issues but this is fundamental because it deals with why we believe what we believe and when you clearly understand the apostles' line of authority, you will have strong confidence in the Bible. You will have strong confidence as you read the description of salvation by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that you can trust what is said here. Listen, we are staking our eternal destiny on the truth of what is written in the New Testament, right? Everything depends on this being authoritative. Everything depends on this being absolutely true. Everything depends upon it being accurate and having the authority of God behind it.

So this is no small matter and what I want you to see, here's what you're going to walk away from today, we can also say this, that when the Bible promises us comfort in our trials, when the Bible promises us that God is working out our trials to declare his glory, God is working out our trials in order to display the sufficiency of his grace, when we understand that God is working out our trials and everything that could ever happen in our lives so that he would ultimately do good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose, it's fair to say, "Why can I believe that? How is it that I can set my heart confidence in the midst of quaking ground underneath it, how can I set my heart confidence in those promises?" Well, it's because this flows from the very authority of the throne room of God. That's why we can trust it. That's why we can be strong and courageous. That's why we're confident in the midst of whatever life throws at us. That's why we're not intimidated by false teachers. That's why we're not intimidated by the world around us. It's because we have an authoritative word from God in the Scriptures. It's all about authority.

Now, here's a little understanding; here's where we're going. There are lines of authority and we're used to lines of authority in life, right? The military has lines of authority: the general, the colonel, the lieutenant, the sergeant, the corporal, whatever. We're used to lines of authority in our business: you've got the CEO and then you've got the vice president, and then the managers and the supervisors under them. You could go on and on. In the home there is the authority of the parents and the children are under the authority of their parents. So we're used to the concept of a line of authority. This is built into the warp and woof of how God has structured the universe. Well, what I want you to see is that when we're talking about the authority of the apostles, there is a direct line of authority here that is easy for us to see and understand and sheds a great spotlight on why we believe what the apostles wrote and it just follows this way: God has all authority, Christ, who is co-equal with God, displayed his authority on earth and then Christ delegated his authority to the apostles and they wrote the New Testament and that's where authority lies. God, Christ, to the apostles. It's a clear line of authority that is unmistakable when you study this in Scripture.

Now, so our first point this morning is that authority rests in God. You could say otherwise: God has all authority. But we'll say authority rests in God and this is a real

simple point. We don't need to really defend this point, especially here. God is the Creator of heavens and earth. God preexisted all things. God preexisted time. He existed before the creation of the world and he alone was reigning in the glory of his inter-Trinitarian being and then he created the angels and he created the world and things went from there. So when you go back all the way to the point before time began, God was who he is, God was reigning and he obviously had all authority because there was no one around to contest it or to challenge it, and everything that we see around us is an outworking, is an outflow of the authority of God in motion. I'll give you a verse to write down here; we won't bother to turn there. Psalm 103:19 says this, Psalm 103:19, you can look it up later, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all." So God's sovereignty rules over everything. Think about it this way: all authority that we see in life around us, in government structures and all of that, all of that is simply flowing from the original source of authority in God himself. Anyone that has true, legitimate authority can trace the line of his authority back to the throne room of God. There is no authority apart from him because his sovereignty rules over all. Eventually God will display his authority over this world when he brings things to an end, 2 Peter 3, in fire and judgment and he destroys this world and overturns it; there will be no questioning the authority of God over all things at that great moment, at that great time of judgment. So God has authority: authority as the Creator, authority as the one who sustains, authority as the one who will bring it all to an end one day and so God has all authority.

Now, right there, beloved, right there, there should be a sanctifying fear that comes upon your heart as you contemplate these things; to realize that you are living out your life under the authority of the supreme God of the universe; that there is a holy God who looks on the human heart and has authority over everything and that has authority over life and death for each one of us, and that every breath that we breathe is derivative of his good pleasure and that he has sovereignly bestowed that next breath upon us. He has authority and that's part of the reason why the book of Proverbs so clearly teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. There should be a holy hush that comes upon our hearts when we think about the great sovereign majestic authority of God and that everything flows from his great and holy throne which traces its origins before the beginning of time.

Beloved, that is the very God who is looking on us as we gather together in this room, as we preach his word, as we hear it spoken, as we sing his praises. The one with all authority is here and he is watching and he knows and as his people, we respect his authority. We fear him with love, with reverential love, and we respect him, and we honor his authority by honoring the authority that he has put into place. And let me add this: we honor his authority by not trying to establish our own independent authority apart from him. We don't challenge his authority, we submit to it. We don't resent his authority, we love it because it's our guarantee that the world is ultimately going to move in a direction that accomplishes the purposes of righteousness which God established before the foundation of the world, because there is no authority including Satan himself who has any power to successfully overthrow the authority of the Creator. We realize that Satan is a wicked, dangerous foe and that he prowls about looking for someone to

devour, but when we are aligned with Christ under the authority of God, we need not fear him as if he could do something to us that was outside the purposes of God because all authority rests in this eternal God. That's point 1.

Now, point 2: authority rests in Jesus Christ. Authority rests in Jesus Christ. God has manifested his authority uniquely in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the second person of the holy Trinity. He has the same essence as God the Father does. He was with God before time began. "In the beginning," John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There is no distinction between the essence and the authority of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So as the second person of the Trinity, Jesus has intrinsic authority that is co-equal with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit.

Now, watch this, watch what happens in this second point of this two week tangent: the Gospels show us at least five ways that Christ displayed his authority on earth. This is so crucial to understanding what's happening. God had all authority before time began but then when Christ came to earth, when Christ came to earth he stepped onto the world stage, as it were, and he displayed and manifested his authority by the things that he did which we are going to look at in a moment, and showed conclusively the authority that he himself has. He displayed the very authority of God by the things that he did during his earthly ministry.

Now, watch this, we're going to go through this really quickly. I'm going to give you five ways that he showed his authority. These are all sub points under point 2 that authority rests in Christ. We're going to nimble up your fingers here, if nimble can be a verb, and go back to the Gospel of Matthew 7. Go to the end of chapter 7 in verses 28 and 29 and here's the first sub point if you're taking down notes, and I encourage you to take notes whenever you can, is that, first of all: Christ taught with authority. Christ taught with authority. In chapters 5 through 7, Jesus had delivered the great Sermon on the Mount and when you study through the great Sermon on the Mount, you are brought face to face with the infinite wisdom and authority of Christ, and when Jesus had finished that great sermon, look what happened, look at the reaction of the crowds in verse 28. Chapter 7 of Matthew, verse 28, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." There was an aspect to the manner in which Jesus spoke, there was an aspect to his voice, there was an aspect to his mannerisms, there was an aspect to his wisdom that when he taught, everyone who heard him realized that there was a unique authority in him that they had never seen before. They were used to scribes who were quoting other rabbis and "So-and-so said this, and on that we say this." Jesus wasn't like that. Jesus spoke from his own authority and said, "You've heard that the Pharisees said, but I say to you this." It's woven throughout, especially chapter 5, of the Sermon on the Mount. This wasn't any casual encounter that those who were there, his audience had with him. You see that they were amazed. They were awestruck. They were thunderstruck by the authority with which this man spoke. Well, what was happening there was that was one of the ways that Jesus was displaying his authority as the second person of the Trinity; he was displaying his authority as God when he spoke.

Now, secondly, Christ displayed his authority in other ways as well. We see his authority, secondly, in the fact that Christ healed diseases and cast out demons. He healed diseases and cast out demons. Look over at the Gospel of Mark now, Mark 1. Authority rests in Christ. He taught with authority and now we see that he healed diseases and cast out demons, and we're only looking at representative passages here, of course. But look at Mark 1:32, "When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed." You see right from the very beginning the crowds understood that Christ had a unique authority and so they are going to take advantage of that authority, as it were, to alleviate their earthly suffering with things that they could not address through any other means. So in verse 33, "the whole city had gathered at the door." Verse 34, and in the typical understated way in which the Gospels describe the magnificent power and majesty of Christ, look at what it says. It says, "He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was." Physical disease was subject to his command. Supernatural fallen angels were silenced because he did not permit them to speak. In the way that was unique to the first century, they had taken over people, these demons had taken them over and Jesus says, "Depart from him," and they were instantly healed and restored to their right mind.

This is, again, just an astonishing array of authority for Jesus to be displaying and note this, beloved, note that the whole city, it says, was there to witness it. This wasn't Jesus operating in a controlled stage environment with lights and heavy music kind of whipping the audience up into a frenzy, this was Jesus on the ground in the dirt, as it were, side-by-side with people, with lots of people watching to verify the veracity of what had happened and he just easily by his authority healed disease and cast out demons and told them to, "Be quiet!" and they didn't speak. A whole city witnessed this display of authority. If there was any doubt, if there was any fraud in it, it would have been exposed. Jesus did it in front of everyone to see and they were all astonished and they were amazed because here was a man standing before them in human flesh who had no earthly features by which we should be drawn to him, doing things that no man in the history of time had ever done before and it was happening right in front of them. Why was it happening? Because Jesus had authority and he was displaying it for all to see.

Now, he didn't stop there. His teaching was with authority, he healed diseases, he cast out demons. We haven't even gotten halfway through what we want to say here this morning about this. Jesus Christ forgave sin. Jesus Christ forgave sin. Look over at chapter 2, verse 9, you remember the story that he had a paralytic in front of him and they couldn't get to him because the crowds were all around; I mean, the crowds were pressed in upon him. Again, even that aspect of it is proof of and verifies the reality of what the Scriptures are telling us. There were multiple, multiple witnesses, hundreds of witnesses as he did this thing. 1 Corinthians 15 says there were 500 men who were witnesses to his resurrection. This wasn't done in a corner. This wasn't done with a stage manager controlling who came up, like everything charismatic is done. No. No, these were real people with real eyes and ears and tongues who saw it all and they were around and they were right there. This was no magician acting here.

Look at verse 4, this paralytic's friends, I like having friends like this, "Being unable to get to Christ because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying." You've got to love the imagery of this scene, you know, there's all of a sudden there's a new skylight in the roof and there is this paralytic being dropped down right into the lap of Jesus, as it were. And look at what Jesus does in verse 5, "Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" Not, "Son, I heal you." Or not, "Hey, that's cool. How did you get down through there? Why, you guys must have had some kind of special spade to get through that roof." "Son, your sins are forgiven." He went right to the heart of things. "Some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, saying, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?' Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, 'Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven"; or to say, "Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' - He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.' And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone," so here it is again, "they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'" The physical miracle that was visible and readily seen by those who were there of a man paralyzed suddenly getting up and walking by the spoken word of Christ was a signifying sign to indicate that the unseen reality that Jesus spoke, "Your sins are forgiven," carried equal authority. The miracle of healing the paralytic attested to his authority to forgive sin because no one does that. No one walks up to a crippled man and says, "Get up and walk," and he gets up and walks instantly. Cured. Healed. Christ as he did that miracle was displaying his authority and he was displaying the authority to forgive sin which the people there knew from Old Testament teaching that only God had the prerogative to forgive sin and here is Christ in their midst doing just that.

Let's just take a moment here to recognize the fact that Christ still has that same authority to forgive sin today. If you're here with a burdened, troubled conscience, knowing that you're guilty before God for a series of dark things in your life, I want you to understand that you can come to Christ today for the forgiveness of sin. It is the point of his death and resurrection. You can come to Christ trusting him as the one who bore the penalty of your sin on the cross, who is the righteousness alone that can satisfy God, and yield your life to him and receive him by faith and find the forgiveness of your sins. His authority to forgive sin is as undiminished today as it was back then. His willingness and his invitation, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." There are enough people in this room that I know there are people here that are not in Christ right now but Christ takes this opportunity through the preaching of his word to call you and to invite you to eternal life and I invite you to come. Come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Now, we're saying that authority rests in Christ. He taught with authority, he healed diseases, cast out demons, thirdly, he forgave sin. We're still not done. Jesus Christ raised

the dead. He raised the dead. Are you kidding me? No. Luke 7. Turn over to the Gospel of Luke 7:11. Look at this, "Soon afterwards Jesus went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd." Do you see that again? The large crowd? All of the witnesses of this. This was undeniable. "Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, 'Do not weep.'" I love that about our Lord, in the midst of our trials, in the midst of the deepest challenges that we could face, the Lord feels compassion on us. He said to her, "'Do not weep.' And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise!'" Do you know what? It just occurred to me there was no doubt in Jesus' mind that this was going to happen. He knew what was going to happen. There was no question that a miracle like raising the dead would occur. There was no doubt in his mind about it because he knew he had the authority to do that. He knew that even death was subject to his great authority. Verse 15, "The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother." I would have liked to have seen that, wouldn't you? To see that astonished mother weeping with joy and disbelief and yet her son is there and she is gripping him and hugging him and she has him back, a widow and her only son who was dead is now a live by the authority of Christ. What do you think that produces? Verse 16, "Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!'" Christ had authority, unlimited, omnipotent authority because he was God.

One last thing as we just see the display of the authority of Christ in the Gospels. Look over at Luke 8:24. You remember the story, we'll pick it up in verse 23. Jesus and his disciples were in a boat, verse 23, "as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. They came to Jesus," obviously somewhat in a panic. The disciples were so much like us, huh? "They woke Him up, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm." In the midst of a boat tossing and turning under the force of a terrific storm, Jesus gets up and speaks the word and says, "Hush, be still," and the rolling waves became a sea of glass and it was calm. And he looks at the disciples and he said to them, "'Where is your faith?' They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?'" Who is he? He is God and as God he has unlimited authority over everything. That's who Christ is.

So in these five things that we've looked at, these miraculous signs, raising the dead, forgiving sin, teaching with authority, healing disease, casting out demons, controlling nature, Jesus, we've just had a little superficial survey of the fact that Jesus during his earthly life and his earthly ministry, incontestably proved that he had authority over all things seen and unseen. Authority over men and their diseases. Authority over the unseen realm of demons. Authority over nature. Authority over sin. Authority over death. This is one of unchallenged, unparalleled authority who reigned before the beginning of time, who reigns now, and who will reign forever more. Beloved, step back and just realize this is your Christ. The one whom you name as Lord and Savior, this is who we are talking

about. You belong to the one who reigns over all and proved it incontestably while he was here on earth. Your soul is in the hands of one with all authority and in that hand, Jesus said, "No one can pluck it out." No matter what's happening, beloved, in your individual lives, come back to the authority of Christ and come back to the pledge of his blessed heart when he says, "If you're in my hand, you'll never be plucked out. I simply will not allow that to happen." And don't you see that he has the authority to guarantee and to deliver on his promise? What a privileged position we have to be in Christ.

Now, I think that settles the question of the authority of Christ but there's a problem for us as you think through all these things; there is a problem for us who live after the time that Christ walked on the earth. You and I are not direct eyewitnesses of these things. Christ has left. He ascended into heaven and speaking foolishly, you could say this, "There is a problem here because Christ did not personally write down with his own hand anything to record who he is or what he had done here on earth." We don't have any writings from the hand of Christ that testify to these things so how is it that you and I know anything reliable about him? How is it that we know anything? Where is it that we bank our hope? Where is the solid ground upon which we stand? "Oh, I hear the magnificent things that Christ did but I wasn't there to see it and he's gone physically now and he didn't record anything for us to know it by with his own hand. What do we do? I want to know this but I fear that I'm vulnerable because of a lack of authority because Christ is gone from earth now." That point is where we must understand point 3: that authority rests in the apostles. Authority rests in the apostles. It pleased God to orchestrate things in this way. It pleased God to have his Son come and minister on earth in this way and display his authority and yet somehow to convey to a small select group of men the unique authority, privilege and prerogative to record the life of Christ and to interpret it for the rest of the world to stand as the authoritative testimony about him. Here's the point, beloved, point 3: authority rests in the apostles. Watch this, by sovereign prerogative Jesus Christ conferred his authority on the 12 apostles and equipped them to minister on his behalf. Stated differently, everything depends on what we're talking about right here, beloved. This is not some abstract thing that really doesn't matter. This isn't abstract theology. This is how we know truth. This is how we know the Gospel. The apostles derive their authority directly from Christ himself. One of the prerogatives of having authority is that you can delegate it if you wish. You can choose to whom you delegate. You can delegate the scope of their authority. In Christ's position, he had the prerogative and the ability to delegate even his power in order to vindicate and verify the authority of these 12 men.

Now, we're going to walk through this rather quickly. This is going to be a longer message than normal and that's okay because this is too important to rush through. First of all, how do we know that authority rests in the apostles? Sub point here: Jesus chose them. Jesus personally chose them. Because all authority belongs to Christ, he can delegate his authority to whomever he wishes and he chose the 12 apostles to uniquely – oh, beloved, hear that word, uniquely. Non-repeatedly. Exclusively. He chose the 12 apostles to uniquely be his representatives on earth.

Go back to the Gospel of Mark 3. This is so important. This is so incredibly important, beloved. Chapter 3, verse 13, "Jesus went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him." Verse 14, "And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons." Verse 16, "And He appointed the twelve," and then Mark lists out their names. Jesus, by his sovereign prerogative, chose these 12 men to fulfill his own sovereign will and he told them in the Gospel of John 15, turn over there. I want you to see this with your own eyes. Here in the upper room, he is speaking after Judas had departed and in John 15:16, speaking to that exclusive group now of 11, he said, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." He is telling those men, "I chose you so that you would go out and bear fruit." Beloved, I'm getting ahead of myself here but what I want you to see is part of the fruit of the life and ministry of the apostles is the 27 books of the New Testament that we have in front of us here. Christ chose them and in the book of Acts, they went out and established their own ministry and they did their own preaching, again, by signs and wonders, not by the inherent power of their own hands but because Christ had given them authority to do that so that it would authenticate their message and show that they were uniquely appointed to speak for God. So as an historical matter, Jesus called the 12 disciples who would become the apostles.

Now, secondly. He chose them, we said. Jesus chose them, now secondly: Jesus commissioned them. Jesus commissioned them. The Bible records several times where Jesus commissioned the apostles after his resurrection. Having chosen them, he told them what they were to go out and do. This is so clear and it is so direct and simple but everything depends upon it. The apostles, mark this: the apostles would speak on behalf of Christ in his absence, in his physical absence, the apostles would speak on his behalf with the very authority of Christ himself.

Look at the end of the Gospel of Matthew 28. Go back to verse 16. Note this, "the eleven disciples," twelve minus Judas, "the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" We know this passage as the great commission. What I want you to see is that he's speaking to the 11 disciples at this point and he invokes the totality of his authority in heaven and on earth as he speaks to these 11 men and he says to them, having invoked his authority in verse 18, he says in verse 19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." While there may have been others around when Jesus gave this commission, the Bible highlights the 11 and he highlights the authority of Christ and he says, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." Now listen to me, beloved, this is so important. Understand when he says, "Go and make disciples of all the nations," he is giving them a global authority. There is no other message anywhere in the world by which men can be saved other than the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ because Jesus gives unique authority to these 11 and he tells

them, "Go to all the nations." So those 11 men to have added to their midst the Apostle Paul, which we'll deal with some next week, these men went out commissioned by the authority of Christ, "You go. You teach what I have commanded to all the nations." The apostles have a role of authority that no one else in time ever did because Christ had uniquely delegated his authority to them.

This isn't the only place where it's recorded. Turn over to Luke 24 in verse 36, let's say. "While they were telling these things, Jesus Himself stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be to you.' But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as these.'" So he gave them direct, up close, personal experience with the proof of his resurrection. Resurrection from the dead. Resurrection from the dead. We hear it so much we take it for granted but this is miraculous. This is outside natural law. A man who had been dead was standing before them in his own authority saying, "See the proof of it for yourself."

Verse 44, "He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" The whole Old Testament, he says, finds its crystallization and fulfillment in me. "Then He opened their minds," verse 45, "to understand the Scriptures. He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to,'" there it is again, "'all the nations.'" All the nations. There are no exceptions. If there are dark places in Africa that don't reach the Gospel, they're lost. That's why missionaries are so important because this covers all the nations. And in verse 48, he tells the disciples, "You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you and you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." You are my witnesses. Stay put until you are clothed with power from on high. I have chosen you. I am commissioning you and soon I will send power upon you in order to fulfill the task to all the nations.

Turn over now to the book of Acts 1. This is so clear and so important and so foundational I'm just filled with emotion wanting you to understand this and embrace it because this changes everything. Acts 1:2, it's Luke, volume 2, you might say, Luke the author. So Luke writes in verse 1, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach," watch this, verse 2, "until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen." Do you see it? He gave orders to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Now drop down to verse 7. He said, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." What are we saying? Jesus appointed the apostles to be his uniquely authorized witnesses. The book of Acts records how the church was founded on their teaching and get this, beloved: their witness

continues to this very moment through the writings which they have left for us in the church through the written New Testament.

Do you see it, beloved? Apart from the apostles who authored the Gospels or a close associate who authored the books of the rest of the New Testament, apart from the apostles, we know nothing about Jesus Christ. We are utterly dependent on what they have said. Apart from them we know nothing about Christ. With their writings, we have everything that we need for life in godliness. It is sufficient. If you're a Christian here today, step back and think about this. Whatever the earthly circumstances were of your conversion, whoever spoke it to you, spoke the Gospel to you, wherever you were, at root if you have been saved from your sins through faith in Christ, it is because you have believed through the word of the apostles. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23, came from an apostle. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 6:23, came through an apostle. The apostles are the umbilical cord, as it were, that connects us to the life-giving sustenance found in Christ.

Jesus chose them. Jesus commissioned them. One last point about this: the Holy Spirit empowered them. The Holy Spirit empowered them. That's the third sub point here. Apart from their commission, the apostles were ordinary men. They lacked the power necessary to fulfill their charge. Jesus knew that and so what did he do? He promised them the Holy Spirit for the task ahead. The third person of the Trinity would be their enabler to make this ministry happen.

Turn back to the Gospel of John 14. Again, speaking to the 11 on the night before his crucifixion, having chosen them, having commissioned them, he says in verse 25, "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

Look over at chapter 16, verse 12. Stay with me just a little bit longer. Jesus says, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Huh, that's kind of how I feel right now, right here today. I have many more things that I want to say but I've already been preaching over an hour. I don't know how much longer you can bear this. Verse 13, "when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you." He's speaking to the 11 there. "He will guide you into all the truth; He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you." Jesus is saying, "I am going to send you the third person of the Trinity to aid you in carrying out the responsibility I'm giving to you. You are not dependent, apostles, on your native skills. I am going to give you supernatural help on high. The Holy Spirit will take the things that belong to me, work in your mind and your heart and in your powers and give you the capacity to do this impossible task for humans that I'm giving you so that your success will be assured." And what happened? The Holy Spirit supernaturally quickened the apostles' memory to recall the teaching of Christ even years after he had been gone. The Holy Spirit guided their words so that the apostles transmitted the history and the interpretation of our Lord Jesus Christ without error in the New Testament.

Now, let me kind of pull all of this together. This helps us understand why Christianity alone is true. Follow the line of authority with everything that we've said. Authority begins with God the Father, uniquely vested in him. Christ came to earth in the fullness of God and displayed his authority, incontestably proving that he was God in human flesh in those five ways that we enumerated. Now, Christ again by an extension of his sovereign authority, he chose 12 and he commissioned them and gave them supernatural power to represent him, to go out and teach about him and to proclaim his name to all the ends of the earth. Beloved, understand this, understand this: as we said Thursday night for the many of you that were there Thursday night, all of this is objective. It is outside of you. This is true whether you believe it or not. This is true whether or not you had ever been born. This is just historical time and space reality that Jesus Christ commissioned the apostles and sent the Holy Spirit to empower them. So ultimately Christ himself is the guarantee that the apostles were trustworthy and believable even to this moment. Martyn Lloyd Jones also said this, he said, "Christ enlightens and reveals his will in teaching to these apostles, endows them with a unique authority, fills them with the needed ability and power and gives them the teaching that is essential to the well-being of the church and God's people."

We sing, "It is well with my soul," as Christians, right? You know that song.

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, You have taught me to say,
It is well with my soul.
It is well, it is well, it is well with my soul."

Beloved, those are precious, incalculably great treasures that belong to us to be able to sing that song through life.

"My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
My sin is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul."

Why is it that we can sing that? Why is it that our hearts well up in the recognition that that is true and those great truths belong to me personally with an utter certainty of mind? Why is it that you can sit here today with complete assurance of eternal life? It is because, beloved, Jesus Christ commissioned the apostles and we have it on the words of the apostles who were commissioned and authorized and empowered by Christ that we have this trustworthy testimony upon which we base the well-being of our eternal soul and our eternal destiny. The apostles had unique authority. They spoke from direct appointment by Christ and that, beloved, distinguishes biblical Christianity from every other religion in the world.

Now, if you're thinking all the way through it you might say, "The apostles are gone. How does their authority help us today?" The men are gone but their writings live. This book declares to us what the apostles taught from the authority of Christ himself. Beloved, in the Scriptures – oh, see the majestic gift that you hold in your hands with the Bible. In the apostolic Scriptures, the risen Christ still proclaims himself as the Savior of sinners. In the apostolic Scriptures, Jesus Christ himself feeds, sustains and directs his church. Beloved, what I want you to see is that you are not separated – oh, drink this in – you and I here in the 21st century, we are not separated by 2,000 years of time with lots of intervening traditions and things covering things up and making it difficult for us to get the truth of what Christ said. We are separated by Christ by only one degree of man, the apostles, who were his direct authority. When we read the Scriptures, we're getting it right from Christ himself because that's what he appointed and that's what we have. There is not a long generation of succession of apostles and popes and other religious leaders who falsely try to claim apostolic succession. No, we have direct access to the teaching of Christ through the teaching of the apostles, the writing of the apostles, when you open your Bible.

You're not separated from Christ by very much. It is right there because of what Christ has done in the apostles. You hold in your hands a trustworthy record about Christ. It is rooted in the authority of God, the authority of Christ is mediated through the apostles and, beloved, its authority is independent of you and your opinions and its authority is independent of me and my opinions for which I am eternally grateful. And beloved, all of this explains to you why we preach the Bible at Truth Community Fellowship. This is where the authority lies. It's not in theories of counseling. It's not in making seeker supposedly sensitive people feel good about themselves when they come on Sunday morning and walk in and feel like they, you know, this is no different than anything else that I know during the week. What a travesty! What an abomination! This is why we preach the Bible. It's because it's in the Bible that we see the authority of the apostles displayed and when we see the authority of the apostles, we see the authority of Christ, and when we see the authority of Christ, we see and hear and understand the authority of God himself. Our faith, beloved, has a sure foundation.

Let's pray together.

Father, by time, we have stretched the limits of human endurance, in subject matter we have barely scratched the service. O God, we thank you for the Scriptures which come to us through the hands of the authoritative apostles. We thank you, dear Father, for the authority of Christ so magnificently displayed while here on earth. We thank you, Father, that one day we are going to see that authoritative Christ face to face. There will no longer be the unseen, our faith will become sight, and how do we know that? We have it on the sure testimony of apostolic witness. Father, help us to honor the authority of you by honoring the authority of the Scriptures which came to us by the hands of the apostles and their close associates. And Lord, as we honor your word, do what you have promised to do which is to use your Gospel as Christ is lifted up to bring men to yourself. And Father, as we do, as we honor your word, build up your church and strengthen it as only

the Shepherd himself could do. We love you and we thank you for your wisdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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