

Authentic Humility

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. My name is James. It's nice to be with you this morning. Have you ever been deceived by something? Something that seemed authentic, but it turned out to be fake? It may have seemed flashy and exciting, but it wasn't the real deal.

I remember when Alyssa and I first visited China. We went to Beijing about 10 years ago, and we were struck by the food. It was so different to what we had grown up eating.

What we thought authentic Chinese food was, was wonderful dishes like Mongolian lamb, satay chicken, beef and black bean. These are kind of classic Chinese dishes, authentic Chinese dishes, or so I thought. These meals usually had four parts, a meat, sauce, rice, and onion.

That was the important fourth part. That's what I thought authentic Chinese food was for years. And then, we visited Beijing, and it was totally different. We saw what authentic Chinese food was. First of all, the meat was often on the bone, and you would eat the meat off the bone and spit the bone out. And that was totally new to me at the time. And at the time, I remember thinking, I know I'm in China, but this somehow doesn't seem authentic. I'm spitting bones out, you know. It's not like what I've had at home. And where's the onion? I couldn't find it anywhere.

But then I realized, this was the real stuff. That's where the authentic, awesome flavors come from. And now, Alyssa and myself and our kids, we love trying all kinds of different foods. I'm not just restricted to that, you know, very Western, satay chicken style dish, even though I still do love it. If you think also that you've got the most authentic dish, I'm happy to try it. You can bring that in for me next week. No, no hands going out? No, fine. I was deceived into thinking that I knew what real food was. We can be deceived into thinking we know what authenticity looks like.

[2 : 35] It is often far more humble than we imagine. This is the same following Jesus. There is the real and authentic good news about Jesus, that He died for us, that our sins are forgiven, that we are brought into God into God's family. And this has nothing to do with us. It is all a gift of God's grace.

But we can also be deceived. We can be distracted by flashier versions. A gospel that might seem more exciting, but is actually just fake. We've been going through the book of 2 Corinthians over the last 10 weeks or so. As we're coming to the end, Paul, he is really worried about this new little church in Corinth. We could summarize this whole letter of 2 Corinthians as, don't be deceived. This church has been deceived by preachers who have come in, people that Paul calls super-apostles. And the church in Corinth was in danger of following a different fake version of Jesus, one that was not authentic.

And Paul calls them back, and he's going to show that he was not a fake apostle, but he's the real deal. He's the real apostle to the real Jesus. And he'll show that the real deal often doesn't look flashy.

It doesn't look powerful. Paul is humble because it is God that has the power. And so today for us, we're going to consider whether we've been deceived and whether we're following the real Jesus. And we're going to make sure that we're following the real Jesus and make sure that we're not deceived by other things going on around us in our culture. So please have your Bibles open to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. It'll also be on the screen, but it's always good to have your Bible open in front of you.

[4 : 37] Paul is going to hold up his ministry, and he's going to compare it with the super-apostles. And he's not just defending himself, but he's also teaching this little church to be able to discern what an authentic teacher looks like. I've got the button somewhere. Here we go.

So first of all, we're going to see what the authentic teacher looks like. From chapter 10, verse 1, Paul doesn't come out fighting against the super-apostles as they would. He doesn't wage a war of

words. He comes as the clay jar, weak and breakable. He comes like Jesus. He comes with the humility and gentleness of Christ. That's how he will rebuke and restore. He speaks with gentleness, giving this church an opportunity to repent. He's not bringing condemnation. He comes with humility, not weakness, but patience, because he knows that God has had patience with him. And this is a bit strange, but Paul also comes begging. This is the leader, the apostle who planted this church, and he comes begging, because there are more important things than his own feelings. There are more important things than his own shame and the desire to save face. He comes begging. Chapter 10, verse 1 again, I appeal to you, I, Paul, who am timid when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I'm away, I beg that when I come, I may not have to be as bold. Paul wants them to repent. Repent, come back to the authentic Jesus, so I don't have to be bold with you. I beg you, come back to Jesus, because if they don't, Paul will come with all of God's power. Not just in the flashiness and a powerful speech of the super-apostles, but he'll come with God's divine power, which, verse 4 says, can demolish strongholds. These super-apostles had come in, and they'd looked powerful and flashy, and so the church in Corinth had judged by appearances. They saw that on the outside, these super-apostles had flashy speech. They were really persuasive, and the church judged them like judging a book by its cover. They don't see them for who they are, and so Paul, instead of just judging the book by its cover, he's going to open this book. Okay, well, let's consider who these super-apostles are, and let's compare them with a real, authentic, humble apostle. Verse 12, we do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. These super-apostles have come in, and they're comparing themselves with each other. Hey, you look great. Hey, you look great, too. Oh, you know, look, do you know what? Let's pat each other on the back. Do you know what? How about I write you a letter of recommendation, and I'll write you a letter of recommendation, and then we can give them to each other, and we will look great ourselves. Aren't we great here? They're boasting in themselves. This is not wisdom. This is just foolishness. Instead, what does an authentic apostle do? Verse 13, we, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us. Paul boasts in what God has given him.

[8 : 42] This is the church of Corinth. It's these people themselves, but these super-apostles are just boasting beyond limits. Boasting of what God has done through Paul and through others. But Paul's boast isn't about what he has done. It's about what God has done in them. And Paul closes this off. If you want to know who an authentic teacher is, an authentic teacher and apostle of God is, you should ask God himself. Verse 18, it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. Who is God commending? The church might not think it was Paul because they've been judging by appearances. Paul has suffered and he has looked weak. As we've seen, as we've gone through this book of 2 Corinthians, Paul looks weak to the eyes of the world. But that's just outward appearance.

And Paul here is identifying closely with Jesus. Christ, Jesus, is the one who was commended by God even though he died. God raised him from the dead. And Paul, his work in ministry is very much like what Jesus did. In chapter 10, verse 1, he appealed with humility like Christ. And in the second half of chapter 11, which we didn't read, Paul leans into how foolish people think he looks. And I can't help but when I read this, it just reminds me of Christ's sufferings. Paul is saying, if you think I'm a fool compared to these super apostles, guys, let me be up front. I am a much bigger fool than you realize.

You guys have got no idea how ridiculous I look. Let me be completely humble. Let me be completely up front. I will tell you how I look. Because Paul says, I know my worth because Jesus himself loves me and has given me a message to preach. And it's not because of how the world views me. And so Paul makes this big list of how foolish he is in the eyes of the world. It's not going to be on the screen. I'm going to go through it fairly quickly, but it's from the second half of chapter 11, from verse 21. Have a look in your Bibles or on your phone.

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about, I'm speaking as a fool, I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I'm out of my mind to talk like this. I am more. I have worked harder. I've been in prison more frequently. I have been flogged more severely. I've been exposed to death.

[11 : 31] Five times I received 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones. Three times I've been shipwrecked. I spent a day and a night in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move. Danger in rivers. Danger from bandits. Danger from fellow Jews. Danger from Gentiles. Danger at sea. Danger on the land. Danger from false believers. I've labored and toiled and gone without sleep. I've known hunger and thirst and have gone without food. I've been cold and naked.

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin and I do not burn inwardly?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. This is radical, authentic humility here from Paul. These are things that you would hide away.

But Paul has endured much so he could spread the gospel. And he was able to do this because his identity is fully in God. He is not worried about how the world is perceiving him.

He knew he was commended by God. And he's gone to great lengths to give this church a framework, how to judge who an authentic teacher is. What is a teacher boasting about? Are they boasting about themselves? Or the power of God to use even a weak clay jar? Are these teachers more concerned with style over substance? Are these teachers more worried about outward appearance compared to how they appear to God? Are they more worried about looking weak because they're trusting in themselves instead of trusting God? I think this is a helpful framework for us as well. Who are the people that we are following?

[13 : 43] And what is driving us to be like them? Do you know the people that you are following? Is there someone in your life that you are seeking to follow in your Christian walk?

And who are we becoming ourselves? Are we ourselves becoming authentic followers of Jesus with humility? Or are we becoming people who are just a bit fake and flashy? If we've got kids, our kids copy the way we behave. They copy the bits that we want them to copy. And they also have this wonderful knack of picking up all our bad habits too. You can tell me about all those stories later. If you have younger siblings, they often look up to older siblings and they want to emulate older siblings.

You might love the way, you know, our dear brother Nick Freestone plays the guitar. And so, you know, you see him on stage and you go, I want to play guitar like Nick. And so you start dressing like him. You know, you wear a lot of scarves like Nick does. Notice he's not wearing a scarf today. It's getting warmer. And so we emulate those that we want to be like. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, to follow me as I follow Christ. And so this is a good thing that God has given us older brothers and sisters in the faith to follow as they are following Christ. And it's good for us to be aware of who we are as people are following us too. I'm the next gen pastor here at St. Paul's, and that means I'm the leader of our kids in our youth ministries. They follow me even if they don't realize it. The things that I talk about and value, they start to talk about and value.

One of my favorite things to do, and one of my favorite parts of ministry, is working with our young preachers. Those at our Friday afternoon Kids Club Boom, those at Kids Church on a Sunday morning and Fridays. I love working with our young preachers. But it's always daunting when I give advice. You know, I'll say something like, you know, when you're preaching, you could say something like this. Let me just spitball, here's some ideas of what you could say. And then when I'm listening to them, I hear my words come out of their mouth. And it's always scary for me. Because I have this area of influence in my ministry. And so, for me, it's important that with this influence, that I have humility like Paul, and don't become overconfident like the super apostles. Imagine if I started to think like them, that it was all about me, and boasting the influence I would have in a damaging way.

I know that people are following me. I've got three kids, and they're following me, and I've got this area of influence in ministry. And so, I need to make sure that I'm walking following Jesus, so that I am commended by God. And for me, I also need to be walking following someone else.

[16 : 57] And so, one of the things I've been doing recently is, I'm seeking a new mentor, so that they can keep me accountable. Someone that is following Christ. So, two questions for us here at this point. Who are you following? And who is following you?

Who is making an appeal to you to follow Jesus, just like Paul does to this church? Who have you given permission to, to speak words into your life that says, actually, you've been deceived here, you need to come back to Jesus?

To call us out when we're running away, when we've been deceived. And are you becoming someone like Paul, who is humble, and who is aware of how God has gifted him, and someone that is worth following?

Wouldn't it be terrible if we became fake, or found out that that we love those who are preaching and presenting a fake gospel, and we'd gone off treasuring the wrong type of Jesus, and people had followed us?

The church in Corinth had been deceived, and they'd begun to follow the wrong people. Paul says, judge what God commends, not the world. Look at the ministry I've been involved in.

[18:19] It's about you, not about me. And the church needed to step back and reassess who they were following, just like we need to. Now, this is also really helpful, I think, for all of us, to see how Paul reacts to these super apostles.

He could have defended his position out of fear. You know, he is the apostle, and all of a sudden, his apostleship is being brought into question. He could have gotten really aggressive.

He could have used his power to reinforce that he was the apostle, and these guys were just fake. But he's not worried about himself, because authentic humility focuses on the gospel.

Authentic humility focuses on the good news of the gospel. From chapter 11, verse 2, Paul is so concerned for this church and where they're heading, that he doesn't want them to be deceived from what they had believed.

They had this pure devotion to Christ, but it's all changed because of these false teachers that have come in. And they've been so deceived that in verse 4, Paul can say that the Jesus they're following, well, it's a totally different Jesus.

[20:00] It's not the real Jesus. They are following a different version of Jesus. Paul says, you've been promised to God, and Paul describes it like a marriage, and he's the maid of honor.

You think about the maid of honor, you know, maybe a girlfriend, and she's got this friend, and she's introduced it to this guy, and she's so excited to see them get married. Paul is saying, he's that friend, he's the maid of honor.

He has introduced this church in Corinth to God, and he really wants them to get to the end, to see the marriage of the church to Jesus.

He doesn't want them to be deceived and to run away. And what Paul is saying is, he wants them to be ready and to wait for Jesus, but instead, they've run off with a poor, rip-off version of Jesus.

It's like every kind of romantic comedy where somebody gets left at the altar. Paul is so worried that the church of Corinth is going to leave Jesus at the altar and run off with the bad guy.

[21:07] A poor, rip-off version of Jesus. Just as the serpent deceived Eve away from following God, these teachers are inciting the church away.

Paul calls them Satan's servants in verse 14 and 15. That is incredibly strong language. In Genesis 3, the serpent deceived Eve with cunning and deceptive speech.

And these false teachers are doing the same thing. They're deceiving this church with cunning, deceptive, but very attractive preaching. But it's a fake gospel.

Now, it's not exactly clear what their different version of Jesus was, but it's likely that they have added to the requirement of faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is a really wonderful thing.

I think we can make the word faith a little bit too mystical sometimes. Faith is trusting in someone's promises. So, for Alyssa and I, when we got married 12 years ago, whatever it was, we made promises to each other.

[22:20] And so, I am faithful when I keep those promises. And Alyssa can have faith that I will trust in those promises. That's what faith is. God has made promises to us that Jesus has died for us and that our sins are cleansed.

And so, we trust in God's promise. So, we can have faith. Jesus has promised that our faith will lead to being in heaven with Him.

And so, faith looks like trusting in God's promise. But here, it seems like these super apostles have come in and added to trusting in God's promises.

Whether it was circumcision, whether it was following the law or something else. In one sense, it seems to make Christianity seem easier.

Do these things, follow these laws, cut off this skin, and it's all taken care of. But Paul is so angry because it destroys what is good about the gospel.

[23 : 25] That God's love for us is a gift. One that cannot be earned. Knowing Jesus Himself is so important to Paul for this church, he doesn't even want to be a financial burden on them.

From verse 12, I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground out from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us.

Paul's saying, these super apostles are going to come in, they're going to take your money, and they're going to give you a rip-off, poor man's version of Jesus. But I'm going to come in, I'm not going to, I don't want to take your money.

I've got a church in Macedonia that's supporting me. All because he wants to give them Jesus.

There were false teachers then that this church needed to be aware of, but the reality is, even for us today, there are different versions of Jesus out there.

You'll encounter people knocking on your door, wanting to tell you about a different version of Jesus. Jesus. You'll hear other versions of the Son of God.

[24 : 33] And so, I've got four questions for us to help us identify whether someone is presenting an authentic Jesus, or whether they've got a totally different view of Jesus.

So, four quick questions for us. The first question to help us identify whether someone is presenting a fake Jesus, is, what is their source? is, anything other than the Bible is not reliable.

2 Peter 1 says that we don't follow cleverly invented stories about Jesus, but we follow eyewitness truth. Someone might come and say, I've had a dream about Jesus, and so you need to follow this instead.

But if it's not consistent with the Bible, the Jesus who is presented to us in the Bible, we don't follow that Jesus. The second question, what is the message?

For the authentic teacher, Jesus is at the very centre of the good news, of the whole Bible. For the fake teacher, Jesus will be there, but He'll often be over to one side.

[25 : 43] The message will be about something else, and they'll just plug Jesus in. The message might be about making you really great. Do you know what? If you follow Jesus, you can be the best version of you, and it's all about you, and let's make you great, and let's get you as much money as you can, and let's make you successful.

And we hear that, we can think, yes, I want to, do you know what? I would like money, and I would like to be successful, and Jesus is going to help me do that. But the problem with that gospel is, that is not good news about Jesus, that is good news about to make us great, but Jesus himself is great, and we get to follow him.

The third question to help us to understand whether it's a real Jesus or a fake Jesus, is what is the character that is produced? True humility will, true teachers will seek humility, holiness, and gentleness, whereas these super apostles have been boasting outside, themselves.

And so, what is the character that is produced for us? Lastly, what is the reason for the message?

The authentic teacher asks, what does God have to say in his word to me today?

The fake teacher asks, well, what do people want to hear? What is flashy? What's going to get in a big crowd today? What's going to make this church in Corinth grow?

[27 : 12] And then I'll add a Bible verse onto that or I'll stick Jesus in there somewhere. No, no, no, what does God have to say to us today? We should not be naive to think that everyone who says that they follow Jesus is following the same Jesus.

But we can be prepared to understand who Jesus is from the Bible and to question other people's view of Jesus. It's not just teachers that can deceive us away from following Jesus.

This church in Corinth had confused outward appearance with God's blessing. Paul has corrected their view and shown what a humble and authentic apostle looks like.

But we can be deceived too from our culture around us. We can think a certain picture of success is God's blessing. So, you know, this is what it looks like to be a Christian.

Or this is what it looks like to be a successful church based on how our culture defines success. We can think, you know, I should be this good by now.

[28 : 23] If I'm a Christian, well, I shouldn't really sin in all of these ways. I should be this mature.

I've been a Christian for 15 years, so I should look like this. And, you know, when I share my feelings and my problems and my issues with my non-Christians, they're always like, why aren't you a Christian?

Shouldn't you be better than this? I shouldn't have to deal with this sin. And the church, well, our society and our culture defines success by size and numbers.

And so, shouldn't my ministry that I'm involved in be bigger? Shouldn't my church be bigger? Shouldn't my ministry be the best? Because that's what success looks like in our culture. But we can judge by appearances and not how God judges. We need to be aware of how our culture defines success and make sure that we don't bring that into the church. Remember, this church had super apostles that wanted to look powerful, but Paul looked weak. I think a common way we can be deceived is thinking that success looks like a size of a church. [29 : 40] We judge so often based on size and turnover in companies and in business that we can judge by outward appearance as if this was the best way to test whether something was a faithful, authentic church that's faithful to God's call to make disciples.

disciples. We have this temptation to jump on a treadmill of competition and comparison over the size of a ministry or over the size of a church, thinking that bigger must always equal better, or that a church of this size, maybe a smaller church is better, and so we shouldn't change. But a small church can be healthy following an authentic Jesus, but a small church can also be deceived. A big church can be healthy following God, but a big church can be deceived too. I've loved seeing some of the markers of a healthy church here recently. Seeing all the stories of people's lives, how they've been changed by Jesus. In our social media, on Facebook, and in the weekly communication. I've loved seeing what God has been doing. I've loved seeing that here, we are not pursuing a Jesus to make ourselves look great, but because Jesus is wonderful.

[31 : 10] He is truly great and generous. And there is truly nothing better to do than to treasure Him. And that is what success looks like as a church.

When we joyfully get to treasure God together. What we have been doing this morning, that is what a successful church looks like. When we are doing that more and more each week, instead of treasuring ourselves more.

I've been reading about the history of the church in China recently. And I've been reading about the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s.

Has anybody heard of the Taiping Rebellion that happened in China in the 1850s? There's one hand up in the corner. Thank you. Oh, there's a couple. Wonderful. Thank you. It was led by a man named Hong Xiuquan.

And he received a pamphlet with information about Christianity from the Bible that had been spread around by Christian missionaries in China. And while it seemed like he became a Christian and wanted to see China become a Christian country, he was following a different version of Jesus and a different version of the gospel.

[32 : 30] He believed that God wanted him to found a heavenly kingdom on earth. He argued that Jesus wasn't equal with God. You had God and then you had Jesus and then he was next.

This man, Hong Xiuquan. And he had dreams and visions that he was to slay demons and lead God's kingdom. He had been deceived and had a twisted version of the good news of the gospel. And he'd made it all about himself. He believed dreams which contradicted the Bible, which set himself at the top. Now, we might not think that we will be deceived into thinking that we need to lead a rebellion here in Chatswood.

Is anybody wanting to lead a rebellion in Chatswood? Maybe not. But we can be deceived into thinking that Christianity is all about me. Maybe we won't make ourselves just a rung lower than Jesus, but we will make ourselves think that God's purpose is for me to look good.

We place ourselves over God's word and we ignore the parts that we don't like. Instead of humility and accountability, we'll fool ourselves into thinking that we are okay on our own.

[33 : 54] We focus on our own little kingdom in Sydney instead of on God's kingdom. Let's be a church that is humble, knowing that God has chosen to love us, not because we are attractive, but because He is wonderfully generous.

Let's be people who are willing to encourage and correct others and be people who are corrected ourselves. Let's be people who long to follow Jesus and not be deceived into following a fake Jesus that makes it all about us, but the very Son of God who reveals His Father to us.

Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, I thank You that You are indeed a good and generous God, that You sent Your Son who lived with utmost humility, who went to the cross with humility, who suffered even though He is God, who is immensely powerful.

God, we thank You that Your Son suffered for us and that You have raised Him from the dead so that we can be brought into Your family. Heavenly Father, we ask that You would help us to be people who are not deceived into following a different version of Jesus.

Give us people who are speaking to our lives to keep us accountable and Father, help us be aware that we are all, regardless of age, people who have others following us.

[35 : 37] Help us to be like Paul, to follow You as other people follow us, so that You would have all of the glory. God, we pray this in Your Son's name.

Amen. One way that we show our need and our humility for Jesus, towards Jesus, is with the physical sign of the Lord's Supper or Communion.

This is a regular time in church where we eat bread and drink juice to remember that Jesus' body and blood has been given and poured out for us.

And so we're going to celebrate communion today. If you've got children with you, please, this is our family meal together. If you would like them to partake in the wafer and the juice, please do that.

And please, children, I want to encourage you to reflect on your hearts, kids. The gospel isn't just for adults, it is for all of us. And we all need to come before God in humility, dependent on God.

[36 : 40] So we're going to say the words of a confession on the screen together. Kids, you can say this too. Let's say this loudly, knowing that we need God's help.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, you have loved us with a love that lasts forever. But we have often gone our own way and rejected your will for our lives.

We are sorry for our sins, and turn away from them. For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us, and change us.

By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you and to please you in every way. For the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. In 1 John, it says that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, but that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[37 : 49] As a way of showing our allegiance to Jesus and our dependence on him, we come to the Lord's Supper, where we will eat and drink bread and juice together, remembering his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus, who on the night he was betrayed, he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and he gave it to his disciples, saying, take and eat. This is my body which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. After supper, he took the cup, and again giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying, drink this, all of you.

This is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

And so we're going to celebrate this now. I'd like to invite our helpers to come and hand out the juice and the bread. Take this and hold on to this. We're going to all eat and drink together.

[38 : 50] Kids, don't eat it just yet. Hold on to it. Don't crack the cups. They're fragile. And as you take this moment, just spend a moment meditating on how God has been good to you.

Amen.