

# Authentic Christianity – Part 1

*1 John*

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 1:1-4  
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Good morning, church. It is my privilege today to not only welcome you but encourage you to turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 John. Now, as you're turning to the book of 1 John, I want to do something today that I think is pretty important on day 1 of our relationship together and that's to go over a couple of the ground rules.

Ground rule #1: my opinion doesn't matter. It really doesn't. In fact, the Bible says in John 1, when being addressed, John the Baptist made this statement in verse 23, he said, "All I am is a voice in the wilderness," and that's who I am standing before you today. My simple role, I am a conduit between your ears and the word of God so my opinion, what Jeff thinks, what Jeff prefers, does not really matter, it's what does God think and what does God prefer.

Ground rule #2: your opinion doesn't matter either because, again, it doesn't matter whose name you attach to the human being. I've got some advice for you that was given to me years ago: there is a God and you are not him. So the ground rule simply is this, that whatever we think, whatever we prefer, whatever happens, we ought to gauge and allow to be our guide the word of God, not opinion, not in a poll, not any type of human element that is out there. And that's what's gotten our world in trouble in the secular realm, it's also gotten our world in trouble on the sacred realm. Today we think that we're smart. We believe as humanity that somehow we have evolved, so to speak, but what we're going to see today is that the people of God, even the church of Jesus Christ, we struggle with the same issues they struggled with 2,000 years ago.

We pride ourselves on our education, we pride ourselves on our enlightenment, on our technology, but we're going to see in just a moment from the book of 1 John that we actually struggle with the same things they struggled with then and really kind of the umbrella that we can place that under is the title that I've given this message series entitled "Authentic Christianity." In other words, there are all kinds of opinions, all kinds of ideals. Everybody's got a perspective in life, if you don't believe me, just go on social media. Everybody has an opinion. Everybody wants to put their 2 cents in but it doesn't matter what they say, what I say or what you say, what does God say that authentic Christianity is and I believe right now in our communities and in our culture, what better time to recapture what the Bible says authentic Christianity is. 2,000 years ago, the

original listeners, the original hearers of what we're about to read were in a world where there were all kinds of opinions, all kinds of ideas, and it's almost as if the Lord spoke directly and said, "Here is what it really looks like. Here is who I am and here is what you need to be."

So I want to encourage you today as you turn to the book of 1 John, four very simple verses that we're going to look at and then we're going to break down. It says,

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Now in just these very simple verses, the beginning of this study of what authentic Christianity really looks like, the first thing that is addressed is the person of Jesus Christ. You understand that the term "Christianity" is an elongation of the word Christ. If you're going to get authentic Christianity, you'd better have an authentic Jesus. If you want real Christianity, you need a real Jesus and so the first thing we need to understand is who is Jesus. Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "Well, I learned that in second grade Sunday school. I've got this down. Let's move on to point 2." Not so fast. Did you know that for the first 300 years of Christianity, the church of Jesus Christ did not always get along. That's right. We had debates. We had discussions and much like today, we had disagreements. Now, today when you talk about churches and we joke about their arguments, they argue what color the carpet should be, what color the paint should be, for the first 300 years, we discussed who is Jesus. If you can't get Jesus right, you're not going to get the church right and so they began to discuss and to study and they were all kinds of opinions but what we discover from verse 1 is that Jesus is timeless.

It says, "That which was from the beginning." You know, in the early stages of Christianity, there were voices that raised up; there were people who came in and they began to not believe that verse. In fact, it became formalized under a man by the name of Arias, a belief system known as Arianism that taught that there was a time where Jesus was not. It's a simple belief that says that God is eternal and God is immortal but Jesus is not. Now, mind you, that 1 Timothy 6 says Jesus is immortal and John 3 says Jesus is eternal, but these group of people said, "No, we believe that there was a time in history where God created whom we know as Jesus to save us from our sins. He's not eternal but he was brought forth." You say, "Well, how do we see this today?" What happens quite regularly in your world whether you recognize it or not, Saturday morning, you wake up, you get a cup of coffee, you go out into the world and there is a sedan that has pulled up in your neighborhood. Out of this sedan pops three or four people, very conservatively dressed, of sweet disposition. They have in one hand a copy of a different translation of the New Testament, in the other hand, a set of magazines. They want to pull you from the

church that you attend to the hall in which their kingdom is celebrated. They believe that Jesus has not always been and that's a battle we've been facing for 2,000 years.

But this timelessness of Jesus, it's not just this Arianism belief, it's also an idea known as adoptionism. You say, "What is adoptionism?" Adoptionism was this formalized belief that there was a time where Jesus was much like you and I. I mean, we know that he was in the flesh; we know he walked about, but that he was susceptible to all the struggles of humanity and the pitfalls of humanity, but at some point in history, God decided, "I want to save humanity and I need a volunteer." So Jesus raised the proverbial hand and said, "Here I am. Send me. I'll be the volunteer." And from that point forward he became sinless, and from that point forward, he became qualified to offer himself for humanity's sins. You say, "Well, how do we see this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century today?" Same story, different verse. It's not in a car but on any given morning, you get a cup of coffee, you walk out, and there's not a car parked in your neighborhood but there's a set of bicycles. Two young men, 18, 19 years of age who want to communicate that there is another testament of Jesus Christ; that there's information that somehow has been left out and we don't have privilege to. But what we discover is that basically it's the same thought of 2,000 years ago, it's just been repackaged.

The Bible makes it very clear that Jesus is timeless. He has always been and he always will be and if you don't get the right Jesus, you can't have the right Christianity. But not only is he timeless, there in verse 1 it begins to say that he is tangible. It says, "that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon, our hands have actually handled, the Word of life." This timeless, eternal, immortal Jesus wasn't some distant being but right in our midst. In fact, he was in flesh. You know, one of the great heresies of the last 2,000 years comes under the formal title of Gnosticism. It is the belief or ideology that Jesus because he was sinless and Jesus because he was perfect, could not have really been in flesh because flesh messes up and so therefore he was a spirit that looked like flesh and almost like a ghost-like mentality. You know, it's interesting that a few pages over in your Bible in the book of 2 John 1:7 it says, "Do you want to know who an antichrist is? An antichrist is someone who denies that Jesus came in the flesh." He manifested. They heard. They saw.

Now think about this: when Jesus came on the scene, when he was manifested in the flesh, humanity heard things they had never heard before from anybody. In fact, the very first sermon of Jesus found in Luke 4, it's on the Sabbath day, it's in the synagogue. He did what most Rabbis did, he walked in, he opened up the scroll and he read. He read from Isaiah 61:1-2 where it says that he came to preach the Gospel to the poor. He came to break the chains of those that are bound. That's not unusual. They had heard that before. In fact, if you were a regular synagogue attendee, you had probably heard that passage dozens of times. It's what they heard when he put the scroll down that was different. He said, "Today, this has been fulfilled in your midst." He literally told them, "I'm who this passage is talking about. I am God in the flesh." They were so excited about what he had to say that they tried to drive him off a cliff and kill him. They were so thrilled because they had never heard this before.

You go to the Gospel of Mark 2, Jesus was gaining a crowd. In fact, the multitudes that wanted to hear him were so great in number they couldn't put everybody in the house and there was a group of friends who had another friend that wasn't doing real well and they wanted Jesus to heal him because they had heard he could heal people, and so they cut a hole in the roof, they lowered him to the ground and Jesus said, "Pick up your mat and walk." Well, they had heard that before. There were lots of people who claimed to be healers. There were lots of people who claimed the ability to heal the sick and the lame, it's the other statement he made that they had never heard before. He looked at him in the eyes and he said, "Sir, today your sins are forgiven." They had never heard anybody claim to be God, much less say that they could heal and forgive their sins.

But then in the Gospel of John 11, we meet a guy who goes by the first name Lazarus. You may be familiar with him. He's one of the guys in the Bible that was like really, really dead. You say, "Well, isn't dead dead? How do you get really, really dead?" Well, in John 11, his sisters tell Jesus that, "Behold, he stinketh." Now, if you stinketh, you're really dead, right? This guy has been in the tomb for four days. They had never heard anybody call somebody's name out and that which was dead, really dead, that which stinketh, that which still had the grave clothes on, walk on and breathing just as well as everybody else watching. By the way, just as an aside: have you ever thought what would have happened if Jesus hadn't called out Lazarus by his name? What if he had just said, "Come forth!" It would have been the original zombie apocalypse. I mean, they would have just come forth. I mean, there was everybody.

They never heard those things, but it says not just what they heard, it says what we have seen. You see, they saw at the hands of Jesus things they never dreamed they would see. For the apostles, for those 12, one night they're in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, an area they were very used to, an area that was very commonplace to them, but there was a storm that arose that was so violent even these expert professional fishermen thought they're going to die. They wake Jesus up and say, "Master, do you not care that we perish, that we're going to die?" Jesus puts his hand up and says, "Peace, be still," and the storm is gone.

This same Jesus, that same Sea of Galilee, one night those guys are out rowing across and he's walking on the water. They had never seen anybody walk on water. They had never seen anybody calm a storm.

One day after three days of teaching and preaching, a group of about 5,000 men, by the way, the Bible counts the men, not the women, the children or in our case, even the dogs that would have shown up so 20-25,000 people. They say, "Do you know what, Jesus? These guys are hungry. We don't have enough money to feed them. There's not enough restaurants around. What are we going to do?" He gets a little boy's sack lunch, he prays over it, feeds 20-25,000 people and has 12 baskets left over.

They had never seen this before. They had never heard. And then what does it say? That which we have handled. You would expect that someone with those abilities, if you'll allow me to say it in secular terms, those powers, you would think that they would keep

their distance. You would think that they would be at arm's length. You would think that they would not have much interaction with them individually but look at the life of Jesus. When the disciples said, "Get all those people away," what did Jesus say? "Bring the children unto me."

When he was on his way to Jerusalem to what we know as the cross event, there was a beggar on the side of the road by the name of Bartimaeus who was calling out to him. The disciples said, "Get away from him." Jesus said, "Bring him to me." In fact, the disciple known as John the beloved in the last chapter of the book of John says that when they would eat their meals, he would lean up against Jesus at the table. They heard things they had never heard. They saw things they had never seen. And they were actually able to handle him.

Now, that's on that side. You say, "Pastor, what do you mean 'that side'?" You see, there is an event in the life of Jesus that should and does change everything. In 1 Corinthians 15:17 it says, "If Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, our faith is in vain." In other words, if the tomb is not empty, it doesn't matter how many people he fed. If the tomb is not empty, it doesn't matter how many people he healed. And if the tomb is not empty, it doesn't even matter if he walked on water. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15 that over 500 people tangibly saw his resurrected body.

There is testimony of the sacred, testimony of the secular. But a few years ago, my wife and I had the privilege of observing the tangibility of the resurrection. We had the privilege like many of y'all have had the privilege of, we went to the Middle East. We went to the Holy Land on a tour of Israel and we did as most tourists. We were there for 8 to 12 days, I believe our tour was right at 10, and you typically begin in the Galilee area. You go up into Nazareth and you see where Jesus was raised. You go on the Sea of Galilee and see where the apostles fished. You go to the very cities and see where he preached. But every tour, in fact every person who goes to the Holy Land as a believer wants to get to one place and that's Jerusalem, right? Because that's where it all happened, specifically the crucifixion and the resurrection. And on most tours of Israel, in fact the one that we were a part of, they wait until the last day. I mean, we want to end this thing right. I mean, this is the great climactic event. The last day, last event, they take you to Joseph's tomb, Joseph of Arimathea, according to John 19, who is the one who allowed Jesus to use the tomb of his family that had never been laid in before. You've waited your whole life to get there. You've waited 10 days to get to the tomb and then you've waited in line hours to be the next person through. It's just a small little hole in the side and it's about a 10x10 foot room.

So there is Tracy and I. We had waited our lives, waited the ten days, waited all day. We finally get to that moment where we're going to step into the room that can either guarantee or change everything about our lives. If this room has a corpse in it, we're in trouble. If this room has a corpse in it, everything we believe is wrong. If this room has a corpse in it, can I be honest, I've got to get a different job because everything changes. We walk into this little 10x10 foot area and I know we were only there for a few moments, a few seconds. I don't know if it was like Acts 10 where Peter gets in a trance

about to go visit Cornelius. I don't know what it is, all I know is in those brief moments, every Bible story I had ever heard, every sermon I had ever preached, it's like everything was going through my mind at one time and I was just kind of in a proverbial fog; I was just kind of letting it all soak in until all of a sudden there I am in this deep spiritual moment when my wife gives me a love tap in the empty tomb of Jesus. You say, "Pastor, what's a love tap?" You know what a love tap is, it's when someone taps you on the backside. For those of you that are younger, we call it a drive-by. I'm in the tomb of Jesus, now it just shows our marriage is good. That's a good sign. She gives me a little love tap and it's not the love tap that matters, it's the most profound theological statement that I may have ever heard in my life that came out of her mouth in that moment. Here we are in that empty tomb, here we are about to depart from, it's all kind of soaking in and she gives me the proverbial love tap and here's what she says, she says, "Let's get out of here. He's not here anymore."

I don't think a theologian could have said it any better. "Let's get out of here. He's not here anymore." And therein lies the tangibility of authentic Christianity. The tomb is empty. If there is still a corpse there, we need to go back to the drawing board. If there's still a corpse there, we've got issues we've got to deal with. But what we see is what verses 1 and 2 say, not only he that was from the beginning, timeless, but that which we've heard, we've seen, we have handled. It's tangible. Well, you see, if you get the person of Jesus right, then that will naturally produce a byproduct. After all, it is the seed that is placed in the ground that ultimately grows the tree that bears the fruit thereof because the fruit always testifies to the root.

I want you to notice what happens here: the product or the products that are revealed. Beginning in verse 2, "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Do you notice how many personal pronouns are being used? It says that we have experienced this. It's something that's a part of us. It's something that you are experiencing as well. You see, one of the natural byproducts of understanding who the real Jesus is, is a testimony of a real life-changing event with Jesus Christ. Let me be very clear, church: Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. Christianity is not about buildings and geography, it's about the person of Jesus Christ and when you've met Jesus, it changes everything. It changed these guys' lives. Now with the exception of obviously Judas who is a different story and a different sermon for a different day, the other 11 apostles, and if you want to throw Paul in there as well, all these guys lost their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Now the Apostle John was left on the island of Patmos to die and to starve to death, and between you and I, would prefer some of the other methodologies to that one, but nonetheless, everything changed. Do you find it interesting that those early apostles did not renounce the person of Jesus even when their life was literally put to the stake? It changes everything. Now we're used to what we call these radical testimonies, this individual who has lived for the world, they've held hands with the devil, they meet Jesus and everything changes, but I want to declare to you today that every transformation is a radical one, that every salvation is a radical one, and oftentimes we

see it through human eyes and not through God's eyes. It says, "that which we have seen."

You know, a couple of years ago I got a knock on my office door early in the morning, a gentleman who I was not surprised to see at church had stopped by during the week. He was one of those individuals that any time we had anything at church, you weren't surprised to see him. He was there when the doors were open. He was in Sunday School. His kids were part of the children's ministry. In fact, he was one of the ushers of one of our services. He was just one of those guys but he had stopped by and something was different. He looked different. He had a serious countenance about him. We small-talked for a little bit and then I said, "What can I do to help you?" He said, "Jeff, you and I need to have a talk." I said, "What is it, friend?" He said, "You know this Jesus you're always talking about, this Jesus you're always preaching and teaching about?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I don't think I know him." I said, "What do you mean you don't know him? I mean, you're at church every time the doors are opened, you're an usher, you're this, you're that." And he began to explain to me that the only reason he came to church was to make his wife happy. That was it. Now, guys, let's just be honest: happy wife, happy life, happy husband, nobody cares. We know how that works, but he showed up only because it would make her happy. He brought his kids because he wanted them to have good quality friends. He went to Sunday School because he liked people and he is Baptist and so therefore we eat a lot and he enjoyed to eat. And he was an usher because he just generally had a servant's heart and wanted to help. The problem is he had all the trappings of Christianity but he didn't know Jesus.

That day in my office with tears streaming down his face, he did what myself and many other people in this room have done, he acknowledged he had a sin problem. He acknowledged that he had messed up. He believed that Jesus Christ was the only answer and according to Romans 10:9-10, he didn't just believe it in his heart, he confessed it and that confession was made unto salvation. This man didn't quit coming to church, in fact, his attendance didn't get any better because it couldn't have gotten any better. The same church, same Sunday School, same usher, same kids, same everything, do you want me to tell you what the difference was? The countenance on his face. Something changed.

I've got news for you, church, it's not a sin to smile. It's not a sin. You know, oftentimes, "I'm gonna go to church. Oh, I've gotta do this. Oh, I've gotta serve the Lord." You know, when you meet the Lord, it changes everything and it changed his life and it changed his marriage. He said, "I thought everything was going good." No, no, everything was just surface. Do you remember what Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 23? He said, "You're white-washed tombs." It looks good on the outside but it's rotten on the inside and when he met Jesus, it changed everything. Do you know what the byproduct is of knowing who the real Jesus is? You have a real life-changing experience with him.

But there's a second product: it says that we have this fellowship with one another because we have a fellowship with the Father. It's not only the testimony of a changed life, it's the entity known as the church. Now, I did not say organization, did I? I said the entity, the organism known as the church. It says we have fellowship with one another.

Now, I have become convinced throughout the years that humanity is desperately in need of fellowship. In other words, we want to be around each other; we want to engage with each other; we want to be around. Why is it that we reserved the worst punishment for the worst criminals, a place called solitary confinement? Why? Because humanity wants to be together. Allow me to demonstrate. You take a young child who maybe is raised without a father, without a mother, without both, in an environment that stresses all the wrong things and doesn't encourage any of the right things. They naturally gravitate toward others who are bitter and angry and typically they find themselves in what oftentimes we call a gang, correct? They want to have fellowship as well. They don't want to be isolated, they just want to rub shoulders with people who feel about life the way they do. On the other side of the equation, young 18 and 19 year old boys and girls, much like myself and even my wife, there comes this time where they go off to college, they're away from mom and dad, they're away from the friends they grew up with; they don't know anybody, nobody knows them. So they naturally gravitate toward fraternities and sororities. They want to have fellowship. But as we grow older adults, we have car clubs, golf clubs, we have chess clubs, we have coffee clubs. Why? Because down deep we want to fellowship one with another. We want to enjoy each other.

It's what it says. We have fellowship with one another. Here's the difference in the church: why? Because we have fellowship with the Father. Young people who get involved in gangs have fellowship with one another because they're angry with somebody else. Young people who join fraternities and sororities have fellowship with one another because they want to have family away from home. Adults who want whatever fellowship to have, it's because of common interests or hobbies. Here is the difference: the church, it's not just a horizontal relationship, it is a vertical relationship. We have fellowship with one another because we have fellowship with the Father. Listen to me: the church isn't either/or, it is both/and. And it says one of the natural byproducts is not just a changed life but what we know as the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, here's where the problems come in. We've talked about the real Jesus. We've talked about the products that come from knowing the real Jesus. But there are some problems that can arise, in fact, they are found in verse 4 because he encourages them that, "we write this that your joy may be full." Is it possible that they weren't having joy and it wasn't full? He says, "You need joy and you need it to be full." What are the problems that can arise themselves? Problem #1 is this: a life that is full of contradictions. You know what a contradiction is, it's two opposing things. By the way, this is not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is when you say one thing and you live another. A contradiction is when two opposing lifestyles try to occupy the same space. Contradiction. It says that "your joy." You know, in Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness. In other words, there are some natural fruit that ought to be borne from the root of Jesus Christ in our life.

What are the contradictions? Let me share with you who I believe are the two most miserable people in any church environment. Here we go. Hopefully this is not you but here we go. Miserable person #1 is somebody who knows Jesus, they've been saved, they know the blood of Jesus has saved them, they are seated in the heavenlies and they're

going to be with him for all of eternity, but they're not plugged into other believers. They're not a part of a church or part of a Sunday School or a Bible study. They're in a part of what we call Lone Ranger Christianity and, folks, I've heard all the excuses but excuses are like armpits, you may have them but you know they stink. Let me tell you what those excuses are. They say, "Well, I don't want to be a part of the church because they're more messed up than I am." Yeah, you're absolutely right. In fact, I'm going to give you some great advice: you ever find a perfect church, don't join it, you're going to mess it up. But they've got the vertical but they don't have the horizontal. Do you know what happens? They're miserable. They're absolutely miserable because they may have a connection to the Father through Jesus Christ but we were designed to have fellowship with one another as well. If you only have the vertical, it's a contradictory life.

On the other side of the coin, somebody who has the horizontal like the man I mentioned earlier, but doesn't have the vertical. You know, this may be my first Sunday with you, but I want to share with you what I consider the scariest passage in all the Bible. It's found in Matthew 7. Jesus is concluding what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. He began in chapter 5 with, "Blessed are these and blessed are those." He's about to end with there are two ways that you can build your life, either on the Rock of Christ Jesus or the shifting sand of anything else. Right before he gives that analogy of him being the Rock, he says, "And on that day," speaking of the judgment day, that last day, "that the door of heaven will be shut and there will be people that proverbially knock on the door and say, 'Hey, why didn't we get in?'" I doubt they're going to be that happy when they say it. They're probably pretty mad when they say it. "Why didn't we get in? We prophesied in your name. We taught in your name. We did great works in your name. What's the problem here?" Do you remember what Jesus says? "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." 21<sup>st</sup> century jargon, "But I showed up and I gave. What's the problem?" Jesus says, "It's not about a building and it's not about the money, it's not about the grounds, it's not about the carpet, it's not about the paint, it's about him." And so one of the contradictions that we can have is either a vertical relationship with the Father but no communication with other believers or we're hanging out with a bunch of believers and we don't know the Father. It's a life of contradiction.

But he says he doesn't just want us to have joy, he wants us to have joy that is full, to the extent. In other words, one of the problems that can creep up in our lives is not just the problem of contradiction, but a life that doesn't have consistency. Now consistency simply means same today as tomorrow and vice versa as yesterday. In other words, it's the same all the time. One of the things that I want to challenge you, church, is simply this: it's one thing to be the church on Sunday, it's a whole other ballgame to be the church on Monday. Let me give you a statistic: in the United States of America this year just like last year and all other years, the number of people who will come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior in this building is about 3%. The overwhelming majority of people who come to know Jesus don't meet him "in church," they meet him on the tailgate, they meet him at a ball practice, they meet him at the office, they meet him at school. Why? Because you spend more time out there than you do in here and we need to be people who are not just the church on Sunday but are saying, "I'm willing to be the church on Monday."

Let me share with you as a senior pastor, let me share with you where I do my greatest ministry. I know what some of you are thinking, "Well, when you preach, right?" No. "When people come and meet with you in your office." Absolutely not. The greatest ministry that I am a part of is when I'm sitting on a tailgate or at one of my kids' ball practices. Why? Because people want to talk and people want to share and people want to discuss their problems. You know what I find just thrilling is when people get in this long conversation with me and then they find out I'm a pastor. Oops, you already played your card. Here we go.

In other words, a consistent life, that our joy may be full. In other words, I love Sunday and this is great but how about we, the church that meets here on Sunday, also how about we be the church on Monday, and the church on Tuesday, and the church on Wednesday, the church on Thursday and Friday and Saturday? Do you know what we might just see, we might see what happened in the book of Acts 17, it said they turned the world upside down. The world is not going to be turned upside down just in this room in a brief time one time a week, the world is turned upside down when the people that gather in this room then go outside of this room and they live just as much for Jesus out there as they claim to live for him in here.

You see, authentic Christianity is built on the person of Jesus, it has the byproduct of a relationship with him joined with other believers in what we know as the church, who decides that not only are we going to have a life that is non-contradictory but a life that's just as relevant out there as it is in here.

Would you do me a favor and would you bow your heads and pray with me for just a moment as we prepare for our time of invitation? Before I pray over us, allow me just to share with you for just a moment. You know, maybe you're that person today that you say, "Pastor, boy you hit the nail on the head. I know how to do this thing on Sunday but Monday is a struggle and Tuesday is a struggle, the rest of the week is a struggle. My home is a struggle. My job is a struggle." Maybe in just a moment after I pray and we have our time of invitation, maybe the aisle you need to walk isn't the aisle forward, maybe it's the aisle backwards. What I mean by that is maybe you don't need to make another decision in this building as much as you need to make a decision at your office, and a decision in your home to be different there like you proclaim to be in here. Or maybe you're one of those persons, purposefully or not, that you find yourself swimming in the sea of contradiction. Maybe you've been saved for years or decades, maybe you just haven't found a place to plug in, maybe you just haven't found a group to say, "That's where I need to grow spiritually." Let me share with you honestly: if I were living in this area and I wanted to be a part of any church, this is the church I'd be a part of. So maybe, maybe just maybe you're that person today who says, "Well, I'm already saved, I'm already born again. I've got the vertical down, I need to get the horizontal down today." Or maybe just maybe you're here today for the first time or the 10,000<sup>th</sup> time and maybe the Lord showed you something, maybe he showed you that you don't know him, but here's the great news: you can. You see, I've got great news for you, church, it doesn't matter what you brought in with you, what you drug in with you, or what your life looked

like before, in or during this hour, there is nothing that you've done or anything or place you've been or whom you've been with that voids out the opportunity for Jesus Christ in his grace and mercy to forgive you and to save you.

And maybe you're that person today, maybe you're that person that says, "Man, I would love a transformed life. I would love to be forgiven." Here's the good news: it can happen right now. All you need to do is have a very serious conversation with the Lord. Now, I know we technically call it prayer. You don't have to pray out loud. You don't have to even say the same words that I would say, but maybe your conversation with God might go a little something like this: God, today I just want to admit what you already know, I'm the problem. I'm the one who is messed up. I'm the one who has sinned. I understand today I can't save myself and nobody else can save me, only Jesus Christ has the ability to forgive me and to save me. So, God, right here, right now in this moment, that's what I'm praying. I'm praying that Jesus would come in and save me; that his blood would wash over me and that I would be cleansed by him. God, I come this morning and I don't know a whole lot but I do know this: I know that I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can cure. So I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you.

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in just a moment I'm going to pray over us and after I say amen, we're going to stand and we're going to sing together an old classic song entitled, "Just As I Am." Don't think of this time as the way you wish you were or that you can be, just come and let the Lord clean up your life.

*Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, how grateful we are that you're a God of second chances. In fact, Lord, there's probably somebody here today that would say, "Second chances, how about the God of infinite chances?" How good it is to know that it doesn't matter how long or how far we've run from you, that your arms are open, that your grace is willing to receive us if we would come to you. Lord, whatever decision we need to make today, God, I pray that whatever you have written on the tablet of our heart would be manifested in our feet. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as Bryan leads us in "Just As I Am." Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.