

## I

### THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying: All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."*—MATTHEW XXVIII, 18, 19.

THE one word in this passage which immediately calls attention to itself is the word "authority." Said Jesus: "All *authority* is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This word calls attention to itself for the reason that the age we live in is resentful of authority. In the realm of science and of philosophy there can, of course, be no authority except the authority of truth. In the political world men are resentful of authority. And this is especially true in the religious world. As some one has put it: "The age stands in doubt; its coat-of-arms is a question mark rampant above three bishops dormant, and its motto is 'Query.'" And yet, if religion speaks to men at all, it must needs speak with authority. If religion does not speak with authority, then it does not speak at all. For religion cannot hold any second place in a man's life; religion is not something that is superficial or accidental. It is essential and vital. It is a matter of great interest, then,—indeed, a matter of supreme interest,—to us, that here stands One in the midst of time who says: "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

<sup>1</sup> Baccalaureate sermon of the fourth annual commencement of the Rice Institute, preached by Edwin DuBose Mouzon, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Dallas, Texas, in the academic court, at nine o'clock Sunday morning, June 8, 1919.

The question has often been asked, "Where lies the seat of authority in religion?" There have been men who said, "It lies in the *church*. When the church speaks men must hear. The church speaks with authority." And that has appealed to men of a certain type of mind. There are men who must have external authority or they do not know what to think or what to do. It was when John Henry Newman was in that frame of mind that he wrote his beautiful hymn, which we often sing, putting our own meaning into it:

Lead, kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom,  
 Lead thou me on!  
 The night is dark and I am far from home;  
 Lead thou me on!

But unfortunately his prayer was not exactly answered, and he found rest in the surrender of his intellect to the church. Now, whenever any institution calls upon a man to surrender his intellect and his conscience, that institution has done its uttermost and its best to damn him for time and for eternity.

There have been others—and it was in obedience to a natural instinct that they did so—who have said, "No, the final authority is not in the church; *the final authority is in the Bible!* The Bible, the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants." And so, in place of one infallible Pope, they have put an infallible Book as an external authority. Now the authority of the Bible is the authority of the truth it contains; and any man profoundly spiritual can desire no other authority in addition to the authority of the immediate appeal of the truth.

This morning, then, we say that when religion speaks to men it speaks with more authority than the authority of the church; it speaks with greater authority than the authority of the Bible; it speaks with the authority of Christ. The authority of the Christian religion is the authority of Christ.

All authority is given unto Him in heaven and in earth. And this is in no particular an external authority. Very rightly are men resentful of any external authority. Whenever men feel that the position they hold or the supposed truth that they promulgate needs some external authority, they reveal the fact that they are a little uncertain about the position they hold and the supposed truth that they seek to promulgate.

But where lies the authority of Christ?

1. *The authority of Christ is the authority of his personality.* Now, there is no authority at all like the authority of a matchless and masterful personality. Personality always defies analysis. You cannot weigh it in your scales and you cannot analyze it in your laboratories—whether it be the personality of the simplest and humblest man among us, whether it be the personality of a marvelous genius like Abraham Lincoln, for whom environment and heredity have never been able to account, or whether it be the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. I say that you are never able to account for personality. There it is; not a thing to be argued about, but a fact to be proclaimed and to be appreciated. It is exceedingly interesting to read the Four Gospels and to put one's self under the influence of Jesus. The Four Gospels are *a kind of perpetual incarnation*. One wishes sometimes that it were possible to put one's self back in the atmosphere of the New Testament and that one might live with the men who saw Jesus in the days of His flesh. Well, one may do the next thing: one may open the Four Gospels, Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, and with an open mind and an open heart he may expose his soul to the Person of Jesus, and when he exposes his soul to the Person of Jesus, he finds himself more and more coming under the compelling power of that matchless personality.

It is not anything to be argued about. It is simply a fact to be proclaimed. If the man denies the fact, so much the worse for the man; the fact is there. It is imaginable that a mole burrowing in the earth, having no eyes to see anything, might some day remark, "I am sorry for you people who think you see the sun." It is so much the worse for the mole; and so much the worse for the man.

There is the personality of Jesus. Men saw it and men see it to-day. You remember how one day He passed along and saw certain men mending their nets by the seashore, and He said to them, "Follow Me." And they left their nets to rot by the seashore and went forthwith to follow Jesus even unto death. And then again He was passing by and He saw Matthew, the publican, and He said, "Follow Me," and Matthew left his table and forthwith followed Jesus. And from that day down to this good hour, wherever men have come under the influence of the Person of Jesus, we find them saying: "Thou seemest human and divine; the highest, holiest manhood, Thou." The fact is, Jesus Christ has so fully revealed the Father to us, He has so fully made God known, that it is as impossible to think of God without thinking in terms of Jesus as it would be to go out to-night and look up at the stars without looking through the all-embracing atmosphere. And once more, I am not arguing in order to establish a thesis; I am simply affirming a fact. No one to-day can think of a better God than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And let this be understood: The men of the New Testament were not first of all philosophers; they were not first of all theologians. A distinguished theologian has written a series of books in which he seeks to establish the thesis that the great religious conceptions of the early church were the outgrowth of Greek metaphysics. Why, certainly the

men of those early days made use of Greek metaphysics. They made use of Greek metaphysics because that was the highest instrument of human thought; and they needed the highest instrument of human thought when seeking to think Christ's thoughts after Him. But, first of all, the men of the New Testament were not theologians and they were not philosophers; they were Christians. They had personal experience of Jesus and of what Jesus meant to them; and the things that they had experienced in their own lives, the things that were vital to them, the things that had made life worth living, the things they stood ready to die for—those were the things they were trying to give utterance to whenever they used the language to which we have fallen heir.

The authority of Jesus, then, I repeat it, is the authority of the Person of Jesus Christ.

2. *The authority of Jesus is the authority of the truth that Jesus proclaims.* And as I remarked a while ago, the truth needs no external authority. Too much, I am quite sure, have men spoken as if Christianity were a problem. Christianity is not a problem; it is a solution of problems.

Jesus did not write anything, but He said things in such an unforgettable way that men wrote about them. If you were to take everything that Jesus is reported to have said, it would make a very little book. Nevertheless, how comprehensive the teachings of Jesus are! He taught about God. He said, "God is our Father." Well, you say, "Everybody says that; everybody knows that." But who said it before Jesus? The men of the Old Testament did not say it. They said, "The Lord is my *Shepherd*"; or they said, "God is *like* a Father." You say, "The Sacred Books of the East said it." Why, certainly the word "Father" has often been on the lips of men of other lands and other days; but nobody in the history of religion ever used the word "Father" in

reference to God as Jesus used the word. It was a daring thing to say. And it is far beyond the comprehension of most men to-day that God is Father. And then you remember what Jesus had to say about religion. Religion is not in forms and ceremonies. Religion is within, in the heart. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are the merciful." "Blessed are the pure in heart." And the rewards of religion are in character, now and forevermore. Jesus taught about immortality. "In My Father's house are many mansions." He that believeth hath "eternal life." To the Christian dying is but "going to the Father."

And although the teachings of Jesus occupy very small space, no man has ever discovered anything that Jesus said that He ought not to have said, and no man has ever been able to put his finger on anything that Jesus failed to say that He should have said. To-day the teachings of Jesus are more in the public eye than they were ever in human history. To-day Jesus stands in the front of the progress of the world. To-day men are feeling that the future of the world depends upon our living out in human society the teachings of Jesus.

I read some time ago a very interesting story of a Japanese gentleman who had become a Christian. He was being entertained in the home of a distinguished philosopher and theologian. At night, when the house was still, this philosopher and theologian put to his Japanese friend some very interesting questions. Said he, "Tell me how it was you became a Christian." He reminded him that it was easy enough for us in England and America to trace back our history almost to the early days of the church; but he also reminded him that there was a great chasm of darkness and night intervening between the early history of the Japanese

and the coming of the missionary with open Bible and the gospel of the world's Redeemer. And he also reminded him that side by side with the coming of the missionary with the Bible, there were those who came teaching that Christianity had no right to hold sway over the minds and hearts of men. And when he had reminded him of these things, he said to him again, "Now, tell me how it was you became a Christian?" His answer was quite significant. Said he:

"I was a follower of Confucius, and Confucius often speaks of 'Heaven.' Sometimes when I read Confucius I thought that by 'Heaven' he might possibly mean a great Benign Personality that had an interest in men; but then again I was sure he could not mean anything of that sort. That awoke within my heart the wonder if there might not be such a person taking an interest in men. About that time some one put into my hands a copy of the New Testament and said, 'Read this; you will be charmed with the literary beauty of it.' I read the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.' I had never heard of such morality as that; I had never dreamed of such morality; and I began to think that maybe this morality came down from that 'Heaven' about which I had been speculating. And then I turned to the New Testament and I read the words of Jesus. I read the Gospel according to John, and I surrendered my heart and my life to Jesus."

My appeal to you to-day is, Give the teachings of Jesus a chance in your lives. They make their direct and their immediate appeal to men. I do not argue about them. If it were necessary for me to argue about them, it would be useless for me to argue about them. If we were here this morning in the presence of great music and I should say, "Is not

this oratorio marvelous? Do you not feel the uplift of it all?" and you should answer, "No, it does not affect me that way," I would not argue with you at all. If I should put into your hands a great poem and say to you, "Read it; do you not feel the inspiration of it?" and you should say, "No, Tennyson is nothing to me; Browning is nothing to me," I would not argue with you about it. If we were in the presence of great art, the work of some master, and I should say to you, "Do you not feel the power of it?" and you should say, "No, it means nothing to me," I would not argue with you about it. And so it is with the teachings of Jesus. If it is necessary for me to argue with a man about them, it is useless for me to argue with that man. What is needed to-day is that the great teachings of Jesus should be flung out into the darkness of the world, that men may see them; and the marvelous thing about them is, that whenever the teachings of Jesus have had a chance they have won their way.

3. *Again, the authority of Jesus is the authority of His work.* Those early disciples believed that Jesus had done something for them. They not only believed in Him as a *matchless personality*; they not only believed in Him as *the supreme Teacher*, but they believed in him as *the world's Redeemer*. His authority to them was the authority of the Redeemer.

Again, I remind you that these men did not sit down to write theology. These men were not primarily philosophers. These men had an experience. All religion is founded upon experience. In every part of the world, wherever there is any religion at all, that religion is founded upon experience. Here is a human need, and here is a divine response. That is the basis of all religion. And so it is with the religion of the New Testament: its basis is in experience. These men had discovered that Jesus had done

something for them. The world was different to them because of Jesus. All life was different to them because of Jesus. All had become different, and they became better because of the coming of Jesus. And so these men said, "*Jesus is the world's Redeemer.*" You remember the language that they used? One of them uses language like this: "Him that knew no sin, He made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Another uses language like this: "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree." Another uses language like this: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." The center of the New Testament is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and here is the center and heart of Christianity.

It was popular a few years ago for men in certain quarters to endeavor to discount and discredit the Christian doctrine of vicarious suffering. But that day is past, and it will be many a day before men will again seek to discredit it, because in your day and mine we have entered into the meaning of it. By sympathy and service and sacrifice we have entered into the meaning of it. We have discovered the truth, as old as God, that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin; that without the shedding of blood there is not anything that is really worth while in this world.

The men of the New Testament felt, therefore, that Christ had a right to command them because He had done something for them. We find the Apostle Paul saying: "He loved me and gave Himself up for me." "The love of Christ constraineth us." "I count not my life dear unto myself." He has done something for us. He has made the world different for us. He has made life different for us. He has established us in a new relation to God and a new relation to our fellow-man. He has put us under everlasting obligation to Himself. And again to-day He says to us:

"All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make a new world for men to live in."

4. There is yet another thing that I have to say, and to that I call your careful attention: *The authority of Jesus is His authority as the Risen and Ascended Lord.* Without the faith of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there would have been no Christianity in the world. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there would have been no church of Jesus Christ in the world to-day. Now, the resurrection of Jesus Christ rests upon a twofold foundation—upon a foundation of *history* and upon a foundation of *experience*.

The foundation of history is in *the empty tomb* and the *triumphant faith* of the disciples of Jesus. On the morning of the third day Joseph's tomb was empty. The body of Jesus was not there; and, in addition, the faith of the disciples had revived. They had passed beyond the possibility of doubt. They believed and were sure that Jesus died and was alive forevermore. No explanation of the empty tomb and the faith of the disciples will stand investigation, except the explanation which Christianity has always given: *Christ rose from the dead.*

I know perfectly well the attitude of certain men toward the whole question of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They do not have an open mind toward that question any more; their minds are closed with reference to it. They say, "It is entirely impossible, and there is no use to discuss it." To all men of that sort I say: "Your position is not a scientific position; it is entirely a dogmatic position." The scientific man will always sit down before any fact like a little child. Whenever any man would know the truth, he must become like a little child, and sit down and consider carefully every fact. Whenever any man turns his back

without proper investigation upon any fact, or anything that claims to be a fact, he is utterly dogmatic and has nothing of the scientific instinct.

The resurrection of Christ also rests upon a *foundation of experience*. If the truth of the resurrection did not verify itself in one's experience, it would not have any significance or any value to men; and it is because this historic fact does verify itself in Christian experience that it is of abiding power in the lives of men. What do I mean by that? I mean to say that the Christ who lived and died is alive forevermore; and Christianity is alive in the world to-day because men have made the pragmatic test, and know that they have entered into living experience of the living Christ. You may say, "If that be true, how is it that there are so very few people who know anything about the experience that you talk about?" Let me remind you that the greatest and finest things never trumpet themselves abroad. Philosophy is not everybody's business. It is only philosophers who have any business with philosophy. And music is not everybody's business. It is only one who is born a musician that can become a musician. And art is not everybody's business. Art does not go around and proclaim itself in the streets. It speaks gently, silently to men. And just so literature makes itself known to men. And so, also, it is with the great things of the religion of Jesus Christ. They do not go trumpeting themselves abroad. They reveal themselves to men of a certain loyalty, to men of a certain sympathy, to men of a certain experience, to men who are prepared to receive them.

By His resurrection from the dead, Christ put behind Him the days of His humiliation. His claim to be the Christ was vindicated. "God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified." Before His resurrection, He had called himself "the Son of man." But now He

“has been declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.” He has entered upon a loftier plane of existence, and has taken a place of authority in virtue of which He has a right to command.

This, then, is the sum of my message to-day: The authority of Jesus Christ is the authority of His matchless personality; the authority of Jesus Christ is the authority of His self-evidencing teachings; the authority of Jesus Christ is the authority of His work in the world; the authority of Jesus Christ is His authority as the Risen and Ascended Lord.

Backed by this authority, Jesus stands before us and says: “Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” I rejoice, therefore, that I have the opportunity of standing here and looking into the faces of young men and young women who have come to the kingdom for such time as this. The only hope of the world is the religion that Jesus brought into the world. There is no hope in any non-Christian religion. I am not taking the position that there was never a time when the non-Christian religions did good. I know what Buddha did for the East. I know that Confucius has given lofty ethical teachings to China and to the great Orient. But I know perfectly well that no longer is there any power in any heathen religion to lift men morally. The only hope for the world is in the power of the religion of Jesus Christ. And surely we have found this out in our own human affairs in these recent years. We had no idea that the world would ever have another great war. The commerce of the world would prevent it; and commerce brought it on. We had no idea we would ever go into another great war, because diplomacy would prevent it; but diplomacy brought it on. We had no idea we would ever go into another great war, as science would prevent it; but science clothed herself in scarlet robes and became procuress to the lords of hell. We had

no idea we would go into another war, because our lofty social ideals would prevent it; but our lofty social ideals were utterly powerless when the crisis came. Then did the heart of humanity turn to the teachings of Jesus. The one hope of the world to-day, and the one hope of the world to-morrow, is in what Jesus is, and in the truths that Jesus has brought into this world, and in the moral influence that Jesus has turned loose in this world.

Much has been said in recent months about the church by men who surely do not know what is going on in the world. One thinks, sometimes, that some of these critics have been living in a cave or in a monastery somewhere, because they are thoroughly out of touch with the modern world. The most vital institution in the life of to-day is the Church of Jesus Christ. The institution that lies closest to the heart of humanity is the Church of Jesus Christ. The institution that has done more to rally the forces of righteousness for this great war than any other institution or group of institutions is the Church of Jesus Christ. The institution that holds the greatest hope for the future is the Church of Jesus Christ. The institution which is rallying the forces of righteousness for the supreme struggle in overthrowing the strongholds of iniquity everywhere is the Church of Jesus Christ. One's best chance to make one's life count for good is in coöperation with the forces of Christianity as organized in the church.

And this is the only thing worth while—the doing of something that will make the world better. You have, no doubt, read Count Tolstoi's "Confessions." You remember what Tolstoi said about himself when he was fifty years of age. He found himself, having reached middle life, occupying a high social position, surrounded with a circle of influential friends, and yet miserable, afraid that he might commit sui-

cide, and yet not daring to do so. And why? Because he had no faith in God, because he had no faith in man, because he had no great purpose in life. He said: "What is the use of it all? What is position worth? What am I in the world for? There is no great objective. I had as well end it all." Then, in his thinking, he began, little by little, to get hold of life by its right handle: "Above everything is God; everything tends toward God; the teachings of Jesus must be made supreme in human life; the service of humanity is the one lofty and worthy ideal." Then life came to mean something to him.

And this I set before you as the supreme ideal of life and the one thing that is really worth while—to go out into the world and seek to incarnate the teachings of Jesus in the life of humanity. So shall you help in your day to make a new world, and so shall life become happy as well as useful.

EDWIN DUBOSE MOUZON.