

## *“Jesus As the Truth”*

*Psalm 119:1-16; John 14:6*

January 26, 2020

Several months ago, we got Lillian this new pair of prescription glasses. She wore them for like a week and then, poof, they were gone. Thankfully, we had her old pair so Natalie and I figured she could wear those as we thoroughly searched the house and the school for the new pair before getting her another one.

We looked EVERYWHERE. Under the couch, in the upstairs recliners, cars everything and still, no luck. In fact, we’d decided a few days prior that we’d go get a new set the following Saturday. Couldn’t do it that Saturday, we had guests coming over.

And, you know how it is with guests coming over, gotta clean up the place. As I was doing, I ran across Lillian’s new glasses case as I was straightening up the kitchen. Now, mind you, I’d see that case a dozen times since her glasses went missing but I didn’t pay much attention to them at first, knowing that they couldn’t possibly be there. We NEVER put glasses in cases at our house. But, I figured that morning, well, I might as well check. But then, well, when I lifted them, they felt kinda heavier than I imagined

Boom – glasses found. *They were right where they were supposed to be.*

Sometimes, even things as large as the truth can be found in the most obvious of places. Hear now the word of God from the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

This week I continue a three-part sermon series that I hope will form the backbone of my next writing project. I’m basing it on Jesus’ declaration we’ve just read about Him being the Way, truth and life. I’m using that foundational statement as a means to more easily comprehend the structure of a Christian life. Last week, we asked the question, “what does it mean to say Jesus is the way?” What we arrived at was that the Way isn’t checklist you have to do to go to heaven or a set of instructions to be meticulously followed, rather the Way is a three-point fix on the ways of Jesus. Those three points, taken from the life of Jesus, are humility, love and self-sacrifice. The Way of Jesus is charting our course by the power of the Holy Spirit to draw nearer and nearer to the center of those three attributes.

This week, we’re going to talk about the second part of Jesus’ statement, namely that Jesus is the TRUTH.

Truth is a big word even though it’s only five-letters, isn’t it?

And let me tell you, I should know. I’ve spent the last 30 odd years since I look for it. Along the way, I’ve amassed a library of books that has become so voluminous it required Natalie and I to have an off-premise storage space as the books no longer fit in our home.

I amassed all those books in a search for the truth, really. And to that end, I’ve read a wide array of theology, philosophy and psychology. But every time I’m reading one of those books and I think I’ve got the truth nailed down in some concrete way, my newfound system becomes spongy, then vaporizes and floats away. Sinking sand, really.

Given this broken world and especially the atrocious philosophies that lay behind many of our assumptions, truth can be very difficult to locate, especially if we’re looking for it in the wrong places.

So where’s the truth?

One of the biggest problems our society faces presently is that the dominant model for locating truth gives ultimate authority not to objective data but rather to our experiences.

That’s why people are becoming more and more comfortable with the idea of multiple truths. Like, well, that’s your truth, not mine. I ran across the idea succinctly stated in the first principle of Scientology. I know, they’re kooks, but there is a reason they have followers. One of them, I believe, is that they sacralize the dominant epistemology of this age. An epistemology is just a fancy-schmancy way of saying finding the truth. David Miscavige, the leader of Scientology puts it this way “Because, after all, the first principle of Scientology is that ‘It’s only true if it is true for you.’”

The truth is what we experience without any other tether to anything, even objective reality. That, dear friends, is a sure-fire path towards what we find ourselves entrenched in here in the West – *alienation from God and from one another with a great many among us leading bitter, self-centered lives.*

Because, you see the proven fact of the matter is, we're not reliable narrators. Dave List and I were talking about this Friday night. Study after study shows that even our memories are terribly faulty. Too often we perceive things as we would have them be, rather than how they are. My wife says this to me all the time – "just because you think something so, doesn't mean that it is." She's right, you know?

It isn't as though this is a new phenomenon. If we'll look in the Scriptures, we'll find in the Gospel of John a moment when Jesus is before Pilate.

I read now from the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel; "Then Pilate said to Jesus, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

Pilate's query reveals something, doesn't it? By Western standards, truth is malleable, changeable according to the needs of the moment. Thus, truth is always in flux, always moving and adapting. Some would argue that truth is a function of power. Truth is what we say it is. Why? Because we've got the force to back it up.

Unfortunately, such a view of truth has us all standing on sinking sand. No wonder we're anxious. What we believe today can be upended tomorrow in the name of progress.

Thankfully, TRUTH isn't what we feel because that changes pretty quickly, doesn't it? Neither is truth what power says it is.

The TRUTH is Jesus Christ, WORD OF GOD who is known to us through the canonical scriptures of our Holy Bibles. The truth, the kind with a capital T, its found there, in the WORD of GOD.

Y'all, like I said earlier, I've read so many books that it sometimes makes even my own head spin. What I've come to believe after all that reading is that it was all rather unnecessary. Jesus tells us where to locate truth, and it is in Him, the incarnate Word of God. *So I'm here to tell you this morning, seek the truth in the most obvious place of all. The Word of God recorded in Scripture made known to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Jesus Christ himself pointed to the Scripture as truth, too, citing our need for the Word of God. Do you recall that as Jesus is being tempted in the wilderness, he rebukes the tempter, telling him that "man does not live by bread alone but by every word of God." Here's he's quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

Paul writes to us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

You've probably heard that one Scripture quoted like a bazillion times, I'm sure. It seems to be one of us pastors' favorites verses, and for good reasons. But the fact of the matter is that the percentage of congregants actually reading the Bible on an ongoing basis is shockingly low. Perhaps even worse, studies seem to indicate that pastors, as a whole, aren't reading the Word nearly as often, either. In fact, within our own denomination, scores on the Bible Content Exam given to seminarians as they approach ordination dipped to only 28 percent achieving a passing score which was 70 out of 100.

The fact of the matter is that the Bible is one of the most-owned books in the country, no less than 87 percent own a Bible that is likely gathering dust in our homes. I confess, there have been times in my own ministry when the only interaction I had with the Bible was in selecting a passage to preach on.

So I get it, I really do. There are lots of reasons why we don't easily pick up our Bibles and read them.

The first and most obvious reason is that it can all be confusing and overwhelming. The Canonical Bible is made up of 66 different books spanning the course of over a thousand years. And, oh, guess what, it isn't always arranged in chronological order.

But still, I'm sure great many of us have started out one day in Genesis chapter 1, verse one with high expectations. Maybe we start out going gangbusters. We breeze through Genesis and coast into Exodus, but then, well, the going gets a little rough. Perhaps we persist through and then, LEVITICUS and all it seems like they're talking about is skin diseases. It's enough to have many of us put it down and never pick it up again.

The fact of the matter is that treading the Scriptures takes time and dedication. It's also bound to create tons of questions about life, the universe and everything. In fact, I dare say that if you read into Joshua, you're

going to have a lot of questions, concerns even, about the nature of our God. If you didn't, you just wouldn't be human.

But, you see, that's what Pastors and Elders are for.

Now look, I know that you can get answers about the Bible much more quickly than calling me (which I hope you'll do) or waiting until Sunday to ask me. After all, the Internet is right there waiting for us, right?

But not everything out there is trustworthy. The Scriptures themselves are, as they are the Word of God, the TRUTH. But interpretations, well, they vary, some good, some bad, some atrocious.

Which is another unfortunate reason why a lot of us don't read the Bible. Because we've found a easier, quicker alternative.

Theology.

Theology comes when you take those 66 books of the Bible and reduce them down to a system of thought. In essence, you say, the Bible ultimately says THIS. It's reductive at best and absurd at times as well.

Let me see if I can put it another way. Back when I was in high school, I didn't like English class very much. So, pushed once for time, I chose not to read an entire assigned novel and instead just read the Cliff Notes. Believe it or not, I passed the test. And I thought, "AHA, I know what to do now."

So, I'll never forget it, the teacher next assigned a book called Catch-22. I rushed out and got the Cliff Notes. Boom, Flat-out failed the test, like I made a 45 or something atrocious. Having done so poorly, my teacher allowed me to take another test. For this one, I actually read the novel. I'm here to tell you, Catch-22 remains one of my favorite novels to this day. I passed the next test, which was nice but I would've missed out on a great book had it not been for that abject failure.

Theology is like Cliff Notes for the Bible, ultimately. When we rely to heavily on them not only are we going to fail the test, so to speak, choosing to be partisan, we also miss out on a great portion of the best book you're never going to read.

The more and more I talk to people who don't come to church, the more convinced I am that it isn't so much the church they reject as it is theological systems. What makes it worse is that those theological systems they reject are oftentimes being articulated by people who, you got it, aren't reading the Bible to begin with. Instead, they're resting comfortably with whatever system they've heard and liked.

No wonder people don't come to church.

Because, you see, if we were actually reading the Bible, we'd know a few things.

First of all, we'd know that we, ourselves are sinners. The line between good and evil is somewhere far off over yonder, it instead cuts right through us.

Hear these words from Hebrews -

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

That's true, isn't it? When we read our Bibles, if we get a bit further than a chapter or two, we're going to find something that rubs us the wrong way.

We ourselves ain't perfect and, yes, in fact, our own stuff stinks, too.

I'm pretty comfortable when I'm reading about what I perceive as other people's sins but then a passage will come up and I'll be like, "well, shucks." Guess I'm in the soup, too.

You see, judgmentalism just isn't anywhere a Bible-believing Christian ought to be, like, ever.

In the sermon on the Mount from Matthew's Gospel - "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye

Or how about Psalm 75:7 - But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

The TRUTH revealed in the Word of God is that we're all sinners, all fall short of the glory of God, all saved not by our works or our righteousness but instead by the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we're faithful to the truth, we will never use Scripture to feel superior to anyone else in all of creation. Remember, Jesus is our Way. And Jesus' Way is one of humility, love and self-sacrifice.

But, still, I'm aware that, at the end of the day, you, like myself, need a reason to engage with the Word. Yes, we might concede, it sounds like a good idea, yes, we'll agree, it's probably the right thing to do. But why should I take time to slog through all those many pages.

To begin with, I promise you this, in deliberate reading of the Bible, you'll draw closer to God.

The epistle of James tells us, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

Taking time out of your day to dedicate to the Word is a great way to draw nearer to God. There is nothing so wonderful for spiritual growth and development as intentional reading of the Word.

If you're worried about it getting confusing or perhaps even boring, there are some great alternative strategies for reading the Bible other than progressing from Exodus to Revelation.

To begin with, get a good study Bible, Harper-Collins makes one that I highly recommend. You'd be surprised how many questions are resolved just reading the notes.

Another great way to read the Bible is start with the New Testament instead of with the Old. It covers a much, much shorter span of time and is, for most people, much more easily understood.

Another suggestion would be to do it with a partner or, better still, a group. As the people of God gather around the Word, I'm convinced, the world changes.

And the benefits will come to you.

One will be a surer sense of God's presence in difficult times.

About 7 years ago, I had a pretty intense medical crisis. Thankfully, everything turned out okay but it was a harrowing experience. One of the things they needed to do was to get an MRI of my head. Now, if you've ever had one of those, they're not exactly the most fun thing to do in this world. They basically place your body in this huge tube which makes all sorts of clunks and clanks which only adds to your anxiety. Thankfully I'm not claustrophobic but being in such a tight space under uncertain circumstances had my heart racing.

So, there I was, worried. Thankfully though, I had just read Habakkuk again. While doing so, I discovered a verse that I liked enough to take the time to try to commit it to memory.

Habakkuk 3:16-17 - "Though the fig tree shall not blossom, nor fruit be on the vine, the produce of the olive fail and the field yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation."

Those words of Scripture kept coming back into my head, calming me in the midst of a great storm in my life. I knew, whether I was to live or I was to die, I was blessed to have known Jesus Christ. Further, I knew he would take care of me just as he had taken care of all of the sheep of his flock.

The only reason I had that verse was because I was in the Word.

As we read Scripture, we will grow strong in the Lord.

And in that strength, we'll be led to do exactly what we're all called to, share Jesus, God's truth, with others in a non-judgmental, non-coercive fashion.

I think we all look around and see a world careening towards darkness. Rates of depression, anxiety and depression keep going up. Society seems to get more divisive, more divided every single day.

And yet evangelism, our desire to share Jesus with the world, is at an all-time low in the West. Some denominations have even begun to question trying to bring others to Jesus through evangelizing.

But, friends, I promise, if we know the Word, if we know the truth, we will see that this is our mission on earth. All that other stuff, our jobs, our families even, are blessings given to us in order to keep us able to do the work which our God has called us to.

Paul in Romans 10 says this – "13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved [but then] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone proclaiming?"

Reading Scripture will fill our lives so that we will want to fill others with the peace, joy, love and hope which are given to us by God.

And there will be another blessing as you take to reading God's Word, the truth conveyed in Scripture.

Jesus tells us, in the Gospel of John, the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

I've seen the power of the Truth to do that very thing.

Let me tell you about something that happened to me back in 2017 at the Food Lion right down the road towards Mount Holly.

Y'all it was about 2 months after my sister died very suddenly. I was really struggling emotionally but, you know how it is? The kids' still have to eat supper. Well, there I was in that Food Lion wandering up and down the aisles, I couldn't concentrate, couldn't figure out what I'd get to fix.

As I was wandering, sad and lost and on the brink of tears, I kept passing a short, elderly African American man. Our eyes would meet on every aisle, and he smiled. By the third time we passed, he said hello in a deeply accented voice.

I said hello and we got to chatting. Turns out, his name was Lazarus, he was a pastor (he showed me his card) and he'd just lost his wife of a great number of years. I shared my own loss and we just began chatting. HE told me more about himself and it was amazing.

He shared how he was a terrible young man, committing crimes and not caring about anything except himself. Well, that behavior led him to prison where someone threw a Bible into his cell. Now, Lazarus said, at the time, he was illiterate, but he picked up the Scriptures and began to read, haltingly at first but as the days passed, it became easier and easier.

Lazarus shared that his behavior changed too. And, when he knew enough of the Truth, he gave his life to Jesus Christ. He was released, he said, he was a different man. A man that then met the woman he'd married, the woman he now missed.

He looked at me and he said something like, "But you know, Mr. Jason, it's going to be all right. All right. Because, one day, she and I, you and your sister, will be together again. Forever. It's all going to be okay."

And that truth, dear friends, set me free from sorrow for the remainder of the day.

Jesus Christ is the Truth, He is the Word of God which the Scriptures point to with every single verse. The Scriptures are the Truth.

Imagine that, it was there all along.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Intro**

John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

## **The Search for Truth**

"Because, after all, the first principle of Scientology is that 'It's only true if it is true for you.' David Miscavige

John 18:37-38 – "Then Pilate said to Jesus, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

## **The Word of God as Truth**

Deuteronomy 8:3 – "...know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

## **Exposing our Sin**

Hebrews 4:12 – "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

## **Leading us Away from Judgmentalism**

Matthew 7:1-3 – "'Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye

Psalms 75:7 – "But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another."

## **Advantages to reading Scripture**

James 4:8 – "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

## **Calm in Storm/Being filled**

Habakkuk 3:16-17 – "Though the fig tree should not blossom nor fruit be on the vine, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food; the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I WILL rejoice in the Lord. I will take JOY in the God of my salvation."

## **Filling Others**

Romans 10:13-14 – "'For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved [but then] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone proclaiming?"

## **Freedom**

John 18:31-32 – "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."