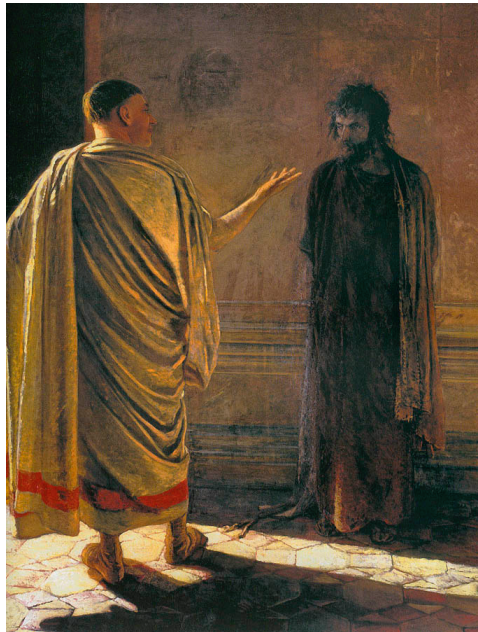


God's Word is Truth
John 17:13-19

Let me begin with a question today. "What is truth?" When asked in humility and honesty, that can be a great place to begin a quest for knowledge and understanding. But, in our day, it is a question that is often asked with a dismissive sneer. "What is truth?" Can I demonstrate that this is nothing new? Some 2,000 years ago, there was a mighty man who derided a meek and lowly prisoner on death row by asking that same question. Here is an artist's depiction of that historical moment.



That mighty man was a Roman governor by the name of Pontius Pilate. We read about his encounter with this poor prisoner in John 18. You've figured it out by now that the prisoner was none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jewish leaders had handed him over to Pilate to be executed for the crime of sedition against Rome. The Jews told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be their king, and that therefore, he deserved the sentence of death from Rome. Watch how Pilate's exchange with Jesus ended.

³⁷Then Pilate said to him, "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." ³⁸Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38)

Pilate embodies so much of the spirit of our own age in his treatment of Jesus. He treats him as a contemptible and pathetic case of irony. "You are a king?" "What is truth?" His words drip with sarcasm. Our post-modern, post-Christian society treats Jesus in the same exact way today. His truth claims are dismissed out of hand. But Jesus could not have been clearer. He came for a very distinct purpose: to bear witness to the truth.

We continue today in our series, Jesus' Magnificent Prayer. Jesus is only a matter of hours away from having that conversation with the governor who would essentially seal His fate, and hand him over to be crucified. With that darkest of hours looming over His head, He selflessly and courageously prayed on behalf of His own beloved disciples. He thought of them as He stared the devil and all his malignant forces square in the face. He prayed as our great and merciful High Priest. This prayer that He prayed ought to be one of the greatest foundations of our confidence today. Why? Because we know who it is who intercedes for us, the Righteous One, and the prayer of the righteous man has great power as it is working. Today, we will see our faithful and merciful High Priest answer Pilate's question, and we will be forced to decide what the truth is. Let's continue where we left off last Sunday.

¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:13-19)

Jesus provides us with four life-altering realities in these words, which have the power to make you wise in an age of confusion.

First, Jesus provides us with the reality of the gift that He gives us: the Word of God. **¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, (John 17:13-14a)** He gave His disciples God's Word. His words were the Father's words.

Notice that the joy that He offers is connected with the words that He spoke in this world. The joy flows out of our receiving His words. His joy came from completing the work to which His words had reference. You see, His joy comes from all that was entailed in His returning to the Father having completed the work the Father gave Him to do. It is the joy that comes from being our Prophet, Priest, and King. It is the joy that comes with His exaltation to the right hand of the Father, where He lives forever to intercede for us. That is the only source of true, eternal joy today. The joy the world offers will leave you wanting, but the joy that Jesus offers will never fade away.

At the moment He was praying this prayer, His joy was not yet fulfilled in His disciples. They still didn't get it. They did not understand what He was doing for them. They were about to be scattered like sheep from the Shepherd, but they would understand His words in due time. As proof of that, watch how John would later begin his first epistle to the church.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of

life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

That word complete is the same exact word Jesus prayed in John 17, “that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” As Jesus spoke His words on earth to fulfill His joy in them, so they wrote His words to others that their joy, which was now His joy, would be fulfilled. That is how Jesus’ prayer came full circle. Jesus’ joy became the disciples’ joy, and they in turn found joy in sharing His words with others. There is a connection between Jesus going back to the Father and their fellowship with the Father and the Son. They did not fully enjoy that fellowship until Christ was there at the right hand of His Father, having finished the work that brings us there with Him. Do you have Jesus’s joy fulfilled in you today as you hear His words? Are you eager to share that joy with others by sharing His words with others?

Second, Jesus provides us with the reality of what the Word of God has the power to do in us, namely, it makes us new creatures. “and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (John 17:14b-16) The Word of God makes us new creatures. Two times in the breadth of three sentences, Jesus says, “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” That repetition indicates the significance of this great statement. What is Jesus saying? First, negatively, He is not saying that we are not *in* the world. He makes that clear. He wants us to be in the world. He does not ask that the Father take us out of the world. So clearly, He is not speaking of some religious form of external asceticism. In other words, He is not saying we should completely cease from our labor and activity in the world. He is not saying we are now so spiritual that we do not interact with the world at all.

Positively, He is saying that internally, in our inner being, we are no longer of the world. When the Word of God is mixed with faith in those who hear it, they are born again. That is the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Look at Peter’s words in 1 Peter 1:23-25,

²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;²⁴ for

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:23-25)

Or, again, as James put it,

18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:18)

That word, brought us forth, literally means, “gave birth to us.” Those are just two of many statements about the new life that comes through believing the Word of God. We are born again through the good news that is preached to us. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. (Romans 10:17) By faith, we are joined to Christ in a living spiritual union, so that what is true of Him—that He is not of this world—becomes true of us—we are not of this world. He restores all that was lost by our father Adam in the fall. The life of the Holy Spirit is implanted within us, never to be taken away. Jesus is the life, and He imparts that life to all who believe His words. This is why Paul refers to all who are in Christ as “New Creations, or Creatures.” We are dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus. That is new birth, regeneration.

Jesus knew better than anyone that this meant hatred from the world. The world, without faith in Christ, remains under the dark dominion of the evil one. As Paul put it, he is the god of this world who has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus has prayed that the Father would keep us from the evil one?!

In another place, he described unbelievers like this, **“18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”** (Ephesians 4:18-19) What a fitting description of the world today! That is the difference between the Christian and the unbeliever. It is a difference within. What can those who want the freedom and autonomy to make their own truth, to choose their own preferred pronouns, to celebrate their sexual perversions with pride; what can such people do but hate those who have put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness? (Ephesians 4:24) What a clear distinction!

Prayerfully, this difference between those who are not of the world and those who are will only become increasingly more evident in our day. It must, Christians, because the world is given up to sensuality, and we must not be. For too long, we have complacently looked no different from the world. But now, we are being forced out of our comfort, and it is time to take a stand with Jesus Christ. It is time to stand upon the Truth.

Which leads us to the third life-altering reality Jesus provides: Sanctification in the truth.

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17). What is sanctification? It is a big, theological word that can be difficult to wrap our minds around. But it is ultimately something simple. The Greek word is *hagiason*, which comes from the root *hagios*, which means holy. To sanctify something is to make it holy. Ok, then what is holiness? It is godliness. It is living in fellowship with God, who is holy. God is holy by nature. We are made holy by His grace when He condescends to make His abode within us through our faith in Jesus Christ. So, this flows naturally out of the second reality. If we are not of this world, even as Christ is not of this world; if we are new creatures, born again to a living hope, then the process of sanctification,

becoming more like God, ought to begin to naturally take place in us day by day. I like how Martyn Lloyd-Jones once defined it,



“Sanctification is that condition in which a man is praising God by being what he is.”

Being what we are, not of this world, regenerated, new creatures made in the likeness of Christ, we live entirely unto the glory of God. Everything is done to the praise of His glorious grace. This does not mean being true to yourself. It means being true to who God says you are. It means being true to His Word. As we sing in the song *New Name Written Down in Glory*, “I am who I am because the I AM tells me who I am.” I think Jesus displayed His perfect wisdom in clarifying what He meant by the truth. See it again, **“Your word is truth.” (John 17:17b)** Why does he add that clarifying statement? Because he knows us so well. He knows that our great danger is that we will search for truth in the wrong places. He knows that our enemy’s aim is to deceive us. So, He makes it abundantly clear where the truth that sanctifies us can be found. This tells us what our primary work in the Christian life ought to be: the careful study of God’s precious Word.

Now, I want to show you one of the philosophies that has come to dominate Western thought today. This is important because it reveals how we are living in an age that has lost touch where truth is found. Ideas have consequences, and we are living in the consequences of the ideas of many who have gone before us. I want to point to two men in particular because their thoughts about truth have really come to shape the modern Western worldview. They are



Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher who lived during the 18th Century, and he was one of the central thinkers of the Enlightenment. He argued that what can be known is only what we can see, touch, smell, taste, or experience with the senses—what he called the phenomenal world, the world of our sensations. This has been called empiricism, which leads to a breakdown between faith and reason. He placed the truth in another realm outside of knowledge, which he called the noumenal world. He argued one cannot know the truth about God, since that is a realm outside of human understanding. Can you see how his ideas stand in stark contrast to the words of Jesus? He claimed human beings cannot know truth about God, while Jesus claimed our knowledge of the truth can only come from the objective reality presented to us in the Word of God. Kant's ideas led to the conclusion that man's reason is the ultimate authority, what we call rationalism. Truth is limited to what man's mind can know, everything else is relegated to the realm of faith, which is opposed to knowledge.

This breakdown between faith and reason led to a great deal of trouble in the theological realm in the century that followed. The Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard lived a generation later in the 19th Century, and he took Kant's ideas to their inevitable conclusion in the religious, theological realm, while two other famous philosophers named Hegel and Marx were busy taking them to their conclusion in the materialistic, humanistic realm. Kierkegaard taught that "truth is subjectivity." He said, "Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual." That's a lot of philosophical mumbo-jumbo, so what does he actually mean?

The truth about God, in the Kantian stream of thought, could only be known subjectively. Kierkegaard coined the famous term, "leap of faith," saying "faith does not have reason,

rationality, or logic.” It was a leap into the dark, into the unknown, into a world of blind optimism. This came to be known as existentialism, which became one of the predominate worldviews of the West in the 20th Century. All that we know about God, about the Absolute, can only be known by our own subjective, inward experience. So, we get to be the arbiters of the truth about God based on our own subjective impulses, or what feels right to us. Does this sound somewhat familiar to where we are today?

I would argue that today, we are seeing the imbalance of Kierkegaard’s philosophy work itself out in the fragmentation of our own society. We see faith and absolute truth itself treated as something purely subjective. The mantra of our age is “be true to yourself.” Pride month is nothing but the working out of these existentialist ideas. It is the triumph of the modern self, freed from the fetters of the objective reality that is defined by the Word of God. The great need of our day, therefore, is to be reminded of the objective element of faith. It is what Kevin DeYoung titled his recent book, “Don’t Be True to Yourself.” We need to be reminded that the truth about God can be known, not by turning inward, but by turning to the Word of God. God’s Word is truth! Sanctification that is not anchored in the objective truth of the Scriptures is not sanctification at all. We hold to the faith that is in Christ Jesus, once for all delivered to the saints. That is the truth that truly sets us free, not your truth or my truth, but the objective, absolute, and unchanging truth of the Word of God.

Jesus longs for you to know the truth of God’s Word. He yearns for you to study it and hide it in your heart. He prayed that you would be sanctified in, or through, the truth of God’s Word. Do you want to know if you have a heart that looks like Jesus’ heart? Here’s a good test: Do you yearn for the truth of God’s Word? Do you long to be fed daily with the Word. This is your daily bread. This is your manna! **“It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)** If you do not hide this word in your heart, you are leaving yourself defenseless in a relativistic age, when lies predominate. Here is your armor for the battle. Here is the means of your maturation in Christ. Nothing else can make you grow. The Word is the source of your sanctification. Paul, describing the church, said,

¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:13-16)

We grow as we speak the truth in love. What is the truth? God’s Word is truth. Here’s where the rubber meets the road. We cannot speak God’s Word if we are not feeding upon it daily, hiding it in our hearts so that we carry it with us everywhere we go. Do the work of memorizing the word, brothers and sisters! It requires dedication and discipline. Wake up an hour earlier in the morning so that you can devote yourself to study in the word. Start with a chapter in one of the epistles. Set out to memorize it in full. It’s not easy, but it is something you will never regret.

It will give your life renewed purpose and mission. That's the fourth and last point for this morning. The fourth life-altering reality that Jesus presents to us here is that He gives us a renewed purpose and mission for our lives.

¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:18-19)

He did not want the Father to take His disciples out of the world, and this is why. Because He has sent them, even as the Father sent Him into the world. That is an amazing thought! Jesus sends us in the same way that His Father sent Him! Being joined to Christ, being born of God, we are now citizens of heaven, and we are in this world for one reason, to be salt and light. Not to make our homes here. Not to settle in and become just like the world. But to complete the work that Jesus has given us to do.

He consecrated Himself—again, I don't love the translation here because it's a little confusing in English. That word consecrated is the same exact word in the original Greek as the word Sanctify: *hagiazō*. He is holy, and He set Himself apart to do the work the Father gave Him to do, to lay His life down as the once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin, to be the Savior of the world, so that we might be set apart to do the work He gave us to do. The Great Commission. **¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.** (Matthew 28:19-20) He did what He did so that we might do that. What is truth? That's the truth! God's Word is Truth. Be sanctified in it. Be Holy as He is Holy! Go, and fulfill the call He has given you as His disciple.