

can we handle the truth?

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Scripture Passage John 18:29-38

Allow me to transport you back 2,000 years, and suddenly you find yourself out in the open air, but in the middle of a trial, here is the actual transcript of one of the most legendary and most important trials in history.

John 18:29

29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

31 Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. 32 This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

38 "What is truth?" retorted Pilate.

**If you asked people – lets say 50 years ago – what is truth? – they might answer along these lines: Truth is --
Following the Ten Commandments
What the Bible says
Believing in God
Following the Golden Rule.**

50 years ago or so, there would have been a general recognition, a consciousness of truth requiring and accepting a point of reference outside the human experience.

But today if you asked, what is truth, the answers would have changed and would probably go along these lines. Truth is

whatever you believe.

Truth is individual. Each person needs to decide what is true for themselves.

Truth is simply what works. We call this pragmatism.

Some might say there is no such thing as truth.

People need to believe in whatever they want. Finally someone says, no one religion has the truth. In fact all paths lead to the same truth.

It seems that the first casualty of pluralism is truth. The external reference point of truth in God, external to our human experience has all but vanished in our culture. There is a growing collective consciousness that says truth is relative. What is right and wrong for one person is not necessarily true for another. Relativism says that true is not fixed or determined by some external reality, and most certainly not by God, but rather truth is decided by an individual or by a group to meet their own needs.

So we say that truth is always changing, not only in the smaller matters of taste and fashion, but also on the crucial matters of morality, spirituality, and even reality itself.

So we are witnessing in our day, if it has not already happened, the complete abandonment of truth. In the death of Christendom, we have witnessed the death of truth in public life, and we witness what John Neuhaus calls the naked public square, by which he means public life which is devoid of truth.

This slow steady but invisible demise of truth is almost like snow melting. No one really notices until it is all gone. This loss of truth silently filters down into our day-to-day lives and then takes its toll on society.

So we live in a day in which people have consciously and unconsciously suppressed truth. So Romans 1:18 says **people suppress the truth in wickedness**. In other words wanting to be free from any moral restraint and ethical responsibility.

It is against this backdrop that we need to hear one of the most profound statements that Jesus makes about himself when he says I am the truth.

But it seems that as soon as we hear that word truth, our first instinct is often to make a list of what we have to believe, a list of essential doctrines that we have to agree with – but truth is much more than a series of facts to be acknowledged, or a creed to be confessed.

Truth is much more than learning lists of correct doctrine and signing our agreement. Evangelism is much more than giving the right facts to a truth-seeker and calling for the correct answers to the questions.

Christian truth cannot be reduced to a formula. It is more than believing the right stuff. We do not bring to the truth to our lives and see what we like/do not like, deciding what we will accept or not accept. Rather we bring our lives to the truth and we bend our lives to the silent but immovable demand of truth.

When Jesus says I am the truth, he is calling on us to see every aspect of our lives, the whole of life, through the lens of who he is. From a Christian world view, not one distorted by pragmatism, relativism or any other ism. Christianity and Christ is an all-encompassing truth about ultimate reality.

Seeing all of life through the lens that Christ is The Truth will take us far beyond simply saying that some things are true. They will demand that we ask ourselves **can we really handle the truth?**

Remember this scene with Tom Cruise.

Here are some essential core truths in the Christian faith. There are others, but these will stimulate and challenge to ask – **can we handle the truth?**

WE SAY THAT WE BELIEVE IN CHRIST'S BIRTH, BUT CAN WE REALLY HANDLE THE TRUTH OF THE INCARNATION.

We celebrate the story of Christmas with the belief that God came in the flesh, his seed impregnated the womb of a virgin. All of history turns on that.

The gospel of John puts it in a most breath-taking way:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

3 CAN WE HANDLE THE TRUTH?

That is good doctrine, and we confess it to be true. We say that we believe in all it says, but can we really handle the worldview that flows from the truth of the Incarnation. It demands more of us than simply believing in the events that took place in a stable or a cave 2,000 years ago. It calls us to bring our lives into that truth and having it live in us and change us.

The phrase and the word became flesh, demands that we lay aside a dualistic way of thinking. The early church and even today, we find ourselves too much influenced by Plato. We easily think in terms of dividing life and reality into two parts, dualism.

Sacred – secular

Spiritual – physical

Contemplation – action

Prayer – activity

Faith – works

We almost unconsciously create a two-tier spirituality.

For example, many of you would probably think that what I and other pastors do is essentially more spiritual than your daily jobs, and therefore more important. After all, I am doing spiritual things. You are doing ordinary things. I have a calling, but you only have a job.

That is dualism doing its deadly work in our thinking.

When Jesus says that he is the truth about life, all of life and the word became flesh, that dualism has to end. In the truth of the incarnation, there are no longer sacred and secular things. There are no longer callings and just jobs. The word become flesh. The word impregnates all of life, and now all of life has to be lived out to the glory of God. This is the worldview that comes from the Incarnation.

It means that you need to pray about your job just as much as I do about mine. You also live your day to the glory of God. You are as much a minister and servant of God as much as any pastor. This fusion of the word into flesh, spirit and body, ends a false dualistic way of thinking. The incarnation means that all truth is God's truth.

William Wilberforce, a name that we connect with the abolition of the slave trade in Great Britain, and from that led a number of efforts to change the world. When Wilberforce was 25 he became a Christian, and thought that he could do more work if he became a minister. He assumed as millions have done that spiritual work was more important than secular work. But a friend wrote to him and persuaded him that God might want him to stay in politics and work there, so he worked to bring an end to the slave trade, and that is what he did. The person who wrote to him and persuaded him to stay in Parliament was John Newton, who was a former slave captain and he wrote Amazing Grace.

The point is that all of life, every job, every task, no matter what we do is to be seen as a calling from God. Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper declared, there is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out this is mine, this belongs to me!

It is the truth of the incarnation that reaches into every corner of life and sets the seal of God on it. So every Christian is to live the truth that all of life is to be lived and one for the glory of God.

There is a terrible misconception that we have to be exceptional and do grand things for God to notice us and be impressed by what we do. This is not true. We have to be exceptional in ordinary things, to be holy in ordinary days.

The incarnation means that we have to reclaim territory and whole tracts of life that were originally God's, and they have either been stolen from God or in our carelessness we have given them away or abandoned them. These include areas in music, art, history, science, public life.

All of these belonged to God and in our shallow dualistic thinking, we have given many of them away. The Incarnation demands that we take them back.

Can we handle that kind of truth? Can we handle the truth of integrating Jesus into every part of our lives, the total fabric of who we are, so that we think and live incarnationally.

WE SAY WE BELIEVE IN CHRIST'S DEATH, BUT CAN WE REALLY HANDLE THE TRUTH OF THE CROSS?

At the heart of our evangelical faith is the death of Christ. We believe that Christ died for our sins. There is no way around that. The cross stands at the heart and core of our faith. It is how we come to faith, grace and mercy leads us to the cross, we call people to the cross.

But can we handle the truth of the cross.

The truth becoming righteousness.

2 Cor 5:21:
God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That is a marvellous verse. One that you should memorize. Can you handle the truth that through the cross God is at work in you making every part of your life righteousness just as He is?

The truth of sacrificial love.

Eph 5:25
Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

To every man who is married, and who believes the truth of the cross, can you handle that truth of sacrificial love towards your wife which is embedded in the heart of the cross?

The truth of forgiving love.

Forgive one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

It is tragic when you see Christians, believing in the doctrine of the cross, but they refuse to give up some anger towards someone and forgive. They hold that the death of Christ is true, but they are far from the truth of its power in their lives. Can we really handle the truth of the cross and all that it demands of us.

It takes us far beyond orthodoxy into sacrifice. It asks of us, not only do we believe that Christ died on the cross, but it asks us to practice the sacrifice of the cross. Can we handle that truth?

In the beginning of the 1900's, Great Britain was still striving to set its flag on parts of the world that were still unconquered. One of those parts still to be conquered was Antarctica, and so in 1900, an explorer called Ernest Shackleton ran an ad in the London newspapers inviting people to join his expedition.

The ad said, men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete

darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

He thought that few people would ever respond to such an ad, but many did inspired by the challenge. He said, it seemed as though all of Great Britain wanted to accompany me.

Perhaps at times we are afraid to see just how high the cross sets its demands for us.

Truth is more than believing in Christ's death, the one who is truth says to us, take up my cross. It is a place of submission, a place of surrender and a place of obedience.

The cross is greater than Antarctica. It is a call to follow Jesus. Can we handle that truth?

WE SAY WE BELIEVE IN AN EMPTY GRAVE, BUT CAN WE HANDLE THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION?

The life and mission of Jesus hinges on what happened after they took him down from the cross. Several days after his execution, his friends came to find the body, and the tomb was empty. What had happened?

For 2,000 years the church has sung, worshipped and declared that the tomb was empty, but can we handle the truth of the resurrection?

The truth of the resurrection created people then, and creates people today, who:

LIVE OUT OF BOLDNESS RATHER THAN FEAR.

One of the hallmarks of the early church was the fact that it created people whose lives were marked with boldness. The fear and the apprehension that sent them scurrying away into the darkness of Jerusalem brought them back out into the light of confrontation. They were no longer afraid to face people and to declare what they believed.

PEOPLE OF PURPOSE AND MISSION, RATHER THAN BEING LOST IN SELF-INTEREST.

One of the great tragedies of our modern society is that we have so much to live with and so little to live for. Pragmatism robs life of purpose, truth is whatever works.

Capitalism for all its drive and energy fails to answer the question why am I here?

What Tolstoy wrote of science could be applied to many of today's philosophies. Science is meaningless, because it gives no answer to the question, the only important question, which is what shall we do and how shall we live?

The place where we find the answer to the questions of meaning and purpose lies in the person of Jesus who holds all of life together.

THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION CREATES PEOPLE OF HOPE RATHER THAN PEOPLE OF DESPAIR.

For so many people life is simply, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. This is the final whimper of existentialism. This is the last line of the song of despair.

But people who embrace Jesus as being the truth. Are people who are called to live with hope and especially to die with hope. When we stand beside a dark slit in the ground at the graveside of a loved one or friend, we do so as people of hope in the truth of the resurrection of Jesus.

Each one of us needs something for which we will live, and for which we are willing to die. We need a cause which is bigger than who we are. Without that, we may find that our lives have little meaning.

Jesus knew what that mission was in his life when he said to Pilate, you are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth.

Truth is not a commodity for philosophers to argue about. Truth is not going to be suppressed by Nietzsche or Hitchens or anyone else. Truth is not just a doctrine waiting for our agreement. It is not a system of belief waiting to be checked off.

The purpose of truth is not to explain the world, but to change the world.

Truth is the energy and the power for people whose mission and task is to change the world by changing the very way people think and so how they live.

Truth is the fuel of Christianity.

The Spirit whom Jesus promised to us, and who came after Jesus returned to the Father is a spirit

of love. He is a spirit of power. He is also the spirit of truth.

Truth is a person, whose name is Jesus!