

INTRODUCTION

We're looking in John 8:30 today. If you are one of the new kiddos in Big Church, you'll find this passage on page 1017.

Many people have heard and used the expression, "The truth will set you free." However, not everyone knows that Jesus said it. After preaching for almost fifty years I've been able to add my own tagline to it: The truth will set you free or it will make you mad. Or sometimes truth will set you free but first it will make you mad.

Four high school boys were late for class and the teacher asked them why they were late. They said they had a flat tire. This was back when people changed their own flat tires. The teacher was skeptical, so she put the four guys in four corners of the classroom with a piece of blank paper. Then she said, "Write down which tire was flat." They got busted.

This is a message about truth. And before we read what Jesus had to say about truth, I need to issue a warning. Whenever we hear the tornado sirens go off, we take action immediately. This warning is more dangerous than a deadly tornado. WARNING: The rejection of absolute truth is destroying our moral foundation.

We have dentists to take care of tooth decay. But I'm alarmed about the rise of truth decay in America. I grew up in an America where there were absolute truths. I grew up in a time when the Ten Commandments were posted in our schools. Perhaps one reason there weren't any mass shootings back then is because we were all taught, "Thou shall not kill." I can remember some guys in my high school who would bring their guns to school. They were hunting rifle racks in the back window of their trucks in the parking lot...but there was never any shooting at people. About ten years after the Supreme Court removed these Ten Commandments from public schools, they voted 7-2 that it was legal to kill a baby in the mother's womb.

Today truth is subjective and personal. People say, "There are no absolute truths. Whatever I feel to be true is my truth. And my truth may not be your truth." But think about the contradiction. For someone to insist that there are no absolute truths is a statement of an absolute truth.

Not long ago, the George Barna Research firm asked Americans about whether they believe in absolute truth. 66% of adults say there is no such thing as absolute truth and 91% of teenagers said that truth is whatever they feel to be truth.

To illustrate this, consider gender identity. I know that there are people who truly struggle with gender confusion, and we need to show them love and compassion. However, we have arrived at a place where our culture says, "Whatever gender you feel that you are today, that's your truth, so it's okay."

Take for instance, Paul Wolscht. He is a 52-year-old man who was living with his wife and seven children. But inside he believed he was really a young girl. That became his truth. So he left his

family and moved into a home in Toronto with a couple who are now his adopted parents. He took the name Stephanie, and now he spends his time playing with dolls and with the grandchildren of his adopted parents. I'm not making this up.

Today if you sign up for a new Facebook account, they will give you 58 different gender options to choose.

This is just one example where we have replaced Biblical truth with personal subjective truth. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to warn about the danger of this. He said, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20)

If we say all truth is subjective, the results of that position become disastrous. If there's no such thing as absolute truth, well then, the Holocaust was just "Hitler's truth." And the attacks on 9/11 weren't evil, they were just "Osama ben Laden's truth."

As a culture when we adopt this position, we are headed toward chaos. The Book of Judges in the Bible tell us those times were evil because "Each man did what was right in his own eyes." That's a definition of truth in our culture. Truth is whatever you think it is. Now, what I'm about to say would make a lot of people mad. Because the truth will set you free or it will make you mad. While we live in a culture that recognizes 58 gender options, Jesus said, "God created them male and female."

John 8:30-42. As he was saying these things, many believed in him. Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"We are descendants of Abraham," they answered him, "and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus responded, "Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever. So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free. I know you are descendants of Abraham, but you are trying to kill me because my word has no place among you. I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father; so then, you do what you have heard from your father."

"Our father is Abraham," they replied. "If you were Abraham's children," Jesus told them, "you would do what Abraham did. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You're doing what your father does."

"We weren't born of sexual immorality," they said. "We have one Father—God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn't come on my own, but he sent me."

The ongoing debate between Jesus and the Jewish religious mafia would eventually lead to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. But Jesus was in control of the timing. He was going to die during Passover because He would be the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world.

In this passage in John 8, Jesus spoke the truth about three important areas of the Christian life. He gives us the truth about discipleship; the truth about sin; and the truth about freedom.

1. THE TRUTH ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP: Real disciples continue to grow spiritually.

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciple." Not everyone in Jerusalem was opposing Jesus. We see in verse many of the Jews believed in Him. They heard His words and saw His miracles, so they decided they would believe in Him. But no doubt, there were some in this crowd who were only mentally accepting Jesus, and in a few weeks would be part of the crowd yelling, "Crucify Him."

So Jesus told them, "It's good that you believe in me, but the proof that you are really my disciple is that you will continue to follow me and obey me."

The same is true today. There are crowds of people who have some kind of initial experience of making a public profession to follow Jesus—and they may even be baptized. But they don't continue. They become spiritual dropouts. Right now, Green Acres Baptist Church has over 16,000 names on our church roll. These are people who at one time indicated a desire to believe in Jesus. But according to Jesus, are they true disciples? Did they continue in His Word? You decide. At least half of our members never show up to worship God. They never open God's Word or seldom pray. But they need to understand that having your name on a church roll isn't the same thing as having your name written down in the Lamb's book of life.

Of course, I'm speaking this to those of you who ARE here. The ones I'm talking about aren't here. So if you see any of them this week tell them that the pastor talked about them.

There are many passages in the New Testament that confirm that the real evidence of discipleship is to continue to grow. The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2: "So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude." (Colossians 2:6-7 CSB)

We're all growing older. One person observed that growing older is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer you get to the end, the faster it goes! But growing older in age doesn't necessarily equate with growing deeper spiritually. There's no magic pill for spiritual growth. But there are four spiritual disciplines you can practice consistently over a period of time that will result in spiritual growth. Avery Willis included it as the disciples cross in Masterlife. There is a vertical axis to a cross, which represents talking to God in prayer and listening to God through His Word. There is a horizontal axis to the cross that this represents fellowshiping with believers and sharing your faith with non-believers. It's not rocket science; it's continuing to follow Jesus

throughout your life. Jesus said, "If you CONTINUE in my word, then you are really my disciple."

2. THE TRUTH ABOUT SIN: Sin will blind you and bind you.

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." The word "commit" isn't speaking about an isolated sin that you commit once or twice. The verb tense should read, "Everyone who continues to commit sin is a slave of sin."

These Jewish leaders boasted, "We're children of Abraham, we've NEVER been slaves." Huh? What a joke. They were blind to their own history. Their ancestors had been slaves in Egypt. Then they were slaves to the Assyrians, and then slaves to the Babylonians. And at that particular moment, they were under the yoke of the Romans. They were blind and they were in bondage to sin. That's what sin does, it blinds you and binds you.

If you or someone you know has ever struggled with addiction, you understand. It's like the person hooked on cigarettes who says, "I can quit anytime I want to. I've quit a hundred times before." It may be physical addictions like drugs, alcohol, and pornography. But there is also the bondage to sins of disposition. You may be someone who is bondage to a negative critical spirit, or the bondage to worry and anxiety.

One of the saddest stories in the Bible is Samson. He was a he-man struggling with sexual addiction. His strength wasn't in his long hair, God gave Him strength through the Holy Spirit. His life is the story of a downward spiral away from God. When Samson got his hair chopped off in the devil's barbershop, the Bible says he woke up to fight the Philistines. And Judges 16:20 says Samson didn't realize that the Lord had left him. He was blind to the fact that his sin had sapped his source of strength. Then the Philistines literally blinded and bound him and put him to work as a slave. Are you like Samson? Have you found that sin has sapped you of your spiritual strength?

Adrian Rogers used to say, "Sin will take you farther that you ever wanted to go. It will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay. It will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay." But the good news is that Jesus came to set you free from the bondage of sin.

3. THE TRUTH ABOUT FREEDOM: Jesus forgives you and frees you.

Jesus said, "So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free." For most of my life, I thought the song "Amazing Grace" couldn't be improved on, but I love the bridge Chris Tomlin added. Every time we sing it, I do motions. "My chains are gone; I've been set free; My God my savior has ransomed me. And like a flood, His mercy reigns; Unending love; Amazing Grace." Italians or so expressive. When Italian model, Valeria Altobelli, sang that with our Italy for Christ choir, she put 110% of her heart in it.

America is the land of the free and the home of the brave, but we often say freedom isn't free. It was bought and preserved by those who laid their lives down for our country.

The same is true of spiritual freedom. It isn't free. It cost Jesus laying down His life to forgive us and to free us. Listen to how the Bible identifies Jesus in Revelation 1: "To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6 CSB)

Because Jesus paid the price, we can have freedom from the fear of judgement. We have freedom from guilt. But if you are going to have freedom in Christ, you have to understand what freedom really is. And this is my Take-Away Truth: Freedom isn't doing anything you want to do; It is being the person God created you to be. Have you ever heard someone say, "I can do whatever I want to do; it's a free country?" But when they say that, chances are they are doing something that will put them in the bondage of sin. Real freedom is understanding who God created you to be. Your identity shouldn't be shaped by what you do or don't do. It shouldn't be shaped by what others think or say about you. Your identity is found in who you are in Christ.

Revelation 1:6 says God has made put us all in a kingdom and made us priests. As evangelicals, we have a precious doctrine that we call the priesthood of all believers. In the Old Testament, there were priests at the Temple, but you never read about priests being a special class of Christian in the New Testament. But the pagan religion of Rome that was in place when Constantine legalized Christianity had an elaborate system of priests. So, as I've said many times, Constantine didn't Christianize paganism; he just paganized Christianity. And to this day you are aware that some expressions of Christianity have a special status for those who are called priests.

But the truth is that all of us who are part of God's kingdom are priests. That's why you never hear me talk about clergy and laity. We are all priests before God. A priest in the Old Testament did two things and that's what all of us should be doing. A priest would talk to God on behalf of others, that's our call to intercessory prayer. And a priest talked to the people on behalf of God. That's our job to spread the truth of God in our culture. But be ready to make people mad when you share God's truth because the truth will set you free, or it will make you mad.

CONCLUSION

I will always remember the first time I shared a particular Biblical truth and it mad somebody spitting mad. I was in college and speaking in a church in Montgomery, Alabama. This was in the early 1970s when there was still a lot of racism. During the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, this church had made a decision that if a black person ever tried to attend worship, they would station men outside the church and block their entrance and escort them off the property.

When I heard about this, I decided to address it in a sermon. I preached from 1 John 4 where it says if a man says he loves God but doesn't love his brother, he is a liar and the truth is not in him. I said that God was no respecter of persons. Now I probably had a lot more zeal than knowledge then. But I said it bluntly, "If you say you love God but you don't love a brother or sister if their skin is black, brown, yellow, or purple, you're a liar and you've never been born

again. You need to repent and get saved." That statement didn't get a single amen. The church got as quiet as death.

After the service, there was a deacon in the church who confronted me. He was literally shaking with anger he was so mad. He was one of those short, chubby guys. He had a big belly and a short tie. He said, "Son, I don't care what you say, but I'll never love a (and he used the n word.)

I said, "Well, what about what the Bible says?" He said, "I don't care what the Bible says." And that summarized his problem there.

That sounds like our culture today. Multitudes of people are saying, "I don't care what the Bible says, this is what is truth for me."

We live in a culture where we've lost the idea of what is wrong and right. Martin Luther King said that the church is the conscience of the state. In a culture where absolute truths are rejected, the church must stand up and speak the truth in love. We must say good is good and evil is evil. But we need both truth and love. Truth without love is harsh brutality. Love without truth is empty sentimentality.

243 years ago our Founding Fathers revealed that they believed in absolute truth. They wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." Thomas Jefferson who composed that sentence later said that "self-evident truth" means these are universal truths that need no proof. They are unquestionable and without debate.

The absolute truth of human equality was a radical statement—and they got it from the Bible. The Bible says God is no respecter of persons. And our founders had the view that morality was based on the rules laid out in the Bible.

230 years ago, President George Washington was giving his first inaugural address. His first official act as President was to give his fervent prayer that the Almighty Being who rules over the Universe to bless the liberties and people of the United States. Then after speaking for about ten minutes, he concluded his speech with a stern warning, one that has become a prophecy we've seen fulfilled in the last 50 years he said: "The propitious (favorable) smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained." (April 30, 1789)

And God has blessed our nation with greatness. Ronald Reagan once said that America is great because America is good. If America ever ceases to be good it will cease to be great.

You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free. Our job is to hold out the truth of Jesus to a lost and dying world.

OUTLINE

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TAKE-AWAY TRUTH

Freedom isn't doing anything you want to do; It is being the person God created you to be.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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