

A God who Speaks: The Ninth Commandment

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[0 : 0 0] I, some of you know that I used to have hair that went down to my waist, down to my belt, and a big bushy beard sort of looking like a cross between, I don't know, somebody with really long hair and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

And I used to be sort of very much into radical politics, and I've demonstrated in my wayward youth, I've demonstrated on Parliament Hill and on the Spark Street Mall and in front of the War Memorial and Department of National Defense Headquarters and in front of embassies, and I'm probably missing some, oh, Queen's Park, I can't forget Queen's Park.

And I have to, if I was doing confession to you folks, I'd say, you know what, I was probably wrong on virtually every issue as well, but that's a whole topic for another sermon.

But one time, and I have repented of some of those things, you know, just one thing, you know, I think that more Vietnamese people died in the first year of Viet Cong rule, in the first two years of Viet Cong rule, more Vietnamese people died than in decades of civil war.

And I just, every time I think about it, I repent of demonstrating against that war, but that's a whole other topic of conversation. One time, I was with, at a demonstration in front of the Department of National Defense headquarters, and very few people showed up, but the press showed up.

[1 : 3 1] And this is like 29 years ago or something like that, a long time ago, and the press, the reporter and the photographer were very sympathetic to us.

So they said to us, after they'd interviewed us, they said, listen, if you folks could just sort of demonstrate in this type, just line yourselves up this way, and we'll stand with our camera here, and that'll make it look like there's lots of people demonstrating.

And we went along with it. And sure enough, in the press, they gave us a very, very favorable view, gave us exaggerated numbers, and the picture gave us exaggerated numbers.

And I thought about that a lot this week, as there's been lots of things in the press about how the press has been lying, with a lot of its pictures about what went on in Lebanon, and how it's been distorted. And you know, there's nothing new under the sun.

That's what the book of Ecclesiastes said a long time ago. And today, in our ninth of our ten sermons on the Ten Commandments, we come to the commandment that says, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

[2 : 3 5] And the false witness, it could also be said, you shall not bear untruthful witness about your neighbor. You shall not lie, give a lying witness about your neighbor.

You shall not do anything which is a falsehood, an untruth, or a lie. And as I was thinking about how to try to preach about this today, I was thinking at first, you know, I could try to deal with how do you do this and this and this and different examples and stuff.

And then it really struck me in prayer. You know, we are inundated in our social context with a culture that violates this all the time. Like, how many of us believe the advertising?

I'm not going to pick on anybody here, folks. This isn't like, you know, radical politics 101 revisited George H.W. Bush, you know, now that he's turned 50, pretending he's young again and ranting against the man or anything like that.

But, you know, you think about it, you know, advertisements, you know, by their very nature are trying to make things look far better often than they really are. And they're trying to convince us of needs that we don't really have or tell us that we have needs that we don't really have.

[3 : 42] And how many of us really believe the politicians when they speak? And how many of us believe everything that we hear in newspapers and televisions? And to be honest, how much do we believe what's said by our leaders or by our church?

And on and on and on and on. And in fact, we are completely and utterly inundated because very few cultures in the history of the of the earth have been as bombarded with words and images as ours.

I mean, you think about it in Jesus's time or in Moses's time when the Ten Commandments were said. I mean, there could have been little nomadic tribes that other than the couple of people in the family, they would have seen nobody or no no image other than just natural world.

And they could maybe go weeks and weeks and months and years, maybe being in the desert or being in other places and seeing virtually no people. And our culture, we are completely and utterly inundated with words, with songs, with images.

And in the midst of all of this, time after time after time, our culture wants to exaggerate, manipulate, undercut, tell a lie, slander, position themselves this way, spin this, spin that, spin that.

[4 : 56] And then it dawned on me, you know, we live in a culture which is so much at variance often with this commandment that we are inevitably blunted to the force of this commandment.

And so I said to myself, how on earth can I unblunt myself? Well, let's look at Jesus. And I'm going to take a bit of a risk today. Those of you who are in our TESO, I am doing, I'm going to flunk Sermon 101 by having us jump around in the Bible, and I'm going to start backwards in the Gospel of John.

So you need your Bibles this morning for sure. If you haven't brought your own, use the Pew Bible. We're going to look at the end of John's Gospel, close to the ends of John's Gospel, and we're going to work backwards from this.

John's Gospel is constantly mentioning the truth. I think true or truth is mentioned, I don't know, it's like 30 times, lots and lots of times in John's Gospel. But we're going to begin with one of the last times that truth is mentioned in John's Gospel, and it's right towards the end.

It's John chapter 18, verse 37. And it's page 939 if you're using your Pew Bibles.

[6 : 09] And this is the famous story, famous for Christians, of Jesus before Pilate. And Jesus is before Pilate in a sense. He is before Rome.

And Roman power, secular power, is standing before Jesus. He's being examined. His life is hanging in the balance. And this is how the conversation continues.

Pilate therefore said to him, verse 37, Are you a king then? Jesus answered, You say rightly that I am a king. Now listen to this. This is really significant.

Jesus is on trial before Rome. And he is on trial before the civil power. And listen to how he describes his purpose to Rome.

For this cause I was born. This is why I was born. For this cause I have come into the world. This is why I have come. That I should bear witness to the truth.

[7 : 07] Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. Pilate said to him, What is truth? What is truth? And then Pilate just figures out ways the balance of this probability and that probability.

And then he has Jesus put to death. Jesus' purpose is to witness to the truth. And given that that is one of Jesus' purposes, it should be one of ours.

And we see in this text the murderous purposes and the harmful purposes that come when we ask the question, What is truth?

And dismiss it and choose something which is untruth as the way that is going to guide our behavior. And to choose that which is untruth as the way forward effortlessly and easily coexists with murderous intent.

And we see it perfectly put to the person of Jesus. John 17, 17. This is the reason I'm saying that.

[8 : 15] I'm flunking Sermon 101. We're looking at seven of the key texts. And I'm not going to spend a long time in each of them. It's just a matter of trying to bring us before the word of God time after time after time.

And by going beginning at the end and moving to the beginning, see how the truth is constantly pushed to us. And the truth is trying to, God who speaks truth to us is trying to clarify what we should understand as truth.

Inflame within us a desire for that which is true. Inflame within us a repulsion of that which is lie and untruth and falsehood. In a sense, the scripture here can heal us.

Or can begin the process of healing us. John 17, 17. It's just the page earlier. It's page 937 if you're using your pew Bibles. Those of you who are familiar with the gospels will know that this is John's gospel.

13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 are all Jesus' final words to his disciples. It's Maundy Thursday. Shortly after Jesus says these words, he's going to be betrayed by Judas.

[9 : 23] He is going to be brought up on false charges. And I don't know what it is, 12 hours or something like that, or 16 hours after this event, Pilate is going to say, what is truth?

And have Jesus crucified. And Jesus here ends his words with his disciples by what is called the high priestly prayer. It's Jesus praying for his disciples.

Friends, if you are in Jesus, he's praying for you. If you want to have a bit of a sense as to how does Jesus intercede to the Father for you and me, listen to this.

You know, if you can just imagine Jesus up there in heaven all the time, he's saying, Oh, Father, this is what I hope for George. This is what I hope for the people of St. Albans who have come to know me. This is what I hope for my followers and my friends and my disciples here on earth.

And listen to what Jesus says, what he prays. Verse 17 of chapter 17. Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.

[10 : 27] Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. Sanctify means to become holy. It means to become set aside for God to use us as we desire.

It means that not only are we his precious treasure and his precious possession, but that we become more and more one that God can use us as he desires, and that we more and more can say, not my will, but your will be done in my life.

And that's the heart of sanctity. And here we see that God is truth. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. God can only speak the truth.

If God had a DNA, truth is part of God's DNA. There is nothing in God that is not true. He is true in his judgment, in his mercy.

He is pure, unadulterated, unending truth. And so to become like God, to be set aside for God's use, is to have to know the truth, and to be in the truth, and to be people of the truth.

[11 : 48] Those of you who are in university, and many university professors mockingly say, like a pilot, what is truth?

Do not despair. All the professors, and all the theologians, and all the editorial writers, and all of the people in the world can say what is truth, but God is truth, and that cannot stop that.

And it's woven right into the fabric of the universe. Do not despair. Seek truth. The third thing. John 16, verse 13.

We don't have to even turn our pages if you're using the Pew Bibles. John 16, verse 13. And here's Jesus still in the upper room, still his final moments of teaching with his disciples.

And here Jesus says, Listen again to the first part of the verse.

[12 : 54] Friends, the Holy Spirit has come.

Hallelujah. Isn't that fantastic? The Holy Spirit has come. Jesus did triumph over sin and death and hell and the evil one, and he poured out his Holy Spirit upon those who are his people.

Not only is the Holy Spirit come, the Holy Spirit is the one who is in our midst. And he only leads one way. He only leads towards truth.

To choose untruth, to choose lies, to choose falsehoods, to choose slander, to choose exaggeration, to choose flattery, to choose character assassination, to choose any of these things is to step out of the Holy Spirit.

It is to quench the Holy Spirit. It is to resist the Holy Spirit. It is to feed a contrary impulse than what the Holy Spirit is trying to put into us.

[14 : 04] It would be as if we go to a doctor who's giving us medicine to heal us, and then at the same time, as soon as we leave the doctor who's putting in medicine to heal us, we immediately go across the street to take poison to kill us.

And the Holy Spirit is like the doctor who is in our lives, moving in our lives, and he moves in our lives to foster within us a longing for truth, a yearning for truth, a desire for truth.

He heals us so that we can start to recognize what is lie and falsehood and untruth and what is truth, to hunger for truth, to be able to receive truth, to be able to speak truth, to live by truth.

That's the direction of the Holy Spirit. There's no other direction that he has. The fourth text, John 14, verse 6.

Those of you who are Bible scholars know that that's the verse that I just quoted to the little children before I prayed to them. It's on page 934, John 14, verse 6.

[15 : 13] And here we see Jesus talking about himself. As I said, he's describing himself, and he says to his disciples, he's still in the upper room, final teaching with his disciples, he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Jesus said to him, that's Thomas, who's asked him a question, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

You know, one of the first names for the Christians, or one of the first ways that the Christians described themselves, if you read the book of Acts, is that they were followers of the way.

That's who they were. They were followers of the way. And in a sense, this text then is asking us to choose, to we choose to be people of the way or people not of the way.

And if we choose to be people of the way, we are choosing to be people of the truth. And we cannot choose to be people of the lie, people of the untruth, people of the falsehood.

[16 : 23] We are invited to be the people of the truth. And like God, the Father, Jesus is only truth.

You know, I could try to describe to you complicated ethical dilemmas. You know, what do you do if the Nazis are knocking on your door and you're hiding Jewish people? You know, gosh, I'm a fallen human being and I live in a fallen world and I don't possess the wisdom of Jesus and I don't possess the foresight of Jesus and I don't abide in the Father's will like Jesus does.

And Jesus, because he's pure truth and not only pure truth, but purely and utterly obedient to his heavenly Father and purely and utterly obedient to the leading and the guiding of the Holy Spirit and pure goodness and all of those things.

I mean, you know, he just went through his life that there was nothing ever that he did that was in contradiction between mercy and justice and love and goodness and purity and the truth and all of those things and we're disjointed and broken people until we come to know Jesus and throw our lives into his hands and trust him and ask the Holy Spirit to start to work a work of healing in our lives and submit to his word that we can start to be healed and all I want to tell you, I'm not going to try to analyze for you complex moral questions.

I'm going to say to you that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that truth is not thin or narrow or abstract or disjointed but when Jesus says that he is the way, the truth, and the life, he is telling us that the truth is real, that it is pure, that it is thick, it is deep, it is powerful, it is living, and it is a person.

[18 : 22] In a sense, the truth is a face, the face that we were built to know, the face that we truly were made to long for and yearn for, that everything within us was designed that we would see the face of God through the person and the face of Jesus Christ and friends, I urge you to do what you need to do to be right with God so that at the end of your life when you appear face to face with God, you will see the face of Jesus and see him smile and you will say to him, I have been longing to see you all of my life and he will say to you, well done, my good and faithful servant, come into the kingdom prepared for you from all eternity.

The fifth passage of scripture tells us of that, of another face and it's John chapter 8 verse 44, it's page 928 and gosh, this is a powerful text, it's part of a controversy with the religious leaders, the leaders of culture, the leaders of religion, the people who get on the cover of People magazine, the movers and the shakers of Jerusalem and at the end of this long conversation in verse 59, they took up stones to throw at him because they wanted to kill him and here's what Jesus says to them in verse 44, talking to these people, you are of your father the devil and the desires of your father you want to do.

He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources according to his own nature for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Whoa! Listen to that again. You are of your father the devil and the desires of your father you want to do. In fact, these are the people who are going to conspire with false charges to have Jesus put to death and are going to put pressure on a man who says, what is truth?

So that he will agree to have Jesus put to death. He is completely and utterly bang on. You are of your father the devil and the desires of your father you want to do.

[20 : 54] He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie he speaks really I should say he speaks his own native language.

He speaks according to his nature for he is a liar and the father of lies. To choose untruth to choose lies or falsehoods slander character assassination to use language to manipulate to belittle to hurt is to step towards hostile spiritual powers and persons.

It does not mean in this text that every time one of us say we have a lie or an untruth we have a demon not saying that at all but it does mean that demons always lie and those who are afflicted with the demonic harassed by demons oppressed by demons possessed by demons believe lies and tell lies and that when we lie and tell untruth we are not learning the language of heaven but the language of the demonic.

That's a very hard word and friends before we leave this let me tell you this those of you who have ever had any dealings with the demonic demons always begin by telling you something like come with me and you will be like God and they end when they have power in you by telling you you are worse than dirt and you are completely and utterly under my thumb and to leave me who is really God will be the end of you.

Jesus says come to me all who are broken and heavy hearted and weary and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your soul for my yoke is easy and my burden is light and the work of Jesus in our lives is sometimes he confronts us of our brokenness sometimes he comes to us in despair sometimes he comes to us in the midst of consciousness of sin time after time he comes to us when we feel that things are out of control and that maybe we are worse than dust and about to be oppressed and destroyed or broken by powers far greater than us and Jesus comes to us unlike a demon and reaches down to us in that state of affairs and when we place our hands in his we find this wonderful unbelievable shocking pronouncement you will be like me the most broken person the most sinful person the weakest person you like me will be like

[23 : 55] Jesus not by works but by grace those lies are terrible folks just in the same passage the same conversation John chapter 8 verse 32 and you know one of the things I found is when I was working backwards in John earlier things in John made more and more sense you're able to understand things in the case of John's gospel when you know the end and you go backwards you can understand the beginning better and better and better and listen to what John Jesus says oh you have to turn the page John chapter 8 verse 32 and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light truth here we now see is more than two plus two equals four but even tiny tiny truths like that give us some freedom no if you're in Canada and you can't read and you can't count you aren't free even abstract thin narrow truths give us freedom but the deeper the truth the deeper the freedom and friends you and I we are very deep

God has created us not to be shallow but we in our very nature are very deep and we need deep truth not thin narrow abstract little bits and pieces of truth we need deep truth because we are deep and there is nothing deeper than God who is truth nothing deeper than God who is truth friends one of the purposes of the ten commandments there's two purposes in the ten commandments the ten commandments are the outline of sanity and they are the outline of sanity the outline of freedom the outline of truth the outline of hope they are the outline of sanity and for those of us who have not yet come to know Jesus the fundamental purpose of the ten commandments is to make us realize that we need a savior like you take this one here even this ninth commandment and maybe you hear this commandment and you say okay from now on

I'm only going to speak the truth know the truth love the truth yearn for the truth and if you even made that commitment today it would not take very long if you have any type of self examination before you fail but even if you had sufficient power to somehow or another only live in the truth for the rest of your life what would possibly atone for the lies and the deceptions that have characterized your life for the last in my case 50 years nothing that I can do can atone for that or change that and so the commandments are pushing us when we see what sanity means and our inability to hit sanity by ourselves to finally call out to God and say God I need a savior and then Jesus says I am the way and the truth and the life come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light for those of us who have come to the person of Jesus trusting him as our savior committing to follow him as Lord and open to the

Holy Spirit then we have here before us the outline of what it is how it is that we are to live how are we to live as people of the truth and not as people of the lie learning the language of heaven not the language of demons learning that to love God who is truth learning the truth is deep and so there is within us here something that can that's why the prayer book go back and read page 68 and 69 of the book of common prayer the little red books in your pews and after every one of the commandments there is a prayer and the prayer is Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law praise God final one and this all I can really say this really all it teaches us is to adore just to adore this final passage is just teaching us to be thankful to adore God to meditate upon his son Jesus Christ to understand that Jesus is not only full of truth but he's full of grace that there's no contradiction between truth and grace between truth and love but that Jesus is only grace only mercy only truth and that he comes to be amongst us so that we might know the grace and the truth of God through the mercy of God he comes to us so that we may say yes to him and by saying yes to him that we might learn to adore

John chapter one verse 14 actually you know what I think we have time we're going to begin verse one John chapter one verse one the beginning of the gospel see sometimes it's worth it to read the book backwards in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him without him nothing was made that was made in him was life and the life was the light of men and women and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it there was a man sent from God whose name was John this man came for a witness to bear witness of the light that all through him might believe he was not that light but was sent to bear witness of that light that light was the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world that light was in the world and the world was made through him and the world did not know him that light that word came to his own and his own did not receive him but as many as received him that word that light as many as received him to them he gave the right to become children of God even to those who believe in his name who are born these new children not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth

[30 : 35] John bore witness of him and cried out saying this was he of whom I said he who comes after me he has preferred before me for he was before me and of his fullness we have all received grace for grace for the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ no one has seen God at any time the only begotten son who is in the bosom of the father he has declared him let us pray loving father we thank and praise you that you are filled with mercy that you see us in our time of deepest need and you do not despise us belittle us but that you send your you sent your son you send your son to us as the savior loving father may your son truly be our savior may we entrust our lives to him and may your holy spirit spirit move and work in our lives leading us to a full confidence in your word a healing of mind and heart and will fan into flame within us father a deep longing and yearning for the truth heal us that we might speak the language of truth heal us that we might receive truth and dwell in truth and abide in truth all this we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen