

Big Question - Can we know the truth?

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Preacher: Benji Cook

[0 : 00] Angie, thank you very much for coming to speak to us this evening. Now, you are a senior barrister, you are a KC at King's Council.

I believe you took SILF, that is, well, became what was then a QC, Queen's Council, at the age of 41. You work in insurance law and also sits as a judge at the Southwark Crown Court, is that right? So when you do insurance law, you can sometimes insist the judge of a crime, about which you know almost nothing. And you probably won't enjoy me telling everyone this, but just so we know who we're listening to, Angie went to Cambridge aged 17 and graduated top of his class aged 19. But I have it on good authority that you are not the person in your family that graduated from Cambridge with a double starred first.

So that makes me feel a little bit better sitting on top of your class. I didn't get a star. Unlike someone else in my family.

[1 : 13] I can arrange that for you. I can give you a gold star. Now, just for those of us who don't know, can you tell us what a KC is?

It basically means I'm a senior barrister. I represent clients in court. I give them advice. Nowadays, the points of law that come to me for advice seem to be harder than they used to be.

But in some ways, that's easier because it's easier to say, well, it's a very difficult question. The answer is very uncertain and we'll have to wait and see.

And it's really practicing the facial expression with which you don't have advice. Whoever's killed, I think truly can't. And have you always been interested in law?

I first started to show an interest in law when I was in my early teens. And then just after I'd done my O-levels in those days.

[2 : 16] So when I was just before my 15th birthday, I had the chance to spend a couple of days with a barrister friend of my parents in his chambers. And I think that's where my interest really started.

And was there anything particular about that work experience that piqued your interest? Well, I have quite vivid memories of the work he was doing over that couple of days.

My friend was acting for a British company that had a contract to make a certain type of speed bridge. But they were basically a modern form of landing craft.

They had a ramp at the front and they were designed to deliver people onto a beach at high speed. But the issue was that they had machine gun mountings front and back.

And they were called fast assault craft. And his client had a contract to sell, I think, about 15 of these boats new to an admiral who was in charge of the Iranian naval in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war.

[3 : 23] And the problem was that the British government had imposed an export ban. And that had stopped the contract in its tracks. And my friend was instructed to try and persuade the British government that they should lift the export ban.

And his instructions were that the client, or rather the purchase of the admiral in the Iranian naval, had a large family.

He had a number of wives and a significant number of children. And the story was that they all liked going to the beach. And this is why he needed landing craft.

So that he could deliver his extended family onto the beach at some speed. And this was the argument that I heard my friend putting across for the representatives of Her Majesty's government, who were trying to stop weaponry making its way to the Iran-Iraq war.

And now what we were wanting to say is, did they win? He did not win. What he did succeed in was persuading me that I thought this was really rather an interesting career path that I might follow him.

[4 : 33] And that was when he said to me, look, if you might be interested in doing this, you just need to go and get a first-class degree in law from either Oxford or Cambridge, and then come back and speak to me again.

And 39 years later, that is actually the set of chambers I'm now practising. So, in your experience, what would you say makes a good barrister?

I think someone who is quite quizzical, who has some knowledge of the law, some attention to detail, and is willing to work quite hard.

Otherwise, I'm not quite sure. You'd have to ask my clients what they look for in a good barrister. Okay, we will. And, obviously, as mentioned, you work part-time as a judge in Southwark Crown Court.

Are there any particular cases in that that, well, A, you can tell us about, and B, that were particularly gripping? So, I'm supposed to do a month-a-year at Southwark.

[5 : 42] You get quite a mix of serious crime. It's presiding over jury trials. Sometimes it's not very interesting. Sometimes it's really quite fascinating.

I did have one case back in about 2018, I think, that got me into the mail online for two or three days. But the defendant had been released from prison on a particular day.

And that evening, she was in the street. She found a Stanley knife blade discarded by a bill. So, she picked it up. She went behind a boyfriend and girlfriend who were walking on a night out together. And she slashed the girl on the back of the knee, causing an injury which, according to the mail online, needed 16 stitches and was really quite serious.

The couple retreated into the local Burger King because this was a complete, unprovoked stranger attack and they really didn't know what had happened. The defendant followed them in and in the Burger King, filmed on the CCTV, committed a sustained and frenzied attack on the girl, slashing her about the head and neck repeatedly and really causing a significant amount of permanent damage.

[7 : 04] And I got the case. You only get told on the morning, oh, judge, there are journalists in the public gallery. And then, of course, you have to go online to find out for yourself why there are journalists in the public gallery.

And the reason was that this defendant had been the girlfriend of the then Prince Charles' godson and had lived with him for a couple of years at the Broadlands estate, which was the Mountbatten family home.

So it was really quite a challenging case. It was quite gruesome in some ways. The defendant refused to participate in her trial.

She misbehaved in court and everything kind of kicked off in the way that you hope it doesn't when you're trying to control the courtroom. Gosh, I mean, that's quite kind of extreme in one sense, isn't it?

How do you go from witnessing something like that in court to hearing all about it, seeing the CCTV footage, to transitioning to home life with your wife and two children?

[8 : 14] Well, I mean, those can be difficult transitions to make. I think sometimes I find that when I'm in court and I'm the judge, you do have a certain amount of power over the people in the room.

And yet when I go home, sometimes I'll get in fine. But it doesn't work quite the same. And in a sense, I think the members of my household regard themselves as having a responsibility to ensure that it doesn't work.

Unless I think that I have more power than I really do. I like sloppy there, just in case somebody sees you for defamation of character. I was really referring to the cat being a weird joke.

Of course. Now, you're obviously, what you preside over in the Crown Court is very different to the work you do in insurance law. And I know you've been working on quite a big case for a long time. What can you tell us about that? So, I don't know whether insurance law sounds dull to you. I do quite a lot of what's called political risk work and political violence work.

[9 : 32] And something happened in February 2022 that means there's been really quite a lot of that work around since then.

So, the big case I'm involved in concerns aircraft that Western companies have leased to Russian airlines. And when Western sanctions were imposed 36 hours after the invasion of Ukraine, the leases were terminated.

And the aircraft should have come back for the leasing companies and come out of Russia. But here we are, two and a bit years on, two years on.

The aircraft are still in Russia. They're still largely being flown around Russia. And the Western owners of the aircraft say they have lost their aircraft and they're bringing insurance claims for the loss of their aircraft.

So, we're currently, I'm acting for London marketing sugars who are not, they say, liable under their policies to pay for these aircraft.

[10:40] And we're going to have a 12-week trial starting in October. One of the key issues in that case is going to be why have those aircraft stayed with Russia?

Is it because Russian airlines decided to keep them? Or is it because Putin's government ordered the airlines to keep them? So, we've basically been spending quite a lot of time trying to understand how power works in Russia and to try and get to the truth of what happened in the dealings between the Russian government and Russian airlines over a two-week period starting on the 25th of February 2022.

So, quite involved. And just to give us an idea, how much is the fleet, do we call it a fleet?

Yeah, we call it a fleet. How much is the fleet worth, do you say? So, in the case I've instructed in, we're talking about 113 passenger aircraft, Airbus and Boeing's, a range of different ages and sizes. We have one Airbus A350 that was delivered brand new 24 hours before the invasion and we have 112 others of varying sizes and ages.

[12:00] When the claim was issued, in my case, it was a \$3.5 billion claim. That's one round of it subsequently because various things have happened.

And the cause in London is going to hear six cases at the same time with six sets of lawyers in each of the cases. And I think in taking we're dealing with 160 aircraft, about \$4.5 billion.

Wow. And by the sounds of it, lots of lawyers involved. There are more lawyers than you might know, Mrs. There are certainly more lawyers than you could fit in a court.

Amazing. Now we're considering the question this evening, can we know the truth? Obviously, you, in your work in a court, you're having to determine the truth all the time.

So what would you say are the key criteria to establishing truth? So the way we go about trying to get to the truth in court cases is what we call evidence.

[13:10] And that's basically documents, what do they show, what do people write down at the time, and witnesses, what do they say. And you're really looking at the whole spectrum of the available evidence, trying to decide what's reliable, what's not reliable.

And from that, try and draw conclusions about what the truth was. And how might you weigh some of those testimonies? Well, you start by listening to what people say, you pay attention to how they say it, you think about whether what they're saying is consistent with what was written at the time, what was done at the time.

You think about whether what they're saying has the air of reality, is that what happens in normal life. And you put all the pieces of the evidence together, you think about consistency and reliability. If you know something about the witnesses, you might take that into account. So, for example, if you have someone charged with drug dealing, you say they weren't a drug dealer, but they've got five previous convictions for drug dealing, well, that might be something you take into account in considering whether their denials are acceptable.

And in society today, we seem to have a sort of, you know, I can have my truth, you can have your truth, there's a bit of a potentially crisis of truth.

[14:38] Do you think truth matters? If so, why? And what might you say to somebody who said we have a crisis of truth in our society? So, three questions there.

Well, I think we all actually live our lives on the basis that truth matters. We're all in our day-to-day lives trying to work out what we can rely on that other people are saying to us.

And truth is of the essence of reliability. So, for example, if you go to the doctor and you ask the doctor what's wrong with you, and the doctor does the tests, and the doctor gives you a diagnosis, very few people say, well, thank you doctor, that's your truth, but I have my truth, and I'm going to ignore what you say because I don't like it.

If actually you've gone to the doctor because you trust them, and you want them to tell you what's wrong, you're then going to rely on what they say. And I think that's the normal part of human life, that in order for human relationships to be possible and to be meaningful, we're always working out

who we come into contact with, whose words and statements are trustworthy and reliable. And I think that lies at the heart of human relationship. Then you say, well, don't we have a crisis of truth? truth. And I understand obviously why people say that.

[16:18] But actually to say that is to concede that there is such a thing as truth that there to be a crisis about. Because it's not very meaningful to talk about a crisis of truth if there is no such thing as truth in the first place.

I also think that to talk about a crisis of truth is, I suppose, quite a hopeful statement. Because it's a recognition that society and the way people relate to each other could be better.

There is actually a means of interaction in society which is based more on truth than what we see at the moment. And I think when people say there's a crisis of truth, they're really revealing that they want something better than they see at the moment.

And they think that something better is possible and ought to be achieved. That's really helpful.

Thank you. Can we dig a bit deeper into Andrew Wales now?

So you're a Christian. You grew up in a Christian home. Your parents are Christians. Some might say that you just inherited your faith. What might you say to that?

[17:38] I think it's fair to say to some extent that I did inherit my faith. I think when you grow up in a Christian family, you are shown Christian truth from a very early age.

But it's not inevitable that you will end up believing it. And I certainly feel that I went through a process where having first become a Christian age 12, I then found myself very irritated through my teenage years that other Christians I came into contact with couldn't answer my questions, couldn't help me to understand what it really meant to be a Christian in the way I wanted to understand.

And it was only really when I went to university and was able to work that through for myself that those doubts were disperse. people. And I think at the end of that process it would be very hard to say that I had merely inherited my faith.

I think it had come to be something much more personal, much more meaningful than just what my parents had handed down to me. And can you tell us a little bit more about how you, I can't remember the word that you used, but kind of investigated it for yourself at university?

Yeah, so I think the way I went about it as a teenager, in hindsight, wasn't very helpful. So I would go and ask a lot of Christians for them to tell me the answer to a question I had.

[19:15] when in fact at university I was introduced to the notion of really reading the Bible for myself, and instead of asking other people what the answer was, I came across people who would point me to the Bible as the place where I would find the answers.

And it was really through that process of reading the Bible and seeing what it says, and learning what it's trying to teach me, that I started to find answers to my questions.

But I think I also found that you really have to be willing to live with uncertainties for quite a long time. You will have questions to which there is no obvious or immediate answer.

But actually, over time, as you engage with the Bible and think about what it's saying, those questions can be resolved. And I put it that way because sometimes you can come to see that you've been asking the wrong question, or it's not really a question at all.

And other times you come to see that there is an answer to the question. So resolution, I think, comes in different forms, but not necessarily straight away. But it's really through that process of wrestling with the Bible and being willing to read it and see what it says, that I found this helpful.

[20:46] And the Bible's a big book, so where would you suggest somebody starts? The Bible is a big book, but it's a collection of little books. And if you have a gospel like this, which is really not that thick, I think this is the place to start.

Because when you start with the gospel, you're really starting with Jesus, you're starting with his life, his words, his claims, what he did. And I think I certainly found that this is the heart of the matter, and that you can read it, and when you've read it, you can start again, you can read it a second time.

And of course, as you read things more than once, you then find that details that maybe you missed first time become clearer, or points that you didn't understand first time start with it together.

So I think I'd start here. And just, that's an eyewitness account of Jesus' lives, and what persuades you that this eyewitness account is true?

Well, that's, I think, an interesting question. I mean, I can bring to bear the tools that lawyers regularly use. So I can read it, I can see what it says, I can think about whether the accounts are

consistent, whether the evidence holds together.

[22 : 06] But actually, there is a bit of an inbuilt problem, that when I'm doing crime, and I'm sitting in court, you're asking juries, members of the public, to bring to bear their ordinary experience of everyday life, in thinking, you know, is it likely that something happened this way?

And the quote about the Bible and the story of Jesus is that Jesus claims to be unique in what he says, and what he does, and who he is.

And that's a bit of a problem, because you can't then say, well, it's likely to have happened because that's what happens in normal, everyday life. But the claim to uniqueness is saying, well, no, this isn't what happens in everyday life.

This has never happened before, and it's never happened since. And so it's almost as if God is then stacking the deck against himself, in terms of, well, how could you ever be sure that it's true?

And that's actually where you then start looking around for, I think, different categories of evidence that might help with that point.

[23 : 18] And that's where the rest of the Bible comes in. So then you start to realize that it's not just about what Jesus said and did. There's a whole new category of evidence in the form of what was promised for many generations and many, many years beforehand.

And you start to realize that it hinges then not just on the eyewitness testimony, but on whole generations of people. who died long before Jesus lived, but who actually looked forward and foretold what would happen.

And in Jesus, their words find a fulfillment. And so you start to realize that the claim to uniqueness rests on a God who, throughout human history, has organized everything to come to band in Jesus and his life.

And you are, in a sense, then, working with normal categories of evidence. that you're realizing that there's actually more going on that can accommodate some of the unique claims that Jesus and, therefore, the Christian faith make.

What makes you glad to be a Christian today? I think what makes me glad is ultimately the promises that Jesus makes.

[24 : 37] So, you know, you can look around the world and it's not great and the future's uncertain. And yet Jesus says he controls the world and he controls the future.

God. And I think as I get older, I find that more reassuring. But I think that is what makes me glad that there is a loving God who knows the future and controls the future and wants a certain future for each one of us.

So, coming back to our question, can we know the truth? It's just a small one. It's just a small question.

I don't think we can know all of the truth in all situations all of the time. But it doesn't follow that we can't know any of the truth in any situation any of the time.

To come back to my example of a doctor, if you go to a well- qualified, competent doctor, and the doctor gives you a careful professional diagnosis, you may very well be able to say, and nobody will say if you take a second opinion, that you come to know the truth about the condition you may have.

[25 : 57] Think about the jury. There are very, very, very many criminal cases in which when all the evidence has been heard, there is really no doubt about what happened and where the truth lies.

And again, I think there's a situation in which we can say that the truth is known. I think where it then becomes harder is when we start to think about promises or predictions about the future.

Because that's where human promises or predictions often turn out to be unreliable. And I think that's because human beings don't know the future and can't control the future.

So I might regularly bring my wife and say, well, I promise to be home by 9pm. But when I make that promise, I'm making certain assumptions about the demands of my clients and the reliability of the trains and nothing else going wrong.

And of course, she factors that in and knows that when I'm not home by 9, something must have happened that was outside my control. But of course, I've then broken my promise.

[27 : 12] And I think this then starts to be where the comparison with Jesus can be drawn. But yes, the Christian claim is that Jesus renders a true verdict about events, about guilt, about judgment.

But Jesus gives a true diagnosis of our human condition and our human need. So like a perfect judge and jury, like a perfect doctor.

But also, when Jesus makes promises about the future, we would want to say that those promises are so reliable that we can describe them as being true.

And I think the difference there is that it's not just that Jesus knows the future, it's that Jesus controls the future. He can bring the future about in accordance with his word.

And so, one comes to see that there is an utter reliability to the words of Jesus that we have in the Bible, but puts them in a category apart from human claims to truth.

[28 : 22] And thus, it means that insofar as Jesus reveals the truth to us, we can know it. Now, that doesn't mean that we're given all the truth about everything, in every situation, all of the time.

But I think it does mean that we can know the truth that has been given to us by the one who knows the truth and reveals it to us. Thank you. And just as we close, is there any sentence in this account of Jesus' life that has been particularly precious or helpful to you?

I think, I mean, there are lots of sentences in John. It is worth reading. I mean, in preparation for this, I read through it, and with my favourite barrister's implements being a yellow highlighter pen. I highlighted in a copy at home every occurrence of the word true, truth, or truly, used in relation to the words of Jesus. And by the time I got towards the end, there were more than 50 references. And then you come to a verse towards the end, where John writes, these words are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that by believing you might have life in his name.

[29 : 47] And I find that a helpful verse, because it shows the purpose for which the Gospel is written. And I think you can start to see that the purpose is not just that we might pass some judgment on Jesus, like a judgment, where you form a conclusion, you place the book, you put it aside, and you move on to the next case.

It's not about an objective decision in that sense. The issue is, will we believe? Will we accept what Jesus says? Will we put our trust in what Jesus says?

Will we live in accordance with what Jesus says? And the promise is that by believing, we might have life in his name. So there's something much more personal and relevant going on in relation to the claims to truth and respect.

And I do find that verse very helpful in reminding me why it is that this is here, and why it is that it's profitable to read it. That's great.

Thank you so much. It's been really interesting and thought-provoking to hear from you. Thomas said to him, that's Jesus, Lord, we do not know where you are going.

[31 : 06] How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.

From now on, you do know him and have seen him. Thanks, Natasha. It's great to see so many of you out here this evening. My name is Benji. If we've not met before, I'm on staff at Grace at Sturge. I'm one of the ministers here. And we're going to start by doing something quite un-British, which is we're going to see that Jesus actually says something that we've just read in that passage far more offensive than you might have originally thought.

So he said something far more offensive than we might have originally thought. Don't worry, I won't take up too much of your time. There are only two points, so you know where we're going. And we're already into the first, which is the extent of Jesus' truth claim.

And I wonder if you notice that in our verses from this eyewitness account that we have read, that immediately from our verses, it is obvious that Jesus is making a truth claim that flies completely in the face of our modern secular understanding of truth.

[32 : 18] If you have a look down with me again at the biblical verse 6, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the love.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Did we catch what Jesus is saying? He's not just saying, I know the truth. I can show you the truth. No, no, no. Jesus is saying, I am the truth.

I am the truth. Which, of course, to modern sensibilities is deeply offensive. Now, many of us might be familiar with the famous Buddhist parable. I wonder if we come across this.

It's often a parable used to describe how different world religions, including Christianity, have some of the truth, but not quite all of the truth. And it goes something like this, that you get ten religious men and you bring them into a room and you blindfold them.

And when you blindfold them, you then sneak an elephant into the room. I don't quite know how you sneak an elephant into the room, but there you go. You sneak the elephant into the room and you instruct each of the blind men to grab a different part of the elephant.

[33 : 19] One of the blind men grabs the tail and proclaims it's a snake. Another blind man grabs the leg and thinks that he's rubbing up against a nice tree. And another man grabs the trunk and thinks that he is grabbing, ultimately, a stick or a piece of wood or perhaps another snake.

But the point is that none of them have an objective understanding of what's going on. They all are ultimately grabbing the same thing. Whilst they might have some kind of claim to the truth, they certainly don't have an objective claim to the truth.

And they don't have a complete understanding of the truth. But do we notice that Jesus doesn't let us say that about him? He doesn't let us say that he only knows part of the truth or a distorted part. No, he says, I am the truth. Far more offensive than perhaps we immediately realise. And his response is we see to a question.

If you have a look down at verse 5 again, Thomas said to the Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? What is Jesus referring to? Well, if we look at verse 2, he's referring to in my father's house.

[34 : 29] Which is just another way of saying heaven or God. So I'm afraid, ladies and gentlemen, it gets even more offensive than we might have originally thought. Because not only is Jesus saying, I am the truth.

Jesus is saying, I am the only way to know God. I am the only way to heaven. Now it's important to get clear that truth is never in a vacuum.

Here's a truth for you. Killer whales all breathe in unison. Did you know that? Killer whales, they all breathe in unison. Your lives have now been inordinately changed by this truth, obviously.

Now, obviously, you're going to go and form a whole series of religions that conflict over the nature of whale breathing. Some of you are going to go into one corner and say, no, listen, whales breathe on the offbeat. And others are going to go and say, no, no, no, you don't understand.

They breathe on a one-four pattern. Of course you're not. Because some truths are not consequential. But others are. And in this case, this is deeply consequential.

[35 : 30] Because Jesus is not just saying my way is just a way to God. He's not saying that my way could be part of a bigger way to God. No, he is saying I am the way.

And it's not just that he can point people to the truth of God. It's that he is that truth. He is that truth. And it's important, I guess, I suppose, to then take a step back to see what Jesus is not saying.

Or I suppose what he is denying about himself. Because Jesus is not claiming to be a holy man that could perhaps point us on the way to Nirvana. Jesus is not giving us a seven-step process by which that we can find exaltation.

He is not a holy man that points us to enlightenment or to some greater truth. Nor is Jesus actually claiming to be just a prophet like Mohammed, with particular insight into God.

No, rather he is saying I am the truth of God. I am the way to God. In other words, Jesus is not like a map that shows us the way up the holy mountain.

[36 : 42] Jesus is like the car that you get in to take you to the destination. Do we see why this is potentially slightly more offensive than we originally realised?

That's the extent of the true claim that Jesus is making. And immediately that will lead some of us to say in our minds, and I wonder if we're thinking that right now, does that mean therefore, John and Jesus, by implication, that all other approaches to God are not true?

Does that mean that what you're ultimately saying is that other religious claims are false? And Jesus' answer is yes. Yes, they are.

Now, of course, this is deeply offensive until we realise we all make these sort of claims. I want to tell you about my old aunt Ethel. I'm sure all of you now in the room believe that I have an aunt called Ethel, and I need you to believe this for the sake of this illustration, okay?

So you're all with me here together, okay? Now, there's more audience participation here, don't worry, it's going to be fine. Who in the room believes that my old aunt Ethel is below five foot tall?

[37 : 54] Very small lady, my old aunt Ethel, she's below five foot tall. Does anyone in the room believe that? Anyone at all? Amazing. Thank you. Thank you so much. That's exactly right for some of you in the room. Now, I hear, but I have it on other authority, that my old aunt Ethel is six foot eight, a female NBA player, she can dunk without jumping, it's incredible, and that my old aunt Ethel

is actually very, very tall.

Who in the room believes that my old aunt Ethel is very, very tall? We've had some very, amazing, look at that, we've got two people who think she's tall, more people think she's short, which means the third option, who in the room believes that Benji is a liar, and he doesn't have an old aunt Ethel? Who would that be in the room? Yeah, that is, yeah, that is pretty, that is pretty damning, isn't it? Yeah, and whether or not that is true, if old aunt Ethel did walk into the room, and her head was scraping the ceiling, well then of course we would have to all pause and realise that of course she is not a midget, and nor, as many of you, very cruelly believes, does she not exist.

No, in other words, if Ethel stepped into the room, well we would have to be confronted with the fact that she has shown us what she is like. And it is the same with the Lord Jesus.

What if God has stepped into the room? What if he has shown us what he is like? What if he has told you that he is the truth? And we care about truth, and Andrew touched on this.

[39 : 21] We all live our lives based on the foundation of objective truth. Now it would probably be fair to say, I am very privileged to do some youth work with our young people, and often they tell me that their friends say things like, yeah but my truth is dot dot dot, and yes but your truth is, insert your Taylor Swift fan, which would be your truth, certainly not mine.

In other words, whatever works for you, this is what they are saying, whatever works for you is true, whatever works for me is true, but there is no such thing as the truth.

And that probably would be the mantra of our age, that's probably why if we're honest we all in this room realise that Jesus is saying something fundamentally very offensive. Because we all know that if we went into the office place and said all religious claims are false, apart from this one, well we know where that would end us up.

We know that that is offensive. But yet we all live our lives based on the foundation of objective truth. And even that claim, that there is no way to know true objective truth, well it fails its own test. Because of course, ladies and gentlemen, we know, don't we, that the claim that there is no universal truth is itself a universal truth claim. We know that. If there is, I'll say that again, because if there is no universal truth, that of course is itself a universal truth claim.

[40 : 44] And in fact if we return to our elephant idea, imagine so all the people in the room, they're all grabbing different parts of the elephant. Well what does it say about the person who stands back and says, yeah but they're all just kind of grabbing the same thing without realising.

Well where are they in the room? Well of course they're in a helicopter, aren't they? Flying above the elephant, looking down on all these silly religious people holding a different part of it. It's quite something to say there is no truth.

Because what does that mean, ladies and gents? It means that Muslims are wrong, it means that Christians are wrong, that Hindus are wrong, it means we're all wrong. In other words, it doesn't matter where you fall, ultimately you are going to have to make an objective truth claim.

And if you say there is no truth, that is just as exclusive as saying Jesus is the truth. But of course Andrew again touched on this in our everyday lives, we don't live life this way.

The cancer diagnosis is. The contract terminates at. Until death us do part. No, we live our lives on the foundations of exclusive truth and God is no different.

[41 : 51] Here is Jesus Christ making absolutely clear to us the way to God. I am the truth. So we've touched, haven't we, on the extent of the truth claim.

We've seen that it is far more offensive potentially than we might have realised. Although perhaps we've also seen that we too make similar kinds of claims. But the second and final point, you'll be pleased to know the final point on the home stretch.

The second and final point is that this is the best truth claim that there has ever been made. This is the best truth claim that has ever been made. Andrew touched on some of these things.

We could have gone in our final points to talking about the historical reliability of Jesus' truth claim. I could have stood up here and pointed to the 3,000 original Greek New Testament manuscripts within the first three centuries, making Jesus' death and resurrection the most attested historical event in human history.

An ancient event, that is. But we won't. We could have spoken about the internal evidence. As Andrew said, that there were generations of people. The Bible spans 3,000 years and 34 authors.

[42 : 59] And there were predictions of Jesus' death, where he would be born, who he would be born to, what he would ultimately go on to do. 700 years before his life, death and resurrection. We

could have spoken about those things, but we won't.

Instead, the truth that we will end on is that this is the greatest truth, the best truth, the most liberating truth ever made. Because, ladies and gentlemen, if we had gone through this eyewitness account of John's Gospel, we would have seen something that all of us, I think, in this room will resonate with in one way or another.

Because the world has a problem. And again, we heard this somewhat in the interview. Humanity has a problem. And it doesn't take long to see that as we talk about lawyers, as we talk about insurance, as we talk about terrorists and political violence and all the other things that we heard about, it doesn't take long to realise that this world is not particularly lovable at all.

No, not particularly lovable. And in many ways, human beings have made great strides. We've made great strides in the forms of modern medicine, art and science, and that is wonderful. But we've also, if we're honest with ourselves, morally not progressed at all.

Maybe not even a little bit. Despots still threaten death. Putin is a story as old as human history. So old that if it wasn't so horrible, it would be dull.

[44 : 27] Women are still unsafe from predatory men, as Wayne Cousins, coming back into the news with Sarah Everard, proves. Politicians, they still like. And God, ultimately, is still routinely ignored.

Though, if we're honest with ourselves, we are not very lovable. We are broken. Very broken. And this is what John, in his eyewitness account, calls sin.

And we might think that that is a religious word that doesn't really have much bearing on you and I. But it is a serious thing. A very serious thing. Because John would want us to see that sin is the reason that there are wars.

It's the reason there is illness. It's the reason there is racism. Broken families, deceit. It's why, if we're even honest with ourselves, in our best endeavours, we can never live up even to the ideals of ourselves in our own heads.

I wonder how many New Year's resolutions are still ongoing. How many hopes and dreams that we have in our mind from January, and yet are still not fulfilled. But John presses the point to say that this is even worse than we might have imagined.

[45 : 35] Because so far we've only spoken on the horizontal. If I lie, I impact my wife. If I'm lazy, I impact my colleagues. But John wants to say that there is another axis upon which our sin and our brokenness impacts.

Which is simply that we have offended God. We've offended the person who made us. We've offended the person who gave his son. I'd like to say that just briefly so that we can see this for ourselves.

If we turn towards the beginning of John's Gospel, we get an executive summary on page 8. If we turn to page 8 in our little Gospels, our little iBooks accounts, we can all just turn to page 8.

And we're going to look down at the verse 16, which is on the final paragraph on page 8. Verse 16, page 8. Now, ladies and gents, that is utterly staggering.

That the world that we've just described, yet God would send his son into that world to save it. The Bible says that we deserve, and John says that we deserve to perish.

[46 : 47] Do we see that in verse 16? But that there is a way where we do not have to, if we place our faith in his beloved son. Because God could have left us in our brokenness and in our sin, but he did not.

And Jesus, if we go on to read John's iBooks account, he would go on in that conversation with Thomas, straight after it, to go and be spat upon, be mistreated in a Roman court, and ultimately nailed to a piece of wood and die.

And in three days' time, rise again. Now, I talk about my daughter so much that my staff team and the church family in the room are now going to be rolling their eyes.

I recently became a father. You might be amazed that a lovely lady decided to marry me, but she did, wonderfully. But I recently had a daughter, and I am utterly convinced that she is, objectively, I am not joking, I always have to caveat this, I have learnt, that she is the cutest girl that has ever lived.

I have used this illustration like seven times in the last year or so, unashamedly so. She is the cutest child that has ever lived. Parents in the room are thinking, yeah, no, but my child, no. No.

[47 : 57] The cutest, I am telling you. And, you know, she does these wonderful little things like uses crayon on the walls, and my landlady is here, so I'm going to pretend to, you know, just stop your ears, Rachel.

And even then, I'm like, oh, my little darling. And there is no way, there is no way in this world that I would ever give my precious girl for anybody else.

She is the most precious, most delightful thing to me. But that is the staggering truth at the centre of the Christian story, that God so loved this world that he gave his son for it, so that we might have eternal life.

And this, if we come back to where we started, why is it that Jesus said, it's an interesting turn of phrase, isn't it, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Why does he include the way and the life? Why does he include those two things? Because the truth at the heart of John's Gospel is that this man, Jesus, would go to the cross and die for a broken and unlovable world.

[48 : 58] Which means that if we put our trust in that truth, that exclusive, exclusionary truth, well, we too can have eternal life. And is that not, ladies and gentlemen, just utterly liberating?

To know that there isn't a battle for truth. That in your own life there doesn't have to be a crisis of truth anymore. To know that when death comes to us all, that we have certainty in the face of death, because we know that someone has gone there before us.

The Lord Jesus. Is it not the most liberating and wonderful of truths? So can we know the truth? Well, and we've heard from Andrew that we can know it about Jesus.

And what is that truth? Well, it is the greatest truth that you could ever hear. And I commend John's Gospel to you.