

The Truth

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. My name's Steve. I've met you before. I'll leave past here at St. Paul's. And if you've just joined into amongst us right now, just checked in for the first time in 2026, we are really beginning this year asking the question, is it still reasonable and desirable or good to be Christian in 2026?

Given that 45% of our neighbourhood declare that they are not religious people at all, they are secularists, and that in our neighbourhood, we are, in fact, significantly lower than the state and national average on people who claim to be Christians.

So, you know, working on the assumption that we are the minority here, is it still reasonable to be Christian in 2026? And that's kind of what we're doing. And our main focus as we do that is the bold claim of Jesus in John 14, 6, to be the way, the truth and the life, exclusively the way to God, exclusively the truth for all of humanity and the life for all of humanity.

And so my focus today, as we unpack those three statements over three weeks, is the claim for Jesus to be the truth, that is exclusive truth, authority of truth for all people, all times, all cultures that exist outside of the world in which we live.

So that's what we're looking at.

[2:06] And that is, something is regarded as being true, being truthful, if it matches external facts and reality.

It corresponds with. That is, a statement is true, a proposition is true when it matches reality. Linked with the correspondence theory is the coherence theory, and that is, a statement or proposition is true if it fits logically and consistently with a whole system of other statements and propositions that fit with reality and facts.

So combined together, it corresponds with, and it's internally coherent, and therefore it's true. In both cases, facts and reality are things which are external from us.

In a postmodern world, which we're being marinating in for many decades now, truth is viewed as being constructed.

It's constructed by beliefs, by language, by cultures, and therefore truth is not aligned to an independent reality which has authority over all people of all times.

[3:34] So every individual group or culture can come up with its own version of truth. We now, however, live in a time called the post-truth era.

And in 2016, Oxford Dictionary selected post-truth as its word of the year. It defines post-truth as an adjective relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Post-truth. So post-truth as a concept exploded. It really began in 1992 with a judgment which was passed down by a Supreme Court judge in the US, but has exploded in 2016 linked to the US presidential election that saw Donald Trump elected as the president of the US.

That is the concept of fake news. And post-truth exploded 2,000% in the latter stages of 2016.

And I think you'd search in vain to find a more apt description of our age of expressive individualism where all forms of universal truth, any claim to universal truth, to exclusive truth, like Jesus does here in John 14, is rejected.

[5:16] The irony of that is to declare that there is no such thing as a universal truth is itself a claim to universal truth.

That's the irony of it. It's a universal truth claim. And expressive individualism suggests that truth lies, which is the post-truth era, that truth lies within each individual.

And to find true liberty, true freedom as an individual, you must discover that truth that is within you. Within you. And live it. In all its forms, regardless of any other person's opinion.

Because personal liberty is the highest value, then any truth that constrains my view of myself is regarded as oppressive and therefore must be rejected.

[6:36] In a post-truth world, answers to life's big questions no longer need to correspond to reality, to fact at all.

They just simply need to cater to my desires and my perceptions of the world. So what is it here that Jesus is saying?

What is he claiming when he claims to be the truth? To answer that question, what we need to do is to step back and have a really broad sweep of the Christian worldview, if you like.

The Bible begins by declaring that there was no reality except God at the very beginning. And that in that sense, God is ultimate reality.

God stands outside of all things that are created. He's beyond all things that exist. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty.

[7:43] That is, before anything was made, anything could be measured, before anything could be measured, there was God. God was. And then this God speaks.

He communicates. And when he speaks, he creates physical reality. He creates reality. He creates the physical universe. He creates history.

Crucially, in the Christian worldview, God does not interpret history. He creates history. And that statement, that view, is a massive hurdle for people in our world, modern world today.

I spoke about this two weeks ago when we kicked off this season. One of the interesting things is, with the remarkable growth in scientific discovery, science itself is increasingly and powerfully pointing to a designer behind the world, to a creator behind everything that exists.

In actual fact, it is more reasonable to be a person of faith, to believe in a God, than it is to be a person to not believe in a God, based purely on scientific fact.

[9:14] So if you want to trust science as the arbiter for you, as to what's true and what's reality, then your science is pointing you to a creator.

And so the Christian worldview, quite reasonably, begins with a God who creates all things, and therefore defines all things, because he is the one who is ultimate reality.

Reality is determined. It is created, determined, and defined by God. This Christian worldview also declares that the only way that we can know what is true, what is reality and reasonable, the only way that we can know the way things actually are, is if this God was to reveal it to us.

As Ash mentioned in his prayers just a moment ago, first of all, in the created order, the created order points to a design in some way, but more specifically, in very specific revelation, this created God speaks.

And so the Christian worldview, Psalm 119, 160, says this about God when he speaks. All your words are true.

[10:44] All your righteous laws are eternal. They're true because they come from an eternal God, the ultimate reality. When God speaks, because he's ultimate reality, he reveals things the way they actually are.

Regardless of whether we think it corresponds to the world as we see it, he speaks truth because it is him revealing reality.

And so what truth is, which is linked to the philosophical view of correspondence, but also the cohesion view, is that truth is when reality and the communication of that reality are aligned to one another.

They make sense. And the opposite of that is a lie. Lies are when reality and when the communication of that reality don't correspond.

You know, like the fridge is open, the ice cream tub is empty on the floor, and you've got three kids with ice cream all on their faces, and you say, who ate the ice cream?

[12:05] Don't know. The dog did it. You know, there's a... The facts don't correspond to reality of what you're observing there in that moment.

The unique claim of Christianity is... Because what that leaves you with is, well, how do we know then reality?

And the unique claim of Christianity is that the God who made reality known, the one who has communicated, who created all things, has communicated that reality.

He has communicated the unknowable. The claim of Christianity is that God did not just simply write a book, like an instruction manual, like you would get with your car, on how to, you know, best look after the design of the car.

It's not that he just gave us an instruction manual to tell us the way things actually are, but that this God who created reality wrote himself into the storyline.

[13:14] He put himself into the reality. And that's what our world has just finished celebrating. The world's biggest festival called Christmas.

That is what we celebrate. And it's what the beginning of John's gospel, just chapters earlier than what Mel read out to us, actually confirms.

In the beginning was the Word. That is, he existed before anything was made. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

And through him, that is through the Word, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. And then down in verse 14, you read something startling.

The Word, who is God, who's made all things, became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. And we have seen. In other words, we have seen, we have understood, the facts are there, the reality is in front of us.

[14:21] The glory, the glory of the God who has made all things. Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And so the question is, well then, who is this one, this Word who is God, who existed before creation, who made everything and is full of grace and truth?

A couple of verses later, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. So what John claims here at the very beginning of his biography of Jesus, which the rest of his biography explains and defends and supports, the claim here is that the Word that was in the beginning became flesh and lived amongst us so that we could see reality.

We could witness reality. And we are told five things about this Word in those verses.

The Word is a person. The Word is a divine person. The Word is an eternal divine person. The Word is the eternal divine person, is the source of all things. And this Word is Jesus Christ.

[15:41] Now, John uses a word here that's very specific. When he says, instead of just saying, look, Jesus, he says the Word.

And the Word in the original Greek language, which is what the New Testament is written in, is the word logos. And the word logos in the first century had an enormous amount of meaning in the Greco-Roman world.

An enormous. It was a very loaded word. Greek philosophers, when they looked at the world, they saw balance, they saw harmony, they saw design, they saw order, they saw all of those things, and they concluded that what they observed from the reality and the facts of the world, that there is order and there is a principle, there's a design, there's a principle that sits behind the world, and they called that principle the logos, the logic that sits behind the created order.

But for Greek philosophers, the logos was an impersonal, it was a divine, but it was impersonal structure behind the natural order of the universe.

The logos was the purpose of the universe. It was the reason, the logic behind all things that make sense to all the individual parts.

[17:23] And they concluded, in order to live life well, you must align yourself to the logos, to that order, to that principle.

In the same way, you want your car to not be void of warranty, you want it to work well, then you follow the instruction manual. You don't put diesel in a petrol car, for instance, and you don't try to plug electricity into a petrol car.

Those things are not going to go well for you. That's the idea of the logos for them. And if you did not align yourself to the principle of the universe, then life would go badly for you.

Either you would experience this sense of lack of contentment in life, at the very least, or at the very worst, you'll entirely destroy your life.

You see what John is saying here? John comes along with an earth-shattering category. The logos is not a principle.

[18:38] The logos is a person. A person that you can know. That is, what he's saying here is that Jesus Christ is the designer.

He's the source of all life and the one, therefore, that we must align our lives to in order to flourish well in life.

And that is the radical claim of Christianity. Jesus is not just ultimate reality as the one behind all things, but that he comes into the reality that he has created to reveal the existence of ultimate reality, of truth.

That's why he claims to be the truth. That's the Christian worldview. Now, there's a paradox here. Paradox of truth and freedom.

You see, because the modern Westerner, ever since the, particularly the postmodern age, the modern Westerner is repelled by such an exclusive claim.

[19:51] And the reason is that, the view is that any claim to exclusive truth that is external from the individual is regarded as oppression.

It is regarded as a constraint upon my freedom. So, in other words, we must get rid of God in order to enjoy life.

The British Humanist Society, a couple of weeks ago, I mentioned this. British Humanist Society put an advertisement on the side of buses in London a number of years ago now where they said, God doesn't exist, so enjoy life.

You see, there's two things there, two statements that are being made there. Number one, God doesn't exist. That's a statement of belief. But secondly, that it is the existence of God, the existence of ultimate reality, that is putting a constraint on your enjoyment of life.

And that is exact opposite of what Jesus claims here. Jesus makes that connection. Absolutely right. Truth and freedom go together. But Jesus couldn't disagree with you more than the British Humanist Society.

[21:06] John 8, 31, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples and then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

You see, verse 22 there promises freedom. But, Jesus says in the verse, it's only if you hold to his teaching, then you will experience freedom.

To hold to his teaching here is to embrace it, to obey it, to live it. Much stronger than just simply agreeing with it. Jesus says that we can only be free, truly free, if we accept his constraints.

That's the paradox of freedom. In his book, Two Concepts of Liberty, philosopher Isaiah Berlin distinguishes between negative liberty and positive liberty.

Negative liberty describes personal freedom as from all constraints, all external constraint, and anything that's an outside interference.

[22:23] That is negative freedom. In other words, negative freedom is the absence of all obstacles, the absence of all constraints to live any way I see fit for my personal fulfillment.

That's, in its ultimate form, is expressive individualism. Positive liberty means freedom to do, not freedom from, it's freedom to do.

It's the freedom to make choices, to make the right choices for, not just myself, but for a common good, for the advancement of others.

Because as others advance, so do I. Negative freedom basically rules out personal relationships as central to my flourishing.

Positive freedom says personal relationships are essential to my flourishing. That's the difference. And so therefore, for any sort of liberty, what Isaiah says here is that you need to take on certain constraints in order to be truly free.

[23:46] For example, I'm a diabetic. I've got this insulin pump attached to me all the time. It's not a pager. Those things are gone. And sometimes I tell kids it's my battery charger to keep my heart going.

But, you know, that just confuses them. I'm a diabetic. What if I chose to exercise my freedom by accepting no constraints on my diet whatsoever?

No, you know, like expressive individualism. I'm going to eat whatever I want. I'm going to, you know, chocolate cake and Tim Tams and rice. Rice is evil, by the way. Rice and burgers and Coke. You know, I can do whatever I want. I'm free. However, if I did that as a diabetic, it won't be long before my body will put constraints on me. I might not be free to eat. Sorry, I might be free to eat whatever I want but I won't be free to see for very long. I won't be free to run.

[24:52] I won't be free to walk. I won't be free to have both limbs or fingers or toes. I won't be free to live for much longer. Also, think about, forget about that.

What if you've got two passions in life and you want to be free to pursue both passions and what if those passions contradict one another?

What if I want to eat those foods on one hand but on the other hand another passion is, one of my great passions in life might be chocolate cake but what if the other passion in my life is to run half marathons?

What if I want both of those things? They are both deeply embedded values. The only option for me is to constrain one freedom in order to pursue the other freedom.

I can't have both. You see, true freedom is not the absence of constraints in life, it is choosing the liberating constraints in life.

[26:03] It's the strategic loss of some constraints, sorry, of some freedoms in order to gain the more liberating freedoms.

The constraint of relational fatality grows into the freedom of intimacy and companionship and love. but how do we make those right choices?

And that's the point Jesus is making here in John 8 because what he's saying here is there is a barrier. There's a barrier to us making those right choices about what are the things that I should pursue that will result in greater and greater freedom.

amazing what Jesus says here is again the exact opposite of our post-truth world. The barriers that exist for our liberty are not external barriers although I acknowledge that there are external barriers in our world that we ought to be working against for the liberty of all people.

but for all people the external barriers are not laws, institutions or exclusive claims to truth it's an internal barrier.

[27:27] There's an internal barrier that gets in the way of our freedom and we don't know it. in verses 33 and 34 the people Jesus speaking to push back on him suggesting that they're not free and they say we have a hand of standards and we have been slaves to anyone how can you say that we shall be free Jesus replied truly I tell you everyone who sins is a slave to sin so Jesus says everyone's biggest problem is that we are slaves that's why he uses the word everyone they say here we are Abraham's descendants we have not been slaves of anyone now these are Jewish people that he's speaking to here right and they knew that he wasn't talking about external constraints they knew Jesus wasn't talking about external constraints they knew that he was talking about inner freedom the reason they knew that is because you just look around you got the occupying

Romans right there they're all there what they were blamed to is an inner slavery an inner slavery to wrong decisions wrong choices you see these people thought they were right with God and that they were in fact true to themselves but inwardly they were slaves to sin that's why Jesus includes us in verse 34 with the words everyone he's saying what Jesus is saying is that sin is a power in our hearts and over our lives that makes us that results in us doing bad making bad choices and doing bad things sin sets us up against not just God but also against other people every person is enslaved to sin but every person is blinded to the deepest reality of that sin in our life our deepest deepest desire in the heart is what

Martin Luther called I just couldn't remember the Latin phrase it would just sound impressive I could remember it but anyway it's curved in on itself that's the English version of it curved in on itself every single human sin means expressive individualism is at the deepest sense of my life and most part we go about our daily lives thinking that we are free but we are not we're enslaved to ourselves enslaved to sin and the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death and unless that wage is paid we

are not free in the same way you might have the freedom of opening up the own door to your home but until it is entirely yours you're enslaved to the mortgage even though you feel free in your own home that freedom happens until the bank comes in and takes over the mortgage in other words all of us have got a debt and we're enslaved to that debt now

Jesus doesn't unpack here what sin is but the rest of the Bible does sin is resisting our creator deep inside the human heart is an impulse that resists anyone telling us how to live our lives and the ultimate trigger for that impulse is God himself Romans 1 puts us put our resisting in these terms and it's in the terms of rejecting truth the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godliness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them for since the creation of world God's invisible qualities his eternal!

And so the question that we are left with here if that's the problem if my deepest issue is sin who is going to set me free?

[32:11] Verses 35 and 36 in John 8 give us the source of true freedom now a slave has no permanent place in the family but a son belongs to it forever so if the son sets you free you'll be free indeed the image here that Jesus uses is that a servant might get to imagine a servant in a rich family they're the butler or something like that they might get to live in the mansion they might get their little section in the mansion they might in fact get to drive around in the family's limousine they might even get to accompany them on overseas trips in the private jet they might even have a great relationship with them over many many years but their relationship is a relationship with the boss purely that it's based on good works it's based on the fact that they perform if you do your job you obey the rules you could exist in that environment and have all the the benefits of that environment and if you don't you're out you don't get to do the private jet limousine in the mansion anymore but

Jesus says it's an entirely different relationship with the children of the owner one relationship is based on good works the other relationship is based on unconditional love the son the daughter of a wealthy person may disappoint their parents but they're not always kicked out only unconditional love sets us free the only way that sin in our life will be dealt with is if Jesus the son is the one who sets us free the only one who can change us from being slaves to sin to children of God is Jesus that's what John looked at last week in that he is the way sorry Nick looked at last week he is the way they're just your twins!

Can we see how Jesus does that right at the very end of John 8 58 very truly I tell you Jesus answered before Abraham was born I am this is this is where we get a glimpse of how he does it how he sets us free now the way you might expect Jesus to say that is something like before Abraham was born I was but he says before Abraham born I am he uses the word I am very specifically because it is the personal declaration from the Old Testament in Exodus 3 when God reveals himself to Moses and is claiming to be the truth.

He's claiming to be God himself. And so the people around him immediately pick up stones in order to stone Jesus' death for blasphemy. Outrageous claim.

Jesus claims to be the all-powerful, all-present, unrestricted, totally free God, the ultimate reality, the revelation of God himself right here.

[35:45] And so they pick up stones to kill him for blasphemy. And in that moment, we get a foreshadowing of how it is that Jesus actually sets us free from our sin.

They will kill him, but it will be Jesus' plan in order to make us children of God, to set us free from sin. You see, Jesus Christ, God the Son, gives up his ultimate and infinite freedom as ultimate reality, comes into his creation, takes on all the constraints of being in a human body, being born of a woman.

He descends further still in humility by eventually surrendering himself to a Roman cross. He gave power to those Romans in the first place.

His liberty is taken away by nails through his wrists and in his feet, nailed to a cross. And then the author of life itself surrenders himself to death and faces the constraints of a tomb so that we, the slaves deserving of death, could have the freedom of being children of God forever.

He was bound to a cross and death so that we could be free and live. As he died for us, he was plunged into the unimaginable darkness of sin and despair and rejection and loneliness so that we could see he is the light of life and in seeing, have life and have freedom and have acceptance. [37:41] From the manger to the cross, Jesus Christ gives up his freedom consistently to set us free from the freedom that we cannot get, set us free from ourselves, the deep slavery in the human heart of sin, the slavery because we have rejected the one true God and choose to live life our way.

And we see, once we see what he has done for us, it transforms us from being slaves to a child of God.

Jesus is truth that causes the blind to see, for darkness to be extinguished, death to be defeated, eternal life granted and freedom experienced. It is remarkable, earlier Ash on the screen told us about Joni Erickson.

Joni says now, having been a quadriplegic for virtually seven decades, I think, says she would again, willingly, live again another entire life constrained to a wheelchair with Jesus rather than having the full function of her legs and her arms without him.

She feels freer in a wheelchair with Jesus than life without him because of the freedom and the peace inside.

[39:21] So let me just really quickly wrap up how we embrace. Verse 31, Jesus says, his true followers are those who hold to his teaching.

The word hold there, as I mentioned, means to abide in, to align your life with. In other words, freedom comes by the constraints of obedience, living by Jesus, his teaching.

It means accepting God's word and all that it reveals as supremely true for you in life. It has the final authority for you in life. And to take that truth into your life and live into how God has designed you. So even if it conflicts with your worldview, at several points, what we see is that Jesus, as the truth, confirms the historic Christian scriptures, the Bible as God revealing reality.

He confirms the Bible as true, as reflecting ultimate reality, the revealing the way things actually are. And therefore the Bible is authoritative over all of life for all people and all times.

[40:36] And it's also by his Holy Spirit, as John tells us a little bit later in his biography, by his Holy Spirit, we are led into truth. It's where we meet God.

It's where we meet him personally. It's where we engage with God. It is not a dead letter book. I mean, it's so intimate. 2 Timothy 3 talks about like this, all scripture is God breathed.

God's speaking to us. And he's useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, training in righteousness. In other words, shaping our lives, conforming it to Jesus. In the Bible, God gives us knowledge of himself, his will, his work in his world, wisdom, meaning, purpose, to navigate all the complexities of life.

His word is a liberating constraint. And when we hold to it and align our lives to it repeatedly to do what it says, we will increasingly grow in freedom.

Freer, like a Johnny Anderson. Free from sin, free from guilt, free from shame, free from condemnation, free from enslaving emotions and desires, free from what people think of us, free from needing to prove ourselves, free from fear, free from loneliness, free from the fear of failure, free from the fear of sickness, from the fear of insecurity, free from vulnerability, and free from the commitment to other people, free from the fear of death itself, and free to love, to sacrifice, to be generous, to celebrate the other people's wins, free to serve others, free to live within our design, free to forgive, and therefore set free to flourish.

[42:38] When Jesus sets us free, we are free indeed. But to grow into that freedom will mean constraints. It might mean, for instance, constraining your, picking up your Bible before you pick up your phone in the morning, for instance.

Constraints on your time. It will result in things like that. Constraining on, fighting back fire with fire. There are all sorts of things. It will put constraints on you.

But what you'll discover over time is that when the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.