

Matthew 23-03-26b

We're continuing our study now, looking at the mourning of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus by way of John chapter 18 and chapter 19. And this notion of truth is critically important and I think it is sometimes underserved in our mental perambulations as we think about our lives and we think, well, have I sinned? Am I doing good? Where's the, am I operating in the filling of the spirit? All of which are wonderful things to remember, but the idea that we should be characterized by truth. This is conversation, it is behavior, it is the reason that the Lord Jesus came into the world is to bear witness to the truth.

As we've seen from his statement about the law coming by Moses and grace and truth coming by Jesus Christ, it is a specific kind of truth. I was told in school, all truth is God's truth, not in the sense that Jesus is describing it here to Pilate. The truth that he came to bear witness of is specifically the truth related to God's character and God's interaction with mankind.

This is why he was born. If it was objective truth, he could have simply put it down in the Old Testament and Jesus need never have come. It is what is about to happen on the cross that is a part of that truth.

The love of which there is no greater kind than that a man should lay down his life for others. And not just in the earthly sense, not just in the temporal sense, but the life that the Lord Jesus is laying down for us is accomplishing a purpose, but it is also communicating a truth. It accomplishes a purpose and sometimes people limit the work of Christ on the cross to atonement or reconciliation or redemption or propitiation, but that is not the expression, that is not the point of the communication of truth.

It is an expression of God's character, God himself. I want to continue, I want to read you a little bit more of the first chapter of Guruthi's book. It expresses better than I can the meaning of this idea.

On July 4th, 1776, the authors of the Declaration of Independence voicing, quote, the unanimous declaration of the 13 United States of America, close quote, proclaimed, we hold these truths to be self-evident. I say again, we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the declaration along with John Hancock and the other signatories, argued their case by presupposing that truth was objective and knowable.

We saw this in the early chapters of John, it is observable, it is understandable, it is knowable. Jesus is going to go on to say in John 8, verse 32, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. In your list of John passages, that is the next.

8, 32, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. There are two truths about truth in that statement by the Lord Jesus. First of all, truth is knowable.

We tend to wanna throw up our hands and say, well, who knows what really went on? These parties say it's this way, those parties say it that way. Who blew this up? Who, as my dad used to say, who shot John? I don't know who John was, but that was one of his, when he couldn't figure out what was going on, he would say, well, who shot John? But it is knowable and knowledge of the truth, knowing the truth is liberating. It frees us from restriction.

It frees us from entrapment. It frees us from deception. It frees us from being misled, misused.

The truth, Jesus said, this specific truth, once again, it's not all truth, it's not any kind of truth. Oranges are orange, that's a truth. Now I'm free, not at all.

This is the truth embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ. I was born, I came into the world to bear witness to a specific set of truths, a specific corpus of truth, which is the revelation of the father's character, his plan and his purpose as it relates to human beings. This is not angelology, this is not ecclesiology, this is pederology, it is pneumatology, truth about the father, truth about the spirit, truth about the Trinity, truth about the relationship of God to mankind and to individual persons of the human race.

This is the locus, this is the center of that truth. And when you know that truth, this world no longer has a hold. Circumstances and people no longer control, no longer confine, no longer restrict, no longer dictate who we are, how we think, how we feel.

This truth of our receiving grace from God, the expression of God's love for us and our opportunities, our potentials, wonderfully expressed in Ephesians 1, in him we have, in him we are, in him these wonderful truths elevate us above the mundane, the temporal, the things that Solomon complained about in Ecclesiastes. If in this life only you have hope, if you're restricted to this life, if you're limited to the time bound and the short term, we are of all men most miserable. It is these transcendent truths.

This is the gift that is given to us. But keep in mind in the introduction, it is also true of truth that while it has wonderful positive outcomes and features that attract us to it and make us want to have and know more of it, there are painful truths. There are uncomfortable truths.

There are truths that make us want to escape and to deny and to leave the light. I don't like hearing about my flaws. I don't enjoy my faults.

I think when you say it's my fault, I think that's a fault in you. When you're laying blame, I think that's blame worthy in you. I don't want to think about a truth that pertains to me.

I want to shift blame and find some other truth that is more comfortable. That's what he's talking about here. Truth is objective and knowable.

Hancock, Jefferson and the other signatories believed that it rests on quote, the laws of nature and nature's God. There were so many godly men at the founding of our nation. And I don't think it was an accident that God had them be born in the place and time that they were to lay the foundations of our nation.

This truth is objective and knowable. It rests on the laws of nature and nature's God. This is a reference to the revelation of God in creation, Romans chapter one and the word of God, which we have before us.

And that it supported their position against the British. For the founders, truth was not something to be manipulated for the sake of political gain. Where did that go? Truth is not something to be manipulated for the sake of political gain.

Self-evident truths must be recognized, respected and obeyed. At least if you are rational and reasonable and in any way objective. If it is a self-evident truth, it must be recognized, respected and obeyed.

They are not created nor can they be dissolved by any political power or military might. These truths alone provide a firm basis for asserting an independent national identity. Nearly 200 years after the founding of the United States of America, a moral reformer called his country to be true to its constituting ideals.

On August 28, 1963, in front of over 200,000 people gathered between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King Jr. explained the purpose of this historic gathering. Quote, in a sense, we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But King lamented, it is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Nevertheless, the civil rights leader passionately intoned, quote, I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed.

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. And that one day all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, free at last. Free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last.

King's flair for oratory should not obscure the philosophical assumptions on which his earnest and articulate outcry were founded. His moral appeal flowed from his conviction

that America's deepest ideals, though imperfectly implemented, were true to a moral reality larger than America itself. His hope was animated by his belief that a greater measure of justice was attainable through the struggles of the oppressed, the repentance of the oppressors and the providence of God almighty.

Truth would win out in the end. Despite the snarling police dogs, the gushing fire hoses, the bombed black churches and the political damage control of an establishment unwilling to grant full personhood and the rights thereof to African-American citizens. I agree with all of that.

I saw it growing up. Those of you who are as old as me or older, remember that. And there were Christians in this country who did not live the truth of the word of God when it came to respect for others.

There was something blinding them. There was a more convenient truth. There was a different reality that they chose instead of the acknowledgement that all people are endowed by their creator with the opportunity to live, to pursue their goals, not to be slain, not to be oppressed and so on.

For millennia, a resolute confidence about truth has summoned philosophers, prophets, reformers and even a few politicians to defy convention and resist illicit authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical. When professor Martin Luther affirmed at the Diet of Worms in 1521, the newly rediscovered doctrine of justification by faith alone, a truth that would galvanize and energize the reformation, he confronted both state and church power by saying, here I stand, I can do no other, God help me. The very phrase, speaking truth to power, so often invoked by idealists and activists of many stripes, rests on the assurance that truth is owned by no one, is rejected at one's peril and contains a dynamic greater than any error.

Whether we find Socrates suffering death at the hands of the state, rather than recant his teachings or envision Gandhi standing unarmed for Indian independence against the British imperial forces, or remember our American suffragists fighting for the right of women to vote in a male dominated society, heroes have heretofore been defined and esteemed by their adherence to truth and their willingness to suffer all on its behalf. And I would add to that list, the greatest of all examples, the one that is before us. For this cause I was born, for this reason I came into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Pilate responds by asking, what is truth? And famously, he does not wait for the answer. Pilate said to him, what is truth? 1838 of John. And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews.

When he had said this, he says this as he's walking out. He doesn't wait with his arms folded for Jesus to answer the question, what is truth? And this is of all of the errors that Pilate makes on this day, there is no greater error than asking the question and not

waiting for the answer. What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out.

It's no accident, there's not a wasted word in scripture. When he had said this, he walked out. What is truth? He turns around, doesn't give Jesus a chance to answer.

Goes out to the Jews and says, I find no fault in him at all. What has happened today in terms of truth? What's going on around us? What are we seeing in the news? What are we hearing in political rhetoric and in power plays and in manipulation of the media and social media and so on? 23 years ago, Dr. Gruthius wrote this, surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, American philosopher Richard Rorty sounds a different tone. Following his hero, John Dewey, of Dewey Decimal System fame, but John Dewey also was the founding father of liberalism in our education.

You can look it up if you don't know already. Following his hero, John Dewey, Richard Rorty asserts that truth is what one's peers let one get away with. Rorty and a raft of other academics in philosophy, history, psychology, law, sociology, anthropology, and even theology, and I would say especially theology, have abandoned the classical and commonsensical view of truth that lies at the heart of the examples given above and have instead embraced a concept of truth that undermines any sense of truth as objective, absolute, or universal.

The idea of truth as objective, we are told, must be abandoned with the demise of modernism, which is regarded as the misguided attempt of the enlightenment to obtain objective certitude on matters of philosophical, scientific, and moral concern. We are postmodern now and have left behind such grandiose endeavors for the sake of more modest aims. So it's a waste of time trying to figure out an absolute truth.

For these postmodern thinkers, the very idea of truth has decayed and disintegrated. It is no longer something knowable by anyone who engages in the proper forms of investigation and study. Truth is not over and above us, something that can be conveyed across cultures and over time.

It is inseparable from our cultural conditioning, our psychology, our race, and our gender. Do you hear this today in spades, that, well, you're hopelessly in the grip of deceit and falsehood and racism because of your color. So truth can no longer be conveyed across cultures and over time.

Now truth is tied to our cultural conditioning, our psychology, our race, or our gender. At the end of the day, as they say today, truth is simply what we as individuals and as communities make it to be. This is the Tower of Babel.

This is me talking. This is the new Tower of Babel as we are constructing our own truth out of our own bricks instead of looking to the truth revealed in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Truth is simply what we as individuals and communities make it to be and nothing

more.

Truth dissolves into a host of disconnected truths, quote unquote. All equal to each other, but unrelated to one another, there is no overall rational scheme of things. One chronicle of post-modernism, Walter Truett Anderson, explains it this way.

Post-modernity challenges the view that the truth is, as Isaiah Berlin put it, one and undivided, the same for all men everywhere at all times. The newer view regards any truth as socially constructed, contingent, inseparable from the peculiar needs and preferences of certain people in a certain time and place. This notion has many implications.

It leaves no value, custom, belief, or eternal verity totally untouched. It corrupts and leavens everything. As a bumper sticker has it, I've given up on reality, now I'm looking for a good fantasy.

Or consider the oft-heard refrain concerning matters of religious belief or moral decision, whatever. Apathy rather than angst often accompanies truth decay today. Truth decay insinuates itself even into churches, seminaries, and Christian colleges.

During a debate at a Christian college, a man who teaches philosophy told me that objective knowledge is impossible, and he rejects the claim that our ideas can correspond to an external reality. When I asked him if the law of gravity would be true if no one were on the earth at the time, he replied, no, truth is limited to our language. That's at a Christian college campus by a professor teaching there.

Philip Kennison, another professor at a Christian college, propounds the notion that, quote, there is no such thing as objective truth, and it's a good thing, too. Author and chaplain William Willimon stated in an article in Christianity Today, quote, Christians who argue for the objective truth of Jesus are making a tactical error because, quote, Jesus did not arrive among us enunciating a set of propositions that we are to affirm. This I have heard from formerly dear friends who got the same background and training as me, and that it is wrong to focus on propositional truth.

We should focus on emulating behaviors. It doesn't really matter what you believe, just behave in a certain way. Some church growth advocates advise that churches tone down any emphasis on objective truth of Christian doctrine because post-moderns have short attention spans and are only interested in their own felt needs.

Many counsel that Generation Xers can be reached only by a relational and largely non-cognitive approach. Quit thinking and just feel. One author counsels that since for Generation Xers, the linear method is no longer the primary method of study, Bible studies must deemphasize the inductive method with its progression of observation, interpretation, and application.

That should be deemphasized. While this writer does not hold a post-modernist view of truth, he capitulates to the post-modern sensibilities of intellectual impatience and crass pragmatism that helps contribute to truth decay in the churches. Such decay is evident in the fact that various polls have shown that high percentages of self-proclaimed evangelicals do not believe in absolute truth or the supremacy of Christ or have a kingdom orientation to life.

A recent study claimed that over half of evangelicals agreed with this statement, the purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment. Over half. A woman I know startled a table of Christian women at a luncheon by saying that her mission in life was to discover the truth and apply it to her life.

It was apparently a new thought for them. So this is why our study of the truth, exposing ourselves to the truth on a regular basis and allowing the truth to do its corrective work is so essential. If we push away inconvenient truths, uncomfortable truths, painful truths, if we don't stop to consider that it is only by acknowledging that truth as it relates specifically to God and our relationship to him that we can grow, that we can be better fields producing more fruit from the seed that is planted within us.

Returning to our John passages, it is amazing how consistent the gospel of John is throughout emphasizing truth. We have seen John 1.14, we have seen John 1.17, the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 3.21, he who does the truth comes to the light so that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

John 5.33, you have sent to John and he has borne witness to the truth. You have sent to John the Baptist, he has borne witness to the truth. John's purpose as the last great Old Testament prophet was to bear witness to the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ in his incarnation, 5.33 of John.

We've already seen 4.23, the hour is coming and now is when true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and truth. These are the worshipers the father is seeking. If our worship does not center on truth, partake of truth, implant the truth within us so that the Holy Spirit can use it and bring it to our minds and enable and empower us with it, we are not worshiping.

The father is looking for worshipers. Notice our worship is aimed at the father, according to Jesus. John 8.32, we have seen, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

I should have included with 4.23, John 4.24, God is spirit, those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth, spirit and truth. So just add 24 to 23 there. In John 8.40, Jesus says to these very Jews and this leadership that has turned him over to Pilate on the occasion we are studying, now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth

which I heard from God.

You seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. This is in response to them saying, we are sons of Abraham. Jesus says, Abraham didn't do this.

When he received the truth from God, you say you're sons of Abraham. I'm a man who tells you the truth which I heard from God. You're trying to kill me.

Abraham didn't do this. You are not sons of Abraham, not really. John 8.44, 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. What an interesting thing to say about Satan. You're of your father, the devil.

The desires of your father are what you want to do. You don't have Abraham's desire to be of the truth and come to the light. You are of your father, the devil and it's his desires 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. He is not of the truth, he is not in the truth and the truth is not in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own self, his own resources.

In Greek it just says, when he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own. He is a liar and the father of it. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Our own heart will lie to us. We have either a response or a reaction to truth. It is easy to push the truth away if we don't like it and we deceive ourselves.

He speaks a lie out of himself. That's what he's made of. He is a liar and the father of it.

John 8 45, the next verse, but because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. I tell the truth, you don't believe it. Verse 46, which of you convicts me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? This is the great question when we speak the truth of the gospel of salvation to someone who is in unbelief.

We speak the truth. God, the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of sin, righteousness and judgment. And the question that Jesus asks here is one that we can echo.

Jesus says, if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? We like to assume of ourselves that we are of the truth, that we welcome the truth, that we are truthing people. If we are of the truth, then when the truth is spoken, we believe it. It is a conviction when the truth is spoken and we do not believe it.

We reject it, we reinvent it, we modify it, we redirect it. One of the most common responses that you get from someone who is resistant to the gospel is to turn

observations about their belief system or their system of faith back on yourself. You say, well, you believe a lot of things from science that can't be proved, that you've never observed.

You believe in black holes, you believe in dark matter, you believe in the Big Bang, you believe in life from non-life, abiogenesis. You believe these things on the basis of no evidence and they'll turn it back around and say, well, you believe what you believe on the basis of no evidence. You've never seen a God and you didn't see Jesus and you're taking somebody's word for it.

And this reflection idea, this is what psychiatrists use. The patient gets on the couch and says something and all they do is reflect, they bounce it back to the person. I'm feeling miserable.

Well, why are you feeling miserable? Well, because my mother hates me. Well, why does your mother hate you? And they don't provide answers. They don't offer solutions.

They don't speak truth. It's like people that practice volleyball or tennis against a vertical wall. The ball just comes right back to you in the same direction, reaction and response to the way you hit it.

He is speaking from himself. He is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

Because I tell the truth, you do not believe. There is an innate response or reaction. We either respond positively.

We welcome the truth. We are guided by the truth. We are chastised by the truth.

We are corrected, rebuked and instructed by the truth or we push it away. No, no, that's not right. I don't accept that.

And truth falls to the ground. Jesus was the walking embodiment of truth. He spoke the truth.

Those who did not believe him, killed him. What a shame if we murder the presence of Christ in our own lives because there are areas in which we will not accept truth. We will not believe it.

We don't wanna believe bad things about ourselves. And this is the nature of that convicting truth. The Holy Spirit, why is it that when Jesus and John talked about the coming Holy Spirit and if the great commandment is love for God and love for one another, why is it that when the Comforter comes, he will convince the world of love, peace and acceptance.

He will convince the world of joy and happiness and mutual brotherhood. He will

convince the world of the value of every human life, the golden rule of doing unto others as they should do unto you and the great command to love God and love one another. Those will be the things the Holy Spirit reveals.

What is the job of the Holy Spirit? It is the same. I will send you another Comforter. What was the role of the first Comforter? The first expression of God's presence in the world in the form of Jesus Christ to bear witness to the truth.

And the truth is sin, righteousness and judgment. The truth is we are in need of help. And as Gruthius said in his introduction, it is a mistake to assume that, well, I know the truth, so I don't need any correction.

That is a dangerous arrogance to be unassailable and unconvincible in the truth that Jesus reveals, the truth that the Holy Spirit reveals. Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. If I spoke lies, you would probably believe it.

But because I speak the truth, you do not believe. John 8, 44 through 46. John 14, verse six, talking to Thomas.

Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, and I think it's no accident, it doesn't say Jesus said to them. He says to Thomas, who has doubts, who isn't convinced, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. No one, individual. The great expression and witness to the truth that Jesus brings is the opportunity, not just for national relationship to God, but individual relationship.

No one, no one comes to the Father except through me. John 14, 17, the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive. He's going to convince the world, but the world cannot receive him.

Because it neither sees him nor knows him. The world cannot receive the spirit of truth because of the truth that characterizes him. It doesn't see him, it doesn't know him, but you know him for he dwells with you and will be in you.

He dwells with you and will be in you, the spirit of truth. How much good does that presence do us? Well, do we believe him or not? John 16, verse seven. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth.

It is to your advantage that I go away. If I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I depart, I will send him to you.

The spirit of truth is with you and will be in you. And that is an advantage. The presence of the spirit truly is more advantageous than if we were spending time with the Lord Jesus.

What is he going to do? John 15, 26, when the helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father. Notice the emphasis, he comes from the Father. He is the spirit of truth proceeding from the Father.

He will testify of me. I am the truth. I am the life.

I am the way. I came into the world and was born to bear witness of the truth. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, will bear witness and testify of me.

John 16, 13, when he, the spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own, but whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will tell you things to come.

He will tell you things to come. The high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prays to the Father, sanctify them, cleanse them, purify them, make them holy by your truth, your word is truth. That's our emphasis on the word of truth, grace and truth.

The expression of God's grace is that we have the spirit and the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, his words and works, his savior hood, his high priesthood, his intercessory ministry on us, for us, on our behalf. John 18, 37, we have just seen, for this cause I have come into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. And finally, in John 19, 35, John says, he who has seen has testified and his testimony is true.

Speaking of himself, John, if he put this in the first person, it's John saying, I who have seen have testified and my testimony is true. And he, John, knows that he is telling the truth so that you may believe. The issue and truth is what are you going to do with it? It is the issue for every human being, whether it is the gospel of salvation or whether it is the truth of God's word, this is the reason Jesus came into the world, to bear witness to the truth.

We are here to first and foremost believe the truth, to be transformed by the truth and then to bear witness of the truth as John does in his gospel and in his epistles, as John the Baptist did, as the Lord Jesus himself did, as the Holy Spirit constantly does. It is all about the truth. Originating in and proceeding from the Father.

The Father sent the Son. The Father sent the Spirit. The Father defined the truth and expressed the truth and makes an issue of the truth to us.

The question for us is what do we do with it? It's a sober question. It's a question for our time. It is a question as we look around the world and see nothing but lies and deceit and twisted and partial truths, truths that are bent in the service of human goals, greed, power, destruction of one's enemies, self-gratification, self-seeking, relativistic and destructive truths, destructive to relationships, falsehoods masquerading as truths.

We have to constantly focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in leading us into all truth. That

requires acknowledging the truth about ourselves, acknowledging our sins so that God can faithfully and righteously forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from that unrighteousness. Well, we will move forward in our view and observation of this momentous morning next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the testimony to the truth that we have throughout your word and especially through the Lord Jesus and through your Holy Spirit. We pray that as we reflect on these truths that they will convict us, that they will pierce to the dividing asunder of our souls and spirits, our joints and our marrow and judge our thoughts and intents in a helpful and productive way that will make us those who are sanctified, those who are drawn to the light and who walk in the light and who can, as the Lord Jesus did, bear witness to your truth in this world in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name.