

The Truth is The Truth

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[0 : 0 0] But in our evening services at the moment we have begun a short series called Doctrine for Mission and the aim of this series is to think through some of the foundational truths that the Bible gives us in order to help us share our faith. That's something that we all long to do. We long to be those who can tell others about Jesus and we long to see people coming to faith. We all benefited from people who were willing to share the Gospel with us. We long to be able to share the Gospel with others. We long to see people in the community either coming back to church who've stopped coming or people coming for the first time and yet it's something that we all find really hard. It's always something that we feel guilty about, something that we feel that we could read so much better at. It's something that I think every single Christian feels that they're just falling short. And so the purpose of this series is to highlight some key truths that the Bible gives us that

I hope are going to help us, that are going to equip us and encourage us as we seek to share our faith. Last week our title was God is God and we started with that because that's the foundation of all theology and the foundation for all evangelism. This week our title is the truth. Is the truth. And we're going to focus on Jesus' words in John 8 and I can read again at verse 31. Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. As I'm sure you all know here in a place like Carlyway or in any of the villages on our island, it's not uncommon to go for a walk and find a sheepdog attached to a tether outside somebody's house. And so you can only imagine that, you can see a dog on a chain or a rope and they're kept there in order that they have got space to move around but at the same time they can't run off, it makes sure that they're safe and that everybody is safe. It's something that we see quite often. When you walk past a sheepdog on a tether, there's one of three things that tend to happen. One, the dog barks like crazy. So you come along, the dog sees you and instantly starts barking because she feels threatened and defensive. You and the dog are now in a confrontation and the tether reduces her options so the default tactic is just loads and loads of barking. Option number two is the dog just cowers in fear. She can't run away, she's exposed, she's afraid of what might happen. Next. And option three, the dog might not be afraid, the dog might in fact be quite friendly so she comes along to meet you, she cheerfully walks towards you until the tether stops her in her tracks. Whatever these outcomes that may happen, the dog is perfectly happy until you come along. The moment it meets you, the problems arise and those problems are exacerbated by the fact that the dog is held back by a tether. The reason I'm telling you that story is because I think that in our efforts at evangelism, we can easily feel like a sheepdog tied to a tether. So we're quite comfortable until we actually have to interact with people in terms of evangelism. When the opportunities to share our faith do arise, I doubt that there's anybody here who feels like an eagle soaring through the skies or like a stag bounding over the hills.

Most of us feel stuck, held back by a tether, unsure what to say or do. So like a sheepdog, we might back, we try to tell people that they're wrong, we tell people that they must listen to us, that they need Jesus or we might just cower in fear, kind of lying down with a whimper, wishing that the person would just go on to someone else, wishing that we were braver, smarter and more confident. Or maybe we will try and speak like the dog will go forward optimistically, only for doubts, fears and insecurities to kind of yak us back before we've made any real connection. When it comes to evangelism, this is how I feel. I long to go forward, I long to do more, but whenever I try to run, something holds me back.

Now there's lots of reasons why we feel like that as Christians. One of the most common tethers in evangelism however, is the question of truth. We believe as Christians that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth. We want to communicate that truth, we want other people to understand, accept and trust that truth. It all sounds so simple, but that question of truth can easily hold us back. That

might be because we feel like the truth is under threat, so our default confrontation with other people can be confrontation. We feel that we need to defend the truth, to stop people from damaging the truth because people who don't agree with us are a threat. Or we might shy away from speaking to people because we feel that the truth is in poor hands. So we can be terrified of the questions that we can't answer. We can be pretty certain that someone else will do a far better job, so we just are better off just keeping our mouth shut. Or we might find ourselves thinking well the person we're talking to probably doesn't want to hear this anyway. So we might come some of the way, we might even form a good friendship with someone, but taking that step to speak about the truth in Jesus is just a step too far. We're stopped in our tracks by that feeling that the truth is just not what people want to hear. So even though we believe and know that the Gospel is the truth, our evangelism is tethered by the feeling that people can't believe us because we're contradicting them, that people won't believe us because we're rubbish at speaking, or that they don't believe us because they really just don't want the truth. It's so easy to feel like that. I often feel like that. I asked myself, you know, I look back at the last week of my life, I think, did I share the Gospel as often as I wanted to last week? The answer is no. Maybe it's the same for you. If this is how you feel, then the crucial thing we need to learn is that the truth is the truth. And we need to remember that in this chapter Jesus says something wonderful for everyone who feels held back, confined and tethered in our evangelism. What did he say? He said, if you abide in my word, you're truly my disciples, you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free. These words are bursting with amazing theology. Jesus' message leads us into glorious freedom from sin, guilt and death. And there's so much that we could say more broadly in terms of theology. But what I want to focus on is the fact that these words are also a huge encouragement for us in terms of our evangelism. And in order for us to see that, I want to just highlight to you this evening three truths about truth.

[8 : 31] Number one, the truth is central to life. Now this is a really important thing to consider because over the past hundred years or so, the whole question of truth has come under scrutiny in the Western world. So post-modern philosophy, as we've called it, is redefining how we understand the truth. For centuries and centuries and centuries, people's general view of the world was that certain stuff is true and we need to discover it. And so for centuries people learn more and more about the world in order to recognise the stuff that's true. Certain things are true, certain things aren't. Post-modernism has generally rejected that idea of objective external truth. And so the idea of a meta-narrative like an overarching truth over the world, that's kind of rejected. It's to be avoided.

Great truth is more relative, more subjective, more individualistic. In other words, the great overarching truth of reality is that there's no great overarching truth of reality.

That's really post-modernism in one sentence. And the consequence of that is you get lots of people saying, well, what's true for me doesn't have to be true for you. I can have my truth, you can have your truth. And this is the dominant philosophy in the western world at the moment. It's all over the place. You see it in Disney movies, where people say you can be anything that you want to be. And you see it all the way through to the top of society in politicians who just spin the truth in order to whatever suits their agenda.

This is the kind of dominant situation we face today. This idea of truth is seen as old-fashioned, maybe even offensive. And you can discover that if you were to go stand, say, in a university in Britain somewhere with a sign up saying, I will tell you the truth. And if you don't believe my truth, you're all wrong. It's not going to go down very well at all. So truth is old-fashioned, truth is offensive. There's no great overarching truth in terms of reality.

That's postmodernism. But what you find is that hardly anyone actually believes that.

[11 : 28] So despite all the influence that this has had in art, music, politics, religion, this is why, for example, when you look at 20th century modern art, it's all really unrealistic and weird-looking because truth doesn't have to be accurate. It can just be whatever. Despite all the influence that it's had in these areas, it's still the case that truth is absolutely central to life. And to prove that, all you have to do is look at the news headlines.

So maybe in the peace and tranquility of a song or a movie, people are quite happily with the idea that you can have your truth and I can have mine. But when controversy strikes, people want the truth. In fact, they demand it. So the Me Too movement wants truth about sexual abuse in the film industry. Black Lives Matter wants the truth about racial inequality.

Greta Thunberg wants truth about climate change. When there's an election or a referendum, the public want the truth about exactly what the results are. When Volkswagen reprogrammed their cars to give a false reading when testing emissions, nobody said, oh well, truth is relative. There was international outrage and VW was given one of the largest fines in corporate history. When it comes to controversy, when it comes to the big issues of life, people still want the truth. And all of this forces us back to the fact that the truth is inherently and inescapably exclusive. The truth is the truth. And anything that isn't the truth isn't true. So climate change can't be true and a hoax. Trump and Biden can't both win the election. Consent can't simultaneously be obtained by the man and withheld by the woman. Truth forces us to recognize that certain things are fact, certain things are fiction, certain things are right, certain things are wrong, certain things are genuine, certain things are fake. Truth is central to life. The people around us want the truth. They need the truth. They demand the truth. But the key question that they and us have to grapple with is what is the truth? That brings us to the second key truth about truth. That truth is central to the gospel. Let me ask you a question. Why was Jesus born? That's a key question in terms of Christian theology. The whole Bible is centered on the life of Jesus, the fact that he came, lived, died and rose again. But why did Jesus come in the first place? Why was Jesus born? What comes into your mind? Well, an instinctive answer might be to say something like, he's come to be the savior of sinners. He's come to establish God's kingdom. He's come to give eternal life and all of that is 100% correct.

[14:53] But later on in John's Gospel in chapter 18, Jesus is interrogated by Pontius Pilate and he gives his own answer to the question, why was Jesus born? Do you know what Jesus said?

You can see it in John 18, 37. Pilate's interrogating him. He's asking him and it comes to verse 37. Pilate said to him, see, you're a king. Jesus answered, you say that I'm a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I came into the world to bear witness, sorry I went too far there, to bear witness to the truth. That's one of the key reasons why Jesus was born. The truth is central to Jesus' mission. In fact, the truth is central to Jesus' whole identity. He is the truth. And that means that if we want to know the truth, we need to know him at the heart of the person and work of Jesus, at the heart of the Christian Gospel is the revelation of truth. If you read any part of the Bible, you will quickly discover that the truth matters to God. He's the God of truth, as Isaiah 65 tells us. He speaks the truth. Isaiah 45, his word is truth, John 17. He hates a lying tongue, Proverbs 6, 17. And it's impossible for God to lie, Hebrews 6, 18. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his truth. So God speaks, maintains, propagates, defends the truth. That's why you can trust everything that God says to you. And that's why you can be completely honest in everything that you say to him.

This is one of the many amazing things about God. It's reminding us that with God, you never need to be afraid that he's conning you by pretending to be something he's not.

And at the same time, you never need to feel that you have to con him by pretending to be something that you're not. Instead, God just knows the truth. We can be completely honest with him. The devil is the opposite of that. He does not stand in the truth because there's no truth in him. When he speaks, he speaks out of his own character. He's a liar and the father of lies. And the whole of human history is wrapped up in that tension between the truth that God reveals and the lies that the devil spins. From Adam and Eve all the way through to the newspapers published that are going to be published this week, the devil has been leading people away from God and into a mess. He's convinced humanity that God's commands are restrictive, that God's priorities are irrelevant, that God's requirements aren't urgent. All of these are lies. And yet I'm sure all of us here have fallen into them from time to time. Any of you thought that God's commands are maybe going to spoil life?

[18:31] Have any of you thought that, oh, I've got better things to do than think about God? Have any of you ever thought, oh, I'll think of a God later in my life? That's just playing into the devil's hands. That's thinking exactly what he wants you to think. The whole of human history is shaped by people who are listening to truth that isn't the truth at all. In response to that, God resolves to reveal the truth that actually is the truth. And that desire to reveal the truth goes hand in hand with God's desire to bring salvation. It's a fascinating verse in Hebrews 1 Timothy 2, 3 to 4. It says, this is good. It's pleasing the sight of God our Savior who desires all people to be saved and to come to knowledge, to a knowledge of the truth. A key part of God's desire is that people will know the truth. At the heart of Christianity is the fact that the truth is the truth. Only the truth is the truth.

And only true truth can actually save us. God's goal is to reveal that truth to us. And that objective is at the heart of why Jesus came. But did that mean that everybody believed what Jesus said? Not at all, far from it. He frequently encountered questions, suspicion and opposition. And we read a brilliant example of that in John chapter 8. Here Jesus is speaking with the religious leaders in Jerusalem and he makes this great declaration in verse 12 that you can see there. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. That's a stunning statement about truth.

The whole image of light speaks about illumination, clarity, visibility. But the Pharisees object, they say you bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true. So you can see the argument that the Pharisees are building. Jesus has made this great declaration and the Pharisees responses to say well you are just saying that about yourself. How is anyone supposed to believe that? Jesus responds by saying even though I bear witness for myself my testimony is true because I know where I came from and I know where I'm going. You don't know where I came from or where I'm going. You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge my judgments through for it's not I, I'll only judge but I am the Father who sent me. In your law it's written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself and the Father who sent me bear witness about me. Now you're forgiven if you, you're definitely forgiven if you look at those verses and think I don't really understand what Jesus is saying. There are weaver hearts maybe to understand at first glance and Jesus's argument can sound a little bit circular, maybe even a little bit convenient because the Pharisees are telling him if he's the only one making these kind of claims that they can't believe him because there's no one else to corroborate.

Jesus replies by saying I'm not making these claims on my own. He's saying these things because he's been sent by God the Father. His message is the Father's message. The Father and Son together are declaring the truth. Now if you're a skeptic then all of that sounds very convenient doesn't it because Jesus is making these huge claims and then he uses God the Father as this kind of prime witness but no one can actually interrogate God the Father and so it's kind of, it almost seems circular. But you have to stand back and ask yourself the question what if Jesus actually is telling the truth? If Jesus is sent from the Father to reveal the truth and to bring light to the world, if that's true do we expect him to get corroboration from some rabbi or some prophet or some friend? If Jesus had actually come from God should he appeal to the fallible witness of humans around him or should he appeal to the God of truth who actually sent him? If Jesus said I'm the light of the world and look here's John and Peter they'll confirm it. If Jesus spoke like that

I will be worried. But Jesus doesn't do that. He doesn't need to do that. Instead he relies on the fact that he's been sent by the Father. He relies on the fact that the truth is the truth but that still leaves us crying out for an answer to the question how do we know that that's true? So Jesus says I am the light of the world how are you supposed to know if that's true? Surely anyone can say I've come from God I have the truth because God has sent me and history is full of people who have made outrageous claims like that what makes Jesus different? Well this is where I want you to see that Jesus says something absolutely brilliant. He says I know where I came from and where I am going. What is

[24 : 20] Jesus doing here? What Jesus is doing here is that he is grounding everything that he's saying on his origin and his destiny. He's talking about his origin and his destiny.

Jesus claims to know where he's come from and he makes an inextricable link between his origin, his message and his destiny. He says that he's been sent by God but like we said anyone can do that because the real test is not where someone claims that from.

The real test is where they end up and that's why Jesus doesn't just claim to know his origin he claims to know his destiny he claims to know where he's going and what he's doing is revealing the fact that his message is going to lead on to a conclusion and that conclusion is going to prove whether or not his claims really are the truth. So what was he claiming and what kind of conclusion could validate that claim? Well Jesus's claim was that he had come to give eternal life to the world and there is only one conclusion that can validate a claim like that. There's one event that can prove that these words are true. If Jesus really has come from God, if Jesus really is going to give eternal life to a dying world and a dying humanity then there's one thing that's got to happen. Do you know what it is? A resurrection. If Jesus ends up dead at the end of this then his words are empty and all our faith is in vain. If Jesus rises again everything he says is verified.

Jesus knows his origin and he knows his destiny. If the resurrection happened then the truth of the gospel really is the truth. But what has all of this got to do with sharing our faith? Well this is where I want us to see our third truth about truth that the truth is central to evangelism. What I want us to see is that if Jesus' message is true and if we remember that the truth really is the truth then it can liberate us from the doubts and fears that are holding us back in sharing our faith. In terms of evangelism Jesus' words really are true. The truth will set you free. And so if the truth is the truth, if the truth is the truth then that means that we don't need to back back in confrontation when we interact with people who disagree with us. The gospel doesn't need our shouts or our barks to make it true, it's already true. Nothing can change that, nothing can threaten it. Locked away in Paris somewhere is the international prototype of the kilogram.

That's a small lump of metal that's made of platinum and iridium and up until 2019 it was the reference point which defined what a kilogram was. In 2019 the definition of a kilogram was changed to a new system of calculations that are too complicated for me to understand. But for over 100 years this lump of metal in Paris was the definition of what a kilogram really was. And the reason that they had to change to a system of calculations was because even though this prototype of the kilogram was locked away in total security they still couldn't prevent small variations affecting the mass of that piece of metal.

[29 : 02] The true kilogram had to be protected because it could so easily be compromised. The gospel is the complete opposite of that. The truth in Jesus is impregnable. That means that if you meet somebody who disagrees with what you say you don't need to panic and you don't need to worry that the foundation of your faith is about to be pulled out from underneath you and you don't need to go on the attack as if somehow this person's arguments are going to undo the resurrection and topple Jesus from the right hand of God. You don't need to do any of that. Instead you can just talk about the truth. So you can ask them what they believe, ask them why they believe it, ask them how they know it's true. And they might say something that you've not thought of before, they might raise questions that you can't answer there and then you might need to ask for someone else's help, you might have to do a bit of research yourself. All of that's healthy. But not for one second do you need to be afraid that your savior is going to be falsified. The resurrection has happened, it cannot be undone. The truth is the truth and remembering that can liberate us from feeling intimidated and it can turn a confrontation into a conversation. If the truth is the truth then that means you don't need to cower away in silence afraid that your feeble efforts are going to do more harm than all you need to do is tell the truth.

So you can talk about the difference that is made in your life to know Jesus. Talk about the reality of his peace, the joy of his friendship, the wonder of his love. One of the wonderful things about Christianity is that you don't need to be a genius in order to be an expert.

In so many areas in life you know you have to be a genius in order to be an expert whether it's with computers or with finances or with medical procedures or whatever it may be. But in Christianity you don't need to be a genius in order to be an expert because an expert is simply someone who knows what they're talking about. So you might still have a lot of some areas, lots to learn in terms of theology, there may be areas of the Bible you're still getting to know. There may be many experiences still ahead of you in your path as a disciple but in terms of sharing your faith, in terms of telling someone the truth about the difference that it makes to know Jesus, you are not a clueless idiot. You're an expert. You're an expert because when we say that Jesus has come to save us and to heal us and to transform us, you know exactly what that means. But we do have to be careful. The truth is the truth. So that means we've got something wonderful to say but if the truth is the truth it should also shape the way we say it. Paul highlights that fact in Ephesians 4 when he mentions that we have to make sure we speak the truth in love. Arrogance, harshness, dishonesty, hypocrisy, all of that is going to undermine our attempts to share the truth. And no wonder it will undermine it because if the truth of Jesus' love doesn't shape the way we speak then others are going to think that we don't really believe what we're trying to tell them.

Sometimes people might be put off by what we say but it's probably far more likely that they might be put off by the way that we say it. The way we speak must reflect that what we're seeing really is the truth. And if the truth is the truth then that means that you actually have what people around you are longing for. Now I want to really press this home to us all because it probably doesn't feel like that. You probably think to yourself well all the people I know they don't want to hear me talk about Jesus and it can seem like that but if people want the truth which they do and if Jesus' message is

the truth which it is then never again do you or I have to be held back by the thought that people just don't want to hear what we are saying. That doesn't mean that it's always going to be plain sailing, it doesn't mean that they're going to accept every word that we say with open arms but it does mean that even if people seem like they don't want to know deep down they do. Deep down they do. We have something incredible to say all around us people are crying out for the truth as Christians we have it. We've got something amazing to share.

We've got something that people around us long for. So in terms of our evangelism it's really important to remember that the truth is the truth. Next time you feel pulled back by the niggle that people don't really want to hear about Jesus you can undo that tether by remembering that the truth is the truth. And perhaps the most astounding truth of all what us as Christians in terms of thinking about our evangelism is this. For 2000 years Jesus has been building his church and he's been doing it through very very ordinary men and women. He's been doing it through women and men who have doubts and fears, men and women who don't always know what to say, men and women who've much it up on more than one occasion, men and women who do not feel confident but when it comes to building his church Jesus uses people just like you. That's the truth. That truth is the truth and when it comes to evangelism that truth will set you free because Jesus can do amazing things through you. And maybe we just need to give him a chance to prove that that's the truth. Give him a chance to show that through you this week by getting in touch with someone or inviting someone to church or getting someone around to your house or asking someone if they want to read the Bible together or pray together or whatever it may be. Give Jesus a chance to prove that he's really ready to use people like you. But for any of us who are not yet a Christian as well we need to think about this too. If the truth is the truth then the two things that we need to think about is exactly what Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about. You need to think about your origin and your destiny. And the truth is that your origin is that you're created by God, made for God but held captive in sin as Jesus said in this chapter. And that reality raises a massive question over your destiny. Jesus spoke to these Pharisees and he said to them unless you believe you'll die in your sins.

[37 : 24] But to all who come to him he will give eternal life. That means that Jesus is calling you tonight to put your faith in him. That's the truth. The truth is the truth. He's holding it to himself to you again tonight. Amen. Father we thank you for the fact that you are the God of truth, that you speak the truth, that you cannot lie. And we thank you so so much that in Jesus we have the one who is the way, the truth and the life. And we pray

Father that you'd help us all to put our faith in Jesus if we haven't already. And for those of us who are Christians we pray that these words would liberate us in all the ways in which we feel held back in our evangelism. Help us to share the truth of the Gospel in Jesus with the people that we meet this week. Help us to remember that the truth is the truth and that the truth will set us free. Amen.