

How Do I Know ...

A sermon series on God's Will

What's True

John 14:1-14 (way, truth and life)

September 16, 2018

Welcome and intro to the series...

So, a few weeks ago, Julie and I were going to a baby shower. The shower was being held at a house we had never been to before. So, we did what a lot of people do...we opened up the GPS and we typed in the address and hit GO. Now, the problem with a lot of GPS systems is that you only see what is close like the next turn. The map covers just a little bit of the territory around you. And unless you zoom out you don't really get the whole picture of where you're going. For the most part that works out fine until you want to start looking for alternative ways to get around an accident or you've got to pee or you've never been to that place you're going. So, we typed in the address, we hit Go and we started out. Most of the drive was on familiar roads until the very end. Remember, I've never been there before so, when the GPS said to turn onto this particular street I followed the leader. Now, it was not the street that we had typed in so I just assumed that the street would be taking us to that street. We didn't travel more than two blocks on this street when the GPS announced that we had arrived at our destination. Julie and I looked at each other and instantly proclaimed, "well, that's not right."

So, what did we do, what anyone would have done...we grabbed a smart phone and pulled up a different GPS and typed in the address and hit GO again. This time the GPS took us back out on the main road, down the street one block and had us turn onto the street we were looking for. We assumed that the other GPS we were using was working off of proximity not exact location. When we got into the party everyone was talking about how the GPS systems had taken them to the next street over and how it seemed that some GPS systems got it right and some didn't. It gave us all a good laugh because it was a classic GPS failure. The answer one person gave was, "well, nothings perfect." And while that is right, it is only right if you exit God out of the term "nothing." God is perfect or He's not God. One of the things I believe with all my heart is that the God we call out to, the God we worship is perfect or He is not worthy of our worship, he is not worthy of us praying to him. If he is mostly perfect then we leave room for God to be wrong and the last thing we need to be worshipping is something that has the potential to be wrong. Because **God is perfect**, that means that **whatever God says or does is trustworthy and true**.

And there is the problem we have, truth has become questionable. We just don't know who or what to trust any more. We live in a day when the cry of "fake news" is heard almost every day. Who can we believe? We certainly can't believe everything we read, especially on Wikipedia.

So, **truth has become subjective, relative, and experiential**. The *subjective* nature of truth says that my truth and your truth can be different and yet equally valid...which makes us all scratch our heads. Two subjective truths about the same thing must have something in common that makes both of them true but, that's not how it works because truth, as I often see it is what someone holds as true in spite of what anyone else might think or hold true. Friends of ours have said things like, "well it's all *relative*," dismissing any connecting tread of truth that might exist that holds it all together. And still other friends say things like, "well, that might be true for you but, based on what I've seen, that just isn't true. My experience, while being valid, does not stomp all over truth just because I believe in something because that's the way I experienced it.

This thing we have about truth is the source of some of the most heated arguments on Facebook that I've witnessed. People will argue things they believe are true from the existence of Bigfoot and Extra Terrestrials to the belief that the president is spying on me through that little camera on my laptop computer. And don't mess with my truth...people get territorial – my truth is mine, yours is yours and that's all there is – so don't challenge my truth. We hold on to our truth like a teddy bear or a comfortable blanket and if someone tries to take it from us with something like facts, well then, we get hurt and outraged. Don't confuse my truth with facts...

The opposite extreme is the claim that there is no such thing as THE truth and to suggest so is arrogant and pompous and rude. I've had friends say things like, well you can't be 100% sure so you can't claim *ultimate* truth. "What if what you believe isn't true and some other faith system is the right one or the true one?" is a dilemma I've been asked about. We seem to want evidence for someone else's truth but, don't mess with what I believe is true, like – there is no God but, fairies and elves are real.

All of this stuff can get your head spinning, right? And these issues that surround the ideas about truth cause all kinds of conflict. We will veer away from conversations if we believe it's going to degrade into a debate about what is true. **For people who believe**, this is challenging because **faith and truth** for us **are deeply connected**. We are convinced that what we believe is true. And to challenge our belief is to challenge what we hold to be true. Things like God is the creator of all things rather than a scientific explanation for all of creation that does not include a divine being. I mean, there might be elements of the truth in a scientific explanation of the formation of the world but, to exit out God is removing a truth that I believe in strongly.

And that's not all we do with truth. We're willing to skirt around it if we don't like it. Take for example cigarettes. It has been proven over and over again that cigarettes are immensely harmful. The warning on a pack of cigs is huge and the price is even bigger. But, we will suspend the truth because it would keep us from doing something we believe we want or need. I mean, come on, don't mess with someone if they have re-written the truth to fit something they believe they want or need...you'll get your face chewed off. We'll even use a truth to support our suspension of the truth...don't believe me, have you ever heard someone justify their truth by saying: "well, you've got to die of something." The truth is, unless Jesus comes back, there's a 100% chance that the only way out of this thing called life is that we've got to die...that's true. Romans 1:25 says that people who do that have...***exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator*** (NIV)

So, this thing of questioning the truth isn't new. Jesus and Pontius Pilate have a conversation about who Jesus is, as Pilate is making the decision about the life and death of Jesus. Jesus tells Pilate that he has come "to testify to the truth" and Pilate's answer is, "what is truth." That's the response of the career soldier and politician. You see, the issues we have with truth are not new...they're thousands of years in the making. We didn't get here easily or yesterday. It will take everything we've got to turn this around in our lives and in our families and in our communities because people don't want to hear the truth. (Clip...you can't handle the truth)

He's right...we often cannot handle the truth. We don't like when the truth shines its light onto the dark places of our lives or reveals a falsehood that we've been hiding or maybe even enjoying. This might be part of the reason that people like Jesus so much but are not necessarily interested in following his teachings because if what he says is true...then it hurts a bit at times...like when we discover that there are consequences for our actions. When Jesus is loving us, it is warm and fuzzy, and we're good but, there are times when the truth he is saying sounds harsh to the ears of those who are not living the way God wants for His creation to live.

If the truth is wobbly then what is good and what is evil becomes subjective rather than ordained by a God who is over all things. That means we make up our own truth and our own consequences and eventually, our own idea of where we will live for eternity. We even have a term that we use to brush off the conviction that happens when we hear the truth...we say "the truth hurts" but, we go back to whatever lie we were using to dull the pain, hoping and trusting in the forgiveness that is promised by the One who could not lie. But, **the truth is not always attractive**. Do I look good in this dress? This is nothing new, John the Baptist lost his head by speaking the truth about the regional governor and his mistress. *You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.* John 8:31

In a world where we struggle to believe...there are several things God says to all of us. In John 14 Jesus is telling his disciples about the truth of eternal life. When the disciples hear this, they start to question Jesus and he answers them with these words:

⁶ Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."⁹ Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?"¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. ¹¹ Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do. ¹² "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.

Jesus looks at his own followers, those who knew him in person as he walked the earth and says to them...don't you yet know the truth? I and the Father are the same. If you've seen me you've seen the Father...that's the truth. He goes on to say that if you don't believe my words, at least believe what you've seen with your own eyes. Can we just admit today that we struggle with the truth? That there are times when we just don't know if we can believe. We've heard the words of God that were said by Jesus. We've read them. We've read about all the things he did. But we drop back into that place of wondering, can it be truth? Is Jesus the truth? What about all of the other religions? Is there only one truth?

So, I want to give you a tool today that is going to help all of us. It's called the Quadrilateral and it is the way to evaluate the truth of Jesus and how it intersects with your life. The Quadrilateral is this:

- **Scripture**
- **Tradition**
- **Reason**
- **Experience**

These four can help us discover and live with the truth each day if we ask a core question about what we are experiencing based on these four things. Here's how it works. Let's say I want to do something and I'm not sure if it's okay – according to God and my faith – to do it. So, the first question and always the place we go to first is: what does the Bible have to say about this thing I want to do? Is there a directive, a Proverb, a parable, a situation that the Bible covers that would address my decision?

Second, we need to ask those same questions about the traditions I adhere to, the reason of my own mind and the experiences I've had in my own life. If we want to get to the truth, we need to walk through these steps and trust that God is going to guide our minds and our hearts. These steps take us beyond just being sincere. **Sincerity is not a substitute for truth.** If we're are going to trust in God, then we need to believe that what he wants for us and what God has said to us is true. This is foundational to who God is, truth. If who God is and what God says is conditional or maybe even not true then, God is not who He says He is because everything would be up for question. **If God is truth, then everything God says is true for all of us.** It's not selective and not conditional. No other religion addresses faith in this way. No other faith says that there is an objective truth for all of us that comes from a perfect Father who loves us and wants the best for us.

Next week we're going to talk about God's plan specifically for your life and how you can know that plan.