

Truth and Life

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[0:00] We're going to be in the Gospel of John this morning. We will return to our very lengthy series in the Sermon of Acts next week. We'll start our trudge again through Acts. We've been away from that for quite a long time.

I think it's probably like six months or more. And so we'll be back in that. But today we're in John's Gospel, John chapter 14. I'm only going to look at part of one verse, but we're going to read from verse 1 through to verse 14.

This is John recording some of Jesus' words for us. Chapter 14 and verse 1. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

[1:01] Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said, Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us. Jesus answered, Don't you know me, Philip, even after I've been among you such a long time?

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority.

Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

[1:59] Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study. Gracious God, your word is truth, and we ask you to be merciful this morning and to meet us with your truth.

Not just truth that we might have our minds expanded and know more about your word and about the gospel, but truth that would change us, bring about fundamental change in our lives as we come to love you and worship you more.

Show us your Son, Jesus. Let us see him clearly. We ask this all for Christ's sake. Amen. And I suspect that one of the things someone might be looking to get out of a sabbatical, if they go on a sabbatical, is to have something of a spiritual aha moment.

You've been working for a long, long period of time, a number of years. You're getting a chance to sort of reset. You've obviously over that time got things that you'd like to change in your life and get better at spiritually and grow in or change in the church or change in your own life or your family situation.

[3:32] And so you're kind of hoping, well, if I get this time away and if I'm reading the Bible and I'm doing all these things, this unbroken time with the Lord, then at some point I'm going to have this aha moment, sort

of like a mini Damascus Road experience.

And then I'll be rejuvenated and renewed to come back into the task. Now I want to say I feel very rejuvenated and renewed and so I'm very grateful for that. I feel like I've got a lot of energy, but there was no aha moment.

The cloud's not part. There was no writing on the wall by a finger or anything like that. There was no aha moment. In fact, if anything, the aha moment was that there is no aha moment. The aha moment was that the basics are what matter.

The basics of Christianity are what matter and what will always matter for each and every one of us. God is gracious sometimes and he gives us little boosts and nudges along the way, but there is no substitute for the basics of Christianity.

And it all starts with Jesus. Daily, weekly, monthly, turning back to him and finding your all in all in him.

[4:40] Finding your portion in him. The Bible uses that term often, portion. What it means is like the perfect size of food, the perfect portion of food, which you're not hungry afterwards and you're not full afterwards, it just perfectly satisfies you.

Finding your all in all in him. And so I want us to think about that a little bit together this morning by looking at this famous saying of Jesus that we find in John 14, verse six. Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Now that's a big claim. It's a huge claim. You've been in church circles, you've heard it quite a lot, but I think you sometimes maybe miss how big that claim is, how maybe offensive that claim is.

He is basically saying, if you come to me, you come to ultimate reality. You come to the one true God. You come to find true truth. You come to find true life.

And he's exclusive. Only if you come to me will you find your true self. Who you're meant to be. Who God designed you to be.

[5:49] Now that is an extraordinarily enormous claim. In our culture, we don't like claims like that. We don't like exclusive statements like that.

They can sometimes be very controversial. We are generally a culture that goes out of its way to avoid big truth claims like that, to avoid appearing to discriminate in any way or shape or form. And so we sometimes dial back on big claims like this. But I want to say, well, what if Jesus is telling the truth here? What if he's telling the truth?

Because he's not just saying that he's the way to salvation. That's, I think, the way this verse is often construed. And he is saying that. He's saying that the way to salvation is only through him. But he's not just saying that. He's not just saying, well, here's your get out of hell free ticket.

He's saying more than that. He's saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He sets out a completely new way of being. Of actually truly being you.

[6:58] A way of living life the way you're supposed to live. And not just in the future, but even now. And so we might as a culture get twitchy about truth claims, big truth claims, but I would argue that this claim is too big and it is too consequential for us to sort of just ignore it and be apathetic about it and pass over it.

So even if you, your jury is out on Jesus or you know that you don't believe in Jesus, I would put it to you, you have to. Because of the size of this claim, at least explore it and figure out where you stand in relation to it.

So we're going to have a look at it together this morning and I'm actually going to focus on the second half of the claim that Jesus offers truth and he offers life. Those are sort of our two points of where we're going.

Truth and life. This is the first one, truth. I want to look at how Jesus actually builds up to this statement. So we're going to go a little bit further back in John's Gospel, even further back than where we read from.

If you've got a Bible open or it's on your app, you can turn back to chapter 13, verse 33. Because that's kind of where this section starts. Jesus says, My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

[8:15] You will look for me and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now where I'm going you cannot come. A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have loved one another. Now Simon Peter asked him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus replied, where I am going you cannot follow, but you will follow later.

Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I'm going. And Thomas says to him, Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?

[9:24] And then Jesus answers, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Now this comes in a larger section that's known as the upper room discourse in John's Gospel, verses 13 through to verse 17.

It's the final night before Jesus goes to the cross where he, as the Last Supper with his disciples, he shares a whole bunch of important information, particularly about the Holy Spirit coming to be with us in this section.

And so that's where we are. We're in this moment on this very tense night, this very tense scene before he's going to go to the cross. You'll notice as you get to chapter 14, he says to his disciples, don't let your hearts be troubled.

Now that's actually quite an astounding insight into what's going on inside Jesus' heart on that night as he is about to go to the cross and die. So in chapter 12 or chapter 13, we're actually told that Jesus' heart was troubled on the one hand, or he's about to face this bloody, gruesome, soul-crushing death on a cross and he knows it.

He's not getting caught unawares when he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. He knows this is coming. And so at this point, you should expect that the people around him, his good buddies, should be comforting him.

[10:47] The disciples should be, it's all right, we got you, we'll be with you. They should be comforting him, but instead he is, in his travail, his soul travail, he is concerned about comforting them.

And he says to them, do not let your hearts be troubled. Now why is he doing that? Well, this band of disciples, they've given up quite a lot to follow Jesus. They have, so to speak, put all their eggs in the Jesus basket and now he says, I'm going away.

So they're not just troubled at losing a friend, at losing a leader, they're troubled because they're going to lose their newfound identity that they have gained through following Christ.

These men are mostly a bunch of uneducated peasants from a rural area who were one moment fishing in Galilee. Next minute, they're caught up in this life-changing revolution, traveling around the countryside, seeing incredible miracles, hearing the most profound teaching.

They don't understand all of it. They certainly, you can see in the Gospels, they don't understand everything that Jesus is saying and what he's doing and what it means, but they are changing. They are profoundly changing as people.

[12:04] They're not the same people that were with their fishing nets three years earlier and they're starting to see the world now with new eyes. Everything around them. They're beginning to see that there's a lot more to their existence than just fishing nets and the sea and their families, concerns of rural life.

They're beginning to live by new truth and now it seems like that's all going to go away. It's going to be gone and so he comforts them and he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

So he says he's the truth. He's saying to them, you men, you men think you've been with me for these three years and you think that in this being with me and seeing everything and coming along

and having your hearts changed and your minds changed, you think that you've found truth. Well, I'm here to tell you that you actually have found truth in me. I'm not just the way in that I might take you to heaven one day. I will do that but I'm the truth in that I might shape you. I might shape the way that you look at yourself, the way you think about yourself, the way you look at this world and you think about this world around you. I am that truth, he's saying.

[13:19] Be confident in that. Don't be troubled. Now probably more than any culture in history, we have, I think, an overriding sense that we are supposed to discover who we truly are.

That sort of language is absolutely everywhere in pop culture. Throughout, maybe this whole first quarter of the 21st century, a baseline assumption of the predominantly Western world has been this.

All of the people who are flourishing in life, doing well in life, the reason they're flourishing is because they found out who they really are inside and they're living that out. All of the people who are floundering in life, the reason they are floundering is because they haven't yet discovered their true self and the solution to the floundering is, well, you discover your true self and when you do that, then your life will start to go the way it's supposed to go.

Now you've heard that message. That is a cultural assumption in so many spaces in our world today. And yet, I think any thoughtful person doesn't need to think about that narrative for very long before you start to see some very significant problems in it.

Here's one big problem with that worldview. Which self do you be true to? Which self do you be true to? So say my life is floundering financially, relationally, psychologically, or in terms of finding a meaning and a purpose in life.

[14:48] Say I'm floundering. Life is not going well. I feel like I can't get my life on track. The culture says I'm only going to succeed if I'm true to myself. Which self am I going to be true to?

Stephen at his best? Stephen when I want to make the world a better place? When I want to love people? When I want to serve people? When I want to seek out the good of people?

When I want to pursue justice initiatives for all people? That's Stephen? Or Stephen at his worst? In fact, let's not even be Stephen at his worst.

Let's go for Stephen at his usual. So Stephen when I'm feeling lazy and all I want to do is lie on the couch all day and doom scroll through my phone and eat high calorie snacks.

That's my newest thing now is I get all these food guys telling me about what has high calories and what has low calories and how just small changes are going to change your diet. But which Stephen do I be true to?

[15:49] How do I know which of those two is my true self? They both feel pretty true. And listen friends, there's a lot riding on this decision that I have to make now. Because if I get this wrong I basically screw up my life and continue to flounder.

Now I suspect that that puts a ton of pressure on people. On all of us. Because we're hearing that message over and over and over and over and over again. And so there are a lot of people running around in our world right now who are wrapped up in anxiety trying to find their true selves.

Who are crippled by anxiety trying to find their true selves. And there are some extra conundrums to this that make it even worse. So here's one.

We live in a culture that for the most part says there's probably no God. Which is kind of weird. Because although the majority of people for example in this country are still religious the cultural elites at least so whether you're talking about mainstream media or the academy tend to speak and tend to operate as if there is no God.

There's no God. There's no divine being out there. There's no higher mind that created us with a purpose. And if that is true then why on earth would we possibly think that there is such a thing as a true self that can be discovered.

[17:07] What a ridiculous fiction if there is no God. Surely without a higher power that notion of a true self that hidden identity that you've got to find just goes away.

It just ceases to exist. Now I've actually seen one way that secular people try and solve this problem because they really like this find your true self thing. And that is by saying well the way you find your

true self is sort of getting more in touch with your your biology your evolutionary traits that make humans basically slightly more sophisticated primates.

So your gut instincts for survival for food for comfort for sex. But if that is all that finding your true self is then surely that ends up looking a lot more like Stephen lying on the couch than Stephen the altruistic philanthropist.

if there is no God there is probably no true self. And so this sort of dominant cultural narrative that we all swim in of finding yourself is wildly incoherent and it induces crippling anxiety in all of us. It's not good news. Now into all of this mess Jesus comes along and he says I am the truth. that is to say I can tell you who you truly are.

[18:41] His disciples are confused they are troubled they're thinking what if we lose this what if we lose everything that we've gained over the last three years this new life this new identity this new purpose what if we lose it and Jesus comes and he comforts them and he says I am the truth.

friends I want you to know that he doesn't just say that to his disciples he says that to you this morning as you sit here he says to you I can tell you true truth I can tell you who you really are if you look for articles online on how to find your true self and you look sort of into popular psychology or you do what a lot of people today are doing and you turn chat GPT or Claude into your personal therapist and you ask them how do I find my true self what you're going to find as you look at these articles and I say this because I've trawled through countless articles in this particular genre what you're going to find is you're going to find articles offering advice things to do if you do this you will find your true self with sort of bullet points do this then do this then do this then do this ten steps to finding your true self and so you say well okay

I've got all that out there where does Jesus fit into this do we just add his teachings to these other lists that are out there there's some good stuff in some of those lists but is he just another voice in the chorus offering advice first I want to be crystal crystal clear this morning that is not what he's offering it's not at all what he's offering when Jesus says I am the truth he's not saying I'm teaching truth he does teach truth but that is not primarily what he is saying he's saying I am truth itself I am truth embodied I am truth come to be with you you see this really is the difference between Christianity and every other religion or ideology is that Jesus doesn't come and offer you advice on how to get to God Jesus doesn't come and say well here's ten things you must do to find ultimate meaning and purpose in your life he comes and embodies the truth for you not do this but here I am think about football and I mean football where you use a foot and you kick a ball not the American version think about soccer think about a football coach he coaches a team of players okay he trains them he works with them through the week he instructs them on how to approach the game maybe he researches the opposition team they watch some tape on the opposition team and he figures out their tactics if he is a good coach and if he is perceptive he can get his team to play really well maybe if he is a really really good coach he can actually even get his team to play a little bit above themselves on occasion but at the end of the day all he can do is offer advice from the sidelines he can set up stuff and offer advice from the sidelines the team the team has to play on the field the team has to harness their skill to perform and to get the results no matter how good that coach is the results are always limited by the ability of the players on the field to perform but what if the coach also happens to be the greatest striker in the history of the game like Messi and Ronaldo and Maradona and Dennis

Bergkamp yes Dennis Bergkamp all wrapped into one and better than all of them combined what if he happens to be the greatest striker in the history of the game what if he gets onto the field himself and he scores the goals and he sort of drags his team over the victory line single handedly you see friends that's the difference between good news the good news of Jesus and just good advice Jesus is not coming to us and saying here's some more advice on how to be true to yourself how to find your inner self how to find that flourishing he's not saying here are some things you can do to achieve your goals to achieve higher levels of flourishing in life he is saying look at me believe in me and then the fourth official lifts up the substitution board and he comes onto the field of life your field of life and he performs perfectly exquisitely he lives the perfect life a life free of sin he dies in your place freeing you from sin freeing you from death and then he rises from the grave giving you a picture of this new true humanity you see he doesn't come and first off say copy me he comes and he says believe in me if you go back earlier in the gospel of john and you go to john chapter 6

verse 29 the disciples asked jesus the question what must we do to do the work god requires so they are asking him for advice there give me your 10 bullet points jesus on how to be right with god how to find salvation how to live this good life how to be true to myself give me your 10 points what advice can you give jesus so that i can live in such a way that i can be friends with god jesus says this the work of god is this and now you expect the list that's not what he says he says the work of god is to believe in the one he has sent that's strange think about those words the work of god is to believe in the one he sent jesus is not just the coach he's the one sent to score the goals as well you're going to spend your whole life trying to find the right advice that's going to help you score the goals of finding your true identity in this world all the while jesus is standing there and he's saying i will score that goal for you i will do it for you just trust in me i am the truth place your faith in me friends that is an unbelievable offer on the table in front of us in the midst of a world that is full of incoherent anxiety inducing worldviews now what about the second thing the life he says i'm the way the truth and the life there i think jesus is not just saying well he's saying i'm not just here to tell you who you are i'm actually here to give you a life worth living now as i alluded earlier on one of the things that bothers me about this whole find your true self thing and i can be pretty facetious with this but take it from where it comes i just worry about the kind of person i would become if i followed that mantra completely and consistently if i became who i sense in my gut i am sometimes i don't know any of you have heard of the world domination summit i came across this thing a couple of years ago in an article written by ann sophie reynard who's a

she's a wellness writer social media influencer she was writing a piece on her experience with introversion and being true to yourself in the face of being introverted and she describes her experience of going to this thing called the world domination summit it's kind of like a big adult conference in portland oregon where about 3 000 people descend on the city and what they do when they get there is they listen to keynote speeches about how to be true to yourself and live amazing lives sort of like ted talk style talks then they do a lot of partying and a lot of socializing it's incredibly popular there's this long waiting list to go to the world domination summit and one of the traditions that they do every year at the summit is they try and break a world record so some of the records that they've broken in the past is create the world's longest yoga chain or the most people eating breakfast in bed together a few years ago when the author went along they attempted to break the record of the world's biggest group in a tube float how many people can they get in a lake on tubes floating together now she describes her experience with being involved in this tube float and the 600 other people who were involved in it

[27:55] I would have thought 600 was quite low I would have thought we could do more than 600 she writes this she says as part of the world domination summit fund there was an inner tube float world record attempt and I had signed up for it the thing was it was in the cold water early in the morning with hundreds of people now I like water but only in the tropics where it's warm kind of like a hot bathtub I like mornings but for things like reflection and waking up slowly and comfortably I like people but not 600 in one spot so great idea for me to sign up then no I didn't go I didn't want to go but all day I felt like a failure another thing in my life I hadn't done another chance of having fun I had missed could I not have just pushed through the truth is I could have I could have been cold could have pretended to like it and could now be holding a world record but it this is an important line she writes it wouldn't have been me

I would have done it to earn bragging rights and to feel cool but I would have denied myself the right to feel whole and complete exactly the way I am this was my biggest lesson throughout the weekend the importance of staying true to myself no excuses necessary now staying true to yourself doesn't mean that you get to make all kind of excuses for not working because hey I'm not a worker or for not making an effort or for not stretching your limits and going out of your comfort zone no that's chickening out staying true to yourself is acknowledging who you are knowing what your body needs knowing what you need to thrive and be present and not letting peer pressure make you do things you'll later regret so I read that and I thought okay great I got this down I can do this I must I must be who I am I must be who I am but also I mustn't chicken out so those are the two tensions I've got to live between be who I am but don't chicken out then I thought same problem

I thought of just now how do I tell the difference if I say true Stephen lies on the couch all day doom scrolling and binge eating is that chickening out or being true to myself class which one now I know all of you are sitting there and you're thinking well that's chickening out on life but then in the article she also said I mustn't give in to peer pressure that will make me do things that I will regret doing so how do I know how do I know if I'm living a life that is true to myself or I'm chickening out how do you know if you're an introvert where's the dividing line where is the dividing line between acceptable moderate introversion and being a cranky recluse how do you know where that line is if you're an extrovert where is the dividing line between moderate extroversion and being a person who doesn't understand the concept of a space bubble where's the line if you're a driven person where's the dividing line between good healthy ambition in your life in your career in your goal setting and being a sort of egotistical megalomaniac narcissistic maniac who's just trampling on people to achieve your goals where's the line how do you know where the line is there are people in this world that we do not want to be true to themselves we do not want the pedophiles to be true to themselves we do not want white supremacists to be true to themselves and you say well okay those are extreme examples and I say fair enough but we don't want selfish self-absorbed individuals to be true to themselves either do we we don't want arrogant prideful trumpet blowing people to be true to themselves we don't want those people to be true to themselves we want them to change and if you see some of that stuff in yourself you want to change too right you want to be different friends listen to change like that to change from being steven on the couch and to really change change it's clearly not simply about changing behavior it requires deep deep change inside of you like you need to be rewired you need to be reconstituted what Jesus says to you I am the life that is to say I can rewire you I can rewire you from the inside out to live the life that you are supposed to live and here is how he rewires us this whole upper room discussion starts in chapter 13 but I want you to see how chapter 13 starts this is the first verse of chapter 13 it was just before the Passover festival Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and to go to the father having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end the evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas the son of Simon Iscariot to betray Jesus Jesus knew that the father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God and so he got up from the meal took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist after that he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples feet drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him you see before Jesus makes this grandiose over the top claim in chapter 14 that he is the way and the truth and the life before he says that as the one who knows that he has come from the father and is going to the father and that all authority has been given him he knows that's who he really is before he rides on that authority and makes this exclusive claim he stoops down he stoops down he stoops down like the lowest of low in that culture like a servant and he washes the cracked broken stinking feet of his disciples now do you see what he's doing there he is showing us true life he's showing us what true life really looks like true life is humility true life is self deprecating true life is sacrificial true life is other person centered that is what not chickening out looks like if you're confused that's what it is you might come in here today and hear

Jesus say I'm the way and the truth and the life and you might say well that's really offensive Jesus that's very exclusive you're discriminating against all the other people who don't trust in you that's very offensive but friends I want to say if his exclusive claim is really a way to help people be more humble more sacrificial more loving of their neighbor is it really that offensive really you don't want that you don't want that for yourself what if Jesus is the way don't you want to be that person isn't the vision of a world full of people who are bent on sacrificially serving themselves in the way of Christ a glorious vision shouldn't we all at least want that well the Bible says Jesus has made it true Jesus has made it true and he made it true not just by washing your feet but by washing away your sin washing away your shame washing away your pride washing away your selfishness washing away your darkness and he did that all when he shed his blood on the cross that washes us clean you see because at the cross

Jesus didn't chicken out at the cross Jesus humbled himself so that he could deal with your pride at the cross he sacrificially sacrificed selflessly sacrificed himself so that he could deal with your selfishness at the cross he faced humiliating ridicule so that he could deal with your arrogance and most of all at the cross Jesus died so that he could give you life friends here's my biggest fear for you for all of us in this culture that we swim in and that is that if you keep on looking for that true self within you that hero that super disciplined person whose life is all put together that person

you want to be I fear that if you keep looking for that person inside of you it's going to wear you down and it's going to break you you're going to be worn down because when you keep looking inside for that person you instead keep finding that selfish person that prideful person that arrogant person that lazy person that person who's apathetic and indifferent you keep finding that person time and time again it's going to wear you down it's going to exhaust you bring despair it's going to make you feel anxious cripplingly anxious why are other people seeming to do better than me it's going to make you feel defeated and so I want to very aggressively reject the prevailing culture and say stop please please please stop looking deep down in yourself to find yourself don't do it and please stop listening to people that are telling you to do that they're not helping you don't look inside to find that true self that is going to make you flourish look outside look at

[39:05] Christ look at the sacrificial king who has everything and yet he stoops down to wash us clean he's going to tell you who you truly are in fact he's not just going to tell you who you truly are he's going to make you who you are truly supposed to be let's look to him let us do the work that God requires which Jesus says is believing in the one whom God sent let's pray together our father and our king we ask for protection this morning lord we ask for protection from believing false things about ourselves and about this world that we will somehow be able to look inside and find a person who is going to save us from everything we don't like in our lives show show us lord this morning that that person is only found outside of ourselves and that person is the lord

Jesus Christ let us trust in him let us rest in him and let us be changed by what we see there as we see him offering himself up let us know that the true self is not a person full of self indulgence but a person of self sacrifice the true self is not a person who puffs himself up with pride but a person of humility show us Jesus clearly so we might see these things and live this truth and life that you have placed before us father I pray for any person who is sitting here this morning who is not sure about Jesus maybe they've been not sure for a long time maybe they've just started thinking about Christianity I pray!

I pray that you would bring them to a place where they say I don't understand everything but this stuff looks marvelous let me repent of my sin and trust in Jesus Christ bring them to that place this morning I pray bring them into the gates of your kingdom for the rest of us Lord help us to live out this way this truth this life that Jesus offers so that people will encounter something of that that they won't actually encounter people chickening out they will encounter people who wash feet make us that kind of a church Lord we pray and we ask this all for Christ's sake and his glory Amen God