

GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY - Part one

Sunday, December 18th, 2022 - 10 a.m.

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JESUS' CHRISTMAS WORDS TO DECONSTRUCTING CHRISTIANS

IPAD TEXT - John 18:33-37 - “So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” [34] Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” [35] Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” [36] Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” [37] Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Look carefully at those words of Jesus in **verse 37 - “...For this *purpose* I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to *bear witness to the truth.*” - IPAD TEXT**

Not all that long ago you wouldn't have any reason to drill down into that word Jesus very intentionally chose to use - ***truth***. Virtually everyone had the same understanding of what that word meant. Not so anymore.

Let's define that word, "**truth.**" **Truth is a thought, statement, or idea that lines up with reality.** If I crack two eggs into a recipe and then crack two more eggs into the same recipe, there are **four eggs** in that dish. That is true. It makes no difference if someone thinks there five eggs there or six. It makes no difference whether they think there **ought** to be four eggs - whether they **like** that many eggs. Two eggs plus two more eggs will **always be four eggs.** That is true today. It was true when glaciers covered the earth. It's true all over the earth, in every culture, and on every planet in the universe. It will never be otherwise. It's impossible to change.

That's because no one **creates** truth or **invents** truth. You don't **manufacture** truth. You can only **discover** truth. A truth is true even if nobody believes it. Truth is true even if nobody **agrees** with it. That's because **objective truth** is different from a **belief.** Beliefs can be either true or false. Truth exists entirely separate from belief. Truth is unaffected by the one **proclaiming** it. It is unaffected by the one **denying** it.

Here's the point where an incredible confusion has come into vogue. It's a fog that has settled. It clouds the possibility of reason and understanding. It also radically alters the objective power of the Christian faith.

Consider this statement: "**Chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream is the best dessert in the world.**"

Is that a true statement? And if you don't see that the very question, "***Is that a true statement***" is a false category then you don't understand what truth is.

You see, "***Chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream is the best dessert in the world,***" isn't a truth statement at all. It's a preference statement, not a truth statement. In other words, that statement about dessert only exists as a ***belief in my own head. It's my opinion.*** The truth is there is no such thing as the "***best dessert in the whole world.***" Even if somebody traveled the globe and finally came to me and said they had ***found*** the best dessert in the whole world, they would only be telling me that ***in their view*** they had found the best dessert. And that would be their ***belief*** - their ***opinion.*** Someone else would disagree, I'm sure. This is simply ***not*** an objective truth possibility.

Objective truth is ***unaltered by how people feel about it. It is absolutely unaffected by majority opinion or survey. It is unaltered by the effect it has or doesn't have on people. There is absolutely no such thing as "Your truth," or "My truth."*** There certainly are ***your beliefs*** and ***my beliefs.***" But no one owns truth. It exists entirely on its own.

What I want to proclaim today is ***all of this relates to Christmas***. Like no other time of year, Christmas is all about embracing the person of Jesus as absolutely trustworthy and true. That's because Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In space-time history. And, in our text, Jesus said the reason He was born was to ***correct people's faulty thinking*** and ***replace error with truth*** - life changing, granite-like, heaven bestowing truth. He came to ***give people truth they are eternally lost without. Truth they must never relinquish.***

In all likelihood there are people in this room, right now, who don't understand, or refuse to believe the testimony of Jesus Christ. Let me do all I can to awaken you to the seriousness of ***not responding to the testimony Jesus came into this world to give***. Matthew says that when Jesus spoke truth and people ***didn't*** respond, something ***eternally destructive*** was actually taking place:

IPAD TEXT - Matthew 13:14-15 - "Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." [15] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'"

On another occasion, John says that Jesus was speaking truth to people and, again, they weren't believing Him. John quotes the same prophecy from Isaiah that we just read. Then, after that, John says Jesus stood up, and with **great frustration and agony in His voice**, John says Jesus actually **"cried out to the people!"** Here's what Jesus said:

IPAD TEXT - John 12:44-48 - "And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. [45] And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. [46] I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. [47] If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. [48] *The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.*"

Jesus' words - his testimony to the truth - will determine eternal judgement on the last day. So I would urge everyone with these warnings from the Scriptures to make room in your heart for the testimony of Jesus. He said that the reason He came into this world was to **give testimony to the truth.**

Our text in John 18 has three parts to it. **FIRST**, there is the *uniqueness* of His birth - “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world....”(37). **SECOND**, the *purpose* of His birth is given - “to bear witness to the truth. ”(37). **THIRD**, the *condition* of knowing the truth is given - “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”(38).

1) THE UNIQUENESS OF HIS BIRTH

IPAD TEXT - John 18:37b - “....For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

As Jesus describes his entrance into this world, he frames it in terms of both a *birth* and an *arrival* - “I was *born*...I have *come*...”It’s the same kind of language the prophet Isaiah used in predicting Jesus’ birth - “For unto us a child is *born*, unto us a Son is *given*.”

There seems to be no mistaking the intention to describe both the *physical birth* and the *life that existed before the physical birth* - “For this purpose I was *born*, and for this purpose I have *come into the world*.”

When my daughters were little I used to look across the table at their faces. It seemed incredible that at one point in history, not all that long ago in terms of recorded history, there was absolutely no physical reality behind the names of Melissa and Laurel. Those names were only letters strung together out of the alphabet with no persons behind them at all.

Now, our text says that is not true about Jesus. His human body was **born** in Bethlehem but, as a person, He existed long before He **“came into this world.”** That’s why the word we use to describe His coming into this world isn’t **creation**, but **incarnation**. Jesus didn’t begin his existence when He was born in the manger.

Listen to how the prophet Micah expressed it 700 years before Jesus’ birth: **Micah 5:2 - “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” - IPAD TEXT**

Here we begin to see the nature of the miracle of the incarnation. It's a miracle even greater than the virgin birth. It's a miracle greater than the guiding star. The birth of Jesus isn't the coming into the world of a ***new person***. The birth of Jesus is the coming into the world of (if I can use this term the way Micah uses it) an ***infinitely old person*** - one "***from long ago, from the days of eternity.***" Far and away, this baby is the ***oldest person ever to be born.***

Listen to how Jesus expressed this truth about Himself in **John 8:56-59** - "**Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.**" [57] **So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"** [58] **Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."** [59] **So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."** - IPAD TEXT

That name, "Jesus," was given to the baby born in the manger to describe His saving mission on earth. But the ***person behind the name*** was living and active long before Abraham was even born.

Here's how the writer of the book of Hebrews put this truth: **Hebrews 1:1-2 - "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."** - IPAD TEXT

So, not only was Christ before Abraham, but He was also before this whole created universe ever existed. He was there before time as we know it. He created the world. ***Jesus really was the oldest person ever to be born.***

2) THE PURPOSE OF HIS BIRTH

IPAD TEXT - John 18:37 - "Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*"

Notice, "**...to bear witness**" to the truth. That's the same idea as testifying to, or giving testimony to the truth. Just like a witness in a court would give his or her testimony, Jesus came to **verify something true - to underscore something we needed to know for certain.**

So what truth did Jesus come into this world to verify or give witness to? What was it that was so urgent that God Himself had to come? And why couldn't He just text us this truth? Why did He have to come personally?

What I want to say is Jesus came to bear witness to ***two truths in particular:***

- a) ***He came to testify to the truth that God wanted to show mercy to guilty, sinful people like you and I - John 3:17 - "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." - IPAD TEXT***

Jesus came into this world to give witness to the fact that God's heart was tender and anxious to offer pardon to people who deserved His judgement. That's why, in His own words in **John 3:17**, Jesus stressed the negative side of that statement first - **"I did not come into the world to condemn the world."**

Jesus reveals something quite startling in saying this. ***Judgement is what we would expect.*** We ***are*** guilty people before God. **John 3:16** says the danger of ***perishing*** is very real. God being holy and we being unholy, what else could we hope for but judgement?

But Jesus gives testimony to a stunning revelation. The first thing Jesus came to testify to is the fact that **God has something else for us rather than judgement.** This is the “**good will**”(“peace on earth, good will to men”) the angels sang about at Jesus’ birth. It wasn’t primarily the wish for good will **between people and nations.**

That’s the way those words are almost always interpreted at this season. This kind of love for one another is said to be the Christmas spirit. But the angels were singing about the **good will of Father God** to sinful, guilty people through the Baby who was born to die for their sins. Guilty as we are, we have no need to run from God.

So our Creator comes with a message of mercy, not condemnation. This is good news indeed! God has **good will** - not just **bare justice** - in His heart for wicked people!

- b) ***Jesus came to testify to the truth that eternal life was bound up with His own death and resurrection and the way people responded to those events.***

So many people miss the main truth to which Jesus came into the world to give testimony. It is this: **saving mercy (not common mercy - the rain falling on the just and the unjust), but saving mercy, is only offered through Jesus Christ.**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 2:23 - “No one who *denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.*”

Jesus is the *doorway* to the grace and mercy of Father God. That’s what Jesus was giving testimony to when He said He was **the way, the truth and the life.** He is the way - the doorway - the entry point - into a relationship of grace with God. Apart from Jesus, there is no mercy for sinners. There is no grace. There is no pardon.

IPAD TEXT - John 17:3 - “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

So Jesus came to bear witness to the truth - ***stunningly***, the truth that God has a message of mercy to sinners - and ***specifically*** that God's mercy must be received in Jesus if it is to be received at all. Eternal life is all ***tied up in Jesus Christ***. People can't by-pass Jesus and somehow reach God - "**No man comes to the Father but by me.**" That's what Jesus, who never told a lie, said.

That leads into the third point from this text:

3) **NOT EVERYONE BELIEVES THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS**

IPAD TEXT - John 18:37b - "...For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. *Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*"

Notice the ***conditional*** emphasis in Jesus' words. Almost everyone ***admires*** Jesus. Not nearly as many ***take his words seriously into their hearts***. When Jesus says, "**everyone who is of the truth hears My voice,**" He doesn't mean that only a certain group comes within hearing distance of the sound of His voice. All sorts of people ***physically heard*** Jesus.

No. He means that, among the many who know the words He says, only a certain number of them take the time and make the choice to ***respond*** to ***His words as true***. Only ***some***, not ***all***, give ***emphasis*** to His words. Only a certain number ***take His words to heart***. Only a certain number ***think them through***. Only a certain number have the courage and the humility to respond with commitment and faith. ***Those are the people of the truth.***

Let me give you one example of how people of the truth respond to the testimony of Jesus. It's an example that might surprise you:

IPAD TEXT - Mark 10:35-41 - "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." [36] And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" [37] And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." [38] Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"[39] And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, [40] but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." [41] And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John."

This issue of where they would be seated when Jesus came into His future glory didn't just pop into their minds by accident: **Mark 10:28-30 - "Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." [29] Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, [30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." - IPAD TEXT**

Now, the disciples started thinking about those words. Jesus had already told them in this same chapter that He will be mocked, spat upon, crucified, buried and would then rise from the dead and enter His kingdom.

Most of the time, when this passage is used in any kind of study or message, we quite naturally, and properly, point out the immaturity, selfishness and pride of the disciples. They did almost everything wrong in this incident. I say *almost* everything wrong, because there was one wonderful thing they got right. ***They took Jesus seriously at His word about His future kingdom and they acted on it.***

Jesus told them He was, on a particular day, at a particular time, going to rise from the dead, after His crucifixion, and enter another His heavenly kingdom. And they immediately put their hearts and minds there. They were already banking, however incorrectly, on that kingdom.

That's what it means to believe the testimony Jesus came into this world to bring. If I tell you that one company has stock that is about to go through the roof, and the stock you're presently investing in will soon be worthless - ***and if you really believe my words - then you will get out of your investment and put your money into the other.*** If I tell you that when the earthquake comes every building in Newmarket will be flattened but this building you are in, then, if you believe my testimony is true, ***when the earthquake comes where will you be?***

And if Jesus says He is the way, the truth and the life, and that one day He alone will rule the universe, and every rival and every other leader, and every other thing will be put under His feet - and if Jesus says that only those who have committed their whole lives to Him will enter into His kingdom - ***what will that person do if he truly believes the testimony of Jesus, the Son of God?***

The Christmas issue is this - ***are you a person of the truth?*** Do you receive the testimony of Jesus? Are you committed to His truth? Do you humbly embrace God's revelation of His mercy in Jesus Christ? Do you put aside your own way of viewing life and eternity? Do you accept the verdict of Jesus that you're a sinner, lost and hopeless without Him? Do you accept the truth that you cannot climb up your own ladder to God, but must kneel before Jesus as the only Redeemer and King? Are you a person of the truth? Don't make the mistake of merely ***mouthing words about Jesus this Christmas.***

Look at how Jesus responds to Pilate's question in **verses 33 and 34** - **"So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" [34] Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" - IPAD TEXT**

More important to Jesus than the question is the ***motive*** for the question. "Are you asking from a hunger for truth in your own heart? ***Are you ready to acknowledge the truth when you hear it?*** Or, are you just mouthing what everyone else is saying? ***What is going on in your heart, Pilate?"***

Are you a person of the truth? If you will take the testimony of Jesus into your heart you will see the truth of His words: **John 7:17 - “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” - IPAD TEXT**

Those are very important words. You **can** know Jesus yourself. You **can** verify the truth of His testimony. God’s mercy and renewing grace can set you free from your sin and give you eternal life. I pray that everyone here will be included as people who are **“of the truth”** - who embrace Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.