

This Changes Everything

Part #3 - "Truth"

John 1:1-14

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 17, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Parker Palmer wrote a book entitled, *A Hidden Wholeness*. In it he tells about how farmers in the Midwestern United States would prepare for a blizzard. One key thing was to tie a rope from the door of the house to the barn.
 - You see even in a blizzard a farmer still needs to head out to the barn to care for his animals. But when a blizzard is in full force a farmer can hardly see his hand in front of his face. The whiteout leaves him completely disoriented. Many farmers wandered in circles. They got lost in their own backyards and froze to death.
 - So they tied ropes from the house to the barn. As they gripped tightly to the rope it safely guided them on their journey to the barn and back home.
- We live in a culture where truth is lost in a blizzard of opinions. Since Donald Trump came into office we now have terms like "fake news" and "alternative facts." In the 1960's TIME magazine had a very famous cover asking the question, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** "is God dead?" This past year they used the same font and design and asked the question, **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** "is truth dead?"
 - The blizzard of opinions can leave us disoriented and confused. Listen to this quote from a Harvard graduate on his graduation day. **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** "*Among, my classmates, however, I believe that there is one idea, one sentiment, which we have all acquired at some point in our Harvard careers; and that, ladies and gentlemen, is, in a word, confusion.*"
 - Why is he so confused? Another Harvard grad elaborated saying, **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** "*They tell us it's heresy to suggest the superiority of some value, fantasy to believe in moral argument, slavery to submit to a judgement sounder than your own. The freedom of our day is the freedom to devote yourself to any values we please, on the mere condition that we do not believe them to be true.*"¹
- So our culture says, "Believe whatever you want. Just don't believe it is true for everyone." How confusing. If it's true, isn't it true for everyone? But how can you know what is true and what is not?
 - Into this blizzard of confusion comes the message of Christmas. The message of Christmas says there is a rope. There is something, that if you grip on to it, will guide you safely through the blizzard of this life.
- So today is about this big issue of truth. This is the most practical of all subjects. If there is ultimate truth then it effects everything. It gives you a rope in the blizzard of opinions.
 - In this series showing how the coming of Jesus into the world changed everything. For instance, two weeks ago I showed you Jesus' coming changes how we think of the church: we are family. Today I'll show you how Jesus' coming changes how we understand truth.
 - So let me develop this message in three sequential parts. First, the *disorienting blizzard*. Second, the *guiding rope*. Third, the *journey home*.

¹ Robert Bellah, *The Good Society*, 43-44.

THE DISORIENTING BLIZZARD

- First then, let's talk about (**SHOW SLIDE 6**) the disorienting blizzard.
 - Again, I am using this image of a blizzard to describe the confusion that arises from the fact that there are so many different views of what is true and what is not. The ancient world was no different.
 - We see this right here in verse 1. You notice that John's theme here is what he calls "The Word." **READ 1 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** When our English translation says "the Word" it is translating this from the Greek, which is "Logos." I don't usually bore you with Greek words but this is very important.
 - So John is saying, "***In beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.***"
- This term "logos" was a loaded word in the ancient world. You can start to understand what it meant when you realize we get our word "logic" from it. If something is logical then it follows a unified system. There is no contradiction in it.
 - The Greek philosophers were all searching for the logic, or the logos, behind the universe. They wanted to answer the questions of ultimate reality. They were seeking the ultimate truth behind why everything exists.
 - This is very practical. Until you know why a smart phone exists you cannot know how to use it. If you don't know why it exists and you try to use it for a hammer you will destroy it. But once you know why it exists it is a very useful tool. The Greek philosophers wanted to find the ultimate reason why everything exists so they would know how humans beings should live.
- But not everyone in the ancient world agreed that there was such a thing as ultimate reality – that logos even exists. If you were an educated urban person in the ancient world your views on logos would follow either the Stoics or the Epicureans. You remember Paul debated these two groups when he was in Athens in Acts 17.
 - Let me show you these two viewpoints. They will become very practical.

THE STOICS AND LOGOS

- When the Stoics looked at the universe they saw harmony and order. They saw logic. They saw logos. So they believed that logos was that divine force that was in everything and that held everything together. Logos was impersonal but alive.
 - The new *Star Wars* movie came out this past week. In *Star Wars*, the force is the logos. The force binds all things together. The force is ultimate reality. The force is not a personal god whom you can know. The force is impersonal.
- So Stoics believed in truth and meaning but it was a mysterious. No one can know logos personally. Your goal is to learn how to rightly align yourself with logos.
 - It is the same today. The vast majority of people on the Westcoast believe in God. There are not many atheists. But if you ask them what they think God is like then most people will say they believe God is an impersonal force, a power, or a life force that is in everything and brings life to everything. They like this idea of logos – of an impersonal ultimate reality.
 - Since logos is impersonal it does not tell you how to live, whom you can and cannot sleep with, or how you should spend your money.

THE EPICUREANS AND LOGOS

- But just as not everyone believes this today so not everyone believed in logos in the ancient world. The Epicureans were what we would call today a “naturalist.” A naturalist does not believe there is a spiritual world or a God who stands outside our universe. They only believe in what our senses can perceive.
 - Epicurus himself, like Richard Dawkins and his atheist friends today, wanted to save humanity from what he believed was the superstition and darkness of religion.
 - For Dawkins and all naturalists there is no ultimate reality beyond the universe. There is no ultimate meaning to your life. As Dawkins says, **(SHOW SLIDE 7) “There is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pointless indifference. . . . We are machines for propagating DNA. . . . It is every living objects sole reason for being.”** In short, there is no logos.
- But if there is no logos to guide the human race we have good reason to fear what the future will be like. You can see this anxiety in culture right now. The most popular genre of young adult novels for these past few years is what we call dystopian novels. *The Hunger Games* is a dystopian novel. Whereas utopian novels imagine a perfect future world where human life comes together, dystopian novels portray a pessimistic view of the future where the world is falling apart.
 - *Macleans* magazine ran an article on the amazing rise of dystopian literature among teens. The article says teens resonate with these books because they have grown up in an era of economic uncertainty, conspiracy theories, nuclear threat, and the fear of environmental collapse. Most teens have been raised to believe that there is no logos - that we are just the result of blind chance. With all these threats and no logos the future does not look very bright.
 - You see, if there is no logos, no ultimate reality guiding us, then the future can easily be dystopian.
- Now with all that said, let’s bring this first point together. Just like in the ancient world we face a disorienting blizzard of opinions on the big questions of life. Is there a God? Is there ultimate reality? Is there meaning to life?
 - Into this disorienting blizzard of opinion John begins to make the claims of Christianity. He begins to show how Christmas changes everything. In the first verse he states one simple fact: **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** there is a logos. **“In the beginning was the logos.”**
 - Before creation itself, there was an ultimate reality. There was and is truth. There is meaning. Life is not a meaningless struggle through a blizzard that just ends in death. There is a home waiting for us and there is a rope that can take you there. There is a logos.
 - At this point we are not drawing out anything more than that. We are simply drawing a line between naturalists who say there is no logos and those who say there is a logos. Let’s take it further.

THE GUIDING ROPE

- At this point the average person on the Westcoast is just like the ancient Stoic. We, like the Stoics, respond by saying, **“This sounds fine to us. We also believe there is more than the material universe. We believe there is some kind of force, or god, or whatever that binds all things together.”** This isn’t very radical to Canadians and it wasn’t very radical to the Stoics.
 - But what John says next sent a shockwave through the ancient world – a shockwave that is still felt in our culture today. What John will say next literally changed the western world from Greek thought to 1500 years of Christian thought.

- Therefore, we can know truth. **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** We can know truth because Jesus, logos in human flesh, has revealed it to us. Jesus told us the truth about God, about our sin, about our need for a Saviour, about how to live, and about what happens when we die.
 - So this means we have a rope. There is something to guide us through the disorienting blizzard of opinions on what is true and what is not. No, not something. Someone! The rope is a person.
 - Let me see if I can put this a different way.
- There is a very liberal church in Vancouver that used to put up all kinds of interesting signs outside their church. One day I was driving by and the sign said, **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** ***“The universe is the primary revelation of the divine.”*** So the universe is the primary way that God reveals himself. What do you think of that? I was so frustrated that an apparently Christian church would put this up that I yelled, “Ahhh.” Can you see why?
 - Do Christians believe that the universe reveals God? Of course we do. Psalm 19:1 says, ***“the heavens declare the glory of God.”*** But the sign did not say, **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** ***“The universe is a revelation of the divine.”*** If that was the case I would have cheered. But one word turns it from Christian teaching to anti-Christian new age teaching. The word **“Primary.”** ***“The universe is the primary revelation of the divine.”***
 - **“Oh no,”** says John. The universe is a revelation of the divine but since Logos became flesh, the sign should say, **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** ***“Jesus is the primary revelation of the divine.”*** If you want to know God look at Jesus. If you want to know truth look at, and listen to, Jesus for he is full of truth. We can know truth.
- But people will say, ***“How can you be so arrogant as to claim that you know the truth?”*** Let us be clear: Christians do not claim to know truth because we think we are smarter or more enlightened than anyone else.
 - We claim that everyone can know truth for this simple reason: the divine logos became flesh. He revealed himself to us. He walked among us. He spoke to us.
- This was scandalous in John’s day and it is just as scandalous in our day.
 - Today you can talk about truth all you want as long as you don’t say that there is one supreme standard of truth. You can talk about how you think the tree is God and how all paths leads to God and people will smile. But start saying that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one can come to the Father except through Him and the air will get chilly.
 - But listen, John writes this book to convince us that Jesus really is the logos. If He is the logos then all other truth claims must be measured against him.
- This is how Christmas changes everything. The message of Christmas is that there is a rope to guide you through the disorienting blizzard of opinions.
 - That rope is Jesus, the logos who became flesh.

THE JOURNEY HOME

- Well we have considered the disorienting blizzard of opinions. We have said there is a rope to guide us, Jesus the logos made flesh. Now finally let’s end by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** the journey home.
 - It does no good to talk about a rope that will take you home, if we don’t talk about grabbing hold of the rope. John does not write his letter just to tell us that there is ultimate truth or that ultimate truth became a man to reveal truth us.
 - John writes his book to convince us to believe in Jesus, that is to grab onto the rope - to shape our whole lives around He who is ultimate truth.

- Turn over to John 20. **(SHOW SLIDE 17) READ 30-31** - **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**
 - So there it is. John has written all of this that we might grab hold of the rope. That we might come to Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life.
- So everything we have said this morning leads us to one big question: **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** who decides truth for you?
 - For most Westcoast people the answer is, **“I do. I decide what I will believe to be true and how I will live my life.”** Most people endorse the postcard I saw one day that had a saying attributed to Buddha who said, **(SHOW SLIDE 19) “Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who has said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”** In other words, you are your own logos. You decide what is true.
 - But friends, are you really competent to decide ultimate truth? I confess that I am not smart enough. I can’t even run my own life let alone decide ultimate truth. I am one puny mind, among 7 billion other puny minds, living on a planet, when compared to the rest of the universe, is not even as big as a grain of sand.
- Isn’t the real reason why people want to decide their own truth because they want to be in control? They don’t want someone else telling them what to do – even God. I think this is why Westcoast people love the idea of an impersonal god who is like the force in Star Wars. An impersonal force does not confront you with truth claims. An impersonal force does not say, **“You are not treating your wife rightly”** or **“here is how you must think about your sexuality.”** Before he became a Christian C.S. Lewis wrote that he did not want to believe in a personal God because, **“I had always wanted, above all things, not to be ‘interfered with.’”**²
 - If God is an impersonal force then you can use that god for your own ends. But if God is personal then he will speak truth to you. In contrast to Buddha Jesus said, **(SHOW SLIDE 20) “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”** That is scary because he will confront every part of your life. But this is why Christmas changes everything.
 - You don’t have to be scared of God because He has proved his loving character to you. Jesus says he came to this earth to rescue you. Jesus, logos in human flesh, said, **“I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.”** He gave his life on the cross for your sins. He did this that he might lead you home to the Father’s house where the fire is roaring, the feast is prepared, and atmosphere is charged with eternal joy.
- So what will you do with Jesus? The first and primary truth that he came to reveal is that though you are a sinner, He is a great Saviour who can rescue you. But you must give up your control. You must say, **“Jesus, forgive me for living for myself. I submit my life to you. I want to listen to you. I want to align my life with your truth.”**
 - Living as a Christian is no different. It is looking to and listening to Jesus that he might transform every part of our lives. Since Jesus is logos in human flesh, you can trust him to guide you safely home. Who decides truth for you?

² C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 228.