



Sermon Growth Guide

March 17, 2024

Truth and Love



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All for Love - Truth and Love

John 2:13-25

Key Verse: John 2:15

“So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.”

Big Idea: Jesus is God’s justice and the true presence of God in the world.

Foundations

The Temple complex in Jerusalem included “the court of the gentiles,” which enabled gentile believers to come worship at the temple without mixing with those who were ethnically Jewish. The money changers and those selling animals for sacrifice were taking advantage of people who had traveled from far away and needed to change out their foreign currency and buy animals to sacrifice for the Festival of Passover. In a way they performed a needed service, but their presence in the temple complex itself undermines the desire of God that all nations will come and worship Him freely. Jesus shocks the religious leaders by taking over the temple court and driving out everyone and everything who would take advantage of the gentile believers and turn God’s house into a house of business rather than a house of prayer. In this way, Jesus is bringing about God’s justice and righteousness in the temple, for “he himself knew what was in man,” as it says later in the passage. (John 2:25)

When the religious leaders ask Jesus for a sign that would prove His authority, Jesus responds with a veiled prediction of His coming resurrection, and challenges our understanding of God’s presence in the world. Jewish believers understood that God is present everywhere, but they believed that God was present in a special way in the Temple. By calling Himself the temple, Jesus revealed that the true presence of God in the world was Himself.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read John 2:13-25.

Does Jesus’ action in this passage surprise you? How might this change your understanding of who Jesus is?

Host a discussion over the relationship of the resurrection to Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. How is the resurrection the sign to us that Jesus is who He says He is?

Applying God’s Word

Jesus is God’s justice and the true presence of God in the world. The disciples understand this in retrospect by remembering the Scripture (Psalm 69:9) and Jesus’ own words.

Are there areas of your life where you wish to see God’s justice or feel His presence more deeply? Have you ever seen God’s action in your life in retrospect, rather than understanding it at the time?

Witnessing God’s Word

Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:13 of the hope offered to everyone in Christ: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Jesus actions in the temple show how much He desires that everyone come near.

In a world which cries out for justice in confused ways, can understanding Jesus as God’s justice and presence in the world help you witness to those who need to come near?

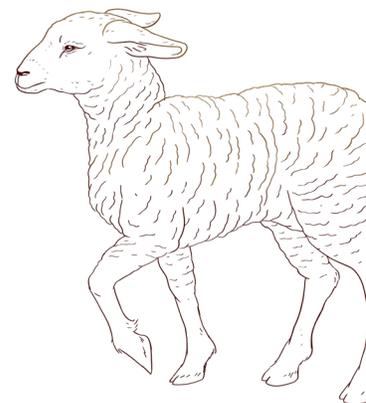
Have you ever heard the saying, “He has a casual relationship with the truth”? Usually, it’s harmless. It means he likes to tell the story a certain way. It gets the most laughs. Never let the facts get in the way of a good story! I could be accused of that. But today something is happening with our collective relationship with the truth. What if our culture, American society, our government and press corps, what if we all have a casual relationship with the truth? What if we are living as though there is no truth, only the power to say what is true? Is that going to work out? We have all experienced the schoolyard bully who makes up their own truth. My elementary school had five good swings everybody wanted at recess. 130 kids. Five swings. I ran to hop on one. A kid came up to me, “That’s my swing.” No, it’s not. That’s not true. But the icy glare and tightened fists made it true. She was the meanest girl. We all know bully truth. Is that really the only truth there is?

Among the questions you in Gen Z ask as you make sense of this world is the question, “What is truth?” What is truth? Because the world is saying truth is really fluid. Do we all have our own truth? The world is saying that truth claims are acts of violence. The bully says, “That’s my swing.” That’s all truth is. But common sense and the inner conscience aren’t satisfied. We are close to Easter when Pontius Pilate asked Jesus when He was arrested, “What is truth?” ““You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’ ‘What is truth?’ retorted Pilate.” (John 18:37-38) Pilate should know all about bully truth. Every day a Roman governor like him defined truth by force. Something inside Pilate knew it wasn’t enough. What is truth?

Jesus had some ideas. God wants us to have a unique relationship with the truth, distinct from the world’s conjectures.

Number nine of the Ten Commandments is not to bear false witness against your neighbor. Don’t participate in lies. The Jewish philosopher Maimonides said, “Truth does not become more true by virtue of the fact that the entire world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it.” Christian philosopher Dallas Willard said, “Truth reveals reality, and reality can be described as what we humans run into when we are wrong, a collision in which we always lose.” Truth is reality, reality in God’s perspective—which is ultimately the only reality. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Jesus doesn’t only testify to the truth; Jesus is the truth. We need more than a casual relationship.

What about love? Isn’t that what this series is about? **All for Love**. Is there any relationship between truth and love? Yes. We see it right here. Jesus cleansing the Temple. He found the Temple courts filled with all the noise and distraction of a market. “So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!’” (John 2:15-16) We see anger in Jesus, force, a whip in hand driving out animals and kicking over tables. Jesus! All without sin, because Jesus never committed a sin. Righteous anger, we call it. Maybe His eyes were filled more with firm resolve than wrath. The text does not say He hit anyone. Still, imagine the disciples freaking out. I wonder if they made up excuses. “Honestly, He’s never like this!” But this too is love. Truth and love are connected. We think of love as a teddy bear, fuzzy and cozy, never a hard edge. If someone dropped down from Mars and asked, “What do humans do to show they love each other?” “Well, they give each other stuffed bears clutching blood red hearts in their claws.” “Oh.” We have a lot to learn about love. Love



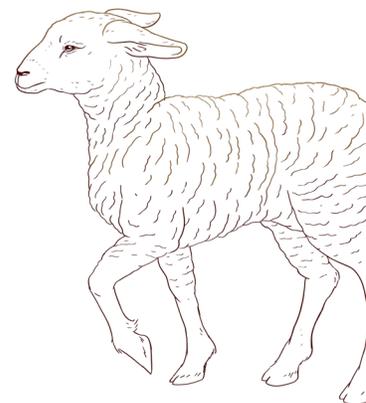
isn't always fuzzy and warm. Sometimes love corrects.

How could this possibly be an act of love? Why did Jesus do this? Let's look at a few things. Jesus was forceful about removing the marketeers from the House of the Lord. The Temple was the place where people could draw close to God. It's hard for us to relate. God is everywhere. But the Temple was the heart of the relationship between God and the people. Why? The sacrifices were offered there. God provided, mercifully, a system for sinful people to interact with a sinless and holy God. It was the priestly office of sacrifice. Animals were slaughtered and their blood was allowed to cover over the sins of the people; not remove them, not pay for them entirely, but God mercifully accepted these sacrifices as provisional atonement. It looks archaic to us, but don't forget, animals are slaughtered all the time. Have you been to a chicken factory? Eaten any beef? The people ate this meat too, but God provided in mercy that animals' blood covered over people's sins and this allowed the people of God to feel and know his presence. The priest entered the sacred space with God, deep inside the Temple, the Holy of Holies—just like Moses spoke with God face to face in the tabernacle, a temporary, tent-temple that traveled with the people of God until they built the Temple in Jerusalem. Face to face is inside there. So when an Israelite read in the Psalms, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek." (Psalms 27:8) they thought of going to the Temple. The face of the Lord, the personal presence—it's there. The Temple.

What had gone wrong? The necessary businesses surrounding the Temple sacrifices, buying animals because you traveled a long way and couldn't bring one with you, or changing money because you only had Roman coins with faces of emperors calling themselves gods on them, and all that business that had to get done, it had all been pulled

inside the house, inside the courts where people were supposed to be able to worship and pray. In another Gospel (maybe at another time; Jesus may have done this twice) Jesus says, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (Mark 11:17) There's reason to suspect the moneychangers were abusing the exchange rate. That's something Jesus would rage against. Or the animal sales were taking advantage and gouging customers. That's injustice enough for Jesus to exercise righteous anger. But do you see the real crime? They were getting in the way of people praying, of people worshiping, of the people of God enjoying God's presence, God's love—people seeking the face of God. This is a house of prayer. What is established here is a way to be with God, and you are blocking it. How many ways might we be blocking the people who need God from enjoying of His grace and love?

The next question is what authority does Jesus have to attack this system, disrupt this market and alter this religious practice? "The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'" (John 2:18) What are your credentials? Do you see what Jesus is doing here? It's not only "my Father's house," it's His house. You don't rearrange the furniture when you are a guest. Jesus steps up and claims ownership. "This is wrong. Get this out of here. Stop this. Remove that." Show me your credentials, Jesus. By what authority? "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'" (John 2:19) They didn't understand, "But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." (John 2:21-22) Some things are only clear after Easter. My body, says Jesus. The entire system, the Temple sacrifice, the Holy of Holies, all of it, it was only provisional. Jesus



came to complete the sacrifice; to once and for all provide the perfect and complete sacrifice for sins. He is the new Temple, the place where people meet God face to face. This is truth and love. All for love.

Jesus cleansed the Temple. This is a common passage for Christians during Lent, on the way to Easter. We use Lent to ask if there is anything in the way of enjoying the presence of God. Is there anything you wish Jesus would drive out of your temple, your little kingdom, that you have allowed to creep in where you should freely enjoy God's presence? You would be grateful if Jesus cleared that stuff out. Sometimes love looks like this. Love removes what is damaging and perverse and false to return your life to right relationship with God. A stock analyst on a financial news network said, "Slap my hand if I ever try to buy another airline stock." This is not investment advice. But aren't there times you wish Jesus was there right beside you? Slap my hand if I start to do that again, if I reach for that, if I allow that sin back in. Jesus is the Lord of the Temple, the Master of the House. Is Jesus that in your life? Have you allowed Jesus in to cleanse the temple in your heart? We don't just want to talk about God's love, we want to experience God's love, to feel it. Do you want to feel God's presence? You need to say to Jesus, "You, Lord, are the Master of this house, of my life. Rearrange the furniture. Drive out the distractions. I want to be with you."

Love includes truth. Truth and love are interconnected. Paul told the church in Ephesus this is mature Christian behavior: "...speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." Ephesians 4:15 Speaking truth in love. People have a lot of ideas about that. Sometimes Christians say the nastiest things, then add, "Just speaking the truth in love." I'm not sure that's the application. But truth is love. Participating in falsehood is not love. Perpetuating lies, even lies people tell about themselves, is not love. Love tells the truth. It's true in relationships, marriages and friendships. When we can't tell the truth to the people

we love, the relationship is on thin ice. It takes courage to share our needs, our expectations of love in marriage. Friendship too. I once had a friend tell me I had neglected our friendship. I hadn't returned his call for over a month. I felt pretty low, but it made me a better man and it made our friendship deeper. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," says Proverbs 27:6. The truth can be a spade in the soil that digs the relationship down to deeper foundations. How do you speak the truth in love? I won't solve this for you. It is one of those areas where we are constantly challenged, and in that challenge is where we grow and mature, more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Jesus. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) Grace and truth. Let go of either and the ship lists to capsizes.

Love and truth are connected. Jesus was willing to stand for truth. People today want to ask, like Pilate did, "What is truth?" The truth that day was that those things needed to be cleared out. The Temple was about to change. Jesus was about to become the perfect sacrifice. The Holy of Holies was about to break open and the face of God was about to shine on every believer. For Jesus, His ultimate purpose was never out of view. The cross was always on the horizon. I wonder, in a way, if Jesus wasn't mad to see the waste, if He didn't associate Himself a little bit with the sacrificial lambs and doves. "These animals gave their blood, paid for something with their lives, the right to go into the presence of God with shameless joy, forgiveness and grace, and you're ruining it, you're wasting it, blocking people from what it purchased." Jesus was about to become one of them, to go to the cross and pour out His blood. The Lamb of God. Are they going to waste it? Let His rage sit in the right spot with us today. Let us never, never, forget the cost Jesus paid to bring us home to God. Let us never take it for granted. Let us never block any who would come to find it.

