

**Eternal Unchanging Truth**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Cong. Church**

**Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61:1–2**

**Sermon Text: Luke 4:14–30**

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The Merriam-Webster dictionary online defines truth as the property of being in accord with fact or reality. In other words, when a statement is consistent with the observed facts or reality concerning situations or circumstances, that statement is considered to be true. Ancient philosophers held to the correspondence view of truth and affirmed that truth is what corresponds to reality. So, something is true if it corresponds to the way the world is. This is the biblical view of truth.

A proper view of truth is crucial to the Christian faith because Christianity claims there is absolute truth, that is, truth that is true for everyone, everywhere, at all times. For instance, it is true that the sun is at the center of our solar system, and therefore, it is true for every person who ever lived that the sun is at the center of our solar system. Now, before Nicolaus Copernicus and his work in the mid-1500s, people sincerely believed that the Earth was at the center of the solar system, but that doesn't change the fact that the Sun has always been at the center of the solar system because that is the reality of the way things are. Those who believed that the sun was at the center of the solar system lacked or had incorrect information. Ignorance of the facts does not change the truth.

In the last century, postmodernism emerged, questioning the basic assumptions of Western philosophy and rejecting absolute truth.<sup>i</sup> The postmodern view of truth denies that absolute truth exists and affirms that all truth is relative to individual perspectives and experiences. Absolute truth is truth that is true for everyone, but the postmodernist denies that absolute truth exists. To quickly see how foolish this is, consider the case of a person jumping out of a window from the fiftieth floor onto the pavement below. It is an absolute truth that every human who attempts this will die. It is an absolute truth that if you write checks from a checking account with a zero balance, your checks will bounce. It is an absolute truth that all mere humans will die. It is an absolute truth that the sun is at the center of the solar system, as has been verified by powerful telescopes and observations. So, it is easy to show that saying there is no truth is false.

Let's examine the Postmodernist view of truth a bit more closely. If there is no truth, as the postmodernists claim, the statement "there is no truth" is also not true and should therefore be rejected. So, we immediately see that the idea that "there is no truth" is self-defeating. Even if the postmodern view of truth seems indefensible, it has worked its way into popular culture and beliefs. Here is an example: Author and Senior Editor at the Gospel Coalition, Brett McCracken, writes,

In Oprah Winfrey's Lifetime Achievement Award acceptance speech at the 2018 Golden Globes, she said, "What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have." Unquote.

The words "your truth" express the idea that different people can have different and simultaneously correct views about reality, which, of course, leads to contradictory truth claims. We used to call differing beliefs personal opinions, but referring to opinions as personal truths implies that people can have different truths that are equally valid. That is a real problem because people have a right to their personal opinions but not to their own personal facts or truths. If something is true, it is true for everyone. If something is a fact, it is a fact for everyone. Opinions are fueled by emotion and passion, whereas facts are informed by evidence and reason. Brett McCracken continues:

"Your truth." Those two words are so entrenched in our lexicon today that we hardly recognize them for the incoherent nightmare that they are. Among other

things, the philosophy of "your truth" destroys families when a dad suddenly decides "his truth" is calling him to a new lover, a new family, or maybe even a new gender. It's a philosophy that can destroy entire societies, because invariably one person's truth will go to battle with another person's truth, and devoid of reason, only power decides the victor.<sup>ii</sup> Unquote.

The concept of believing each person can have their own truth makes each person the sovereign of their own reality and leads to immense cultural confusion. It might be a person's truth that when they jump from the fiftieth floor, they will bounce like a basketball, escaping harm, but when they land on the pavement below, they will learn the absolute truth. It might be a person's truth that there is no God. Nevertheless, when they die, they will learn the absolute truth. There is only one kind of truth, and that is truth that corresponds to reality. Someone might not know or accept the truth that Jesus is the only way to God, but that doesn't change the truth.

Jesus challenges the people of Nazareth's view of truth. Our sermon text, beginning in the middle of the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel, describes the early public ministry of Jesus in Galilee. The chapter begins with the epic temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness for 40 days, at the end of which Luke writes, "When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time." The devil could not tempt the Son of God into sin, so he would use others in an effort to destroy Him.

Following the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. News about Him was spreading in the surrounding districts. He was teaching in the synagogues and was praised by all. When He came to Nazareth, where He had grown up, He entered the synagogue and stood to read. He was likely invited to read by the ruler of the synagogue, and the scroll of Isaiah was handed to Him. Jesus opened the scroll and read a Messianic passage from Isaiah, that we read as our Scripture Reading this morning, saying:

Luke 4:18–19

<sup>18</sup> "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, <sup>19</sup> TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

Jesus picked this passage, I believe, because it perfectly describes His mission at His first advent. The mission of the Anointed One was to preach the gospel to the poor. This is similar to the language that Jesus uses in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5, where the poor are those who depend on God and His resources, not themselves. The poor are the humble who recognize their need for God. Israel had long been captive to foreign oppressors, either Greek or Roman. So, too, the people were captive to their own sin and fallen nature. Through Jesus, the truth would set them free. For believers, through Christ, victory over sin is possible. Jesus' miraculous ministry restored sight to the blind, both physically and spiritually, released people from demonic forces, and healed their diseases. Furthermore, Jesus' ministry is good news for sinners, for sinners are reconciled to God by faith in Him.

If we compare the text from Isaiah 61:1-2 to what Jesus reads in our sermon text, we will see that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of verse 2. Jesus stops in mid-sentence in reading this passage from Isaiah because the remainder of the verse reads, "And the day of vengeance of our God." In His first advent, Jesus came to proclaim and initiate the year of the Lord's favor, not to initiate the vengeance of God. Since Jesus began His ministry and to the present day, and until Jesus returns, we are in the period that Jesus refers to as the favorable year of the Lord. Since Jesus came and until He returns in His Second Advent, we are invited into the kingdom of God by faith in Christ. The opportunity to receive Christ and to be adopted into the family of God will cease at the Second Coming when the time is up. At His Second

Advent, Jesus will preside over the day of vengeance of our God, and all who have ignored, resisted, or rejected Jesus will be separated from God for all eternity.

After reading from Isaiah, Jesus closed the scroll and sat down. It was customary for a man to stand to read in the synagogue and then to sit to explain what had been read. All eyes were fixed on Jesus, awaiting what He would say in explanation of the passage He had read. Luke records that Jesus began by saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In saying that, Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, long promised to Israel in the Old Testament, who would usher in the Kingdom of God. He undoubtedly said other things because, in verse 22, Luke writes that all were in wonder at the gracious words that were falling from His lips. That didn't last long.

At the same time, there appears to be murmuring among the crowd, and they are saying, "Is this not Joseph's son." Referring to this same event, Mark 6:3 says, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him." In other words, the crowd was asking, isn't this just the boy who grew up in this town in the household of Joseph, the carpenter? He is just a carpenter. How could He possibly be the Messiah? They were thinking, He is just like us; how could He possibly be the Messiah and the Savior described in the Scriptures?

Jesus is aware that the people are murmuring. So, Jesus said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" Jesus anticipates the crowd's desire to see the signs and miracles that they heard Jesus had done in other places. So, there was skepticism and unbelief amongst those in the crowd. It was not Jesus' way to do miracles on demand; rather, He did miracles where there was faith. He would not be treated as a cosmic bellhop, granting wishes on demand. The parallel passage to our text in Matthew's Gospel reports that Jesus did not do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

Verse 24 records Jesus saying another familiar proverb: "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown." This proverb is recorded in all four gospels, but Luke softens the criticism of Jesus' family. Mark 6 records Jesus as saying: "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." It appears that familiarity breeds contempt, and in Mark's record of these events, even Jesus' relatives and family members did not believe in Him and His Messianic calling. John 7:5 directly states that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him. Israel had a history of persecuting or killing the prophets. Jesus will later say to the Pharisees in Luke 11:47, "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them.

By way of explanation, Jesus reminds them about two events in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and suddenly, the people in the synagogue were filled with rage. What exactly did Jesus say to precipitate this response? In a matter of seconds, the crowd seems to go from admiring and fawning over Jesus to trying to kill Him. It had to be an amazing scene to witness. These two events that Jesus mentions refer to times when Israel had strayed from God into unbelief, and thus, God sent the Prophets Elijah and Elisha to minister to the Gentiles instead of the Jews.

The first event that Jesus refers to is a time when God's judgment was on the land of Israel, and there was drought for three and a half years. There was a great famine in the land. While there were many widows in Israel, God sent Elijah out of Israel to Sidon, among the Gentiles, to a widow who believed in the Lord. By the power of God, Elijah was fed, and the widow and her son were continually supplied with flour and olive oil to make bread. The second event mentioned by Jesus is an occasion where Elisha healed the Syrian Gentile Naaman from leprosy, while no lepers in Israel were healed.

Let's consider why the recounting of these events by Jesus precipitated such a violent response. Jesus was saying that the unbelief of the Jews, like those in the synagogue in Nazareth, would result in God blessing the Gentiles. Jesus was announcing merely what the prophets had said about the Messiah, that He would be a blessing, not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles. As we find in Isaiah 49:6:

6 "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob [the Jews that is] and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

God had always intended for the Messiah to bring salvation to all nations. Unfortunately, the Jews in Nazareth didn't want to hear about the Messiah being a blessing for the Gentiles; they wanted a Messiah that would restore the power, prosperity, and prominence of the Jewish nation. They rejected anything in Scripture that did not conform to their desires; in short, they revised the Scriptures to meet their own evil desires and self-serving perceptions of the Messiah.

The crowd in the synagogue, those nice religious people who had been taught to love their neighbor in the Books of Moses, are suddenly filled with rage, and they want to kill Jesus for uttering the truth that is plain to read in the prophets. They drove Jesus out of the synagogue and attempted to throw Him down a cliff, but Jesus' ministry was just getting started. It was not time for Him to die, and so He miraculously escaped. The crowd is no match for the Son of God. Passing through their midst, Luke writes, "He went His way."

In the Confessions of Saint Augustine, He writes: "They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate truth when it accuses them."<sup>iii</sup> The citizens of Nazareth rejected the Messiah God had sent to them because Jesus did not match their typical first-century Jewish Messianic expectations of a human political leader who would free them from Roman oppression. They were looking for another King David, but the Messiah in their presence was far greater than David. They rejected the truth that the Messiah was in their presence, even though a careful reading of the Messianic prophecies reveals that their Messiah would be a human possessing the attributes of God who would conduct a miraculous ministry and suffer for the sins of the people.

It is not just the Jews that reject the truth of God. In John 1:17, we learn, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Yet many mainline, theologically liberal Protestant churches (Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, United Church of Christ, and some Presbyterian and Baptist denominations) have rejected the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus, and the supernatural miracles He performed. Moreover, they have caved to the culture supporting abortion and unbiblical views of marriage.

Not surprisingly, these denominations are closing churches, suffering catastrophic declines in membership, and facing extinction. According to Ryan Burge, a political scientist who has tracked church membership, mainline church membership has declined from 50% of the US population in the 1950s to less than 10% today. Meanwhile, Bible-believing denominations and churches are holding steady or growing. Churches that do not believe or follow the teaching of Jesus Christ die. That is the reality that has played out over the last sixty years in the United States.

As I said a few months ago, if we want this church to be here in 100 years, we must never forget Jesus, and He must be our first love. The church is a divinely ordained institution, and any local church will only survive if it loves Jesus and honors and obeys God's Word.

Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jesus rebukes Satan at His temptation in the wilderness, saying in Matthew 4:4, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds

out of the mouth of God.” Jesus also says in His high priestly prayer for His followers in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” In John 8:31–32, we read, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” The plain teaching of Jesus in the verses I just read is that He came to bring the truth into the world, that the truth is found in His teaching, which is universally applicable to all people, and is the only way that leads to eternal life in the presence of the Father.

There is no doubt that Satan’s lies and deception are at the root of the decline of the mainline churches, but with the rise of postmodernism, he has new tools to deceive the masses. Satan would love our society to believe the lie that there is no truth because it contradicts the teaching of Jesus that He is the truth. He would love people to believe that the truth cannot be known or determined because if everything is questionable, then doubt is cast on the teaching of Jesus. He would love people to believe that they can be in possession of their own personal truth because that notion places personal opinions on par with established facts of history and reality, further adding to the chaos and confusion in our society.

Simple reasoning, as I noted earlier, shows us the faults of Satan’s deception. First, if there is no truth, the statement that there is no truth is also not true and should be disregarded because it is not true. Second, if the truth cannot be known, the truth of that statement cannot be known and should therefore be disregarded. Third, if people can have their own personal truth, we are perfectly within our rights to believe the truth that Jesus has revealed to us. All these postmodern views of truth are self-defeating.

The only view of truth that can be defended is the biblical view that truth is what corresponds to reality. To speak the truth is to say the way things really are. Praise God that He has sent Jesus Christ into the world to make the truth manifest and present with us. The truth that Jesus has brought into the world is the eternal, unchanging truth. The wise will receive Jesus in the present favorable year of the Lord. Fools will face Him on the day of vengeance of our God. All glory be to God, who sent us a Savior on that first Christmas day! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/postmodernism-philosophy>

<sup>ii</sup> Brett McCracken, *The Wisdom Pyramid*, (Crossway, 2021), pp. 59-60

<sup>iii</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 184.