

# Who is Jesus?

## Messages from the Gospel of John

Message 10

### *The Truth* John 14:1-6

#### ***Who's Telling the Truth?***

John slowly became aware of someone talking to him. It didn't sound like Christie, his wife. Maybe it was Sarah. She and Tom had been over to visit. But that was last night. As he gained consciousness, John leaned over to look at Christie, who was fast asleep. The voice was saying, "...a terrible day. The storm is moving rapidly from the coast. It looks like a good day to stay inside if at all possible..." By now John was half awake, and realized he was in his own bed. The clock said 6:30 – time to wake up for work. The radio continued reporting on the news headlines and the developing storm. It was definitely a bad storm, and a rotten day awaited the city.

Just then a rumble from the other end of the house brought John fully awake, and in an instant Derek and Jill burst into the bedroom. "Mom, Dad," they squealed, "did you *see* it? Isn't it *wonderful*? This is the best day this winter! There must be a *foot* of snow already, and Dad, you should see how fast it is coming down! We're going out!" And before Mom could say, "Be sure to wear a hat," they were down the stairs and pulling out their coats. It was definitely a wonderful storm, and a beautiful day awaited the city.

Who told John the truth, the news reporter, or his children? The radio declared it was a bad storm and a rotten day. Seconds later, his kids reported that it was a great storm and a terrific day. Who told the truth? Who can you trust? And how can we know? These are profound questions, the stuff of philosophy. It is not our intention to get into the philosophy behind these questions tonight. But in case you need a conversation starter at a holiday party, I will mention that the branch of philosophy which is concerned with how we know things is called epistemology. So when you return home for the holidays you can impress your friends by telling them you dabbled in epistemology this semester at Lehigh.

#### ***Truth vs. Tolerance***

Perhaps the search for truth is the simplest way to describe the task of philosophers through the ages, but even if you aren't a philosopher, truth matters. Let's go back to the snow storm for a minute. Although both the weather reporter and the children were dogmatic in their assertions about the conditions outside, we understand that they are expressing their opinions about the day. But if the weather service assures you it will be a clear day, and you end up in a snow storm, you will be very unhappy – perhaps even in a dangerous situation – since you aren't prepared for slippery conditions. If your roommate tells you the calc. exam is next week, but you get it tomorrow, you will be quite upset. On a very practical, every day level, we have a profound need for the truth.

But when we move to religion, if you suggest that some beliefs are true and others are false, you will be accosted by laughter, scorn, and anger. Tolerance is the main virtue today – perhaps the only virtue in a society which affirms all behavior and beliefs, no matter how perverse, as alternative lifestyles. I will not elaborate on this, because you know what I am talking about. You live with it every day. But because you live in a society which enforces an ethic of tolerance, you are becoming dulled to the twistedness of this new religion. Actually it's not new. Tolerance is the state religion of all large, powerful societies. Persia, Greece, Rome – all these permitted all sorts of religions in their bounds – as long as their subjects were loyal to the state. That was the root of the problem for the ancient church. Rome perceived allegiance to Christ as disloyalty to the state, and this provoked the persecutions. America today is very much like Rome. We

are the unchallenged power in the world, we are very diverse, and what unites us is our citizenship as Americans. And as the peoples of the world continue to stream into our country seeking a share in our wealth and freedom, there will be increasing pressure to “tolerate” every imaginable religion. And any religion which makes exclusive claims will be opposed.

Of course, freedom *is* a desirable condition. None of us here is advocating an enforced religion. So if America is going to harbor people of many different religions, we have to live in harmony with each other. But our search as a society for peace among different groups has led us badly astray. In reality, instead of many different religions living peacefully among each other, all religions are being forced to worship the state god of tolerance. You can read and dream and worship as you please, but you may not practice your religion outside the church because doing so will condemn your neighbors. In essence, religion is locked out of everyday life and the things that really matter to us. Religion becomes more a matter of thoughts and feelings than of truth and behavior. But hey, it’s a small price to pay for social harmony, right? Perhaps – as long as religion doesn’t really matter. As long as there is no God who rules us according to His Word, as long as there is no final judgment, and as long as there is no such thing as sin. If Jesus died in vain, then we can coast along as though all religions were equal.

The trouble with all this is that such a situation makes true Christianity impossible. Our passage tonight clearly and irrevocably shows that this kind of state-sponsored tolerance is totally incompatible with true faith in Christ – or perhaps I should say faith in the *true* Christ. For Christ is the one who said, “*I* am the way, the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father but by me.” This passage teaches us that there is only one way to heaven. It’s not by living a good life. It’s not through the pursuit of the cosmic consciousness. It’s not by reincarnation or appeasing the spirits. It’s not by finding the god within. And it’s not through Mohammed. Only by believing in Christ can anyone become pleasing to God and go to heaven after death. You can’t mix and match religions as some today prefer. You can’t have Jesus, and Buddha, and the spirit within, and Mohammed. Christ will tolerate no competitors. Only through Him can anyone escape God’s punishment for sin and receive eternal life. You see, Jesus Himself, the gentle teacher, the example of good behavior, the loving leader – Jesus said these uncompromising words. Why? Why is Jesus so strict? Why is He so rigid? Why is He so intolerant? Why would anyone worship such a man? Because He is right.

### ***Truth and Love***

Jesus did not come to make the world safe for democracy. There was no democracy then. He did not even come to make the world safe at all. Jesus came to a doomed planet, a world of people on the edge of extinction, a race destined to be burned. These were a people who hated Him and actively rebelled against Him all the time. It was an ugly, violent world, periodically punctuated by brief moments of peace and joy. Persia, Greece, and Rome accomplished great things in engineering, the arts, philosophy, etc., but the glory of Rome was a thin veneer over a rotten society. God gave His opinion of mankind’s finest achievements in both the Old and New Testaments. Paul, quoting from the psalms, said,

“There is none righteous,  
no, not one;

<sup>11</sup> There is none who understands;  
There is none who seeks after God.

<sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside;  
They have together become unprofitable;  
There is none who does good,  
no, not one.

<sup>13</sup> Their throat is an open tomb;

With their tongues they have practiced deceit;  
The poison of asps is under their lips;

<sup>14</sup> Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.

<sup>15</sup> Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery are in their ways;

<sup>17</sup> And the way of peace they have not known.

<sup>18</sup> There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Romans 3:10-18

It is essential to grasp this. If we fail to understand the nature of man, we will never understand the man Jesus. It is easy to be confused, or even deceived, because some people claim to seek God. There are people who profess a desire to do good. And some people truly do good things. Some people appear to make efforts to seek God. But it is all a charade. I am not accusing all unbelievers of lying. Some unbelievers are genuinely deceived themselves. But you see this passage we read tells us that no one seeks God, and no one does good. This is what God says. This is reality. This is the truth. No matter how sincere and virtuous people may appear to be, the plain fact is that they do not seek God and they do not do good.

This is why all attempts to reach God will fail. No one can be good enough to please God. Even with the help of some great man such as Buddha or Mohammed you cannot reach God. There are no spirits who are powerful enough to help you reach God. Whatever you may think about the cosmic consciousness, God declares that you are inherently wicked, and His anger is poised against you. You may sincerely think that you are seeking God, but God says you are not. The truth is that you seek your own pleasure, and you are willing to use God to the extent that He works for you. This is repulsive in God's eyes, and apart from Jesus there is no hope for the world. Such a world must be destroyed.

In the face of this horrible reality, Jesus came to earth to bring us to God. We hated God, we loved ourselves, we were determined to live our own way. This was a terrible offense against the God who made us and cares for us. We deserved to die for our sin. But instead of coming to destroy us, God came to save us. God came as a man. Jesus preached the good news that God would welcome everyone who followed Him. And since we were rotten to the core – since we were not seeking God and did not do good – Jesus changed us from the inside out. Jesus made us able to do good and gave us a genuine desire to seek God. Jesus changed us so profoundly, He called it a rebirth. Jesus came to give us new life, life from above, life from heaven, life in the Spirit of God. We who formerly hated God became people who loved God. We who formerly sought to please ourselves became people who desire to please God.

Why did God not destroy us? Why did God go to the trouble of coming to earth to preach a message of salvation? Why would He bother to give us a new spiritual birth? Because He loved us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus is the good shepherd who, for love of His sheep, endured terrible suffering to save them from a death of their own deserving. At last, in the supreme demonstration of His love, Jesus died a horrible death for us. He took the punishment deserved by His people upon Himself to put an end to the power of sin and set us free. Jesus' love was not some abstraction. He gave His own life so that we might live.

Now do you see why Jesus is so intolerant? Can you see why Jesus declares that He is the only way to God? Only if God changes us will we cease hating Him and desire to please Him. Only Jesus can give us the new kind of life – eternal life – that loves God. It is not that all other means of reaching God will fail. That is not the point at all. The point is that no one is seeking God. All other so-called paths to God are lies.

Now if Jesus loved the world so much to die for it, why would He deceive us? Why would Jesus pretend that there may be other ways to God when there are not? To do so would be worse than cruel – it would be evil. Jesus came to tell us the truth because our lives depend upon it. This is the truth: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

### ***Vos Veritas Liberabit***

The motto of my alma mater is *Vos Veritas Liberabit* – The Truth Shall Set You Free. Johns Hopkins University was founded as a secular institution, and has never been sympathetic to Christianity. It is curious, then, that this phrase from John 8:32 was chosen as the university motto. Hopkins prides itself on rigorous pursuit of truth, and this has made it one of the top research universities in the country. But their idea of truth is sharply at odds with the biblical concept of truth. Truth for them is an intellectual understanding of how the material universe works. Truth is contained in propositions and formulas, and stored in books and libraries. But when Jesus claimed that *He* was the truth, He meant something entirely different.

Of course anyone can observe the world around us and draw accurate conclusions about it. In a general sense we speak of such observations as facts – things which are true. The trouble comes when you address the significance of these facts. As soon as you try to understand *why* the world works the way it does, you are dealing with truth on a different level. Everyone knows that the sun crosses the sky during the day. The ancients explained that as the path of the sun-god. Medieval man believed the earth was the center of the universe and the sun circled it. Modern man thinks the earth circles the sun. But what all these explanations are missing is the more fundamental truth – that the sun is God's instrument for light and seasons. Truth is personal, because the God who made everything is a personal God. If you have explained everything but left God out, you have missed the core aspect of reality. All facts find their origin and destiny in God. This does not mean that unbelievers cannot discover truth, but it means their knowledge of truth will always be partial and deformed. Truth without God is like a body without a skeleton – an ugly pile of flesh.

Hopkins claims to seek truth. They even quote from Jesus. But they refuse to recognize that truth is found in Jesus. Paul explains further in Romans how unbelievers deal with truth. Let us read Romans 1:18-23.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,<sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

This passage tells us that truth is open for all to see. At least some truth is. Every person on earth is able to see that there is a God. They can see that He is divine and powerful. In fact, not only *can* everyone see this – they *do* see this. The creation shouts to us all that God made us and rules heaven and earth. Furthermore, God's anger is evident also. Everyone sees that God is angry with us for our rebellion against Him. So all men and women on earth know there is a God and they know He will judge them. This thought is too terrifying to live with. You cannot go through life with the constant knowledge that God will destroy you for your sin. It is too horrifying. So people develop coping strategies. They devise clever ways to protect themselves from the devastating knowledge of God's judgment. Creation shouts the glory and wrath of God, so they find ways to suppress this truth. This is the true purpose of all other religions. Only when

we come to Jesus are we able to see reality clearly. Only when God's wrath is removed are we able to face the truth of His glory. Only when the guilt and power of sin are destroyed can we face the fact that we were morally reprehensible. Until then, man must suppress the truth. As God said, "There is none who seeks after God...There is none who does good, no, not one."

### ***Love Triumphs Over Tolerance***

Jesus refused to tolerate other religions because He loved people too much. The truth is that other religions are false, and will kill you. All mankind is subject to God's anger for sin. Jesus provides the only shelter there is from God's furious anger. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will be safe forever from God's wrath. But all those who refuse to trust Jesus will perish. So we see that love and tolerance are mutually exclusive. If we, like Jesus, love people, we will refuse to tolerate their beliefs. Now I have been using the word tolerance in the manner it is currently used today in American culture – as the state religion which demands that we accept all other religions as equally valid. Of course we should practice a sort of common sense tolerance, but that is part of the biblical teaching on love. One of the ways we love people is by showing kindness and patience and respect to them – regardless of their beliefs. But as we are able, we will also love them enough to say, "No one can come to God except through Jesus." We must practice this sort of cultural intolerance if we are to love as Jesus loved.

All this is not just a lot of philosophy and high ideas. The bottom line is that Jesus did what He said He would do. By His death and resurrection He opened the way to heaven. You can enter, too, if you believe in Jesus. Do not fall for the trashy substitute this world calls tolerance, Accept only the truth. Believe in Jesus, the Truth, and He will set you free from sin and give you eternal life.

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November 29, 2005