

“He Came To...Testify To The Truth”

John 18:33-38

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on November 29, 2015

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to John.
- It has killed many pilots. In the early days of aviation, before there were instruments, it drastically shortened the average life expectancy of an air-mail pilot. In fact, of the first 40 pilots hired to fly the mail, 31 were killed by it. Perhaps the most famous pilot it has killed is JKF Jr. who, while flying his wife and sister, crashed his private plane into the ocean. It is called spatial disorientation.
 - Spatial disorientation occurs when a pilot, flying in fog, loses sight of all visual reference points such as the horizon. Without any fixed reference points the inner ear can give the pilot the impression that the plane is climbing when in fact it is diving; the impression that it is flying straight when in fact it is banking hard to the right.
 - For this reason, every pilot must be instrument rated before flying in such conditions because the instruments tell the pilot if the plane is turning or climbing or diving. One lesson every flight instructor pounds into the students is, ***“Trust your instruments, don’t trust your feelings.”***
- In our generation an astonishing thing has happened in the way people view truth. In previous generations people believed that there were fixed truths that should guide people as they flew through fog of life. For instance, the truth that God exists, that heaven and hell are real, that there is good and there is evil, were assumed by most people to be absolute realities. These fixed truths guided people as they flew through life.
 - But, speaking generally, our generation has rejected the idea of absolute truth. Truth is relative so that what is true for me may not be true for you. In other words, our generation says that there are no fixed points of reference to guide your life. This has left us in a state of confusion.
 - If truth is relative then how am I supposed to know what to believe? How do I determine what is right and wrong? What is the meaning of life? Is there a God? What happens when I die?
- Into this cultural fog comes the good news of Christmas. The message of Christmas says, ***“There is a fixed point of reference that can guide your life. Truth does exist and you can know it.”***
 - So three points today. First, understanding the message of Christmas. Second, applying the message of Christmas. Finally, deciding about the message of Christmas.

UNDERSTANDING THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First then, understanding the message of Christmas. Here I want to show you why Jesus' birth is such good news to a generation flying in the fog.
 - In John 18 Jesus is on trial before Pilate. Pilate's primary concern relates to this issue of Jesus' kingship. The Jewish leaders were trying to get

Jesus crucified by saying that he was a threat to the emperor of Rome. Pilate gets to the point in verse 33. **READ 33** – “*So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”* Jesus then explains that his kingdom is not of this world.

- Pilate thinks this is a little bizarre and so in verse 37 he asks, “*So you are a king?*” To which Jesus agrees by saying, “*You say that I am a king.*”

➤ But then Jesus says something very provocative. **READ 37** – “*For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.*”

- Jesus says there is a reason or purpose for his birth. But then he goes further. He says there is a reason why he has “come” into the world. Come into the world? This is crazy. To say you have come into the world assumes you existed somewhere before you were born and so have come from somewhere. Jesus is saying that he left the place he existed in before he was born in order that he might come into this world.
- All through John’s gospel, it is emphasized that Jesus is none other than the eternal God who created all things and that this eternal God became a man when he was born as the man Jesus.

➤ In John 1 we read, of Jesus that “*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*”

- The Bible teaches that 2000 years ago the King of glory left his eternal realm to come to this earth. On that first Christmas day the Creator of all worlds took on human flesh.
- But why did Jesus come? Why would God become a man?

➤ **READ 37** – “*For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.*”

- Jesus’ kingdom invaded this world not through violence but through truth. The Bible declares that truth is what we need most of all because the entire human race is flying through fog trusting our feelings to guide us.
- In the beginning God created Adam and Eve to know the truth about reality. They were flying on a clear sunny day with fixed points of reference to guide them. (**SHOW SLIDE**) Although humanity once knew the truth, our sin brought us into a fog of ignorance and lies. Today we are not really sure what is true and what is not. We all suffer from spatial disorientation.

➤ This is why Christmas is such good news for it declares that rather than let us crash, God became a man to teach us the truth. He came to guide us through the fog.

- But it is not simply that Jesus tells us the truth. It is more than that. Since Jesus is God, he is the embodiment of truth. To listen to Jesus is to listen to Truth incarnate. That is why Jesus said in John 14:6, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*”

- (**SHOW SLIDE**) The message of Christmas declares that Jesus came into the world to teach us the truth in order that we might fly safely through the fog. Despite how foggy this world is, despite how many opinions there are, despite how unreliable your feelings are, you can know absolute truth as you listen to Jesus.

APPLYING THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

- Now that we understand the message of Christmas, I want to take some time to **(SHOW SLIDE)** apply the message of Christmas.
 - Here we will see how Jesus' birth allows us to fly safely through life's biggest questions.
- We can see why our generation needs this message by looking at Pilate's response to Jesus. This provocative statement stops Pilate in his tracks. Look at verse 38.
READ 38 – “What is truth? Pilate asked.” Now the Bible does not tell us the tone that Pilate used in asking this question. We are left to speculate.
 - Did he say it with scornful ridicule? **“What is truth? There is no such thing as truth.”**
 - Did he say it with a sense of despair? **“What is truth? I have investigated many philosophies and religions but I can't figure out which one is right.”**
 - Did he say it with dismissive laughter? **“What is truth? Everyone has their own opinion on that. They're all right and all wrong.”**
 - Or did he, perhaps, say it with sincerity? **“What is truth? I would really like to know.”**
- Pilate never waited to hear Jesus' response. He evidently considered Jesus to be a harmless philosopher or an impractical dreamer. In verse 38 we read, **READ 38 - “After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.”** But it is then Pilate shows his true colours. Even though he finds no fault in Jesus he turns him over to be crucified.
 - In the end, Pilate is a pragmatist. For him truth is whatever works for the situation. In the end, Pilate is also a relativist. Jesus may be innocent to him but if he is guilty to the Jews then so be it. Pilate fits perfectly into 21st century Westcoast culture.
 - The great irony of Pilate's question is of course the fact that the Truth is standing right in front of him.
- In Isaiah 59 God speaks about the corruption of culture when he says, **“truth has stumbled in the public squares.”** Other versions say, **“Truth is slain in the streets.”**
 - This is describing a culture where truth is ignored, relativized, and rejected. This is literally what happened 2000 years ago. Jesus, the Truth, did stumble in the street when they forced him to carry his cross after torturing him. The Truth was slain when they pierced his hands and feet.
 - So it is with us today. The loss of absolute truth in our day has left our culture in a state of confusion. We are flying in the fog. You can see this by how confused our generation is regarding the most important questions of life. Let's take some time now to apply the message of Christmas to some of life's biggest and most important questions.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD?

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, since Jesus came to testify to the truth, we can know the truth about God.

- Our culture is greatly confused about this whole idea of God. Does God exist? Are there millions of gods or just one God? Is God a force? Is God nature? If there is one God, what is God like?
- Theologian R.C. Sproul tells about a time he was travelling on a train. At dinnertime he sat with two women who were having a discussion. The young woman was excitedly telling an older woman about how she was just returning from 2-year training camp in new age philosophy. She was explaining the great discovery that she had made after two years. She discovered she was God.
 - Sproul was sitting there minding his own business. As she was speaking she kept glancing at him to see his reaction. She finally asked, "***What do you think?***" Sproul said, "***This is the only time I have ever sat across the table from the Almighty.***" She giggled. He said, "***Do you really think that you are God?***" She said, "***Well no, not really.***"
- Our generation has a million answers about God, all of which contradict each other. On this issue Jesus brings clarity. In Jesus we learn that there is one God and you are not him. This God loves you but you have ignored Him and lived contrary to how he has commanded.
 - Rather than destroy you this God sent Jesus to rescue you. This God gave up His own Son to die for your sins in order that He might win you back to Himself.
 - Oh what a good and glorious God He is. Do you believe this truth?

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT WHERE WE CAME FROM?

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, since Jesus came to testify to the truth we can know the truth about where we came from.
 - For the last 150 years or so it has been common to believe that there is no God and that the universe exploded out of nothing. But this has brought tremendous confusion.
 - Something cannot come from nothing. Self-creation is a contradiction in terms. The universe cannot create itself. It is like the rabbit out of the hat trick but without the rabbit or the hat or the magician.
- Many people are realizing that an atheistic Darwinism cannot ultimately answer the question of where we came from. I recently read an article on Ridley Scott. He is the director of a film called *Prometheus*. Scott said the film is really the story of his own shift from atheism to agnosticism. He now believes there must be some sort of God who created us but he is unsure who or what this God is.
 - In the film human beings learn that we were created by malicious aliens known as engineers. But all of this only pushes the question of origins back a step. The female scientist Elizabeth Shaw, who turns out to be the heroine, retains her Christian faith throughout the movie. She asks the obvious question that if aliens create us then, "***Who created the aliens?***"
 - The movie ends with this line, "***My name is Elizabeth Shaw...And I am still searching.***"
- On the question of origins our generation is flying in the fog. Along with Ridley Scott we strain through the fog, searching and searching for the answer.

- In Jesus we learn that we are not the result of some random accident of chance that washed up on the shore of time. Rather you are the special creation of the one God. You are made in his image. You came from him and were made to know him. Do you believe this truth?

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MEANING OF LIFE?

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Third, since Jesus came to testify to the truth we can know the truth about the meaning of life.
 - Since our generation is so confused about where we came from, it is no wonder that we struggle to find the purpose of life. You see if you truly believe that you came from nothing then it follows that you are nothing. Your life is ultimately meaningless.
- Richard Dawkins, today's most famous atheist, is honest enough to admit this:
"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."
 - Albert Camus, the French existentialist novelist, followed this to its natural conclusion. If life has no ultimate meaning then Camus said the only real question worth discussing is why we should not commit suicide.
 - And yet Dawkins and Camus and every one of us live as if life does have meaning. People are caught in a tension. People want meaning and yet don't believe in a universe with meaning.
- The singers, poets, and artists are always the best at expressing this angst over wanting meaning but not believing there is any. One great example of this is in modern art. For our 10th anniversary Heather and I went to Paris and London for 8 days. We visited all the great museums like the Louvre. Then we went to the Tate Modern Museum in London. One key moment stands out to me. I was standing in front one of the 10 most highly recommended pieces in the museum. It was a piece by Lucio Fontana entitled, *The End of God*. **(SHOW SLIDE)** It was a canvass with no paint on it. A razor blade had slashed a line down the middle of the canvass. I did not get it.
 - Then I started reading on the history of modern art. One author named H.R. Rookmaker was particularly helpful. He was the chair of art history at the Free University of Amsterdam. He points out that not all art is merely for decorating purposes. In fact, all art expresses deeply held values and beliefs. The artist preaches about their view of reality through their art. Many people bypass modern art failing to see that it is one of the great keys to understanding our times.
 - Art embodies how people think.
- In tracing how we got to modern art, Rookmaker shows that the major shift took place at the Enlightenment when the Western world rejected God in favour of human reason. But how does one make art when there are no absolutes? When there is no ultimate meaning or truth?
 - If you put even one drop of paint on the canvass you are saying there is meaning. But how do you do this when you have denied the existence of ultimate meaning? And so Fontana took his razor blade and slashed the canvass.

- In that action, he was declaring that there are no absolutes that he has to respect. God is dead. But in that action he was also expressing despair over a life without any ultimate meaning. How can he paint something with meaning when there is no meaning? And so he lashed out and struck the canvas. (**SHOW SLIDE**)
- To a world searching for meaning Jesus says, "***I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.***" Jesus says the reason you cannot find meaning is because you are separated from God. But Jesus came into the world to die for your sins in order that you might be restored back to God.
 - Only in God will you find the meaning you want. Do you believe this truth?

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG?

- Let's deal with two more areas. In the fourth place we can say that (**SHOW SLIDE**) since Jesus came to testify to the truth we can know the truth about right and wrong.
 - On this issue, our generation is truly flying in the fog. We are feeling our way along. We say things like, "***what is true for you may not be true for me.***" But we are very inconsistent. People are moral relativists when it comes to whom you can sleep with but no one seems to say it is all relative when someone breaks into their car. Then we want to talk about absolute truth.
 - Dawkins says there is no evil and no good but then he says it is evil to raise children to believe in God. This is very confusing. Which is it? Are there such thing as absolute right and wrong or are we free to make up our own standards?
- A little while ago well-known Ivy League professor named David Epstein was charged with a single count of incest. For several years he had been having a sexual relationship with his 24-year-old daughter.
 - The vast majority of people in our culture would say this is wrong. Our laws say it is wrong. But William Saletan of Slate.com responds by saying, "***If homosexuality is OK, why is incest wrong?***" He raises a good question.
- You see, our culture says homosexuality is acceptable because it is an act between two consenting adults who are not hurting anyone. But as Saletan points out, David Epstein and his daughter are also consenting adults who were not hurting anyone. Saletan is asking why our culture says homosexuality is right but incest is wrong? If you reject absolute truth then why can't a person sleep with whomever they want?
 - This confusion is what happens when you deny the existence of absolute truth. When there are no more fixed reference points, for deciding what is right and wrong, you are left to try and feel your way through the fog.
 - Again, Christmas is such good news. Since Jesus is God in human flesh he defines what is right and wrong. And Jesus did just that. In the Sermon on the Mount he outlined God's good law for human beings. Jesus affirmed that sex is a good gift of God to be enjoyed between a man and woman within marriage who are not

directly related to each other. The Bible is our instrument to enable us to fly through the fog. Do you believe this truth?

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT LIFE AFTER DEATH?

- Finally let's say this: (**SHOW SLIDE**) since Jesus came into the world, we can know the truth about what happens when we die.
 - Again our generation is flying in fog on this critical issue. Some believe that when you die then that is it. Lights out. Others think you get reincarnated. Others think you become one with the universe.
 - This issue matters. If there is a God to whom you will give an account one day you must ask yourself if you are ready to meet him. But how do you know if you are ready? People say, "**I know I'm not perfect but I am sure God will accept me.**" Really? How do you know this? How do you know what God is like?
- Jesus again answers all our questions. He tells us that a day is coming when God will judge the world. On that day there will be only two destinies. One is called heaven. The other is called hell.
 - The biggest truth that Jesus came into the world to tell us is that He is the Saviour who can rescue us from hell and bring us into heaven.
 - Do you believe this truth?

DECIDING ABOUT THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

- In our last two minutes let's turn to the final heading: (**SHOW SLIDE**) deciding about the message of Christmas. Look one last time at our passage. After Jesus told Pilate that he came into the world to testify to the truth he said in verse 37, **READ 37 – “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”**
 - Jesus is inviting Pilate to listen to him explain the truth. Jesus is also challenging Pilate to decide what side he is on. The man on trial invites his judge to be his follower, to align himself with those who are of the truth.
 - The challenge of Christmas is simply this: (**SHOW SLIDE**) which side are you on? Those on the side of truth listen to Jesus. This is how you know if you are really a Christian. You seek to conform all your thinking, opinions, and actions to Jesus beginning with looking to him for salvation.
- According to Jesus there are only two options. The first option is to side with Jesus and let him guide you through the fog of life. If you listen to him then on the day he returns, or on the day of your death, you will suddenly find that the fog has cleared away. You will see reality for what it truly is. Beyond the fog, you will see unimaginable beauty and you will fly into the eternal sunset.
 - The second option is to side against Jesus and keep trusting your own feelings to get you through the fog. If you reject Jesus then on the day Jesus returns, or on the day of your death, you too will see the fog clear. But it will clear only long enough for you to watch the ground come rushing up to meet you.
 - What side are you on? Do you listen to your own feelings or to Jesus? **“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.”**