

Living Truth #8 – You Must Be Born Again
John 3:1-15
Argyle – 6/25/27 – Living Truth

Introduction to Scripture

Today we come to the end of our sermon series, “Living Truth,” based on Jesus’ “Truly, truly” statements in the Gospel of John. Next week we will begin a short series in the Book of Acts preaching each week on one of the *Discovery Bible* reading guide passages from that week. Next Sunday we will be looking at Acts 1:1-11 (different than the bulletin).

Bryan and I have appreciated the feedback we have gotten from many of you about this series. One suggestion we received was to turn this series into an adult Sunday school class to give us the chance to interact with this material on a deeper level. So, you may see this material again someday.

- “Bryan, this series was your idea. Where did the idea for this sermon series on ‘living truth’ come from?”

Before we look at Living Truth #8 this morning, we thought it might be helpful to briefly review the 7 truths we have talked about so far. They are listed in your bulletin if you would like to follow along.

#1 Heaven is Opened in Jesus – Bryan

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” (John 1:51)

#2 Hearing is Essential to Life – Steve

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”
(John 5:24)

Hearing in the sense of understanding and embracing Jesus’ words will lead to eternal life. And the great thing about eternal life is that it is not just a future expectation, but a present reality. Having eternal life means we are free from condemnation now and free from death when that day comes. And because we have eternal life now, our lives are being transformed. You can see it in our daily lives in our attitudes, words and actions.

#3 The Body is More Than Food – Steve

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” (John 6:26)

The problem Jesus identified here is the problem of materialism, which is an over emphasis on the things of this physical world to the exclusion of the things of God. Many of the folks who were following Jesus didn’t care about him. They just were interested in the material benefits he could offer like feeding them. A lot of us are guilty of that same thing. A good way to find out if we are materialists is to write out our prayers and compare them to the Lord’s Prayer which has a healthy balance between spiritual and physical concerns.

#4 Jesus Frees Us From Sin That Enslaves – Bryan

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”(John 8:34)

#5 To Believe in Jesus is to Adopt His Mission – Steve

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12)

You can't be a follower of Jesus and not follow him. His mission when he walked in this world was to get the good news about what God was doing out to folks. That is still his mission and he has entrusted it to us. Surprisingly, he said we will do an even better job of accomplishing that mission than he did. That is because he has given us two key resources to help accomplish this mission – prayer and the Holy Spirit.

#6 To Follow Jesus Will Lead to Sacrifice – Bryan

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

#7 The Christian's Weeping will be Turned to Joy – Steve

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” (John 16:20)

Jesus had bad news and good news for his disciples. The bad news was that he was leaving as a result of his death on the cross. The good news was that first he would be resurrected from the dead, second he would send his Holy Spirit to live in believers, and third he would return some day. All three of these pieces of good news should lead to joy in the lives of believers. Joy because we, too, will be resurrected from the dead. Joy because we, too, have the Holy Spirit living in us, confirming that we are God's children – loved, forgiven, adopted, being made whole and destined for glory. And joy because we will join believers of all times and places in the new

heaven and the new earth that Jesus will usher in. No one can take that joy away from us!

We turn now to Living Truth #8 – You Must Be Born Again. We'll be looking at a familiar passage, that well known conversation that took place one night between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. It is that conversation that introduces us to this important spiritual concept of being born again. (Read) (Pray)

Born Again

I am not sure if there is a more helpful Biblical principle for those of us in the church to talk about than being "born again." Tim Keller argues that Jesus used this metaphor because he was talking to a religious insider. Nicodemus was a man who was well steeped in religious knowledge and practice. He would have presumed that he was pretty close to God. We see in his approach to Jesus that he saw himself on God's team. Nicodemus said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." We might have expected Jesus to respond with a similar compliment. "Nicodemus, you are a wise man. I should have picked you to be one of my disciples." But Jesus wasn't interested in building him up. He was interested in loving Nicodemus into the kingdom of God. In order to do that, he needed to knock Nicodemus down to show him his deep spiritual need. So Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." And then "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

The problem with being a religious insider is that sometimes we have a hard time seeing our need for salvation. Our religious knowledge and practices sometimes hinder our ability to understand and express faith. We might think that because of our religious knowledge and activities, we are accepted by God. We are certainly better than those “real sinners” who live around us, so God must be pleased with us. Maybe we need to tweak a few things, but we are close. We fail to understand the depth of our need and the radical commitment that faith in Jesus Christ really is. That is part of the reason that according to research, 40% of us in the average church are not Christians. We may think we are Christians, but being religious insiders has hidden the meaning of faith from us.

To get our attention, Jesus introduced this radical concept of being born again. What does it mean to be born again? It means humbling ourselves and starting over. It means humbling ourselves and becoming a spiritual baby. It means humbling ourselves and giving up confidence in ourselves for our salvation. It means humbling ourselves and becoming totally dependent on someone else - the Lord Jesus Christ.

The concept of being born again communicates the radical transformation that needs to take place in order to enter the kingdom of God. It's not a transformation in behavior and character. That will come later, once we have entered the kingdom. No, to be born again is a transformation of dependence and submission. When I am born again, I transfer my dependence for my salvation from myself to Jesus. He

becomes my Savior. When I am born again, I transfer my submission from myself to Jesus. He also becomes my Lord.

That is why I say that this concept of being born again is so helpful to us religious insiders in the church. It helps us to realize that just because we attend church and live relatively good lives and know a bunch of religious stuff, that doesn't mean that we are okay with God. We need a radical transformation in our lives, not just a spiritual tune up. We must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God."

Kingdom of God

What is this kingdom of God that Jesus was talking about? We sometimes think as if Jesus said, "Unless one is born again he cannot be saved" or "Unless one is born again she cannot experience all of God's blessings for her life" or "Unless one is born again he cannot go to heaven when he dies." We have a tendency to look at faith from our own narrow perspective as if it is all about us. It is, of course, true that in order to be saved, to experience the extent of God's blessings and to go to heaven, we need to be born again. God, however, is calling us to much more than just a personal improvement project. He is calling us to be a part of his kingdom.

A kingdom is the realm in which a king rules. We normally think of this in terms of geography. For instance, King Abdullah II (picture) rules over Jordan. Jordan is the realm in which his kingship is recognized and submitted to. The kingdom of God is that realm in which God's kingship is recognized and submitted

to. However, God's kingdom is not a geographical realm, although it will be when Jesus returns. For now it is a spiritual realm made up of all of those folks who have been born again and their areas of influence.

For instance, the kingdom of God exists within my life and the areas I influence. Because I am part of the kingdom of God, I live by kingdom principles. For instance, I have married a kingdom woman and, therefore, our home has become part of God's kingdom. We raised our kids by kingdom principles. We've opened our home from time to time to homeless people because that is a kingdom principle. We give at least 10% of our income away because that is a kingdom principle. When I go to work, the kingdom gets extended to where I work. You would expect that to be true of my work here at the church, but it was just as true when I worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant or a machinist in a machine and tool shop and later as a truck driver for that shop. I did my work according to kingdom principles. I interacted with my employer and fellow employees according to kingdom principles. When I go shopping, when I volunteer in the fire company, when I go to a graduation party the presence of the kingdom of God is extended to those areas, at least temporarily. You see, I have been born again and I now have a King. I am a part of his kingdom, a kingdom which is expanding, a kingdom and which one day will fill this world. When Jesus returns and establishes the new heaven and the new earth, this whole world will be the kingdom of God. To be a part of that kingdom, we must be born again.

Conclusion

In his “truly, truly” statements, Jesus has given us living truth on which to base our lives. That truth is rooted in and based on who Jesus is and what he has done. Over the years I have often quoted the English church leader, John Stott to make a point and I am going to do it again this morning in concluding this series on living truth.

Stott was the subject of a 2004 NY Times Op-Ed column by David Brooks. David Brooks is Jewish, which adds significance to his comments. Writing about Stott, Brooks said, “.... Most important, he does not believe truth is plural. He does not believe in relativizing good and evil or that all faiths are independently valid, or that truth is something humans are working toward. Instead, Truth has been revealed. As [Stott] writes: ‘It is not because we are ultra-conservative, or obscurantist, or reactionary or the other horrid things which we are sometimes said to be. It is rather because we love Jesus Christ, and because we are determined, God helping us, to bear witness to his unique glory and absolute sufficiency. In Christ and in the biblical witness to Christ, God's revelation is complete; to add any words of our own to his finished work is derogatory to Christ.’”