

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:16-21*

How many of you have heard the phrase: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me"? How many of you have told someone: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me"? That phrase is usually used in reply to someone in the context of being verbally insulted, disrespected, denigrated, slandered or abused by another. It is commonly considered that when we say: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me" – what we mean is that, “While you might be able to hurt me with physical force you cannot hurt me with just words.”

Now, how many of you believe that? In one sense, the phrase "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me" is a *declaration of our intent* to not allow verbal assaults to harm us. But the truth is most often behind the façade of inner strength, what we are really declaring is “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but your words have cut me deeply” - because *words are powerful*. God created the world by simply speaking words. He said, “*Let there be light, and there was light.*” And every time God said, “*Let there be*” - there was. In being created in the image of God, our words also have power. Now, our words do not have the power of God to create life, but our words do have the power to build up and inspire and stimulate life. But, quite often, that is not the case. Because of our rebellion against God and our rejection of God in the Garden at the beginning of creation – we now also use the power of words to slander, wound, break and destroy those who are threats to our personal kingdoms.

God’s Word speaks of this in James 3:5-6: “*So the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.*” Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me? The Word of God is telling us that words have the power to do much more damage than physical objects can. Flesh wounds heal much faster than heart wounds. The truth is the target for words, good or bad, is deep in the heart.

Is it true that: "Sticks and stones may break our bones, but names (words) can never hurt us"? No, it’s not true. But, there are still many of us, who still believe words can never hurt us. Why would we believe that? Because our standard of truth is based on our own words rather than God’s Words. We see this also in the Garden at the beginning of creation when God told Adam: “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Genesis 1:16-17). And not long after - God’s Word tells us that the devil approached Eve and asked her the question: “*Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’*” And the woman said to the serpent, “*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.*” But the serpent said to the woman, “*You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Genesis 3:1-7). We’ve been questioning the truth of God’s Word from the start.

We see this also in John 18:37-38 where the apostle John records the dialogue between Jesus and Pontius Pilate prior to Jesus' crucifixion, when Pilate asked him: "'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" Pilate then made a remark that is even today one of the great questions that is still being asked by fallen humanity: "What is truth?"

What is truth? Every man, woman and child that has ever lived has had to deal with this question because every human behavior is ultimately guided by what we believe to be true. We tell our kids to eat their vegetables because we believe they are good for our health. We also tell our children to stay away from certain people, places or things - because in doing so, it will keep them from great harm. We support particular politicians because we believe they will not mess things up as much as other politicians. We buy particular products over each other because for various reasons we think they will be better for us. From the simple to the complex, from the mundane and trivial to the extraordinary and life changing, our decisions are ultimately grounded in what we believe is true. Our perception of truth is the foundation for everything we do. But are our perceptions of truth correct and really true?

"What is truth?" is the vital question to our existence - for to believe incorrectly in the wrong truth can result in death. The common illustration of this is taking medication. We must make sure we are taking the correct drug in the correct amount or serious injury or death could result. But while truth is vital to the existence our physical well-being - it is even more vital to our spiritual existence and well-being.

This is what the apostle Peter has been addressing in his second letter to the churches in Asia Minor, as they endured the struggle, suffering and pain of persecution. In the first 15 verses of 2 Peter told them they had become partakers of the divine power of God's grace, and they were now channels of that divine power which enabled them to overcome their circumstances. Having been born again, they were now on a path which led to spiritual maturity, a path that demanded the Word of God. As they matured in Christ, their lives would become fruitful, visionary and secure. At the times when they needed to evaluate where they were spiritually, Peter encouraged them to look to their spiritual calling and election. They should not take their new life in Christ for granted but should use the Word of God as a mirror held up to their lives for the purpose of evaluating their walk in Christ. Peter ended by telling them he knew that he would soon be gone and he encouraged them with the words from today's text - where Peter contrasts the truth about Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word of God with the falsehood of man-made myths. And in light of God's glorious truth, the church should be focused on living faithfully according to the truths of the Word of God as a witness of the light of life in a world darkened with evil.

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:16*

Peter begins by saying, he and the other apostles "*did not follow cleverly devised myths*" when they taught the truths of the Word of God. The word "*myths*" in the Greek means "manufactured stories that have no basis in fact." The Greek and Roman world abounded in stories about the gods, mere human speculations that tried to explain the world and how it came to be. Myths were the foundations of both the Greek and Roman religious systems. Multitudes of stories were made up about the actions and activities of the various gods and goddesses in their religious beliefs that tried to explain why things were like they were in the world. The sun was the chariot of Apollo going across the sky. Evil came about because Pandora opened a box and let all wickedness and immorality escape into the world. Wars were won or lost depending on the favor of particular gods or goddesses. The world continued to exist because it was supported on the shoulders of Atlas. Man has fire because Prometheus stole it from the Gods. Crops succeeded or failed based on the whims of various gods. You fall in love and have children due to the intervention of the gods Eros and Aphrodite. The mythology of the Greeks and Romans is no longer believed, but at the time of Paul those myths were thought to be absolutely true by most. People lived and behaved according to their belief of those myths to be absolute truths.

We have the same today. Truth is seen to be much more subjective than objective. But “true” truth has to be objective and independent of our personal opinions. If not, then it is no longer truth. For truth is that which exists above and beyond our preferences, thoughts and desires. Truth must correspond to reality, not our opinion. But the world does not see that today. We saw that publicly last year in the U.S. during the Judge Kavanaugh hearings for the position on the Supreme Court. Defenders of Christine Blasey Ford often made the case that truth is actually subjective, rather than objective. For example, Democrat Senator Cory Booker from New Jersey kept referring to her testimony as “her truth.” If “her truth” was to be applauded and championed, then Judge Kavanaugh’s “truth” should have been also.

If there is no objective truth, but only the “truth” of each person as they see it, then no truth is to be believed over any other truth. And no truth is more important than any other. We have seen, today and all throughout history – far, far too much of such subjective and relative notions of truth. The Nazis in Germany thought that their truth was what mattered, and the truth of Jews and others did not. Slave owners thought that their truth about Africans trumped the truth that all people are equal and deserving of respect. Abortionists believe their truth that some human beings are not persons and can be disposed of at will. Those who euthanize human beings who are created in the image of God believe their truth that they have they have the God-given right to decide who lives and who dies.

When it comes to truth - today we seem to just make things up as we go along. This is especially the case in the area of what it is to be “a person.” Thus someone born a biological male can now make up his own truth about biology, DNA and reality and simply claim he is female. Or a grown man can claim to be a toddler. Or a white woman can claim to be black man. The list is now endless as to folks identifying with whatever, regardless of the flight from reality it takes to get there. Truth no longer matters which means reality no longer matters. This is the death of truth. And when truth dies, we all die. No culture can long last when truth is trampled underfoot, reality is transformed into fantasy, and everyone does what is right in their own eyes. To claim to have objective, absolute truth is the new heresy. As Charles Colson once put it, “The most scandalous thing that one can do today is make a claim of truth.”

But even more scandalous is the fact that most folks do not realise the reality that - when we deny truth, we become ripe for tyranny. Indeed, all tyrants have known the importance of this. As the Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, famously said: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”

Presently, our children are being taught that “what you think you are is what you are.” That’s the truth to a certain extent in that *we should be* what we think we are. However, sometimes even in the best cases, that’s not true – and the way things are going today, we are slowly but surely losing the mind of the truth - which means we end up losing the reality of what we really are - which is why we need to look up to a higher being that is the bedrock of truth of the one who said: “*For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*” Jesus also declared: “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6).

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What Peter is proclaiming is not a myth or fairy tale or an event shaped by his personal opinion but rather the truth about the One who is the truth of God. Peter says that what the Apostles have told about Jesus Christ is absolutely true - because they were eyewitnesses of what they have reported. They were simply proclaiming what they had seen and heard. Matthew 17:1-8 records the event Peter is describing here: *“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”*

Peter says that he, along with James and John were eyewitnesses of this event. This is something that really happened. It could even be verified in a court of law *because* it is on the testimony of two or three witnesses that the reality of a report or event would be established. The apostle John says something similar to Peter in 1 John 1:1-4: *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”* John claims, just as Peter, to be an eyewitness of the life of Jesus Christ. Both knew how Jesus lived, what he said, what he promised, how he died and how he rose again from the dead. These apostles are passing these truths on to us in what they have written and those truths are attested to by multiple witnesses. This is not true of some mythical religions. There were no eyewitnesses to attest to the truthfulness of any of the mythical stories of the Greeks and Romans and the founding of what is Hinduism, Buddhism and Mormonism.

Peter, John and Paul attest to the fact that there were many witnesses to the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These things were recorded in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul remarks that the resurrected Christ was seen by Peter, then the other Apostles, to James, to over 500 brethren at one time, and finally by Paul himself. In Acts 26:26 Paul tells Governor Festus that King Agrippa knows about all the events concerning Jesus because *“this has not been done in a corner.”* These things were common knowledge throughout Judea and the surrounding territories. The facts concerning Jesus and his teachings have been proven true by many witnesses.

*And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:19-21*

What is truth? That which conforms to actual reality and not just perceptions of it. Our knowledge of truth is made sure by the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. Peter says that *“the prophetic word”*, which was already certain, is made more certain because they were eyewitnesses of the transfiguration of Jesus and heard the confirmation of God declaring, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”* They had seen the fulfillment of God’s promise, so we will do well to pay attention to both the words of the prophets and what Peter says about their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. We should be as attentive to the Scriptures as we would to a lamp shining in a dark place. David gives a similar description of the Scriptures in Psalm 119:105 saying, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* Only the area around a lamp is illuminated so that we can see which allows us to both accomplish our purposes and avoid obstacles that would cause us to stumble if we were still in the dark.

Paul also used this analogy in 2 Corinthians 4:6 saying; *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* We need of the light of the revelation of the Word of God in order to walk as children of light. Ephesians 5:8 tells us: *“At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”* and in Matthew 5:14–16 Jesus declared to us: *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* Revelation 22:16 says, *“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”*

*“No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* The Bible is unique among all books. Other religions have sacred books, but none compare to the Bible. While finite humanity cannot comprehend an infinite God, the Bible gives us a vast and adequate revelation which contains all that God wants us to know. It is not a collection of myths and stories. It's not the invention of mankind. It's the product of the Holy Spirit working through us. 2 Timothy 3:12-17 tells us: *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”*.

The glorious truth of the Word of God is two things. First, the glorious truth of the Word of God is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of God to send a Savior into the world to pay the penalty for our sins in our place on a cross – so when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus as Lord and Savior, we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back to God, so we might have a new life here on earth and an eternal life with God when we die. And second, the glorious truth of the Word of God is that Jesus is the absolute truth of God in the Word of God in a world full of wounding words and self-truths and individual opinions and personal kingdoms and myths and false teachers – the prophetic Word of God that is fully confirmed, so we might live out our lives shining like lamp in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star of our crucified and resurrected Lord and Savior rises up in our hearts and shines with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Winston Churchill once said, “Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.” Brothers and sisters, let that not be us. But also know that we will face opposition – within and without - when we believe and live out the truth of the Word of God. To this pastor Adrian Rogers says: “It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie. It is impossible to find anyone in the Bible who was a power for God who did not have enemies and was not hated.” God's Word's today is telling us when such things happen to us, we are in good company with those to whom Peter wrote.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says: *“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”* In light of God's glorious truth, I pray we would be focused on living faithfully according to the truths of the Word of God as witnesses of the light of life in a darkened world. Amen!