

October 11, 2009

Vision Series – Learn Truth

Alright good morning and welcome back or welcome for the first time. We are still in the midst of our vision series. What that means is that on Sunday mornings this Fall God is fleshing out for us the vision He has given us – the purpose for which we exist as a church. That vision is to be moving people to life in Christ one step at a time together.

At the heart of that is the understanding that there is so much more to being a Christian than just praying a prayer or walking an aisle or being baptized or any form of a one time decision where you want to go to heaven instead of hell. Salvation is about life in Christ now.

Jesus defined that for us several weeks ago by equating being a Christian with being a disciple: someone who believes that Jesus is who He says He is and therefore he or she has put their faith in Him alone and now spends the rest of his or her life intent on becoming like Him and rearranging the affairs of life to that end. The rest of that life then is worship.

Worshipping Jesus is foundational to life in Christ – responding to who God is and to what God has done through what we say and what we do. So let me give you a long summary statement of what we've seen so far. **If we as a church are going to make disciples – are going to move people to life in Christ – we must make worshipping Jesus a priority by offering consistent OPPORTUNITIES to participate in Christ-exalting corporate worship and then we must WORSHIP JESUS together.**

Then we saw Jesus say last week in John 8:30-32 that if we are really his disciples, we will hold to his teaching. So here is another long summary statement of where we were last week. **Another aspect of being a disciple, another aspect of life in Christ, which flows out of worshipping Jesus is holding to His TEACHING. Doing so is how we learn the truth – which is God's perspective on what is real – and that truth then sets us free from the LIES of this world that are not based on Jesus Christ or reality and sets us free to LOVE the Lord our God with all our minds – to know Him more and more and more.**

And yet right there is where we often find the next problem. So many of us hit a wall here. Turn to **Philippians 1:9-11** with me.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

Verse 9 says that love – biblical love – **the kind of love God wants and expects both in and from disciples – grows through KNOWLEDGE and insight – specifically of God's truth.**

Now just to jump right into it today in connection to last week, most of us are living with a pseudo love. Why do I say that? Because so many of us have no clue what this (the Bible) really says. Some of us can't even find our way around the Bible and we've been supposedly walking with God a long time.

We have removed the study of scripture from our relationship with the Lord. It is no longer even a factor for most of us really and so what we practice is this pseudo love. And in that when your relationship with God comes under pressure – when your relationship with your spouse – with your child – with your boss comes under pressure, our love is revealed for what it is. It is not the love of the Bible. It is a love that we have made up and embraced and is a love that cannot stand up under real pressure. And then we wonder why our relationships fall apart so easily!

You cannot divorce the STUDY of the Word of God from your walk with Jesus. You cannot be a person who says "I'll serve here or I'll give to this or I'll love on people but I'm not going to quicken my mind by studying this." Without this you can't rightly do any of those things. Without this you can't

love God – you can't love me – you can't love each other – you can't even rightly love your spouse or your kid!

God's prayer for us is that our love would grow in knowledge and depth of insight.

You know we ended two weeks ago when we were looking at the step of worshipping Jesus together in Romans 12:1 where we understand that our response to who God is is to give ourselves completely to Him. But that's not a one time deal. That's why Romans 12:1 says we offer ourselves as living sacrifices. It is not a one time deal – it is a progressive deal. And that's what **Romans 12:2** tells us. Look back there with me. Romans 12:2 says:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Out with the old, in with the new, over and over again. Church, God is calling us to turn on our brains. Walking with Jesus is not a mindless exercise where you shut off the mind and just have warm feelings from the heart. The heart will never grow fonder – **we will never progress as disciples without our MINDS being turned on and acquiring the knowledge contained in these pages.** There is no way around it. That has always been God's plan. Go back to **Joshua 1:8** with me.

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

God has always intended those who follow Him to know and understand and keep His Word. The process we see in Joshua 1:8 about the amount of God's Word that God's people had then is still God's heart for us today and the amount of God's Word we have now.

Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. In other words take it in – **the RECEPTION of truth is the only way to grow in knowledge.**

Meditate on it day and night. Not only do you take it in, you digest it, **meditation on it in order to grow in UNDERSTANDING of the truth.** Why?

So that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Crucial. It is not about head knowledge. It is about life action. **We grow in grace as God enables us to APPLY that understanding to life.**

Then you will be prosperous and successful. When we grow in knowledge, we grow in understanding, we grow in grace, then **we grow in fruitfulness as God's truth is INTEGRATED into our lives and we continue to move from reception to transformation** – a changed life.

There is no way to hold to the teachings of Jesus without this process. And we say Jesus say last week, you can't really be my disciples if you don't hold to my teachings. **This process of LEARNING TRUTH is absolutely critical in the life of a disciple.** I say learning because it implies the process we just saw in Joshua. **It is more than knowing. It is more than even understanding. It is both of those things combined with the ability and practice of applying what we know and understand to how we live.**

As I grow in my knowledge of scripture – of who God is – I now have in my mind a greater understanding of God that has been transferred from here (Bible) to here (mind). So that as I go about my daily living – because I have the knowledge of God in here, I am now able to flush everything I'm seeing, to flush everything I'm hearing, to flush everything I'm observing through my knowledge of God – through what I've seen in His Word.

And by flushing that data – the stuff that I'm seeing in my real life day to day through the Word of God I understand then God's perspective on what is happening around me. And remember, truth

is God's perspective on what is real. So I'm able to see what God thinks about what I'm seeing and I'm able to see God's position on what I'm seeing and hearing whether it is at work or school or home or in my play group on the athletic field or on TV or in the mall or in music or whatever. And by knowing God's position – listen – by knowing God's position I can then know what my position ought to be because as a Christ follower I should never have any position but the position of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Knowledge by itself is not enough. It is a starting point, but that alone does not bring glory to God. But as you grow in knowledge of God: as we study and hear and memorize the Word, the Word then becomes part of who you are so wherever you go you are able to evaluate what you are seeing and hearing in light of the Word of God.

And here is a crucial part of that. We don't just do that to get another opinion. As if God is one of the voices in my head and life – God is one of my advisors in my life whose opinion I may accept or reject depending on how I'm feeling. No. When I flush what I'm seeing and hearing through the Word of God, what I'm actually doing is taking what I'm seeing and hearing to the authority of my life: the Lord Jesus Christ. And saying God – what do you think about this? Then I embrace His position.

Listen – **the Word of God is the final AUTHORITY of a disciple's life.** It is the defining factor of life Christ. That's why we must flush what we see – what we hear on a daily basis through the Word because it is the final authority and where God stands I too must stand.

What does that mean tomorrow at 8:30 for us? That means that **scripture trumps CULTURE.** Every subculture we encounter in this country is trumped by the truth of Jesus. **When culture stands in direct contradiction to the Word of God, one must reject their culture and embrace where God stands.**

There are subcultures that teach that abortion is acceptable. If you cling to scripture, you cannot claim that claim of your culture.

There are subcultures that reward laziness and excuse gluttony. God speaks against them both. You can't cling to that claim of culture and embrace laziness or gluttony if you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

There are subcultures that say might makes right, that homosexuality is right, that quality of life outweighs the sanctity of life, that adultery is expected and divorce is no biggie. There are subcultures that teach that net worth equals personal value, that beauty is skin deep, that all roads lead to heaven but in the mean time that life is all about you so get yours while the getting is good.

Folks for the Bible to be the final authority on all matters means that scripture trumps any cultural standard to which you belong. This is not just a Sunday morning ritual in here. This is where the rubber meets the road. This deeply impacts every day living.

You are really my disciple if you hold to my teaching, Jesus says. Folks the Bible even trumps family unity. If I have to choose between God's position and hurting someone else in my family's feeling or choosing their position and hurting God's feelings, for scripture to be the final authority – for me to hold to the teachings of Jesus – for me to really be a disciple means I am growing to always stand where God stands no matter the cost. Doesn't mean I am cold or arrogant or unwilling to listen or even that I won't make mistakes in applying what God says here. It just means **I learn truth to LIVE truth in every way I can without excuse.**

That is why we preach and teach this corporately. I want you to see God's heart in this yourselves, so turn with me back to **Ephesians chapter 4. Let's look at verses 11-15.**

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants,

tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

God is saying the reason He gives men the gifts of preaching and teaching His truth and then puts them in His local churches is not to impress you. It is not to entertain you. It is not to tell you what you want to hear. It isn't even just to teach – to pass on facts. That's why in Greek verse 12 doesn't say "to teach people" or "to educate" people, but uses a word that means "to perfect," or as the New American Standard translates it, "to equip" God's people for what? For works of service. To do ministry. To live life in Christ one step at a time together.

Maybe that's not how you grew up. Maybe you grew up somewhat like I did where you went to a church service where the pastor preached – we heard – and then we went to Furr's. It was never taught or explained or expected that the reason we were being taught is so that we could grab that knowledge and go act on it – not just for ourselves but as a disciple's lifestyle that impacts the culture around us. But that's not what we see in God's heart here in Ephesians.

God's goal for the PROCLAMATION of His truth in the church is not Christian intellectualism but character development – that we would be able to become more and more like JESUS.

That we would be covered in the dust of our rabbi, remember? And when you think about it, why else would you come here? Why on earth would you sit through a Sunday morning Bible study class – why on earth would you come each week to hear me preach if you had no intention of doing what you hear – of putting what I preach into practice?

Church when we summarize this week and last week into saying that a disciple is one who learns truth – ***when we see that life in Christ is only possible as we learn truth – then we see that God is challenging us in two ways.***

First God challenges each of us personally to become THINKING followers of Christ so that we might be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Become a person who reads scripture – who wrestles with the text – who wrestles with understanding how what this says applies to every day living.

Coming in here and listening to me once a week is not enough to do that – it is not enough to really walk with Christ. Why do I say that? Just ask someone who goes to sermon after sermon and see how very little they actually know. **Coming to corporate worship is a start** – because it will always include a fresh chance to learn truth, **but you need to be reading and studying the Word PERSONALLY and you need to be in a Bible study class CORPORATELY.** You need to study scripture with other people who are also trying to walk with Jesus.

And let me just add this in there as well. Not only do you need to be here – not only do you need to be in a Bible study – not only do you need to be reading and studying the Word – you need to be studying scripture with your kids. When you are not discussing at home with your kids what you and they are hearing in here, you aren't doing Deuteronomy 6 where God says talk about His truth when you're sitting at home – when you're getting up – when you're going to bed – when you're eating – when you're walking – when you're doing whatever it is that you do, be talking about God's truth. Come here and hear God and then go home and talk with your family about what was said here.

Which means God is also challenging us as a church with something important for our vision of moving people to life in Christ one step at a time. The process we saw in Joshua 1:8 has got to be a part of everything we do as a church family. **God's challenge to us as a church is to be actively leading people to learn truth from the WOMB to the TOMB, from preschool to senior adults.**

And here's all we can do in that process. As the church we can and must teach scripture. We can and must give people knowledge of God's Word. We can and must show them how to apply it to their lives – show them what is best according to God's Word, but at that point it is up to the individual whether he or she wants to do what is best.

And though at that point we cannot force people to follow through, we are not responsible for them choosing what is best or not, we can become the biggest cheerleaders they have ever seen in their life. We can't make them live what they have a chance to learn, but we can pray for them to do so – we can encourage them to do so – we can try to hold people accountable for doing so.

We exist to move people to life in Christ one step at a time and as much as giving opportunities to worship Jesus together starts that process, giving opportunities for people to grow in knowledge – to grow in insight – to learn truth flows next.

So whether God uses you in His church as an apostle, prophet, evangelist, preacher, or teacher or if He uses you as a glorified cheerleader - literally, **we together must be a church that moves people to life in Christ by LEARNING TRUTH together.**

Let's pray that we will. I want you to bow your heads this morning with me and I want you to answer some questions between you and God. With your heads bowed, eyes closed – deal with the question:

- 1) Am I trying to be a Christian without holding to the teachings of Jesus?
- 2) How much of what I think comes from my culture and how much comes from scripture?
- 3) Is God's Word the authority in my life or an advisor in my life?
- 4) What am I really doing to learn truth? Do I intend to hear and understand and apply God's truth to my life every time I hear it? If not, why I am I coming to hear it?
- 5) Do I believe God's Word is truth? What do I need to do to show it?