

TRUE RELIGION

April 26, 2020 ser3930 – True Religion, Pt3

Hello everyone, I want to thank you for joining us here today for our Church service.

For those of you who don't know me I am Stephen Childs and I am the Creative Arts Director here at GCCC.

Before we begin, I just want to take a moment to give a shout out to Julie Seifert and my wife Desiree for that beautiful performance of Julie's original song. Thank you both for sharing your gifts with us this morning!

Now, I've got to tell you, whenever I see my wife sing, it truly blesses me more than words can describe, but I've noticed that I have been even more thankful to be married to her during this Covid-19 pandemic . It's not just because we have been stuck with each other every day during all of this, or how beautiful and funny she is to me (although that's reason enough). It's because I can't imagine how a single guy could ever try and "pick up" a girl during this outbreak with both of them wearing one of these silly masks.

I mean what do you do? Are you in the supermarket and your like...Hey baby, I like your smile...I THINK.

I mean it must be pretty hard to "put out the vibes" looking like Dr. Dufus.

And is she like (pulls down mask).

Praise God for marriage that's all I've got to say about that!

So today we are going to conclude our sermon series entitled "*True religion*".

And for me, this has always been a passionate subject to discuss as I have spent most of my life in ministry striving to present viable answers to those who had question about my faith in Jesus Christ.

But what I have noticed more and more, particularly in the past few years is that the very notion of **truth itself** has literally been under attack within our secular cultures and has seemingly reached a pinnacle around the time this pandemic began.

In fact, a recent barna research poll showed that nearly three out of four Americans believe there is no such thing as ultimate, or absolute, truth. And this number is the highest amongst the youth.

And why not? Research also shows that 75% of American college professors have been teaching that there is no such thing as truth.

So it's no wonder that we have seen a dramatic decrease in church attendance by the youth in recent years as the thought of religious truth is looked at as naive, old fashioned , and not fitting within the framework of a more "enlightened" post modernistic world.

Time and time again, I found that whenever I would discuss my faith I would here phrases like, "***Hey that may be true for you, but not for me***" or "***Well as long as you believe in something that's all that matters.***"

But the problem with this thinking is truth means just that. Truth.

It's not the same word as opinion or perception. Truth is an absolute.

If something is **universally** true for me, then it goes without saying that it's **universally** true for you. And the statement that "simply believing is all the matters" is a half-truth at best.

What if what I believe is wrong? Does that still make it right? Of course not.

You see, the sobering fact, is this thinking makes life more complex, it's contradictory and illogical. Without truth there is simply no hope, because there is nothing to believe in. And without hope...we are lost.

In fact, Jesus said in John 8:31-32 - "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will **set you free.***"

We have been anything but free as a society. We have been lost trying to fill a God shaped void in our lives with anything that we could get our hands on.

This is why we recently have seen **huge** jumps in drug and alcohol abuse. A dramatic increase in depression, and there has been an alarming increase in suicide rates...particularly amongst the youth.

You see, people need truth. Especially in moments like these.

Watching the news these last few weeks has proven how devoid of truth we are. No one knows if things are better or worse. Do we lift restrictions, or do we add more? And it's frustrating.

And to make matters worse, there is a trend that I've seen whenever there is a national tragedy. Whether it's the horrors of a mass shooting or terrorism or even with this pandemic, you will see countless articles and blogs asking the question...Where is GOD in all of this?

If there really is an all-knowing all-powerful God...why did He let this happen? How could **this** be truth?

And even believers In Jesus Christ, now facing an uncertain future, reeling from the loss of jobs or even loved ones may be asking the same? Maybe that's you?

I want you to know there is truth to be found in all of this, and that is, God shines the brightest in our darkest hour. In fact, when we look at church statistics do you know what the number one motivation for spiritual growth is?

I'll tell you what it's not...It isn't a great sermon or worship set they heard; it isn't a beautiful building with the latest, greatest technology. Statistically the number one cited motivation for deep and lasting spiritual growth was found to be...**hardships.**

You see this is where we witness **true religion** in action.

And the Bible is replete of examples of men and women who lived their faith as true believers despite the circumstances they found themselves in from famines to persecutions to illness.

For instance, many of us have heard of the story of Job in the Old Testament. The book of Job is regarded as the oldest book of the Bible and yet it's still applicable to us today. You see Job was a man who had his life all laid out before him. He had his routines and was by all accounts very successful. He had money, He had his health He had comfort and a loving family and, He loved and served the Lord.

But God allowed all these things to be taken from Him in an instant? And why?

- Because God forgot about him?
- Because God was punishing Him?
- Because God is mean?

No. What I believe is that God used his hardships to demonstrate to all of us what it means to be **a true believer of a true religion.**

What does **true religion** look like...

- When we face loss?
- When we face pain?
- When we are facing uncertainty?

Do we still raise our hands and praise Him in the midst of it all, or do we lay in our beds depressed and unmotivated?

You see, Job was just like us today. He lost so much and at the same time, also had people around him who said... **Where is God?** Forget your faith. Give up.

And at first, Job was understanding of his circumstances.

In fact, He said the most beautiful passages of faith in the Word of God that should speak volumes to us all.

Job 1:21-22 – *“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” 22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

And then he asked, **Job 2:10** *“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”*

You see **that’s** true religion. To trust God not just when things are good, but when things are far from good.

But even Job, as time progressed, began to question the

“whys of the situation.” He started bringing up how seemingly unfair all of this was and began to bring up his good deeds and how he was not deserving of his troubles

In **Job13:23-24** he said, *"Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face, and count me as thy enemy?"*

You want to know the truth? I've been there. Maybe you have too where, in the beginning when all of this started to unravel, you were living out your faith, trusting in the Lord. Posting Bible verses on Facebook declaring: **The Lord has this!**"

But as time progressed, did we start to have moments of fear and wonder... *maybe God truly has forgotten me? What did I do to deserve this? Is God punishing me along with the world?* And maybe we start giving God a list of all the good that we have done. The times we served, or how we tithed and helped others in need.

If you have found yourself saying and feeling these things, just know we have all been there. But also know...it is not truth.

The truth is...**not all suffering is our fault. Not all trials and difficulties are punishments from God.**

Sometimes we go through hell on earth because quite frankly...this is not heaven on earth. And it never will be.

There are Seasons of good and there are Seasons of bad.

But God uses them both for His glory by building us up as a light in the darkness. That's our role in all of this.

God can use this to bring us... AND OTHERS closer to Him.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 - *For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God.*

I believe that's the truth that we live in right now, and it's hard...It was even hard for Job.

In fact, when we read that when things began to drag out, Job began to have depressive thoughts and became hopeless, dreading the fact that he was even born.

So, what did God do? He reminded Him of the truth that He was in control and did not forget him. That there was purpose behind his hardships. He did it by pointing out to Job His miraculous creation and showed His power and might. That the hardships we go through in life are nothing to the one who laid the foundations of the earth and the constellations in the heavens.

And I will admit. That's where God had to bring me as well. I'll share this with you...

I was sitting at home during the quarantine. I began moping and reminiscing of past summer vacations going to the Jersey shore for the weekends, wondering if those good times will ever happen again. It's becoming almost hard to imagine they ever did happen.

And during those moments, I started thinking of the summer of 2017 where we all experienced an awesome event together. Do you remember what it was? It was the solar eclipse.

And like today...It was another event that EVERYONE was talking about. Everyone was united in that moment and to tell you the truth...it felt a little spooky seeing the sky go from bright and sunny to almost nighttime dark in a matter of seconds.

To me there was some trepidation on top of this as well, because we all had to be cautious not to look directly at it because it could permanently damage our eyes.

And thinking back on that day I truly felt God speaking to me through my complaining and tears... like He did with Job.

You see God revealed to me just how miraculous that eclipse was, and how it was yet, another example of His Power.

Because when you think about it, how can the moon block out the sun when the moon is so much smaller than the sun?

Well, did you ever take your thumb and with a closed eye try and make your thumb the exact size of someone's face. You have to move it and find the right distance to do it but with some finagling...we do it.

Well as it turns out... this same precision is what causes an eclipse. You see the Moon is exactly 400 times smaller than the Sun, and it's also exactly 400 times closer to Earth than the Sun. And because of this balance of mathematical precision, we see this... (ECLIPSE). The moon is exactly the same size as the sun.

It's not bigger, it's not smaller.... its one perfect circle directly over top of another perfect circle. Not a little above it or below it. They are perfectly aligned with one another and what's amazing...ITS ONLY OBSERVED AS AN ECLIPSE FROM OUR POSITION HERE ON THE EARTH. **It is for us... and us only.**

And this gives all of us the one inexplicable truth that no one can deny. **The heavens declare the Glory of God.**

- It shows his might.
- It shows His power.
- It shows us we have nothing to fear!

If my God can do this, can He not also deliver me from my troubles? If God went to this extreme to show Himself to us, why would we ever think He would forget us when we need him most?

That's the truth behind all of this. All throughout history man has faced incredible hardships. It's almost

unavoidable. But God used those times to build up his church

James 1:2-4 - *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*

You see, although Job was a man of high standing before men and God, the Lord was not done with him. Job didn't arrive...And nor have we.

God wants more out of his church. We need to still serve where we can, still tithe what we can. I mean what better testimony to the world and to the Lord Himself then to tithe now when it's so easy to say...No I can't...things are too tight. That's how God will build the church.

He wants...

- A **true religion** that trusts when trusting is hard.
- A **true religion** that serves when serving is hard.
- A **true religion** that stays faithful when having faith is hard.

He needed to bring man to a level playing field where we are all in the same boat facing the same storm where there was nowhere to turn but up.

And He allowed you and I to go through this moment of History for a reason. And that is, He is not done with us

yet. We have a job to do.

And that is to share the truth of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. Not just through our words, but through our example.

You know what this pandemic has taught me? That truth is contagious! So let's take off our masks of fear and uncertainty and show the world what truth really looks like...

It's a relationship with the God of all creation.

Jesus told us out of love that He was **the way, the truth and the life**. That no one comes to the father but through Him.

That is the truth.

So, may I ask you? Have you come to that place where you've accepted Jesus into your heart and asked Him to be your Lord and Savior?

If you haven't, just know God made it so simple for us. In fact, it's literally as easy as ABC...

A - We Admit the truth about ourselves that we have indeed sinned against a Holy God.

Romans 3:10-12 - *"None is righteous, no, not one;*

B - Believe!!!

John 3:16 tells us that - *God so loved the world that He*

gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him -will not perish but have everlasting life.

And that bring us to the C - Commit. Commit to His righteousness.

And if I may, I'm going to add a **D - Do it today**. Because the truth is, none of us are guaranteed tomorrow.

So I'm going to ask that you pray this simple prayer in your heart with me...

Say, Father, thank you for loving me... a sinner. I know that I have done things wrong, things you have called sin. But I also know you did something about it by sending Jesus, who died on a cross to save me from eternal separation from you. And so, Father I accept this free gift of salvation. I am asking you to please forgive me for my sins. Make me born again and alive in your son JESUS. I thank you in HIS name...Amen.