

Gospel Blueprints: What is Truth? John 18:36-38, 9/12/21

Reference Student Retreat and Pray for 9/11

My son Nathan is a huge Lego fan since he was young. Picture of just a few of his vehicles. All of these Legos come with a design, blueprints that show you how the master-builder intended for the Lego to be built. One of largest Legos **USC Millennial Falcon**- \$800 set, 7541 pieces. Challenging enough to build with the blueprints. What if Lego said, "Here are all the pieces, but there are no blueprints, you are on your own to figure it out."

[Title Slide] As complex as the Millennium Falcon is, how much more so is human life? But we live in the narrative of modern secularism that declares there are no blueprints and no master-builder but you. You are your own designer for your life, your body, your family, for your society. Let me be very direct-this series is designed as a counter-narrative to modern secularism. It is our goal to better equip us to navigate the cultural waters that we live in with discernment and poise. We want you to have confidence that the Word of God and specifically the Gospel of Jesus gives us the blueprints to build our lives, relationships and society.

We need to start with what is most essential and fundamental to the formation of any foundation, any discussion on worldview, must begin with the topic of truth. Nothing is more important and more powerful. Truth can inspire revolutions, be the cause willing to die for and as Jesus said, can set us free. What is truth? It is the question that Pilate asked Jesus at his trial before he was sentenced to death by crucifixion. There he was standing before the creator of the universe, the embodiment of truth...and he did not stay to hear the answer, but I hope you will stay. You may not be a Christian or not sure what you believe. We are glad you are here to take a journey with us, we want to challenge your presuppositions. You may not agree with everything I say, and some of you may not like some of what I say throughout this series. But I hope it at least makes you think, and while my thesis is aggressive, my desire is to be winsome and gracious in how I communicate it. Reach out and let's get coffee.

What is truth? I believe the most significant worldview shift we have seen in the last 100 years is the **exchange of Cosmic Truth for personal truth**. Hang with me for a little because this will take some explaining. In 1966 Sociologist Phillip Rieff wrote a landmark book the *Triumph of the Therapeutic*, which turned out to be quite prophetic. He said that the death of God in the West (that is the removal of God and religion from the educational and public society and the rise of secularism) had given birth to a new civilization devoted to **"liberating the individual to seek his own pleasures and to managing emerging anxieties. Religious Man, who lived according to belief in transcendent principles that ordered human life around communal purposes, had given way to Psychological Man,**

who believes that there was no transcendent order and life's purpose was to find one's own way experimentally. Men no longer understood himself to be a pilgrim on a meaningful journey

with others, but as a tourist who traveled through life according to his own self designed itinerary, with personal happiness as his ultimate goal.”¹

“Religious Man” as Rieff calls him, was the dominant worldview everywhere in the world until the last 75-100 years and is still the dominant view in most places outside of the West. Religious man thought truth was outside of them and above them. In order to make sense of life, understand yourself, your purpose and identity, your family, even your pain and your emotions- you had to go outside of yourself and embrace the metanarrative the Cosmic Truth, and align your feelings to that truth. But what Rieff calls the “Psychological Man”- Modern Secularism- the narrative is that now you find truth by going inside yourself, finding your truth through your sense of psychological wellbeing and feelings and then you order your life, your relationships, your identity and purpose around that and society must be ordered and accommodating for your truth.² 60% of all Americans and 74% of Millennials believe in personal truth over Cosmic Truth.³

Implications:

1) The Greatest Authority is Self

The locus of authority has shifted from God to personal feelings. If you pay attention to the maxims of our culture in social media, entertainment, politicians you will see just how pervasive they are and how they are just subconsciously accepted by most people without much thought. Identity narrative- “Be true to yourself. Look inside yourself. You are who you feel yourself to be and no one can tell you otherwise.” I was watching an interview with politician who is now transgender. She was sharing her story about transitioning and giving advice to young people who are considering a transition. She said, “I wish a transperson told me early on that I am the best expert on who I am and what I need to be happy, healthy and safe.”⁴ Not medical experts, not parents, her community, religious leaders, not God- she is autonomous and self-authoritative. I’m not picking on her because it could be anyone making any decision. But her statement that a few decades ago would have been considered narcissistic, delusional and now is received and resonates with the cultural worldview.

2) The Greatest Goal is Personal Happiness

The Westminster Catechism says the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We might say the Modern Secular Catechism would say the chief end of man is to seek personal happiness above all else. Happiness Narrative- “You deserve to be happy. Only you know what will make you happy. Never sacrifice your happiness for anyone else.” Your sense of personal, psychological well-being becomes a higher goal and priority than what is best for family or society or God. One way this is observed- #1 Reason people get married- “They make me happy” and the #1 Reason they get divorced- “I just wasn’t happy anymore.”

¹ Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies*

² Tim Keller, Q Ideas talk.

³ Pew Research Forum, 2019 Study.

⁴ From a 2020 Interview with DE Senator Sara McBride

3) The Greatest Threat is Religious Belief

There was a time when 80-90% of people believed that having religious beliefs and being part of a church were good for you. Even people who didn't go to church thought it was generally a good idea. That's changing- the extreme is becoming more of the norm, increasingly people believe that faith, particularly Christianity is bad for you and dangerous for society. Cosmic Truth stands in the way of personal truth, my self-authority and my happiness. If you say that you believe something is absolutely right or wrong you are seen as narrow, arrogant and potentially dangerous. Absolutes are seen as a powerplay to impose your views on others and oppress those who don't conform. So the strategy of modern secularism is to avoid the powerplays by eliminating truth. As one sociologist commented, "There is no metanarrative, rather there are just stories and symbols that individuals and groups should use to find their own truths about how they wish to live. The purpose of religion, politics, science, literature- is not to find truth (that's oppressive) but to allow individuals and groups to tell their stories to empower them and give them identity. So the only sin is intolerance."⁵ Hence cancel culture who increasingly eats their own. Like the self-proclaimed liberal feminist, Meghan Murphy, who was banned from Twitter for her post that said "Men are not women."⁶ The good, virtuous, open-minded people are those who agree and anyone who disagrees with these modern secular axioms and speaks out, especially on social media, will be vilified as narrow, bigoted, hateful, oppressive and even silenced.

What I've attempted to do in short-order is to give you just a brief portrait of modern secularism. **Blank slide** Now I have spent the last 10 minutes sharing what I would consider some problematic implications of this shift from Cosmic Truth to personal truth. This is not to say that life was great 100 years ago when everyone believed in duty to God, family and country. No- there were egregious sins done in the name of religion- The Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades and Slavery to name just a few. This is also not saying that this shift is all problematic. There are some really healthy things that have come in this shift- the valuing of the individual and human dignity, the a greater concern for issues of justice in the world, a sensitivity and awareness of the importance emotional and psychological health to name a few. However, these are not modern inventions- as we will argue throughout this series, these are all values that emanate from the heart of our Creator and essential aspects of a biblical worldview.

Challenging the "Personal Truth" Narrative and Why we can believe "Cosmic Truth"

#1 Law of Non-Contradiction

Truth is that which corresponds to reality. When someone says you have your truth and I have mine and they are both equally valid, it is OK to say lovingly- "no they aren't." Two contradictory "truths" cannot both be true at the same time. $2+2=4$, it can't also equal 6. I can't say that Jesus is Lord, you say he is not and both be right. We are either both wrong or one of us is right, but we both can't be right. There are beliefs and values that correspond better with reality and are more coherent than others. Do we think the Amorite religion that ripped

⁵ Concept from Terry Eagleton

⁶ <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/journalist-sues-twitter-for-banning-her-over-women-arent-men-tweets/>

children's arms off and beat drums with them, or Jim Jones religion in Giana that resulted in mass suicide are all equal? Christian- be confident, we have a better origin story, a better answer for evil, a better answer for suffering and sin, a better answer to rescue, a sacred book that has stood the test of history and criticism and no one who has solved the mystery of the resurrection.

#2 All truth claims are narrow absolutes.

I heard a pastor share a story about how his brother-in-law was an adamant relativist. His BIL at dinner said, "How can you believe there are absolutes, that's so narrow of you. There are no absolutes, it's all socially constructed." To which he replied, "Wow, you really believe that?", He said, "Absolutely!" The woman who claimed she was the best expert for her own identity.- That is a narrow absolute statement. She is claiming to be right and anyone else is wrong. Don't be intimidated or feel bad about believing in absolutes. What make you narrow is how and why? Have you actually thought about? Are you willing to be challenged and listen? Can you hold your beliefs in humility and love without being a jerk?

#3 The Inconsistency of the personal truth narrative

One philosopher said that if there is no cosmic truth, "your own being is unbearably light."⁷ If you have seen the devastation of a category 5 hurricane to a small town, only things that are able to stay standing were incredibly heavy, grounded things like monuments in the town square. everything else was whisked away. If there is no metanarrative, not Cosmic Truth, nothing about you can withstand the flow of time. It all goes away, nothing in the universe, not you, not your virtue, your good works have any meaning whatsoever. But here's the reality- no one who believes this lives this way. They live according to hard, immovable cosmic truths all the time, just like cosmic truthers do...Personal truthers are not trying to deconstruct and relativize the truth of gravity atop a building because they know cosmic truth will deconstruct them at that point. Not just cosmic truths of physics, cosmic truths in ethics that apply to all of us. As simple as- Personal truthers aren't cutting in line at Starbucks and saying, "This is my personal truth." What if the transgender woman who said she is the best expert who she is and her own wellbeing happened to be a pedophile who justified their behavior by saying, "I'm the best expert in who I am and what I need for my happiness and health." We would say, "Nope, you aren't." If there is truth that surpasses reality, then maybe there is a supreme being who all truth corresponds to and emanates out of. But that's for a sermon in 2 weeks.

#4 Personal Truth Suppresses Cosmic Truth

Let's go back to Pilate's question in John 18. His question was in response to Jesus' claim to be the true King sent from heaven, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. **John 18:37 In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.** Jesus was claiming and defending that there were absolute truths that can be known, and the embodiment of that Cosmic Truth was standing right in front of him. See Pilate was not sincere in his question. For him it was a cop out and passing the accountability for his actions to someone else. Joy Davidman, poet and wife of C.S. Lewis, **"We must understand**

⁷ Quoted by Tim Keller in "What is Truth?" sermon 1995, unknown origin.

Pilate to understand ourselves for he represented the very contemporary view that truth is after all a relative and subjective affair, an agreed upon convention, a matter of expediency and therefore we are justified in doing whatever seems expedient, even as Pilate.”⁸

Romans 1:18-20

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Aldous Huxley- “Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don’t know because we don’t want to know. Those of us who find no meaning in the world generally do so because for one reason or another it suits us. It is an instrument of liberation.”⁹

The reality that our decisions matter eternally, that there is a God who with are accountable to, where we are confronted with the direction of our lives, that not everyone is going to be OK. It’s like a rich old guy who gets a mail order bride. You say- but she doesn’t actually love you, this is a sham and you are living in a fantasy world. That’s the truth. And he says I know that’s true. But I don’t care. But I’m lonely, and she makes me feel good. Truth can set you free, but sometimes we hear truth and we take comfort over truth. If you believe there is no truth, you better have at least done all the research and read the Bible and checked history. This is not something to be trifled with.

5) Jesus is the Embodiment of Truth

Why does is this interaction between Pilate and Jesus in the John’s Gospel? What does he tell us that Pilate asked the question, “What is truth?” and walked away without the answer? I believe the answer is that he wanted us to search for the answer and see it in Jesus. John tells us that the reason he wrote his gospel – *John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Truth is that which corresponds with reality. He’s what I know to be reality- Evil is real. I see it in the world, but I see it in my own heart. Our world cries out for justice- where does that come from but from very nature of our creator? My heart longs to be loved and accepted unconditionally. And I know that I have a deep need to be forgiven, and so do you. Modern Secularism has no answers for these realities... but Jesus does. A one theologian once said, *“Only in the cross of Christ do all four of those, evil, justice, love and forgiveness converge.”* Evil

⁸ Joy Davidman as quoted by Tim Keller

⁹ Aldous Huxley, *Ways and Means*

is punished, justice is served, unconditional love is on display and forgiveness is accomplished. This is why Jesus' last words were, "It is finished."

Maybe you are skipping off the surface of life in your vincible ignorance, and you'd rather not know the answer to truth. Or maybe you are truly open... wherever you are know that Jesus is seeking you even if you aren't seeking Him.