

The Magnificent Story: TRUTH
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
September 26, 2021

Open your bulletins on your phone. We want you to use them in worship. It's part of our preparation. Let me read the sermon intro to you today:

I have two concerns about stories:

1) We think the story is about us, but the magnificent story is Jesus' story. It truly is the greatest story ever told. Colossians 1:15-18 is mouth-dropping. Jesus came in the flesh to show us the way to God. In fact, He is God. Because of His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and pouring out the Holy Spirit, we can have a magnificent story, too. Knowing this compels us to worship.

We have a magnificent story only when we are in relationship with Him, shaped by His Word.

2) Some stories are insufficient. To be magnificent, the story must have all three components: it is beautiful, good, and true. Just because I have had an experience or feel a certain way, does not necessarily mean that it is beautiful, good, and especially true.

In chapter 3, "Participating in the Trinity," Jim wrote about the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (see diagram). We test truth based on four things: **Scripture** is the foundation. John Wesley was a man of one book, the Bible. However, we also need to steep ourselves in nearly 2,000 years of Christian **tradition**. What has the church taught? We learn from others. Third, we are not anti-intellectual – so we insist upon using **reason**. Finally, the candle on top of the cake is **experience**. Unless we experience Christ as real in our hearts, we are not personally connected with Jesus. Many Christians today begin conversations with "I think, I feel," and "this is my truth." Pilate famously asked Jesus, "What is truth?" Pilate didn't comprehend the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus is the One who sets us free. Our story cannot be magnificent unless it ends with "And they all lived happily ever after." Only Jesus can help us live happily ever after. We can never do that on our own.



The word "truth" is found 97x in the New Testament. John uses "truth" 18x in the Gospel and 21x in 1, 2 & 3rd John. The New Testament emphasizes that truth is not as much a **PRINCIPLE** ("true" vs "false") but truth as a **PERSON** – Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus is about believing certain truths + having a personal relationship with Him. These verses all stress the Personhood of Jesus, who is beautiful, good, and true.

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 4:23 *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*

John 8:31-32 *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

John 14:16-17 *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

John 14:1-7 Verse one begins: "Let not your hearts be troubled." Jesus told his disciples to not be troubled, yet says Jesus was troubled in 11:33 when he went to Lazarus' tomb; when He thought about His crucifixion (12:27); and when

Judas would betray Him and Peter deny Him: **John 13:21** says, *Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."* It means "agitated, disturbing, unsettling, & stressful."

1.) **Jesus had a right to be troubled.** Circumstances weren't breaking in his favor. Obviously, Jesus had problems with the religious leaders. They didn't like Him messing with their power structures or traditions. He was crucified for a reason. His "I Am" claims (Bread of life, light of the world, gate, good shepherd, resurrection & life - now He says He is "The Way, the Truth, + the Life") were extraordinary/offensive. He had to deal with outsiders.

Jesus also had to deal with the "insiders." His disciples were argumentative, belligerent (call fire down from heaven), racist (to kill Samaritans), greedy (Judas was stealing money), clumsy (Peter with a sword in the Garden), competitive (who sits at Jesus' right hand?), cowardly (they didn't stick around at the crucifixion) & confused.

John 13 ends with 2 failures: Judas leaves the Last Supper to betray Jesus. Jesus tells Peter before the rooster crows; Peter will deny Jesus 3x. Jesus was troubled by Judas' treachery, disappointed by Peter's denial, and in so much anguish about the impending crucifixion that as He prayed in Gethsemane, His sweat was like great drops of blood. Betrayal, denial, and crucifixion are spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical deaths. Jesus experienced disappointment.

WE have a right to be troubled, too. Life is a series of troubles. Following Jesus doesn't mean everything breaks in our favor, in fact, following Jesus may cause you more troubles. We gain nothing by minimizing or denying problems. It helps to acknowledge our hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

We are often disappointed in OURSELVES. We are not what we want to be. We desire to be strong but are weak. We aspire to be disciplined, but sloth so easily besets us. We want to be successful, but often experience failure. We want approval, but people ignore or dislike us. And we are disappointed in OTHERS. It may be a family member, a friend, someone we work with or go to school with. Sometimes people do evil things. And CIRCUMSTANCES are a source of troubles. Sometimes we can do something about circumstances, but often we cannot. Poverty cannot always be changed. Accidents happen. Sometimes we lose our jobs. Health situations may be chronic. The loss of a loved one is beyond our control. Sometimes these circumstances lead us to anxiety, anger, fear, or shame. And we also have SPIRITUAL troubles. Maybe we get on God's nerves, and He just ignores us or wants to punish us. Sometimes we have "the dark night of the soul." What are we supposed to do with our failures, and those of others? What about the circumstances that aren't good? What about our moments of despair; our "dark nights of the soul?"

2.) **Jesus had more reasons NOT to be troubled.**

*Jesus is God. God in three **PERSONS**. We have a relationship with the Lord. A week from tomorrow, I'll travel with 28 others to Israel. I will get on an airplane that I will not fly and end up in Tel Aviv where I will get on a bus that I will not drive and stay in hotel rooms that I did not build. I will travel the Land and go places that are beyond me. How does this happen? I must have travel agents (one in Philadelphia who works with our Jerusalem-based company) and guides. I cannot do this on my own. I need a guide.

Jim quotes Scot McKnight, *"The central question of the gospel is not how can I be saved, but who is Jesus? Your relationship to Jesus unleashes redemptive power. I hear people say, 'We need to get people to make a commitment to Jesus.' My response always is, 'We need to get people to know Jesus.'" If they come to know Jesus, in his beauty, goodness, and truth, they will naturally make a commitment to Him.* Jesus never said, "believe my arguments" or "believe my teachings," but He did say, *"Follow me."* At its core, faith is trusting in a person. Jesus says to trust him; not just believe in a principle or proposition, but to have a relationship with Him.

*He tells them they have a great **PLACE**. They have a destination – the Father's House. They are going somewhere. We all need a place of safety, security, comfort, and love. While we have a great place, it won't be about how big and fancy our mansion will be. What makes it wonderful is that we will be with the Father and with our siblings in the faith.

*He also tells them they have a **PURPOSE** in life. In the following verses Jesus tells them they will do even greater things.

We all face storms in life. We are all storm facers. We all face trials and ultimately death. The big bad wolf is coming our way. This is not optional. We will choose how to construct our lives. We can build life on straw, of wood and hay, or brick. The risk doesn't go away. The storm is coming. The good news is Jesus has built a house for us. "In my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you." His house isn't weak. As Luther wrote, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." That's our Father's house. As we know Him, we are headed to

be with Him. Our faith is built on our relationship with Him. We say it in our communion liturgy: *“That we may be one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”*