

For Your Good

on John 16:4-15
from the series *Sacred Space*
by Pastor Tim Porter, March 11, 2007

[*worship team member*] I invite you to open your Bibles and follow along as I read John 16:4-15.

“I did not tell you this at first, because I was with you. Now I am going to Him who sent me. Yet none of you asks me ‘Where are you going?’

“Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief, but I tell you the truth, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

“When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. In regard to sin because men do not believe in me. In regard to righteousness because I am going to the Father for you can see me no longer. And in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own, He will speak only what He hears. And He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you.

“All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

[*Pastor Porter*] An objection comes in our culture and the objection goes like this: ‘Christians believe they have absolute truth, but people who believe they have absolute truth oppress others and harm the freedom of others.’

This is the objection that comes from the western world to Christianity or anyone, any worldview, any religion that claims absolute truth. This is what Pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York calls one of the ‘defeater beliefs’ of our culture. Because this is so widespread and to highly held, Christianity cannot be true.

This is an objection that comes to us, yet this is an objection that right now, today, in our culture is not novel, it’s not new. In fact, it can be traced back to Frederick Nietzsche.

Nietzsche lived from 1844 to 1900 and he is most famous for his phrase “God is dead.” What he meant by that is that we have sufficiently shown that God doesn’t exist. And if that is true, if God doesn’t exist, then we’ve got to figure out some grounds for morality because God was the grounds for morality in the past. We’ve got to figure out how to do morality without God.

This is a combining phrase—it isn’t a direct quote from Nietzsche—this is a combining phrase regarding the heart of what he believes: “Any belief in truth enslaves. Only when one jettisons the very notion of truth is one truly free.” To be truly free, you have to jettison the very notion of truth.

Now I’ve probably lost about fifty percent of you because you were hoping that instead of saying ‘Nietzsche’ I would say [Ray] Nitschke, but I didn’t. And bringing up a German philosopher can be difficult at the introduction of a sermon, but I want you to stay with me, please, if you would. It’s

going to get better, I think, but it could be worse. I could be quoting him in German, but I'm not going to do that.

To move from a barbarian language like German to French [*laughter*—sorry, that's somebody else's assessment, not mine—a French philosopher who is highly indebted, *highly* indebted to Nietzsche for influencing his thoughts is a man named Michael Foucault, a French philosopher who lived from 1926 to 1984. Foucault took Nietzsche's ideas and put his own little spin on them. He looked at systems of truth and he realized that truth is manufactured, and it is manufactured by those who are in power.

Maybe you've heard the phrase at some time that "those who win write history." That idea can be traced by to Foucault—that power leads to truth, and then that truth is used by those who are in power to keep those who are under them, those in oppression, those in subordination to those in power, in their place. You use truth, then, to oppress people.

So what Foucault did—if power brings truth—is say that any truth claim, any time someone says 'this is true,' they've just made a power play. They have just oppressed someone with that thought, with that statement. Tracking with me so far?

Now this isn't just nice 'across the pond' over in Europe. We have a very important 1992 [U. S.] Supreme Court decision in our nation's history. This is verbatim from that decision:

"At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence or meaning of the universe and of the mystery of human life."

I'll say that one more time. This is a finding, a court decision: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence or meaning of the universe and of the mystery of human life."

Said a different way, this is Foucault all over again. As soon as I say to you or you say to me or to anybody else 'this is true for all of us,' you and I have just restricted the heart of liberty. In other words, you've just oppressed somebody. Because at the very heart of liberty is my right to determine for myself 'the meaning of existence and the mystery of human life.' As soon as you say to me that you know the meaning, you've just oppressed me. Liberty is at stake, with truth, according to this decision.

Now these ideas make their way down to those in their late teens and early twenties in this video:

[*audio from video clip*]

Female voice 1: Do you think there is one specific religion that is right or that all religion's good—or right?

Male voice 1: All religion's good.

Female voice 1: All religions are right?

Male voice 1: Yeah, I don't think one specific one's...

[*new scene*]

Female voice 1: Do you think there is one true religion or are all of them true?

Male voice 2: I would say that there is not one true religion but I don't know that all of them are true.

Female voice 2: I think it's really arrogant to say that, like, my religion is *the* right religion and everybody else is wrong, umm, because how do you know that yours is right. You could be, like—that's

just what your parents taught you and what, how you were raised. And, like, how do you know that your neighbor doesn't have the right religion or whatever and that yours is wrong.

[end of video clip]

[Pastor Porter] (pause) You should weep over this. (pause) A girl in her late teens, early twenties saying that it's arrogant for her to say that one religion is better than another or more true than another. This is Foucault, this is Nietzsche. It's taken a couple of hundred years, almost, but it's now part of the very air we breathe in our culture—the very air we breathe in our culture: To speak of truth is to be arrogant, all at the same time.

Into this context, into our western world with this worldview prevalent in the very things that we breathe, Jesus says this in the passage that was read today:

“I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes”—notice, ‘*Spirit of Truth* comes’—He will guide you into *all the truth*, for He will not speak on His own authority but whatever He hears He will speak and He will declare to you the things that are yet to come.”

The passage that we're looking at today, first and foremost, is directed to the disciples so that they understand their place in history at that point in time. Jesus' coming and His eventual departure by way of crucifixion and then resurrection, to be exalted at the right hand of God, His Father, our Father, changes the world in a way that the world has not yet seen. Because when Jesus leaves, His Spirit will come. When Jesus leaves, the Spirit will come. He will ascend to the Father's right hand and the Father and the Son together—two separate persons, two distinct persons—will send another person, the Spirit, and that Spirit will speak what He hears. And that Spirit will speak about what Jesus has taught and about Jesus' significance, and He will guide the disciples into all truth.

First and foremost, this passage is about the Spirit. But a few weeks ago in his sermon *Out of Sight, Wonderfully Present* Haugen talked about the Spirit, and last year, March 25 and 26, we had Bruce Ware, the author of this book, *The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit*, here during Intersect 2006, and you can still get those presentations on our Web site at www.faithcommunity.info. Because we've had people talk a great deal about the Spirit and, specifically, about the Trinity—how Father, Son, and Spirit relate—I'm going to talk, in this passage, about *truth*, specifically, the Spirit of Truth who guides into all truth.

And the reason why I want to talk about truth from this passage is because this passage in John is found in the larger book of John which is written specifically to show that Jesus *is* the Truth. John in his book about Jesus, his gospel about Jesus, uses the word group for *truth* 48 times. Now this might not seem like all that big of a deal, but when you see it in light of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the other gospel writers, they only use it about ten times. They only use it about ten times—the word group for *truth*.

John is recording faithfully for us something significant about Jesus and that is in regard to *truth*. So we need to hear what he says about truth, especially in our context.

The book of John opens with a significant statement about seeing Jesus. They saw Him with their eyes. John writes: “We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only”—talking about Jesus here—“who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” “*Full of grace and truth.*”

Now we don't tend to think those two things go together. Someone's either graceful or someone's really truthful. If they're truthful, they're a pain in the backside. Right? If they're full of grace, oh, they're nice and mushy. But not with Jesus. They go hand-in-hand. “Full of grace *and* truth.”

Jesus says later on in the gospel, in chapter 8 verses 31 and 32, to His disciples: “If you hold on to my teaching, if you hold my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then”—now notice: it’s if you “hold His teaching”—“then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” We like that last line: “know the truth and the truth will set you free.” But we divorce it from its context. What did Jesus say? To know the truth “you must hold on to my teaching.” ‘My teaching is what reveals what the truth is—my teaching.’

Then Jesus makes what is probably one of the most offensive statements (to our modern culture) by saying, “I, I am the way, the truth, and the life.” We like the *life* part; it’s just the *truth* and the *way* part that gets in the way. ‘Jesus, you are so arrogant to say that you are the truth! to say that you are the way! How can you do such a thing?’

With Jesus emphasis on truth and Himself being the truth, what would, say for example, Jesus say if we had Jesus and Foucault right here. Foucault says that any truth claim is a power play. What would Jesus say to Foucault if He were here? I think He would say ‘You’re right.’ ‘You’re right.’ Truth claims are power plays, sometimes.

This is one of the things that Jesus came against. In Luke 11, Jesus is talking to the experts in the law and He says this to them: “And you experts in the law, woe to you. Cursed are you.” ‘You’re going to be destroyed. Why? ‘Because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry and you, yourselves, will not lift one finger to help them. You experts in the law use your understanding of the law to burden people, to load them down and then you will not lift a finger to help them. Yes, truth can be used in power plays.’ Jesus would affirm specifically this.

In fact, did not Jesus undergo the worst power play ever created? We’ll come back to that.

But Jesus wouldn’t only agree with Foucault, He would also critique him. This is something that Tim Keller does as he deconstructs what Foucault is saying. This is very helpful.

To say that all truth claims are power plays is to make a truth claim, itself. Right? As soon as I say to you, ‘All truth claims are power plays,’ I’ve just made a truth claim. And, “following your train of thought,” Tim Keller says, “I don’t have to listen to you.” ‘Great, you’ve made a truth claim. Now get out of my way, I’ve got more important things to do.’

It’s a horrible irony. As soon as I say that to make a truth claim is to make a power play, I have just made a power play and I’ve just oppressed you, so don’t believe me.

In fact, irony of ironies, this week as I was doing just a little dabbling on-line with Foucault, I found a Web site dedicated to misconceptions about Foucault. I’ll say that again. There’s a Web site dedicated to misconceptions about Foucault.

Now just think about that for a second. If truth is a power play, how in the world can I make a Web site that’s trying to get at what Foucault actually said and not be putting a power play over on you? That’s exactly what I’m doing: I’m telling you what to actually think about Foucault when Foucault said, ‘you should just read me and whatever you think, just do it.’

Jesus says, ‘Look. No, “All truth claims are power plays” is not right. What matters is not the truth claim as a power play but what is said as the truth claim and the intent of the truth claim.’

See the significance? the difference? the distinction? It’s not just the making of a truth claim. It’s ‘what are you saying is the truth?’ And ‘Why are you saying it?’

We’ve all experienced this at some time, right? We *know* when people have spoken truth to us but they have not spoken it to us in love, they’ve told it to us to destroy us, to hurt us, wound us, injure us. Yes,

we can step back and say, 'Yes, what you've said is true, but the way you said it—you are intending to hurt me, not to help me.' You know the distinction.

It's not someone *making* a truth claim that does this; it's what is *in* the truth claim—what is *in* the truth claim and what is its intent.

Jesus would also agree, in theory it seems, that truth is not an abstract principle. We need to get this in line here as we come to Jesus who says that He is the way, the truth, and the life and that in Jesus are found grace and truth, that truth in and of itself is not an abstract principle or a list of things to be believed out here. Truth is not abstract principles. Truth is a person. Truth is a person—hear that well.

At the heart of truth is a person: Jesus Himself, who tells all that the Father is, from whom the Spirit is given to remind and to teach. Truth is a person.

Now that doesn't mean that we jettison or do away with lists of right things to say about who Jesus is and about God's word. We don't do that, but we see that there's a distinction. Not a separation: they're held intimately together; not a separation but a distinction.

For example, you could—I don't know why you'd want to do this and if you did it we'd probably have you checked in some place, but you could go through a listen to all my sermons and [extract] a list of the things I believe. But just because you know what I believe doesn't mean you know me if you've never talked to me.

We need to be careful as Christians—specifically as Jesus talked about truth—not to isolate Jesus and say, 'Well, all you have to do is believe these things and you are a Christian.' No. You must believe in the *person*, trust the *person* about whom right things are said. See the distinction?

Truth is not an abstract principle, Truth is a person. And to be a Christian is not to know a list of abstract truths. It's to know a person who says He is trustworthy and true, about whom right things can be and need to be said. We don't trust in the abstract truth, in and of itself; we trust in a person.

In fact, I think this is the most important thing I'm going to say today. (And you might be wondering, then, 'Well, why don't you just be quiet after this' [*quiet laughter*], but I've got some more time to kill.) But this is, quite frankly, one of the most important pieces that I'm going to say today, for I can tell by looking at different world religions, looking at different worldviews, Christianity is unique in this: Christianity does not call us, Jesus does not call us to make a leap of faith. Jesus calls us to trust in Him, a person. Very big difference.

We are not called to make a leap of faith, to hope that something might be there that we're going to trust in and that maybe by taking this leap of faith we might find it. No, no, no, no, no. Jesus as man says to us, 'Trust me. Trust *me*. I am truth. I am truth.'

When we encounter this Jesus, we find out some very important things about Him and His claims to being truth. We are transformed because we see that truth is, again, in and of itself, at its heart, not some list of abstract principles. Truth is a person. Truth is relational.

Now we're going to talk a little bit about the Trinity from John 16:12-14, the passage for today. Jesus says this to His disciples:

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own, He will speak only what He hears. And He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you.

“All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

Now there is all kinds of stuff, here, about the Trinity, of course, and that’s a whole other sermon, a whole other book, so we’re not going to tackle that today. What I want to see though, are the words of Jesus about truth and that it is relational.

The Father gives to the Son all that is His. And then the Father and the Son give the Spirit so that the Spirit makes known all that belongs to Jesus. There is relationship in the truth—relationship in the truth. Truth is relational, and we know this to be true.

Think about your relationships. Do you enter into or stay long in relationships where people lie to you? What does lying do? Lying destroys relationship—lying *destroys* it. If you lie to me, I don’t know if I can trust you.

Relationships are built on truth. A lie coming into a relationship causes it to unravel, to fracture. Truth, rightly said, coming into a relationship builds relationship. Being trustworthy.

If I lie to you, would you want to trust me? to come into a relationship with me? Would you want to spend time with me? You wouldn’t know whether or not anything I said was true, if you were wise.

Truth is relational. Our human relationships are built on it.

We also see from this passage about the Spirit and the giving of the Spirit that truth is *revealed*. This is a place where Christians, myself included, have done a poor job at times. We tend to think that if we have the truth then we have a corner on the market and we tend to think a lot of ourselves because we have the truth. And there’s a little bit of truth to the claim that Christian’s are arrogant because at times we are arrogant with the truth.

We need to remember the story. We need to come back to the gospel. Did Jesus go around looking for the brightest, smartest guys to be His disciples? No. He didn’t look around and say, ‘Who are the sharpest tacks in the world right now? I want to go find them.’ No.

The disciples are constantly confused. The disciples are constantly trying to figure out ‘What is Jesus talking about, anyway?’ If the disciples are there and they’re hearing His words straight from His mouth, should we really think that we’ve got it all figured out? No. There’s a humility that comes about—right?

This is what Jesus is emphasizing in these verses. Jesus says this about the Spirit: “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes He will guide you into all truth.” You can’t figure it out on your own, disciples. In fact, I have things to talk to you about that you can’t figure out, right now—you can’t even bear it. But when the Spirit comes, He will guide you.

Now if you need a guide, that means you can’t figure it out on your own, right? Truth is revealed to us. If God did not speak, we would be left to ourselves. Left to ourselves, unable to figure anything out.

Just think about what it must have been like to be Peter. If you’ve read any of the gospels, you know a little bit about Peter. He’s the loud-mouth who speaks out of turn—sometimes I know him all too well. He makes bold claims. Think about the recording of him. He might say, “Thank you for recording my efforts, John. That was really kind of you. Now everyone throughout church history knows that I am a loud-mouthed knuckled head who oversteps his case every now and again and I don’t have things figured out.’

But there's a nice part about that. We know by looking at Peter, we know by looking at the disciples, that we don't have to have it all figured out. Christians don't have to pretend to have it all figured out. Jesus never requires us to. What is required is that we trust in the One who has it all figured out.

Christians don't say, 'We've got it all figured out. We know the truth.' Christians say, 'I know the Truth, and He knows it all.' We are humble with the truth. Stand up with conviction but humble with the truth because everything we have has been given to us. *Everything* we have has been given to us.

(*pause*) Going back to Foucault, it's not truth claims that are, in and of themselves, oppressive. It's what the truth claim contains and the intent with which it is spoken. If anybody ever comes to Jesus and says, 'Your statements that you are the truth—you are arrogant to be making those claims. You are arrogant to be making the claim that you are the truth.'

Jesus would say, 'Read the rest of the story.' Truth was crucified.

It was not as though Jesus was just nice and truth and standoffish. No. Jesus entered into the mess. 'You want to talk about power plays, Foucault—you want to talk about power plays? I've undergone the greatest power play. I came to earth saying, "I'm the truth." I came to earth healing. I came to earth bringing wellness, bringing wholeness. And you killed me.' Talk about a power play. Jesus knows power plays intimately. He faced them. He underwent them. Truth was crucified.

Truth, specifically, gives Himself a sacrifice for those who don't deserve it. This is what truth does. Truth doesn't sit up on the mountain and say, 'Ah, I know it all. I've got it all figured out.' No. Truth Jesus-style goes right into the mess, takes on the worst that humanity can throw at Him, and beats it. Not in a distant, removed way does He cry out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

Truth was crucified. Jesus knows power plays very well because He, as Truth, voluntarily gave Himself up for people who didn't deserve it. Keep reading the story. Don't take Jesus' words out of context. The one who claims to be Truth, also claims to be the way. And the way that Jesus makes is *through* death *unto* life. Through *death* unto life.

(*pause*) James Mercer is the lead of a band called *The Shins*. In a recent *Wellstone* issue, February of this year [2007], he says this: "Growing up in the age of Wal-Mart and Seven-11, which was the landscape of my youth, I'm craving authenticity. I think everyone is. You know, there is something real out there you can buy but you just have to scratch the surface to find it. I think people are sick of fakeness."

Notice what he wants. He wants *authenticity*. He wants authenticity and he knows that there's fakeness out there and he can't stand it anymore. He's sick of fakeness.

Now just substitute the words: authenticity ~ truth: fakeness ~ false. That's what he's saying. He's saying he wants truth. And this is the horrible, horrible piece of this philosophy, this worldview that comes down from Nietzsche to Foucault to us. The very thing that our hearts hunger for is for people to be real with us—for authenticity. But you're not going to find it in this worldview. Give up hope. You're in despair. You'll never find the authenticity you're looking for if there's no such thing as truth.

So you either have to kill that part of you or maybe, just maybe there is truth in a Person who's relational.

(*pause*) When we encounter Truth—this is the Biblical story over and over and over again—that when we encounter Truth, Jesus crucified, a sacrifice on our behalf that we don't deserve, we are transformed. When you encounter Him, you are transformed.

We've seen this before. Think to the closing scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*. Captain Miller is charged to go with his company to save, redeem, Private Ryan whose brothers have been in the campaign during WWII. The brothers are killed so it's decided that Private Ryan should come home. As the company is going to find him, they're debating 'Why him? I've got a family. I've got friends. I've got loves, I have sisters, I have mothers, I have brothers, I have fathers, I have wives. Why him? Why not me? Why should I give my life for him?'

And in the closing scenes you see Captain Miller dying, face to face with Private Ryan. And Captain Miller says to Private Ryan in a breathy voice, "Earn this. *Earn* this." Miller knew that sacrifice transforms. It changes lives.

Ryan, in the closing scene of the movie, is at Miller's grave site, his wife, his children with him. Ryan turns to his wife and says, in desperation and in hope, "Tell me I've been a good man."

Now forget for a moment all the weird, works-based theology that's a part of that and think only about this part, because this is the correspondence: Undeserved sacrificed, when encountered, transforms. You know that once you've encountered it you can not be the same. It requires transformation. When someone sacrifices on your behalf and you know you don't deserve it, it changes you.

This is not just true is historical fiction, which *Saving Private Ryan* is. I experienced this as well when I was in fifth grade. No, let me back up.

I grew up in and around the church. When I was in fifth grade, my grandparents had taken me to church and there were times, unlike services here at Faith Community—I mean services there were really sort of boring [*laughter*—and I did not want to go to the service that day with my grandparents. And one thing that we would do as fifth and sixth and seventh graders was that we would go volunteer in children's church during the time of the service so that we could get out of going to the service and cloak it in that we were serving people. Really, it was just a lot of fun to hang around with these little kids and we would swing them around and they'd come back for more, you know? So this one day I did not want to go to the service, so I told my grandparents that I was going to volunteer to help in children's church with a couple of my buddies.

We went down there and they didn't need any help. They had more teachers than they had kids. Okay—so, we could go back up to the service and be bored, or we could go down the street to Rocky Rococo's and have a little pizza with the few dollars we had in our pockets and no one would know the difference. And that's what we did.

We went down to Rocky Rococo's, had a nice slice of pepperoni and sausage pizza, came back, and my grandparents said, 'How was children's church?'

'Just great. Just fine. Wonderful.'

Go home and later in the afternoon my dad gives a phone call to my grandfather. The phone call ends. My dad comes to me. "Did you work in children's church today?"

Okay, how long before I actually have to admit I didn't go? Let's see, I go through the scenarios. "No, I didn't go today."

"Okay, well, we need to go over to your grandparents. You need to go to your Grandfather and tell him that you lied to him and ask him for forgiveness."

So we go. We walk into their house and I see my grandfather sitting in the same brown leather chair that is now is in my house, I've inherited. I look at him and say, "I lied to you."

I knew that day something I had never known before. I knew I had disappointed somebody. I had lied countless times before and have lied countless times since then, but that time, that time was different. I lied to someone who sacrificed for me. I lied to someone who only thought good for me. I lied to someone who was always seeking my good. I could never look back into my life and say that my grandfather was mean or that he had ever intended something wrong for me—no. That day I realized guilt in the face of someone who deserved better, who had given them self for me, who sacrificed for me and I didn't deserve it. And I was transformed.

I vowed that day 'Never will I do this to my grandfather again. It hurts me too much.' It hurt me too much to disappoint him.

When we encounter Jesus who says He is the truth, who takes on the cross on our behalf, who underwent the worst power play for us, when we encounter Him—not a list, but Him—it transforms us.

(pause) Let's pray. *(pause)* Father, save us from one point of despair that says there is no such thing as Truth. Save us from that despair. We know it, deep in our hearts, not to be true. And save us from the other despair that puts up religion and abstract truths as savior. And Father point us to who Jesus is, who is the Truth, who represents you fully, who gives the Spirit that we may know You, truly.

Thank You for Jesus' death on our behalf, His undeserved sacrifice on our behalf.

And now, grant that Spirit will be working, uniting our hearts and our tongues and our minds that we would sing to You truthfully. True things because you are truth. Thank You, Father. Amen.