

## **“The Battle for Truth” (John 17:13–19)(4.28.21)**

John 17:13–19 (NIV84)

<sup>13</sup> “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

Title: **“The Battle for Truth”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

We have in this scripture, Jesus’ prayer for His disciples the night He is arrested; likely in the vicinity of the Garden of Gethsemane. That is what Jesus means by “I am coming to you soon;” by which He means coming to His Father. Jesus will be crucified the next day.

With that in mind, you can easily see that Jesus is identifying a dichotomy – two opposing cosmic forces. This is why I titled this message “The Battle for Truth.” On one side is The Evil One and the World. On the other side you have Jesus and His disciples.

As Jesus was sent by the Father, Jesus sends the disciples. They are not of the world, but they are sent to confront the world. The disciples are equipped with the word from God the Father given through God the Son. It is this very gift of revelation that separates followers of Jesus from the world.

This word is Truth! Hebrews 4:12 (NIV84) For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Note that Jesus is called the Word of God and that in John 14:6 (NIV84) <sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Most everyone here has heard the **Battle Hymn of the Republic**

1 Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
he hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;  
his truth is marching on.

Refrain:

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

Yes, my friends, the Battle for Truth rages on today. If we open our eyes, we see this battle in our culture. Unfortunately, we even see the battle for Truth in the Church of Jesus Christ. The Evil One and the World hate the Truth of God.

BODY:

John 1:1 (NIV84) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 (NIV84) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Full of grace and truth. Full of grace and truth.

I tell you that the World, meaning all those things that oppose the Kingdom of God, does not want to know the truth. They make of show of wanting truth, but it is merely the shadow of human wisdom that they idolize. We see this void of truth and the resultant angst in Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus.

John 18:37–38 (NIV84)

<sup>37</sup> “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, **to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.**”

<sup>38</sup> “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

Pilate is the representative of the Emperor of the Roman Empire. He is powerful and educated. Certainly he knows the great Greek philosophers. This Empire controls much of the known world and represents human progress – roads; aqueducts; Temples; and, a dominant military force.

Today we hear an echo of Pilate's lament, “What is truth?” Pluralism tells us that there is no absolute or objective truth. You can have your truth and I can have my truth. Everything is relative. Can't all religions get you to God? Is Jesus the only way to heaven? That is just one school of thought, but I belong to another school of thought.

When I was attending Drew Theological School, one of my required courses was Philosophy of Religion. Dr. Robert Corrington was the Professor. He is well known in scholastic circles and has written and edited many textbooks on philosophy. I found this course very challenging. During breaks, I would ask my classmates if they understood what was being taught, but they were in the dark too.

This subject was supposed to be important and I was determined to get the most out of it that I could. In my studying, I would prepare a list of questions about anything that I found confusing. At one point, I raised my hand again, and I think Dr. Corrington reluctantly called on me.

I gave the page number and quoted the philosopher. Then I said, “If this statement means “A,” then it contradicts what came right before it. If this statement means “B,” then it is pointless.” After a very long 20 second pause, Dr. Corrington answered, “Yes, that's true. Now, let's move on.” From there, I became even more skeptical of the course material. I had thought that much of my confusion was due to my limitations, which may have been true; but, the philosophers themselves were often confused.

We should not be surprised when the world is in chaos and confusion. That seems to be the normal state in human history. When this chaos and confusion is evidenced within the Church, then I am even more concerned. We have witnessed this in many independent churches, in denominations, and within the United Methodist Church denomination. When a church entity espouses the philosophies and positions of the World instead of scripture, you can be assured that the Evil One has infiltrated that church entity.

1 John 5:19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. Who is the Evil One?

After Jesus was baptized, he was led into the desert to be tempted by the devil. In that scripture, the Devil is also called the Tempter. Jesus calls him Satan, which means accuser or adversary. Jesus responds to Satan's temptations with God's word. Three times Jesus says, “It is written.” Of course, He means it is scripture.

In the third temptation, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” How could the Devil make such an offer? John 12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now **the prince of this world** will be driven out. Colossians 1:13 For [God] has rescued us from **the dominion of darkness** and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1–2 (NIV84),

**2** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of **the ruler of the kingdom** of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

2 Corinthians 4:4 **The god of this age** has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Why am I taking time to tell you about the Evil One? If you are going to battle for the truth, then you need to know and understand the Enemy of truth. There is a famous book called *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. Hear an insightful quote from this book:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.” WE MUST know our Enemy.

No one knows the Evil One better than Jesus. And how does Jesus describe Satan? The answer is in John 8:44: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

There is no truth in the Devil, in Satan, in the Deceiver. In contrast, Jesus is the Truth. Jesus came in the fullness of truth. Jesus came to testify to the truth. There are two sides in this battle. Those on the side of truth and those that oppose God; those that have been blinded; those that cannot see the revelation of God Almighty. 1 John 3:8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.

This is why Paul entreats us in Ephesians 6:10–17 (NIV84) <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, **with the belt of truth buckled around your waist**, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, **which is the word of God.**

In Jesus’ prayer for His disciples we learn more about the importance of truth. Truth is from God. It is found through obedience to God’s word. When Jesus refers to the sanctifying effect of the word He means it in a least two ways. In one sense, this sanctification makes us right, being purified, and being made holy. In another sense, this sanctification is to be separated from the world for heavenly purposes. Disciples of Jesus are set apart. They do not look like the world or act like those in the world.

My grandson, Ben, goes to The Pilgrim Academy. All the students take a Bible class every year. He is preparing for a debate about whether the Bible better supports universal atonement or limited atonement. He texted me last Wednesday morning. Can you help me with my Bible debate tonight? I took the opportunity to make a joke and texted him back, “The Bible wins every debate.” He replied, “Yes it does.”

Between fifty and sixty years ago, the 1960’s and 70’s, it was a time of turmoil in the United States. In what was characterized as freedom and individual self-actualization, 2,000 years of church teaching came under attack. When participation in the life of the Church began to decline, many churches came to believe change was needed to get people to come back.

No doubt, the church must adapt methodologies, but the content must not be compromised. Some churches chose an attraction model, which too often devolved into being entertainment focused. But, many of those churches grew in attendance so other churches followed suit. You have probably heard the terminology Seeker Sensitive and there is merit in the intent.

Another aspect of human wisdom was applied to the Body of Christ. Because so many of the denominational structures had become institutionalized, it seemed natural to apply business models and strategies. Pastors were to become managers. Decisions would be driven by numbers, numbers, numbers. We needed to improve marketing, establish our brand, and enhance our image.

Then evangelism efforts were modified. The thought was that we needed to make things simpler; we needed to make things easier. The message of the gospel was narrowly defined as individual salvation. The focus was to get someone to make a decision for Christ, to accept Jesus into their heart. If they said the salvation prayer or signed a pledge card, we counted them as a convert.

In contrast, let us hear from Jesus: Matthew 16:24–26 (NIV84) <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup> What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

CONCLUSION:

Over and over again, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth.” In the Gospel of John alone, Jesus says it 26 times. John 3:3 (NIV84) In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” John 5:24 (NIV84) “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” John 8:34 (NIV84) Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” John 8:51 (NIV84) “I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”

And I will give you two from the Gospel of Matthew: Matthew 5:18 (NIV84) “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” Matthew 17:20 (NIV84) He replied, “...I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

This battle for the truth is a serious business. We are called to live radically committed lives for our God. We have an Enemy that opposes us. The more success we have in claiming this world for Jesus, the more intensely we will be attacked. Therefore, put on the whole armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

My friends, I tell you that the world’s concept of freedom is simply license and whim. The wisdom of the world calls us to self-fulfillment. The truth is that freedom is found when we live into the lives God has purposed for us. The truth is that self-fulfillment is attained when we submit to God the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus is manifested in our lives.

John 8:31–32 (NIV84) <sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;  
as he died to make us holy, **let us die to make all free**,  
while God is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.