

John 1:1-30

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[0 : 00] The one lesson that the cyclist Lance Armstrong needed to learn was that in the end the truth always wins.

! After seven tours, seven Tour de France wins, seven yellow jerseys, he'd become an international sports icon. He'd had a phone call from President W. Bush and he famously become the top of his game of cycling.

But at the end he on the Oprah Winfrey show live admitted to doping, to drug abuse. He and others had lied to the world throughout most of his professional career.

And this lie was so all-encompassing that his multinational sponsors couldn't afford for the truth to come out. Even the FBI stopped an investigation because of the power that he had over government officials.

The body of lies that he'd created was so powerful and so great. But the truth always wins.

[1 : 20] I don't know if you know the story of Lance Armstrong, the cyclist. What was interesting about that story was how those who knew the truth about his drug use were treated by him.

His personal trainer was threatened by legal action. She spoke the truth. A friend gave false testimony in court in order to keep her job. She hid the truth.

You see, in a place dominated by a lie, the only truth is a vulnerable truth. The truth, if you believe in it, gets you into trouble.

It struggles to survive. It's a threat to the status quo. And it's subdued. But the truth, as in Lance Armstrong's case, always wins in the end.

Well, if you were around this morning, we saw earlier in John chapter 18 how Jesus, just before his death, gives us an explanation of his birth.

[2 : 25] There in verse 37, chapter 18. For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I've come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. But as the truth comes into the world in the person of Jesus, truth is personified, but is gravely under threat, here in the trial of Jesus.

The religious leaders and the Roman governor conduct this mock trial on trumped up charges, where neither the judge nor the accusers care about the truth, or want to face up to it.

In a place that is dominated by a lie here, the only truth is a vulnerable, subdued, disregarded truth. Jesus inevitably becomes a crucified truth. It's a world that John describes earlier in his book, in chapter 3.

He says this in verse 19, this is the judgment that light has come into the world, but people love the darkness. People love the darkness, rather than the light.

[3 : 36] Because their works were evil. So do you see that actually as Jesus comes into our world, as the truth, there's only one thing that can really happen to him, isn't there?

Because he is the one who reveals the truth to us about God, and the reality of our lives. He is truth incarnate, truth as a man, the light of the world.

But he poses a great threat to the darkness we love, to hide in. And so he becomes a crucified truth. As one writer puts it, Jesus could not be the truth, without being called to die for the truth, as the truth in this world.

This is how far the real truth fares in our world. It becomes a crucified truth. A truth that faces rejection and scorn, because, John says, people love the darkness, rather than the light.

So as we think about the birth of Jesus, the truth coming into our world as a man, we immediately have to look at the consequences of that, which is his crucifixion. And his death.

[4 : 56] Isn't it interesting how John places this statement of Jesus about his birth in a narrative about his death, right at the end of the Gospel.

But you see, that's his point, isn't it? That the only real truth in this world is the truth that Jesus brings us, and when he does that, he is immediately rejected and killed.

He inevitably becomes a crucified truth. But I want us to see tonight that even though the truth of Jesus is rejected in our world, in the end, the truth always wins.

As John says in his prologue in chapter 1, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Jesus' truth, his light always wins. So I've got three points tonight. The first two are slightly similar, and the last one we'll look a bit more at what they mean for us, a bit of application.

[6 : 03] Firstly, when the lies seem to pay in this world. That's our first point. When the lie seems to pay.

Seems to pay. And one of the most attractive things about lies, I guess that we've all felt and we've all been tempted with, is the feeling that you can get an easy shortcut to something better, isn't it? By living a lie, you can live in an alternative world that suits you. It's good for the here and for the now. Sometimes we think that lies pay.

And it looks that way, doesn't it, for Pontius Pilate and for these Jewish religious leaders at this trial of Jesus. If you think about it, both of them, even though they've rejected the truth, and they've gone with lies about Jesus, they've all actually got what they wanted here.

So, even though the religious leaders have lied about Jesus, they've got what they want. They've got rid of Jesus. He's dead. For them, the lie seems to pay. They've got what they wanted.

[7 : 19] They can keep their position as Pharisees, and their life can carry on as they want it to.

And for Pontius Pilate too. Even though he's acted against the truth that he admits to himself about Jesus, he also gets what he wants.

Pilate's a pretty crafty guy. He doesn't simply give in to the religious leaders until they promise to pledge allegiance to Rome. Look at what they say in verse 15, chapter 19. They say, we have no king but Caesar.

Jesus dies. Lies seem to pay for Pilate. He has the allegiance of the Jews. The religious leaders keep their religion how they want it. Pilate keeps his political power and keeps the Jews happy. Pilate keeps his political power and keeps his political power and keeps his political power and keeps his political power. And isn't it true that in this world, it often feels like believing a lie about Jesus pays?

Does it really do us good to receive the truth of Jesus? Does it really pay, we might ask, when Christians lose their jobs or are threatened for believing the truth of Jesus?

[8 : 41] But you can get ahead, can't you, without Jesus? Because in this world lies seem to pay. And isn't that because we live in a world where the only truth we recognise is the truth of power.

Whoever is strongest, whoever shouts the loudest, whoever has all of the influence, all of the military power maybe, they can say what's true, can't they?

And even if that truth is a lie, lies pay in our world. Where the real truth of Jesus is crucified.

Getting rid of Jesus might well actually tide you over for a while. You might even be perfectly content and happy tonight if you're doing that with Jesus because lies seem to pay.

Don't think that people who reject the truth about Jesus, like Pilate or the religious leaders, will suddenly get struck by a bolt of lightning. And that their lives will be terrible.

[9 : 52] No, because often it seems as though in this world lies pay. And it looks like the truth has lost. The light shines in the darkness, but hang on John, the darkness here pays for Pilate and the religious leaders.

It's just unfortunate, isn't it, that Jesus is the truth and he gets killed. That's just the way it is, it's a shame. But lies pay. If you're living without Jesus, and life seems to be going well, well perhaps that doesn't mean that what you're doing is right or true.

Because lies in this world can seem to pay. But secondly, as well as lies seeming to pay here, the truth always wins in the end.

The truth always wins in the end. Isn't there a sort of sadness, there is a deep sadness, isn't there, in seeing someone who lives their life through a lie?

Because although it seems to pay for a while, we see here in this passage in the lives of these religious leaders and in Pontius Pilate, that the truth will always catch up with them in the end.

[11 : 12] It makes them tragic examples of the futility of rejecting the truth that Jesus reveals. So just take the religious leaders for example.

Well, they'd thought they'd won, hadn't they? They'd get rid of Jesus. But at the same time, by living the lie of getting rid of the truth of Jesus, they'd deny their own heritage as God's people. Remember what they said, we have no king but Caesar. Now it says in the Old Testament that they were claimed to keep to, that God's people only have one king. He's called God. So to keep the truth of Jesus away, they betray their own identity as God's people. They pledge sole allegiance to this earthly gentile king Caesar. In living a lie, they end up convicting themselves as well, don't they, of killing this innocent man, who is also their promised king, the Messiah of God's people. [12 : 20] See, that whenever we reject the truth of Jesus, we betray not only him, but ourselves. We undo something inside us.

We harden our consciences. Lies pay for a while, but the truth always wins. And as we see these religious leaders, mortally wounding themselves, saying things that perhaps they'd never dread they would say.

They defeat themselves. You might remember back in chapter 11, the leaders say about Jesus, that if they let him go on behaving the way that he is, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come away and take away both their place and our nation.

They're worried about this. They're worried about their political status in the land. Yet by living the lie, those very things happen to them.

Only a few years after the crucifixion, the Romans come and destroy the temple to historical facts. And it's never been rebuilt since.

[13 : 35] They should have known, shouldn't they, that it's always been the same in the land. The only way to be secure is to trust in God and receive his king over their lives.

The lies seem to pay for a while, but in the end, the truth always wins. Then just think about Pontius Pilate. The lies seem to pay for him for a while too, don't they?

He keeps his position. But as we thought about this morning, he loses what is most precious to him as a political leader. He loses his integrity.

Pilate gets a hollow victory here. Because he is supposed to be an independent ruler. But he stops ruling independently.

He becomes a puppet of these Jewish people who fought his hands. He makes a decision which again betrays himself. Betrays his own convictions about Jesus.

[14 : 40] And he is left trying to atone for his mistakes ever after. The lie pays for a while for Pilate, but the truth catches up to him in the end.

Shortly after this, the history books tell us that Pilate is removed from power in Jerusalem. And taken back to Rome for disciplining.

Because of disorder in the city. And it's his name, isn't it, we remember 2,000 years later in the Apostles' Creed. Jesus was crucified and suffered under Pontius Pilate.

He not only betrays Jesus, but he betrays himself. His memory is immortalised by a lie that seemed to pay at the time.

Living the lie that Jesus can be crucified in your life. That he can be politely brushed off may seem to pay for a while.

[15 : 38] But please realise that by doing that you undo yourself. You defeat yourself. Because the truth of Jesus will always win in the end.

Now what about Jesus himself? Lies seem to pay for everybody else, don't they? There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness, slain.

Even though the Jews and Pilate have mortally wounded themselves, by contrast, actually, Jesus appears to be the major loser in all of this, doesn't he?

The truth is inevitably crucified as it comes into a world of lies. But as the embodiment of truth, Jesus will always win in the end.

You see, even in his death, Jesus has not lost or yielded anything. He has ultimately not lost anything.

[16 : 41] And he has gained everything. Because the truth of Jesus wins in the end. Think about it. Jesus keeps his integrity, doesn't he? He lives and dies in a way that is true to who he is.

He has lived a life of love, of service to others, and of uncompromising obedience to God. And he dies in keeping with his divine character.

Obedient to his Father. He keeps his integrity. His name remains clear and clean. He entrusts himself to God and puts his faith in him.

In the end, Jesus wins. And he completes his mission, doesn't he? He becomes subject to lies and deceit.

But he yet completes what he came to do, to die for sinners. Like you and me, to be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

[17 : 40] He reveals God's love to us. That God the Father loved the world so much, that he sent his one and only Son. In the end, Jesus' truth wins.

He completes what he came to do. But most importantly, the lies of Pilate and the Jewish leaders and the world come to nothing in the end, because Jesus is raised from the dead.

Lies are overruled, and the truth wins in the resurrection of Jesus. God the Father vindicates the truth of Jesus by raising him from the dead.

Now you may not have noticed this before, but when Jesus talks about his death earlier in John's Gospel, he talks about his death to his disciples, especially in the upper room discourse from chapter 13 to 17, you can read it later.

But as he talks about the end of his life, Jesus there, it's interesting, doesn't dwell on the moment of his crucifixion. It's quite strange. So when we read about the last moments of Jesus' life, it's described in different ways.

[19 : 00] Let me read a few of these passages out. So John 13, verse 1, John says, Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. Then he says to his disciples, John 14, 12, John 16, 28, John 17, 28, I came from the Father, and I have come into the world, and now I'm leaving the world and going to the Father.

John 17, 5, And now, Father, he prays, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

See, the point of those verses is to show us that neither John the Apostle nor Jesus thought of his crucifixion as a defeat.

The cross is where lives seem to win. But the cross for Jesus, it merely marks a moment in his departure from this world to go and be with his Father, to return to glory.

[20 : 25] The glory that he had at the very beginning. It is just a staging post in a journey to glory. Jesus is sure, isn't he, that in the end, truth, his truth that he embodies will always win.

The cross is not a defeat for truth, but a victory leading to glory. In our world, truth comes through power.

Whoever is strongest says what's true. But in Jesus, we see that power comes through the truth that he embodies.

Jesus brings us the only truth. He is truth incarnate, as we thought about this morning. He was born to bear witness to the truth.

And when the truth comes into a world full of lies, it is crucified. And that's inevitable. But Jesus' truth always wins.

[21 : 35] As we close, let's think briefly about where this all leaves us tonight. What does it mean to live for Jesus, the truth in this world?

We think maybe that brushing the truth about him aside will pay. But his truth always wins. So where does this leave us? Let me tell you a story about a writer, Vaclav Havel, who was around in the late 70s.

Vaclav Havel published an essay which got him into the Czechoslovakian prison. The essay was titled, An Attempt to Live in Truth of the Power of the Powerless.

Not a very catchy title, but I think you get the gist. Havel devoted himself to criticising the communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

He describes the life of those living under the regime who live the lie of all the propaganda. Think perhaps of North Korea today and what that could be like.

[22 : 48] He tells the story of a greengrocer who displays a pro-communist sign in his shop window. He says, why does the greengrocer display this sign?

Any political system that causes such an act of inauthenticity in its people symbolises the rule of a lie. In fact, people's every action is a lie.

Voting in elections that are meaningless. Listening to speeches that are inconsequential. Saying the opposite of what they really think. Displaying an ideological slogan under obligation because they don't want to get into trouble.

This is what living a lie is all about. But Havel asks the question, what would happen if this greengrocer were to start to try and live in the truth?

If he were no longer to go to elections where the results were already decided? If he stopped going to events just to toe the party line?

[23 : 56] If he were to speak his mind rather than parroting the beliefs of those in power? What would happen if he were to remove that sign from his shop window?

Well, Havel himself knew what would happen. And the consequences were certain for anyone who spoke up for the truth in the midst of a system of lies.

In a system ruled by lies and darkness, the truth is a crucified truth. One that is crushed and subdued. But listen to what Havel says about suffering for the truth.

Living in the truth has the potential of causing the collapse of an entire system of lies. And in his case his words proved prophetic.

The Iron Curtain fell. And the man who served repeatedly in prison for speaking up for the truth was appointed president of his country.

[24 : 56] Just after the fall of communism, the nation's coat of arms had the title, Truth prevails.

And so in this world where the ultimate truth God reveals to us in Jesus, in his son, shedding light on us that first Christmas is a crucified truth.

It seems to pay to reject him and to believe a lie. In our world truth comes through power.

But Jesus turns that upside down doesn't he? In real power comes through the truth.

The truth of his gospel. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus come to us as a warning that in the end lies do not pay about Jesus.

Avoiding his truth does not pay. They also come to us as an encouragement. Because in the end it seems there is no greater power than the truth of Jesus.

[26 : 08] And there is no greater power than standing up for him. To live in the truth and cause the collapse of an entire system of lies.

There is no greater power than being a Christian and hoping in the truth of Jesus. The truth of Jesus is the power of the powerless.

There is no greater power than being a Christian who holds on to the truth embodied in Jesus.

Because the lie of crucifixion, of rejecting Jesus, never really pays in the end. Because his truth always wins.

Let's pray. Let's pray.