

Truth or Consequences

Introduction:

Some of you are old enough to remember the Quiz Show “Truth or Consequences.” It actually started as a radio program in the 1950’s, but ran as a television program well into the 70’s I believe. On the original program, people were asked a tricky question to which few people knew the answer. A buzzer would sound after just a few seconds, which meant the contestant would now face the consequences for not knowing the truth. They would then have to perform some stunt that had been prepared for them. They would also be given a prize.

Well, life isn’t a game show, and the consequences for not facing up to the truth can be a lot more serious than that, and there’s not often a prize waiting. Facing the truth can be a little bit scary. I mean, many of us have parts of us that we’ve been trying to keep hidden for a long time. We know it’s not healthy; we know it’s not good; we know we should deal with the real issues in our lives, but... It was Plato who said, *"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when adults are afraid of the light."*

In John chapter 8 Jesus deals with this very subject. The scene takes place in the courts of the temple in Jerusalem about 3-4 months before His crucifixion. He’s speaking to a mixed crowd. There are some Pharisees and some Sadducees, two different branches of Judaism. There were also some ordinary, everyday people who just wanted to hear Jesus teach.

As He taught, the people began to make up their minds, one way or the other, about this Jesus. To those who believed that what Jesus was saying about Himself was true, He began to speak. We find what He said in John 8:31-32: *"To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"*

These verses, and the section that follows, are very interesting, and they’re very representative of a lot of people. I would like for us to take note of a few things that we can learn from this.

1. Believing is only the beginning.

These people had just heard Jesus proclaim that He was “*the light of the world.*” (v. 12) They heard Him say that God was His Father and that He had sent Him (v. 16). And these people believed what He had said – they were interested; they were intrigued.

This group represents hundreds of people that I’ve encountered in my life – people who would say, “Yes, I believe the Bible is true. Yes, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Yes, I believe that church is important.” But Jesus doesn’t send out a congratulatory letter and say “Welcome to the family!” There’s a Japanese proverb that says, “*Beginning is easy - continuing hard.*” Rather, Jesus begins the next sentence with a word that we have grown to hate... “IF.”

“*If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples.*” There’s an implication here. It was not all right in Jesus’ eyes, if they stayed where they were. Something had to be done. There was a condition that had to be met for them to be called His disciples.

2. Discipleship requires obedience to Christ.

Let’s define some terms before we go any further with this. What is discipleship? We don’t often hear this term any more. It really has to be understood in the context of Jesus’ life and times. The Greek word for “disciple” literally means “student” or “pupil.” But there’s even a deeper meaning here.

You see, in Jewish culture, everything revolved around the Torah, or God’s Word, and every young child, from an early age, would study the Scriptures. If they excelled, they would be chosen by a teacher or rabbi, to become apprentices. They would get in-depth, hands-on training from the rabbi. It involved a single-minded commitment. While other young people would be learning the family trade, perhaps fishing or carpentry or leatherwork, these “disciples” would commit their time, energy and resources to learn everything they could from the Master.

Jesus said “*If you hold, or continue, or (literally) stay in My teaching, you are really My disciples.*” It’s the picture of a group of students sitting at their teacher’s feet, learning from Him; watching Him as He models the lesson; becoming more and more like Him in thought and action. It’s the same picture that Paul paints as He writes to the Galatian church about his desire to see

“Christ formed in them.” The object, then, of our discipleship is to become like Christ – to think like Him, to act like Him, to love like Him.

How does that happen? Jesus clearly tells us that it’s by a consistent exposure to His Word. Jesus’ inner circle of twelve disciples spent three years living with Him. They followed Him around; they heard Him preach; they were able to question Him about what He meant. They watched Him as He interacted with people; they saw how He had compassion on the widows; how He loved the children; how He embraced and healed the sick and the lame. They absorbed all of this.

After He left them to return to His Father they, in turn, modeled all of this to new believers as they were empowered by the Spirit of Christ. The teaching and the miracles did not stop just because Jesus’ earthly ministry was over. It continued right on through the work of His disciples and their disciples and has continued right on to this day, through all of those who are willing to spend the time at Jesus’ feet. Let’s look at what else we can learn from in these verses.

3. The truth is revealed as we spend time with Jesus.

Let’s get right to the big philosophical question – what is truth? The dictionary very simply defines truth as *“that which conforms to reality.”* Jesus said in John 14:6, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Later on in this very chapter we’ve been studying, Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh. That’s one very large, audacious claim. He claimed to be the one who defines reality - truth. Christianity exists today only because Jesus verified His claim by rising from the grave and defeating death. If He did not do that, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:14, *“... if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”*

So hear me – this is the ultimate question – is Jesus who He says He is? If He is, then He knows everything about you because He made you – He is God. He also loves you, and has called you, and has a plan for you. Do you really believe that? Can you really commit yourself to that? You see, this is the difference between those who are just interested, and those who would be His disciples. Which are you?

It matters, because as we make that commitment, as we begin to expose ourselves to the truth that He reveals, we begin to see ourselves for who we are, in the light of God’s truth. Our habits, our excuses, our secrets are revealed to

us by the Holy Spirit as sin – sin that will keep us from becoming all that God wants us to be.

4. The truth will set us free.

The point to this exercise is not that God shows us how bad we are so that we can live our lives in guilt and shame – far from it. The point is that Jesus calls us to face the truth in our lives in order to be free from the chains that hold us back. The world, this community, this church is full of people who are bound with chains that keep us captive – that prevent us from becoming all that God has called us to be.

Those chains may be chains of addiction, lies or deceit. We may be hiding out in prisons of anger, fear, guilt or denial. It is into that reality – our reality – that Jesus walks boldly and declares that *“If the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Conclusion:

I think it’s interesting that these people to whom Jesus was speaking rejected His message. They were so much like we are. Read this chapter when you get home. Basically what they were saying is: “How dare you talk to us like this. We’re not in chains. We’re good people. What do we need to be set free from?”

Masks. Our first reaction is to protect our image. Who me? Oh no, not me. I don’t have that problem. I don’t have that issue. Oh sure, I’ve had challenges in my life, but I can handle it. As Peter Lord said, *“When our embarrassment level is exceeded by our desperation level we are a candidate for God’s grace.”*

We all have choices. One of the biggest choices facing us is to go on living our lives pretending that we’ve got it all together – like these people Jesus was talking with. Think about it for a minute – they were arguing with Jesus about the truth. They were arguing with God in the flesh, about what was real. They were telling Jesus that what He said about what was in their hearts was wrong.... It happens all the time.

We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are. Jesus hasn’t called you to just believe something; He’s called you to become all that you were created to be. Free to live, to love, to risk; to believe. Free in Him. It’s time to face the truth – He’s already dealt with the consequences.