

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: "Did God Really Say?"

Text: Genesis 3:1; Acts 23:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-20

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-4-21 **UNEDITED**

- When I was growing up in school in Detroit, MI, I was taught a story about our first president, George Washington. When little George was just six years old, little George took an axe to a cherry tree owned by his father and gravely injured the tree or completely chopped it down.
- Of course, this wanton deforestation of the Washington estate was not the point of this story. *Green* ecological policies were not yet in place in the Colonies.
- The moral of this story derives from little Georgie's reply when asked by his father if indeed he had chopped down said cherry tree. We were taught to be proud of and follow the model of our someday first president who replied, "***Father, I cannot lie. I did indeed chop down your cherry tree.***"
- The official video on the Mt. Vernon website, by a man with the interesting title of, Mt. Vernon *History Interpretation Manager*, makes it ***absolutely*** clear that this story ***must*** be a myth made up by a writer named Parson Mason Weems, an early biographer of Washington.
- The *History Interpretation Manager* is, of course absolutely certain this story is false. I doubt he concludes this because he was actually there at the time because he doesn't look old enough. I suspect he concludes it because, in his *experience*, six-year-old little boys may injure cherry trees with an axe but six-year-old boys absolutely always—that is without any possible exception—***lie*** about it when asked by their fathers to take responsibility for their actions.
- I guess that is how one ***manages*** the interpretation of history.
- I'm not CERTAIN whether George did and said what the story reports or not. Right now, I'm not all that concerned about this personal uncertainty. I am more concerned about something along the lines

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of what this next *meme* I show you suggests. If you cannot read it because of how you are consuming this sermon, the meme is a cartoon of a guilty looking little George standing near and injured tree stating to his father, "*I cannot tell a lie.*" However, as the captioning says at the bottom George goes on to say, "*Can I interest you in some alternative facts?*"

- Now, please pay close attention to this deft homiletical move in which I will seamlessly connect together a story of a six year-old boy with a destructive axe, a "Mt. Vernon History Interpretation Manager", Easter Sunday, the Resurrection and the OT book of *Genesis*.
- The potential confusion over cherry trees, history and alternate facts began a long, long time ago in a place far away from here. What started then continues to confuse the nature and content of **truth** as reality through human history, including the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- When and where did confusion of truth and the introduction of "alternate facts" begin? A description of that beginning is recorded in the familiar **Genesis 3:1**. That verse reads, "**Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman** (i.e., specifically he posed a question to the woman), **Did God really say...?**"
- You probably remember how that question continues but the posing of that question is my connection with *Genesis* on this Easter Sunday Morning in 2021 in COS at 5590 N. Nevada Avenue. In our real-life context, it is still the Deceiver's most potent, direct question.
- **Do you really know what God said?** And, the implication along with that, can you really believe it when it is outside of your personal experience as a modern day *History Interpretation Manager*?

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- C.S. Lewis (or at least someone who sounded like him) wrote: *"If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair."* And, *"You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death for you."*
- Because I have never before been this age I am now, I am not sure if the very strong feelings I have about truth these days reflect a correct perception of the changed understanding of truth in our culture or the feelings are just how a man my age naturally comes to feel about truth. At least that much of this, you will need to sort out from Scripture with the illumination of God the Holy Spirit.
- But, just to start, here is how I *feel*—truth is more upside down than I have ever experienced in my life. This is why I have been haranguing the "Yutes" and even the FBC Elders with a constant call to *found* all truth and actions based on it in Scriptural TRUTH revealed by God and not feelings or emotions.
- Our feelings or emotions, on their own, apart from a solid Scriptural foundation permeating our thoughts, words and deeds, can easily move us to seek what Lewis called "*comfort*" as truth—that is, what makes us feel good—but will ultimately bring us "*despair*" not the freedom of God's truth.
- In a sense, when it asked, "*Did God really say?*" the serpent was asking Eve what do you *feel* God is saying because, ultimately Eve had no more information to add to the equation than what she felt about what God was saying. As the serpent knew, truth is easily turned on its head when truth becomes defined as how we humans *feel* about things

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- It doesn't matter much when a Mt. Vernon *History Interpretation Manager* proclaims with absolute, expert certainty that the *truth* is George Washington never said, "*I cannot tell a lie.*" That manager actually *feels* certain that from his experience and his resultant *feelings*—that no six year-old would say such a thing. Look, knowing some six year-olds personally and up close, I probably "*FEEL*" the same way but that doesn't make it absolute truth. But again, who cares anyway?!
- But what about feeling and then proclaiming as truth that, for example, *Justice* is really something called "*equity*"—an this "*equity*" would have often been called "*injustice*" right up to a short time ago when some folks decided they *felt* differently and that *feeling* now constituted "their truth" which must be "THE truth?"
- Or, what about a news organization's recent bold statement presented as if it were accepted "truth," that "*It's not possible to know a person's gender identity at birth, and there is no consensus criteria for assigning sex at birth.*"?
- This "truth" comes from some today *feeling* that the *true* truth is gender, sex and sexual attraction are not binary—and especially not parts of our identity created by God but rather are up to us to choose as we *feel* our own truth about ourselves.
- There is even current legislation in the US Congress about to come up for discussion and potential codification in the Senate called the "Equality Act" that affirms that the really *true* truth about gender is whatever a person *feels* their own truth about gender to be.
- Of course, God said in Scripture, God's *truth* is that "*male and female he created them.*" Do you remember that part of *Genesis*?
- God's truth in Scripture about the meaning of "*justice*" is very different—focused in a totally different direction—than the word

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"justice" we hear bandied about as **"truth"** today simply because people *feel* it is truly justice.

- It is Easter Sunday not Gender Fluidity and Critical Race Theory or Justice Sunday. I only bring these up as examples of how *true* TRUTH for me—God's truth from God's Word is turned on its head even by some believers who have bought into the idea that truth is about what they *feel* to be "their truth."
- I bring this up today especially because this "upside-downing of Scriptural truth—God's Truth—is not, at all a new phenomenon in the world or even in Jesus' church.
- ***Did God really say?...*** Asked a deceiving serpent.
- In Jerusalem, after being arrested and beaten, the Apostle Paul was released, with some great angst on the part of his "torturers," after those Jewish leaders found out they had illegally beaten a Roman citizen. Being told this, the Roman commander, rather than doing what we might think of as the "just thing," did the convenient and pragmatic thing and let the Roman-lawbreaking, Jewish leaders put Paul on trial.
- The truth—God's truth--is not really what was being sought in all this. What those in charge *felt* the truth to be mattered much more and was claimed as the truth.
- Luke records the questioning in Acts 23:1 and following **READ Acts 23:1-11**
- Now when Paul seems to *feel their* truth along with them and that gets the Pharisees a win against the Sadducees, Paul's truth is OK truth. But this is not really how truth works. Certainly not God's truth! We and Paul aren't making it up as we go along to "feel" true or to manipulate a situation to our advantage. No! We and Paul are

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simply **testifying** to God's truth—what is really true no matter how anyone feels—no matter what anyone's personal truth might be.

- ***We are testifiers to God's, Scriptural truth not makers or shapers of our own authoritative truth even when we claim our truth is from God!***
- Paul had learned earlier that he would face this truth issue even inside of Jesus' church. The Corinthian believers apparently sent Paul a letter that contained a series of questions. Some of the questions were seeking information from the Apostle. Others were questioning what the Apostle had called God's Truth and taught to them.
- The fifteenth chapter of *1 Corinthians* may be in response to one of these questions. It may just be that Paul has heard of an issue about God's Scriptural Truth in the church in Corinth being challenged by some "alternative facts" someone *FEELS* to be *their* truth.
- **READ 1 Corinthians 15:1-2**
- Folks, says Paul, let me remind you of the good news I testified to by my preaching. You accepted this good news as true and you decided you would live by it—that is, you would "stand on it." Paul doesn't use the word "truth" here, but certainly it seems like he is saying the Corinthians accepted what he said as being the truth.
- If they now reject what Paul said—if they now change their mind on what they *feel* is truth—at least concerning what he has in mind here as the Gospel—the whole *deliverance* of their lives—*salvation* here is not simply the matter of going to heaven—the whole matter of their lives being delivered from uselessness to fulfilling their created purpose will be a no go.
- Why is this so? Because it is **God's** truth and that is real truth. **READ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8**

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- What is Paul's primary, foundational critical evidence of the truth of the Gospel? "Christ died according to the **Scriptures**," Christ was buried according to the **Scriptures**," and "Christ was raised according to the **Scriptures**."
- This truth is not something Paul believes because he *feels* it is truth. It is truth because God said it is truth in God's Word, Scripture.
- Human testimony matters to Paul but it is secondary. Paul does not believe the resurrection is truth simply because Peter and others say they saw Jesus.
- Paul does not even believe the resurrection is truth because Jesus "*appeared to him*" after the resurrection. Paul believes the Gospel and here, especially the resurrection, is truth because God said in his Scriptures it is truth.
- Interestingly now, today, I can say to you that the **truth** is that Peter, the twelve, the more than 500 brothers at the same time, James, all the Apostles and Paul, all saw the resurrected Jesus. Why can I now say without any doubt that their testimony is truth? Not because it feels like truth to me and fits the narrative I wish to tell. No! Because Scripture in *1 Corinthians* 15 now tells me they saw him and thus, Scripture confirms their testimony as God's *true* truth.
- Paul goes on in verse 9. **READ 1 Corinthians 15:9-11**
- Is the Gospel truth they believed, and especially the resurrection here, truth, or not truth, because of the messenger Paul? No! Does truth depend on whether or not a hearer likes the messenger? Does it depend on how entertaining a job the messenger does to testify to it? If it's more interesting, does that make it truth? No! The Gospel Paul testified to and the gospel they believed was absolutely *true* truth because God said it in his Word—in the Scriptures.

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• **BUT... "Did God really say?"** Look at verse 12. **READ 1 Corinthians 15:12-19**

- The truth is, and this is what I preached—this is what I testified to says Paul, "Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead!" This is God's *true* truth in God's Scriptures.
- So, what will you do Corinthians when the **History Interpretation Managers** of your Corinthian culture come along and, with great certainty, tell you what *their* truth is instead?
- *"Doesn't the wise Plutarch make it clear the truth is that death releases the soul from the body and the body is no more so therefore there can be no bodily resurrection?"*
- *"Haven't the interesting Stoic ideas that are becoming more and more popular now told us that the truth is that, at death, the body goes to the earth forever to remain while the soul is released in freedom to the atmosphere?"*
- *"Paul, aren't you aware that not even all Jews—Jesus was a Jew you know Paul—not even all smart Jews believe in that earthy, carnal idea of a bodily resurrection as truth Paul."*
- *"Paul some of us are absolutely certain George Washington didn't chop down his dad's cherry tree and that the idea of bodily resurrection may be an outmoded concept for us. That's what we feel strongly to be truth! That's our truth Paul. Don't you agree with what we feel about this Paul? Or do you reject our truth and thus reject us?"*
- **"Did God really say?"** *"Yes my brothers and sisters in Corinth, God really said, in Scripture, that Messiah would die and be raised from the dead **bodily** to live a new life **bodily**. "So, guys, I'm going to believe that is truth since God said it rather than what you feel is truth!"*

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- So then, what Paul points out confirms the point that C.S Lewis made. If some of the Corinthians reject the possibility of bodily resurrection because that version of the truth fits better in their culture and *feels* better to them—if they select what is true based upon their comfort—they will end up with Lewis' "soft soap and **despair!**"
- He says, if there is no such thing as bodily resurrection—then Christ wasn't raised as the testimony says, to new life. If Christ wasn't raised because resurrection can't happen, then that Gospel—that Good news was empty. Your faith—your trust was empty because what you trusted to be true was empty.
- As a side note, if the resurrection of Christ isn't true, then the messenger, Paul, is a liar because he claimed with all his heart that it was the truth of God.
- If the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true, as some of you Corinthians are feeling your truth now, then this whole Christian faith thing is a waste of time. You are still human beings trapped in sin, and its indicator DEATH, and you have no hope to escape.
- As sad as that thought is, those people you put in their tombs dealing with that loss by the comfort that you would one day see them again—forget them. If Christ's bodily resurrection can't be true, they are gone and gone forever without any hope.
- If Christ was not raised from the dead bodily—if that is not the truth—this Christian stuff—is a waste of life. The sacrifice of this world, in faith, while seeking a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God elsewhere, is a foolish way to live if Christianity is built on un-truths—and it is untrue, if the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a lie as some of your truth is now telling you.

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- If God did not raise Jesus from the dead, bodily, to new life—if that is not THE TRUE TRUTH, then the whole God and Jesus thing is a house of cards that will crumble in front of you while you can only despair of no hope! Sin, and sin's partner death, then have no answer.
- **HOWEVER... HOWEVER**, look please at what Scripture now says—not what Raleigh says—Scripture God's Word says in verse 20
- **READ 1 Corinthians 15:20... READ 1 Corinthians 15:20... READ 1 Corinthians 15:20**
- You see, what matters here, what Paul was telling the Corinthians and what Raleigh is telling the Colorado "Spring-ians" is what Scripture says because Scripture is God's Word and God's Word is TRUTH—what we are saying is...
- It doesn't matter what the smartest thinkers of our culture might say. **The TRUTH is Jesus Christ was bodily raised from death to new life and he is alive today and forevermore.**
- It doesn't matter if anyone can or cannot devise a rationalistic test-tube of an experiment to prove the possibility of resurrection. **The TRUTH is that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from death to new life and he is alive today and forevermore.**
- It doesn't matter what theologians—Christian or otherwise--say. **The TRUTH is that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from death to new life and he is alive today and forevermore.**
- It doesn't matter what your friends think of the claim of the resurrection. **The TRUTH is that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from death to new life and he is alive today and forevermore.**
- It doesn't matter what your personal experiences with death around you have taught you. **The TRUTH is that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from death to new life and he is alive today forevermore.**

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- It doesn't matter what you **feel** about this Scriptural truth of resurrection (and this is where we are in danger of moving more and more away from God's truth today because our world tells us "that what we feel is our truth and that comforts us but always courts disaster and despair rather than freedom). **It doesn't matter what we feel or don't feel to be the truth—feelings don't make it or break it.**
- **The Scriptural TRUTH is that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from death to new life and he is alive today forever more!**
- ***Did God really say?*** Yes! God Really said that Jesus Christ is alive! That is the TRUTH! That Scriptural truth means, by faith in him, we too can have hope—we too will one day be free from the devastation of sin and death to live life with him forevermore.
- Maybe, as I said, I'm just older now and truth feels so upside down to me...more than ever upside down.
- Maybe exposed some every day for a year to arrogant *experts* and their obnoxiously blaring media partners shouting they have the truth of how to live in a pandemic—maybe this has just gotten on my nerves more than normal times.
- Wear this...No don't wear this! Stand here...No don't stand here! Do this...No don't do this!
- "Follow the science!" Follow the science!" But what often appears to be the so-called "science" is the personal truth the expert **feels** because it will give me them the results they want and that is comforting for some power reasons I can't endorse!
- In our culture, personalized, psychologized, therapeutic, comforting perceptions of "truth"—that is "**my** truth"—are now, in some areas of life, very much the acceptable norm. I think our world will only continue in this trend of defining truth for some time to come.

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- So, on this Easter Sunday 2021, I'll "follow the Scriptures of God." I'll go with the Apostle Paul. The foundation for all TRUTH is God's Word—Scripture.
- AND...Scripture says the TRUTH is that **Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the death to new life and is alive today forevermore.**
- That is TRUTH whether or not I believe it, but I choose to believe it. It is grounds for true hope, true life, true freedom and true purpose for living.
- ***Did God really say?*** Yes, he really did say! ***Jesus is alive now and forevermore.***