



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

September 17, 2017

Discussion Guide

WHAT IS TRUE?

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- DO YOU BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE FOR TWO OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS TO BE EQUALLY TRUE? HOW MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE UNDERSTANDING OF TRUTH AS RELATIVE AND TRUTH AS UNIVERSAL.
- CHRISTIANITY CLAIMS IT IS RELEVANT BECAUSE IN JESUS WE HAVE ACCESS TO WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT GOD AND LIFE. THEREFORE, WHAT WE DISCOVER IN JESUS IS RELEVANT NOT JUST FOR OUR LIVES BUT FOR THE LIVES OF OTHERS. READ JOHN 1.1-5, 14. IN WHAT WAYS DOES JOHN MAKE THIS

CLAIM?

- READ JOHN 14.6. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES JESUS MAKE THIS CLAIM?
- CHRISTIANITY'S CLAIM THAT IN JESUS WE FIND WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT GOD AND LIFE RUNS AFOUL OF THE CULTURAL BENT TO UNDERSTANDING SUCH TRUTHS, PARTICULARLY MORAL AND ETHICAL TRUTHS TO BE RELATIVE. IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? WHERE DO YOU EXPERIENCE THIS MESSAGE? WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, DOES IT HAVE UPON YOU?
- THE ARGUMENT HAS BEEN MADE THAT MORAL AND ETHICAL TRUTH CANNOT BE RELATIVE BECAUSE SUCH AN APPROACH TO LIFE LEADS TO CHAOS, AND THAT SUCH AN APPROACH LEADS TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF UNIVERSALLY UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR. HOW MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE? HOW MIGHT THESE PROBLEMS POINT TO THE EXISTENCE OF SOME UNIVERSALLY PRESENT TRUTH?
- IF UNIVERSAL TRUTH CAN EXIST, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IN JESUS WE MIGHT FIND WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT GOD AND LIFE. HOW MIGHT WE GO ABOUT TESTING THIS QUESTION?
- IF IN JESUS WE HAVE ACCESS TO WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT GOD AND LIFE, WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN FOR HOW WE LIVE OUR EVERYDAY LIVES? DO YOU FIND THIS EASY OR DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- CONSIDER CLOSING IN PRAYER, ASKING GOD FOR STRENGTH AND WISDOM TO ENGAGE CULTURAL PRESUPPOSITIONS CONCERNING TRUTH, FIRST IN YOURSELF AND THEN IN OTHERS WITH LOVE AND GRACE.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

RELATIVISM AND UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH

THE CONCEPT OF RELATIVISM IS THE IDEA THAT VIEWS ARE RELATIVE TO DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION OR CULTURAL BELIEFS. IN THIS VIEW,

THERE ARE NO UNIVERSAL/OBJECTIVE TRUTHS BECAUSE EACH POINT OF VIEW HAS ITS OWN MERIT. ON THE OTHER HAND, UNIVERSALITY IS THE CONCEPT THAT TRUTHS WHICH APPLY ACROSS EVERY TIME AND PLACE AND WITHIN EVERY CULTURAL FRAMEWORK EXIST AND ARE DISCOVERABLE. THE IDEA OF RELATIVISM IS NOT NEW. IT CAN BE FOUND IN A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PLATO AND PROTAGORAS IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF GREECE. PLATO REPRESENTS PROTAGORAS AS A PROPONENT OF RELATIVISM, SOMETHING HE TRIES TO REFUTE IN FAVOR OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH. IN THIS DEBATE, PROTAGORAS STATES:

EACH THING APPEARS TO ME, SO IT IS FOR ME, AND AS IT APPEARS TO YOU, SO IT IS FOR YOU—YOU AND I EACH BEING A MAN. (PLATO, THEAETETUS 152A, 6-8)

HOWEVER, RELATIVISM AS A POPULAR WAY OF THOUGHT HAS ONLY ARISEN WITHIN THE 20TH CENTURY. THE RISE OF RELATIVISTIC THOUGHT WAS PAVED WITH THE ENLIGHTENMENT-INSPIRED REJECTION OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE RISE OF SOCIAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCES. PRACTICALLY, WHEN ONE REJECTS THE CONCEPT OF GOD, HE DOES AWAY WITH A HIGHER STANDARD WHICH CAN ADJUDICATE CLASHES BETWEEN SYSTEMS AND IDEALS. WITHOUT A HIGHER STANDARD, TRUTHS STAND ON EQUAL GROUND. EMPIRICALLY, AS SCIENTISTS BEGAN TO STUDY OTHER CULTURES AND SUB-CULTURES THEY NOTICED DIFFERENT MODES OF THOUGHT AND STANDARDS OF REASONING AND PRACTICE WHICH WERE CULTURALLY DEPENDENT. THIS DISCOVERY LED SCIENTISTS TO QUESTION IF TRUTH WAS MORE CULTURALLY-BASED AND ROOTED IN A UNIVERSAL REALITY. THESE TWO FACTORS CREATED FERTILE GROUND FOR THE UNDERSTANDING THAT VIEWS ARE RELATIVE TO CULTURAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND PERCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES.

IN THE MODERN WORLD, RELATIVISTIC THINKING HAS TRIUMPHED OVER THE BELIEF THAT THE UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH, A TRIUMPH WHICH HAS BEEN BOTH HERALDED AND VILIFIED. MOST SECULAR AND CHRISTIAN THINKERS AGREE THAT THE CONCEPT OF GLOBAL RELATIVISM (EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE) CANNOT WITHSTAND THE CRITICISM OF INCOHERENCE AND INCONSISTENCY. THE CLAIM THAT ALL THINGS ARE RELATIVE IS IN ITSELF AN ABSOLUTE CLAIM. HOWEVER, THE CONCEPT OF LOCAL RELATIVISM (SOME THINGS ARE RELATIVE) REMAINS POPULAR IN BOTH HIGHER AND POPULAR THINKING. MOST OFTEN, THE CONCEPT OF LOCAL RELATIVISM IS EXPRESSED IN MORAL/ETHICAL TERMS; THAT IS, DIFFERING MORAL/ETHICAL BEHAVIORS ARE NOTED TO BE OF EQUAL WORTH BECAUSE THESE BEHAVIORS ARE ROOTED IN "TRUTHS" WHICH ARE DETERMINED BY THE CONTEXT AND CULTURAL BELIEFS WITHIN WHICH THE PERSON FINDS HIMSELF.

ON SOME LEVEL, THERE IS MERIT TO THIS ARGUMENT. SLAVERY PROVIDES AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE. TO ASSERT THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THE CLAIM "SLAVERY IS WRONG" DEPENDS HEAVILY UPON THE CONTEXT IN WHICH ONE MAKES SUCH A CLAIM. TO MAKE THIS CLAIM

IN ANCIENT GREECE OR EVEN THE 19TH CENTURY AMERICA (EVEN THE AMERICAN CHURCH!) WOULD BE MET WITH STRONG ARGUMENTS TO THE CONTRARY. HOWEVER, TO ASSERT THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THIS CLAIM IN A DAY IN WHICH THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IS THE STANDARD FOR DETERMINING THE RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS WOULD BE MET WITH GENERAL ACCEPTANCE. THESE DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO THE "TRUTHFULNESS" OF THIS CLAIM ARE WHOLLY DEPENDENT UPON THE TIME AND SPACE IN WHICH THEY ARE MADE. IN THIS VEIN, CHRISTIAN ARGUMENTS FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTH HAVE BEEN UNDERCUT BY CHANGING VIEWS ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY, CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, AND HOMOSEXUALITY. OPPONENTS POINT TO THE CHURCH'S OWN CHANGING OF POSITIONS ON ISSUES FOR WHICH NOW REPUTED CLAIMS WERE ONCE ACCEPTED AS "ABSOLUTELY TRUE."

HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT ONE CAN ARGUE THAT ONE MUST ACCEPT MORAL/ETHICAL RELATIVISM'S CLAIM THAT ALL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ARE EQUALLY TRUE. ONE ARGUMENT AGAINST THIS POSITION IS THE POINT THAT MORAL RELATIVISM HAS CONFUSED CULTURAL PRACTICE WITH CULTURAL MORES. FOR INSTANCE, ANTHROPOLOGISTS HAVE ARGUED THAT THE DIFFERING PRACTICES OF THE COVERING OF WOMEN'S BREASTS ACROSS CULTURES POINTS TO DIFFERENT VIEWS OF MODESTY. HOWEVER, THE PRACTICE OF HAVING ONE'S BREASTS COVERED OR UNCOVERED IS OFTEN A RESULT OF RELIGIOUS AND TOPOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS, BUT THE UNDERSTANDING OF MODESTY ACROSS CULTURES MIGHT REMAIN THE SAME; THAT IS, WOMEN WISH TO BE MODEST IN BOTH CULTURES RATHER THAN ONE CULTURE ACCEPTING AND ONE CULTURE REJECTING MODESTY. THE PRACTICES OF MODESTY DIFFER, BUT NOT THE MORE. A SECOND EXAMPLE MIGHT BE THE DIFFERENCE OF EATING OR NOT EATING COWS BETWEEN AMERICANS AND INDIANS. ANTHROPOLOGISTS POINT TO THIS AS EVIDENCE THAT DIFFERENT CULTURES HAVE DIFFERENT MORES. HOWEVER, INDIANS DO NOT EAT COWS BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTAND THEM TO POSSIBLY CONTAIN THE SOUL OF AN ANCESTOR. IT MIGHT BE GRANDMA. IN THE SAME WAY, AMERICANS WOULD NOT EAT GRANDMA. IT IS "WRONG" TO EAT SOMETHING WHICH HAS A SOUL. WHILE THE PRACTICE IS CULTURALLY DETERMINED, THE MORE IS SIMILAR ACROSS CULTURES. IT SEEMS THAT SOME MORES ARE UNIVERSAL EVEN IF THE MEANS OF EXPRESSING THESE MORES DEPEND ON TIME AND CULTURE.

A SECOND ARGUMENT AGAINST MORAL/ETHICAL RELATIVISM IS THE UNACCEPTABLE CONFLICT WHICH SUCH THINKING CREATES. THOSE WHO SUPPORT MORAL/ETHICAL RELATIVISM DO SO IN AN EFFORT TO FAVOR DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE. ALL PEOPLE ARE TO BE VALUED AND ACCEPTED AS THEY ARE. HOWEVER, THIS WORKS ONLY IN THEORY, NEVER IN PRACTICE, BECAUSE SOME PRACTICES ARE CLEARLY NOT ACCEPTABLE. A PRIME EXAMPLE MIGHT BE DRAWN FROM THE ABORTION DEBATE. THE ARGUMENT IS MADE THAT IF YOU DISAGREE WITH ABORTION, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO HAVE ONE. YOU ARE TO TOLERATE THOSE WHO DO. HOWEVER, WHEN MEMBERS OF OPERATION RESCUE BEGAN TO ENGAGE IN TACTICS WHICH HARMED PEOPLE IN THEIR EFFORT TO RESIST ABORTION, THIS WAS SPOKEN AGAINST BY BOTH

SECULAR AND CHRISTIAN ACTIVISTS. WHY? BECAUSE, HARMING PEOPLE WAS CLEARLY NOT A BEHAVIOR WHICH COULD BE ACCEPTED BY EITHER CAMP. TRUE TOLERANCE MEANS THAT WE WILL TOLERATE EVERYTHING FROM THE BURNING OF WINDOWS TO THE BURNING OF BODIES IN MASS GENOCIDES, BUT THESE ARE CLEARLY NOT TOLERABLE BEHAVIORS WITHIN ANY CULTURE. THEREFORE, SOME MEASURE OF ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR—CAN WE SAY “RIGHTNESS?”—APPEARS TO EXIST ACROSS CULTURES. WHILE ONE CAN ARGUE FOR DIFFERING CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF TRUTHS AND EVEN THE LIMITED SHIFTING OF ETHICS WITHIN CHANGING SITUATIONS, ONE CANNOT ARGUE THAT SOME UNIVERSAL TRUTHS DO NOT EXIST AS THEY APPEAR WITHIN PEOPLE ACROSS CULTURES. THEREFORE, THE REAL QUESTION CONCERNS WHAT THESE TRUTHS ARE AND HOW TO DISCOVER THEM.

The Text

John 1.1-5, 14; 14.6: *Living Truth*

JOHN WROTE HIS GOSPEL FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENCOURAGING THE FAITH OF THE BELIEVERS WHO POPULATED THE CHURCHES AMONG WHICH JOHN MINISTERED (JOHN 20.31). PART OF THIS ENCOURAGEMENT OF FAITH INCLUDED AN AFFIRMATION OF BOTH JESUS’ IDENTITY AS MESSIAH AND HIS DIVINE ROLE AS SON OF GOD. THEREFORE, IT IS NOT UNEXPECTED THAT JOHN REGULARLY SEEKS TO ILLUMINATE THE TIE BETWEEN JESUS AND GOD THE FATHER, PERHAPS MORE SO THAN IN ANY OTHER GOSPEL. IN FACT, THE OPENING PROLOGUE TO HIS GOSPEL IS HIS FIRST SUCH ATTEMPT.

JOHN BEGINS HIS GOSPEL WITH WORDS WHICH CLEARLY ECHO GENESIS 1, THE RECORD OF GOD’S CREATION OF ALL THINGS. IN HIS OPENING LINE, JOHN NOTES THAT CREATION ITSELF BEGAN WITH THE SPOKEN WORD OF GOD (JOHN 1.1; GENESIS 1.3). IN KEEPING WITH JEWISH THOUGHT, JOHN UNDERSTOOD THE VOICE OF GOD TO BE AN EXTENSION OF GOD HIMSELF, THE PART OF GOD WHICH CREATED AND INTERACTED WITH MANKIND. ONE CAN SEE THIS THINKING IN HOW THE VOICE OF GOD IS LINKED BOTH TO CREATION (GENESIS 1; PSALM 33.6) AND TO THE SELF-REVELATION OF GOD’S PERSON IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (JEREMIAH 1.4; EZEKIEL 1.3; AMOS 3.1). IT IS THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING THAT JOHN REPORTS THAT THE VOICE OF GOD WHICH CREATED WAS NOT JUST WITH GOD BUT SHOULD BE IDENTIFIED AS GOD. FOLLOWING GENESIS 1, JOHN REMINDS HIS READERS THAT ALL THINGS WERE CREATED BY GOD’S VOICE. THEREFORE, JOHN REASONS, IT IS THE VOICE OF GOD WHICH WAS THE SOURCE OF LIFE AND THE ONE WHO GAVE LIGHT (UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO LIVE) FOR ALL; THAT IS, BECAUSE THE VOICE OF GOD GAVE LIFE, IT ALSO UNDERSTOOD THE WAY THIS LIFE WAS TO BE LIVED. THIS ONE WHO GIVES AND UNDERSTANDS LIFE BROKE THROUGH DARKNESS, THE ANCIENT IMAGE OF CHAOS, TO GIVE LIFE AND ORDER SUCH LIFE IN A WAY THAT COULD NOT BE STOPPED. TO THIS POINT, JOHN IS SPEAKING IN A THOROUGHLY JEWISH MANNER. HOWEVER, HE BREAKS FROM HIS JEWISH APPROACH TO CREATION BY STATING THAT THIS PERSONIFIED VOICE OF GOD

HAS BECOME PERSONIFIED IN THE FLESH, WITHIN THAT WHICH HE CREATED (JOHN 1.14). SIMPLY PUT, JOHN ARGUES THAT THE PART OF GOD WHICH MADE LIFE INTENTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY ENGAGED WITH THAT WHICH HE MADE. THEREFORE, IN THIS PERSON, THE VERY GLORY OF GOD WAS SEEN AND EXPERIENCED, AN EXPERIENCE WHICH JOHN CLAIMS WAS PRESENT IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, THE SON. IN THE EXPERIENCE OF JESUS, ONE ENCOUNTERED THE GRACE (EFFECTIVE POWER) AND TRUTH OF GOD; THAT IS, IN JESUS ONE COULD SEE WHAT GOD DID AND WHAT HE WAS TRULY LIKE.

WHILE AMAZING, THESE CLAIMS REMAIN FANTASTICAL IF THEY ONLY COME FROM JOHN. HOWEVER, THROUGHOUT THE GOSPEL, JOHN REPORTS THAT JESUS HIMSELF MADE SIMILAR CLAIMS (JOHN 3.19; 5.26; 8.58; 14.9). PERHAPS THE MOST OVERTLY OPEN CLAIM FOR SUCH A CONNECTION BETWEEN JESUS AND THE FATHER IS JESUS’ CLAIM IN JOHN 14.6 THAT HE IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. THIS CLAIM IS MADE WITHIN A DISCUSSION OF GOING TO THE FATHER. THE DISCIPLES ARE CONFUSED ABOUT JESUS’ STATEMENT, NOT UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY WILL FOLLOW JESUS AND EXPERIENCE THE FATHER WITH HIM. JESUS RESPONDS THAT IN HIS OWN PERSON THEY HAVE ENCOUNTERED THIS WAY. IN THE CONTEXT, HE IS CLAIMING THAT HIS OWN WAY OF LIFE IS THE WAY TO APPROACH THE FATHER. SECOND, HE CLAIMS TO EXEMPLIFY WHAT IS TRUE, NOT JUST ABOUT LIFE BUT ABOUT THE FATHER. FINALLY, HE NOTES THAT IN HIM ONE DISCOVERS THE SOURCE OF LIFE, NOT JUST WITH THE FATHER, BUT LIFE ITSELF. THIS CLAIM IS NOT UNLIKE JOHN’S CLAIM THAT IN JESUS ONE ENCOUNTERS THE POWER AND TRUE CHARACTER OF GOD.

TAKEN TOGETHER, THE CLAIMS REGARDING JESUS POINT TO A REALITY WHICH CAN BE EXPERIENCED IN AND THROUGH THE PERSON OF JESUS. IN JESUS, ONE ENCOUNTERS AND EXPERIENCES GOD AS HE CAN BEST AND MOST CLEARLY BE KNOWN. IN JESUS, WE SEE WHAT IS THE PROPER WAY TO LIVE, THE POWER TO LIVE THIS LIFE, AND WHAT IS TRUE ABOUT GOD.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

IS CHRISTIANITY STILL RELEVANT; THAT IS, DOES CHRISTIANITY HAVE SOMETHING OF WORTH AND VALUE TO CONTRIBUTE TO LIFE AND OUR WORLD? PART OF THE ARGUMENT CHRISTIANITY MAKES FOR ITS RELEVANCE IS THAT IN CHRISTIANITY, ONE FINDS THE BEST WAY TO LIVE AND WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT GOD. THIS IS NO SMALL CLAIM BECAUSE IT PLACES A PREMIUM ON WHAT CHRISTIANITY HAS TO OFFER WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING LIFE AND GOD. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT CHRISTIANITY CLAIMS THAT IT HAS THE FULL CORNER ON LIFE AND GOD. CREATION ITSELF STANDS AS A SOURCE OF UNDERSTANDING BOTH IN A GENERAL WAY, A WAY WHICH HAS BEEN GRASPED ACROSS TIME AND CULTURES (ROMANS 1.18-20). HOWEVER, CHRISTIANITY DOES CLAIM THAT IT HOLDS THE KEY TO WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT BOTH GOD AND LIFE, THE FULLEST REVELATION CONCERNING BOTH. IN OTHER WORDS, CHRISTIANITY SAYS, “WE KNOW THE RIGHT WAY TO LIVE AND THE RIGHT THINGS ABOUT GOD.” THIS IS WHERE THINGS GET STICKY,

BECAUSE IT SAYS CHRISTIANITY'S UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE AND GOD EXCEEDS ALL OTHERS, AND THIS IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE THING TO CLAIM TODAY.

ONE OF THE BIG IDEAS FLOATING AROUND IN OUR WESTERN WAY OF THINKING IS THAT ALL THOUGHTS AND IDEAS ABOUT LIFE, ABOUT GOD, ABOUT ALMOST EVERYTHING ARE PRETTY MUCH OF EQUAL VALUE. THEY ARE OF THE SAME WEIGHT BECAUSE WE BELIEVE WHAT WE DO ONLY BECAUSE OF THE ENVIRONMENT WE ARE IN. WE MIGHT THINK DIFFERENTLY IF WE HAD GROWN UP IN INDIA OR CHINA! So, CHRISTIANITY IS "WRONG" TO SAY IT KNOWS THE BEST WAY TO LIVE AND KNOWS THE GREATEST TRUTHS ABOUT GOD. HOWEVER, CHRISTIANITY HOLDS ITS GROUND BECAUSE IT CLAIMS TO HAVE EXPERIENCED GOD HIMSELF THEREFORE ENCOUNTERING THE CREATOR AND SOURCE OF LIFE HIMSELF IN THE PERSON OF JESUS.

CULTURALLY, THIS IS ACCEPTABLE INsofar AS CHRISTIANS KEEP THIS KIND OF THINKING TO THEMSELVES. HOWEVER, AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY CANNOT KEEP THIS THINKING TO ITSELF. IT POINTS ALL PEOPLE TO JESUS AS THE SOURCE OF KNOWING HOW TO LIVE AND HOW TO KNOW GOD. IT CLAIMS RELEVANCE, BUT IS IT? OR, COULD IT BE THAT THIS IS JUST ONE WAY OF SEEING THINGS, OUR CULTURALLY DETERMINED WAY? CAN ALL THINGS REALLY BE "JUST OUR WAY OF SEEING IT?"

WHILE I HEAR THIS MESSAGE EVERY DAY, I CANNOT SEEM TO MAKE A PATH FORWARD IN LIFE USING THIS WAY OF THINKING THAT RESULTS IN ANYTHING OTHER THAN CHAOS. MY THINKING PUTS ME IN DIRECT DISAGREEMENT AND SOMETIMES COMPETITION WITH OTHERS. AT SOME POINT, OUR WAYS OF THINKING COME INTO SUCH CONFLICT THAT THERE MUST BE RESOLUTION, BUT IF THEY ARE BOTH EQUAL THERE CAN BE NO RESOLUTION. ARE WE JUST TO LIVE IN THE TENSION? IT IS ONE THING IF THE TENSION CONCERNS THE FLAVOR OF ICE CREAM WHICH IS THE BEST. IT IS SOMETHING OF A DIFFERENT ORDER IF THE TENSION CONCERNS THE DESIRE TO ABDUCT MY DAUGHTER IN ORDER TO SELL HER INTO THE SEX TRADE. CLEARLY, THESE TWO WAYS OF THINKING CANNOT BOTH BE ACCEPTED AS THEY INVOLVE DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED DESIRES. ONE MUST RISE ABOVE THE OTHER, BUT IF THEY ARE EQUAL, WHO DECIDES? ONLY CHAOS CAN REIGN IN THIS KIND OF WORLD, AND WE ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO THIS DILEMMA, DON'T WE? DEEP DOWN WE KNOW THERE IS A REALTY WHICH TRANSCENDS THE TWO OPPOSING DESIRES. AT THIS POINT, WE HAVE TOUCHED UPON THE EXISTENCE OF SOMETHING WHICH TRANSCENDS EVERYTHING ELSE. IT REALLY DOES EXIST. THE QUESTION IS WHERE TO FIND IT.

CHRISTIANITY CLAIMS WE FIND THIS REALITY IN JESUS, BUT THIS JUST PUTS US BACK WHERE WE WERE BEFORE BECAUSE OTHER RELIGIONS MAKE SIMILAR CLAIMS FOR THEIR OWN PROPHETS AND MESSIAHS. So, HOW DO WE FIND OUR WAY? I DO NOT THINK WE MUST PUNT AND CLAIM IT IS ALL A MATTER OF OPINION. I BELIEVE WE CAN LOOK TO THE LARGER NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE, THE REDEMPTIVE DRAMA OF GOD AND COMPARE ITS PRESENTATION OF ANSWERS TO OTHERS WORLD VIEW QUESTIONS AND COMPARE THEM TO THOSE PROVIDED BY OUR CULTURE AND OTHER RELIGIONS. DOING THIS, WE MUST SEE WHICH

ONE LEADS US TO THE LIFE WE INNATELY DESIRE. IN OTHER WORDS, IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL MORE THOUGHT, BUT ONE THING WE CAN SEE. NOT ALL CLAIMS ARE EQUAL, NOT ALL MORAL BEHAVIOR IS ACCEPTABLE. THEREFORE, THERE DOES EXIST A "RIGHT WAY" TO THINK AND LIVE. JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THAT WAY. SHOULD THE OTHER ANSWERS CHRISTIANITY PROVIDES TO THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF LIFE HOLD SWAY, THEN I CAN BE SURE THAT JESUS IS NOT JUST A WAY, BUT I CAN BE ASSURED THAT HE TRULY IS THE WAY TO KNOWING GOD AND LIVING LIFE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

IS CHRISTIANITY RELEVANT? DOES IT HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO LIFE WHICH GIVES DEPTH, PURPOSE, AND MEANING? CHRISTIANITY SAYS IT DOES, AND THIS IS FINE, SO LONG AS YOU DON'T MAKE THE CLAIM THAT CHRISTIANITY'S WAY IS BETTER THAN ANY OTHER WAY. IN THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE, ALL WAYS OF LIFE AND THOUGHT ARE CONSIDERED EQUAL, PRODUCTS OF THE TIME AND SPACE IN WHICH WE LIVE. HERE LIES THE PROBLEM, BECAUSE CHRISTIANITY MAKES THIS VERY CLAIM. IT CLAIMS THAT IN JESUS WE FIND THE BEST WAY TO THINK ABOUT GOD, LIFE, OURSELVES, AND THE BEST WAY TO LIVE WITH ALL THREE. HERE OUR CULTURE CRIES "FOUL!" WE CAN'T DO THIS, OR SO THE CLAIM GOES, BECAUSE ALL TRUTH IS RELATIVE. IS THIS REALLY THE CASE? IS ALL TRUTH RELATIVE? WHEN WE REALLY THINK ABOUT IT, TRUTH CANNOT BE RELATIVE, AT LEAST NOT THE BIG THINGS. WHICH ICE CREAM FLAVOR IS THE BEST TASTING? IT DOESN'T MATTER. SHOULD WE RESPECT HUMAN DIGNITY AND LIFE? NOW WE HAVE SOMETHING THAT MATTERS. IF ALL TRUTH IS EQUAL THEN WE COME TO IMPASSIBLE DILEMMAS. MY DESIRE TO PROTECT LIFE RUNS UP AGAINST ANOTHER'S DESIRE TO HARM LIFE. BOTH CANNOT COEXIST PEACEFULLY. ONE MUST TRIUMPH AND IN THIS, WE ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER. IT LIES DEEP WITHIN US EVEN IF ITS EXPRESSION MIGHT DIFFER ACROSS CULTURES. NOT ALL TRUTH IS EQUAL. SOME IS BETTER THAN OTHERS. THUS, WE COME TO CHRISTIANITY'S CLAIMS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THEY ARE CORRECT AS IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THERE ARE DEEPLY INHERENT AND TRUE WAYS OF BEING. THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER IT IS POSSIBLE BUT WHETHER CHRISTIANITY PROVIDES THESE TRUTHS. HERE WE MUST PAUSE AND REFLECT BEYOND THE QUESTION OF TRUTH AND PONDER THE VARIOUS TRUTHS CHRISTIANITY OFFERS, PARTICULARLY THE ONES OFFERED BY JESUS, BOTH IN HIS PERSON AND HIS TEACHING. DO THESE TRUTHS HELP US TO MAKE SENSE OF LIFE? DO THEY LEAD US TO THAT WHICH WE INNATELY DESIRE? DO THEY EXPLAIN OUR WORLD? IF WE PONDER HONESTLY AND THOROUGHLY AND CONCLUDE THAT THESE TRUTHS WE FIND IN JESUS' PERSON AND TEACHING OFFER A PATH FORWARD THEN WE CAN BE ASSURED NOT LONELY THAT THEY ARE RIGHT BUT THAT THEY ARE RELEVANT FOR OUR LIVES AND THOSE OF OTHERS.



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