

71 – Unchangeable Truths

John 12: 29-48

Truth doesn't change, especially spiritual truth. The spiritual world is not a myth. There are lots of myths and fairy tales, invented stories about gods, goddesses and how the world was created. But that doesn't change spiritual truth; it only makes it harder to find. The fact that there are people who say wrong things doesn't mean right things don't exist. And the truth is: There is a God who made us; He's holy, and He's going to hold us accountable for our words, thoughts and actions, unless we choose His path to salvation, whether we believe those facts or not.

What took place between Jesus and the crowd on that Palm Sunday afternoon was a battle of wills. Most of them were willing to believe in Him so long as He let them decide what kind of Savior He would be. They wanted to mold Him like clay into the person they felt they needed. If He would let them do that, then they would follow Him passionately, but if He continued to talk about sin and insist that He was going to die violently, they would move on and find someone else. And in time, they did and the result was catastrophic.

Yet in spite of the pressure, Jesus refused to change His message. Every time they argued with Him He simply repeated the same truths. Why? Why didn't He compromise with them? Why didn't He, at least, emphasize those truths they like and de-emphasize the ones they didn't? Any skilled communicator understands the mood of their audience and quickly recognizes which elements in the message "work" and which don't. But Jesus refused to do that. He wouldn't even debate with them. Instead He warned them that they would be sorry if they didn't listen. Let's revisit that Palm Sunday afternoon and hear Jesus proclaim those unchangeable truths. And let's not react the way many in that crowd did. Let's identify those spiritual realities and believe them with all our heart. While we have the "Light," let's believe in the Light so that we may become "children of Light."

A battle of wills (Jn 12:29-40)

• DBS (Mon-Sat)

It's amazing that human beings are capable of assuming that we can change spiritual realities by simply changing what we choose to believe. It's as though we think God must become who we want Him to be, that He would cease to exist if we decided to stop believing in Him. You may have heard someone say something like this: "I can't believe in a God who would..." or "If I were God I would never..." And for some people, in their own minds, that settles the matter.

The ancient Greeks had a word for pride when it becomes so severe that it brings a person's downfall. They called it "hubris." Hubris deceives its victims into making a fatal mistake by believing that they are wiser, stronger or better than they really are. And what we're watching take place on that Palm Sunday afternoon was hubris: people thinking they could alter spiritual reality by believing whatever they chose to believe. Jesus saw what was happening. And it grieved Him, yet He didn't change His message. Facts are facts. All He could do was warn them that a day was coming when an unchanging God would judge them by their response to His unchanging truth.

Unchangeable truths

So what are those unchangeable truths that Jesus insisted, so steadfastly, on proclaiming because He said those who believed them would become children of God? And why are they so offensive? Why did so many people reject them?

Though the sorrow of the cross had already swept over Him on that Sunday afternoon, Jesus still reached out to the crowd gathered around Him. His love for them compelled Him to speak. John says He even "cried out" (v44), inviting anyone who wanted eternal life to come to Him. John records at least nine unchangeable, offensive, life-giving truths contained in the words He spoke that day. Let's hear them, and consider each one:

1. **Judgment:** Jesus said, "Now judgment is upon this world..." (v31), and warned that the Father will judge those who reject Him (v48). He didn't avoid the uncomfortable topic of judgment. In fact, He brought it up all the time. He clearly believed that there will be a judgment day and those who've refused the grace He offers will be condemned. That offends our self-righteousness. It means our best efforts aren't enough. And it provokes our rebellious nature. It makes us angry. How dare God sit in judgment over us and hold us accountable to His standards? Rather than admit failure and accept mercy, many will choose to cling to the goodness of their own deeds, and trust that those will be enough. They won't be.
2. **Satan:** He called Satan "the ruler of this world" (v31). Now Satan isn't the rightful ruler. God is, but by his temptations and deceptions Satan is able to gain control over people. He's able to lead whole societies into destruction and individuals to eternal death. By pointing to Satan, Jesus exposes our chains. He announces to us that we're not free at all; we're slaves (Eph. 2:1-2). That offends us. We prefer to live under the delusion that we're in control, that we chart the course of our own lives. He insults us by reminding us that if God's not our master, we're constantly being manipulated by an enemy who wants to destroy us.
3. **Death:** The fact that God's Son had to die a violent death, because He was enduring a curse which God had pictured so vividly to Abraham two thousand years earlier (Ge 15:9-21), shows us God's assessment of our sin. It displays what should happen to you and me; it announces how evil our deeds are in God's sight because He sees the motives of our heart. Jesus had to die that brutal death because there was no other way to save people like us. That removes all hope of self-righteousness.



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4. All: By saying, “I... will draw all men to Myself,” Jesus was declaring that His death would be for all humans, Jews and Gentiles alike. That was highly offensive to a culture that separated themselves from Gentiles. And it still violates our prejudices and exposes how little our love is toward people who are different from us, or more broken than us, or who have rejected us. The largeness of God’s heart exposes the smallness of ours.
5. I: Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (v32). He spoke of “He who believes Me...” and “He who sees Me...” (v45). He called Himself the “Light” of the world (v46). He didn’t simply talk about the best way to live life or how to find God, He proclaimed Himself and said people must believe in Him. He said the Father wants everyone to love and believe in His Son, and warned that the Father would judge those who reject Him. That’s exclusive. That’s offensive. It was then; it is now.
6. Follow: Jesus made it painfully clear that He was calling people to something far deeper than mental assent to a doctrine. He was demanding a lifetime of obedience and selfless service. He told people that they must die daily to their own ambitions, safety, comfort and goals, and let Him direct them into ministry in the same way the Father had directed Him (vs24-26). To say “yes” to that challenge required the deepest sort of surrender. It still does. It’s very intimidating.
7. Walk: He repeatedly used the word “walk” to describe discipleship. A walk is not one choice. That would be a “step.” A walk is a continuous flow of choices, one right after another. It requires commitment, endurance and a constant supply of divine strength. To succeed, a person must walk all the way to the finish line. The first step down that path is the most difficult. It requires us to trust that God will sustain us, that He will be with us always, that He will never leave us, even to the end of the age. It requires us to ignore our fears, and trust His promises. And that’s frightening.
8. Darkness: Jesus called Himself the “Light,” meaning that in Him we see the full revelation of the heart of God. The Son is exactly like the Father in His words and actions. John said that in Him we see the “glory” of the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). But Jesus warned that the light He brought also presented a danger. He said “darkness” would “overtake” (seize and bring into submission) those who rejected that light. That means that if a person understands who Jesus is and what He has done, and then rejects Him, that rejection will harden that person’s heart, and it will become more difficult to accept Him the next time.
9. Sons: Jesus made it clear that God’s goal for believers was far greater than merely rescuing us from judgment. He said He came to make it possible for humans to become children of God (Jn 1:12-13). His death and resurrection would lift us up to become like Him, not only in purity and character, but in glory. He came not only to justify us, but also to glorify us (Ro 8:20). He announced that we would become “sons of light.” As God’s beloved children we will live in the joy of His unrestrained presence forever. That’s overwhelming.

Jesus didn’t soften or apologize for any of these truths. He stated them boldly knowing how offensive, frightening and wonderful they were. He presented them clearly, and then let people decide how they would respond. He still does.

Our response

During the course of that afternoon, Jesus used three words to describe the decisions a person must make in order to follow Him. Let’s ask ourselves if we have made these decisions:

1. Believe (v36): This is the decision to trust that what Jesus has told us is true, that He is who He says He is and that He has done what He says He has done. It means that we abandon every other way to salvation, and make Him our only hope for eternal life.
2. Confess (v42): This is the decision to openly acknowledge our faith in Jesus and accept whatever disapproval or abandonment may result.
3. Obey (v47): This is the decision to live the way Jesus taught us to live, in purity and selfless service to others. He said we must not only hear His sayings; we must “keep them.”

Our reward

He didn’t leave us with only the challenge to believe, confess and obey; He also left us with promises of how God will respond to those who choose rightly. He said that person will receive:

1. Truth (v46): They will not walk in darkness; God will light their path. That means they won’t stumble, and by following that path they will fulfill the plans God has for them (Eph 2:10).
2. Approval (v43): John is actually the one who used this word but there’s no doubt who taught it to him. When God “approves” someone He sends His abiding presence, which brings into that person’s life peace (shalom) and power (ministry). You might say, “He will make His face to shine upon you” (Nu 6:25).
3. Honor (v26): That means God will bless us in this life, but even more than that it means we will someday hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21).

Aren’t we grateful that Jesus taught us these truths, these unchangeable truths? Had He softened or removed certain ones we would never have had the opportunity to believe them, to confess Him and to obey. Now He asks you and me to present those same truths to others, so that they, too, can become children of God.

Questions

1. Look over the list of “unchangeable truths.” Which one do you think would be the most difficult to present to unbelievers who you know? Why?
2. Have you decided to believe, confess and obey? If so, pick one and tell us when you made that decision and why.