

Icebergs and Truth

Seeing Reality:

John 18:37-38

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It was shipped in 55-gallon drums and labeled with color-coded bands. It would save many American soldiers fighting in Vietnam. They were being picked off as the enemy hid in dense foliage. These herbicides would uncover the enemy. There were 15 different ones, and they carried such common names from their bands as Agent White, Agent Pink, Agent Blue, Agent Purple, Agent Green and Agent Orange. Years later, ten separate diseases would become associated with exposure to Agent Orange. Many children of women vets, who were exposed, suffered a common birth defect, Spina bifida. The best scientific minds did not see this coming. The harm of walking through a defoliated area was unseen. The facts were obvious. There was no vegetation and no enemies hiding. The truth was hidden. Our soldiers weren't safe. In Vietnam, the best minds did not accurately see reality, and many people suffer as a result.

This past Thursday morning, who saw reality when they hopped on the London subway or into a double-decker bus? Do we actually see reality when we open our eyes, smell with our noses, touch with our hands, hear with our ears or taste with our mouths? Aren't we simply accumulating a few facts and interpreting their meaning? We are interpreting reality and making judgments based on the few facts we have, but aren't there a whole lot more facts that could escape our notice? Could not the facts escaping our notice be essential to interpreting reality? Could they not be crucial to our health? In London, what escaped notice? Was it a briefcase, a knapsack, or a piece of artwork? The missing facts led to catastrophe.

In the 18th chapter of John, Pontius Pilate sat in judgment of Jesus of Nazareth. Did he know who he was judging? Did he see reality? Pilate tried to get a grip on it. He asked, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Then he asked, “What have you done?” When Jesus said that his kingdom was not like the kingdoms of this world, Pilate pressed, “So you are a king.” And Jesus answered:

You are right in saying I am a king. (John 18:37, NIV)

As Pilate heard this, what did that reply mean? Was he aware of the virgin birth? Was he familiar with Jewish prophecy? Had he heard Jesus teach? Had he witnessed the expulsion of demons and the healing of people? Did he know of Lazarus’s miraculous return to life? Was Pilate actually seeing reality? When he delivered Jesus to his enemies, wasn’t he making a big mistake? Wasn’t he self-servingly biting the very hand that fed and blessed him? Knowing truth is essential. It is a life-and-death issue.

Little Josh had a persistent, high fever. Was he suffering an infection or a virus? Was it a common variety or was it something more menacing like meningitis? The facts are important, but the meaning, the truth is critical. One little Josh was shipped to a major medical center and survived. Another Josh never made it to the hospital. The known facts were much the same. The hidden facts were critical and determined the outcome. In these instances, we not only see the necessity of truth; we also see the nature of truth.

A teenager named David was anointed king by the Prophet Samuel. To David’s father, David seemed like the worst candidate in his family for such responsibility; and to Samuel, an older brother seemed more qualified. While a nation’s destiny hung on the decision, Samuel heard a word from God:

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV)

God told Samuel that the critical facts were below the surface and beyond his field of vision. The future of humanity depended on Samuel grasping truth. However, Samuel, like humanity, sees the iceberg floating above water. We see chunks of ice bobbing up and down in the North Atlantic. We don't see the jagged edges or the huge mass below the surface, yet those invisible things often define our destiny.

The Bible is a record of a people who triumphed precisely because they grasped truth, of which much was largely unseen. The Bible states:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1, NASU)

Faith is making decisions and living on the basis of meaning that is beyond the observable facts.

The Bible says:

Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6, NIV)

God lives and operates outside our field of vision. He is not an observable fact. To come to God, we have to go beyond what our senses are capable of discerning. We have to believe in a reality beyond our vision. Since our world was created by an unseen God, much truth about our world is unseen. That is why the Bible teaches that the beginning of knowledge and wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Truth is like icebergs that are massively and mostly below the surface and thus beyond our field of vision. We need help in both grasping the facts and understanding the meaning to which the facts point. (Next week, we will look at how to correct some things that hinder our apprehension of the truth, so that we can fulfill our potential and overcome pain. Later we'll look at biblical truths that, up until now, have been neglected; and we'll learn how they can make a difference in our lives.)

In the Scriptures, we learn how God helps us grasp truth. Returning to Jesus' conversation with Pilate, Jesus not only admitted that he was a king; he also declared:

For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. (John 18:37, NIV)

Pilate then asked, "What is truth?" Pilate wasn't asking for facts. Pilate was asking for meaning. Pilate was asking about the nature of truth itself. Jesus had just said that he had come into the world to testify to it. That implies the world was misunderstanding reality. Jesus came to fill us in. Jesus came to help us see. Jesus came to expose what is hidden. Second, Jesus said that those, who were on the side of truth, listen to him. Jesus told Pilate that with truth you have to choose sides. Like the War on Terror, we choose up sides. We either are on a side that fogs reality for humanity, that perpetuates deception, superstition and falsehood and therefore humanity's destruction; or we are on the side that listens to Jesus and unveils reality. There is no Switzerland, Sweden or Finland here. Unlike World War II when there were neutral nations, there is no neutral ground, no neutral people, and no neutral position. There can not be a neutral position because of truth's necessity and nature.

Truth is more than facts and meaning. It is a moral force or family to which we belong or that we actively oppose. "Those who side with the truth, those who belong to the truth listen to me," said Jesus. Jesus reveals that truth is fighting for the hearts and minds of humanity, and that it is also violently contested. Ignorance is not the resting state of humanity; it is the product, prison and position of forces that are arrayed against humanity. That is why, right now, while I'm speaking, there are people praying for you and me, that we all might grasp truth; for we come to truth by the grace and mercy of God. Even our senses, which work with our brains in collecting data and organizing them into facts, are gifts from above. God designed us to see reality, but we are opposed. Adam and Eve were designed to see reality, but their grasp on

reality was opposed. Jesus called our chief opponent “the father of lies.” Truth then is moral.

Truth then is militant. Truth then is magnificent. 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. (John 8:31-32, NIV)

Truth liberates people from ignorance, illusion, delusion, deception, depression and destruction.

Truth does so because it is good. Heaven celebrates truth. Heaven sings and worships in truth.

We do not acquire truth through a pill or through a sudden knock on the head. We do not acquire truth by careful investigation or empirical study. To be sure, some facts can be gathered that way; but they may lead to our destruction rather than liberation. With empirical study last century we approached the brink of annihilation through nuclear war. No one knows how close that might come in this century. Obviously then, our best efforts so far have not only left us vulnerable to death; they have also brought us near death. We do not acquire truth. On the contrary, it comes to us, apprehends us and then delivers us. However, we are not passive recipients. Jesus’ teaching reveals that truth can be nurtured. As we hold to his teaching, we come to know the truth and its liberation. It is validated in our experience, and we are thus released as witnesses. We pray to our unseen father, and we gain answers that validate his reality. We forgive those who’ve committed sins against us, and we find mercy for ourselves. We listen to the testimony of Jesus, call upon him to forgive, save and change us; and we find our hearts burning with new desires, new hungers and new hope.

The nurture of truth comes in a walk with Jesus who unfolds reality. It is a walk that puts his teaching to the test. It tests his faithfulness because it acts on things unseen and proves out their reality. That is the journey you are called to. That is the journey that liberates us from deception and brings tremendous growth. Are you ready to test what is unseen, what Jesus testifies to?