October 1, 2023

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LIVING IN ULTRA HIGH DEF

John 14:3-6

Technology is amazing, isn’t it? About 35 years ago a grocery store in Encinitas called Alpha Beta had a deal where for a low price you could buy volumes of an encyclopedia when you bought a certain amount of groceries. We bought the whole set. It was a great resource for years. We don’t have those books anymore. Technology has rendered them obsolete. We have all the information they contained available to us on our cell phones. I remember when if you were driving no one could get in touch with you. Now you can talk to anyone anywhere in the world through your car! It’s amazing. And let’s not forget one of the greatest inventions of all, an incredible boon to human life, the television remote.

But there is one concern. You can’t always trust it. Michael was telling me that modern jetliners have the technology to fly and land themselves. But you can’t always trust it. For instance, it’s not uncommon when making an instrument landing the plane will suddenly while on final approach decide to ascend for no apparent reason. Pilots always fly the takeoffs and landings because you can’t always trust the technology.

Technology is wonderful, but it also has the potential for making an enormous mess. Recently Laurie and I were taking care of Toby and Anna’s kids while the parents went to a Padre game. At one point Laurie was texting Anna. I don’t know exactly what she intended to text, but the wonderful artificial intelligence in the phone that corrects your spelling and even writes what it thinks you mean to say, changed what Laurie was typing. Unfortunately, Laurie didn’t catch what it did before she sent it. For some inexplicable reason it inserted what Ralphie in the movie *A Christmas Story* called the queen mother of curse words. Yes, Laurie accidentally sent to our daughter in law the F bomb. Laurie was mortified. Toby and Anna got a big laugh out of it. That’s artificial intelligence? Seems more like artificial idiocy to me. That is a very disappointing failure of technology.

So yes, technology is wonderful, until it’s not. It raises the question, what can you trust? What can you be sure of and know that it is unfailingly reliable? Today I want to talk about what you can know is trustworthy that will not make a mess of your life, but will significantly enhance your life. This is something you can count on with confidence. You’ll see what I mean in John 14:3-6.

JESUS IS THE WAY

In verse 3 Jesus told his disciples that he was going to leave them but would come back and take them to be with him so they could be where he is. Then in verse 4 he said, “You know the way to the place I am going.” This was too much for Thomas because he didn’t know where Jesus was going. I am pretty sure he spoke for the rest of the disciples when he said in verse 5, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus was a bit cryptic. He told them he was going to prepare a place for them so they could be with him, but he didn’t spell out exactly what he was talking about. They didn’t understand where he was going.

I think it was quite reasonable for Thomas to ask how they were supposed to know the way to this place Jesus was going when they didn’t even know what place he was talking about. Imagine that I told you about a great new restaurant we have discovered and said we wanted to have dinner with you there. You say, “What’s the name of the place and where is it?” Then I say, “Oh, you know the way to it.” What are you going to say? “No I don’t. I don’t even know what place you’re talking about, so how could I know how to get there?”

Jesus’ response to Thomas’ understandable objection was, “I am the way.” Jesus himself was the way to get to this mysterious place Jesus was telling them about. What does that mean? To understand that we first need to understand what place Jesus meant. Jesus wasn’t abandoning them forever. This wasn’t the end of his work and of their relationship to him. His Father’s house is his eternal kingdom. They were going to be with him in his kingdom. They were going to be with him in his eternal kingdom.

I want to tell you something that the overwhelming majority of people do not believe is true. Most Christians don’t even live as though it is true. We all deeply want the kingdom of God. In Jesus’ opening words of the Sermon On The Mount he said things like, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” Jesus assumed getting the kingdom of God mattered to people.

Jesus’ statement about the poor in spirit would not have been very compelling if he had said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is a double wide in Buttonwillow, California.” Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about. I’ve always dreamed of living in Buttonwillow. The statement Jesus made is compelling because Jesus was saying, “This is what you want. More than anything, you want to have the kingdom of God.”

Writer Frederick Buechner said, “The kingdom of God is what we, all of us, hunger for above all other things even when we don’t know its name or realize that it’s what we’re starving to death for. The kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers…The kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it.”

Laurie and I were watching a show on TV recently and it occurred to me that this particular show spoke to some of the aspirations of the human heart. Characters in the show plotted and maneuvered and put great effort into trying to obtain success, wealth, position, power, acclaim, and even, in better moments, love in relationships. They are trying to make life full and meaningful that way. Never once was there even a hint that maybe what they really wanted was the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom was totally absent, considered utterly irrelevant, not even worth mentioning.

But think about the kingdom of God for a moment. Dallas Willard, the late philosopher and college professor, said the kingdom of God is where what God wants done is done. What does God want done? He wants people to love each other, to be unified, to live in peace, to be good and kind, to have unbounded joy and fullness of life. The kingdom of God is a place where fear is defeated completely. That is a place that is the desire of every human being. We all wish for it. We don’t think it is possible. But Jesus said his desire is that we go there. How do we get there? Jesus said he is the way.

How is Jesus the way? Some people seem to think Jesus tells us the things we have to do to gain the kingdom of God and be with him. But notice he didn’t say he would *show* us the way, he said he *is* the way. Suppose that you decide you want to go to a really exotic place for a memorable vacation. You decide you want to go to Tahiti. So you go to Lindbergh Field and inform one of the airlines that you wish to go to Tahiti. Do you suppose they would tell you to get an ocean capable boat, stock it with provisions that will be sufficient for at least a month. Then they hand you a manual on ocean sailing and navigation and instruct you to head out into the Pacific Ocean, set a course to the southwest and prepare to sail for weeks?

That’s not what’s going to happen. The airline will sell you a ticket that enables you to board an airplane. The airplane is the way to Tahiti. You sit in the plane and the pilots fly it to Tahiti. When Jesus said he is the way, that’s what he meant. Just like you trust in the airplane and the pilots and they take you to Tahiti, you trust in Jesus, you put your faith in him, and he takes you to the kingdom of God.

Sometimes we start thinking there’s something we have to do to make sure we can get into the kingdom of God. But that’s like thinking we have to do something wile on the plane to make sure we get to Tahiti. we are to do is the same thing we do on an airplane. We might think we need to walk, or flap our arms like we’re flying, but none of that makes any difference in whether we get to Tahiti or not. All we do is completely entrust ourselves to the airplane and it gets us there. In the same way, we sometimes try to do something to make sure we get to the kingdom of God, maybe try to read the Bible more, pray more, give more money, tell more people about Jesus, do more good deeds, but those end up being like flapping your arms on the airplane. It is not going to help us get where we are going. Jesus is the way. Trusting him is the way we get there, and it is the sole way we get there. Jesus is the way, so we should trust him and him alone. Jesus is kind of like the Mandalorian, except he doesn’t say, “This is the way.” He says “I am the way.” It is not, “Here are the rules, the prescribed way to live.” He tells us to utterly trust him.

Some people think Jesus takes us part of the way, maybe most of the way, but it’s up to us to get the rest of the way. That would be like an airline getting you part of the way to Tahiti, then dropping you in the ocean and expecting you to make it the rest of the way. That’s not what Jesus said he is. He is the way, the whole way. The way we get there is by relying on him to get us there.

JESUS IS THE TRUTH

Jesus said in addition to being the way, he is the truth. That statement is rejected out of hand by our culture because our culture insists there is no such thing as truth. It consistently asserts that believing that there is one truth and we know what it is, is narrow and bigoted. Maybe Jesus can be “a truth” for some people, but not “the truth.” He can’t be the truth because there is no one truth. Everyone has to find their own truth. It is commonly asserted that insisting one knows “the truth” or has “the truth” is the source of much of the conflict that we see in the world. People use their “truth” to hit others over the head. They stand on their truth, others stand on their different truth and they fight about it. The solution to all this fighting and hurt is to admit that there is no one truth so everyone can have their own truth and we all have tolerance for others and their “truth.”

I once saw a news show on TV on which there were a couple of guests. One was William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education, the other was Jane Seymour, the actress. They were discussing the need to teach morals and values to children. I was a bit surprised that Seymour, a Hollywood personality, was speaking in favor of morality and faith. Hollywood is not known for its support for either of those. But she was urging instruction in matters of virtue and morality. However, when she was asked about her perspective on faith she said she is positive about morality, virtue and faith, but that she objects to any religion’s claim to exclusive truth. She draws the line at claiming to have truth. She is right in line with our culture.

In his book, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, Ravi Zacharias wrote that in our culture, “Philosophically you can believe anything, as long as you do not claim it to be true. Morally, you can practice anything, as long as you do not claim that it is a better way. Religiously, you can hold to anything, so long as you do not bring Jesus Christ into it.”

Unfortunately, Ms. Seymour wants to teach virtue and morality, but by insisting there is no truth she cuts off the limb she wants to sit on. She removes any possibility of actually having morality and virtue. Years ago in his book, *Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law*, well known non-Christian lawyer and Yale professor, Arthur Allen Leff, commented on the idea that we are all alone in the universe and there is no absolute truth. He said, “It looks as if we are all we have. Given what we know about ourselves and each other, this is an extraordinarily unappetizing prospect…As things now stand, everything is up for grabs. Nevertheless: napalming babies is bad. Starving the poor is wicked. Buying and selling each other is depraved. Those who stood up to and died resisting Hitler, Stalin, Amin and Pol Pot have earned salvation. Those who acquiesced deserved to be damned. There is in the world such a thing as evil. All together now: Sez who? God help us.”

Leff made a powerful case that without God revealing absolute truth, there is no possibility of any moral standards. There is no way to label anything evil. This leaves us, as he points out, with a big problem, because evil is very real. Some things are evil and we know it.

There is another issue with this approach. It aims at tolerance. That seemingly sounds good until you give it some thought. Do you just want to be tolerated? That is better than being oppressed or rejected, but it’s not enough. I don’t want to be tolerated, I want to be loved, and that approach does not make that possible.

What makes this idea that there is no truth seriously problematic is that everyone knows that some things are true and some are not. A few months ago I watched a documentary about Malaysian Air 370, the plane that mysteriously disappeared in 2014. There are a number of theories about what happened to that plane, some reasonable, some outlandish. The theories are the pressurization system on the plane failed and everyone died, the pilot committed suicide and took everyone on board with him, the plane was hijacked, the CIA took control of the plane and crashed it purposely, it actually flew north and landed in Central Asia. Here’s the question: are all those theories equally valid? Or, since there is no agreement about what happened and people believe different things, should we conclude that nothing happened to the plane? Should we just say each person needs to find his or her own truth about it and that’s all that matters? Any of those approaches make no sense. We know that something happened to that plane. There is a truth about it, though we may not know what it is. Our desire should be to find out what actually happened. In other words, the reasonable thing to do is to know that something is true about that plane and many things are not, and so we should try to learn what the truth about that plane actually is..

Often the response to that is that yes, this is the case in the physical realm where we know that some things are objectively true and some are not. There are facts that are not open to discussion or opinion. We know that 2 plus 2 equals 4, whether you believe it or not. Any other opinion is just wrong. The moon is not made of green cheese, whether you think it is or not. We all know that. But, it is asserted, in the realm of the metaphysical, in spiritual matters and in morality, it is different. In those realms there is no absolute truth, only many different opinions. We must reject claims to exclusive truth.

There are some significant concerns with this claim that in the metaphysical realm there is no absolute truth. Here are some issues with this claim. What is the proof that while in the physical realm it is undeniable that some things are true and some things are not, in the metaphysical realm it is completely different? What is the evidence that somehow in that realm there is no truth, there is only opinion and that in the end all the opinions lead to the same place? The problem is that is merely an assertion supported by no facts. It seems inconsistent and foolish to assume that the structure of life as we experience it, one in which there is truth and untruth with the reality being that truth is typically quite narrow, is somehow different than the structure of the non physical world. Wouldn’t it make sense to assume that what we see in the physical world is consistent with what we see in the non physical? To conclude something else would require some compelling evidence to the contrary, yet there is no such confidence.

I recently had my throat cut. A surgeon cut open my throat and then proceeded to cut out of my body half of my thyroid gland. How did he know where to cut? They’ve seen lots of human bodies and they’ve seen the thyroid gland is consistently at the base of the throat, so they extrapolated from that to determine my thyroid is at the base of the throat. They saw how things consistently are in human bodies, and assumed that what is consistently true would be true of me as well. What we should do is look at reality, see that there is consistently truth and non-truth, see that truth is quite narrow in its nature, and we should reasonably extrapolate from that consistency to conclude that is how things are throughout reality. The reasonable conclusion is that there is truth in the metaphysical realm and that it is probably quite narrow.

It is crucial that we observe that the claim that there is no absolute truth and that all beliefs are equally valid (or invalid according to some), one that is widely asserted and believed in our culture, since it is not based on evidence or proof, is itself a statement of faith. It is a religious belief. Those who promulgate this belief take it as a given and assume everyone should see this truth. They fail to note that it is nothing more than a religious belief, and that anyone who was not raised in this culture is likely to find it a highly questionable belief. We should ask those who clamor for this faith to apply their own claims to their beliefs. In other words, we should expect them to point out that their own beliefs and their own religious faith, has no more validity than anyone else’s.

The problem is that those who make this claim typically insist on it being the one absolute truth. There is a “truth” that they do not recognize. That truth is that everyone’s religious beliefs end up being exclusive. The person who says there is no one exclusive truth, exempts his own religious claim from that statement. He believes it is exclusively true that there is no one exclusive spiritual truth, except for his or hers. In his book, *The Reason For God*, the late Tim Keller wrote, “We are all exclusive in our…beliefs about religion, but in different ways.” This is true for Christians, obviously, but it is also true for Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, New Agers, atheists and every variety and stripe beside those. I recently read a quote from the Dalai Lama in which he said that the only way to nirvana is through Buddhism. Contrary to their claim that Buddhists accept all religions, they believe they have the truth! The only way. We don’t believe something unless we think it’s true. And we know that truth is narrow.

There is one last thing we should remember. To not know what is real and true and believe in it is both foolish and dangerous. If a person doesn’t know what is real in life we understand that person to not be completely sane. You can decide that you don’t believe in gravity, for instance, because believing in it is narrow and way too restrictive. Unfortunately you not believing it doesn’t change reality. Gravity is true and real, even though you can’t see it or touch it. If you make decisions on the basis of not believing in it at best you will get hurt, at worst you might die. The same is the case with truth in the spiritual realm. Jesus said the truth will set you free, unless you ignore or reject it, in which case you put yourself in peril.

Laurie and I recently read something that surprised me about the famous ancient mathematician, Pythagoras, who lived in the 6th century before Christ and is known as one of the fathers of mathematics. He is known for having proven the Pythagorean Theorem, that in a right triangle the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other 2 sides. He had other important contributions, but that was his most well known. What I did not know was that he was also the founder of a religious cult. He taught that the study of math was essential to brining people closer to God. I can understand that. I had a number of religious experiences in math classes. “Oh, God, please let me pass this test.” But in addition to studying math, he taught that people needed to obey certain religious rules. Some of those rules were that people should never wear shoes in the temple, they should never touch white roosters, they should always put their right shoe on first, and they should never eat beans. Um, what now? I’ve never touched a white rooster in my life, so apparently I’m perfectly holy. Oh, wait, I recently had a bean and cheese burrito, a clear reason for God to condemn me eternally. Did Pythagoras have a particular revulsion to passing gas, thus the rule against eating beans? I have no idea where that came from. My point is when you don’t believe the truth you are setting yourself up for delusion. You can end up believing some pretty silly things. And if the “no absolute religious truth” crowd is correct, then the Pythagorean cult’s beliefs are as valid as any other ideas. So no beans for you.

Jesus made a blatant claim to exclusive truth. He insisted the only way to come to the Father was through him. We need to come to grips with that. Rather than asserting nonsense about there being no truth and all paths leading to the same destination, an idea that is true nowhere else in all reality, we need to acknowledge his claim and decide it is either true or not true. The good news is that Jesus gave powerful reasons for believing that he is exactly what he said, the way the truth and the life.

JESUS IS THE LIFE

Jesus said not only is he the way and the truth, but he is also the life. What life? How is Jesus the life? Everyone wants life. Not only do we all want to live, we want a terrific life. No one wants to merely exist, and we certainly don’t want a life that is terrible, a living hell. Somewhere deep within us we have a sense of what life ought to be, of the way we want to live. We are aware that in nearly everyone’s case, life could be better.

The question is, what would make it better? What is that life that we all sense is possible, but that we don’t have the way we sense it should be? To answer that we should start with noting that when Jesus talked about life he often spoke of eternal life. In John 6:53 Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” That was a graphic illustration of believing in Jesus. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood meant totally depending on him, believing in him to give life, just as food and water give us life. He said without believing in him we won’t have life. Clearly he didn’t mean we’d die instantly. He meant though existing, we wouldn’t have the true life, the life we all sense we want. But then in verse 54 he said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” Jesus connected having the true, full life we all want with having eternal life. They are linked. Having eternal life means you also have the true life now.

Oh, eternal life means heaven, right? But isn’t heaven going to be kind of boring? Isn’t it going to be sort of like an eternal church service? We will be worshiping God, but it is not going to be boring. In Psalm 16:11 David wrote to God, “You make known to me the path of life; you fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” He understood that the best, most powerful joy we will ever know comes from being in God’s presence. In Romans 14:17 Paul wrote that the kingdom of God is, “Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The kingdom of God is a place of goodness and peace and unbounded joy.

Is it really possible that there could be joy just from being in God’s presence? Imagine your ideal vacation spot, a place where you would be at peace and have total enjoyment, complete joy. I’m sure you know that for me that place is…Bakersfield. Uh, no. Sadly that place for Laurie and me may never be the same after the terrible fire that destroyed the town of Lahaina. But it’s still Hawaii. Whatever that place is for you, imagine it. Suppose that I offered to make it possible for you to go there free, but with one stipulation. You have to go alone. Is it going to be the transcendent experience you would want it to be? Here is the truth for me. I’d rather take a vacation in Bakersfield with Laurie, than one in Hawaii without her. My greatest joy is not a place, it’s a person. Could it be that this is even more true when that person is God himself? The answer is yes, for we were made for him. Ultimately fulfillment is found in him.

Life in God’s kingdom is not going to be boring, it’s going to be spectacular, peaceful and joyful. What will it be like? Paul was given a glimpse of it and he said in Philippians 1:23 it was better by far than being here. In 2 Corinthians 12:4 he said when he was given that peek into God’s kingdom he “heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.” He didn’t mean there was a rule against telling it, he meant human language did not permit him to express it.

You all are old enough to remember TV the way it used to be. I remember when it meant everything was in black and white. There was no color. Even when color came along we watched on, at best, a 32 inch screen. We knew nothing of High Definition TV, and certainly not of Ultra High Def. We couldn’t imagine what that was. Now we watch those sharp, crisp pictures with vivid colors and surround stereo sound, and we think, “How did we ever watch those horrible, fuzzy pictures?” Think of that as a little like the difference between life in God’s kingdom and life right now.

In God’s kingdom there will be no evil and no fallenness. Even the best things in this world are touched by evil and have an element of brokenness. Imagine a world where there is no more fear, no more anger, no more bitterness, no more guilt. Colors will be brighter and more vivid and varied. Music will be even more awesome. Everything we do and experience will be better. Remember what Paul said in Romans 14:17. It will be a place of peace and joy.

Life in God’s eternal kingdom and fullness of life right now are cut from the same cloth. They are of the same material. They are closely linked, for without the hope of eternal life there will never be true peace in this life. There will only be an ever present fear and sadness. The life Jesus said we could have in him is the beginnings of that eternal life. It is a life of peace, joy, goodness and fulfillment, a life lived in the presence of the source of joy, God himself. When Jesus said he is the life, he meant we come to the Father through him, and in the Father we begin getting that taste of life as we dream of it, a life of fulness, freedom, peace, joy and love.

APPLICATION

JESUS GIVES US CONFIDENCE

We can know that he is the way, the truth and the life. This should not make us arrogant and unloving toward others. We should never, ever, beat others over the head with the truth of Jesus. The truth of Jesus should make us humble and grateful that he has provided the way, given us the life. This should bring us great peace. We don’t have to try to force others to believe it, but neither should it make us feel uneasy and threatened if they don’t.

When Jesus made these statements they were as radical in his culture as they are in ours, though for different reasons. His disciples, like most in their culture, believed the Old Testament law was the way, the truth and the life. The Romans believed a little like our culture that there was no one way, one truth, there was only power. It was revolutionary for those first followers of Jesus to believe he is the way, the truth, and the life. But they believed Jesus. It changed them gave them true life, and changed the world. It will do the same for us.

This should give us peace. We know the truth. We can rest and rejoice in it. It should fill our hearts with not tolerance for others, but love, God’s unconditional love for them. Our confidence in this truth, this life, is not in some theology or doctrine. It is in the Person of Jesus Christ. It comes from knowing him. It is in living in his presence that we have confidence, knowing he will not abandon us or fail us ever.

WE SHOULD REJOICE IN HIM AND EXPERIENCE LIFE

So the great news is we should rejoice. Eternal life is ours, and we can begin experiencing a taste of it right now. Live in the presence of our Lord Jesus. Rejoice in him and his love and forgiveness. As we do this we can walk daily with him and experience true peace, true joy, unconditional, unlimited love, and true fullness of life. Everything we are and do matters in him, and that fills our lives with meaning and his fullness.

We should remember always the life we want is God’s kingdom. This is what we were made for. It is our true home. The power, the pleasures, the approval, the acclaim of this world can never give us that kingdom. Jesus is the way and the life. Let’s trust in him in everything.