

TRUTH HAS ONLY ONE VERSION!

Today's Text: 2 Cor. 13:1-10

Extracts:

This will be the third time I am coming to you. “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare- since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.... Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?- unless indeed you are disqualified...Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honourable, though we may seem disqualified. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth [2 Cor. 13: 1-3, 5, 7-8].

On Saturday, 8th March 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 departed Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Malaysia, and it was scheduled to arrive Beijing, China, about six hours later.¹ Less than an hour after take-off, however, the plane lost contact with the ground. To this day, over seven weeks later, no reliable trace has been found. In the interim, speculations are flying. For example, some terrorist attack or the crew's technical competence, among others, have been offered as possible explanations for the mishap. The bottom line is that nobody knows what has happened other than that the plane is still missing! Unless and until it is found, nobody knows the truth about that plane. Truth can only have one version.

Truth is invaluable but it is also said to be bitter, that is, not sweet to hear. In our family, school, office, business or church, the need to hear or tell the truth is preached or professed but hardly practised. Yet, our honour and integrity are said to be umbilically tied to truth-telling. What is truth? Why is it so elusive? How can we obtain it and live by it? In this week's Bible story, Paul wrote, “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.” He was writing to the Corinthian church in respect of the truth of Christ in his life and ministry. There is something in Paul's message that will help us to answer those questions and more. Read on!

¹ Story is based on the following sources: “Missing Malaysia plane: What we know,” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26503141>; 7 April 2014; and Tom Watkins, CNN, “In search for Malaysia Airlines plane, new signal possibly detected,” 10 April 2014; <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/10/world/asia/malaysia-airlines-plane/index.html>

1. Background: What is truth?

It was a remarkable encounter between a judge (Pontius Pilate) and an accused (Jesus Christ) that first Good Friday morning two thousand years ago [Jn 18: 28-38]. The Jews had “tried” Him in their court and found Him guilty of blasphemy, deserving of death which they had no jurisdiction to execute. That was why they had brought Him before the Roman governor of that province.

As soon as Pilate entered the Praetorium a second time, he asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” That was at the heart of Rome’s concern. If the Jews were to have a king, that would be considered a major threat to Caesar’s control over that province. It would be regarded as rebellion punishable by death. If found guilty, non-Roman citizens were crucified but Romans were beheaded. The simple answer that he had expected was a yes or a no. But Jesus looked at him with an air of dignity and authority and asked back, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?” Staggered by that “audacious” response, Pilate admitted that it was the Jewish nation and the chief priests that had delivered Jesus to him. Then, he asked the question that he ought to have asked in the first place, “What have You done?”

Jesus then went back to answer Pilate’s earlier question! His kingdom is not of this world; otherwise, His servants would have fought to prevent Him from being delivered to the Jews. Pilate then threw back his earlier question, “Are You a king then?” Jesus affirmed His kingship for which cause He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth. He added, “*Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*” Apparently exasperated, Pilate shot back, “What is truth?” Pilate then went out to the Jewish leaders and said, “I find no fault in Him at all.”

What is truth? That is a question that still baffles most of us to this day. Wickedness has reached a stage that even believers are getting confused about truth. For example, *some of us repeat a lie so often that people begin to cite it as the truth.* Some of us pass what is popular as the truth, hanging on to such clichés as *vox populi vox Dei* [the voice of the people is the voice of God]. Some of us claim that if something cannot be proved empirically [by touch, taste, hearing, sight or smell], then it cannot be true. But we know that *opinions can change*; that *facts can be updated by new information but truth is an invariant reality. It is the same yesterday, today and forever.*

That truth is unchanging does not make it acceptable to everybody. We still look at it in terms of our aspirations, values and other things. That is where faith comes in. Do you believe the truth or not? Interestingly, the popular Apostles’ Creed (that summarises the totality of the Christian faith) begins by saying, “I believe in God the Father Almighty ...and in Jesus Christ our Lord...” *Unless you believe, the truth of God and of His only begotten Son will have no traction with you. Therefore, truth can best be established by irrefutable fact anchored on faith.*

That is the point that Paul is drawing our attention to this Easter morning. In his words, “We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” [2 Cor. 13: 8]. The truth he had in mind was *the proof of Christ speaking in him [v. 3], the same Christ that was in believers in the Corinthian church [v. 5] and in today’s congregations. Paul is like saying as follows: Everything I have taught and shown you about Jesus is true, but I do not want you to accept it as a mere fable. Test it out yourself and be convinced that I am telling you the absolute truth that you can put your faith on. Truth has only one version.*

In establishing the truth of Christ in him, Paul drew the attention of the Corinthians to the following yardsticks:

a) *Confirmed by 2-3 witnesses*

Paul wrote, “This will be the third time I am coming to you. *‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established’*” [2 Cor. 13: 1]. This rule comes from the Law of Moses [Deut. 17:7] to ensure that anyone who did something deserving of death was given a fair hearing. The witnesses were the first two or three people required to lay hands on the guilty party. To minimize the activities of false evidence, witnesses were to see themselves standing before God, the priests and the judges. Thus, a false witness stood the chance of being visited with the consequences s(he) might have tried to inflict on a person on trial [Deut. 19: 15-21]. Therefore, *being a witness was a sacred duty and a good means to establish the truth of a matter.*

Unfortunately, the test can be abused. For example, during the trial of Jesus before the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin, even the testimonies of the false witnesses that the chief priests had brought against Him did not agree [Mk 14: 55-56]. In another example, when Jezebel wanted to seize Naboth’s land, his treasured inheritance, for her husband, King Ahab, to use as a vegetable garden, she recruited two scoundrels who came before the people to allege falsely that they had heard Naboth blaspheme God and the king. On the strength of their false evidence, Naboth was stoned to death and Jezebel gave his land to her husband. It took God, through the prophet Elijah, to reveal that scheme. On the spot where dogs licked the blood of innocent Naboth, there, dogs were also going to lick Ahab’s blood [1 Kgs 21: 1-19], and so it happened [1 Kgs 22: 38]. How many false witnesses get away with murder these days?

However, *the truth of Jesus the Christ’s resurrection from the dead was confirmed by multiple and credible witnesses.* The Scriptures prophesied it [Lk 24: 44], and His disciples were with the risen Christ for forty days before His ascension into heaven [Acts 1:3]. Paul himself encountered Him on the road to Damascus, leading to his conversion from persecutor to disciple of Jesus [Acts 9: 1-6]. The same Jesus that has ascended to

heaven will one day return to judge the world [**Acts 1: 11; Rev. 22: 12**]. So, whether we believe it or not, that is the truth about Jesus! There is no other version about it.

b) *Proof of Christ speaking through Paul*

Paul wrote that the Corinthians were seeking “a proof of Christ speaking” in him, who was not weak toward them but mighty in them [**2 Cor. 13: 3**]. In other words, they should know better that the spiritual authority that he demonstrated in their midst and which he imparted on them could only have come from Christ’s anointing on him. Writing to the Galatian church, Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” [**Gal. 2: 20**].

Without Jesus, His followers can do nothing [**Jn 15: 5**]. For example, the same Peter that had denied knowing Jesus during His trial was the same one that boldly led His disciples to face the Sanhedrin and assert before the Jewish leaders that Christ is alive and it was only by the name of Jesus that we shall be saved. In fact, when they saw his (and John’s) boldness and, knowing that they were uneducated and untrained, they realized that they had been with Jesus [**Acts 4: 1-13**].

c) *Proof of God speaking through Christ*

Paul wrote, “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” [**2 Cor. 13: 4**]. In other words, Jesus did not come into the world on His own but to do His Father’s will. In His own words, “I can of Myself do nothing... because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” [**Jn 5: 30**].

This is a significant part of the Christian faith. ***Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God*** [**Col. 1: 15**], begotten not made [**Ps. 2: 7; Jn 1: 14**] whose responsibility it will be to judge the world [**Jn 5: 22**]. That is why Jesus has said, “He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him” [**v. 23**]. God the Father confirmed in several places that the world should hear His beloved Son as if they were listening directly to God Himself [**Matt. 3: 17; Jn 12: 27-28; 2 Pet. 1: 16-17**]. Therefore, ***just as God spoke to Paul through Christ, so He is speaking to you today***. So, when you speak about Jesus who is in you, remember that it is the Spirit of His Father that is speaking in you” [**Matt. 10: 20**].

Having established “beyond reasonable doubt” the truth of Christ in his ministry, Paul challenged the Corinthians to examine themselves as to whether they were in

the faith, whether they knew that Jesus Christ is in them [2 Cor. 13: 5]. It is the same question that he is asking us right now. Do we appear approved? Do we do what is honourable? ***It is only when we are anchored on truth that we can answer those questions without being disqualified*** [vv. 6-8]. Truth has only one version.

2. Evaluating your truth threshold

Those who do not practise truth-telling in their secular affairs are less likely to accept and practise truth by faith. Therefore, a good starting point is to honestly assess your truth threshold. In a typical group, we can easily come across the following types of people:

a) *Pathological liars*

Some people live and feed on lying, especially if it helps them to get what they want, such as a new job, a promotion, a contract or a political appointment. Like Satan, they are ready to steal, kill or destroy if it serves their purpose. Some people even raise their children to never tell the truth if it will hurt or slow them down in climbing the social ladder in a competitive society! Those who do such things are called pathological liars. Lying is like a way of life for them.

I recently came across an insurance policy document in which the policy holder is warned, “In the event of an accident, do not accept liability.” What if the policy holder were the guilty party? Take the Biblical example of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, who sold a possession with the intention of giving the proceeds to the church. However, they both agreed to keep part of it for themselves while telling Peter that they had brought the whole amount. Having lied to the Holy Spirit, they both died on the spot, one after the other [Acts 5: 1-10].

The word of God says that all liars will be excluded from the New Jerusalem [Rev. 22: 15]. ***Wilful lying is a sin against the Holy Spirit*** which will not be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come [Matt. 12: 31-32].

b) *Some people distort the truth*

Some people may be ***telling the truth but in a slanted way***. There is some truth and some lying in the story! For example, a mother is busy preparing dinner. The home phone rings and her 5-year-old daughter picks it up. Somebody mummy does not want to speak to is on the phone. So, she asks her daughter to tell the person mummy is not at home. The innocent child tells the caller, “Mummy says to tell you she is not at home!” The truth is that she is not available; but not at home? That is a lie.

Take the case of the young Amalekite who brought David the crown that had fallen from the dead king Saul's head on Mount Gilboa. We know that it was Saul himself who fell on his sword after he had been wounded by the Philistines [1 Sam. 31: 4]. Yet, the Amalekite, hoping to get a reward from David, claimed that he was the one that killed King Saul! Instead of a reward, David got him executed for killing God's anointed [2 Sam. 1: 1-16]. The lesson for us is to always tell it like it is and receive the reward from God rather than from human beings.

Another form of distortion is *exaggeration of the truth*. In this case, we *embellish the truth to blow our own contribution out of proportion* for, according to an African proverb, the snake seen by one person is always longer than the stick with which it is compared! For example, some false witnesses told the chief priests during the trial of Jesus that they heard Him say that He would destroy that temple made with hands "and within three days" build another one without hands [Mk 14: 57-58]! Of course, He could do so if He chose to. The truth is that Jesus was referring to the temple of His body [Jn 2: 21].

You can do much better than pathological liars or those who distort or embellish the truth. Let the Holy Spirit help you to accept the truth of Jesus because no one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12:3]. *Jesus is alive in you if you have accepted Him as your Lord and Saviour. You can do nothing against that truth but for it. That is Paul's message for us this Easter.*

3. Conclusion: Jesus is the truth!

Two thousand years ago, there was another "flight," a ground flight on a donkey on that first Palm Sunday. The sole passenger was Jesus Christ, as He did a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, supposedly to ascend the throne of His father, David [Lk 1: 31-33]. By Friday of that week, however, He was seen hanging on the cross. Thereafter, He disappeared out of public view. Some people said that His disciples came by night to steal His body and bury it in an unmarked grave [Matt. 28: 11-15]. But numerous disciples confirmed that He rose from the dead, and that He will soon return to judge the world [Acts 1: 1-3, 11].

Unlike the missing Malaysian airline with 227 passengers on board, Jesus arrived in heaven and is sitting at the right hand of His Father [Acts 7: 55-56]. Whether you like it or not, whether you believe it or not, that is the irrefutable truth! Can you afford to trivialize or ignore it?

Truth has only one version. Jesus the Christ is the truth.