

What if..?

by Art Katz

Art Katz challenges the church to confront uncomfortable truths and reassess its beliefs through a lens of humility and accountability.

Duration: 1:06:14

Scripture: Isaiah 55:8

Topics: "Reality"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of truth in the church. He believes that the truth to which God calls the church is not just external or doctrinal, but a deep and spiritual essence. The speaker challenges the congregation to recognize the seriousness of their role as the church of God and to be a true reflection of the realities of the gospel. He also acknowledges his own fatigue and lack of discretion in his speech, but believes that the message he received from God is personal and specific to the congregation.

Transcript

Good morning, Saints. Believe me, I'm more scared than you are. This has got to be the most frightening obedience to which I have ever been required.

And I have had some hairy requirements over the years. Well, we sometimes joke we're living in community on a farm in Northern Minnesota with a Lord brought us 25 years ago, making clear that we're to establish a place of refuge for Jews in flight from persecution in the United States of America. How's that for an opening line? And it's been a searing experience to be in community with God's people.

I'm a Jewish believer, former Marxist, atheist, left-wing, radical history teacher who came to a place of disillusionment 35 years ago. With a failed marriage with a German wife whom I had met in the service there. And it set me on the road to salvation.

I put a pack on my back and went back to where I was as a high school dropout at the age of 16, where I didn't leave school because I was not interested in knowledge and truth, but because I was. Can you understand that? And truth was only a truth. School was only a place in which careers were obtained for split level success.

I had no appetite or interest in that. And not only were the answers not forthcoming, but the questions were never asked that are real questions. So I was a high school dropout at the age of 16, a merchant seaman, subsequently became a Marxist, left-wing radical, embraced what they call Marxism as a worldview until I came to a time of disillusionment.

I've gone through a succession of gods with a small G. And in my final disillusionment in the, I was then a high school history teacher, graduate of the university of California at Berkeley. I took a year's leave of absence from the teaching profession, put the pack on my back again and set forth once more to somehow find the truth that I would leave no stone unturned through Western Europe, where, of which we Jews are essentially the architects of the modern world. We've given the world that's basic contour with Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Steven Spielberg.

It's amazing. If you, but knew the Jews who influenced your thinking, your mode of life. And I wasn't looking for God.

I didn't know there was a God to be found. I was looking for philosophical, ideological truth, but in the course of it, God was looking for me. I had one of my students, a little Gentile girl with a snubbed nose and freckles, whom her mother said to me, my daughter used to come home from school.

She said, weeping over you, knowing that you were an atheist and a radical. And since that day, she said, both my daughter and I have been praying for you. And the Lord nudged me in the ribs and said, she's the one whose prayers have entered you into the kingdom of heaven.

So I'm in grad. I'm grateful for snubbed nose, freckle faced Gentiles haven't always been, but especially when they're the key to your salvation and can pray fervently because they're righteous and God hears that prayer pursued me as the hound of heaven for 14 months throughout Europe. I kept the journal in those days, which subsequently became my first book out of print in English, but I can get it for you in Russian, French, German, Hebrew, Swedish, Finnish.

It's called Ben Israel. That means son of Israel, odyssey of a modern Jew. It's a remarkable existential saga of a modern man.

That's what we Jews are in search and apprehended by the God whom I was not seeking. Well, life was too earnest after being saved to go back to anything less than the continuing pursuit of truth. And it wasn't long, maybe three, four or five years into my new faith, having traversed evangelical fundamental Christianity, charismatic full gospel movements to realize that something was still grievously missing that we could not be to the Jews what we, what we ought until we were somehow back into the vitality, texture quality that characterized the church at the first in apostolic way, that somehow the issue was lifestyle and that we had to find our way back to community.

And that's how the Lord brought us to our place for 25 years in community, Northern Minnesota, 40 below zero winters, nine months out of the year. And that intensifies every question. So, um, I often joke and say that there's an invisible saying over the entry to our property, you know, to the concentration camps.

It was our bite mocked Fry work makes free course. They weren't coming to be free, but to be released by death after exhaustion or extermination over our property. I would have said, all you do enter here, abandon hope of retaining any kind of fleshly self-esteem or any kind of mirage or any kind of illusion, because you're going to be ruthlessly dealt with.

Not because anyone has that as their intention, but it's the very nature of community, the intensification of all of the issues of life that become brutal. I've been accused in that place of being an enemy of the gospel by my own people. After, uh, sacrificially pouring myself out that they might have a place to come of that kind.

So someone said, you have to give a little introduction, a description of yourself that people might know where you're coming from. I jokingly said, maybe it's not too much of a joke at the Sunday school hour. You can see why the church desperately needs Jewish believers.

You guys left to yourselves as a formula for deception and disaster. You bring a wonderful balance to our intensity, but without our intensity and insane jealousy, you would go the way of all flesh and not even know it. So, uh, God intended a body in which these remarkable elements, Jewish and Gentile would kind of counterbalance one another and be sane and right and true and real, so you're going to get a little taste of what you're missing.

And maybe they thank God that it's only a periodic visit that we don't have someone of this kind continually in our midst. You know what it says of these prophets that lay in the street for three and a half days before the resurrected, these are they who torment those who dwell on the face of the earth with tormentors. Well, some of my books are out there.

They're probably already all gone in the few that were left to be made available. I, but I want you to know their existence. And I've asked one of the ladies in the congregation to put a sheet out there that you can request them by filling out your name and address, giving the money for the book and for the mailing.

We'll mail it to you because it's exceptional literature. Reality is my second book for principle essays or themes of an inspirational kind. The message on Elijah is worth the price of the book alone.

And that's in several languages, French and, um, I don't know, Russian and so on. A more recent single message, apostolic conversion. Was given in California where I was to speak for four days.

And after the second day, I despaired. I could not go on. I cried out to God.

I said, Lord, these people ostensibly have it all together. This is a groovy, swinging, charismatic fellowship. But why then do I feel like I'm up against a brick wall? I can't go any further.

They, the word is coming back into my teeth. It's as if these people have silently covenanted to go this far, but no further. Of course, we were living in a home of, I don't know how many thousands of square feet.

Uh, many of the people were wealthy and contractors and cars and double and triple garages with boats that must've had something to do with the fact that they could say this far, no further. And so we spent the day in fasting and in prayer. The Lord gave this word that night.

This is the actual verbatim transcript of that spoken message. When you read it, you'll marvel. You would have thought that this was months in preparation.

It is articulate. It is ordered. This is a divine logic as it flows out from page to page, just spontaneously on the spot, but when they heard this word down, they went, Alan spoke about going down twice in his life.

This was one of those going downs. Probably one of the fraudulent things about our Christianity is both the frequency and the shallowness of our altercals. There are times when I almost want to call a

moratorium and say, that's a no, no.

If we're not going to be changed by our coming forward, if we're going to return to our seats and the condition in which we left them better remain where you are. And we can't play with God. So these people went down and when they got up, I knew that they were changed and that change has remained through these years.

The pastors preaching changed the third, the church left. They were plunged immediately into a financial crisis. So, you know, there's something happened.

And that this little booklet now is in Danish and in Dutch and in French and in German, no, not German yet, Russian. It deserves to go around the world. It will, you must get this.

And then the most recent book, the Holocaust, where was God? How many of us have asked the question? I can't believe that a phenomenon of this kind has taken place in modern times and especially that it has taken place in modern times and that we should somehow sweep it under the carpet, that we should not wrestle with the ponderous questions that the systematic annihilation of 6 billion Jews creates for modern men throughout the world. Maybe it's so painful. Maybe we're so fearful of what the answer might be if we leaped into the grave with these bones that we avoid it.

You know that the world has a wonderful talent to sweep things under the rug and for history to lose its cogency. I shared this morning how if you went to the concentration camp Dachau today, where I went in 1952, where the original barracks stood with the stink of death and whipping posts, places of torture and the gold fillings from teeth that were kept in the hair and the ovens with the bones and the ashes in, you would have one impression. But if you went there today, it's all nicely tidied up.

It's all nicely landscaped. They've removed all of the stink of death and put up one barrack according to specifications. That's the German mind.

So there's something in man that is escapist. We don't have a stomach for hard things and for truth. And that's pitiful for mankind at large.

It'll lead to a life not rightly lived and to an eternity that will be shameful to consider. But for the church to be evasive, for the church to be escapist, for the church to have no stomach for truth, for the church to be a kind of a get by phenomenon that goes on from Sunday to Sunday with predictable services, that is inexcusable. All the more in the last days, I have to assume that we're closer to the end than we know.

If what was given me from one third of this morning till 4:30 was the Lord, I'm willing to run the possibility that it's my flesh and pay the price for it because you know that we men who stand before God's people are under a double obligation. This is no small thing. We're not little professionals doing our cute thing and grabbing the honorarium and running.

We have an obligation before God and what we bring to God's people and what we think he has put into our hearts to share. So I've shared that already because I've written out four pages, unusual for me, with Allen. And if he did not witness that, I was ready to call it quits then.

But he has encouraged me, so I'm going to go on. The final book and the subject of today is the subject of truth. It's much more than just a mechanical thing or just an approximation of things that are externally true or even doctrinally true.

The truth to which God calls the church is the spirit of truth, the intangible, indefinable essence of something through and through, not just its external ramifications. It's the whole truth. And I recommend this to you so you can order any or all of these books on the sheet back there.

They're all seven dollars each, except the slim one for three and throw in a little something more for the mailing. And as soon as I get back, it'll be sent out and you'll be blessed for the having of them. Well, I'm tired physically.

I was tired before I came to Georgetown. I'm more tired now, having been up since 1.30 and disturbed sleep. And I jokingly said this morning in the seminary class, I am not alert enough to be what's the word, careful about my speaking, to be discreet.

I'm too tired to exercise that kind of watchfulness. So I just have to blurt out somehow what the Lord has given. And you will see that it is extremely personal.

You say, would God go that far to name names, identify things that are known to the congregation or perhaps should be known? And will he go that far? Couldn't he say the same thing in general terms? Evidently not, maybe at an earlier time when the last days were not as imperative and the issues as grave, he might have spoken generally, I don't know. But now, if nothing more, this will scare us to say if God is in this and willing to go that far and to risk this kind of embarrassment, how earnest must the issues be that he's willing for that cost? So, Lord, if there's some way that the floor could open up and conveniently swallow me, I would welcome it. But if the time has come, a moment of truth and I'm the appointed one to deliver it, you're full.

And what you what I have from one thirty on this morning is actually from you that I'm asking that the spirit of truth should be so invested in these statements that however much they pinch and even stab, that we have to acknowledge the truth and the God of it and bow before it and let it perform its work. Lord, it's either going to require a violent rejection or a prostration before you. I can't conceive that there's any middle ground.

So speak, Lord, as if this is a moment of truth that has arrived and we're not to be spared. The issues are too great and we thank and give you praise for such a love and such a jealousy that will not let us go and requires this in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, I was wakened with two words. What if? What if what we understand and think to be true and even from God that sanctions and condones and blesses is not so and that there's another way to understand and perceive some of the things that we have assumed that need to be brought into question, I would say, I can't think of a healthier posture for any true segment of God's people that can rightly be called the church and the apostolic meaning of that word than to periodically have a reality check and to raise the question about all of its categories in the sense of what if what if we're wrong? What if we're mistaken? What if we're deceived? You don't think you're a candidate for that? I can't think of anything that would more facilitate deception than to think that you're exempt. The best of us, the Lord has saved me from deception, I'm so grateful for the experience, not out of some carnal thing or some ambition for ministry or anything like that that might have been the format for deception, but out of very spirituality itself.

I mean, I was saved by the correction that came to me by the youngest and weakest member of our community, newly saved, high pitched, cracked voice, pimple, old knees and elbows and the most awkward thing you can imagine. And in this high pitched voice and cracked voice, I said, well, you know,

Art, that we have agreed that that the ministry flows out of the life and the life out of the relationships. And if you're disconnected from the life, then what ministry? Of course, the Lord had already developed something in Kansas City where I had gone for an excursion with Jews that I hadn't sought.

And it was so profound. And Kansas City is the heart of the nation and God is doing this with prestigious Jews. This must be God and a reason to stay there, not to come back to the boondocks of northern Minnesota where they only wanted me because of the insecurity.

The Lord corrected me, I went there to straighten them out, flew in with two Jewish brothers and the Lord straightened me out through the weakest and youngest member of the community. The moment those words came, it went right into my kiskis, my gut and my head fell on my chest. And I knew that I had been in error and I was deceived.

I came back. What if the Lord, who is truth? If. So through our pretensions as being unimpressed, our assumptions and confidences in which we boast as being false, vain, pretentious and apostolically insignificant, what if? What if the best of what we boast in and exalt ourselves in is seen by God being actually the opposite and the antithesis of what we presume it to be? What if? Doesn't the scripture say that his thoughts are not our thoughts? And that his thoughts are as distant from our thoughts as the heaven from the earth? The heart of deception is the presumption upon God that assumes because we think something godly or increase of church or enlargement or building a program that he necessarily comes along to sanction, condone, bless and approve.

What if he doesn't? What if he's allowing us to prepare for our humiliation and our failure, and out of that will come a reality that will be significant for this community and not the hope for building that we thought would once we provide the room, of course, God will fill it. What if? Will we welcome the sort of the spirit to pass, pierce through and lay bare and reveal our emptiness? Would we be willing for a reality check, which we ought periodically to take, which we would not allow our cars to avoid after so many thousands of miles to put to put to certain tests because we have to have a confidence that when we're on freeways and going 70 and more miles an hour, that we know that the brake system works, this works, that works. Reality check for cars.

And we don't allow it for ourselves and require it for ourselves periodically. Are we willing to go back to the drawing board? Are we willing to, for example, suffer the stigma of an unfinished building to haunt us as the statement of our pretension and presumption that God was never in it, even though we were able to raise the money to bring it that far. But the Rotarians could have done that.

And the Eagles and other human societies, that's not necessarily an evidence that God is in something. What if he's not in it? See, the issue of truth is the willingness to bear the what ifs, and in the Sunday school class, I quoted from a script in Jeremiah of the Lord's rebuke of Israel, who was not valiant for the truth. And I raised the question, what's a synonym for valiant? And I was rightly informed, courageous, courage.

Truth requires courage, saints. And because it's going to be painful often, if not invariably, before it becomes glorious. So even the willingness to bear a what if requires a courage, the what if of being wrong, the what if of being mistaken, the what if of being vain, conceited, presumptuous about God and willing to go back to square one.

Truth requires something. It's not just the mental acknowledgment, but it might require a very costly adjustment, maybe even the acknowledgment that tens of thousands of dollars may have been misspent or other kinds of things. Truth is not a cheapie.

And the church is called to be the ground and pillar of the truth. I think that the Lord could lay at the doorstep of the church in the world and in this nation, the full accountability for the condition of the world about us. We are God's plumb line.

We are the statement from heaven of what reality is. And if we are not that thing, not that we approve it or even speak it, but are the thing in itself corporately as well as personally, what hope for the world? No wonder they're deluded. No wonder they're vain.

No wonder they're there. They're on some Alice in Wonderland trip in which there's no eternity, no judgment, no day of reckoning, no day of the Lord. Until when it comes, they shriek with a horror and cry for clefts in the rock to hide because no one had warned them.

No one had lived in such a way before them as to make even the issue of the of eternity a reality, let alone the judgment, the apocalyptic judgment that comes in the suddenness of that day. Oh, I believe that, brother. I believe that.

Oh, yeah. Well, you're not living as if you do. How come you don't give the impression of that in the way you deport yourself and carry yourself and conduct yourself? You're living as if this is the best of all worlds.

And if it's not, it could be made better. You're making plans for your vacations and, and all the other kinds of things as if the world will go on in an endless way. And we, and we have plenty of time and there's no urgency.

There's no apocalyptic expectancy in you. There's no sense of an end to which we're moving that is of a grave kind, which was, if we deeply understood it and subscribe to it, it would change our whole atmosphere. There would be a high seriousness of what we are about and our jobs and our careers would be recognized for what they are.

Mere secondary provision from God to keep body and soul together for the principal purpose of being the church of God in this locality and making known the reality of to which the world is otherwise blinded, not only by what we say, but what we in fact are in ourselves. Got the picture. So you're willing to go back to the drawing board square one to repent of the whole verbal masquerade.

Listen, guys, I've been around a long time. I'm a wordsmith myself. I'm an author and an eloquent man who loves the English language.

I'm a student of language. You know what I realize that the church is a phraseological phenomenon. It's like an extension of what I knew as a as a high school teacher, that if you say something verbally or can master the statement, you think you have the corresponding reality.

They used to put my grades up on the board first and then the rest of the class. I broke the curve. But when it came to teach the things in which I was a plus student and I had to stand before flesh and blood kids, you know what I found out? I didn't know as I ought to know.

I was able verbally to give back the information given sufficient to pass the test, but that is does not constitute knowledge that is of a life changing kind. I had to go back to the drawing board. I had to relearn my subject.

I had to learn it with my students and blood, sweat and tears day by day. Well, much of our Christianity is merely phraseological, verbal, it's a game's playing. And we think that because we can intone and invoke words like apostolic, prophetic, body of Christ, kingdom of God, that somehow we have the awesome realities to which they point.

We need a reality check unless we find ourselves empty symbols and bumbling characters who say the right things without the corresponding reality. Do you know that a great revival began in Argentina because one man of God called a moratorium on one word. He refused to allow his church to speak the word Lord.

With the God I had that authority. First of all, I think the church would be called to a silence for a few months and not be allowed to say anything. But you know what he recognized? The word Lord had become a cheapie.

It was like a reflex action, like a beep, a hiccup, Lord this, Lord that, Lord, Lord, without realizing that the scripture says there'll be a day when some of us will stand before him and say, Lord, Lord. And he'll say, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you.

Anybody can say, Lord, Lord. But is he Lord, in fact? I said to the people in San Antonio that if you're going to be the body of Christ and an apostolic entity in your locality and a lifesaving provision from God for Jews in distress in the last days, you're going to have to become an integral body that submits to the authority of God in that body. And that is not established by credentializing or by office, but by the anointing and the authority that God implants.

And that you autonomous Christians who do your own thing, who think you're doing God's service to come come to a Sunday morning or put a buck in the plate, make your own decisions continually. About a vacation, with whom do you confer about leaving the body of Christ to which you have been joined for some significant number of days without conferring if it's going to cause any kind of significant loss or disjuncture or or that it could not be permitted at that time. Who is anyone who is going to tell me when I take my vacation, it's my vacation.

I've got the right. Oh, yeah. Not if we're a militant company, an island of of sanity besieged by a hostile world that has got to act in concert.

And we can't we can't be the sum total of subjective decisions made on the basis of our convenience and will. Or else it's not the church, it's just a culture of a Sunday kind that requires nothing of any real consequence and allows us to continue in the thing that we really are about our own pleasure, our own security, our own self-interest. The Sunday thing is a gloss and we're singing all of these rapturous songs of worship.

It's a lie. So we're complimenting ourselves and having it together when, in fact, we think ourselves rich and have need of nothing, complimenting so we're on the cutting edge. Listen, we'll look to our vocabulary.

We must be look how we speak of it and the assurance that the Lord is in agreement with our own self-assessment and endorses it, that our five point plank enjoys a ringing amen and approval from

heaven. It's not that the five point plank is in itself in error or unscriptural. No, it's it's compatible.

But is it given? Has it come down from above? Is it just a kind of a verbalism that gives us the sense of being about substantial things when, in fact, we don't have the deepest part of intention of fulfilling it? See what I mean? A whole thing can become a gamesmanship and we're not even aware. What if he sees and now I'm not saying that he does, I'm not saying thus saith the Lord about anything that I'm saying, I'm only just raising the question, what if he sees it in that way? What if he sees the pastor's Ph.D. as being vain, as being insubstantial, that there's not a recognized theological institution in America that would validate that Ph.D. or doctor of ministry or whatever it is as being valid, that has come from some kind of a diploma mill that makes it credible by requiring some kind of a paper and certain kinds of things that are far beneath any kind of standard of requirement that an authentic institution of theology in America or the world would require? And what if it's an ego thing? What if it's a vanity? What if it's something that the congregation itself likes as well as the minister? Because it gives an aura of a certain kind of solidity and decorum and weight which it in fact does not bear. That's called a lie.

Got the picture? Now I'm not saying that that's the case, but what if it is the case? Do we have the guts, the courage to consider that it might be and even to forsake it? What if our so-called liberality and openness toward God in which we would permit almost anything to take place in our congregation is really not so much as a statement of our generous spirit, but rather a statement of our default, of our inability or unwillingness to exercise real discernment and requirement in which we let anything go? If it's making sounds like animals or writhing like a snake on the floor, well, that's the nuts that go with the fruit. Well, where does the scripture talk about nuts and fruit as if somehow both are valid? Talks about that which is of God and not of God. But when we use a vocabulary of that kind that seems to be so generous and liberal, can it actually constitute a default of responsibility, both the exercise of discernment to distinguish between what is godly and ungodly and not allow the ungodly thing a place in the house of God? Following me? It isn't remarkable.

I don't think I've had two hours here. I mean, last night going out for dinner, I was not very conversational. I was already whacked out and tired and so on.

But if we're living a lie and a sham and going through motions and playing a word game in the day of eternity, whether it's by death or the Lord's appearing, we will at that moment see all things as they in fact are. Too late to remedy anything. That's the agony, the wailing and the gnashing of teeth.

All of a sudden truth has come that we have been blinded to or unwilling to see, but it's come now too late to rectify. Would to God that he had sent someone earlier to sound the alarm and to cause us to go through a reality check and to examine what we're saying and doing when it can be rectified rather than we should be caught short at that final moment and have to live eternally with the mortification of a life not rightly lived in God. And a church that has been going through motions, however much we have enjoyed it.

What if the whole premise of our building program, that a larger capacity would somehow assure a larger congregation, is not the Lord's premise at all? And that whatever measure of success we have had in obtaining funds, et cetera, is what any human organization might have obtained and is not necessarily the statement of his approval, let alone his blessing. What if I wanted to live with that possibility? Are you willing to seek the Lord over such a question and suffer the reproach that it may well be his view? What if a pastor's wife states what pastor's wife's statement that he can go to Mexico and start a church if he wants, he raised that as a possibility. But just make sure that the check comes every month.

What if that's not from the Lord somehow to check him from the direction that the Lord doesn't intend, but is rather the actual statement of the fear and concern for security above and beyond any issue of a spiritual kind? And that we have not understood it as that, but have interpreted it in a way as to make it sound as if it's the Lord himself providing a check when it's a condition at the heart of the fellowship that needs to be understood, examined and repented about and prayed through. What if that the wife's comment is not necessarily the Lord indicating through her that this is not his will for her husband, but rather the deadly, serious insistence of her financial security as the non-negotiable fact of where she, in fact, is spiritually and whose involvement with the work has been nominal and is unimpressed with what the husband necessarily is saying or the church doing and incandescently goes along so long as the real issue, security, lifestyle, the things that are really of primary concern are not altered or threatened. What if that's not only her condition? What if that's the condition of most of us and it's not recognized as a condition and we swallow it down or look the other way as somehow not affecting the fabric, the character, the texture of the fellowship itself and its very truth, because at the heart of it is something else, more in keeping with the spirit of the world and its values than that of the kingdom.

And we even boast in that as somehow being God's provision to keep us from having made an error of judgment and will. What if the pastor himself is involved in an occupied with a merely verbal games playing, you know, the kinds of games that men play. There are two ways that we can conduct a safety check, a reality check.

One is our wives. Are they really impressed or they just, you know, let him go along with his harmless blather, doesn't affect anything real anyway, and he enjoys it and it's important for him. And okay.

The second is our children. Are they impressed? You know what I said to the people in San Antonio? You'll know that you're on apostolic ground when you will have persuaded your own children of the earnestness and the seriousness of what you are about. And who don't go to your services reluctantly and dragging their feet because they got to.

There's something both in children and in wives that is intuitive and often unerring in sensing that which is serious and authentic. We would do well to hear them or else we go on playing our games and the sounds good, but it does not affect anything significantly and even keeps us by that very verbal games playing from the things that are authentic that would be consequential. So we can talk about projects and things that will facilitate the kingdom, but it's almost like toys that men play with.

You see, we're living in a world that billions upon billions are expended in space travel, in getting to Mars and bringing back a stone in the hope that they might find that there really is organic life on another planet, which would discredit the Bible. And we're paying for that now taxes to the tune of trillions of dollars. It's an insanity in a world in which children are dying by the tens of thousands daily for the want of the most elementary nutrition.

We think it justifiable to send off these rockets and men and escapades in space. It's that the games that grown men play when they've got the finances to provide it, it's tragic in the world, but for the church to emulate that at its own level with its own games is more tragic still. So our wives will humor us because so long as the real thing is not threatened.

Okay. But it robs ourselves in the church of a real seriousness and the issue of what really constitutes truth in the last analysis lifestyle is not understood or examined. And I'm not in any of these things saying, let's say it, the Lord, just thinking out the what ifs that might be a possibility.

The question for you is, are you willing to put them before the Lord? And the chance possibility that his seeing is different from our seeing and other than our seeing and that his thoughts are not our thoughts and that even if you are correct in every question raised this morning and that everything that I have sounded as a possibility is not a possibility. You have been jealous for the truth. You have been zealous for the truth.

You have been valiant for the truth in your willingness to consider the possibility of a what if. And this is not some strange aspect of church life. This is definitive.

This is normative. The only thing that strikes us is that it's strange is that we're unaccustomed to it. When Paul joined Timothy to preach the word, he wasn't talking about biblical sermons.

He was talking about exhortation, rebuke and correction. Preach the word. That's the word to people right in their face, right between the eyes, right in the kisser, right in their teeth.

Let them know their need. Let them know their condition or the church is going to become some flabby kind of cultural entity that the powers of darkness will yawn over and say, Jesus, we know and Paul, we know, but the church in Georgetown, who? I tell you, dear saints, your foremost consideration and the index that what you are about in God is right is that you have caused the powers of darkness that brood over this locality to fear you. And they're only required to acknowledge one thing only authenticity.

They see right through sham. They see right through pretense. You can turn your loudspeakers up until you're deafened.

You can enlarge your building. You can have every kind of worship and program. Oh, but let them see a small body of saints who are walking in the truth and are jealous for the truth and desire the truth and to be examined and corrected and reprovved by one another, that they might be maintained in the truth.

And those powers of darkness will cringe and be in terror over your very existence. But to come to that is painful. It's called the cross.

It should not be that foreign to us. So even if everything that I'm raising this morning is not really a legitimate fear, the willingness to examine those things is the issue of truth itself. If we're willing to pause, reexamine our suppositions, check our foundations, test our reality, and rather prefer to err on the side that these things might be true than to stiffen and go on with a business as usual attitude as if they could not be true.

And to be complacent invites deception, even in the midst of our amens and hallelujahs. And the reason that we don't want an environment and an even in the midst of our amens and hallelujahs. And the reason that we don't want an environment and an atmosphere that would be confrontive and challenging and asking is because it's painful.

It's troubling. We want something soothing on a Sunday. After all, we've had a hard week and we don't have we don't want to have our essential lifestyle called into question.

And so you know what we constitute a conglomerate of individualities, little islands of self-will, of subjective interest, doing their own thing, coming together for Sunday in a midweek service and enjoying the provision of the facility. But it's not a body. It's not an integral body.

It's not an organic people who are joined living sacrificially with a discipline because they know that there's an end in view, that the stakes are high, that the powers of darkness will have but a short time, that they have issues before them and mandates to fulfill that can only be fulfilled as a body that is a body in the truth. That doesn't have to wait for some freaky character to come from out of God knows where on a Sunday morning because you yourself are performing the functions that he otherwise has to take up in the strange arrangements when there's a free Sunday morning and the Lord has placed him there. You shouldn't have to wait for the Lord to send one.

You yourself are performing that prophetic function one with another. So the truth, as any child, as I said this morning, used to be able to tell you and no longer can is the whole truth and nothing but the truth. When we were kids, we used to say that in Brooklyn, the whole truth is the truth is the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

It's an axiom because it's the nature of truth that if it's going to be true, it's got to be true through and through. If it's only a partial truth, it constitutes a lie. And the whole way in which the Lord got me on that book, Spirit of Truth, as I shared with the Sunday school group this morning, is a man takes me to his church to hear his pastor, who's an extraordinarily gifted and eloquent man, and I'm really going to hear the word of God.

Oh, I couldn't wait. My God, there's a famine for the word. And so I ran tripping to come to that service.

And when I was sitting up there in the balcony and that word began to go forth, my mind was saying, amen, and my gut was going haywire. Everything was freaking out. The fuses were blowing and I couldn't reconcile while my mind was approving in the one hand and my inner man was violently torn asunder to the Lord made clear to me, you see what's happening on his word is technically true.

Can't be faulted, but what his spirit is saying to the congregation is cool it, don't panic. No one is asking you or requiring you to take this word seriously. This is just a Sunday sermon.

Remember the agreement that we have, the unspoken agreement? I'll give you a good biblical word every Sunday. You see to my parsonage and my security and we'll get along famously. No one's going to rock the boat.

What the Lord showed me was that unless the spirit of the speaking is in perfect agreement with the word of the speaking, it's a lie because it's only a truth in part. How would you like to go back to apostolic days when who was that couple that sold the property and gave only a portion of the proceeds and made it to stand as the whole? They were carried out feet first. And I'll tell you that the young men who carried them out and buried them learned more in that the suddenness of that death and that burial because it threatened the truth of the church.

God cut them down just like that, though I'm sure that the amount of money that they were making available was impressive. Peter saw right through it. You know why? Because he was living in the spirit of the truth.

He saw the deception and he said to them, why have you allowed yourself to lie to the Holy Spirit? If it was your own, did you have to bring it? But if you did, why do you make it the part to stand as the whole? Dear Saints, that's more a statement of us today than we know. We're making a part to stand as the whole. We're not the whole thing through and through.

We're not just called to admire the truth, acknowledge the truth and love the truth, but to be the truth. We have got to be the thing in itself through and through. And if we're spending more time in front of the mirror, squeezing our pimples and licking out our complexion or wondering what we're going to wear or whether our breasts are sufficient and admirable as being of a greater consequence than the kingdom come, our life is a lie.

Got the idea? God sees right through all of that, but we don't see it as if somehow we're allowed the luxury of this kind of contradiction. A partial truth is a lie. The whole truth and nothing but the truth, or it's not the truth.

Brother, what a requirement. My God, I'm gasping for air. Who can live like that? This is going to require a moment by moment vigilance of what we say and do in our thoughts and attitudes and our commitments and our money and our time and going in and out.

Who can live like that? Only the church. That's the church. Because when he came as truth, he came full of grace as well as truth.

He'll give you the grace for the truth. If you have a heart for it, notice he doesn't say those who respect the truth. That's not enough.

Those who love the truth will be saved from deception. And you know what the test of love is? The willingness to be inconvenienced by it. The willingness to suffer its requirement and its demands.

The willingness to be confronted when someone will raise a question as I have been confronted in my own fellowship and been accused of being an enemy of the gospel, my God, or after finishing a great statement on the Holocaust before 2000 people, an address of such a kind, someone will come up and say, I'm sent of God and I'm a prophet and a Jewish prophet to tell you that you have missed the mind of the Lord and that you have done grievous damage to the body of Christ and you need not to go back to the microphone and recant your message. You're like, oh yeah, really? Well, listen, I fasted and prayed for that message. So don't tell me that I missed the Lord.

You know what I experienced? The knife right up to the hilt, right into my heart. You know why? He could be right. I've been at this over 30 years since, and you know what I have to say to this very day, I always have to live with the possibility that he could be right.

I have to live with this morning. I'm going to have to eat the sacrifice. The priest has got to eat the thing that he has made bloody by cutting.

And if I've missed it, what an accountability before God, but I'll tell you what, I would rather miss it believing that God has wakened me at one 30 with two words, what if, and these thoughts, then I should miss it by swallowing, swallowing it down and preaching something that you would have loved and would have obtained such an admiration and invitation to return. If I have to air, let me air in believing that what I'm speaking has been given of God, although I have to live with the possibility that I might have missed it. That's what I call the prophetic anguish.

And it's something you have to live with. Also, you know, that church is painful before it's glorious. This isn't the vacation.

This isn't the Sunday supplement. This isn't an Island of apostolic reality in a sea of sick schizophrenia that floods the world. We're supposed to be sane and healthy and true and righteous all together.

And that can only be our condition. If we love the truth to the point that we're willing to suffer for it to be misunderstood, listen, I, as a, hey, you know, I, do we have to go back to the house again today? Can we go on to the next meeting? No, we're staying there overnight. Oh, what? I'll tell you, saints, don't, don't be deceived about your supposed love of the Lord.

Don't be carried away by the euphoria of your worship. That's somehow you love the Lord. I'll give you a much more accurate way to assess whether that's true.

To what degree do you love truth? Really love truth. You drool just when you hear the word. You cannot stand the lie.

It's abhorrent. That's your love of God. You know why? Because the spirit of God is the spirit of truth and God himself is truth.

And your love for him is no greater or other than your love for truth itself. You've got to love it. And you've got to submit to its painful requirement to walk in the truth and not merely to acknowledge it.

So the church as the Bible tells us is the ground and pillar of the truth. That's not the church. It could call itself what it will.

It could have its programs. It is not an apostolic entity if it is not the ground and pillar of the truth. The love of the truth that alone saves us from deceptions of the entity of times will leave no stone unturned, no confidence unexamined, no visiting speakers, troubling message ignored.

Please, whatever you do, don't tell me on the way out. I really liked your message. It is ever and always open to the possibility of a what if however painful and costly the consideration, it keeps its corporate and personal heart with all diligence.

You know, this statement in the book of Proverbs, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it proceed all the issues of life, keeping your heart as a full time activity because the heart is deceitful, desperately wicked. Who can know it? We allow those vagaries and thoughts and things that to pass. We're already being dulled.

See, we've got to be honed and stay honed. I'll tell you what happens. When you hear a word that is only technically and biblically true, but is not spoken in the spirit of truth, any word that is a true word of God, invariably and always requires something.

Any word that does not require is only a sermon and we've been sermonized to death. What was I going to say about that? Oh, it's not. Well, I've heard a sermon.

I filled the Sunday hour and I've had, you know, a little, an enjoyable time and a good sound biblical message. You're actually dulled by that. It's not that you have not gone on, but you've fallen back.

Unless you have blown the whistle, unless you have called something to account, unless you have required something, unless you have said, Hey, well, what's the implication of this? What are you really saying? What are you requiring? Or I sense that this is just a soporific kind of a thing to carry us through the morning and it's not earnest, unless you have said that and contended for the truth, you will be dulled

by the very same thing and the next time you're less discerning, you're less able to pick up and to quit and to understand the sensitive issues of truth until finally you come to such a state that it's all the same, all fruits and all nuts. So we have to live with the dangerous possibility of a, what if, however painful, however costly, it's the consideration that keeps our hearts with all diligence, knowing that in this sinister age of deception, no one is exempt and that out of it proceed all the issues of life. So I'd like to end with a prayer.

I wrote a, made a whole list of scriptures before I pray in third John with the apostle says, well, I rejoice greatly when brethren come, came and testified of the truth that is in you. Listen to that language just as you walk in truth and tell me, can you take a step to the kitchen, to the pulpit or to the bedroom? That's not a walking. There's a lot of lies that goes on in bedrooms where wives know how to make the appropriate size and gestures as if somehow they're being ecstatically affected when actually they're gritting their teeth, it's painful because the relationship is not a kind that would have made this the blissful ecstatic thing that the husband would like to believe.

And no one has the courage to address the question. I'm not talking about lives in the world. I'm talking about lives in the church.

Truth has got to come into the bedroom as well as to the pulpit. And that's why John says, I rejoice when I see my children walking in the truth because wherever your feet will take you, truth is a requirement about the coming of the lawless one and second Thessalonians with all power signs and lying wonders and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved, saved out of deception, saved out of gamesmanship and play acting of going through the motions, the love of the truth will save your saints. And that's what I want to pray for.

So Lord, in Jesus name, we're quick to acknowledge that with all men, even at their very best, we do not know as we ought to know. I thought I knew about the Holocaust, the bad guys and the good guys. We Jews were the victims and the Germans were the culprits until I actually went to Dachau, until I went to Auschwitz, until I put my hand on the chimney.

Out of which the ashes of my kinsmen had gone up and something broke in me deeper, too deep for words that I realized I didn't know as I ought to know and that this tragedy, this systematic annihilation implicates us all in its guilt. There are no good guys and bad guys. We are all bad guys, but we don't know as we ought to know.

Grant us a fresh, the love of the truth above every other consideration, call a moratorium on our singing and our choruses that use words like adoration or holy, when in fact, there's not a corresponding reality, even when we sing it, do what the Ben Israel people have done covenant with God. Lord, don't let our singing and our worship exceed the truth of our condition. And if you had come into one of our court worship services, you would have put your fingers in your ears until our life was relative to what we can produce with our voices.

That's walking in the truth. It's being the whole thing through and through. So Lord, we're inviting you to pierce into the deepest and most secret hidden crevices of our life.

We need brothers and sisters who will find us out, who will address that blind spot that we cannot see for ourselves, or we're not wanting to see and bring the light of God, the light of your life into that place. Save us, Lord, we pray from eternal mortification and shame that we should have to enter into eternity and see them where we have been unable or unwilling to see now too late to remedy or correct anything. White

more like now when change can be made, then we should go on with our imagined reality that is more imagined than it is real.

And the Lord's just reminding me of an episode in our community life when our dogs, which we had enjoyed privately as pets, I had a beautiful German shepherd. He was, had a more distinguished lineage and ancestry than me. And mine isn't bad either.

Noble German shepherd that used to sit and look up at me with adoration and pant. But what was privately allowable became a threat corporately. And the dogs had formed a pack and we had found a dead goat and I didn't want to face the evidence that it could have been the dogs or my dog.

Well, maybe someone hit it with a car or some of the, you know how we we're escapists, we don't want to bite the bullet and see what's before our noses. Until one day in the prayer meeting, the kids were shouting, the dogs are chasing the calf and we opened the door and came out and sure enough, there was my dog leading the pack with a blood flecked mouth biting at this calf and having sport once they taste blood, that's it. Well, I tried desperately to call someone.

Do you want a German shepherd? Couldn't get through there. We had to go out in the woods. Every dog was dragged with a rope around its neck that we would kill.

My dog followed me without a rope and I dug his grave and as I'm digging and I'm a tough man, my face was a mask of tears. It was a waterfall. I love that animal.

I don't think I could have cried for any member of the body of Christ and the depth with which I was feeling the loss of this animal and no man spoke more eloquently about the body of Christ than me. You see how false we are? We can say it and believe it and full of conviction, but when it comes to where your tears are, that's where you are. And so I dug the grave, but I couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger, but there was a brother available only too willing to do it with whom I was in an unspoken resentment.

He would gladly do it. I gave him the gun bang, bang. And I saw the blood shooting out of my precious animal and I quickly pulled him into that grave and covered it over.

But when we came back to the community that day from the woods, you want to know something? My arm was around the shoulders of the guy who had killed my dog and his arm was around me. Something had happened to that death of soulless mess that released us to be to each other. What we couldn't have been before.

It took a ruthlessness to the thing that was most dear to us in order to come to the place spiritually that was truth. So I invite you to that ruthlessness and God's grace will be sufficient for you. Lord, I bless this congregation.

I leave my piece behind in their house, help them, give them every grace to go back to the drawing board, to examine everything that needs to be examined. Those things that were unspoken, that we were afraid even to bring up in conversation, wanted to look the other way. The time is too short.

The issues are too urgent to go on like that. It's a deception. We have got to face the truth of our condition and our life and make what alignments and changes your grace will permit.

If we're going to be a body that counts for something in this locality and not just be another one of tens of thousands of quote churches, sound and fury signifying nothing that do not affect anything really, and just our perpetuation of their own self-interest, let it not be for this people. I know that my time and my use of you Lord is too precious. You would not have brought me here if there were not a people who could hear and receive words of this kind.

So I ask your seal upon what was spoken and your grace for these children who will have to live with this word and consider this word and sift this word through their corporate and personal life. Let there be a rejoicing in the house of God, full of glory for the love of the truth, and may there be such a consequence for this day, both in time and eternity for which we shall be eternally grateful for the God who broods over us with such a jealousy who will not let us go. Thank you, Lord.

Keep with us. Keep on with us that you might yourself be honored and glorified by this people and by your church forevermore. And we thank you for that love and that truth in Jesus name and God's people said.

Amen.

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