

The truth hurts

Deuteronomy 5:20 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

“Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.” —Henry David Thoreau—Walden

That’s just simply one of the quotes on GoodReads about truth of the over 100 pages that they have on the topic of truth. And I think that’s for a perfect reason. We, as humans, especially as an American culture, are absolutely obsessed with the truth. From that age-old story of George Washington and the cherry tree and the boy who cried wolf, from a very young age, we as children, even outside of the Bible, are told about the merits and morality of the truth.

And inside the Bible, the eighth commandment, we have a focus on the truth as well. And in our sermon for today, we will study the eighth commandment in that particular light, as in what role does the truth have in regards to false testimony and then Christianity as a whole.

First, we always have to examine what it is that the commandment literally implies, before, as you know from all of our sermons so far, we understand how the application goes far beyond what is directly spoken of in the short and terse commands.

This commandment points first and foremost spoken in a judicial/legal context. In a time when there were no smartphones, or security footage, or even cameras of any kind. Legal proceedings were almost entirely dependent upon witnesses and their testimony to ascertain what happened so the judges were able to dispense justice. The commandment states in very literal terms, that if you are called upon to speak about what happened you are to speak truthfully and honestly.

Lying would be the simplest and most egregious of ways in which to directly violate God’s stipulation. As you sat next to the ol’ cheese maker and saw that Japheth stole a wheel of cheese and you are called in before the court and asked “Who stole the wheel of cheese?” But you decide to say “I saw Adam steal the cheese!” You have by your words showed a different thing that has happened. Something that you knew was false and now Adam is gonna get punished unjustly, and Japheth gets off scott-free.

The truth told means justice for the people involved in the court. The good things are rewarded and the bad is punished appropriately. Telling the truth as a witness has a very good and beneficial purpose: to uphold justice, to keep society harmonious, and to make sure that the innocent are protected.

Which is what we really want to focus on here in this sermon. Is that words have a purpose. Words and speech are not just things but they are acts that can and do accomplish things. Words have a purpose, the truth has a purpose.

It’s something that we overlook. We can tell the truth, and still disobey the 8th commandment. We can say nothing that is false, but because of our intent or even inattentiveness, we can commit false testimony.

The truth is as a wonderful and powerful thing. It can make sure that the innocent are protected, it can assure a loved one that they are so loved and appreciated by you, it can help you to make God pleasing life decisions and to keep away from sin.

But the truth can be a horribly damaging thing when it is misused. When we overhear about a mistake or a sin that another has committed and make sure that we tell others what happened. When we let someone else know just exactly how we feel about them, all the things that are wrong with them, the things that they did that were stupid, how when I was in your shoes I did things differently. I can go along spouting just the way everything is as I know it to be true regardless of how it might hurt or harm someone else.

And we walk around in our confident suit of armor, saying: "well it's the truth!" "That's what really happened" It's all true, I saw it, I know it, I did this." As if we are somehow being noble or good as long as we say things that are true. If I'm speaking the truth, how is it that I could ever break the 8th Commandment?

Again, what was the purpose of telling the truth in it's literal context. The truth was meant to protect other people. To help the innocent and to prevent crime and disorder from running rampant in society.

So often we use the truth as a deadly tool. While the words that we speak may be true, we use them in a way that is not to help others, but to hurt them, to harm them or to exalt ourselves. We spread secrets about someone else in order to discredit their reputation and make sure that other people don't like them as much. We can use the truth about things we have done well, not to help someone else out, but to make ourselves feel more superior, smarter, more accomplished, to brag and to boast about just how good we are. Telling the dark secrets about others to cut them down to hurt them and all in the name of 'telling the truth'.

Is that what God wants? Is that what the purpose of the 8th commandment is? No! Even something that God has established as a blessing as a virtue. As something that is for benefits, we as sinners find a way to contort and use for our own benefits, for our own well-being, for ourselves, when it is meant to be to protect others. Martin Luther in the large catechism gives us a statement that summarizes the heart of this commandment: "No one shall harm his neighbor with his tongue, be he friend or foe. We are not to say anything bad about him whether the statement is true or false.

How do we gain the power to tell the truth, but not the selfish truth. Not the self seeking truth. But the truth that protects and serves our neighbor. It is at this point that look at a different a man with a human tongue but in whom was found no sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ.

If you remember from the events of Holy Week sinful man was looking for a way to condemn an innocent man. And they brought forth false witnesses in an attempt to kill him. And they eventually brought him forth to Pilate.

In John chapter 18 Pilate engages in a conversation with Jesus trying to figure out what the charges are against him. When he asks him about his claim: "Are you the King of the Jews". At this critical moment Jesus has the ability to tell the truth or not. Telling the truth would not be good for him. This truth would be a certain sentence to punishment and pain. And what does Jesus say?

"You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Why did Jesus tell the truth? Well its not

because it gained him some advantage, or made his life easier, or extended his influence, or increased his popularity.

Jesus told the truth that hurt him, so that other people would benefit. Jesus testimony to the truth got him killed. His truth led him to be crucified. His truth was out of love for others. To give us the forgiveness of sins. To speak the words of truth of God that all would know the way to eternal life and salvation of their souls. Jesus truth is something that he has always held out not because of selfishness and sin, but to give blessings, hope, security, guidance, assurance, life, comfort, and forgiveness to undeserving sinners like you and me. This is the truth that we cherish, the truth that we proclaim, the truth that we study and take to heart.

This truth, the truth of our Savior, self sacrificing truth is at the heart of the 8th commandment. It the the truth that we proclaim to the world not only in the words about our Savior and of scripture but by our actions that show we know our Savior. Seeking to tell the truth, not for ourselves, but in the efforts to love and serve others. Using our words to build up, to encourage to comfort friend and foe alike. Letting rumors and actions that could be damaging to another's reputation die at our ears. Because the truth is not something that is given to build ourselves up, but something that is used for the benefit and service of our neighbors.

"Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth." I think that we can take Thoreau's quote in the proper light. We as Christians, should be obsessed about the truth. That above all other things we value the truth, God's truth. Not a self seeking truth or a truth that seeks to tear down others, but a selfless loving truth, that is at the heart of the 8th commandment and the Gospel.