

The Spirit of Truth

Good morning everyone. It is a great pleasure to be able to talk to you this morning. Today I want to talk about a topic that is very dear to me and I have spent a life time chasing and that is TRUTH. Even when I was young – and that seems a long time ago I was interested in finding out how things worked and WHY. I wasn't happy with Mum's reply "Just because". The most exciting thing that ever happened to me was when I learned how to read. The world opened up for me then –as I could learn everything that everyone who had gone before me had learned – so long as they had written it down. Later in life – much, much later I had the opportunity to study and find out for myself things that no one else knew – well that is not entirely correct because God knows everything and for me he is the ultimate scientist and he has run some pretty cool experiments and found out all there is to know about everything.

So let's start by looking at this question – What is truth? Does anyone know who famously posed that question? That's right it was Pontius Pilate. He was questioning Christ and he asked a very important question. I would like you to turn to the person next to you and talk about these two things:

WHAT IS TRUTH?

CAN TRUTH CHANGE?

I am going to talk about TRUTH from a scientific perspective for a minute. So truth in the Macquarie dictionary – because we are Australian – is this. Can truth change? Well yes it can because our understanding of it changes and what we are able to do changes. In 1701 if you asked the most intelligent person in the world if man could fly the answer would be "NO of course not" and that would have been completely correct. But today of course man can fly and most of us have done it. So truth for us can change and does frequently as circumstances change. I am married but if I don't clean up after myself and don't continue to do the ironing I may not be married!!!

So let's look at some things that we know to be true now and some we don't know. Can anyone tell me what we are looking at here? So in the top left we have a picture showing all the stages of malaria that appear in a patient's blood. It is a particular type of malaria called Vivax. It has a special type of parasite that can hide in your liver and come out – sometimes months after - and you relapse and get malaria again. On the right hand side we have a parasite stage called a gametocyte. These are the parasites that the mosquito takes up when it bites you and these parasites reinfect the mosquito and get ready to infect the next human. These parasites hide in your bone marrow where they grow to maturity – takes about 14 days.

The bottom photo is an *Anopheles gambiae* mosquito the vector for malaria in Africa. We know that all of this is true

Here is something we don't know. The gametocytes are hiding away in your bone marrow so your immune system can't find them. Somehow they know when a mosquito is biting you and that is the signal for them to get out of the bone marrow and get into your peripheral blood stream – in your outer layers of skin – so a mossaie can suck them up. That is the same as say you being on a cruise and having a roast pork dinner with all the crackling and whilst you are eating getting a call from your doctor who is in his surgery at home, but he knew you were eating fatty food that he told you not to eat so is calling to yell at you! We do not know how this works but it one the projects I am working on and one day I will find the answer.

Here is an amazing thing a T4 bacteriophage. The picture on the left is an actual electron microscope picture of the virus. It actually looks just like the drawing on the right! It is amazing that this virus which attacks bacteria can look just like this. This can not be by chance only God can make things this remarkable. When you look at this you think it has to be man made – it can't really occur in nature.

So here is another mystery. These are some other viruses. The one on the left is the flu virus and the one on the right is Ebola. Both cause so much pain and suffering every year around the world. So here is the mystery part – by all the definitions of what comprises life these things don't really tick all of the boxes. They don't make the basic requirements for life by themselves – they scavenge from other cells all that they need to survive. They don't make it internally like we do. We make insulin in our bodies and we make proteins but these viruses don't do that. Also they don't have a mechanism to reproduce themselves they rely on other cells. They invade another cell and use its mechanisms for reproducing. So technically they are not completely alive! So how can this be possible? We just don't know

Here is one of my favourites – this little creature is a “Water Bear” or a tardigrade. They can be found all over the world – they live in moss and so if you look around your garden you will most likely have some of them living at your house. Look at what they can do though. We complain when the temperature gets to 32 degrees – these guys don't even raise a sweat and can stand conditions that would stop most other forms of life. So this is amazing but true!

Slide. Another mystery – I am a bit of a bird watcher. These guys Arctic Terns are a migratory bird and they travel from the Arctic circle to the Antarctic and back each year. They don't catch international flights – they don't have Satellite navigation or GPS but they can find their way and have no trouble doing it. In their life time they can travel the distance from the Earth to the Moon three times. How do they navigate – we think they may use metal in their brains and tap into the Earth's magnetic fields but that is just a theory. We just do not know.

So how can we know find out these things. I realise most of you may be thinking who really cares but for crazy geeks like me I really do want to know!! But how can we find out things we don't know and find the real truth.

One of the earliest scriptures I ever really learnt was James 1:5. God tells us that if we lack wisdom we should ask him. It sounds so simple but it is often not what we think to do first. These days this is the fount of all knowledge isn't it!! I think this has the potential to make us more stupid than smart but don't get me started on that! It is a great way to win an argument and it is a great source of information. So back to the scripture – no it does not say Google but the point to note is that we are told that “it will be given to you”. Now I know that there are some caveats to that. Some of the things I have had to learn did not come easy – lots of experiments – mostly ones that didn't work – and lots of hard work. What condition does God put on this promise? It sounds very simple “You must believe and not doubt”. That is an interesting condition to be applied. It is one that I struggle with. The world these days teaches you to be self reliant, self sufficient – don't rely on anyone or anything else. You don't automatically think “Well I can't trust someone else to do this – I will do it myself “ – this is to avoid disappointment or just to ensure the right job is done.

So how do we get to that stage of having no doubt? Let's go back to the Gospel reading today and see what light that has to shed on this situation. Christ is asking the Father to give us another advocate. The Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit. One thing that always impresses me about the Holy Spirit is the confident change that happened in the early Apostles once they received the Holy Spirit. Before Pentecost the Apostles were afraid of what would happen to them when Christ was gone. Peter denied Christ, the group hid in a locked room – they were largely afraid and ineffective. What happens after Pentecost – they took on the world – they gave their lives freely and without fear – they suffered horrendous things! What was the difference? The Holy Spirit! The Apostles believed and did not doubt! They were able to fully comprehend the beautiful TRUTH that was Christ's death and resurrection! They were able to fully trust in the GRACE of God and they knew that God keeps his promises. This is what made that radical change in them.

One of those promises comes to us in John 14:26 – the Holy Spirit will “teach you all things” To me that is one of the most wonderful promises and most exhilarating passages in the Bible. It means that I can have the capacity to learn ALL things – provided I do my bit and learn. God through the Holy Spirit can share all the wonderful secrets of Nature with me if I open my mind and believe and not doubt. That is so special to me and it can be for all of us. Through the Holy Spirit we can learn anything. We can know who our new Pastor will be because God knows and the Holy Spirit will tell us if we believe and do not doubt. I know that those vexing scientific questions will be answered one day that fills my heart with

gladness. What do we have to do “ Believe and not doubt”. That is my biggest challenge these days.

I hope this promise is exciting to you as well. I hope that you can meet the condition of believing and not doubting. Don't be afraid to get on your knees and Ask God and then believe and not doubt and the Holy Spirit will be able to teach you all things.