

SCRIPTURE:

John 18:15-32

SERMON:

Aaron Renn is a Christian writer and consultant who commentates on culture, politics, and societal trends. In February of 2022 he wrote a ground-breaking article on what he called "The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism." In it, Renn provides a framework for understanding the cultural shifts that have taken place in the United States and how the church's approach to engagement with the culture needs to take these shifts into account.

Renn provides a 3-tiered framework:

- **Positive World (Pre-1994):** Society at large retains a mostly positive view of Christianity. To be known as a good, churchgoing man remains part of being an upstanding citizen. Publicly being a Christian is a status-enhancer. Christian moral norms are the basic moral norms of society and violating them can bring negative consequences.
- **Neutral World (1994–2014):** Society takes a neutral stance toward Christianity. Christianity no longer has privileged status but is not disfavored. Being publicly known as a Christian has neither a positive nor a negative impact on one's social status. Christianity is a valid option within a pluralistic public square. Christian moral norms retain some residual effect.
- **Negative World (2014–Present):** Society has come to have a negative view of Christianity. Being known as a Christian is a social negative, particularly in the elite domains of society. Christian morality is expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order. Subscribing to Christian moral views or violating the secular moral order brings negative consequences.

We live in a Negative World. Many of you who are old enough have lived to experience the transition from each of these. Living as a faithful Christian in a Negative World requires courage because you embrace truths and beliefs that are not in step with the culture. In fact, they are despised by the culture. And those beliefs will make you

despised by the culture, regardless of how carefully you try to articulate them and how kind you are to those who don't believe them.

This is what we are going to be looking at in our passage today. We're examining the importance of owning the truth, and the difficulty there is in doing that when there is opposition against you.

The message is entitled: Courage to Own the Truth

Exegesis: John 18:15-32

We are going to notice in our text today how John splits out two things going on simultaneously so we can see the contrast. He is going to carry two plot lines forward: Peter's interactions with accusers & Jesus' interactions with accusers.

Scene 1: VS 15-18 -- 15 Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, 16 but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. 17 The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." 18 Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

- Peter follows behind Jesus as he is arrested and hauled to Annas. Another disciple was there too, most believe it is John (writer of the Gospel). He was known by the high priest, so likely recognizable. But Peter stood outside the door that entered the courtyard and the disciple who was known spoke to the servant girl who was keeping watch to bring Peter in. She asks cynically about Peter being one of the disciples. He denies that he is. Peter joins others who were warming themselves in the courtyard by a fire.
- Peter denies belonging to Jesus because of the pressure of the moment. It is not a convenient time to be associated with Jesus, so he disassociates.

Scene 2: VS 19-24 -- 19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. 21 Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I

said to them; they know what I said.” 22 When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” 23 Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” 24 Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

- The high priest (Caiphas) is the son-in-law to Annas. Most believe their residences shared a courtyard. Jesus is brought before Annas first. He's questioned about two matters: his disciples and his teaching. Why did they ask about his disciples? They were likely trying to discern the size of his following. They did not want a conspiracy and insurrection to unfold. The second issue, his teaching, shows that their primary concern was not political, but theological. They will present their case to Pilate as political (by necessity), but their hatred is fueled by theological difference.
- Jesus reminds them that he has not taught anything in secret. He doesn't have a public message and private message. In fact, his teaching privately to his disciples simply expounded on the things he communicated to the crowds. They knew his teachings, and Jesus pointed that out to them.
- One of the officers believed Jesus' remarks were disrespectful, so he hit him (likely backhanded him). But Jesus doesn't back down. Not only does Jesus stand firm and answer their accusations, but after they strike him he still challenges them about what he has said that is untrue.

Scene 3: ***VS 25-27-- 25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” 26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” 27 Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.***

- Back to Peter. He is still warming himself. Someone else accuses him of being a disciple of Jesus. Rather than standing firm in the face of their accusations, like Jesus did, he denies it again.
- Then we see one of the servants of the high priest who is kin to Malchus chimes in. He remembers seeing Peter in the garden across the brook Kidron. Peter denies a third time.
- Peter's third denial is a fulfillment of what Jesus said would happen. Now John doesn't record this for us in his Gospel, but we read in Mark 14:71-72 that Peter provoked a curse on himself ("I swear I do not know this man!") and then wept bitterly. His denials took an emotional toll on him because he was lying. He was

acting cowardly. His conscience tormented him because he knew he was denying the truth.

Scene 4: **VS 28-32 -- 28** *Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. 29* *So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" 30* *They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." 31* *Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." 32* *This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

- Jesus now goes from Caiaphas' place to the headquarters of Pilate. Pilate didn't live in Jerusalem, but came and stayed there during religious festivities to help keep the crowds from any unwanted disturbances.
- The Jews didn't want to defile themselves by entering the dwelling place of Gentiles. This would make them unclean on the holiest of all religious observances (Passover celebration). The irony is that they are concerned about being kept clean and holy for Passover while they are actively plotting to kill the One who is the true Passover lamb.
- We see this exchange taking place. Jesus is inside Pilate's headquarters and the Jews are outside. Pilate goes back and forth. So the Jews don't hear any of Jesus' answers to the accusations they make or questions that Pilate asks.
- Pilate is not a friend to the Jews. He is an antagonistic governor to them. He played games with them regularly. He held his post for about 7 years up to this point. He knew their accusations against Jesus, that's how it was able to come to him to begin with. But he officially kicks the trial into motion by formally asking what accusations they have against Jesus. This is why they reply the way they do.
- He tells them to take and judge him by their own law (religious law), but they reply it isn't lawful to put a man to death (capital punishment). In order for a capital sentence to be handed down, they had to show Pilate that Jesus was guilty of a capital crime. They had to get Pilate to see Jesus as a political threat, not a religious leader.
- This is ultimately why Jesus doesn't end up stoned to death. He is crucified. The Jews didn't crucify. Their capital punishment was stoning. But Jesus isn't stoned, he's crucified. This is what John means when he says this fulfilled what Jesus said by what kind of death he was going to die. What is he referring to?

John 12:32-33 -- *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

- A reminder, once again, that the death of Jesus was not some accidental set of events being orchestrated by sinful men. It was a fulfillment of the decree of God being fulfilled by the willful actions of sinful men.

Application:

1. People come to faith when Christians embrace the truth despite unpopularity.

There is an entire testimony of church history that reminds us that as believers stand firm in the truth, despite the opposition they face, people come to faith. The growth in the church throughout China has happened specifically as they have experienced persecution. The growth of the early church in Acts happens in the context of persecution. The forerunners of the Reformation died for the gospel and authority of God's Word, and it gave birth to a movement led by Luther, Calvin, and others.

The same can happen today. Our country is in an era of darkness. But rather than throwing our hands up and losing hope, we stand firm and believe that God can bring reformation in our country as we own the truth without apology.

2. Willingness to stand for the truth empowers other Christians to stand firm.

As we stand firm in the truth, it draws other believers to lock arms. Christians are looking for solid community that will help them stand firm. I can't tell you the number of people we have talked to over the last several years that have made their way to TJC because of our willingness to address the truth unapologetically. Why are people drawn to this? Because we need and want others that we can lock arms with just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did.

3. Failure to remain in the truth weakens the church and leads to apostasy.

If the church doesn't stand firm in the truth, it dies. Many churches are fading into irrelevance because they pretend as if we are still in a Positive World or Neutral World. Many are deconstructing from Christianity because they don't want to own the truth of God's Word. It is not fashionable. It costs you something.

4. Courage to walk in the truth requires dying to public approval.

You can't be a servant of Christ and live for the approval of man (Galatians 1:10). But the moment you decide to stand for the truth, people will not sing your praises. Not everyone will love you. You must be okay with that. You don't want to grow cynical or contentious, but you need to live content with God's approval for you.

Listen carefully to me: If you don't go along with the program today, you'll be labeled a racist, homophobic, transphobic, misogynistic, and other things. Follow me: the most important thing is to not be those things while being okay if others choose to call you them.

5. Jesus gives grace to repentant cowards and help to dependent strivers.

Have you failed like Peter? Our passage today is not the final scene of Peter's story in John's Gospel. There is grace that forgives him and grace that restores him. There is grace when you repent. Confess your shortcomings to Christ and let Him restore you back to Himself. Do you need help to walk in the truth? Do you need strength to stand firm when resistance comes? The Lord provides this to all who seek Him for it.

Close:

Many of you are likely familiar with the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes." If you don't know it, I'll summarize it. Two con-men arrive at the capital city of an emperor who spends lavishly on clothing. Posing as weavers, they offer to supply him with magnificent clothes that are invisible to those who are stupid or incompetent. The emperor hires them, and they set up looms and go to work. A succession of officials, and then the emperor himself, visit them to check their progress. Each sees that the looms are empty but pretends otherwise to avoid being thought a fool. Finally, the weavers report that the emperor's suit is finished. They pretend to dress him and he sets off in a procession before the whole city. He's completely naked. The townsfolk uncomfortably go along with the pretense, not wanting to appear inept or stupid, until a child blurts out that the emperor is wearing nothing at all. The people then realize that everyone has been fooled.

We live in a culture where the truth has been exchanged for lies. Right is called wrong. Wrong is called right. Evil deeds are called good, and good deeds are called evil. Many go along with the charade. They know it's not right. They know the truth. But they suppress it. The role of the church isn't to mimic the crowds that pretend the emperor is wearing clothes. The role of the Church and the Christian is to tell the truth, like the child.

This requires us to have the courage to own the truth. Jesus displays the courage to stand confidently in the truth without backing down. To follow him means we seek to do the same.

REVIEW:

- ❖ Why do you think Peter denies Jesus three times in these verses?
- ❖ Why do the officials and high priests hate Jesus and why did they strike him?
- ❖ How does Jesus respond?
- ❖ Why wouldn't the religious leaders enter Pilate's residence?
- ❖ What does John mean in verse 32 that "this was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show what kind of death he was going to die"?

REFLECT:

- ❖ How are the religious leaders actually fulfilling the Passover by taking Jesus to Pilate?
- ❖ In what ways do we see today that we are living in Negative World?
- ❖ What are the positives and negatives of embracing the truth of God and his Word?

RESPOND:

- ❖ What are some ways you can walk in truth where God has you right now?
- ❖ What negative consequences might you face and are you prepared to face them?
- ❖ What are the dangers of not standing on God's truth?

MEDITATE:

- ❖ John 18:32 - *This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

MEMORIZE:

- ❖ John 14:5 - *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ❖ Lead Ministry Assistant - **Becca Depolitte**
- ❖ Ministries - Jail & Deacons
- ❖ Pray for NAMB Church Planter - **Gregg Gober** - Brooklyn, NY - Hope Community
- ❖ Unreached People Group (UPG): **Durbet** in Mongolia
- ❖ Population in country: 87,000
- ❖ Global population: 87,000
- ❖ Christian Adherent: 2.0%
- ❖ Evangelical: 1.5%
- ❖ Primary Religion: Buddhism
- ❖ Primary Language: Mongolian, Halh