

Sermon 4-14-19
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He Won the War of Words

I'll say it again. We're in a constant war of words. And let's point out the importance of this war. I am what I believe. I am the words I believe. I invite you to say that with me – "I am the words I believe."

And I'll quickly demonstrate how this is true. The crisis we're having over so-called transgenderism is in reality a crisis of words and belief. There are females who genuinely believe words in their head that they are really male. Likewise, there are males who believe they are female. On top of it all, there are people who ideologically believe absolutely that we need to accommodate such people in the mainstream of society. They believe their ideology with such strength that it must be forced on all "unbelievers." This includes indoctrinating all children.

So for better or for worse, as human beings, we are what we believe. The world we believe in is the world we live in. Therefore, sorting out the words we believe is of maximum importance in life. For there are words and there are words. And this must be done not just for our personal good, but also for the good of society.

As we've said many times, in this war of words there are two sides. On one side, there are our Creator's Words. And on the other, any and all words opposed to His. This reality pops out at us dramatically in our first lesson today. Yahweh declared through Moses in Deuteronomy 32:39, "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand."

This means that Yahweh is the Creator and sustainer of all things. Whether we like it or not, His Word brought everything into existence, including we ourselves. His Word sustains the existence of everything in this universe. His Word also judges everything, as we see in that verse.

This past week, I read an article on how more and more scientists are coming to believe that this universe is a computer simulation. They think we're living in a video game. From what we have discovered, it's not unreasonable to theorize this way. But these fools speculate that this simulation exists because the humans of the future have evolved to be intelligent enough to do this, or that very intelligent aliens have in effect created a zoo. The one thing these wise fools refuse to consider is that the "computer" may be owned and programmed by a Creator. Indeed, that He doesn't need a computer, for He is His own computer. His being, mind and will are great enough to conceive of and execute the universe we live in. He is. And there is no other. No one can deliver out of His hand.

St. Paul put it this way to the philosophers of Athens in Acts 17:24-28, "24 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as

if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 "For in him we live and move and have our being." Those last words were penned about 600B.C. by a poet named Epimenides from the Mediterranean island of Crete – a man involved with the altar to the unknown God in Athens. So, even though the ancient world fell into paganism, a memory of the Creator God remained from the time of Noah.

And, even our modern scientific investigators are beginning to arrive at this same conclusion, though they want to remain pagans and attribute a simulated universe to alien computers. But, in Him, we live and move and have our being. If accepted, these words are the beginning of all wisdom. Say this truth with me. "In Him, we live and move and have our being. In Him, I live and move and have my being."

And if this is true, there are many corollaries. The first is that my Creator has a design for human life and if I walk in it, I will not be disappointed. As it says in Proverbs 9:10-12, "10 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 11 For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. 12 If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.'" And as it says in Psalm 111:10, "10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise."

But there's another corollary that makes living in our Creator's righteous will absolutely impossible for us. Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Romans 3:23, "... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Ephesians 2:1-2, "1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

The sinful nature enslaves us to the desire to create our own universe simulation apart from that of our Creator, where we alone can be our own gods defining good and evil for ourselves. This terrible, destructive desire is responsible for all the evil we see in the present universe. And it will find its complete fulfillment in hell.

Satan and the sinful nature have filled this world with all kinds of persuasive words. But ultimately such words are all folly. As it says in Isaiah 32:6, "... the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the LORD..."

The hard thing to grasp is that this sinful nature is in control of our beings from the moment of conception. But that is the Word of the Lord. As it says in Ephesians 2:3, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of [God's] wrath." That is the sad state of this world as reported in the news every day. It's our sad state as well.

However, in the very next verses of Ephesians we read of unexpected grace from God. Ephesians 2:4-7, “4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

How has our Creator done all this for us? It’s through the life of His servant Jesus – the life we celebrate as we walk through these first six months of the church year that begin with Advent. And today we find ourselves at what is called Palm Sunday. It was the day at the height of Jesus’ earthly ministry that He entered Jerusalem for the festival of Passover. It was on this day that Jesus’ disciples and those coming with Him down to Jerusalem from Galilee were in serious expectation about what might happen if Jesus openly declared Himself Messiah. So they hailed Him as Messiah as He entered the city. And Jesus Himself gave them reason by riding in on a donkey.

But like all people without God’s Holy Spirit, they could not see the reality hidden in plain sight in Moses and the Prophets. The Messiah they were hailing must be rejected, suffer, die and be raised from the dead on the third day. That’s the only way the true Messiah can ever be recognized.

Jesus didn’t come the first time to end the war of words. Rather, He came to exacerbate it. For, He did not bring the present age to an end by openly revealing the glory of God, expelling Satan and abolishing evil. No. In resurrection He only showed Himself alive to a limited group of witnesses over forty days – about five to six hundred in total. Therefore, Jesus’ identity as Messiah must for this time rest on faith in the words of those who witnessed Him resurrected.

And, as we have often pointed out, this faith was just as necessary for the people of Jesus’ time as it is for us. For, only ten days after Jesus’ Ascension into heaven, on the Day of Pentecost 33A.D., the 3,000 plus who believed in Jesus as Messiah did so not because they had seen Jesus alive, but because they believed the testimony – the words – of those who had seen Him alive in a resurrected body. It is absolutely necessary to believe the testimony of the eyewitnesses in order to recognize Jesus as Messiah.

Now, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, He engaged in a war of words. This is clear from the chapters of the gospels that follow Palm Sunday. However, this war of words was remarkable in that both sides claimed to be speaking the Word of Yahweh. Therefore, who was? That’s something that has to be decided to this day.

The Jewish Sanhedrin could not believe that a mortal human being could also be Yahweh the Son. Indeed, the whole idea seems quite contradictory. But it’s hidden in plain sight in Moses and the Prophets. However, without Lord Holy Spirit, there was no way for the Sanhedrin to see it. Therefore, at a trial they convicted Jesus of blasphemy for claiming He was the Son of God.

On the other hand, if Scripture – God’s Word – declares that the Son of God must be rejected, suffer and die, then the Sanhedrin blasphemed by sentencing Jesus to death and then beating up on Him. In the war of words between Jesus and the Sanhedrin someone blasphemed – either Jesus or the Sanhedrin. Also, someone

spoke Yahweh's Word of Truth about Messiah. It's only when the Spirit of the Lord comes that we know it was Jesus who spoke the truth.

Now, knowing Jesus as the truth-speaker has consequences. In last week's second lesson, we heard this testimony from St. Paul about his relationship with Jesus. He said in Philippians 3:7-11, "7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

So, we list Paul's conclusions. First, everything in life is to be measured over against Jesus. If He is the Son of God, then He is greater than all things because He is the source of all things. Martin Luther noted that whatever we fear, trust and love the most in life is our god. It could be money, weed, booze, sex, power, prestige, winning – whatever, even religion. But St. Paul testified that everything in this life is worthless compared to Jesus, the Son of God.

Second, nothing in life compares to gaining Jesus and being in Him. This also ties in with the third all-important thing – righteousness. The righteousness Paul is speaking of is the perfect goodness that comes from Yahweh, the only source of all goodness.

This perfect goodness is what we're lacking because of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. Our lack of perfect righteousness is the reason we listen to all kinds of words and ignore Yahweh's Word. It's the reason the world is a mess, our lives get messy and why Yahweh keeps Himself hidden from us.

But by suffering, dying and being resurrected in Jerusalem, Jesus gained Yahweh's perfect righteousness for us through the forgiveness of sins. This is the gospel. Yahweh's righteousness is ours, freely given through Messiah. It's credited to us by faith in Jesus.

Now this is where being in Christ and He in us becomes absolutely important. In Christ, God counts the sinful nature as dead, even though it's not. In Christ, God counts believers perfect in righteousness, even though we're not. This means that dead to sin and alive to righteousness exists in our Creator's mind through the work of God the Son. And that's as good as actually seeing it exist in reality. For, in His Word Yahweh has promised that what is in His mind will become full reality for believers when Messiah returns, and the dead are resurrected.

In the meantime, dead to sin and alive to righteousness in Christ is a present reality by faith in the Word of our Creator. It is a present reality by faith in the eyewitness testimony of those who saw Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection. And we're talking about that third level of faith that confesses in humility, "Jesus, You alone are all my righteousness."

Can you confess that with me? "Jesus, You alone are all my righteousness!"

So by faith, we live in Messiah and Messiah lives in us. This is necessary so that Yahweh's works of righteousness might appear in our lives. It is also a great blessing

to be close in heart and mind with our Lord Jesus, to have His Father dwelling within and to be filled with His Holy Spirit. This kind of intimacy is what eternal life is all about.

It's also a great blessing to be with others who live in intimacy with Messiah. For that shared intimacy with Messiah makes for easier shared human fellowship. The goodness of God is a rock solid foundation for relationships as members of Christ's Church.

The righteousness of Christ is even a rock solid foundation in the midst of our enemies. Indeed, Jesus demonstrated that when He prayed on the cross in Luke 23:34, "... 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'"

Throughout His earthly ministry and especially upon the cross, Jesus won the war of words for all humanity. As we saw in today's second lesson, He beat the devil and the sinful nature by becoming obedient to Yahweh's Word, even to dying a horrible death on a cross. Therefore, this, day as always, Jesus calls us to participate in His victory. Let Him win the war of words in you today and every day. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.