



Good morning CPC. I'm Dan Reid. I'm the new Community Life guy. It's been a very busy first week trying to acclimate to life at CPC. I must say I am sleeping well. When my head hits the pillow, I'm out.

American writer and intellectual David Foster Wallace was at the top of his profession. He was an award-winning best-selling novelist who committed suicide in 2008. But before his death he gave a famous commencement address in which he said this to the graduating class:

"Because here's something else that's true. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism... Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And... pretty much anything you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough... Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you... Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on..."

What we worship does matter. What we worship will consume us, whatever it is. Jesus understands the painful consequences of aligning ourselves with false beliefs.

I had the privilege of visiting the Holy Land three years ago. One day we went to a place called Caesarea Philippi north of the Sea of Galilee. In this place was a temple carved out of a rocky cliffside. In the time and place where Jesus lived, we get the idea that there were Jews, Gentiles and Jesus. But really, there were all kinds of religions represented with Greek and Roman influence for sure. In Caesarea Philippi there was this temple dedicated to the mythological god Pan. You can walk right up to the grotto where they would throw their live sacrifices into the water to appease this Pan god. If the sacrifice died, it was a good sacrifice. If it didn't drown, it was thrown in again and again until it drown in the grotto.

Pan was the god of nature. It was the belief that God was found in all things natural, and rural—rocks, trees, dirt, water and animals. God was the creature, the material world, and there was no creator or savior. Pan was just one of many gods or spirits that had influence in Jesus' day. Pan was a half-goat, half-man figure,

pretty creepy looking. It was well known that people would bring their animal sacrifices to the grotto, and we find in the New Testament one occurrence where Jesus and his disciples visited the grotto. In Matthew 16 New Testament scholars believe that Jesus stood at the grotto, or maybe on the cliff above it, with his disciples and said:

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"

"'But what about you?' He asked. 'Who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven' (Matthew 16:13–17).

Who do we say Jesus is? We live in a society much like the one Jesus lived in. No grottos dedicated to Pan that I am aware of yet, but a whole bunch of other objects of worship. We all see it. We are not blind to it. Our culture wants to worship who and how they want. Even within Christian churches, there is a pull to bend and contort the person and nature of God to look and do and say whatever we want God to look and do and say.

Do I seek to worship the God of the Bible as revealed in Jesus Christ in the Bible, or do I seek to worship a figment of my desires, twisting and reshaping Jesus until he looks less like the God of the Bible and more like a Gumby toy? We must resist the urge to twist like one would twist a Gumby toy.

Bending and contorting Jesus is nothing new under the sun. Those who take truth seriously have worried about getting it wrong. Throughout history, people attempted to outline and understand scripture. Great systematic theologies were written to help Christians align with truth. Getting doctrine right really did matter. Yet I have noticed that truth seems to matter less and less. I have seen a Gumby-like quality attached to Jesus become more and more common, that we can have Jesus our way. I found a list that illustrates the Gumby nature our society has imposed on the Jesus of the Bible.

Republican Jesus—who is against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning firearms.

Democrat Jesus—who is against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, and for reducing our carbon footprint.

Therapist Jesus—who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tell us how valuable we are and to not be so hard on ourselves.

Starbucks Jesus—who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals.

Touchdown Jesus—who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians.

Gentle Jesus—who was meek and mild, with high cheekbones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash while looking very Scandinavian.

Hippie Jesus—who teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and helps us remember that “all you need is love.”

Yuppie Jesus—who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat.

Spirituality Jesus—who hates religions, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding “the god within” while listening to ambiguously spiritual music.

Platitude Jesus—good for Christmas specials, greeting cards, and bad sermons, inspiring people to believe in themselves.

Revolutionary Jesus—who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on “the system.”

Boyfriend Jesus—who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love in our secret place.

And then there's Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. Not just another prophet or teacher or miracle worker; he was the one they had been waiting for; the Son of David and Abraham's chosen seed; The Word of God made flesh to establish God's reign on earth, to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners and proclaim the good news to the poor; the lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the earth.

In his book, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* Leonard Sweet tells the story of Ed Faubert. Faubert is what you call a “cupper.” In laymen terms, he's a coffee taster. He is the best at what he does. His taste buds are legendary; they are insured by Lloyds of London. So special is his taste for coffee that even while blind-folded he can take one sip of coffee and tell you not just that it is from Guatemala, but from what state it comes from, at what altitude it was grown, and on what mountain.

John's Call to be Ethical and Love Cuppers

In 1 John God calls us as Christians not to be cuppers of coffee, but to cultivate our spiritual taste buds. In the first three chapters John taught us that we can know who knows God and

who comes from God by their ethics and their love. We are to be spiritually sensitive to doing right and loving right. Ethical Cuppers and Love Cuppers so to speak. While driving here from Wisconsin I streamed several 1 John sermons from the pastors at CPC. John drove home to us that ethics matter to God and love matters to God, that our spiritual taste buds are to be sensitive to ethics and love every day. 1 John 3:10 summarizes this pretty well.

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”

The text we are in this morning reveals another call that John gives us: This is the call to be Truth Cuppers.

John's Call to be Truth Cuppers

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (4:1).

As Eugene Peterson translated it (*The Message* translation), “Don't believe everything you hear.” Don't believe every spirit. What does John mean here by spirit? It can be translated as “Don't believe every unseen spiritual influence.” There are beliefs that contradict God, that come straight from the grotto that are revealed in some teachers, some prophet through their speech, their actions or their passions. Even if it sounds good, don't just automatically believe it to be truth. They will sound good. What false prophet is not going to try to establish a following by not sounding good? Spirits are plural. False prophets are plural. You can't turn on your computer, TV or radio without bumping into one.

There's a story of a young American engineer who was sent to Ireland by his company. It was a two-year assignment. He had accepted it because it would enable him to earn enough money to marry his long-time girlfriend. She had a job near her home in Tennessee. Their plan was to put their money together and put a down payment on a house when he returned. They wrote often, but as the lonely weeks went by, the girlfriend began expressing doubts about his being true, exposed as he was to the beautiful Irish lasses.

The young engineer wrote back. He declared with some passion that he was paying absolutely no attention to the local girls. “I admit,” he wrote, “that sometimes I'm tempted. But I fight it. I'm keeping myself for you.” In the next mail, the engineer received a package. It contained a note from his girl and a harmonica. “I'm sending this to you,” she wrote, “so you can learn to play it and have some time to take your mind off those girls.”

The engineer replied, “Thanks for the harmonica. I'm practicing it every night and thinking of you.”

At the end of the two years, the engineer was transferred back to company headquarters. He took the first plane to Tennessee to be reunited with his girl. Her whole family was with her, but as he rushed forward to embrace her, she held up a restraining hand and said sternly, "Just hold on there a minute. Before any serious kissin' and huggin' gets started here, let me hear you play that harmonica!"

Testing is hard. Just the thought of questioning someone's belief system makes us uncomfortable. Who are we to evaluate what others believe? But it must be important because John commands us to do this. Truth matters to God, and it should matter to us. Let me show you a particularly strong stand that God takes on those who claim to have truth in the Old Testament. This will seem harsh to you, but consider the sadness of seeing someone taken captive by a world philosophy and then be eaten up by it as they worship it.

"... and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow" (Deut. 13:1-5a).

Yes. Truth matters to God and therefore it should matter to us. Is there a specific criterion for testing if someone is twisting Jesus like a Gumby toy? John gives us that starting in John 4:2-3.

"Those who claim to speak the truth about God, will speak correctly about Jesus. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. That is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

Evaluate all speakers, teachers and preachers. What do they teach about the nature of Jesus Christ? John is telling us to be on the lookout for any teaching that minimizes the authority and person of Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ has come." I love the rich meaning here. It means that the anointed one came from his exalted place in heaven, took on flesh and became Jesus Christ the God man—100% human and 100% divine. Forever changed. He didn't just appear human; he didn't just appear divine like a mirage in the desert; he became and always will be both God and Man. Emmanuel. God with Us. Jesus of Nazareth is the divine

word of God, who reveals the Father to us, who alone atones for our sins, who loves us so much he became one of us.

False teachers will deny this truth about Jesus. Truth tellers will witness to this truth about Jesus. False teachers will claim some kind of new teaching. Peter warns us about this: **"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord bought them"** (2 Peter 2:1).

Questioning if he is really who he says he is, or if his word is reliable is as old as Adam and Eve. Our enemy, the teachings of the world, and of the antichrist distort and deny God's word. Often times these false teachers are strong attractive leaders. They fool people with their promises. This past Friday I had dinner and a movie was some new friends at CPC. I asked who our congress person was here. It took a while to determine who it was, but then one asked if I remembered Leo Ryan. I did. I was in high school in Orange County when Jim Jones ambushed him and deceived 780 of his followers—men, women and children—to commit suicide in Guyana.

False teachers tend to have an exclusive spirit. That they have a corner on the truth and don't need the rest of the church to work through their faith with a community of believers that they can learn to submit to and be accountable to. They will pull away from other groups where they would run into accountability and be challenged. John spoke about that back in chapter 2.

"They went out from us, but they didn't really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (v. 19).

Some of us might be saying, "You know all this talk about false teachers, I don't know much, I'm no bible scholar, I don't study this stuff, it isn't my thing. This other false prophet stuff is creeping me out. It's scary." One of the feelings that we can feel is fear. Will I be able to stand firm? Is the truth really strong in me? And you know what? John understands that feeling. He says: "You, (all of us) dear children who know God, know with confidence God is greater." He gives us verse 4 as a gift.

"You, dear children, (7 times in this letter; it means really listen now) are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them" (4: 4-5).

Jesus said, "I have told you things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (16:33).

How many times have we relied on this promise that Jesus has overcome the world when facing an illness, a job loss, a relationship problem, a business problem, a wayward child? And

how many times has this promise been communicated to you by people who understood because they had lived it? They have already walked the road you are walking?

My first men's event after moving to Wisconsin was a fishing event on a local lake. Now for you who have lived in the upper Midwest, I want you to think for a moment. This fishing event was in February. So I bundle up, and I drive to the lake. I knew that we are ice fishing and I was kind of uneasy about walking out on the ice. But hey, these are guys God brought into my life, and I can do this. So I arrive at the shore and a few other guys are there with their trucks. I get out and say, "Okay, I can do this, let's walk on frozen water!" "Hey what are you doing? We are not going to walk on this ice. It's a big lake. We are going to drive on the lake." "No way, are you serious?" Be aware. Be alert, but don't be afraid. "Oh yes. And unfasten your seat belt and open your truck door, and stay in my tracks." I was really okay because this community of guys had lived it, and they loved me and walked this California boy into some pretty great fellowship out on the ice. A lot of ministry took place standing out there on the lake on a few Saturdays each winter.

So John in verses 1-3 starts with those teachers. Test them; truth matters. Then in verse 4 he says "you" which refers to all of us. Don't be afraid, he tells us, remember who is in you. I am and I have overcome the world. Stay in my tracks.

In verse 6 he ends this section by talking about himself and others that have walked with Jesus and have recorded what Jesus said and did. In other words he ends this section looking at himself and the other writers of the Bible.

"We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (4:6).

Consider this. It's probably happened to most of us. You have a friend who is really excited about a book, a speaker, a lifestyle they have found. They are excited to share it with you. You are happy because your friend seems so happy. But when your friend tells you about it, it's something you know little about. So John is telling me that I need to test it because truth matters. Is it truth from God or is it something that as John says, "Speaks from the viewpoint of the world" ?

Here is what John tells us to do: God says pay attention to who is following this. Are the people involved in this people who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ? Are they people who know

Jesus, and who are committed to following Jesus? People who know God will reject the viewpoint of the world.

Jesus says, "The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice" (10:3-4).

Why Does Being a Truth Cupper Matter?

We are called to accurately give voice to the one true God among a pantheon of many gods. We can do this! Each one of us as we learn more about Jesus and follow Jesus and internalize the truths about Jesus have been given an unbelievable opportunity to see what God is really like. We have an ever increasing sensitivity to what is most important to him. Through his loving relationships we can know his heart for people. We can know the love, compassion and forgiveness that God provides. NT Wright put it well. "Jesus provides an exegesis of God. Dare to shape your view of truth around the person of Jesus."

So what do I do when my friends challenge my belief about who Jesus is? I make sure I am learning more and more truth about him and about how he rescued me from death, from condemnation, from a life without purpose. Then I am to find ways of making him known more clearly in the world around me. As I know him more clearly, then I can make him known more clearly and carefully, to flush out error without condemning all things different.

If you are like me you need to be reminded that truth is not a club I am to use to hammer people into agreement. God has not called me to be harsh or critical or nitpick. I have learned that God wants me to major on the majors and let the little churchy things go. He has called me to let the love of Christ through me gain me a voice in a darkening world, so that my life can be an illustration of who he is and what he has done, that I can be a solution to a broken world. This was my prayer driving through northern Nevada.

To be truth cuppers means to be winsome happy warriors of truth. Please hold me accountable to this. I am convinced this is how God can use me in the future to reach people who don't know him. As you hold me accountable, I will hold you accountable.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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