

New Year's Eve – December 31st, 2024
TELL US LIES

Prayer

Jesus, we ask you to Sanctify us in the truth because your word is truth.

AMEN

Text

I'd like to start by reading a couple of verses from the extended version of tonight's Old Testament Lesson – in the New Living Translation – Isaiah 30:8 – 11:

Now go and write down these words. Write them in a book. They will stand until the end of time as a witness that these people are stubborn rebels who refuse to pay attention to the LORD's instructions. They tell the seers, "Stop seeing visions!" They tell the prophets, "Don't tell us what is right. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. Forget all this gloom. Get off your narrow path. Stop telling us about your 'Holy One of Israel.'"

Context

As a reminder, Isaiah was God's prophet to Judah, the Southern Kingdom. It was in 930 BC that the 10 tribes – now called the "Lost Tribes of Israel" - formed the independent Kingdom of Israel in the north

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and the two other tribes, Judah and Benjamin, set up the Kingdom of Judah in the south. Tonight's text is the people's response to the prophets warning.

Culture of Lies

The phrase used the title – Tell Us Lies – is just as popular today as it was centuries ago. Some of you may be old enough to remember an song by Fleetwood Mac, titled "Little Lies," that contained the line **Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies**. If you're a bit younger, you may know of the novel "Tell Me Lies," by Carola Lovering that's been made into a TV series streaming on Hulu. The plot is too complex to summarize, but to quote on reviewer:

*[The book] is also a **fascinating examination of toxic relationships**, dysfunctional relationships, and the bad habits we have all been guilty of having: confusing lust with love, drama with maturity, and Mr. Wrong for Mr. Right. Only maybe now, after seeing Lucy and Stephen's trainwreck unfold, we'll all be able to recognize the signs in our own lives a lot sooner."*

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Over the past couple of decades, even the idea of objective truth has become outdated. Truth is now subjective – your truth may not be my truth. Words no longer mean what they used to mean and we disguise evil by choosing to reframe the conversation. There are no longer any illegal immigrants, just undocumented visitors, abortion is a woman's choice over her body rather than the killing of an unborn child, a person can be whomever they choose to express themselves as, marriage is no longer between one man and one woman, and the list goes on.

Especially in politics and medicine, we've all become instant experts and litigators, believing and quoting sources that support our views and opinions while calling those that don't misinformation or conspiracy theories – without bothering to research or validate our own sources of information. In the last round of political campaigns, it seemed like there were more ads calling the other side a liar than those stating what the candidates believed and stood for. And we seem to have lost the ability to compromise or to have even have civil discourse.

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Theology of Lies

Try as they might, faith and religious organization are not isolated from or immune to the impact of the culture in which they are found. Let's look at some of the lies that we ask our pastors, priests, and rabbis to tell us.

God is Love; EVERYONE will be saved: This idea isn't new, having been around since the early church. This lie usually begins with the truthful premise that since God is Love but twists it by adding that love is somehow 'more true' of God than this justice. Surely, a loving God would not condemn anyone to hell! And we want to believe this, because we don't want to believe that the friendly, helpful Hindu, Muslim, or Jew that we work or go to school with will be condemned for all eternity just because they reject the belief that Jesus is God's son and that trust in His finished work of the cross is the **ONLY** path to eternal life. We are either embarrassed by the exclusive claims of our Christian Faith or guilty because we don't care enough about them to warn them of their impending doom. John records Jesus' words (John 14:6)

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Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you just have more faith: This one ties into the false 'name it and claim it' Theology of Glory that we heard about recently. But even if we don't swallow this view wholesale, we can begin to question our own faith when God answers our prayers with either 'not yet' or 'NO.' Be it a loved one that doesn't recover and dies from an illness, a marriage that ends in divorce, a spot on a sports team that goes to someone else, or whatever else we ask for and don't get, the results can be the same: Self-doubt about the strength of our faith and/or the goodness and faithfulness of God.

You CAN stop sinning: To quote one Christian author ([Richard Savage](#)) "*But is it really possible to stop sinning? Yes, most certainly. Not only is it possible, but it is what it means to be properly born again to be a child of God . . . Jesus not only died for our sins, as a lamb without blemish, but He rose again from the dead and is now able to give us all the help we need to live as He lived, without committing sin.*"

This false teaching, again drawn from verses where we are

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commanded not to sin, fails to distinguish Law from Gospel; it fails to let scripture interpret scripture, and it quotes 'proof texts' that support their viewpoint while ignoring those that don't. (Sound familiar?) In truth, we are not Jesus, and our wills are bound to sin. We'll be simultaneously saint and sinner until Christ calls us home to be with Him. As St. John wrote (1 John 1:8-9)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Life will be better if you are Christian: Let's see – Jesus was crucified, all twelve apostles except for one was martyred for their faith, and the whole of the Christian church was illegal and persecuted for the first several centuries of its existence. And Jesus, as recorded by Matthew, ties tonight's text into a hard life when He said (Matt 7:13-14)

*"Enter by the **narrow gate**. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. **For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life**, and those who find it are few.*

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Theology of Truth

So, what's the antidote for these lies? The Good News of the Gospel! Because of the finished work of Jesus, on our behalf, the benefits of his death and resurrection are yours through the faith that God has given you. Since you're a forgiven child of God, through the means of grace, be assured that:

God is Gracious: *(Psalm 145:8-9) The Lord is gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.*

God is Merciful and Comforting: *(2 Corinthians 1:3-4) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

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God is Forgiving: *(Ephesians 1:7-8) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight*

As we close this year and move into the next, it's my prayer that we would have the steadfast faith of a child and that these words would echo in your ears whenever you are tempted to believe the theological lies of the devil **(join with me – 594 verse 1)**

God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!

He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price.

Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any

That brought me salvation free, Lasting to eternity!

AMEN