

**Revelation 21:1-7** <sup>NAU</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,<sup>4</sup> and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." <sup>5</sup> And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." <sup>6</sup> Then He said to me, "<sup>1a</sup>It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. <sup>7</sup>"He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

## “Things Faithful and True”

In the movie *A Few Good Men* Jack Nicholson plays Colonel Nathan Jessep commanding officer of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. A Marine was murdered on the base by two other Marines because he was about to report that one of those Marines had fired an illegal shot at Cuban troops. In the trial, it became clear that someone higher up had ordered the murder known as a Code Red. Tom Cruise plays the young lawyer who's handling the trial. Eventually, in a manoeuvre that could have cost him his career he has Colonel Jessep brought to the stand. Eventually, Cruise asks Jessep point blank, "Did you order the Code Red?" Accusing a superior officer like that could have got him court-martialled. The Judge announces he is in contempt of court. Instead of withdrawing his question, Cruise boldly continues the examination, yelling "I want the truth." To which Jessep responded, "You can't handle the truth" and goes on to say that Cruise has no right to question the behaviour of those who are laying their lives on the line because Cruise as a lawyer has a no-combat role. Then, Jessep confesses to ordering the Code Red.

Nicholson's saying, "You can't handle the truth." opens a huge conversation over what is truth and who has a right to it. Jessep was claiming that there is a different standard of truth for combatants that non-combatants don't have a right to. That's movieland but I think it is like that out here in the real world as well. In the interest of something called "national security" our leaders can do things we the people would consider to be morally wrong. Record of these things gets shoved in boxes classified documents that won't be made public until long after the people involved are dead. The truth is locked in a box because apparently we can't handle the truth and our right to it is delayed.

Moreover, in the weeks prior to the Gulf War President George Bush Senior sent Secretary of State Madeline Albright to Iraq to try to get Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait. Albright was probably the best statesperson alive at the time, but because she was a woman Saddam Hussein believed he (and he regarded himself as a Middle Eastern king) didn't have to tell her the truth about anything. That's the way things are in that culture. He believed he was only obligated to tell the truth to someone he regarded as being of equal status. Nearly ten years later George Galloway, a Scottish Parliamentarian, saw Hussein days before the invasion of Iraq which started the current war and Hussein told him the truth that he had no weapons of mass destruction. Unfortunately, that was truth that no one in global leadership wanted to believe and when all was said and done there were no weapons of mass destruction. How many millions of people now dead and disabled because certain powerful elected officials believed they knew the truth and trusting what they thought to be the truth wreaked havoc.

Well anyway, I might be a bit of a conspiracy theorist but it seems that the way of this world is that those who have power believe they have the final say on what the truth is and that they can determine who has a right to hear it. And for the most part they withhold the truth because they believe that it's in the best interest of those they have power over not to know the truth because they believe we can't handle it. But that's not the way it is with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We're nearing the end of the Book of Revelation and for the first time in the Book the voice comes directly from the one seated on throne and he tells John to write down that he is making all things new because it is faithful and true. God tells us the truth so that we might have the faith needed to weather so called "reality".

Isaiah writes: "This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: 'I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.' Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them." (Is. 42:5-10) God's way is to reveal what he is doing and going to do so that he may prove himself faithful and true.

In the Bible truth and faith are integrally related. The truth must be responded to with faith. When Pilate was questioning Jesus he was trying to determine whether the accusation that Jesus was trying to make himself king of the Jews was true. Jesus admits he is a king but his kingdom is not of this world. Pilate then says, "'You are a king, then!'. Jesus answered, 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' 'What is truth?' Pilate asked." (Jn. 18:37-38) To listen to Jesus is to follow him, to trust him and live

according to his ways and teachings. Thus, the truth here isn't the fact that Jesus is a king. It is that he must be followed because he tells the truth. Therefore, Pilate has to admit that he does not know what truth is and he does so because he is not about to become a disciple of Jesus. And so, not being able to determine the truth, Pilate must declare Jesus innocent.

The combination of faith and truth shows up a couple of times in the Revelation and both pertain to Jesus as the faithful and true one. At Revelation 3:14 Jesus says, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Jesus is faithful and true because he was faithful and obedient to the will of the Father unto death and won the ultimate victory over sin and death by which we ourselves have been, will be, and are being saved from sin and death. At Revelation 19:11 Jesus comes from heaven riding a white horse leading the armies of heaven to judge with justice and bring about the final defeat of evil. John writes that the one on the horse is called Faithful and True. It is true that God will prove himself faithful when Jesus returns to put an end to evil. Therefore, in turn we must trust the truth and prove ourselves faithful unto the end.

I pause here, and similarly to Pilate's question about truth, to ask, "What is faith?" What is it to be faithful? What did Paul mean when he wrote in Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast." Also later in Philippians, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." In the Bible, faith is a relational matter rather than an intellectual one. It is trusting, indeed trusting exhibited by faithfulness. Karl Barth says faith is what happens when the faithfulness of God encounters the fidelity of man. We all have the ability to invest our personal trust in something or someone. Yet, the problem sin has left us with is that we invest our personal trust in things other than God. Sin is our alienation from our Maker so that we cannot know God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unless the Trinity personally reveals himself to us. Because we cannot find God on our own yet still have this trust to invest, we invest it in idols, dead idols which cannot speak to us yet we trust and value the power we invest in them as being salvific. Because of sin, the onus is on God to reveal himself to us that we might know him and invest our faith in him. This God has done.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has revealed himself to us in, through, and as Jesus Christ. In Jesus we see the Kingdom, the reign of God, God's power and presence breaking into our "reality" and into our personal lives to heal us, to set us free, to tell us the truth, to reconcile us to God. On the other hand, by Jesus we see the extent of our own animosity to God. We crucified him, but yet God forgives. Jesus showed us that God gives himself to the uttermost for us because he is steadfastly loving and faithful. God loved us to the extent of suffering death for us that we might have true life now and forever. The Gospel is that in, through, and as Jesus Christ God has saved his creation and redeemed us from our slavery to sin that we might live as slaves to righteousness as disciples of Jesus Christ, the faithful and true one.

As I said a moment ago, faith is a matter of relationship not the intellect. I can tell you the good news that God has saved his creation from sin and death and Jesus has redeemed you, but without the Holy Spirit uniting you to Jesus so that you know the God to whom you've been forever reconciled faith gets reduced to a blind belief in propositions. Grace is that God has freely given us access to himself through Jesus Christ by uniting us to Jesus with the free gift of the Holy Spirit who makes us able to cry out God, "Abba. Father." The scope of grace also includes that we are the recipients of God's favour and that he is really and dynamically at work in us for what is best for us. Faith in God, the relational trust that creates in us the will and the ability to work at being faithful to God as Jesus himself was, is, and ever shall be, faith in God arises when we find ourselves standing in grace, engulfed in the presence of God and the Holy Spirit begins his work in us making us able to walk according to the Spirit following Jesus rather than the flesh. Faith/faithfulness is our participation here and now in the present in God's making all things new until the day Christ returns and it becomes on earth as it is in heaven. On that day the creation will be made anew and we will be resurrected to live knowing God fully unhindered by sin. This word is faithful and true. Amen.