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Radio Address: Truth (WAAF), 1935

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On the night of August 3, 1914 a small company of British statesmen were gathered in Downing Street listening to telegraphic instruments playing the fearful prelude to a symphony of blood and hate which was to sound the still, sad music of humanity for many years to come. Shortly after midnight Lord Grey, having delivered his memorable speech in the House of Commons, joined the company and watched silently as the flames of war swept over Europe. As dawn came, he and a young man stood by a window looking into Downing Street, watching the lamplighter come up the street to put out the lamps. Lord Grey turned to his companion and said: "Just like that the lights are going out all over Europe tonight and they will not be lighted again in our generation."

Seldom have the words of a man without inspired knowledge of the future been more cruelly verified by the marching of the years. Today we may still be removed from the past by decades by the veil which surrounds all history in the making - and yet there can be little doubt that when their final story is written in the records of humanity it will be a story almost without equal in the annals of mankind. The roaring twenties - roaring with hatred and lust, swollen with prosperity and stricken with poverty, building great churches and forgetting God. Here in America untold thousands did not even know that the lights by which humanity finds its way from the eternity of silence to the eternity of triumph had become faint and dim in the blasting winds of human weakness and selfishness. The same guns that poured the blood of 8,000,000 young men into the fields of Flanders poured money into our pockets - and we had forgotten that in the iron economy of God blood and money must always end in a Potter's field. There were still
lights to be seen - the swamplight of mechanical progress - the
tinselled light of a false prosperity - the flickering light of a
Church to which had come its two greatest enemies at the same time
- prosperity and false peace. And so we stumbled on - until a
few years ago the hand of God struck deep and hard into human life
- the false gods in the marketplaces of the world crumbled into dust and
ashes - and men found themselves once more face to face with the
necessity of looking beyond their machines, beyond their money, beyond
their reason, for an answer to their crying in the night.

Here we find ourselves today. Men asking questions which must
be answered - men seeking light which must be given - men tired and
weary of the long darkness broken only by false and flickering lights.
And the true light will not come from depression-crazed economic theories
- or from the frantic efforts of men to regild a civilization whose vitals
have been torn away - or from a laughing optimism which sees roses
where there are only thorns - but solely and alone from the voices of
eternity speaking in time, from the ambassadors of the King of kings
- from the really forgotten men in our civilization - the preachers of
righteousness. Twenty-five centuries ago the great prophet Micah in
predicting a day of darkness and doubt and fear for his people
climaxed his description of their doom with the words: "And the sun
shall go down over the prophets." In all the long history of humanity
it has always been so. When the figures of the prophets, the preachers
of God, became dim and their voices could no longer be heard above the
babel in the marketplaces of the world, there was nothing left for
humanity but disaster and ruin and that great final bitterness which
comes when men find themselves torn and broken by forces which they do
not understand. And so it is also today. If we are to find our way out of the darkness which has come over the world, if we are to hear again the final answer to all the problems which trouble and perplex the souls of men, if the hearts of 60,000,000 men and women in America are to rise once more in the glad consciousness of the nearness of God, then their salvation must come - not through the voices of demagogues over the radio or the plans of politicians in legislative halls - but solely and alone from the voice of Eternity giving to our brief, broken, mortal life immortal meaning and telling us how to live, how to love and how to be happy despite the trend of all the heavy years, giving us the final answer to the question: What is truth?

What is truth? 1900 years a proud Roman governor expressed the attitude of a dying civilization by asking that question of a man who stood before him as the living answer to it and to all the questions which have always stared at men from the hidden corners of life. What is truth? Standing in the twilight hour of another civilization can I say that truth lies on the heights of human achievement? They are barren today and have given us no true picture of the ultimate realities in human life. Standing at the very center of one of the world's greatest cities can I say that truth lies in the piling up of gold upon gold? We know today that it leaves men afraid and alone when they are face to face with the final issues of life. The towers of Chicago are magnificent but they do not reach into eternity.

Standing at the opening of the second third of the greatest century of scientific achievement the world has ever known can I say to you that ultimate truth lies in our laboratories, our textbooks, and our machines? Even scientists will no longer say that. We know today that
In terms of the human heart our Century of Progress has not given us what it promised. The shallow optimism it brought to the hearts of men has today turned into dust and ashes and from ten thousand tottering pulpits and shabby lecture platforms, the question of Pilate once more rings out over the world: What is truth?

There are various types of truth in the world. There is the truth of the facts of science, the truth of philosophy, the ordinary, routine truths by which men order their lives. But Pilate's question ("What is truth") goes deeper than all these. He had just heard his strange prisoner say that He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth and that everyone who is of the truth would hear His voice. Here was ultimate truth - the knowledge of God and the wisdom of eternity - the truth which will remain eloquent when the half-truths of the world will have followed the feet of those who brought them into silence. Pilate recognized this promptly - and like all his followers throughout the long ages - brought to this truth the immediate, cynical, indifferent answer of the sinblinded heart of man "What is truth?" In three bitter, blinding words he summed up the eternal, immutable fact that the final answers of men have always been questions and that the wider the horizons of the world become the more solemn and dominating becomes the great eternal questionmark beyond the horizon. No thinker, no philosopher, no scientist who has looked only at himself and the world has moved one single step beyond the position of Pilate. Much truth has been found, but the final truth man has not found. His quest for ultimate truth, for the last reality in human life which explains life and death, gives hope and faith, and transforms life from a crawling in the dust of the earth to a reaching for the stars of heaven has always ended in that great final question, the last horizon of the human mind, the ultimate blank: "What is truth?"
How pitifully blind is man! Before the Roman governor 1900 years ago and before every man and woman who have ever repeated this question stands the shining figure of Him who is the final answer. "I am the Truth." Like thunder His words come up through the years to give to life, finally and forever, meaning and holiness and purpose and peace. Here is the truth of God: When the minds of men have searched the secret places of the Universe for knowledge and power - when they have stripped the minds of human wisdom - when they have turned everywhere else for the wisdom of life and the knowledge of death - they turn finally to find truth in the person and work of Him who faced Pilate and who faces the world today with the challenging, uncompromising declaration: "I am the Truth."

Why is He the Truth? Clearly, my dear friend, because He is the final answer to the problem of sin. As the eternal truth of God, Jesus faces with His eternal power and wisdom the great continuing fact of sin in the world. No three words are found more often in the Bible than the tragic words: "I have sinned." They are the solemn confession of various men covering a wide range of history: the experience and working of sin in human life is ever the same, whether one look into Eden 6000 years ago or into Chicago in the year 1935. Sin is universal. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is the world's greatest tragedy. It is the individual's greatest trouble. You remember how King Ahab rushed at the old prophet Elijah with the bold question: "Art thou he that is troubling Israel?" And fearlessly Elijah answered: "I have not troubled Israel. You are the one that has
troubled Isreal in that you have sinned." Sin is the great trouble.
It is your trouble. It is the trouble of millions of restless souls
who travel the ways of life with feverish uncertainty. Back of every
sorrow that cannot be cured is the awful fact of sin. Sin is devast-
tion. It destroys body and soul. It robs the life of peace. It
brings night into the soul with no promise of a better tomorrow.
It slays hope, destroys faith, and crucifies love. It kills.

As long as men and women sin they will have trouble. It is
the source of tears and sobs. If you want something that will make
life a complete failure, try sin. If you want something that will
breed regret and remorse, try sin. If a young man and woman want
something that will destroy the loftiest ideals and reduce life to
barrenness, let them try sin. When it comes to wrecking all that is
high and holy, all that makes life worth living, sin is an expert, a
masterworkman. It never fails. There is no sense in deceiving our-
selves. There is no greater tragedy in the world than the grim fact
of sin.

Is it not clear to us today that over against the overwhelming,
grim fact of sin, human agencies and plans are powerless? There must
be a greater answer than the hearts of men, unaided and alone, have
found until now. Over against the terrifying questions, the continuing
doubt, and the besetting fears of men stands the Truth of God - With a
voice which rings over the world with divine power the entire Holy Scrip-
tures testify to the fact that the final answer to the questions of sin
is to be found in Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. "The
blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "He was
made a curse for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in
Him." Here are the voices of men who have found the peace it alone can give. And above them rises the final revelation of God's eternal truth in the person - not of Christ the great moral example - not the fair teacher of the mountainside or the Christ of the little children - but the Christ of the purple wounds - covered with dirt and sweat and blood - the Christ who two thousand years ago poured down His blood before the heart of God as an everlasting atonement for sin and the final revelation of the truth by which men live and die. Here at the crossroads of the world and the meetingplace of the ages - here where all the desperate tides of the world's doubt and fear were poured through the channels of one weary heart - here is the truth of God - the last, Godgiven, heavenborn answer to the questions of time and darkness and sin. Here is a blotting out of the burden and the guilt and the memory of sin - a forgiveness and a forgetting which extends from the gates of Paradise Lost to the most forgotten soul in Chicago today - a forgiveness which includes also your and my sin.

And so, Pilate's question and God's answer become a very personal matter. My dear friend, if you have heard only the question and not the answer will you not turn to Him who can bring it to you? Today and tomorrow and forever - out of the welter and woe of the Universe - out of the tragedy of a humanity that has lost the way home - out of the disaster of our homemade solutions and our manmade answers, His figure rises, His face shines, and His voice speaks also to you: I am the Truth.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.