

THE NATURE OF REALITY

We are going to take a rather circuitous route
to today's topic.
Try to stay with me.

I'm reading from the Supreme Court decision,
Casey vs. Planned Parenthood.

“At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

I define my own concept of existence and meaning.
I define my own understanding of the meaning of the universe.
I define for myself what human life actually is and what it's for.

That philosophy is embedded in the law of the land in the U.S.

Where did it come from?
It didn't just spring up out of nowhere.
It's a reflection of the culture we live in.

There are the two assumptions that statement is built upon.

1. You have the **right** to determine the meaning and the nature of existence, the universe and the mystery of life.
2. You have the **ability** to determine the meaning and the nature of existence, the universe and the mystery of life.

Do you have the right to determine the meaning of all that is?
I believe you do.
As much as the thought police of political correctness try to tell us
what we must believe,
we still have the right to believe whatever we choose to believe.

But here's the rub.
Do you have the ability to determine the meaning and the nature of life, existence,

meaning, and the universe?
I believe you don't.
Not on your own.
And neither do I.

You define the meaning of existence and the universe?
Did you create the universe?
A universe that is 46 billion light years in diameter
and nearly 14 billion years old.
You're one of 7 plus billion creatures
walking around on an inconsequential planet
with a brain that's smaller than the average cantaloupe,
and you think you can tell me the meaning of
existence and the universe?

Prove to me that your mind gives you valid information
about the world and the rest of the cosmos.
You can't do it.

In fact, prove
that you're not the only person who exists
and that everything else is anything more than your imagination,
an illusion that has no reality in fact.
You can't do it.
It's one of the first questions you deal with in freshman philosophy.

It's called solipsism
and there's no answer.

That alone should teach human beings
to humble themselves when they claim
they can determine the nature of reality and existence.
You didn't create the universe,
so how do you know it's intended purpose?

Is the cosmos matter and nothing more?
Or is reality a combination of the material and the spiritual?
Or is it all spiritual and the material is only an illusion

as the Hindus teach?

How would you even go about determining which answer is correct?

You don't know.

So how are you going to determine the nature and the meaning of the universe?

Did you create human life?

Then how do you know what it was created for?

Or what it means to live a truly meaningful life.

You define the meaning of meaning?

Have you taken advanced courses in epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics?

Heck, most of us can't even define those terms,

much less detail the major philosophical options within each of those fields
and describe why we come down favoring one over the other.

It reminds me of the comedian Jeff Allen

when he did a show for us years ago.

He was an alcoholic, angry atheist who started hanging out

with an older Christian man.

When he told the man that he was an atheist,

the man said, "Jeff, you're too stupid to be an atheist."

I define the nature of the universe, meaning, life and existence?

I can't define the nature of a differential equation,

tell you how an iPhone works

or why people use Facebook to show you what they ate last night.

C'mon, man,

You don't even understand your wife.

Half the time you can't comprehend what she's telling you –

even if you're listening.

And the rest of the time you don't even understand why she's talking at all.

When you go home tonight,

is she going to be happy with you or mad at you?

You don't know.

You don't have a clue.

Matter of fact,
you're not sure if she was happy with you or mad at you
when you left the house to come here 20 minutes ago.

And if you think I'm criticizing her,
that's just something else you don't get.
I'm not criticizing her;
I'm criticizing you.

You don't understand the nature of the person
who lives in the same house with you,
and you think
on your own, you're capable of defining the nature and the meaning
of the mystery of life, existence and the entirety of the universe?

You're either one smart guy,
or one arrogant goofball.

I don't define the nature of existence.
You don't define the nature of existence
or what it means to live well.
The One who created the universe and human life and all that is,
he does.
God does.

The good news is
we are not limited to our limited intellect
or to our meager understanding of realities
much greater than ourselves.
God has revealed who we are, the purpose of life and the true nature of reality
in the pages of Scripture and in the person of Jesus.

Finally, the point!
Why did Jesus live such an impactful, one-of-a-kind-life?
Because he understood the true nature of reality.
You'll remember what Sam says to Frodo
in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings.
They have left the shire
and entered a world that is full of strange creatures, dark forces, magnificent
beings, and great battles.

And Sam says, “I wonder what sort of tale we’ve fallen into.”

That’s the question we all need to ask.
 What sort of tale have we fallen into?
 What is the nature of reality?
 What is really going on in the world?

Who can give us the answer to these questions?
 The one who understands it better than we do.

One of my favorite heroines in the movies is Maya,
 the CIA agent who was determined to find and kill Bin Laden.
 She has dedicated her life to this mission
 and has been on the ground with it for years.

Here she is letting her superior,
 the station chief in Pakistan,
 know that she knows what he needs to know,
 but doesn’t know.

Clip: Zero Dark Thirty

I’m sure she would have been a pain to manage,
 but man is she fun to watch in action.

We live in a world that is more complex and confusing
 than Pakistan.
 Who’s going to explain it to us,
 and hopefully with a little more patience than Maya?

The teller of the tale,
 that’s who.
 The author of the story
 we’re a part of.
 The One who created us and the cosmos
 we live in.

The good news is he has.
 And once we understand the true nature of the tale,
 then we can live it well.

When we began this session of Quest, I told you
 each week we will look at one of the reasons Jesus lived such an incredible life
 and try to learn what he knew and how he lived.

So, this week,
 the reason is this.

Jesus understood the nature of reality better than anyone.

So, he was able to live better than anyone.

And if we are to live a life similar to Jesus,
 our rabbi, our Master Teacher,
 then we must understand the tale the way he did.
 We must see the world with his eyes.

If we don't,
 if we see the world the way everybody else does,
 we will live the way everybody else does.

We may believe in Jesus,
 accept him as our Savior, and
 go to heaven when we die.
 But we will not become like or live like
 our Master Teacher Jesus.

So what did Jesus teach about the nature of human reality?

Much more than we can handle in the next twenty-five minutes.
 But, we can make a good start.

1. THE WORLD IS A SPIRITUAL PLACE.

There is more to reality
 than we can perceive with our senses.
 There's more going on in the world
 than what we can see and touch and hear.

That's one reason Jesus would often say,
He who has ears to hear,
let him hear.

And
He who has eyes to see,
let him see.

Because not everyone,
in fact most people,
don't see the spiritual nature of reality

The world for Jesus was a spiritual place.
It was also a physical world.
And the physical world that God had created
was good when he created it
and we were meant to enjoy its pleasures.

In Matthew Jesus reports one of the charges leveled against him.

Matthew 11.18-29: For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

Obviously Jesus enjoyed the pleasures of food and wine
provided by the physical world he and we live in.

So when I say that Jesus saw the world as a spiritual place,
that's not to imply that he denied or denigrated the physical realities of human
experience.

But Jesus saw reality as involving more than the physical world.

The world Jesus lived in was deeply spiritual.
It was filled with devils
who oppressed people,
whom he cast out when he encountered them, and
who often shrieked out his name when they came into his presence.

It was also a world with angels
who announced his birth and
who ministered to his needs as he struggled in the garden of Gethsemane.

In the world of Jesus
 people were comprised of a spiritual nature
 as well as a physical nature.
 And as important as our physical bodies are –
 after all, much of Jesus' ministry was spent
 healing broken bodies and
 relieving people of their physical infirmities –
 as important as our physical bodies are,
 it's our spiritual natures which are of ultimate importance.

Matthew 16.26: What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for his soul?

The treasures and the pleasures of the world,
 the prizes and the praises of men,
 add them up
 and make them all your own.
 And they will never equal the value of your soul.

In his story about a man who has all the physical blessing life can afford –
 his only problem is where to store all his stuff –
 God says to him

Luke 12.20: You fool, this very night you will be asked for your soul! Then, who is going to possess all that you have prepared?

Enjoy the physical pleasures of this world?
 Sure, you're a physical being and God created a good world
 for you to enjoy.

But live for them,
 be mastered by them,
 look to them for meaning and security and a sense or worth,
 and they will become idols
 and you will forever lose what matters most
 and that is your soul.

Jesus saw the world as a place
 that is both physical and spiritual.
 Reality is not one or the other;
 it's both.

But we tend to see the world as primarily physical.
 Occasionally we have a spiritual experience,
 but we tend to focus on what we perceive through our physical senses.
 So we live concerned with, driven by and fixated on
 our physical needs and comforts and advancement.

If we want to live like Jesus,
 that must change.
 Our eyes must be opened to the fact
 that reality is spiritual in nature.
 And we will never define the universe, human life or meaning rightly
 unless we understand what we can see and hear and touch with our physical
 senses
 is but a very small piece of the tale we have fallen into.

Not only is the world a spiritual place,
 Jesus saw the world as

2. THE WORLD IS A SPIRITUAL BATTLEGROUND.

There is a war going on.
 That's how Jesus saw reality.

It's a war for your mind and for your soul
 and for the minds and the souls of others.

The tale we have fallen into
 is the story of a gracious and powerful God,
 creating a good world with magnificent beings made in his image.
 And how betrayal and rebellion both in heaven and on earth
 have left his creatures lost, captive and blind in a kingdom of darkness.

It's a story of spiritual warfare.
 And what's really going on is a battle between good and evil.
 The forces that would deceive, blind and enslave.
 And the forces that would bring freedom and truth.

This is part of the hero's calling.

He must see the world for what it is.
 He must recognize what others don't.
 That there is more to reality than meets the eye.
 That there is a battle going on
 that others are oblivious to.

In this scene you are Neo and Jesus is Morpheus.

Clip: Matrix

What follows is Morpheus gives Neo a red pill
 and he is able to see reality for what it is.

Our turn to get red pillled.

Look how Jesus begins his ministry in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 1.14-15: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus did not come into the world
 to teach some nice little truths and
 make us into nice little men.
 He came to establish a kingdom.

That's what he is announced
 as he began his ministry.
 The rightful King has come to do battle with the forces of evil and
 to rescue those who belong to him
 and re-establish his Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

In Luke's Gospel he inaugurates his ministry with this declaration.

Luke 4.18-19: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for
 the
 prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to
 proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Those who have been blinded to the truth,
 I have come to open their eyes.
 Those who are poor because they have been robbed of the life God intended for
 them, I have come to restore what's been taken from them.
 Those who have been imprisoned and oppressed
 by the cruel power of the evil one,
 I have come to set free.
 Those who have been taken from the Father who loves them,
 I have come to bring them home.

Tell an evil power that you have come to
 expose his lies,
 free his captives, and
 destroy his kingdom,
 and you have made a declaration of war.

One more.

John 12.31: Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this
 world will be driven out.

“The prince of this world,
 the one who led the revolt and who now claims the throne of the
 rightful King,”

Jesus says,

“I have come to put an end to his reign. “

The tale we have fallen into,
 the big story is the tale of two kingdoms,
 clashing and competing for world dominion.

One to enslave the children of men to what is base and corrupt
 and unworthy of the lives God has given us.

The other to set us free so we may become the men we were meant to be
 and live the lives we were created to live.

What does this mean for us?

It means

THE MOST IMPORTANT BATTLES YOU WILL EVER FIGHT WILL BE SPIRITUAL BATTLES.

Near the end of his life Paul wrote

2 Timothy 4.7: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

You want to keep the faith, finish the race and be the man you were created to be? You better be ready to fight some battles.

A. YOU WILL NEED TO FIGHT SPIRITUAL BATTLES WITHIN YOURSELF.

It's not going to be easy becoming more like our MasterTeacher.
To live a godly life and be the man you were created to be,
you will have to overcome three enemies.

1. The Flesh will Betray Us.

What we mean by that is our fallen, sinful nature.
That principle of selfishness and autonomy that lives within every one of us.

Paul wrote –
and every time you see the word “flesh” think “sinful” nature.

Romans 8.5-8: Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires. ... The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

If that's all we had to deal with,
that force within us that says
think pleasure,
think what's advantageous,
think me first,
if that's all we had to fight to live like Jesus
it would be hard enough, but there's more.

There's

2. The World will Entice Us.

When the Bible talks about the world it can mean many things,
 but in this context it means the values and the pressures of the world
 to live contrary to the ways of God.

The classic passage is

1 John 2.15-16: Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

We already have this stinking traitor – this saboteur –
 called the flesh living within us.
 And on top of that, we have the world, our culture,
 telling us that life is found in
 giving into the flesh,
 living for the things we can see, and
 giving way to our pride and our desire to live independent from God
 and call our own shots.

But, wait, there's more.
 There is

3. The Devil will Deceives Us.

John 8.44, this is Jesus speaking.

John 8.44: He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Like he did in the garden of Eden,
 the evil one will tempt us with his lies
 that God's ways are too restrictive and
 that the fullness of life is found in rebelling against his will for our lives.

The flesh, the world, the devil.
 If you're not up for a battle,
 you're not up for becoming more like Jesus
 and becoming the man you were meant to be.

It's easier not to fight these battles,
living like everyone else.
But living like everyone else doesn't create great lives
and it won't make us like Jesus.

When the decision is to be right or to be kind,
you'll have to fight a spiritual battle within yourself.

Deciding what's more important to you –
your career or your kids,
your success or your integrity,
being seen as a good guy or speaking up for what's right –
these are all spiritual battles.

And these are the battles that determine
if we become the man we were meant to be.

When you're depressed,
when your marriage isn't going well,
when no one appreciates you,
whether you turn to a drug, a drink, porn or an affair
or whether you turn to prayer and to a Christian brother for counsel,
that's a spiritual battle you'll have to fight.
Whether you trust God and tithe 10% of your income to his work
or you live in fear and selfishness and withhold what belongs to God.
Whether you love your wife the way Christ loved the church.
Whether you forgive those who do you wrong
or you hold onto our anger.

These are all spiritual battles we must fight.
Not just spiritual decisions,
but real, difficult, painful battles that we must fight
within our hearts and souls if we want to be the man God made us to be.

Jesus fought these battles.
He was tempted in the wilderness.
He was troubled in the garden of Gethsemane
when he saw the sacrifice he needed to make to do God's will.
He was mistreated and attacked
and had to forgive.

Life was a spiritual battle for Jesus.
It will be for us if we want to live the way he did.

The fact that the world is a spiritual battleground means something else.

B. YOU WILL NEED TO FIGHT SPIRITUAL BATTLES FOR OTHERS.

Jesus began his ministry saying that he had come to
deliver the captives,
set the prisoners free, and
bring good things into the lives of the poor.

Being like Jesus is not just an inward battle
we fight for our own integrity.
It's a battle we fight to bring God's kingdom into the lives of others.

The kingdom has come.
The invasion has begun.
Jesus is leading the charge to free the captives,
and we are called to follow him into battle for a better world.

There are many ways we can fight these battle.
Some of us will feel compelled to fight big battles.
Take on the culture and expose the lies
it tells us and it tells young people
about who they are and where to find life.

Some of us will feel called to fight for a denomination
that has lost its moorings and is drifting away from the Bible.

A friend who is destroying his life with alcohol.
He needs you to get in his life
and fight for him.

A buddy who has made a terrible moral mistake.
He needs you to get in his life
and love him and love him and love him,
until he can forgive himself
and experience the forgiveness of God.

Foster kids who have been in a dozen homes

and who tell me that they never felt that anyone in any of those homes
ever loved them.

They need someone to get in their lives
and fight for them and their future.

And many of you are doing that.

God bless you.

Inmates who the only father they ever knew were the streets,
and some who have done truly horrible things,
need someone to go into the prisons and the jails
and fight the power of evil that has overcome their lives
with the love and the truth of Jesus Christ.

And many of you do that.

God bless you.

Children in this church who need Sunday school teachers,
men they can look up to,
to show them what following Jesus looks like.

A buddy who doesn't know Jesus,
Needs someone who will invite him to Emmaus
and be his sponsor.

A neighbor who doesn't go to church
and whose kids have no spiritual foundation,
he needs a friend who will invite him,
and when he says no,
pray for him,
and spend time with him,
and pray for him some more,
and invite him again.

The harvest, Jesus said,

Luke 10.2: The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

There are a million battles to be fought.
And we are the guys who are expected to fight them.
That's part,

that's a huge part of what it means to follow Jesus
and become the men we were meant to be.

Quickly on this last point.
Because the world is a spiritual place,
and because we are here to fight spiritual battles,

3. WE WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR WHAT WE DO WITH OUR LIVES.

We don't earn our salvation by doing good deeds
or fighting spiritual battles.
We are saved by faith in the battle that Jesus fought and won on the cross for us.

But that does not mean what we do does not matter.
God cares greatly if we fight the inner and outward spiritual battles
that make us like Christ and spread his kingdom.

Jesus taught that our deeds would be judged.

In Matthew 25 Jesus portrays himself as the one who will judge the world.
And he teaches that here will be an accounting for what we did with the lives
we were given.

He'll ask us did we feed the hungry,
give drink to the thirsty,
clothe the naked,
care for the sick and
visit those in prison.

That's on the final test.
It won't determine your salvation.
But we'll be asked about those things,
we're accountable for those things.

And the more we are given –
the more talents we're given,
the more finances we're given,
the more opportunities we're given,
the more knowledge of God's will we're given

the more will be expected of us.

Jesus taught the same thing, very succinctly, in

Luke 12.48: From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

You and I have been entrusted with much.

We are wealthy by the world's standards.

Most of us have been afforded a marvelous education.

We have access to the Bible.

We are in a great church that teaches the truth of God's word.

We have been blessed with incredible gifts of intelligence, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

These blessings were not given to us
to be expended solely for the expansion of our kingdoms –

but for expanding the kingdom of God
so the blind can see,
the prisoners can be released, and
the poor can be raised up.

And we will be held accountable
when we meet Jesus.

Much has been given to us,
and much more will be expected than
we lived the American dream and were pretty good men.

It is expected that we will have fought battles that matter
and that have brought people into God's good kingdom.

That's what Jesus did.

And that's what we're supposed to do.