

Torrey 1985 The Tree of Liberty and the Habit of Truth By Calvin Cook

Calvin Cook:

For my wife and myself to be here with you this week. Can you hear at the back?

Speaker 1:

Let's get that on your tie and we'll stick this one in your pocket.

Calvin Cook:

Ok.

Speaker 1:

All right. We'll kind of go on the belt or whatever.

Calvin Cook:

Sure.

Speaker 1:

Crazy people, these Americans.

Calvin Cook:

All right, that's fine. Is that better? Now, I've asked whether you can actually hear my voice. Can you just indicate at the back? Can you hear? Fine. Can you understand? I want to make it clear that I'm speaking in English.

I need to do this because some of you may be rather surprised that Clyde and I are brothers. About 30 years ago, when he was the hottest basketball player in high school in the Orange County, and I had come over for the summer to spend it at home, he was so intrigued at how I had changed that he organized an elaborate practical joke. And so the phone rang. Nobody else in the house, and I had to answer it.

And the program was, according to the phone anyway, "What's the Tune?" Clyde? Is that right? Where are you, Clyde? "Name that Tune." Sorry. "Name that Tune." You can see the original perpetrator had it absolutely cold. So they then started to play "The Missouri Waltz." Now, that may have been Harry Truman's favorite tune. He was President at that stage, was he? No, I could just come in.

No, Harry was still President. And so here, filled with greed and expecting great prizes as a result of getting something right. I hated to see these receding into the distance because I hadn't heard this tune, as I said, well, the best I can do. Look, I'm a visitor here in this country, and I'm afraid I'm not yet acquainted with your folk tunes. I thought that was a pretty good line, just playing for time and hoping that something would happen that I would just hit the right title. And then from the other side of the phone, this diabolical gale of laughter.

Ha ha. You see, he does it all the time. And what it was under these circumstances was, he speaks like that all the time. See, Clyde and I had a very interesting upbringing. I suppose we may have spent about four or five months together in our lives. When you have a gap of eight years, believe it or not, between brothers, you grow up virtually in two families. So I was off to school, and Clyde, not yet literate, remained at home.

By the time he became literate, we were both in different concentration camps. We were then both repatriated, and he went off to boarding school, and I wandered off as a very timid freshman to university. The war ended and the rest of the Cook tribe decided to emigrate to America. The only genuine American among them was my mother, only she had been born in China and had returned to China as soon as she could after having been educated in college in America as a missionary. So they went off and were transformed into real, alive American, Bobby Sock says.

Now, doesn't that date us both? Well, meanwhile, I continued my education on the other side of Atlantic, and so eventually we met up here in Laguna Beach. Nervously, he allowed me to fill in in one of the softball teams. They were really hard up. He put me on first base because all I had to do on first base was to catch. And since I could do it without a glove, that was all right. And then even more nervously, he suggested, "Well, perhaps I might go as a counselor to Forest." No, not lawn, home.

And just as we were leaving in his 1937 old mobile, he looked at me and he said, "By the way, what are you wearing?" And I said, "I'm just wearing like this." I had a white shirt on and gray

flannel trousers like a uniform. And he said, "Oh, no, not on your life. You're not going like that. I don't want to be known as the brother of that square in the white shirt."

So he took me to his wardrobe. I'd never seen so many shirts. I had one in the wash and one on and one in the drawer. But he had this whole rack full of gorgeous technicolor shirts. And so I rummaged my way through them like this and discovered the most conservative of them, which was a kind of maroon with white and black poinsettia design on it.

Well, believe it or not, by the time we got to Forest Home, this was superb camouflage. Nobody could tell the difference except that he played basketball, and I didn't. So I was hugely amused this evening when I saw his wardrobe. Boy, has he changed. White shirt after white shirt after white shirt and one pale blue one at the end. That made me feel more at home than anything else.

But seriously, Clyde, I really appreciate this opportunity of sharing in the life of this university with you. Now it's been a long day for most of you, but I want to talk to you this evening about a title that I've given, which is the Tree of Liberty and the Habit of Truth.

And my basic text is John chapter 8, John chapter 8. And for a moment I want to take you back about nine years to a moment in South Africa in June 1976, when what was euphemistically called the heads of churches were gathered in the basement in Johannesburg, trying to think what the church could do in the situation of emergency, which had developed as a result of the riots that had broken out in the black township of Soweto, the southwestern township. That's where the acronym really comes from, which is the huge black city adjacent to Johannesburg.

Now, I don't think I have ever felt more depressed or upset than the attendants at this particular meeting. We knew there was trouble in the township. We had been told that the police would not permit any white to enter the township. And at that stage, we rather meekly surrendered to this information and thought about what else we could do. And so what happened? The usual kind of thing. We shuffled together a rather communique or statement, protesting about things that we had protested about without much effect for 20 years.

I went home to Grahamstown from that meeting, thinking, now, what really has the gospel got to say in this situation? And that was a very urgent question for me, because I had returned after my studies to Africa with a conviction that if the gospel were going to be able to meet a gospel anywhere, it had to be able to work in a situation like South Africa, which, as far as I could see, stretched the distance that needed to be reconciled, perhaps further than anywhere else in the world, the gap between cultures, between languages, what we had done to one another in history, all of these things seemed to be at a peculiar intensity.

And now, going back home in 1976, one wondered, not so much whether the gospel had lost its power as what had happened to the Christian Church, that a situation like this could develop after a century and a half of intense missionary activity. And the really disturbing thing about the situation in South Africa was that the gospel had been brought very largely by what one might describe as the evangelical constituency of Christianity.

All right, the trouble in Latin America, you would say, that's because the Roman Catholic Church was there, and you can expect that sort of thing where you find Catholics. Liberation theology and the rest of this kind of thing. But how is it then, that in a country which was very largely evangelized by those who would have thought of themselves as evangelicals, we had come to this kind of past? And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that there was a word that spoke into this situation.

And looking back now, over the last nine years, it seems to me that there is still a word which our country has not yet heard. But the more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me to be a worldwide phenomenon and not just something that affected South Africa. And that is why is it that throughout the world, this combination of violence and lies crops up everywhere? Violence and lies, where there is violence you can assume that sooner or later, sooner rather than later, you will have the lie and the cover up equally where there is lying. You can expect violence to be behind the lie.

Now, it seems to me that this is something which is of tremendous importance, particularly to any university community. Does the whole process of cover up and violence find its justification in the academic world just as much as it is anywhere else? Are we also being overtaken by the ideological twists that somehow or other justify the violence we do to others or to one another and excuse ourselves with the kind of euphemisms that you are all too familiar with? We neutralize a person. What does neutralizing a person mean? Putting him up and beating him to death in some cellar or other, or shooting him or blowing him up.

That's neutralizing. Of course, if it's one of our own who have been neutralized, then we are right into the headlines with the murderers. You look at the vocabulary of the range. How is it possible that freedom fighters and terrorists are optional terms depending on which side you're on now, if this was simply something that was the property of the kind of propaganda that we live under, then you'd think, well, an odd body coming from South Africa, yawn yawn.

But it's too universal for that when you watch the glossy eyes of Henry Kay on TV speculating on what had happened, the liberation of or rather the recapture of the terrorists in that Boeing, you knew that there had been lying from first to last on both sides. Now that's the style, but we call it diplomacy. Now I'm not against diplomats. We've got to have them. It's their business to negotiate.

But we're battled any people or group that comes to depend for too long upon ally, because you then get the substitution of a myth for history, and the thing can happen so subtly it creeps into the situation. And before you know the thing is taken over. And if you wanted to think about bounded in terms of psychology and individual psychology, they call this rationalization a nice euphemism. You don't feel worried about rationalizing a thing, do you? We do it all the time, call it a lie.

And immediately you're jolted and the sociologists talk about ideologies the partial truth, the lies by which we live. This is a kind of world in which the University does its thing and its thing these days can be to support the current myth, or it can be getting back into the immensely demanding task of a habit of truth.

Now look up John, chapter 8. If you have your Bibles here. And it begins with Jesus saying to them, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He has not, in fact, withdrawn that claim for himself. But what I want you to notice is that no sooner has he uttered the claim than it is immediately disputed by his heroes.

And we can expect, therefore, that to this day and in the foreseeable future it is going to continue to be disputed and for one very good reason. And that is that people would rather live by an unexamined life which does not disturb the myths and the lies by which they live, then undertake this patient and wounding pursuit of truth. Pharisees had said to him, "You're bearing witness to yourself. Your testimony is not true."

And Jesus says, "Even though I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know whence I have come and whither I am going, but you do not know whence I have come or whether I am going."

The first of Jesus' credentials is that he is somebody who knows where he has come from and where he is going. He is someone who has allowed the light of God to fall upon his own background and upbringing. As an Israelite, he knows that he has come from the Father, that he is doing the Father's will and that he is going to the Father.

And it is this great movement which justifies his claim that "I am the light of the world, and whoever walks in me in that light will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." He has come from the origin of all light and of all life, and he is going through to that same destination. "You don't know where you are going," he says to his opponents. "Oh, yes, we do. We're absolutely clear where we are going." And the dialogue or the argument continues on these.

Rather, it's a circular kind of argument which goes round and round because Jesus has the position of bearing witness as well as being the light bearing witness to the Father who has sent him. He is totally sure, totally committed to the destiny which he has been given. And he finds the meaning and character for his own life in terms of that mission.

Nothing. The people of God, those who heard him and who had been called by the name had come to a position where, of course, if anybody asked them, "Who are you? Where are you going?" And these sorts of questions, they would have trotted back the pat answer. Where the people have gone, he's leading us on. He's a good shepherd, but with this difference, that they were pursuing their own objects and aims and ambitions under the cover of the name of being the people of God.

When Jesus warned about hypocrisy, what he was really saying is, "You disciples of mine must get your act together. If you say you believe, you must behave as if you believe." It's not a question of a lamination coming apart, where the belief and the profession float off in one

direction and the other bit floats off in another. And yet is that not exactly the situation where we find ourselves being pressured into telling the lie about ourselves about our destination?

I've asked a couple of students, "What were your expectations about Torrey Week?" And I could see a flicker in their minds. "What's he getting at?" I said, "Well, come on, let's have it. If you've got no expectations at all, that's fine. I want to know what the bottom line is." Well, they were so relieved that I could accept the fact that nobody among an audience like this would have any expectations whatever. There might be a few of you who might have expectations.

But you see, the pressure is that you've got to say something that is going to make the other person, if I may part of the thing, feel comfortable. Now that's part of domestic diplomacy and the white lies fly to and fro in all our homes. Why call them white lies? Aren't they just plain ordinary lies?

And sure enough, in most cases, when Father is challenged about the reasons why he is doing a thing, he will break out violently, cuff the child and then say, give a reason, a good reason for doing something he hadn't thought of when he did it. I can range from the whole scale. Well, here is a people that has become habituated to living out a lie.

How many of you really find the gospel good news? How many of you find a gospel of repentance and faith and forgiveness? We haven't got any other kind of gospel. But look what that means. It means coming to terms with the fact that God actually means that I need to turn right round and go in a different direction from the one I was going in. I've got to face the fact

that I may well have been totally disintegrated and I need building up from the bottom up. The light of God has fallen on my life and it just cannot be looked at supposing that's the position.

Can you see that as good news yet? That is what people have found to be good news. They've made the astonishing discovery that if you begin by facing the truth about yourself, no matter how terrible it may be, in the end, that is going to be the first step towards Salvation.

So all these social programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and so on and so forth come down to this. That step number one is recognizing yourself for what you are, without excuses, without euphemisms and without any kind of shading of the situation. "I am an alcoholic." Now, that sounds like bad news. But the point is, it isn't really news. You've been an alcoholic for 15 years.

How can it be news? The only person to whom it is news is yourself. The same thing goes with the discovery of our need as sinners. The fact that we are sinners isn't news to anybody else except ourselves. That's where Salvation begins for us all. As, for instance, also the habit of truth. So Jesus is immediately called a liar to his face. Very interesting thing. How many of you have called Jesus a liar to his face? Because in the end, either he or you is the liar.

Did God send him or not? And so it is, that the one who comes from the Father's home is going to the Father's home. And what Jesus then warns his opponents is to say, "Look, you are going to die in your sins unless you believe that I am he because you have come from your home and you are going to your home. But what you don't realize is that your home is destruction. Your father is not God but the Devil."

That's strong language for anybody. And so he comes to the position where in this circular interrogation where the opponents are saying, you cannot be the person whom you claim to be, what you're saying cannot be true happens to the master in chapter eight, and then to the man born blind in chapter nine, the disciple in chapter nine. But it's the same situation they are being. Each is being confronted with a challenge of not telling the truth or not being who they claim to be.

You don't come from heaven, God's not your father. You were born blind. And of course, this is where unbelief gets itself into in the end, with not just simply casual consequences. When unbelief meets this kind of unshakable testimony, it turns to violence, and it will attempt to destroy the evidence.

What's the purpose of all these confessions that are obtained by torture? It is to get the witness to change his story into something else. Neither Jesus nor the man born blind changed his story. The one for the one. It led to being cast out of the synagogue. And you know what it led to for the other?

Well, some people believed in Jesus. And so he goes on. And he says to the people who believe in him, if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. They answered, These are the ones who believed in him. We are the descendants of Abraham. We have never been in bondage to anyone. How is it, then, that you say you will be made free?

Now pause for a moment on that crucial interchange. Jesus says, "If you continue," now, this is one of the great Jahanain words. It means you live or you remain. You abide. You dwell all of those things. If you live in the house of my word, you will be truly my disciples.

You know the difference between being a guest in a place and actually living in that home. The kind of thing that guests does, you sort of grope for the lights. You wonder where the switches are and all this kind of thing that you stumble around, at least for as long as you are still a guest, come to live in a place and you know instinctively where things are. You'll feel at home in it. It takes time to make that kind of adjustment, really, to feel at home in a new place like that. And so what Jesus is saying to those who have come after him.

Look, it's not just simply a question of hearing my word and then going back to where you were before we started, you have now got to come and live in this space, live in this word until it becomes the framework and structure for the rest of your life, all your living, then proceeds out of this home, my word. And he says he adds a promise that when this happens, you will discover that that truth is going to set you free. Now, what's the implication of that? It is quite briefly that you are not free at the moment.

Learning to live as a free person is something that is going to take time and it is going to take a new habit of mind before we get what it means to be free persons. Indeed. Now then, notice the response. We are the children of Abraham, and we have never been in bondage to anyone. There

is the great myth by which, in fact they're living. To be a child of Abram was in fact to have been in bondage at least three or four times.

And what made a child of Abram distinctive was the fact that God had intervened and delivered the people from bondage. Sometimes bondage, which had been inflicted on them with no apparent reason. And other times where they had brought bondage down on their own heads, the children of Abram had gone to Egypt first as privileged guests, then.

And the whole of the Exodus story is a story of God's deliverance deliverance first from Pharaoh, the external oppression. But even more important than that, the deliverance in the desert from their own habits of slavery. They came out of Egypt with slave minds. Their characteristic mood was one of grumbling.

Now, if you are going to live as a responsible person, a free person. There are certain disciplines, and one of the most important of them is the discipline of gratitude and Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is not our natural speech. We really have to work hard at saying thanks. I don't know how many of you were in this kind of a situation is perhaps a bit younger, always wondering whether a birthday present was really worth the letter of thanks that had to be written.

But to change a habit of grumbling into a habit of gratitude is an immense revolution in a person's mind. It was never achieved in the desert. Only two of the whole mob made it into the promised land. When they got to the promised land, once again there were oppressions. They were under the hands of various groups of people and the seesaw of judges where the people

would groan to God deliver us, and he would send a judge who would smite the Amalekites or the Edomites or the philosophy or whatever. And then before long they would be back on the same old track of arrogance, of disregard of God failure to be his people and oppression. Once again.

The climax, of course, was the exile, when, because of their own centuries of stubborn disregard of the privilege into which they've been called, they were eventually sent off into Babylon. And once again, the miraculous thing happened, God returned his people to their land.

But right contemporary with now this situation here about which Jesus is speaking, they were under the heel of Rome. Can you believe it that here they are children of Abrams, denying that they were ever in bondage in any way where one group of them anyway were prepared to stick a knife, a Dulong into any Roman who could be found on his own.

See what's happening? One version of being the children of Abram, the fourth version, we were never in bondage to anybody. That is what makes us children of Abrams. The other version, the true version, is that if you continue in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

So liberation is a process. We have to gain a habit of truth. We have to discover that independence is not enough. We've got to learn to practice the disciplines of this new form of life, which brings us into Liberty. We have to learn the waves of the house into which we have

been called. And how do we learn this by associating with those who are living there already the Father and the Son and the Spirit. That's the way we dwell in the word.

And it means also that we must inculcate new habits by constant practice. The practice of truth, the practice of living as free persons. And what's mean here is not just simply, oh, yes, I've got it. But much more the kind of thing that you have to do as an athlete. I derive an enormous sense of satisfaction that John McEnroe, who must have served hundreds of thousands of serves and some games, only managed to get 60% of his first serves in.

I don't feel too bad as a weekend hacker on that basis. But you see, I haven't inculcated the new habits by sufficient constant practice. But do you see living by truth and the habit of truth in that kind of way, the constant practice of something which does not come naturally until it begins to look like a reflex, and until it becomes eventually a habit, that's what Jesus is talking about here and what he's laying down for his disciples. If you want really to be free, then this is the way it's to be done.

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed, because the Son knows the Father is one to be trusted and obeyed. And it's that point which is so important for us, because our fluctuation in obedience always comes because we doubt the character of the Father. So let's ask ourselves then, which is really Abram's line? The ones who need deliverance and recognize it, or those who deny that they ever were in bondage to anybody? So you have the giveaway.

The opponents of Jesus are plotting now to back their lie with violence against the one who comes to offer Grace and truth, truth and Grace to those who believe those who keep this word says Jesus will not see death to follow that Father. For Jesus is to see that he dies. The sun dies, but does so in an amazing way in a manner that shows who was right.

They take up stones as the children of Abram in order to do what their law had told them to do to stone the blasphemer. Jesus moved through, because Ironically enough, it is going to be a Roman death that these liberated people are going to claim from their oppressor to be done to the one who was offering them freedom. And in the death of Jesus, you have the measure of the bondage of the people of God.

Implications from this, but I think it's only fair to give you a 7th inning stretch. Would you like just to stand up, or if you want to talk over any of these points to the person next to you for two minutes or so, then I'll resume. Not for long. It was a calculated risk that a number would feel that they'd had more than enough. I don't blame them at all. You probably have had more than enough for one day. What has really surprised me is the number who stayed right now. What I just want to do briefly is to just to look at this question of okay, there is the situation.

I believe it repeats itself over and over again in history where you take people are living by a myth, and when they are confronted by the myth with which they are living, they find that they would rather do violence to the Prophet who brings them a message which shows them where they really are and invites them to become something else. And over and over again, we find the

kind of intransigence where people would rather go down fighting for what they think they are, then change.

I don't know how many of you have read a "Stillness Appomattox," Bruce Catton's volume on the Civil War. And the way, for instance, how that absolutely incredible heroism of the last four or five months of the Confederacy, what they were prepared to go on doing when everybody knew it was a lost court.

Now don't mistake the degree to which people will do that kind of thing. "Masada will never happen again" is what every commissioned officer in the Israeli Army says at the time of his commissioning on the top of the Hill of Masada. There are these moments where we would rather live by what may be indeed a myth than to face the consequences of a real repentance, because none of us really knows what those consequences will be except this, that in the end, we are going to be conformed to the image of the Son of God.

That's the end of the historical process for everyone who accepts repentance lives in the house of truth and is set free by the sun. So I would say, first of all, that you are here at this University to develop a habit of truth, which you can practice every moment of the day, because a habit of truth is like a coral Reef. It's built up by these microorganisms and gradually, gradually it comes into being as a solid mass, and it has this kind of unshakeable character. Except I believe the Florida ones are being absorbed by starfish.

But basically what I want to convey is the sense of the slow deposit of a thousand things every day that contribute to the building up of a habit of truth and a foundation of truth by practicing it all the time, practicing it in your classrooms. Fair enough, but practicing it in your dormitories. Even more important, practicing it in the way that you walk about your feet. So with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, does your gate suggest that? Oh, here comes so. And so look, let's Scram, let's get out of here before he upsets us again.

Or do you come into a group welcomed as the bringer of good news of victory from a distant quarter and over the Hill where the only thing that the anxious citizens in the city can see is the way the messenger is running on the horizon that tells them all they need to know whether it's victory or defeat. Well, that's one of the possibilities, too. Even the way we walk is going to say something about the habit of truth and the degree of freedom which we have. Secondly, a University education surely is intended to help you in this acquisition of a habit of truth.

But your classroom instruction, as I say, is only a small fraction of the total. And unless the habit extends throughout the rest of your life, you're going to find yourself in what is such a common dilemma of a University person that they are overdeveloped as far as their minds are concerned and underdeveloped as far as their emotions and their Wills are concerned, a habit of truth living in the word of God should make it possible for you to get the whole act together. As the desert fathers used to say, what is acquired in the mind from the Word of God has to descend into the heart.

For university graduates, my third point would be that speech matters much more importantly than most people realize. For your words, you're going to be judged academic people have or ought to have. This is part of their training, a vocabulary above average, and they're given that vocabulary so that you can express the nuances in language or in an experience. You don't have to say that everything is "awesome." I believe that's the new "in" word.

Put some nuances. "Awesome" is something it is reserved for an experience properly of God. And it's to be distinguished from awful. But those things are not so far apart as we like to think they come from the same route. But we've devalued awful. What's your speech like? Can it be trusted, even in the smallest particulars? That's a habit that requires a great deal of training. As James reminds us, it's the last of the members to come under the control of God. And therefore, of course, it's the one that needs most training.

My fourth point would be that you've got to remember that you cannot always be expected to be believed even when you are telling the truth. But that does not mean that you ought to alter your story. A witness is a witness to what he has seen and heard and touch and handled and tasted of the word of life. Not even Jesus was always believed, in fact, more often than not. And by most he was not believed.

And so this is where a great deal of the pressure comes on us who are bearing witness to the light of the world with the life that that light gives to others don't expect to be believed all the time. I draw great comfort from the parable of a sewer. I don't know quite how it works out in an

audience like this this evening that there are four soils in every audience, and for three of them, what is said is not going to have any practical effect.

But while that fourth soil is going to multiply 30 or 60 or 100 fold to make up for what has been wasted, apparently on the other three quarters. All right. If you find yourself in that kind of a situation, it may be only one or two people in the group that you're speaking to. Don't worry.

If that takes root in their hearts, and if they cultivate it, then it will have done its purpose. Don't be put out. Therefore, by the pressure of unbelief or nonbelief in what you say. And finally, as a reward for the cultivation of the habit of truth, two things are going to happen.

The first is that we shall have the light of life, that's the promise, and even more, that the truth will set you free so that no longer will you have to live by the myths of contemporary culture because you have gone to the source.

You know that Grace and truth are inseparable for one another as much as violence and lies are inseparable from one another. How do you know it? You knew that when the light of that word fell on, you saw the disintegration, the disease, the evil, the wrong, all of those things which may have been your fault, or they may have been the fault of your ancestors. You knew that recognizing that to be the situation was the first step in an inexplicable process by which you were put together again, not according to the model that you were before you fell, but according to a new model, it not only were you a living being, but you become a lifegiving spirit.

Let us pray, Lord God of Abram, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, God of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of the only begotten son. We bless, and we praise you for the gift of Salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. We give you thanks that you sent him as light into our darkness, as life, into our disease and our dying.

We give you thanks that he follows right to the very end that way which you had ordained for him, and that each step of that way was from your home and to your home, through our chaos, to your own destination. Do we give you thanks that he has made it possible for us to follow in that way so that we may live within the mansion of your word, to us, through Him, that you have given your spirit and set your spirit within our hearts, that we might learn the ways of your home, that with joy and delight and exaltation, we might pray thy will be done.

So, Father, we glorify, and we praise you for the Liberty you have given rooted in what you have done for us in Him, for those liberties which we have yet to learn and appropriate for ourselves. Therefore, we offer ourselves soul and spirit and body, asking not only that we may dwell in your word, but that you will deign to dwell within our bodies so that they may shine with and for your glory.

This we ask in the name of your son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.