* **Series Slide**
* Google has a new initiative.
* They are working to get virtual reality into public schools.
* Google Cardboard is a low-cost virtual reality platform that allows students to look at Verona, Italy…when they study Romeo and Juliet.
* They can look at the Roman Coliseum, or go to the top of the Sears Tower, or swim around the Great Barrier Reef.
* Here’s what some of the students and teacher of a class that tested Google Cardboard said.
* **(*TECH NOTE****: All following, teacher & Student quotes on same slide if possible…if not, teacher on a separate slide*.)
* **“This device can make us go to places we’ve never been before.”**
* **“You have to see it for yourself to believe it.”**
* **“There is so much to see, so you know its never going to end.”**
* **“We got to see, so we could understand what she was talking about”- Students**
* Now, here’s what their teacher said-
* **“[Virtual Reality] is much more enriching than just showing a picture, or just having them read about it.”- Teacher**

Ok, first, I’m not picking a fight with Google, or with virtual reality today. So if you happen to be a technology apologist…flush all that for a minute….

What I do want to point out to you is something that I think we are all sort of passively believing. Something that has bigger implications than you might think.

We are subtly believing that words aren’t powerful. At least not as powerful as looking through a cardboard box into a phone strapped to our heads.

Look at some of these quotes.

This device CAN MAKE US GO PLACES.

Look at the emphasis on how important SEEING is to understanding...or believing.

You have to see it to believe it. Once we saw it, we understood it.

And then, there’s what the teacher said,…

“Virtual Reality…seeing these things in an immersive video environment is much more enriching than…reading about it.”

There is an assumption happening in that statement.

“Reading about something is one thing. But its not nearly as enriching as this new technology…being completed immersed in a 3 dimensional video.”

The thought is “the more we see, the more we can experience something in a virtual way…the more likely we are to actually experience it in reality.”

But, has pornography led to more and better REAL sex? No.

Have video games that call us to virtual courage to fight virtual battles has that lead to more REAL people willing to lay their lives down for someone else? NO. not even close.

In fact, the more we experience the Virtual World, the less we participate in the REAL WORLD.

Then, there’s Jesus’ take on Virtual Reality…well…sort of.

* **Matthew 4:2-4**

In the desert, when Jesus was being tempted by the devil, His temptation was to turn a stone into bread…for pragmatic reasons…because Jesus was hungry.

Makes sense, right?

But Jesus said, (by the way, he quotes words from a book about God…instead of citing his experience as a member of the eternally pre-existant trinity)…. He says, “Man shall not live by bread alone...but every word that comes from God’s mouth.”

In other words, “Its more important for me to feast on the word of God… than to bring something into reality before its time.”

Then there’s Thomas.

After Jesus resurrected, he was only seen by a few of the disciples. Thomas was not one of them.

**John 20:25**

So those disciples came back saying, “Jesus resurrected. We saw him!” And Thomas says, “I have to see it for myself to believe it.”

Thomas says, “This claim would be much more enriching if I could see it.”

So, Jesus lets him put his fingers in his scars…

**John 20:29**

And then asks him, “**Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

Sounds a little different from “Seeing is believing.”

Thomas said, “Having the experience is much more enriching than just hearing about it”

And Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe”

This is not a sermon about Virtual Reality…well…at least not the Google Cardboard version.

Today, we’re talking about Actual Reality.

Today, we’re talking about the Truth.

And how the **RIGHT** Word is worth 1,000 pictures.

Today, I want you to understand why speaking and believing a true word…is more blessed than making your own reality…

Because, speaking and believing lies… will leave you not only out of touch with reality…but also, out of touch with the God created reality.

Title Slide: **“Virtual Reality: How Lies Disintegrate Us and Believing is Seeing”**

If you follow any sort of political news, or if you’re on social media at all, you have become very familiar with the phrase “Alternative Facts”.

You are probably aware of all the accusations of “Fake News”.

Or…if you lean more toward the entertainment industry…you probably know about “La La Land” winning the Academy Award for Best Picture. Wait a minute…actually…I see here in my notes it actually says “Moonlight” has won best picture.

Well, whoever you are, if you are alive and aware, you know we are living in a time when its hard to know who’s words to trust.

In fact, I read an article the other day espousing a theory that none of this is real, but we’re actually living in some Alien’s Virtual Reality. http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/did-the-oscars-just-prove-that-we-are-living-in-a-computer-simulation

You know what the evidence was?

This particular author listed the unprecedented nature of our last presidential election, the Patriots Superbowl comeback, and the announcement of the wrong winner at the Oscars as obvious proof that we are living in some alien’s computer program.

He described the Patriots unlikely Superbowl victory as a Father and son switching controllers in the 4th quarter in a game of Cosmic Madden.

Soooooo, if you can’t trust the news you watch and you can’t even really be sure whether we’re a part of some Extra Terrestrial Video Game…how in the world can you know “The Truth”? …and How in the world can you speak the truth?

* I’d submit to you today, that long before we had Google Cardboard…we’ve been telling ourselves lies. In fact, each one of us constructs our own sort of virtual reality every single day.
* Today, I want you show you how to take off the cardboard glasses…and maybe see things as they are for the first time.
* But, the funny thing is, you can’t really do that until you hear and believe a Word. A Promise. Which sort of means, **Believing is Seeing.**

…and That brings us to the 9th commandment.

Here it is.

* **Exodus 20:16**

**“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

* **Psalm 12:1-4**
* **Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone;**
* **for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.**
* **Everyone utters lies to his neighbor;**
* **with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.**
* **May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,**
* **the tongue that makes great boasts,**
* **those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail,**

**our lips are with us; who is master over us?”**

* **James 3:1-2, 6-10**
* **Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.**

**And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.**

* **Psalm 62:3-5**
* **How long will all of you attack a man**
* **to batter him,**
* **like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?**
* **They only plan to thrust him down from his high position.**
* **They take pleasure in falsehood.**
* **They bless with their mouths,**
* **but inwardly they curse.**
* **For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,**
* **for my hope is from him.**
* **Transition:** There is one thing you can take to the bank. Words are powerful. And that’s what makes lies so devastating and truth so life-giving.
* So what is truth?

**1) Life is living inside the Truth.**

* + In the beginning, there was only God.
  + The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
  + Three in one, existing before anything else.
  + And God SPOKE the world into existence…with his words.
  + His WORDS CREATED Reality.
  + Now, this is something only God can do.
  + Take nothing, and create something out of it.
  + Humans can’t do that.
  + When we create, we need raw materials. We have to have something to work with. But God just speaks things into existence.
  + The WORD comes before the Reality, with God.
  + Now, for us, Humans created in God’s image…we aren’t God, but we are created to be LIKE God.
  + So we our job is not to create things with our words, rather, to rightly describe creation with our words.
  + **Truth is rightly describing reality.**
  + Let me give you an example.
  + If I we were standing on top of a skyscraper, and I said, “JUMP and you’ll fly.” I would not be rightly describing creation.
  + I’d be lying to you.
  + But if I said, “Get away from the edge! If you fall, you could die!” I’m telling you the truth.
  + Now, here’s something interesting.
  + In the first case, “Jump and you’ll fly!” Don’t I sound super encouraging?
  + Isn’t that a positive and uplifting message?
  + I mean that could’ve been a Whitney Houston song or something.
  + And, in the second case, doesn’t that sound remarkably negative? “Get away from the edge! If you fall, you could die!”
  + Wow. So bossy. You know? And, by the way, not very inspiring.
  + But you tell me. Whitney Houston…if you really do “believe the children are our future”, which person would you rather have on top of that building with your children?
  + Would you rather have the positive and encouraging K-Love DJ- “Jump, kids and you’ll fly!” or , would you rather have that terribly bossy and negative person trying to hold your children back?
  + Of course…you choose the latter. Why?
  + Because despite the limitations the truth can seem to put on us…its always for our good.
  + When we describe reality as it is…when our lives align with the truth….we live INSIDE the truth.
  + That’s why Solomon wrote this Proverb.
  + **Proverbs 18:21a**
  + **Death and life are in the power of the tongue,**
  + The way we use our words matters. In fact, it as matter of life and death.
  + If we use words to create alternative facts, or virtual reality…or…lies…we are not living according to the truth….
  + …And we are paving roads to death for our neighbor.
* **Back to 1)**
* **Transition:** Now, I know what some of you are thinking. Especially those of you are “Tell it like it is folks”. You’re thinking, “See, none of my friends like me because I always tell them the truth.” You’re like Kramer from Seinfeld. You just walk in the room and tell somebody, “You stink.” “I don’t like the way you look”.
* So, is that what it means to tell the truth? To be BRUTALLY HONEST. To just say what’s on your mind all the time? Well…not exactly…and that’s where the 9th commandment is really going to help us out. See…
* **2) Truth without love is a lie. Love without truth is hate.** 
  + Take a look at the 9th commandment again.
  + **Exodus 20:16**
  + There are sort of 2 sides to this command.
  + On one side is the truth.
  + Negatively put, its “don’t bear false witness”
  + In other words, “Don’t say things that aren’t in accordance with reality”
  + Postitively put…Tell the truth.
  + But look at the other side of the commandment.
  + “against your neighbor”
  + On the other side of this truth telling command…is love for neighbor.
  + The positive form of this commandment would be “Tell the Truth for your neighbors good.”
  + **Matthew 22:35-40**
  + One time, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was.
  + And he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind…and secondly…love your neighbor as yourself.
  + And then, look what he says in Matthew 22:40
  + He says, “the WHOLE Law depends on those 2 commandments.
  + …and that’s exactly what you find here.
  + **Exodus 20:16**
  + Tell the truth “that’s loving God with all you are”
  + And…do it FOR your neighbor…
  + That’s loving your neighbor as yourself.
  + In other words, there is this constant discernment that has to happen in me in how I steward the truth. Its not only that I tell the truth, but that I do so for my neighbors good.
* **Back to 2)**
  + Think about the way a parent treats their child.
  + I think very carefully about how and when I deliver certain truths to them.
  + For example. My sons are 13, 10, and 4.
  + I’ve talked with all 3 of my sons, in some way, about sex and the dangers of internet pornography.
  + I chose to tell them the truth, because I know there’s a real danger that’s lurking around every digital corner.
  + But, what I’ve told my 13 year old is more detailed than what I’ve told my 4 year old.
  + I haven’t been nearly as explicit with my 4 year old as I have my 13 year old.
  + Now, does that mean I’m telling my 4 year old a lie?
  + No. Of course not.
  + It means when I tell him the truth, I’m telling it in love.
  + I’m telling it in a way that is thinking about who he is and what is most helpful for him to live in the truth.
  + Here’s a question I get a fair bit.
  + What about Rahab? What about the Egyptian mid-wives?
  + You can find Rahab’s story in the book of Joshua.
  + Rahab lived in the city of Jericho.
  + And after Israel left Egypt, they went into the promised land. Jericho was there and God told them that they were to overtake this wicked city.
  + So they sent in a couple spies to see what was going on inside the city. But the Jericho police got wind of the spies and started to search for them.
  + So they ducked into Rahab’s house to hide.
  + When the police came looking, they asked Rahab, “Have you seen these guys?”
  + And Rahab said, “Yes. But they already left here. They went that way!”
  + Now, Rahab lied….right?
  + Well, yes…and no.
  + What she did was give an answer that preserved life for her neighbor. In her belief in what God said was good and right, she protected her neighbor by throwing the Jericho police off the trail.
  + In protecting life, Rahab was living and speaking in accordance with the Truth….that is, who God is and who God made humans to be.
  + The there’s Egyptian midwives… who lied to Pharaoh when he commanded them to kill all the Hebrew baby boys.
  + They said, “We can’t get to the kids in time before these Hebrew women have already given birth.”
  + In their trust of God, they valued the life of their neighbor over the evil command of someone living in opposition to God. In that way, they are living more in the TRUTH, than they would be if they said, “OK, we’ll do what you say.”
  + It's the same with honoring your mother and father.
  + Honoring your mother and father doesn’t always mean obeying them. If they are commanding you to live outside of the truth…outside of who God is and who he made us to be…then you don’t honor them by obeying them.
  + Though, most of the time to honor your parents IS to obey them.
  + Likewise, MOST of the time, to say what is tre IS the way you tell the truth.
  + But all truth must be told in love for neighbor.
  + If not, if you tell the truth without love, you are living a lie.
  + ON the flipside, to love without truth is really hate.
  + Here’s what that looks like:
  + “Loving” without truth is typically conflict avoidance.
  + “ohhhh, I know I really need to talk to my friend about their drinking problem, but, man, I know she’s going to be so mad at me….so, I’ll just let somebody else bring it up.”
  + Or, “Boy, my boss needs to know how hurtful his words are to all his employees. That’s why there’s so much turnover here. Nobody wants to work for him. But…that could cost me MY JOB if he got angry. And, he’s actually kind of nice to me.”
  + See, that kind of “love” that just seeks to constantly be positive or be in someone’s “amen” corner isn’t really love. Because lays down its life for his friends.
  + Love isn’t afraid of conflict, because love always seeks reconciliation. Which means no conflict is unresolvable.
  + So true love speaks TRUTH.
  + It does it patiently, kindly, and at the right time.
  + See, if you try to love without the truth…its actually very self seeking.
  + What you are really trying to do is have a relationship with no bumps in it…no conflict.
  + You are trying to make the relationship about you. About your comfort. About your ease.
  + And in so doing, you are reducing your neighbor to something sub-human. You are making them only an applicance in your life, like your air-conditioner…or your couch.
  + They are just there to make your life more enjoyable.
  + You don’t really have a relationship.
  + This is why I’m always so astounded when people read something offensive in the Bible. A command they don’t like.
  + And they say, “Well, this can’t be the god I worship. The god I want to worship would never say anything like this. He would never challenge me like this.”
  + Truer words have never been spoken.
  + The god you worship WOULD never do that…the problem is, that god is not a real God.
  + Its one that you have created to live comfortably in your own worldview….but that worldview is not in accordance with the truth.
  + Let me ask you. If you read the Bible, and easily agreed with everything it said, would you really think it the divine word of God?
  + I doubt it.
  + See, any good relationship…where the truth is spoken in love, is always going to have some offensive bits.
  + Its always going to have conflict, bumps in the road.
  + When you run up against something offensive in the Bible, it shouldn’t tell you “This can’t be true”…
  + …rather…it should tell you, “the True God wants a relationship of love with me…otherwise…he’d leave me alone and let me jump right off the building with my Google Cardboard glasses on.”
  + “Bearing false witness against our neighbor” goes far beyond just what we normally think.
  + Not only when we outright lie, but also..
  + Anytime we speak truth without love, or love without truth… we are violating this commandment.
  + **James 3:8-9**
  + James says that with our tongues, with our words, we can in one moment bless God…and in another moment we can curse a person made in the image of God.
  + And so he reasons, “This doesn’t make any sense”…if we God is worthy of our blessing…then anyone created in the image of God is worthy to have the truth spoken to them with love.
  + If not, we lose our integrity.
  + You know, the root of word integrity is the noun…integer.
  + You know what an integer is? It's a whole number.
  + Its not a fraction. Its all the way put together. Its not divided.
  + A building that has integrity is one at is whole…it won’t fall down when weight comes on it.
  + Now think about the opposite. Think about something that “Disintegrates”.
  + Like tissue paper in water…it just falls to pieces.
  + **When we don’t tell the truth in love, we disintegrate ourselves and others.**
  + **Psalm 62:3-4**
  + **That’s why David says when you speak lies, when you use your speech to gossip, when you use words hatefully instead of lovingly…that you make your neighbor like a leaning wall…or a tottering fence…an inhumane structure about to fall over.**
  + **You disintegrate them.**
  + …and in so doing, you are disintegrating, because you aren’t an integer. You aren’t whole. You are praising God in here on Sunday, and speaking hatefully of your neighbor on Tuesday.
  + **You have what David called “a double heart”.**
  + **Psalm 12:2**
  + **Everyone utters lies to his neighbor;**
  + **with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.**
  + Flattering lips try to convince our neighbor that we love them, meanwhile, we aren’t telling them the truth.
  + A double-heart means our heart on one hand says we love God, on the other hand, we don’t love our neighbor…
  + …and David says, if you do this…you are lying to your neighbor…you are bearing false witness….and you are going to fall apart.
* Look what Paul says to the church.
  + **Ephesians 4:15-16**
  + **Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**
  + He says, for the church to be a unified, whole body…we have to speak the truth in love.
  + Otherwise, we will disintegrate.
  + So, in a very real way, a church without conflict is as bad as a church that’s fighting all the time.
* **Back to 2)**
  + If we never had conflict to resolve between one another…it would probably mean we weren’t telling each other the truth.
  + But if our conflict led to us not talking to one another, not forgiving one another…it means we don’t really love one another.
  + BUT, if we speak the truth in love, we will build each other up in love.

**TRANSITION:** But that sounds REALLY difficult and uncomfortable- you say.

* + Well, you’re right.
  + But to show you how worth it it is to speak the truth in love, I want to show you the lengths God went to keep truth and love together.

**3) The cross is the truth in love that takes us places we’ve never been before.**

* + When I watched that short promo video for Google Cardboard Virtual Reality…I noticed something interesting.
  + People who had them on…if you viewed them from outside…they looked like they were blind.
  + Blind people without a guide, grope around in the darkness.
  + That’s exactly what we look like with virtual reality glasses on.
  + But inside the glasses, it makes perfect sense to run if you are seeing a lion chasing you. It makes perfect sense to try and reach out and touch a fluffy puppy. It makes sense to scream if inside the glasses it looks like you are on a roller coaster.
  + …but, outside the Virtual Reality…in the real world, you look blind…you look like your virtually INSANE.
  + That’s why Jesus called people who were living a lie “Spiritually Blind”. They thought the lies they were telling themselves about the way to life and wholeness were true….but they were blind to reality…and they were disintegrating. Falling apart.
  + That’s why Jesus said I am the light of the world.
  + See, Jesus is the light from outside.
  + **Hebrews 1:1-3a**
  + **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**
  + The word of God that was spoken through the prophets is now alive and living among us. Jesus is the WORD the Father spoke.
  + He is the WORD that created everything.
  + And in Jesus, we have the exact imprint…the truth about who GOD is.
  + Jesus is the WORD from outside of our VR glasses that has come to us to tell us the truth…but he has also come in love.
  + **John 1:17-18**
  + **For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.**
  + John said, Moses wrote these commandments…but GRACE AND TRUTH came through Jesus…and even though you haven’t seen GOD, in Jesus Christ…the WORD of GOD…you can now know him.
  + In other words, you can take the glasses off and see not only the World as it is…but GOD…as he truly is.
  + See, when you lack the courage, when you lack the motivation to speak the truth in love…you need only to remember the cross of Christ.
  + **John 1:1 & John 14:6**
  + Jesus said that he IS the truth…he is the way to life.
  + He is the WORD that brings life.
  + See, the truth is so powerful, so important, that God couldn’t do what he did at creation. He couldn’t just Speak your lies away. He couldn’t just say, “Never mind” about your sin.
  + He had to tell the truth about it. That it disintegrates. That it tears you apart.
  + At the same time, his beautifully intense love for you is too deep to leave you to your disintegration.
  + Out of pure love, not because he needs you, but because he WANTS you…
  + He made a way to make you whole.
  + On the cross, The Truth was Crucified in love.
  + On the cross, you see God himself disintegrated.
  + He is taking the disintegration that our sin earned us.
  + He is not saying “your sin doesn’t matter.”
  + Or “No big deal.”
  + On the cross, he’s telling you the truth about your sin.
  + At the same time, he’s showing you how much he loves you.
  + Jesus Christ, the WORD made flesh…is dying to make you an integer.
  + A whole person. Put back together by God.
* **Back to 3)**
  + And in his resurrection, he is giving you the best kind of word.
  + An unbreakable promise.
  + That though you will die, though your body seemingly disintegrates…you will be put back together again.
  + That if you believe the Word of God…the truth who was crucified for you…that you will see new creation.
  + See, you’ll look at the cross…an execution device and say **“this can make us go to places we’ve never been before.”**
  + And you’ll take this beautiful GOOD NEWS…which is a lot better than Fake News…and you’ll say to others…”**You have to believe it to see it for yourself”.**
  + And when we are made whole…when Jesus returns…
  + …we’ll for eternity in an infinite New Heaven and new earth where God’s beauty gets newer every morning…we’ll say “**There is so much to see, so you know its never going to end”**
  + When Jesus comes back, we will finally ACTUALLY be able to say, with honesty…
* **“This is beautiful truth we have only read about.”**

BAPTISM… a picture that God tells us to paint. It I worth a 1000 words.