

October 17/18, 2020

What is Truth?

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 18:28-40

Pastor Bryan Clark

I'm guessing everyone in the room can identify with the frustrations over the last six months of trying to figure out what is actually true. What's true with the virus? What's true with all this racial tension? What's true regarding candidates and issues for election? You reach a point where it's like, "How does anyone figure out what's true?"

Well, there are a lot of people that have the same feelings, the same frustrations, related to religion. There are all these different religions—all these different views of God—and people feel this same frustration. How does anyone figure out what is true? I understand why they feel that way, but it's really important to understand that what John is saying is, "That's the point. That's why God became flesh and entered this world, to tell us what is true." This is one of the most common reoccurring themes in the Gospel of John, that Jesus says, "I've come from the Father to tell you what is true about the Father, what is true about Us and our situation, and what is true about the only way to experience forgiveness and a relationship with God." The question is whether or not we choose to believe. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 18. If you're visiting with us, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John; we find ourselves in chapter 18. None of the gospel writers include all the details of these final hours as Jesus journeys to the cross. John records the unofficial meeting with Annas, the former high priest, which none of the other gospel writers do. And then he tells us in verse 24 that Jesus goes off to Caiaphas, to the Sanhedrin, which would be the official hearing. The other gospel writers record that; John includes nothing. In verse 28, which is where we pick it up, Jesus now is coming back from Caiaphas. There are a couple of things here that are helpful. One is sometimes critics attack the gospel writers if they don't include everything, as if somehow that discredits the information. But none of the gospel writers set out to record every single detail. That's not what they were doing. But rather, each one has a particular purpose and includes material relevant to that purpose. This is a great example, because John is not unaware. He tells us Jesus went to Caiaphas, and then he tells us Jesus came back from Caiaphas. He's fully aware of the fact he's not recording that. It is just not relevant to the point he's trying to make. So we pick it up in verse 28:

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered and said to him, "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," to fulfill the

word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die. (*NASB, John 18:28-32)

So there's quite a bit of background information to understand what's taking place here. This is about AD 33-ish, and by this time, the Roman Empire had pretty much diminished the power of all kings. The kings were replaced by what we would refer to as governors. Another way of saying this is, the power that Herod had when Jesus was born thirty-three years earlier, was much more significant than the power that Herod had when Jesus was crucified. By that time, that Herod had almost no real power. The governors ran the show. To be appointed by the Roman Empire to this particular geography, would have been kind of the bottom of the food chain; it would have been an appointment nobody really wanted.

There's quite a bit of historical record concerning Pilate—and none of it's positive. Pilate was a bully; he was a brute. He was a real pragmatist—just get-the-job-done kind of a guy. He hated the Jews and the Jews hated him. Most of the time Pilate lived in Caesarea, which was up on the Mediterranean Sea. Actually, it was quite beautiful. But there were a few times a year, during the national feasts, that Pilate would come to Jerusalem to make sure there wasn't a rebellion, to make sure nothing got out of control. He would bring considerable soldiers, and he would stay either in the Fort of Antonio, which is on the north side of Jerusalem, or somewhere in Herod's palace. The traditional site was the fort, but almost all scholars today believe the evidence points to the fact that he stayed somewhere in the palace of Herod as his personal residence. That's the Praetorium. It just is a fancy word for his own personal residence.

The biggest issue for Rome was that there was a trade route from Egypt, up through the land of Israel, to the Roman Empire, specifically to Rome. Most of what came on that trade route was food, so the primary job of the governor was to make sure there's no conflict—it doesn't interrupt the trade route—because they needed the food. Pilate is in Jerusalem because it's Passover season.

The text tells us that the religious Jews have brought Jesus early. Now this is not unusual. This is not them knocking on the door and Pilate wiping the sleep out of his eyes and trying to figure out what's going on. It was traditional—normal for the Roman officials to start their day extremely early. Most scholars guess it's probably somewhere around 6 in the morning. Most Roman officials were completely done with their day by 10 or 11 in the morning. So Pilate would be open for business, and the Jews bring Jesus to him.

We're told specifically that the religious Jews would not go *into* his personal residence, meaning the place where he conducted business, because they didn't want to defile themselves. Likely they went up to a portico or a porch area, and that's as far as they were willing to go. The idea of going into the residence of a Gentile would defile them; then they couldn't partake of the feast, which was a man-made rule. So you can't miss the irony, that they are so concerned about not violating themselves ceremonially by violating this man-made rule, but they seem to have no concerns about asking to execute someone they know is innocent. But that's the hypocrisy of the situation.

Now the text says **so that they might eat of the Passover**. It starts to get confusing as it relates to the dateline. If you've been here in our study, you would say, "Wait a minute; I thought they already had the Passover. So, what is he talking about?" Well, here's how the dateline works. According to the Jews and how they kept track of days and times, sunset was the start of the new day. So Wednesday at sunset this time of year would be roughly six o'clock in the evening—and would have started the annual Passover. Technically for them, that was Thursday. It goes all the way through the day Thursday, and it was tradition that at the end of Passover day, there was a Passover meal. So that would be what we would call Thursday evening. This is what Jesus shares with His disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus then teaches chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, and they end up in the Garden of Gethsemane, maybe 11 o'clock...midnight—something like that.

So the clock rolls over to Friday morning. Jesus is arrested—maybe one o'clock in the morning— something like that. He is taken to Annas for the unofficial hearing, maybe about 1 or 2 o'clock. At 3 o'clock the cock crows, and Jesus is moved from the unofficial hearing to Caiaphas, for the official hearing before the Sanhedrin. This is now maybe 6 in the morning, something like that. At the end of this day, Friday, by sundown, Jesus has to be dead and off the cross, because that is the beginning of the weekly Sabbath, which in this case is the Passover Sabbath. So that starts at sundown, goes through till 6 o'clock Saturday, which then immediately begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasts seven more days. All of this—Passover day through the Feast of Unleavened Bread—was referred to as Passover. As a matter of fact, Luke chapter 22, verse 1, even says, "They were about to participate in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover." So that's what they're referring to. They don't want to be defiled and not be able to participate. There are eight more days of feast for them.

So, in verse 29, Pilate comes out to meet them, and he asked the question, "**What is the accusation?**" We would probably say, "What is the charge against this man?" Now, it is certain that this surprised, frustrated and infuriated the Jews. Pilate sounds like he's going to hold his own investigation. This is not what they wanted. As a matter of fact, it's almost certain Pilate would have been briefed. He's already sent soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane. He's likely very aware of what's happening. But there is this power struggle between the Jewish religious leaders and Pilate. The Jewish religious leaders just want Pilate to rubber stamp this and, "Let's get Him crucified!" But Pilate is responsible for anyone who is executed. But he also wants them to know who is running the show. So he's going to flex his muscles and do his own investigation. So he asked the question, "What is the charge?" You can hear the frustration in the response of the religious leaders, "**If He wasn't an evildoer**—if He wasn't a bad guy—**we wouldn't have brought Him to you.**" Again, you can't miss the fact they have no charge. They didn't give a charge. "If He wasn't a bad guy, we wouldn't have brought Him. Sentence Him to death. Let's get on with this thing." You can tell they're frustrated by what just happened.

We know from the other gospel writers that the conclusion of the Sanhedrin was the charge of blasphemy. Caiaphas asked Jesus, "Are you the Son of God?" and Jesus said, "Yes, I am." According to Jewish law, that was a death sentence. But the Jews did not have authority under the Roman Empire to carry out a death sentence. They also realized that if they told Pilate the charge is blasphemy, that would be meaningless to the Roman Empire. "We could care less

about that. Go deal with it yourself.” So they’ve got to figure out some sort of a charge that would capture the attention of a Roman official. So they respond back in a very disrespectful way to Pilate. “If He wasn’t a bad guy, we wouldn’t have brought Him here.” Pilate does not like their answer. He does not like being disrespected. So he says, “All right, go deal with that yourself,” to which they say, “We can’t!” You can hear the power struggle in that, as Pilate is wanting them to acknowledge he’s in charge, not them. So they say, “We can’t do that; we can’t do a death sentence as Jews.”

John tells us that, actually, these words fulfill the prophecy that Jesus gave twice in the Gospel of John, referring to the method by which He would be put to death. The Old Testament law said, “Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.” The Jewish leaders didn’t just want Jesus dead; they wanted Him cursed by God. So they wanted Him crucified on a Roman cross. But to do that, they had to convince Pilate. Verse 33:

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

Now, one interesting note here is it appears the only thing that restricted the Jewish leaders from going into the residence of Pilate, where this hearing was held, was their own choice, because they didn’t want to be defiled. It is highly likely that wouldn’t have mattered to John, and he probably did enter and is writing as an eyewitness to the conversation. John records more about this conversation between Jesus and Pilate than any of the other gospel writers. So Pilate asked the question, “**Are You the King of the Jews?**”

Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” (Vs. 34)

Somewhere in this conversation between Pilate and the Jews, we are told by the other gospel writers that they determined that the charge against Jesus was insurrection. In other words, blasphemy will never work with Pilate; he couldn’t care less. So you have to figure out something that would capture the attention of a Roman official. Insurrection—leading a rebellion, not loyal to Caesar, won’t pay taxes—that’s the problem. Certainly that would capture the attention of a Roman official, because that’s the sort of thing that needed to be stopped. So he asked the question, “**Are you the King of the Jews?**” What Jesus says in return is, “*Pilate, are you asking that because you really want to know the truth or are you asking that because they told you to say that?*”

This is part of the amazing conversation. Jesus is not defensive. He’s not fearful. In this moment, He’s reaching out to Pilate and saying, “Pilate, are you really wanting to know what’s true? Because if you are, I’ll tell you.” But Pilate doesn’t like that.

Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” (Vs. 35)

Pilate’s response is, “I couldn’t care less if you’re the king of the Jews. I’m not a Jew.” The Bible would describe Pilate as being spiritually dull. In other words, he doesn’t care. “I’m not interested. I don’t really care what’s true here.” He’s a pragmatist. He just needs to figure this

out and get it settled. But what he can't figure out is knowing that the Jews hate him; they hate Rome, and the last thing they would do is take one of their own and turn that person over to a Roman to pass sentence. So he's trying to figure this out, "Your own people have turned You over to me. What have You done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (Vs. 36)

Jesus acknowledges He is a king. Is His kingdom a threat to Rome? No! It's a different kind of kingdom. If it was that kind of kingdom, His people would rise up and fight to free Him. That's the way it worked. But Jesus says His kingdom is not of this world. It's not of this realm; it's a heavenly kingdom. It's a spiritual kingdom. Actually, it's the most remarkable kingdom of all. It's a kingdom of unimaginable beauty and diversity—every tribe, and tongue, and nation...men, women...rich, poor...powerful, weak—all together in one beautiful kingdom. It's not about land. It's not about power; it's not about armies. **It's not of this world.**

But what He did *not* say is that it's not *for* this world. Those are two completely different things. It is *for this world*, in part now...in full one day. This idea of the kingdom of God—the kingdom of heaven—is what Jesus said when He said, "When you pray, pray, 'Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'" This is what we want. One day, in all its fullness, the kingdom of heaven will come to earth, and Jesus will reign over His kingdom in the new heaven and earth. Until that time, there are glimpses, pockets, of that kingdom that give people just a taste of the world to come. That's what Jesus is saying.

Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly, that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth, hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" (Vs. 37-38a)

Jesus acknowledges, "Yes, **I am a king. For this I have been born.**" That's His humanity. This is the fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 3:15—the seed of a woman will crush the head of the serpent. "**For this I have come into the world.**" That's His deity. He has said this multiple times—John chapter one, verses one through three—this is the eternal God of the universe that pre-existed before He was born as a baby, who has come into the world. During the Christmas season, we often quote the words of Isaiah the prophet. "**For unto us a child is born**", humanity. "**For unto us a Son is given**", deity. It's the same words here, "I am the eternal God of the universe, born to human flesh." Why? To tell the truth...to tell the truth!

This is one of the most common themes of Jesus. "I'm here to tell you about the Father. I'm here to tell you what your problem is with sin. I'm here to tell you that I am the way, the truth, and the life and that no one gets to the Father, but through Me." And what He says to Pilate is, "If you're sincerely interested in the truth, then you need to have ears to hear, because that's why I'm here."

Now just stop and think about this. What a remarkable moment! Jesus doesn't hate Pilate. He's not angry at Pilate. He is not defensive; He's not looking for a big argument. Essentially what He's saying is, "Pilate, do you really want to know the truth? Do you really want to know if I'm King? Do you really want to know who I am?" Can you imagine this moment if Pilate would have had a slightest level of spiritual sensitivity and would have said, "You know, tell me more."? But he is spiritually dull; he couldn't care less.

I've been a pastor now for almost four decades. I could not possibly count the number of times in weekend services, at funerals, at weddings, in concerts, in some of the most glorious moments where the Spirit of God is doing a powerful work, and you're sure that somebody is going to go away impacted by what they just heard—but it doesn't make the slightest dent. They're like, "Whatever. I don't care; what time is lunch?" It's like it just can't penetrate.

That's Pilate. He's a pragmatist. "I don't care. **What is truth?**" That's how he responds. Now some have tried to make this out as some sort of philosophical response, like the Greek philosophers and their very thoughtful and existential— "*What is truth?*" That's not it at all. Pilate was not thoughtful. He was not a deep thinker. He was not philosophical. He was a pragmatist, essentially saying, "Whatever. What is truth? I don't care. I've just got to figure this out and get it solved and move on with my day."

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him." (Vs. 38b)

No charge? No, nothing to charge him with. At this point, Pilate should have said, "You people need to go home. Jesus is released; you're all free to go." But Pilate makes a significant miscalculation and thinks he can use this moment for political gain. He says,

"But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber. (Vs. 39-40)

Pilate had calculated, probably based on Palm Sunday, the previous Sunday, and the way the crowd responded—that the popular crowd was with Jesus. But the religious leaders were jealous. So he's going to say, "Okay, I'll convict Jesus." But we release one prisoner at Passover. I'll release Jesus, and the crowd would celebrate, and he gets favor with the crowd and solves the problem. What he did not anticipate is they didn't want Jesus. They wanted Barabbas.

The text says **Barabbas was a robber**. That's an unfortunate translation. The word means an *insurrectionist*; we would use the word terrorist. He would have killed Romans. That's what he did. Leading a rebellion, he was a genuine threat to the Roman Empire. So now Pilate has a big problem. He is about to release someone who is a genuine threat to the empire, and about to condemn someone whom he knows is innocent. The name Barabbas means *son of the father*. It's Aramaic, *son of Abba*. You can't miss the irony. The pseudo *son of the father* is about to be released, and the true *Son of the Father* is about to be condemned and put to death. Pilate now has a significant problem with what he's going to do with a man whom he knows is innocent. What he does, we will find out next week.

I want to close by going back to this idea of truth. I understand why it's so frustrating to people, but this is the point! I've heard people say, "Why doesn't God just come to Earth and tell us what's true?" To which I would respond, "He did...He did!" Jesus has said this over and over again. John is writing as an eyewitness. There is no legitimate reason to doubt the historical record. Jesus is claiming to be the eternal God of the universe, that has taken on human flesh, to explain to people, "This is what's true about God. This is what's true about your sin problem. This is why I came to die on a cross—because without Me, you have no hope!"

So here's the deal. Either Jesus is a big fat liar, or He tells the truth. There's no middle ground on this. Everybody in the room has to go one way or the other. Do you believe in your heart that Jesus is just a big liar? Or do you believe Jesus tells the truth? A claim that was validated with signs and miracles again and again and again. How you answer that question is highly significant, because it will determine your eternal destiny. John writes in chapter 20: **These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing, you might have life in His name.**

Do you think Jesus is a liar? Or do you believe He tells the truth? That's the question every one of us must answer.

Our Father, we are thankful that when we were lost with no hope, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. You sent Jesus to tell the truth, that we are sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus said it to Pilate, "If you want to know the truth, then you need to hear My voice." God, may we believe, that we might experience life in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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(Video):

I grew up in the church. All my family, we'd be going to church about four or five times a week, you know, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, I knew the gospel in and out. I knew how sinful we were and needing a Savior, and who Jesus was and what He did.

But, there was a problem. I knew in my heart I wasn't saved. Either I was unwilling to give my life to Christ, or I didn't know how to do it. Or maybe I felt like I was doing it wrong. So I can think of a lot of times growing up where, you know, it would be late at night and I'd be just really

emotional about knowing my future if I didn't accept Christ as my Savior. So, a lot of times I'd be praying late at night, and it seemed like nothing would change. I didn't feel any different. If I really was a Christian, wouldn't I have more of a heart for God and feel comfortable around His people? But instead I found my comfort in my selfishness, in pornography, in drug use. Shouldn't something be different?

So I decided to start kind of walking away from the way I was raised. I really wanted to find where I could find my worth, and where I could escape this sense of depression and things I was feeling and not knowing what I should do or what to believe. So, I went on a three-month trip where I hitchhiked across the country, and I bought a bicycle and I biked about 3500 miles around the country. And I felt a lot of this excitement. Maybe that's where I could find my worth, in living an exciting life or maybe being noticed by others for doing things that to them seemed very difficult.

So, I'm not going to lie. During my trip, I had a lot of fun. There were a lot of things to keep me busy. But when I got back, that's when it really started sinking in that it didn't change any of the problems I was dealing with. It kind of all felt void and meaningless in the grand scheme of things. I needed to find other ways to work God out of my life. I searched out more information on evolution and other theories of thought that could explain away God and explain away all these things I had been taught growing up, because I didn't want to believe it anymore.

So in 2015, I started dating the girl who is now my wife, and she was going to church. So I decided, "Well, I can put on that Christian face again, I guess." So after we were dating for a while, I kind of came to a crossroads. "Am I going to keep putting on a face of Christianity or am I going to believe in God, or am I going to push Him away again?"

One day I was over at my brother's. We were talking about salvation, how I never had that salvation moment. I never felt like God saved me. And he shared a few verses with me, both in Acts and Romans, where it talks about, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

I didn't have to wait for God to give me a fuzzy feeling or take my brain out and put in a new Christian brain. I just had to believe God and what He said. I didn't have to listen to my heart and wait for an emotional change. I just had to believe. Finally, one day I did. I turned to Him and said, "I believe You. I believe what You've done for me." And I can't believe the grace and the patience He had to stay with me and love me through me pushing Him away, and me trying to push Him out of my life, that He was with me the whole time.

Today, I know that God's grace and faithfulness are true, and more trustworthy than my feelings. It's been five years now of learning to trust Christ and learning to trust my emotions and how I'm feeling that day less, but more on learning to trust the never-changing goodness of God.



Fall 2020 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // October 17/18, 2020

What is Truth? // John 18:28-40

Introduction

In this week's passage Jesus is taken before Pilate, the Roman Governor of the province of Judea and they discuss truth and the kingship of Jesus.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What's one fashion trend you hope never comes back? Which ones have come back that you wish hadn't?

2. Who has made the biggest impact on your life (besides Jesus)?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For openness to what you're learning together
 - c. For friendships to deepen and grow

 - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 18:28-40 to the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) What was impactful for you from the weekend's message? Was there anything you had a question about?

- 2) In last week's passage, we saw how the Jewish leaders wanted so badly to have Jesus crucified that they were willing to break Jewish law, meet in the middle of the night and not follow the correct protocol for a Jewish trial. In verses 28-32, we see their hypocrisy continue. Jesus is taken from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, which would have been Pilate's residence. The Jewish leaders will not enter Pilate's residence because they did not want to be defiled for entering a Gentile's home as it would have prevented them from eating the Passover meal.

At times each of us struggles with hypocrisy, representing ourselves as better than we are, desiring more to follow the rules than actually love Jesus.

- a. What are these areas in your life?

- b. Read James 5:16. How do you think the practice of confession would help heal some of the areas of hypocrisy in your life?

- 3) In verses 33-37 Pilate and Jesus have a conversation about Jesus' kingship. In our democratic society we struggle to understand Jesus as a king. We sing songs about Jesus as King, songs like Crown Him with Many Crowns, or King of My Heart.

 - a. What does it really mean for Jesus to be King over your life?

 - b. Is there an area of your life that you struggle to submit to Jesus as King? Would you be willing to share that with the group?

c. What would it look like to submit that area to Jesus as King?

4) In verses 37-38 Jesus and Pilate talk about truth. Jesus states that he has come to testify to the truth and that everyone who is of the truth hears His voice.

a. When did you first hear and understand the truth of who Jesus is?

b. How has knowing and understanding the truth changed your life?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

A significant part of creating unity with God and one another is being open and honest with our lives. Praying with a group of people may be a new experience for you, or it may be familiar. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone participates in sharing this time before God together. Here are a couple of suggestions of how you can pray together as a group.

1. Think of a characteristic of Jesus' life and example that is praiseworthy. As these characteristics come to your minds, take turns speaking them in simple sentence prayers, "Jesus, thank you for being _____." or "Lord, we praise you for _____."
2. This is a group prayer time where each person in the group will pray. Before you start, tell everyone, that if someone is not comfortable praying out loud in the group setting, they can pray privately and say "Amen" when they are finished. That will let the next person know it is their turn to pray. The group leader will start the prayer time.