

Intro - Open to John 18:28-38a

Mothers have the unique ability to get to the truth. Don't they? They have eyes in the back of their heads and an ability to sniff out a lie in record time. My mom revealed recently that her magical powers were less magical than they first appeared to me as a child. I always wondered how she knew if we washed our hands before dinner or not. We would sit down to eat and then hold hands to pray and my mom would know. It's obvious to you moms, but maybe not for the dads and kids in the room I will spell it out. **If your hands are dirty, when your mother touches your hand she can tell!** Is she touching dirt or a clean hand? Of course, we began the hand holding for prayer before our meals because me and my brother would try to eat during the prayer. Not if they were holding our hands... So dads and kids, wash your hands for mother's day. Mother's it's the best I can do. But God's word can do much more than clean hands. Let's turn there next.

We are getting properly into the civil trial of Jesus. Pilate takes up the sentencing but he isn't just wanting to follow the orders of the Sanhedrin so he does his own inquiry. He will ask some important questions over the course of his discussion with Jesus. The first two major topics, which we will discuss today, are of innocence and authority. Pilate asks: Are you a criminal? Are you a king?

As we dig into our text, we must consider Jesus' answers and then we can turn to how these questions force us to evaluate our own understanding of truth.

Interrogation of Jesus forces us to admit or reject that he is Truth.

PRAY

One – Are You A Criminal?

Read John 18:28-32

Jesus is taken by the temple officers, the temple police, to the governors house. Its mentioned how early it is being either right after 6am. Still under the cover of darkness, before the crowds wake up, they are rushing Jesus to execution.

There are two major points of irony that John is showing us in this interaction. The first is that the Jews are more concerned with ceremonial cleanness than moral cleanness. They are willing to fudge the law and make unclear and unlawful claims to Jesus' character. Yet they are unwilling to compromise on their traditions and their additional laws set in place by the Jewish leaders. There are no specific commands in the Torah that you cannot enter the house of a Gentile. But their concern for tradition is ironic and deadly.

When Jesus is brought to Pilate there are no instructions that come with him. So Pilate comes out on his balcony and this is where the whole exchange takes place. He speaks down to the Jews saying **“What accusation do you bring against this man?”**. So here is our question. What is his crime? Is Jesus a criminal?

Their answer is basically a non-answer. They claim that if he was not a criminal, (doing evil here in the ESV) they would not have brought him! This type of answer shows us the authority the Jewish leaders wanted to impose on Pilate. A subordinate does not answer in this way. They are jockeying for authority by basically telling Pilate. “Do as we tell you”.

Here is where we begin to see a bit of Pilate's personality. Through the other accounts and in extra-biblical references we find out that Pilate is a snake. He had gotten favor in Rome and risen to his high rank through skillful maneuvering. He would show disdain for the Jews when it benefitted him. There are at least 5 records of him slaughtering Jews which ends up getting him in trouble with Emperor Tiberius and summoned back to Rome. Yet here he seems to be unwilling to cross the Jews. He is a political opportunist. He has no convictions except which will benefit him most. We can see his questions not as truth seeking but uncovering what actions will benefit him.

Trying to stay out of it, Pilate tells them to try Jesus in their own courts, by their own law. The Jews and Romans shared a split jurisdiction. The religious courts were allowed to stand but the Roman rule carried the only legal means of putting anyone to death. Rome made the death penalty illegal for any conquered people because it removed their greatest threat and it made it less likely that those loyal to Rome could be killed. It allowed a fragile peace to exist. The Jews, knowing this, make it clear to Pilate that they want the cross.

In a few years we can see cracks in this arrangement. The Jews would get so bold they would stone the first Christian martyr Stephen, but the closer history gets to AD 70 and demolition of the temple and scattering of the Jews, we should expect the fragile peace to show more and more cracks.

In the Jews recognition that they could not put anyone to death is our second point of irony. That is exactly what they are doing. They brought false witnesses, condemned him to death and are seeking to have an early morning quick execution by Rome. Seeking to manipulate Pilate into carrying out their murder. They are so committed to Jesus' murder that they will break one of the 10 commandments to do it. In a greater sense of irony, they do God's will as they break God's law. They will put God to death, so many can have life.

Let us now notice how this section ends.

Read verse 32

Jesus spoke many times about his death. He spoke in specifics in **Mark 10:33-34** ³³ **See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.** ³⁴ **And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."**

John's gospel records several times, in chapter 3, 8 and 12 that Jesus will be lifted up. John records many times that Jesus's lifting up was about the type of death he will have. Stoning is not lifted up. Crucifixion, only done by the Romans, he is lifted and nailed to a tree.

Jesus, Are you a criminal? No. Will you die as one? For you and me, yes. Let's turn to our next question, Jesus, are you a King?

Two – Are You A King?

Read John 18:33-38a

John is focusing on Jesus's predictions that will be fulfilled. We looked at that in verse 32. When we consider the other gospels, we see that John omits the particular charges to focus on the type of death Jesus is to die and why he died in this way.

The particular charges that are given to Pilate in Luke 23:2 are: 1) He is misleading the nation (teaching false doctrine), 2) He is teaching not to pay taxes to Caesar (he is a rebel against Rome), 3) He is claiming to be the Messiah or King of the Jews (he is treasonous). All of these are of course false which is what Jesus will show in his responses.

This explains why Pilate begins to ask Jesus about his kingship and his kingdom. He first asks because Jesus doesn't look like a king. He isn't dressed well. He was not high born. He is essentially a nobody. Pilate has a hard time thinking that this man with no followers to speak of and no wealth or position could be a king. He will ask him twice and each of Jesus' answers make it clear he is innocent but more importantly speaks the truth.

Pilate comes back inside from the balcony and asks for the first time: **"Are YOU the King of the Jews?"** Jesus answered, **"Do you say this of your own accord, or did others (the Jews) say it to you about me?"** Now this answer is not avoiding the question, he wants Pilate to recognize that there are distinctions here between a claim to kingship which would conflict with Caesar and a claim of kingship that would conflict with Jewish authority. So if Pilate is asking the question himself, he is worried about Jesus starting an insurrection against Rome. If he is asking the question for the Jews on religious grounds, he is simply carrying out this inquiry for them.

Pilate, in a frustrated response says, **"Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"** His answer shows that he wants nothing to do with this, but is doing what he heard from the Jews. He just wants Jesus to admit his innocence or admit his guilt of some crime.

Yet Jesus is not interested in clearing his name nor admitting a false guilt. He shifts the topic back to his kingdom. Jesus answered, **"My kingdom is not of this world."** So it is a spiritual kingdom. What's the proof? **"If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."**

Jesus has always been unconcerned with fitting into the mold of those who sought to put him in one. He was not revolutionary enough for the zealots. He was not generous enough for the poor and hungry. He was not healing enough for the sick. He was not traditional enough for the religious. He was not submissive enough for the Romans.

Today, many have sought to co-opt Jesus' message for their own purposes.

He is all about your health and wealth, the prosperity preachers say. But if that was so, why are there so many faithful men and women who die of disease or accident? Why cannot the holiest avoid death like Elijah? Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn and Todd White will die one day.

He is all about liberation for minorities, the liberation theologians say. Why did Jesus not tear down slavery or Paul instruct Onesimus to run away from Philemon? Why did Jesus pick only men to be his 12 disciples if men are oppressors? In their system Jesus is an oppressor.

He is all about political power for our society, for those who see politics as the only place to live out their faith. Why did Jesus give his disciples the Great Commission to make disciples not the Great Platform for political reform?

Let us turn to Jesus' words for what Jesus' kingdom is to be like. It is not about fighting. It is about surrender to the will of God to die. It is about establishing his kingdom in another more significant way. In a spiritual way.

Pilate is seeing that Jesus' kingship is very different from the threat he was imagining.

Pilate returns to his original question. "So are you a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. The NASB translation inserts "correctly" to help the reader see, that this is Jesus affirming he is a king. It was for this purpose he was born, to be a king. And it is for this purpose that he has come into the world.

His kingdom and kingship are about what? It is about bearing witness to the truth.

His kingdom is not about all those other things. It is about pointing to objective spiritual reality, about God's existence, plans and purposes for our world to be born again in spiritual rebirth. So where does this truth show up most?

It shows up in everyone who is of the truth listening to his voice.

We saw last week that truth in the courtyard, we will have challenges in testifying to the truth in public. Like Jesus we will endure ridicule, attacks to our character and person rather than on the content or truthfulness of our message.

The truth will always be effective in reaching those who are of the truth.

To all those who read and hear the words of Jesus, you will be one of two kinds. You will be a sheep who hears the truth of your shepherd. Or you will be a goat, who finds disdain for the truth of the good shepherd.

This is the nature of Jesus' spiritual kingdom. It is invisible because it exists not in physical armies or buildings or wealth or power but in the heart transformation of his sheep. His people will know his voice and respond in faith and enter into his kingdom in that way.

Pilate finds a gentle shepherd with no desire to usurp the Roman throne, yet he has every desire to take over the throne in each heart which is his. He has no desire to stir up trouble, he is a man insistent on a spiritual kingdom based in truth. But Pilate couldn't care less. He is not one who listens to Jesus' voice and expresses it with disdain. "What is truth?"

Our world is spiraling out of control away from truth. Every side claims truth based on their subjective reality and claims that the other side is full of disinformation. There is no more pointing to an objective standard, there is only subjective musings. Do you see how this will end in disaster? No matter how you see an issue, you are not encouraged to prove your point, you are encouraged to shout louder, protest longer, get angrier, and then maybe you will win enough to find another issue to shout and protest and get angry about. There is no rest, there is just a never-ending fight. How exhausting!

Jesus calls his sheep, to come to him and he will give rest in his kingdom. In the most beautiful of passages Jesus says in [Matthew 11:28-30](#)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Conclusion

So as we close, I want to ask each of you, “What is Truth?” Pilate asked it with disdain because he had given up on transcendent and objective truth. Truth to him was power and prestige. If it could advance him, it was true enough. If it put down his opponent, it was a convenient truth.

Jesus said that he has come into the world to bear witness to the truth. To bear witness in the Greek, mar-ty-reo. Spell M-A-R-T-Y-R-E-O. Spelled and sounds like martyr doesn't it? Not a coincidence.

A martyr, convinced of the truthfulness of their beliefs, that it matters, will die to bear witness to that truth. Jesus said in [John 10:25-28](#)

²⁵ “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Jesus bears witness about his Father. Everyone who is a sheep hears Jesus’ voice. Everyone who hears his voice is of the truth. Everyone who believes that truth must decide whether it is worth dying for.

It is worth dying for especially because what is received from that truth.

What does he give those who know the truth? Eternal Life, security that once it has been given. Once you are one who has heard the truth, you cannot be snatched out of his hand.

Pilate did not listen to Jesus. He dismissed him. “[What is truth?](#)”

Interrogation of Jesus forces us to admit or reject that he is Truth.

What is truth? It cannot be answered with a dictionary definition. It must be answered that Jesus is the truth. He will then redefine for you life itself. He will become the central orbit of your life. If you have accepted Christ but he is not the foundational truth, the foundational reality upon which everything else hinges, you should worry, repent and believe. He is the way the truth and the life.