

What Is Truth?
John 18:33-38a
November 22, 2015
Christ the King Sunday

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. 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." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

If you've been in a courtroom, or if you've watched a courtroom scene on TV or in the movies, you've probably heard these words: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

So what is truth? Our legal system is based on the belief that truth exists. In a trial, witnesses are brought in, they're questioned by both the prosecution and defense, all in an effort to arrive at the truth.

But what is truth? What is this seemingly elusive thing that some people spend their lives trying to find, that others spend their lives trying to hide, and still others are willing to die for?

What is truth? That was Pilate's question. So Pilate may be a good place to start as we try to discover what truth really is.

Pilate is a strange blip on the pages of history. What are the odds of an ordinary Roman governor, out on the fringe of the empire, riding roughshod over the small province of Judea, having his name mentioned on Sunday in Christian churches all over the world, two thousand years after he died?

Pontius Pilate is mentioned in both the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed. Pontius Pilate is a name known to millions of people all over the world. And, yet, in ordinary history books you may never find his name. He was never a great conqueror, he never came up with any great inventions or scientific truths, and he has never been considered a great teacher of wisdom.

So, how did Pontius Pilate become so famous, or should I say infamous? Pontius Pilate had an encounter with truth. He isn't remembered because he was confronted with truth and shouted "Eureka! I found it!" No. Pontius Pilate is remembered because he looked truth straight in the eye and denied its existence.

Pilate heard Jesus say: *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth* (Jn 18:37 ESV). Jesus answered Pilate's question about truth before it was asked. Jesus offered Pilate truth.

But that wasn't good enough for this pagan. Look carefully at Pilate's question. His question wasn't "What is *the* truth?" or "What is this truth you're talking about?" Pilate's question is "What is truth?" The very structure of the question betrays Pilate's skepticism that truth even exists.

Pilate wasn't the first person to ask this question and he certainly hasn't been the last. In fact, today, Pilate's question about truth is just as popular, or maybe even more popular, than it was in his day.

Today, most of the civilized world lives in a state of relativism. By that, I mean that most of the world sees truth not as an absolute standard of true or false, right or wrong, but they see truth as something of a chameleon. Something that, instead of being a rigid, is pliable. Something that can be molded and shaped to fit any situation.

It works like this. What was right or wrong for one generation may not necessarily be right or wrong for another generation. What is right or wrong for society A in place A may not be right or wrong for society B in place B.

To see this in action, just engage a diverse group of people in topics such as the origin of the earth and its inhabitants, or human sexuality and marriage, or sin and salvation.

Did God create the world and everything in it in six days, or was it all just one big bang?

Is man the crown jewel of God's creation, or just the winner in a "scratch and claw your way to the top" game of survival of the fittest?

Is marriage really a God-instituted lifelong union between one man and one woman, or are there other perfectly acceptable alternatives? For that fact, is marriage really necessary at all, or is it just some silly social custom that can be ignored by consenting adults?

Are humans really born into a state of sin and in need of salvation from a Savior outside themselves, or is there no absolute moral standard to which mankind is held accountable?

Sadly, for many people, there are no absolute answers to these and other life-changing questions. These people maintain that what is absolutely right and wrong for one person is not absolutely right or wrong for another person. If that's true, then all truth is relative and right and wrong cease to exist.

For many people, religion and thoughts about God fall into the same state of relativism. They believe that all religions have a kernel of truth in them and that all religions are just

different paths to the same end.

This isn't a new idea. Satan has been confusing the truth from the very beginning. His first question to Eve in the Garden of Eden began, "*Did God actually say . . . ?*" (Gen 3:1). From that day until now, Satan and his brood have been spreading the lie that there is no absolute truth. For untold millions of people today, the only thing they feel is absolutely true is that the Bible is not true.

Even more alarming is that Pilate's question has crept into the visible Christian church on earth. Ask people why there are so many different churches. Many times you will hear that it's because there are different interpretations of the Bible. Some may go on to explain that the Bible is not very clear and no one can really be sure what it really means. And, in those explanations, you can hear the voice of Pilate echoing down from the past: "What is truth?"

The idea that no one can really know what the Bible means is a lie born in the depths of hell by the very father of lies. It flies in the face of Holy Scripture, which St. Peter says should be regarded "*as a light shining in a dark place*" (2 Pe 1:19 ESV). But, if indeed, no one can truly understand what Scripture says about creation, marriage, relationships, salvation, the roles of men and women, the end times, and the like, then Peter is wrong.

Worse yet, Scripture is wrong. The psalm writer is equally wrong when he writes: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path* (Ps 119:105 ESV). If Scripture is, at best, not understandable, and, at worst, just downright wrong, then, as St. Paul writes: *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied* (1 Co 15:19 ESV).

But do you know what? I'm here to tell you that all this garbage about no absolute right and wrong is a lie. All this garbage about the Bible being impossible to understand is just that – garbage. Pilate wasn't truly looking for truth. Like so much of the world today, Pilate was hoping to find that truth doesn't exist so he could go on his merry way and feel justified in doing whatever he wanted.

But Pilate was wrong and today's world is wrong. Truth does exist and its name is Jesus Christ, the King of kings. When Jesus told Pilate "*everyone on the side of truth listens to me*" (Jn 18:37), he was actually saying if you want to know the truth, if you are actually interested in knowing the truth, turn to me, listen to me, and you will know the truth.

Jesus pointed to himself as the only source of truth – the truth about God, the truth about man, and the truth about God's will for all people. To answer Pilate's question – what is truth, Jesus declares – I am truth.

Anyone can lay claim to having the absolute truth of all times. Many people have come along claiming to have a special revelation from God – Muhammad, Joseph Smith, Jim Jones, David Kerish, and countless others. These people have led many other people astray. So, what makes Jesus' claim to truth any different?

Jesus, himself, answers this question by saying: *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth* (Jn 18:37 ESV). Did you hear the difference? With these words, Jesus is testifying to the fact that he was in existence before the world existed. The same thing John is saying in the opening of his Gospel where he writes: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (Jn 1:14 ESV).

That's why Jesus can reveal the truth about God and man and God's will for all people – because he came from the Father, because he is one with the Father in glory and majesty – because Jesus is God.

That's why the soldiers in Gethsemane fell to the ground when Jesus spoke the words, *"I am"* (Jn 18:5). That's why water changed to wine, fierce storms quieted, the blind saw, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, and the dead lived again. Because Jesus is God. That's why those who believe on the name of Jesus will live forever.

And these events don't come to us as legends handed down from one generation to another. We have eyewitness reports – Matthew, Peter, John – not hearsay, eye witnesses. That's why John writes: *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* (Jn 20:30-31 ESV).

Jesus is qualified to proclaim God's truth because Jesus is God and Jesus is truth. He came to earth so that God's truth might shine in a world darkened by the lies of Satan. The truth that Jesus brought is recorded in the God-breathed Holy Scriptures, which Paul says, *Are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Ti 3:15 ESV). Hold on to the words of Christ, keep them, walk in them, and then you will know truth.

And that truth is that mankind was fashioned by the creative hand of God, but the human race has turned its back on its loving God from the beginning. Nonetheless, God loved people so much he planned and carried out a rescue plan for his fallen world. That plan was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That, my friends, is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. That is God's truth.

God's truth tears us down and condemns us as lost sinners. It removes from us any hope of saving ourselves. Then it points us to Christ and makes us alive by faith in him.

This truth is not relative or subject to change. This truth is absolute. If you cling to this truth you will not only know about salvation, but also about God's will for the unborn, God's will for men and women, God's will for marriage, and God's will for church fellowship. You'll know about the end of the world, and everything else that God considers necessary for us to know.

My friends, if someone ever asks you Pilate's question – what is truth, look them straight in the eye and say, "The truth is, God loves people so much he send his only

Son to die and rise again for them, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. And Jesus is the King of kings.” And that’s the truth.