

Sunday talk

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- [0 : 0 0] Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.
- So Pilate went outside to them and said, What accusation do you bring against this man? They answered him, If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.
- Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law. The Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.
- This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. 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 do others say it to you about me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?
- [1 : 0 7] 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 this world.
- Then Pilate said to him, So you're 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? After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in him.
- [2 : 0 2] But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? They cried out again, Not this man, but Barabbas.
- Now Barabbas was a robber. Well we're starting a new series of talks today in the run up to Easter, as we look at John's Gospel, and John's account of the trial of the Lord Jesus, the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, and then the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
- That's where we're going over these next few weeks or so. And I want to start by asking, How would you describe your attitude to the truth? I guess many of us would say, Well, you know, we're truthful people.
- We're on the side of truth. Perhaps you've been called to jury service or something like that, and you've wanted to act truthfully and with integrity. We certainly want our doctors to tell us the truth.
- And I guess we want our politicians to tell us the truth as well. But we can also be ambivalent, can't we, towards the truth? So for example, we know climate change, but actually how much does the truth about climate change actually affect the way in which we live our lives?

[3 : 25] Or pensions, for example. You know, we know that we need to invest for the future and so on for our pensions, but statistically speaking, we don't seem to invest enough. So often we are ambivalent towards the truth.

So look again at John chapter 18, verse 37, as the Lord Jesus Christ says, Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

You see, Jesus divides humanity between those who, as it were, are on the side of truth and those who are not. And however much we protest, Jesus says those who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

By implication, those who don't listen to him are not on the side of truth. Now, of course, that is a very striking claim, isn't it?

What an outrageous thing to say. So let's have a look at it in more detail. You'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. First of all, Jesus Christ, the heavenly king, who speaks the truth.

[4 : 38] Because here we are in John chapter 18, we have front row seats of the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. And Pilate asks Jesus, verse 33, Are you the king of the Jews?

So I thought the way Sue read that was just spot on, because of course the emphasis is deliberate, isn't it? Because it looks so ridiculous. Are you really a king?

So unlike a king. Where are the trappings of royalty? The bodyguard, the smart clothes, the chauffeur-driven car, and all the rest of it. Jesus answers, verse 34, Do you say this of your own accord, or do others say it to you about me?

It's all too easy to have second-hand questions, second-hand arguments, when it comes to the truth about Jesus. Then, verse 36, 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.

[5 : 52] Yes, Jesus is a king, but he is a heavenly king. He's not some kind of political, earthly ruler. Back in John chapter 6, after Jesus miraculously fed 6,000 people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, the crowds tried to make him their king, a political king, who would deliver them from Roman occupation.

And what did Jesus do? He withdrew himself from them. Similarly, when he was arrested, he had to tell the trigger-happy Simon Peter to put his sword away.

Because Jesus Christ is not some earthly, physical king or ruler who will try to establish his kingdom by force or by political guile. He is a heavenly king, far greater than any mere, physical, earthly ruler or leader or president or prime minister.

He's the creator, the sustainer of the world, the one who rules the world, the one in charge of the nations. Now there's just a little hint of that, I think, in our passage.

Verse 32, we get just a hint of it as we read, this was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

[7 : 15] Jesus has been arrested. He's been put on trial once already by the religious establishment and they have resolved to kill him. Now the Jewish authorities were allowed to carry out the death penalty but by stoning.

But they don't want to do that because they don't want to shoulder the blame for Jesus' death, which is now why at this point they've handed him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, instead.

The Romans used crucifixion for their capital offenses. And it is precisely by crucifixion that back in John chapter 12, Jesus has said he is going to die.

Now isn't that very extraordinary? Very few of us can determine how we are going to die. Yet even here, when Jesus looks so weak, when he looks so very un-in-control of events as they unfold, as he heads towards crucifixion, he is going to be killed just as he said he would be.

He is God's king. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Just imagine for a moment that Jesus had set up a political kingdom in this world.

[8 : 42] Imagine that he hadn't died. Why? We'd have no hope of heaven, no hope of life in the next world.

There'd be no forgiveness from God, no assurance of knowing him. We saw a few weeks ago, didn't we, in John chapter 11, that Jesus died so that on the judgment day we needn't face God's judgment.

But without that, we'd have no hope of eternity. Thank God that Jesus did die. Thank God that he wasn't some mere earthly ruler.

Thank God that he is indeed God's heavenly king. God It's why, of course, the cause of Jesus Christ will never look impressive in the eyes of this world.

It's why I take it those who follow Jesus will rarely be prized or rarely be powerful in this world because Jesus' kingdom is of another world.

[9 : 46] Now that, of course, is so different, isn't it, from many of the world's religions which want to create power in this world. And the most obvious, I guess, is Islam.

So focused on this world, seeking to bring in Sharia law, working to establish Islamic governments, linking aid to programs of Islamization, treating those of other faiths, second class citizens, forced conversions, and so on, all because they are aiming to establish a kingdom in this world.

The Lord Jesus goes on, verse 37. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. Now, of course, for Jesus to say I came into the world, it's a rather extraordinary turn of phrase, isn't it, I came into the world, it implies that he existed beforehand.

The story is told of a little seven-year-old boy called Johnny who was asked to do a project on his family origins for his homework. So he got home and immediately he said to his mum as soon as he was through the front door, Mum, where did I come from?

[11 : 11] Well, she was a little bit taken aback, not quite expecting that conversation and so she said that a stalk had flown by one day and put Johnny on the front doorstep in a basket.

Well, Johnny then phoned up Granny and said to Granny, Granny, where did Mummy come from? And Granny, funnily enough, said the same thing, a stalk flew by one day and put Mummy on the front doorstep in a basket.

He then said, Granny, where did you come from? And she explained that she had been found in a cabbage patch and he said, well, having completed his research, Johnny went, he got his piece of paper out and he started his school project and he started writing, there hasn't been a normal birth in my family for at least three generations.

Well, there wasn't with the Lord Jesus either. He existed from before the beginning of time. And then, of course, as he comes into the world, he brings the truth about God, the man from heaven who comes to earth, fully man, fully God.

You see, it is precisely because he came from heaven that he tells the truth. He tells the truth about ourselves, about our world, about God, about life, about eternity, about God's kingdom.

[12 : 36] Jesus, who says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He testifies to the truth because he is God in the flesh and he attracts people into his kingdom by testifying to the truth about God.

In other words, Jesus tells us the truth. I guess, as a culture, we're perhaps fairly comfortable, aren't we, talking about truth, but we're far less comfortable talking about the truth.

We're comfortable talking about different truths, people each having their own different kind of truth. Well, I like to believe this truth, I like to believe that truth. But Jesus speaks the truth that is true for all people for all time.

That's why I take it that Lord Jesus finishes verse 37 by saying, everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. with the implication that everyone who is of the truth obeys his voice as well.

It is, of course, an outrageous thing for anyone to say. It would be completely outrageous for any of us to say.

[13 : 54] Jesus Christ can uniquely say it, the God-man who speaks the truth. It means, therefore, that listening to Jesus' voice is, of course, the litmus test of whether or not we are on the side of truth.

And therefore, of course, it means that we all know where we stand. It is our response to Jesus that shows whether or not we are actually in practice, regardless of what we say, on the side of truth.

Now, it may well be that you're here this morning and actually that's not really something you've ever thought about before. But if Jesus is God's heavenly king who speaks the truth, then actually, I take it, that must follow.

Well, let's move on to our second point, which is the first of two warnings. Firstly, a warning to the religious. Because, of course, the fact is that not everyone does listen to the voice of Jesus, even though Jesus tells us that it's only by listening to his words of truth and by believing in them that we can have eternal life.

So what John is also wanting to show, and it's interesting how he has structured this account of Jesus' trial, is he's also wanting to show us why it is that people reject the words of Jesus.

[15 : 21] In other words, like all the gospel writers you see, John doesn't simply present us with facts, I think, for many years, I think my assumption was basically the gospel writers simply gave us facts, kind of stories, if you like.

But actually, although they do present facts, they also present us with interpretation and explanation of what's going on. And therefore, you see, as John writes, and as he presents us the facts about Jesus' trial, he's also doing so in such a way that he's explaining for us why people rejected the Lord Jesus.

Now, I take it for some of us, this will be an insight, a helpful insight, I take it, into why friends, family, colleagues reject the truth, even though it is the truth. And I take it to help us to know how to respond to them wisely and well.

But I guess it may well be that for others, as we look at these two warnings, I guess it may well be that actually for others, in a sense, we're found out for ourselves.

And our own excuses for not listening to Jesus are exposed. So the first warning is addressed to the religious. The Jewish authorities have decided in advance that Jesus should die.

[16 : 39] Just turn back, will you, to John chapter 11. We were here a few weeks ago. And I wonder if you remember these words, John chapter 11, verses 48 to 50.

Jesus has become very popular. Lazarus has been raised from the dead. The crowds are following him. The religious authorities fear civil unrest. And what do they say, verse 48?

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all.

Nor do you understand that it's better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. In other words, let's plot to kill Jesus.

What are they concerned about? Notice they're concerned about their place. In other words, the temple and the whole temple system and the nation and presumably their place within it.

[17 : 53] More concerned with preserving their religious system and their position in the establishment than they are honouring the Lord Jesus. And we see that worked out again in chapter 18 in our passage as they bring the Lord Jesus before Pilate.

And the irony couldn't be greater, could it, at the beginning of our reading in verse 28. Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning.

They themselves did not enter the government's headquarters so that they wouldn't be defiled but could eat the Passover. They're concerned, we're told, not to defile themselves.

They won't enter the palace of the Roman governor. And yet all along they are plotting a man's death. They have no charges to bring.

The best they can do is in verse 30 is to say, look, he must be guilty of something otherwise we wouldn't have brought him before you for trial. Try standing up and telling that to Southwark Crown Court tomorrow afternoon.

[19 : 03] Here then is a warning against religious hypocrisy. Their concern for outward show, outward defilement, they want to be seen playing the part, going through the motions of religious observance, but actually in their heart of hearts they hate Jesus and they hate the truth that he speaks.

Just listen to J.C. Ryle commenting on this kind of mindset which is so scrupulous about religion and so scrupulous about things of little importance.

He writes, it is no uncommon thing to find people excessively particular about the observance of trifling forms and outward ceremonies and yet to have no real love or concern for Jesus Christ and his words of truth.

It's possible to be scrupulously religious, to be a fully paid up member of the religious establishment, yet to have no concern whatsoever for the words of truth that the Lord Jesus speaks.

I think of a man at a church we used to go to, without fail he would turn up at the 8 o'clock Sunday morning at service without fail he was polite, he was friendly, yet what delighted him most was when the person taking the service was wearing robes and whether or not he actually knew Jesus Christ and trusted the words of Jesus I never really found out.

[20 : 40] Or perhaps you think of the example of some denominational leaders who reject the words of Jesus and yet they are scrupulous to maintain their own religious traditions and their place within the establishment.

Or a friend of ours from a religious background some years ago, he came to a lunchtime talk up in the city and he said to me at the end this really isn't my thing.

But actually we had just heard a talk from the Bible there wasn't really anything else to object to and that's all it was. A man who I think all his colleagues and neighbours and friends back home would have said there's a religious upright man but not interested in the words of Jesus.

Well it may just expose some of us perhaps for whom the real Jesus is too inconvenient and his words of truth too disturbing. But then the second warning is to the secular in verses 33 to 38.

So the first warning to the religious and the second warning to the secular because very strikingly just as the Jewish authorities they had their moment they had their opportunity to hear the words of Jesus and to respond to the words of Jesus and they fluffed the opportunity while Pilate is exactly the same and like them he fluffs it.

[22:10] Do you notice that as well as Pilate asking questions of Jesus Jesus then sort of turns the tables and begins to ask questions of Pilate verse 34 do you say this of your own accord or did others say it to you about me?

It's often the way I think we can so easily imagine that we are the ones who are asking questions of Jesus in the sense putting him under the spotlight but actually the tables then turn and we very quickly find ourselves under his glare I wonder if that's an experience you have had for yourself.

You can always tell who's been driving our car most recently by the radio station that the car is tuned into and well if Rachel's been driving as you would imagine it's generally something fairly civilised and cultured Radio 3 probably Radio 3 possibly classic FM on a bad day but normally Radio 3 all very civilised if I've been driving the car well let's just say it's probably something different from that I won't go into any more details but you know take me to the most kind of wonderful concerts in the Royal Albert Hall or something like that listening to Mozart I think it's fair to say I think I would enjoy the evening but I think if there was a sort of discussion afterwards about what was particularly good and which were the particularly strong instruments and did you notice that someone fluffed a note and all that kind of thing at which point I wouldn't really have very much to say at all now of course all of that it would reflect on me wouldn't it it wouldn't reflect on the people in the orchestra or on Mozart as a composer it would simply reflect on me he would show me up and in just the same way as we see how

Pilate reacts to Jesus claimed to be king actually it tells us far more about Pilate than anything else it puts the spotlight on him same with us our response to Jesus to the truth that Jesus speaks exposes us and exposes our attitude to the truth and Pilate is just he's very contemporary isn't he in verse 38 as he simply says what is truth it may be that he appeals particularly in our postmodern age when it's fashionable to doubt even the very notion of truth but there have always been those who have excused their unbelief by pretending that you can't really know the truth anyway after all there are so many different truths so many different religions so many different paths what is the truth so many different interpretations of the Bible what is truth at times it can be an excuse for intellectual laziness not really wanting to investigate the words of Jesus there may be some here perhaps and we would use that excuse ourselves but it seems to me as

Jesus spotlights Pilate like this it really simply shows his hypocrisy he claims to be interested in the truth and yet actually when he comes face to face with the Lord Jesus who speaks truth he is far more interested in well just pragmatism as we will see next week there's precious little interest in truth at all in other words Pilate shows us you see it's possible to come face to face with Jesus face to face with the words of Jesus even to be generally sympathetic towards him but actually to reject Jesus having done all of that I guess Pilate shows us the danger of asking questions about Jesus saying we want to find out the truth about Jesus but actually never really holding on to the answers as if they kind of go in one ear and out the other perhaps we know people like that perhaps we're in danger of doing that ourselves never really holding on to the truth and taking it to heart never taking action

[26 : 43] I guess there's a challenge there for all of us isn't there whether we are followers of Jesus Christ this morning or whether we're investigating the Christian faith in our own hearts what are we doing with the truth about Jesus that we know are we letting it sink in and changing the way in which we think changing the way in which we process everything that happens every day our lives being transformed or just going in one ear and out the other well as we finish John writes so that we believe that Jesus is God's heavenly king the one who speaks the truth here he is looking so un kingly but actually demonstrating that he is God's eternal king for those who do believe in him John is writing to give us confidence confidence in him confidence that we have life in him that he is indeed

God's king for those who don't he wants to expose us so that we too might come to put our trust in him and be certain of life with God in this life and the next and he wants to challenge us what are we doing with the truth that we hear do we respond as those for whom truth doesn't really matter or do we respond as those for whom truth is the truth the words of truth spoken by Jesus Christ himself let's have a few moments of quiet for reflection and then I shall lead us in prayer Jesus answered my kingdom is not of this world heavenly father we praise you very much for the Lord Jesus thank you that he is the God man come into our world we praise you that he speaks the truth we praise you that at this moment of such weakness and humiliation before the religious establishment before the

Roman governor we praise you that even at this moment we see him completely in charge of events completely in charge of his own destiny we praise you too that he is the one who speaks the truth and we pray heavenly father please would you would we be those who are humbled by the truth who not only hear it but take it to heart that we might be equipped this week to live for Jesus your great heavenly ruler and we ask it in his name Amen