

Behold the Man

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[0 : 00] We bend a story for our own benefit. We evade an answer in order to cover over our forgetfulness.

We keep quiet with the result that somebody else takes the blame. We lie to save our own skin and reputation.

We jettison the truth in order to cover over some other past sin. Hansi Cronje knows something of that this week.

All of us, whatever the situation at some time or other, sits very lightly to the truth. In our age, so-called post-modern age, truth is a very elusive commodity.

We're told that these days truth is relative and subjective. That is, it is what is true for you that matters. But no longer is there, philosophically they say, an objective truth.

[1 : 17] Something that is universally true, whatever we think of it. So it's true for you that such and such is the case, but that's okay for you. It's not true for me, but this is true for me and it doesn't have to be true for you.

Well, apart from being, I think, philosophical nonsense, there's a more serious issue about that sort of thinking. It fails to realize that truth is moral.

And when we relativize or subjectivize truth, then all we are doing is creating an excuse for immorality of some sort.

We justify, therefore, our sinful actions under the guise of being true for me or me being true to myself.

Yes, it's true that I loved her, so therefore being true to myself, committing adultery with her was okay. Or it's true that I work hard and therefore I can justify it to myself that it was okay to use my work for personal gain or personal benefit in some way.

[2 : 31] Oh, it's true that I'm in need of money for worthy causes, so therefore I can justify cheating on the tax department. When we untie the anchor of absolute truth, then we end up drifting in sin.

And nowhere is this more starkly seen than in the trial of Jesus before his death. Perverted truth here leads to the justification of the grossest evil ever committed.

And weakness to uphold what is true and known to be true leads to complicity in great evil.

The only perfectly true one, the one who embodies truth, is put to death. Three times in this passage, Pontius Pilate comes outside his praetorium palace to declare to the Jewish crowd that Jesus is innocent.

He knows the truth, at least in part. But three times he cowers before the crowd, baying for Jesus' blood.

[3 : 51] When he first came out and said, I find no case against him, in verse 38, it ought to have shut the book on the whole matter. It ought to have ended this farce of a trial.

It ought to have set Jesus free and exposed the horrific guilt of the Jewish crowds and leaders. But it didn't. Because Pilate sat loosely with the truth.

He yielded to the mob. And having abandoned truth and untied its knot, he drifted into the grip of lies.

His next words are an offer to release Jesus to the crowd. He says to them, you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?

Well, what a cynical offer that is. If Jesus is innocent, then he ought not to be released under such conditions. For this tradition was to release a criminal.

[4 : 58] So if Pontius Pilate was upholding the truth and sitting tightly to it, he could never make such a cynical, even farcical offer. But all his offer does is to inflame the crowd.

For him to say to them, do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews? And there are all the Jews outside his palace who deny that Jesus is their king. All he's doing is inciting them and angering them.

And his plan backfires, of course. Because where truth is laid aside by Pilate, by the Jewish leaders and crowd, then even a guilty terrorist is welcomed in.

They shouted in reply, not this man, but Barabbas. And Barabbas, we're told, was a bandit. The word means a terrorist, a guerrilla.

He would be the sort of person who would take a bomb onto a plane in Afghanistan to blow it up, if he'd lived 2,000 years later, that is. But evil makes its choice.

[6 : 10] It chooses a terrorist, probably one who's killed, rather than the son of God. Evil makes strange bedfellows, doesn't it? Because a terrorist like Barabbas would have nothing to do with the chief priests.

They're at opposite ends of the Jewish political spectrum. The chief priests sought to keep Judaism, but under Roman rule, fairly pacifically, peacefully.

But at the other end were the zealots, the guerrillas, the terrorists, those who sought to overthrow the Romans by violence. They would have no truck with each other. But here we find evil bringing opposites together.

A zealot being left free by even the chief priest. And even stranger bedfellows, Pilate and the Jews. The Roman governor, who so hated and detested the Jews and all their practices, at every point he seeks to inflame them and mock them.

But in the end, brought together against Jesus Christ. Well, back inside, Pilate goes. As you heard me say last week, Pilate is going in and out in all of this, showing really how weak he is.

[7 : 31] He ought to conduct the whole trial inside. But the Jews don't want to get themselves defiled for the Passover festival week. So they have to remain outside. So Pilate goes out to them and then into Jesus and out to them and into Jesus.

He's almost at their beck and call. And then he goes to Jesus again. And down the slippery slide of lies, he goes. He took Jesus and had him flogged.

Why if he's innocent? What a cynical act that is. What a brutal, cruel act against a man he knows to be innocent. But he's trying to save his own skin.

He's sitting lightly, loosely with the truth. He's on about himself. Probably this is just a minor flogging at this stage. We know that after the sentence of death was executed, then Jesus was scourged.

That would be brutal, almost deadly in itself. Before then, he carried the cross to Calvary. But at this point, before the sentence is handed down, probably a minor flogging.

[8 : 41] But nonetheless, one that would be humiliating and painful. When we see pictures of coronations, we tend to see pictures of order and protocol, of pomp and dignity.

People still look at the old videos or film footage of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1952. I wasn't there. I wasn't born. But nonetheless, we've probably seen pictures of her clothed in regal majesty, a glorious crown being placed on her head, hundreds and hundreds of well wishes and cheers and people acknowledging her as the Queen, bowing down before her, and so on.

The coronation of Jesus in verses 2 and 3 is not at all like that. The soldiers, Roman pagan soldiers, wove a crown, but of thorns, probably long spikes from date palms.

Some emperors or kings might wear a crown with spikes that would go upwards and out. But these would be reversed. Painful, draw blood, blood down the forehead probably, and they put it on Jesus' head.

And they dressed him in a purple robe, purple the colour of royalty. And they kept coming up to him, perhaps mocking what a loyal subject would do for a king, to come and take the king's hand or shake it or bow down before the king.

[10 : 24] But no, they came up to him, they said, Hail, King of the Jews, and they hit him in the face. Soldiers mock, rulers sneer.

See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears. The Jews have rejected him, despised him. The Romans now joining in.

Rejecting and despising him. And yet Jesus, as the prophet Isaiah predicted, did not hide his face from insult and spitting.

Is this the way to treat an innocent man? Where is truth here? And yet the irony of what's going on must not be lost.

For in the midst of the mockery, ring words of truth. Sadly, sadly not known by those who spoke them. Hail, King of the Jews.

[11:30] For king he is, king indeed. Far beyond what they understood. Their words were full of contemptuous mockery. But nonetheless, words of truth.

He is the king. The king not only of the Jews, but of the world. And he is standing before their mocking taunts. Again, Pilate goes out.

Taking with him, it seems, Jesus. And for the second time, declares him to be innocent in verse 4. And then in rather cruel derision to both Jesus and again the Jews, he presents to them their king. His words begin at least with a sense of grand pronouncement. Such as on a television program where the presenter would say, let you, let you, please put your hands together for, and then the big drum roll, a special guest who will come in.

Pilate says, in verse 5, Behold the man. Here is the man. And there before them beaten, bloodied, bruised, and dressed up in a purple cloth stood Jesus.

[12:53] He's mocking Jesus as king. He's also mocking the Jews. Here's the man. Here's this pitiful fellow that you're so anxious and worried and upset about.

I mean, look at him. He's a ridiculous sight. He couldn't hurt a flea. Why are you all so uptight about him? What is it about him that got you so upset?

Can't you see how ridiculous you are because he looks ridiculous? Can't you see how stupid you are because he looks so innocent and harmless? How on earth is this guy here a threat to you? But the smell and sight of Jesus' blood dripping down his forehead from the crown of thorns makes the baying hounds of the crowd bark louder. So they cry out to Pilate in response, crucify him, crucify him.

They're not concerned for justice, just blood. And Pilate's response taunts them even further when he says to them take him yourselves and crucify him because they can't.

[14:11] Because the Jews can't put a man to death under Roman rule. He's mocking them. He's trying to show who's in charge but it's an ineffectual taunt.

because the crowd is more powerful than Pilate. All he's doing is inciting Jews and showing contempt for Jesus.

And he finishes his address to them in verse 6 by for the third time declaring Jesus' innocence which is an act of great hypocrisy on Pilate's part. I find no case against him.

Jesus was put to death for two reasons. The first reason is blasphemy.

The Jews say to Pilate in verse 7 we have a law referring to the Old Testament book of Leviticus chapter 24 and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the son of God.

[15:20] Now in the Old Testament there are various people, the king or the people generally who are described as the son of God or sons of God but they have rightly understood that Jesus' words about himself being the son of God are making a claim bigger than what the Old Testament makes about others.

that is, they recognise that Jesus is making a claim for divinity that in some respects he is God far above any other human being has ever been.

They've slightly misquoted the law because stoning was meant to be the method of execution and they've just been calling for crucifixion. Now blasphemy doesn't worry Pilate he's a pagan a Roman and blasphemy was not a crime.

When you've got lots of gods it doesn't really matter so much if you blaspheme one of them. But what does upset Pilate is the hint of Jesus' divinity. It scares him.

When Pilate heard this he was more afraid than ever. To this point we haven't actually detected his fear so much unless it's fear expressed in his taunts and mockery of Jesus.

[16:28] But when he who is superstitious hears that Jesus might be in some sense linked to the divine then he begins to have second thoughts. He's afraid.

His wife's had a dream remember from one of the other gospels we're told. So he goes again back inside to Jesus and says to him where are you from?

As though he's expecting an answer like Mars or Krypton or something like that or whatever it is that Superman's from. but Jesus doesn't answer.

He said in the previous chapter that his kingdom is not of this earth but from above but now Jesus is silent like a sheep before its shearers is dumb.

So is Jesus before Pilate silent. And the silence irritates Pilate. He says to Jesus in verse 10 do you refuse to speak to me of all people?

[17 : 29] The emphasis is on the last word. That is because as he goes on to say in verse 10 do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you? Don't you realise that I'm the one you should be talking to?

I've got the power to decide your fate? Which is rather ironic because in the end even putting God aside Pilate is powerless.

Jesus now responds to Pilate. He says to him in verse 11 you would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above not only from Rome but ultimately from God.

Therefore the one who handed me over to you Judas Caiaphas the high priest is guilty of a greater sin. Not that Pilate is exonerated and innocent far from that.

He also is guilty but even more guilty are the Jewish leaders who've taken the active initiating role in the arrest and trial of Jesus. Pilate to some extent is passive but he still in the end is a guilty accomplice of these events.

[18 : 45] Pilate we're told in verse 12 tried to release Jesus maybe several times the verb has got a repetitious sense about it but each time he failed which is laughable because he's just boasted that he's got the power to release Jesus and here he is two verses later unable to do what he's trying to do.

Pusillanimous pathetic prevaricating powerless Pilate. Now blasphemy as I've said was not a crime for Pilate but treason was and now the Jews play their trump card.

They couldn't care less about treason but they're playing into the Romans hands. So the Jews say to him in verse 12 if you release this man you are no friend of the emperor of Caesar that is.

To be a friend of Caesar was an honorific title one that quite possibly Pilate had and so they're threatening that they will report to Rome that Pilate has acted in a treasonable way and knowing the emperor Tiberius Pilate would be very anxious that such a report would never get to Tiberius and they go on to say everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor that is against Caesar.

From now on Pilate's last little glimmers of concern for truth are gone. He's out to save his skin that's all and he no longer has any interest in trying to hold the truth of Jesus innocence before them.

[20 : 36] So solemnly though still laced with derision he sets up his court. It's a bit of a mockery because he has to cart it all outside to pander to the Jews seeking to remain ritually pure.

So he goes outside onto the balcony or the veranda of the praetorium in Jerusalem and he sat on the judge's bench at a place called the stone pavement or in Hebrew Gabbatha.

It was the day of preparation for the Passover probably the Friday that is the day before the Sabbath day as it would begin at Friday night to the middle of the Passover week.

John records the place the day the time it was about noon because this is a solemn event a serious event.

This is the formal sentence being handed down. But through it all still Pilate is inflaming the Jews.

[21 : 38] He said to them at the end verse 14 here is your king. This pathetic creature in front of me is your king.

How pathetic does that make you Jews? He's showing contempt for Jesus and the truth and hatred for the Jews. And yet like his soldiers back in verse 3 like Caiaphas the high priest back in chapter 12 he speaks more than he knows.

How sadly ironic his words are for Jesus of course is the king. Predictably his pronouncement about here is your king provokes even more hysteria and rage.

The Jews cried out away with him away with him crucify him bordering on hysteria and Pilate stupid Pilate rubs it in even further when he says to them in effect your king shall I crucify?

And the chief priest answered we have no king but the emperor. When truth is abandoned sin knows no bounds.

[23 : 01] the Jews who have rejected God's truth in seeking his death now themselves commit absolute apostasy and treason.

To say we have no king but Caesar is to reject all about who they are. It is to reject God because he is their king.

It is to reject their law, their scriptures, their covenant, their tradition, their salvation. It is to deny their own Jewishness in the end. It is a terrible apostasy that they commit.

It is the same mistake that Israelites in the Old Testament in several places also committed. To say that we have no king but Caesar is to say God is not our king.

It is the worst possible statement that they could make. but because they sit lightly to the truth they have plunged into the abyss of sin apostasy and lies.

[24 : 17] Blasphemy and treason sin. The two charges laid against Jesus in effect. Sin is always blasphemous and always treasonable.

Sin is blasphemous because sin sets the sinner up as God. Adam and Eve when they committed the first sin in the Garden of Eden did so partly through the temptation to become like God.

Sin is like that. sins of pride or greed, self-pity, whatever our sin is, it is us acting as God or as if we were God.

Sin therefore is always blasphemous in its content. But sin is also treasonable because sin is rebellion against the laws of God the King.

God our King has set out his laws for us by which we are to live. And rejection of them at any point is rejection of our kingly lawgiver.

[25 : 25] The same again for Adam and Eve. When they ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, they were not just seeking to become like God, but they were rejecting God's own commands as well.

Blasphemy and treason. sin. And it's clear here who is guilty of those two things. Not Jesus, who even Pilate three times said was innocent.

but the Jewish leaders, the chief priests and their crowds, they're on trial and they are guilty.

Guilty of blasphemy because they set themselves up as God. Guilty of treason for they renounce, not the emperor, but God.

They are in effect the same charges that we will face on judgment day. Do we live lives of blasphemy, setting ourselves up to be gods?

[26 : 39] Do we live lives of treason, rejecting God, our king? Our world offers us every temptation to abandon the truth of Jesus.

Every enticing sin with which the world seeks to lure us is seeking us to abandon the truth about Jesus Christ. All the philosophical pressure of postmodernism or any other ism is seeking us to abandon the truth of Jesus Christ.

In our day and age, it's the pressure to be pluralistic, to be absolutely tolerant, to be relativistic and subjectivistic. That is that all religions are equally valid, all religions are equally true.

If it's true for you, it may not be true for me, but something else is true for me, and we're equally valid. All that philosophical pressure and all the enticing sins of our world are trying to tempt us away from abandoning the truth of Jesus.

And every time we seek to untie the knot just a little bit more, we are drifting into the same slippery slope that these Jewish leaders were on, in the end, to great apostasy.

[28 : 00] Don't be fooled. There is but one king, Jesus Christ. He may have looked pathetic next to Pilate on the balcony of the Praetorium, bloodied, bruised, and beaten.

He may have looked harmless, defeated. But king he was, and king he is. And if anything else comes to us from this passage, it must be this.

He is the one before whom we must submit. He is the one who is God whom we worship. He is the one whose laws we must obey.

The hymn writer put it like this. A purple robe, a crown of thorn, a reed in his right hand.

Before the soldiers spite and scorn, I see my saviour stand. He bears between the Roman guard the weight of all our woe, a stumbling figure bowed and scarred.

[29 : 16] I see my saviour go fast to the cross's spreading span, high in the sunlit air. All the unnumbered sins of man I see my saviour bear.

He hangs by whom the world was made beneath the darkened sky. The everlasting ransom paid. I see my saviour die.

he shares on high his father's throne who once in mercy came. For all his love to sinners shown I sing my saviour's name.

Then Pilate handed him over to be crucified. There is what he thinks it is ■ he ali rowsbut Paul said he said his pé and told he upon their good