

Good Friday 2024

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[0 : 00] What does power, true power look like? What does truth look like? For the Romans, true power was this.

It was the hand that both figuratively and literally took the spear and thrust it into the heart of their enemy.

And the Romans were excellent at this. They headed down to an art. The Roman historian Plutarch said of Julius Caesar, quote, For although it was not full ten years that he waged war in Gaul, he took by storm more than 800 cities, subdued 300 nations, and fought pitched battles at different times with three million men, of whom he slew one million in hand-to-hand fighting, and took as many more as prisoners.

As unlikely as it is that Caesar's forces killed and enslaved two million Gallic warriors, it's very clear that for Rome, killing, subduing, crushing, this was true power.

This is what true power looked like. The hand that held the spear that thrust it into their enemies.

The gods gave them victory.

[1 : 34] And this view of true power became the worldview that spoke to a powerful truth. Divine favor rests upon the victors.

The ones who, after the dust settles, are still standing while the defeated are lying in a pool of blood, or in this case, hanging on a wooden crucifix.

These are the powerful ones. These are the people that are on the right side of truth. We pick up the passion narrative with the confrontation between Jesus and Pilate.

They have a conversation about truth, and about what real power looks like. Pilate begins the interrogation by asking a pivotal question to see if Jesus is an insurrectionist, and therefore deserves to be crucified upon the cross, or if he is just a regular religious leader to whom Rome doesn't really care about and has just caused a problem amongst his own people.

Is Jesus trying to destroy the true power of Rome? Verse 33, if you're following along with me, there should be a few more Bibles at the welcome table if you want to get up at any time and follow along.

[2 : 57] You're more than welcome to. Verse 33 begins our section, and this is what it says. So Pilate entered the headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews?

It's quite the question to ask. This opening question is so critical to the narrative that all four gospel writers have included it as the first thing that Pilate asks of Jesus.

If Jesus is the king of the Jews, then he must be an enemy of Rome, for Rome is supreme in whatever land she is in.

Rome shares a throne with nobody. No movement, no person, no group. So a king of the Jews, it had the potential of being something more than just this man who is a pretender could be the start of a revolution that looks to cause a huge problem in a Roman province.

And what does Rome do to problems? Rome crushes problems. Again, where is true power situated? In the Roman mind, it's the hand that holds the spear that thrusts the spear into the heart of the enemy.

[4 : 17] So how does Jesus answer? Verse 34. Jesus answered him, Do you say this of your own accord or did others say it to you about me?

This isn't Jesus trying to get himself away from the cross. This isn't Jesus all of a sudden having a bout of cowardice. Jesus knows he's going to the cross.

He knows it. But he makes sure that he will go not as a revolutionary or an insurrectionist against Rome, but as the Messiah, as the Anointed One, as the One who is betrayed and rejected by His own people for the salvation and for their salvation and the salvation of the entire world.

He has not come to set up a temporal, earthly kingdom armed with spears and swords. In fact, the only weapon that Jesus is armed with is truth.

For He is a King whose kingdom is eternal. We'll see this as we continue. Look with me at verses 35 to 37. Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?

[5 : 29] 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 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. And we'll pause there. Notice that Jesus doesn't answer the question that would pin him as a revolutionary.

Pilate, he asks him, Listen, why don't you answer them? They've accused you of being an enemy of Rome. Jesus does not answer the question, What have you done?

But instead, he responds by talking about true kingship, his kingdom, and what it truly means for Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah, the king of the entire cosmos, the entire universe.

[6 : 42] If Jesus was a temporal king of the Jewish state, then why would the Jewish leaders be handing him over? No, his kingdom is not an earthly one, but a heavenly one.

Therefore, worldly ways to bring heaven to earth are doomed to fail. And this is a lesson for us. We desire the joys of eternal love and happiness to know a guilt-free conscience, to be in a right relationship for all of those that are in our lives to be forgiven, to have the ability to forgive.

In short, we desire to have all of the things that heaven is, to live in a heavenly state.

This is our desire, except there's a problem. All too often, we try to gain heavenly things by not submitting to Christ, who is the king over all, but by doing more, by earning more, by engaging in more self-care, and cutting out toxicity in our lives, and eating super well, and doing, and thinking, and just being better.

But it's all from inside. Or it's all from the culture around us, which is all to say that it is temporal. It is not eternal. It is not heavenly. It is earthly.

[8 : 12] How can we achieve our soul's desire, which is heaven itself, by earthly means? Worldly ways to bring heaven to earth are doomed to fail.

This is why the Son of God took on human flesh. Notice that God, in His salvation plan, didn't say, ascend to me. He said, I will descend to you.

And that He did. The Son of God took on human flesh. He established the kingdom of God and to proclaim the truth. But the truth about what?

Throughout the Bible, truth is not merely the absence of a lie, but must be understood as the reality of God's essential being. It's not that God tells the truth, or that God doesn't lie.

It's that God is truth. Not a truth, or the truth. He is truth itself. So, we are witnessing Jesus, bearing witness to who God is.

[9 : 23] We are witnessing Jesus playing out, in a sense, the reality of truth. He is making plain in His life, passion, and resurrection that God is mighty to save.

That truth, that true power is not found in the hand that holds the spear that crushes the enemy. Not at all.

But truth, true power, is found in sacrifice, forgiveness, and love. Jesus is bearing witness to the very heart of God.

God, God, who is love, and saw it just and right to give up His Son for the salvation of us. And if we are honest, we are sinful, we are deceptive, we are liars to our core.

We do not seek the truth. We seek anything but. And if we like the truth, but there's something inconvenient about it, we mask it, or we explain it away.

[10 : 31] We are not people that walk in the truth. And God, in His goodness, saw fit to send His Son to die on our behalf. And what's remarkable about this is that the truth is this cannot be accomplished by any other way apart from the sinless Savior to be beaten to the edge of death, to hang upon a hellish tree completely alone and abandoned.

There's no other way. There's no other plan B if the plan A didn't work. This was the plan. It took God in flesh to die on our behalf to save us from our sin and from evil and from death.

Truth isn't just the absence of a lie we see. It is love expressing itself in selfless love and action.

There are no multiple truths. There are no other ways for our sin and our brokenness, our evil, to be taken away.

For it is the same Savior, Christ the King, who says in John chapter 14, so a few chapters earlier, 6 and 7, what does He say? I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[11 : 52] No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father. Father also, from now on, you do not know Him, or you do know Him and have seen Him.

Jesus is truth. And what He has come to do is truth. And it is real power. So Jesus ends His confrontation with Pilate with this sentence. everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice. It's quite the sentence. And He puts it towards Pilate, but He puts it towards us this morning. So the question is, will you listen to the voice of the Messiah as He journeys toward the cross?

Will you receive the truth and live by the truth and forsake all lies? This section ends with Pilate asking, what is truth?

We won't get into what Pilate may or may not have been referring to here, but what is truth is the question that Pilate puts forward.

[13 : 03] and it seems that John will answer that question by everything that follows. What is the truth? The truth is God hanging upon a tree.

The truth is that He dies for our sins as the Passover Lamb. The truth is He will be buried, but the truth also is that in three days He will rise again.

That is the truth. The passion and death of Christ says that the truth is not the powerful strong hand that crushes, but the life that lays down Himself for the sake of others.

It's not the hand that holds a spear that thrusts it into the enemy, but the side that takes that blow.

That's where true power is. Friends, let us hear and listen to His voice today and let us walk in this truth for today, for tomorrow, as we celebrate on Sunday and forevermore.

I'll pray and then we will all together pray. Father, thank you that through Jesus we see truth and we see you and we see your heart towards us, that you have treated us not as we deserve, you have showered upon us grace, and that you have showed us that true power is not about destroying our enemies, but laying down our life for our enemies to make our enemies our friends.

[14 : 39] Lord, help us to think about what Christ has done for us on the cross of Calvary and let that truth sink deep into our hearts. We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.