

What Is Truth

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[0 : 0 0] Follow along in the book of John, the 18th chapter, as I speak to you. I'm aware I'm among friends, many people who send their children to our camp, many people who work at our camp, a number of staff, many people who volunteer with us on committees, and many people who have cared for and supported the work of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship for many years.

It's a pleasure to be here again, and thanks to all of you for your concern for us. David Short asked me last week if I might take this service for him so that he could have a break, and I was delighted to do so.

We are following in the 18th chapter of John. We've been looking at the last week of our Lord's life, and you might like to follow along. It was early in the morning.

Note that it was early. Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was early. Why early? Well, of course, we know that the leaders did not actually intend to kill Jesus over the Passover.

In Matthew 26, verse 4, we are told that they agreed that they wished to find by self a way to kill Jesus, but not during the feast, lest there be a tumult.

[1 : 3 0] So there is a problem for the leaders. How to arrest Jesus without stirring up this huge crowd that is attending the Passover? We must remember that there may be a million people visiting Jerusalem at this time.

That's why Pilate is there. Pilate is in Jerusalem. He doesn't normally live there. He lives in Caesarea. All of the powerful always live by the sea where it's sunny and warm. But he comes to Jerusalem.

He comes to Jerusalem because he must be ready for trouble, especially at the Passover, when all these strongholds of people from all over the world have come to celebrate the great event which led to the freedom and deliverance of the Jewish people.

And so they were not intending to kill Jesus at this time. But Judas gives them an opportunity. Judas comes with information as to how to seize Jesus at night in a private place where the crowds are not going to know.

And we have looked at Gethsemane last week when he is arrested, and they are delighted for this chance to avoid the crowds. But now the issues are set, and they must have Jesus killed quickly before word spreads to the crowds.

[2 : 4 6] So early in the morning means no crowds. I don't know about you, but I found it easy to get here this morning. It's easiest to get to this church on a Sunday morning if you're driving from a long way, than it is any other time of the week, especially early.

So there are no crowds. Also early because they have to have Jesus dead quickly. Any of you who work with government bureaucrats know that you can't get permits when there's holidays around, right?

And there's going to be a seven-day holiday, and you can't get a permit unless you get it right now. It's going to be a long time before you can get a permit. So they come to Pilate early in the morning.

They want to remain ceremonially clean. There's great irony here, of course. They want to be clean for the Passover. They must not go into a home where there is leavened bread.

Leaven is, of course, now a sign of sin and evil present. Unleavened bread being a token of the quick and hasty way they left Egypt. And so everyone in the Jewish home has taken all the leaven out of their houses.

[3 : 49] But if you go into Pilate's house, you get close to uncleanness, and you can't celebrate the Passover. And the irony is, of course, that they hasten to kill the very one who is going to deliver them from all of this distinction between clean and unclean, the ceremonial, et cetera, and will deliver them into genuine freedom.

And so they come, and Pilate is willing to meet them outside so that they will not be unclean. Pilate says, What accusation do you bring against this man?

And they answered him, If he were not an evildoer, we wouldn't have brought him to you. It's interesting, very vague. I think it represents the fact that they don't actually know what's going to be the trigger, what is actually going to do it for Pilate.

But if they say blasphemy, he will say, Well, you have your own law, judge them yourself. I don't care about blasphemy. We know that David Short, even last week, indicated that Jesus used the term I am many times.

Even in his arrest, I am. The name of God. The name given by Moses. Given to Moses of God. And this name, I am the bread of life. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[5 : 02] I am the resurrection and the life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. This word, I am. Before Abraham was, I am. This word is extremely offensive.

It is blasphemy in identification with God's father. And the Jews want to kill him. But is Pilate going to care about that? And so they say, You know he's a troublemaker. Now, he does know, of course.

Because his own soldiers, as we've been told in the 18th chapter already, are part of the band of people who arrest him. So he knows something about the charges. The danger of sedition. That maybe he is a king.

And a threat somehow to Jesus. And so they say, We don't want to judge him by our own law. Because it is not lawful for us to put a man to death.

The penny drops. We need a permit. We want you to kill him. We don't want to do it ourselves. There may be several reasons for this. And I don't want to go into it in great detail. Well, one of the reasons is that it is true that most of the time, the Romans actually withdrew their right of capital punishment from those people they had conquered.

[6 : 08] You couldn't kill people without their permission. Although we know they killed Stephen just a short time later. So apparently they did it sometimes. It may be actually that by stealth, they need Pilate to agree to this so that they can divert from themselves the responsibility and the danger of the tumult of the crowd.

If we can get the Romans who are hated to kill him, so much the better. Let's get Pilate in on this deal. You can imagine the spin doctors that met in the White House late that night thinking about how to deal with this one, right?

What is the thing that's going to work and that will get him dead by sundown? And so we now go to second scene in which Pilate goes before Jesus himself alone because of the desire not to be defiled and he begins to talk to Jesus.

And he has a right and also a responsibility to find out what Jesus has done and whether he's really guilty of any kind of punishment. And so we have this dialogue, this scene, with Jesus and Pilate.

He has heard the claim, at least above others, that Jesus was a king and he's very sensitive to that. No challenge to the authority of Caesar. In fact, we know this is what's going to be ultimately the charge that works, right?

[7 : 29] If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. We're going to tell Caesar on you. And that is bad business. Don't let Caesar find out.

That somebody has raised up a standard of another king in his kingdom. And so he starts to ask him, Are you a king? And Jesus says, interesting, calmly, a question back to Pilate.

Pilate, have you just been listening to the news or are you actually interested in this, right? Is this just media stuff? Or are you actually wanting to know if I am a king?

And of course, Pilate says, I'm not a Jew. I'm not interested in these things. Your nation has brought you and they have charged you. What have you done? Let's get to the brass tacks here.

And Jesus says, My kingship is not of this world. Note, he does not deny that he is a king. But he's not the kind of king that Pilate's thinking of. My kingship is not of this world.

[8 : 31] If it were of this world, my servants would fight. And it would be a violent world like yours is, where might makes right. My kingdom is from above. The source of my kingdom is in God and not in this world.

And then Pilate says, Aha! You admitted it. You are a king. So you are a king. And Jesus says, That's what you're saying. But I know why I'm here. I was born into this world to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. And then Pilate, who's seen many, many different kinds of cultures and situations and lived in political world all his life, says, What is the truth?

What is the truth? And leaves. Doesn't wait around for an answer. Notice. Actually, does not seem all that interested. Goes outside and, to his credit, begins by saying, I do not find a fault in this man that makes him worthy of death.

He has committed no crime that I'm aware of. So there is this whole issue that Jesus says at the very end, the last day, the last hours of his life, I know why I am here.

[9 : 43] I have a clear sense of identity. I am here to reveal the truth of God. In the very first chapter of John, we have had the summary of John himself. No one has ever seen God, the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father.

He has made him known. Jesus has the task of revealing the Father, of revealing God to all of us. But Pilate doesn't wait for an answer.

Someone has said, in the postmodern world, the opposite of talking is not listening, it's getting ready to talk. You're either getting ready to talk, or you are talking. You ever been in a conversation like that, where everyone is getting ready to talk or talking, and no one is listening?

Thank you, Gene, on listening today. No one is listening. We know he's not a good listener. He doesn't even listen to his wife. Remember, his wife said, don't have anything to do with this man.

Pilate does not listen to his wife. And he does not listen for an answer from Jesus. So what do we learn from Pilate? What do we learn from this situation?

[10 : 47] Well, he's like a postmodern person. His fundamental approach to life is cynicism, skepticism, mistrust. And we can sympathize with him. The world he lives in has been a world of manipulation, a world in which truth is used actually as a weapon to get you.

And we know from, whether you want to say environmentalists, the gay community, whether you want to talk about feminism, that many people have already decided that's what's going on in our culture.

Truth is actually just a weapon to get me. The truths that people talk about are actually just their way of manipulating me. And I must defend myself against them.

In Pilate's day, of course, that truth was usually a political truth. It was a way of continuing power. Probably in our day it's more a commercial truth, right? I mean, how many truths have you watched on television in the last week in advertising?

How many salesmen are in this world who are telling you the truth every day that you ought to buy something you don't need with money you don't have? Right? Everybody is trying to manipulate everyone.

[11 : 51] And the only answer is to defend yourself and say, what is truth? I'm not interested. But don't do that too quickly, Pilate. Don't do that too quickly, a modern person because unfortunately when you throw out the truth, you throw out all meaning to life and all freedom.

That's why Jesus says, if you know my words, you abide in the truth and you will be free. They will set you free. There is no freedom without truth. You're just alone in the hostile world.

So be careful not to throw it out. I remember a day when I was hiking with campers in the mountains, actually in the foothills, heavy forest. And we were just having a great time being free and just doing whatever we wanted.

We were wandering around. It was a lovely sunny day. Somebody had already hauled all our stuff to the next campsite ten miles away, so we were light packs just having a good time. And one of the campers said to me, isn't it lovely just to be free?

We can go wherever we want and just wander around, do our thing. You know, everybody for himself and just have a good time. Later in the afternoon, I discovered I didn't know where I was.

[13 : 00] There are not a lot of new cut lines. The oil companies have been in the area. They changed the paths a lot. And I was staring longingly down a path trying to figure out where I was. And this kid came up to me and said, you do know where we are, don't you?

I said, it's great to be free. We just do what we want. We're all alone. We can just wander and have a good time. He said, you're not free when you're lost. Not a bad line.

You're not free when you're lost. You're not free when you can't find home. You're just plain lost. And of course, we found in our days that the adage, when you're lost, it pays to increase the speed is the way to go, right?

I mean, if you're lost, go faster. So you get lost-er while you have some feeling that you're getting there, but you might be just getting lost-er. Wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years, right?

And so somehow, be careful, friends. When you throw out truth, you throw out freedom. You throw out purpose and meaning to your life. You throw out the map. You can't get home.

[14 : 03] And this feeling of homelessness is very clear, both in Pilate and in us. In our world today, we don't know how to get home. In fact, if you notice the theme that our culture is talking about a lot these days, all the movies are about finding home.

Right? When you go back to E.T., I want to go home. Right? Remember Mrs. Doubtfire? The home has been destroyed and Robin Williams becomes this nanny who tries to get back to home.

And at the very end of that movie, because the home is never intact again, Robin Williams says, well, your family may be fragmented and living apart, but you can still have a family in your heart.

Not very convincing. I've never had a student say to me, my parents have split up, but I have a family in my heart. Right? No, I don't have a family in my heart. And the longing for home is a great theme of our culture.

Good Will Hunting, I gather, is another movie just recently on two men searching for home, trying to find home and they find it in each other. You know Douglas Copeland's Life After God, where he sums up at the end, my secret is that I need God.

[15 : 16] I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me to give because I'm not capable of doing it to myself. I need him to help me to be kind as I no longer seem capable of kindness, to help me to love as I seem beyond being able to love.

I have no freedom to act. Remember John 8 this morning, we read, if you commit sin, you become the slave to sin and you have no freedom to act. You become driven by your own whims and desires with no center to your life.

So don't throw out truth, Pilate, because when you do, you throw out home. You throw out meaning to your life. Well, what do we learn from Jesus in this passage?

First, he is our example. Note how he responds in this very hostile environment. How do you respond in the postmodern world where everybody sees you as trying to manipulate you? Well, he questions Pilate.

He says, Pilate, I'm not here to manipulate you, but I want to find, I want to clarify something. Let's have a dialogue. Are you really interested in me? Later he says, anyone who is really interested in the truth will find me, right?

[16 : 24] If you are of the truth, you can find me. And so he tries to start a dialogue. This is dynamic. This is something incredible. Last day of his life. Last hour. And he is still building bridges.

He is still seeking a dialogue. Dialogue with others. And that's the stance we must take. There is another way than domination. There is another way than manipulation when we talk with people. And it's called dialogue and genuine interest and respect.

Jesus, in the last day of his life, is open to a Gentile, powerful, hated seeker. He wants to turn Pilate into a seeker. So Jesus retains the initiative until the end.

He has a clear sense of identity and he is free to be all that he is and speaks about who he is. A comforting thought to the early Christians who are going through tremendous hostility and a comforting thought to us who still feel that the world around us is pretty hostile to Christians.

In fact, Paul, in 1 Timothy 6, 13, says, when he is exhorting Timothy to be faithful, he says, I charge you in the presence of Jesus Christ who before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.

[17 : 39] We remember that before Pontius Pilate, Jesus spoke about truth, knew why he was there, did not panic and sought to relate. Jesus also teaches us about truth.

It's personal. It's basic to the character of God. The Hebrew understanding of truth is that there's a correspondence between what you say and what you do, that it's life, that it's something you do.

You are truth or you are not truth. Now, friends, I remember when I was a senior in philosophy at the university, we had a new prof coming who was going to be dynamic and ethics, who's going to be my prof in ethics.

I was in my last year and I was absolutely shocked. I had been a Christian a few years so maybe this was getting a hold of me that truth is somehow personal and has grip on your life and has something to do with the way you live because my ethics prof was drunk every day.

My ethics prof had had three wives by the time he was 35 and something in me said that something doesn't fit here. He taught me about the nature of the good but he was not good.

[18 : 45] There was a discontinuity between what he said and what he did but not so for the Hebrews, not so for Jesus. Truth is all about character and God is essentially the truth.

He is essentially faithful, loving kindness at his heart and what he says and what he does are the same thing. You are the truth. You do the truth.

This is the truth that Jesus teaches. He is the truth and when we are in relationship to God we are of the truth. We are becoming real in touch with reality and truth.

Jesus also says a warning to the seekers. You can't find truth if you won't respond to it. Interesting line, right?

It's not something abstract and often a distance. Truth is something you have to be willing to respond to. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.

[19 : 42] If you are not prepared to obey you cannot find it easy to believe. Jesus said earlier in John if anyone will do my father's will he will know whether my teaching is from God.

You will know if you are willing to do it. Or an even more powerful statement in John 5, 48 how can you believe if you accept honor of one another and not God alone? If you are more concerned about being light you are going to have a hard time believing.

If your concern is to be honored by people believing is going to be a tough project. So somehow our own cynical rejection of truth is a cover for our unwillingness to do it.

What is truth? I remember what happens when you go about this time of year to the cabin. I don't know if any of you have cabins. If you go to the cabin you haven't been there since Christmas and you get there usually on a Friday night after you've fought your way through the 401 or the ferries or whatever you've loaded up all the stuff you're going for a rest and you're just exhausted by the time you get there.

I mean it's 10.30 at night and you're just worn out from getting there and you start to haul all the stuff in you find the main switch you turn on the power and what happens? You put the first bag of groceries on the table and it's got mouse dirt on it right?

[20 : 58] And there's cobwebs everywhere and some rats have been in the place and it was leaking in the corner and the whole rug is soaking wet and mildew for life. Now what do you do?

You turn out the light. Baby. Yeah turn out the light. That's what it says of Jesus. He came to this world but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil so they turned out the light.

Right? But it does not work in the end. The other thing is you clean up you have to respond to the truth of what you see and you ask both for forgiveness and for help in cleaning up.

So that is what Jesus tells us about truth. Now let me tell you some encouragements for the seeker. One, in Jesus what you see is what you get.

He's not going to manipulate you. Those who are afraid the truth will be used to manipulate do not need to be afraid of him because what he said he did. He said God loved us and then he loved prostitutes, lepers, Samaritans, rich people, people from the Sanhedrin.

[22 : 03] He loved. He did not just talk. There is total integrity in him. He makes judgments. He teaches and then he makes judgments but his judgments are right.

He gets through the religious crap and sees what's really going on. So what you see is what you get with him. You do not need to be afraid of him. And lastly, Jesus is our Paschal Lamb, our Passover Lamb.

John points out that even in this dialogue Jesus is still in charge. This was so that Jesus had spoken by the way in which he would die. This was still the word of the Lord in verse 32 that Jesus had spoken to show by the death he was to die.

They need Pilate because he's going to be lifted up. He's not going to be stoned for blasphemy. And Jesus already is still in charge of the situation. He is reliable and consistent.

So, you do not need to be afraid of him. He will not manipulate you. There is no deceit in him. And he is the Lamb slain for us. So isn't this fascinating?

[23 : 05] They are trying to rush Jesus into death and he is going to die at the very moment that the Passover Lamb's are slain and remembering for the people their deliverance from death and from slavery.

Jesus is going to be the Lamb for us and God is painting this picture for us to understand for the rest of our life that in him, in the Son, we can be delivered. He will be slain for us.

We are now seeing that in Holy Communion every Sunday. Jesus, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us. Come, let us join the feast. And so, the very work of the leaders in seeking to kill Jesus is actually fulfilling the great vision that God has for our deliverance to our Lord Jesus as he dies for us.

Well, in other words, to say, in the end, friends, do not be afraid of truth because the one who is true loves you deeply and he is not there. He will break down the walls by love and by his self-sacrificial love.

I thought about how to end this and then I realized there's a great poem by a philosopher friend of mine, Paul Gooch. I wouldn't say friend, I've met him. He's at the University of Toronto and he talks about the difference between truth in Socrates and truth in Jesus.

[24 : 31] He's troubled because Jesus does not want to take the cup in Gethsemane. He is shrinking from taking the cup. But Socrates, when he was condemned for being, for corrupting the youth by his philosophical investigation, was not afraid of the cup.

And so he says in this poem, Lord, why weren't you like Socrates? I mean, Lord, it's about the cup. Socrates, you remember how that snub-nosed Athenian died, trumped up charges of corrupting the youth and denying the old gods in a mock trial?

He faced it all with wit and irony and calm and balanced argument. If death is sleep, then there's no sweat. If death is awaking to another life, then I'm persuaded, that's what he thought, Lord, that it would be a life with men and gods far better than we know here.

No sweat. Instead, he took the cup and blessed it and drank all of it full of hemlock, full of death. No flinching, no twitch of the nerve. He forbids the women to weep.

He forbids friends' tears. He pays respects to the healing god of Syphilis. I mean, Lord, he was a cool man or a fool, Lord. But you, Lord, you took the cup and you faltered.

[25 : 43] You took a Judas kiss on those same cheeks that later stung from hairs ripped out on those same cheeks that later ran with soldiers spit. You took it all and gave no balance to counterarguments. You knew to speak was to perform.

So lamb-like you shut your mouth before the slaughter. Lord, was the prophet joking when he spoke, some lamb, some slaughter. And you, too hushed the weeping women with your grim invocation.

Blessed are the barren wombs, blessed are the wizened breath. And Lord, there's some hell of a difference between drinking poison and being crucified. But that was later, Lord.

It's the garden that gets me. Lord, you flinched. You faltered. You sweat cold sweat, bloody cold sweat, and your face in the dirt, and you asked not to have to drink. Lord, why weren't you like Socrates?

But as I asked, I think, and again, here you make me ask again another question. Whose death did Socrates so woefully drink to? His own.

[26 : 44] He was no foolish man, Lord, but Lord, neither were you. Whose death was in your cup? Death. Death. The death of all of us was in your cup.

That's as different as heaven and hell, Lord. No, you weren't like Socrates. Thank you, Lord. Amen. Our offertory hymn speaks of Jesus being our Passover lamb, the one who was sacrificed for us.

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, number four on your white hymn sheet. Amen. Amos.

CEn flocko■ Amen. The arrival of the man I ask, My beauty is gone, my cross is burned"t in stunning beautiful hymns Of the red■■■iest love, io■tumo, against my dead!

icha! Amen.