

What is Truth?

John 18:28-40

Sermon

Hobart, June 29th, 2014

Devonport, July 12th, 2014

Launceston, July 13th, 2014

John 18:28-40

²⁸ Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor.* His accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"

³⁰ "We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.

³¹ "Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them.

"Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied. ³² (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.*)

³³ Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.

³⁴ Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."

³⁷ Pilate said, "So you are a king?"

Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."

³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime. ³⁹ But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" ¹

* Greek to the *Praetorium*; also in 18:33.

* See John 12:32-33.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 18:28-40). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

A. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO DISCUSS ONE OF THE MOST BASIC QUESTIONS IN LIFE

1. It is a question that judges and courts seek out
2. It is the question that lies at the heart of most religious endeavours
3. It is the central foundation and quest of science and scientists
4. It was what our magazine of decades gone by purported to answer,
5. It is the question Pontius Pilate famously asked Jesus,

B. THAT FOUNDATIONAL QUESTION IS, “WHAT IS TRUTH?”

1. Like many topics, it may sound overly abstract, academic or philosophical;
 - a) But it lies at the foundation of our faith, our beliefs and the way we live, and deserves some deep thought and discussion
2. A friend of mine once took me quite aback when I had described some aspect of Christian belief that has been studied and discussed and developed down through the ages, and just rebuffed and lightly dismissed it with the comment, “that’s their opinion, I have my own”
3. We need to beware of assuming that our undeveloped, casual ideas and assumptions are equally valid and credible as the ideas that have been arrived at through painstaking research and broad expert discussion by large numbers of wiser and better informed heads than ours.

4. There is a tendency among some who take pride in being “uneducated”, and on the other hand, among some who take pride in the fact they have had some academic education, towards being arrogant, proud, stubborn, narrow minded and aggressive and belittling and dismissive towards those who hold differing views.

a) We have been amongst them in claiming to have an exclusive hold on the “Plain Truth” in many areas, doctrinal and scientific

b) But such pride came before a great fall, and it took God’s Spirit to lead us to have the meekness and humility to admit we were wrong, and to start listening and learning what was really true

C. SO WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT “WHAT IS TRUTH” IN ORDER TO FINE TUNE THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR CHRISTIAN BELIEF, OUR THEOLOGY,

1. At how we arrive at what we hold true, and base our values and our behaviour upon

2. But our main focus of discussion today is to examine the question, “what is truth”?

D. PRAYER

BODY:

II. "WHAT IS TRUTH?" - PILATE

John 18:29-40

A. THE WHOLE BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO PILATE'S QUESTION "WHAT IS TRUTH?" IS FRAUGHT WITH "UNTRUTHS"

1. Jesus was not being truly or fairly or justly judged
2. His trial was illegal
3. His own people had not believed who he truly was, or the truth he revealed and taught. So deep was their disbelief, so much did they find his "truth" objectionable and heretical, that they contrived and succeeded in having him proclaimed guilty of blasphemy in claiming to be a King, and God's son
4. Pilate was so disgusted by the conniving and bewildering actions, claims and requests of the Jews that he endeavoured several times to dismiss their charges and let Jesus go.
5. In the end he washed his hands and let them have their way because of his own vulnerable political position

B. HE HAD TRIED TO FIND OUT WHAT THEIR ISSUE WITH JESUS WAS

John 18:29-40

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³¹ "Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them.

"Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied.

³² (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.)

* See John 12:32-33.

1. Pilate tried to find out directly from Jesus, who he was, was he a King and what he had been doing and saying that had led to this call for his execution;

³³ Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. “Are you the king of the Jews?” he asked him.

³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate retorted. “Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?”

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Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.”

³⁸ “What is truth?” Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, “He is not guilty of any crime. ³⁹ But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this ‘King of the Jews’?”

⁴⁰ But they shouted back, “No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!”

2. Jesus ended up being crucified based on lies and untruths, and Pilate not only didn’t recognize, or stand up for or uphold truth, he also failed to stand up for justice

a) Too often we misjudge one another, assuming they are wrong and deserve condemnation

b) Life and people are complex

(1) **As we looked at recently, God looks at the heart, not on the outward appearance**

(2) **We need to be slow to jump to negative conclusions about others**

(3) **And we need to leave judgment up to God as only he sees the full picture**

c) In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about the commandment not to murder, and showed that God’s intent includes not assassinating other’s reputations by calling them names or misrepresenting who they are

d) Jesus was subject to all these misjudgements, lies and abuses, and knows what it feels like to be treated so unjustly

(1) **So he knows the damage we cause when we unjustly judge others,**

(2) **and he knows how we feel when we are unjustly condemned**

³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

3. Pilate had no idea about what truth is

a) He felt truth was something beyond his capacity to know

b) Clearly he was having trouble getting to the truth of this case, but overall he was fairly convinced that Jesus was innocent, and did not deserve execution

4. Bible Knowledge Commentary;

John 18:38. Pilate's question, **What is truth?** has echoed down through the centuries. How his question was intended is problematic. Was it a wistful desire to know what no one could tell him? Was it philosophical cynicism concerning the problem of epistemology? Was it indifference to anything so impractical as abstract thought? Or was it irritation at Jesus' response? These are all possible interpretations of his words. But the significant thing is that he suddenly turned away from the *One* who is "the Truth" (14:6) without waiting for an answer. ²

C. LET'S NOW TALK ABOUT THE KEY QUESTION HERE; "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (338). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

III. DISCUSS, "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

A. DISCUSSION

1. How would you define truth?

a) Write down some definitions

b) Discuss in small groups some of your definitions

2. Why is Truth important for your life?

a) Why do you want to know truth?

3. What benefit are you wanting, seeking from God's truth, from studying the Bible etc.?

4. Have you been misjudged?

a) How did you feel, how did it effect you?

5. How to you discover "what is truth?"

IV. WHAT IS TRUTH?

A. STILL FOCUSING ON OUR MAIN QUESTION, “WHAT IS TRUTH?”, LET’S GO BACK TO JOHN 18

1. It is easy to get ourselves lost in such a question, as Pilate clearly was,
 - a) But the truth was all the while right in front of him
 - b) Let’s go back and focus on what Jesus himself had to say

B. PILATE’S “WHAT IS TRUTH” QUESTION IS IN RESPONSE TO JESUS’ EXPLANATION OF WHO HE WAS

1. and in particular about what his purpose and life on earth was all about

³⁷ Pilate said, “So you are a king?”

Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.”

C. DISCUSS:

1. (6) How does Jesus response (v37b) answer Pilate’s question “what is truth?”

D. LOOK UP THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES:

1. (7) What does John 15:26 tell us about the question, “what is truth?”

John 15:26 “But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.

2. Gary Deddo;

Jesus tells us that he is, himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He does not show us a way or tell us about the truth or give us things that lead to life.

He himself is these things. Thus God's gracious revelatory work reaches a qualitatively different level with the birth of the Word of God in human form.³

E. JESUS IS THE ANSWER

1. Karl Barth

- a) respected by many as the greatest theologian of the last century
- b) Emphasised in his last book, that "the object of theology is, in fact, Jesus Christ."⁴

2. The centre and goal of all our study of God ("theology"), and the centre of God's revelation of truth is Jesus Christ.

- a) Famous French scientist turned theologian, Blaise Pascal made clear that the only way to understand truth, is through Jesus Christ.

The only proof of the living God is Jesus Christ. God can only be known through Him and without Him we cannot relate to God. ...He consisted of two natures, human and divine, by which He redeemed mankind by saving men from sin and bringing them to God.

Everything points to Christ and everything is understood only in light of Him.⁵

John 14:6-10

⁶ Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. ^{*} From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

⁹ Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me."⁶

³ Gary Deddo, *Interpreting Scripture*,

⁴ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology, An Introduction*, p. 202

⁵ Blaise Pascal, *The Mind on Fire*, editor James M. Houston, 2006 David C. Cook

^{*} Some manuscripts read *If you have really known me, you will know who my Father is.*

⁶ Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 14:6-10). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

3. [8] How does John 14:9 answer the Question, “What is Truth”?

John 14:9

⁹ Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?”

4. So important to catch what is being taught here;

- a) The truth we are seeking is not a set of facts, not a measurable and scientifically provable type truth, not some data, not information, formulas or principles or laws of life that we can grab hold of and for our own ends or purposes

F. THE TRUTH ISN’T A WHAT?

1. What is truth?

- a) The truth is a WHO
- b) Jesus himself is “the truth”

G. HOW CAN THAT BE?

1. The ultimate reality and truth is that God is

- a) That he is the creator and sustainer of all things

2. Elmer Colyer;

The ultimate level of truth, of course, is the *supreme truth* of the self-existent being of God.⁷

3. And God is a personal being, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

- a) Not a mere fact, or principle or piece of accurate knowledge
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⁷ Colyer, p. 366

V. GOD AS TRUTH

A. BUT GOD IS BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO SEE, MEASURE AND KNOW OF OURSELVES

1. The Truth of God is more than can be described in human language or earthly analogies
2. We can't comprehend or view, or fully grasp who God is because we don't have the minds, the senses, the powers to observe him, nor the language to describe him if we did

B. REVELATION;

1. So how can we know God, and believe in his true reality of nature and being?
 - a) We can only know him as he reveals himself
2. How does he reveal himself to mankind?
 - a) Through Jesus, *who* is the truth!
3. Elmer Colyer in his book, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, writes,

...for Torrance, knowing the truth of God is quite impossible apart from God's condescension to be one with us in our creaturely conditions and therefore to sustain our knowing and our doctrinal formulation that arise out of a real relation to God through God's self-revelation. This is what God has done in the incarnation of his truth within our creaturely existence in Jesus Christ within the matrix of Israel, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostolic community.⁸

4. This is what Jesus told his disciples

John 16:13

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.

a) Colyer continues,

...when we know the love of God through the grace of Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, "we know much more than we can grasp or

⁸ Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, Wipf & Stock/IVP, 2001, p.368

express; we feel or experience far more than we can put into thought or word.”

Torrance can even speak of theology as “a kind of ecstatic passion” in which we are lifted up by God’s Spirit “to share in God’s own self-knowing and self-loving.”⁹

In light of God’s self-revelation and self-communication through Jesus Christ and in the creative operation of the Holy Spirit, the human mind is renewed, transformed and spiritually reorganized, and it begins to reflect to a degree the triune God that we know in this way.¹⁰

CONCLUSION:

I. TRUTH IS A VITAL AND HUGE TOPIC

A. EVERYTHING WE ARE, DO AND THINK AND SAY IS IMPACTED BY TRUTH OR THE LACK OF IT

1. But as we have seen today, the core and most important aspect of truth, is God himself
 - a) And we know him because in love, he has reached out to us to reveal himself to us personally, through his Son, and his Spirit

B. PILATE WAS CAUGHT UP IN HIS OWN WORLD OF POWER, EGO, WORRY AND WEAKNESS

1. His thinking, his judgment and his actions were skewed and distorted by his human failings
2. His question, “what is truth?” was an expression of where he and his world and ours is in its thinking
3. We look to our world, we are confined and confused by our constricted view in which we seek to sort and good and evil on our own, in reference only to our minds and world

⁹ Colyer, p. 137-138

¹⁰ Colyer, p.138

4. Because God is precluded, our quest for truth becomes a “what”, a quest for materialistic answers that will always be incomplete and unsatisfying
5. It is only when we lift our eyes to the Son of God, the one we crucified because we insisted on judging and evaluating truth on our own, apart from and in resistance to God
 - a) It is only when we look to him, and listen to the Spirit of God he sent, that we begin to have our eyes open to who truth is
 - b) And can begin to see who God is, and the truth of his life and love, and the future he holds out to us all

C. IN THE NEXT MONTH OR SO

1. We plan to look more at how we know God
2. How we grow in grace and knowledge
 - a) The role of Scripture and the Holy Spirit
 - b) And the way we approach and seek the truth in the difficult personal and societal questions and issues of life

D. QUESTION TO THINK ABOUT FOR NEXT TIME;

1. [9] **What difference does it make to you that the truth is a “who”, not a “what”**

E. PRAYER
