

John 18:33-38a

³³ Pilate went back into the Praetorium and summoned Jesus. He asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ “You are a king then?” Pilate asked. Jesus answered, “I am, as you say, a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ “What is truth?” Pilate said to him.

Sermon # 6 for Lenten Series, “Solemn Hours of Lent”, the Hour of Truth

Text: John 18:33-38a

Theme: “This is the Hour of Truth—So We Listen to Jesus”

In the name of Jesus, my dear fellow redeemed,

It was the moment when everything came together—a turning point in his life. What would he do? It would be the most critical decision of his life. It was the moment when he had the chance to continue on the path of unbelief, or to put his trust in Jesus. This was the moment when Pilate asked, “What is truth?” In those solemn hours of Lent we see that others came to a similar critical point in their lives.

Remember Peter, the coward, the one who denied even knowing Jesus. But when faced with his sin, he repented and appealed to Jesus’ forgiveness—forgiveness which he saw purchased through his Savior’ suffering and death in the darkest of all those hours of Lent. And then there was Judas, schemer, offering to betray Jesus to his enemies, who loved cold hard cash so much he gave Jesus away for the price of a common slave. But then reality struck. Jesus was not going to free himself. He knew Jesus was innocent, but somehow thought his teacher and master would free himself as he had done other times. But when the guilty verdict was handed down and Jesus was condemned to die Judas came to that critical moment when he would have to choose between Jesus’ forgiveness and eternal remorse and sorrow. Scripture reports he refused to put his trust in Jesus’ forgiveness, rather than appeal to the promise of forgiveness and salvation first given in the Garden of Eden.

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And in this hour of truth we see the direction the chief priests and teachers of the law also chose to go. They wanted nothing to do with the man they falsely accused of blasphemy, of claiming to be something they did not believe him to be. They did not want to face the truth—Jesus not only IS the Son of God, he is the Savior every person needs. They did not want to face the truth of their sins, the truth that they needed Jesus to wash them clean. They turned their backs on truth and instead condemned the very one whom they had been looking for, but for all the wrong reasons.

And then, in the hour of truth, what would Pilate do? He began asking questions, but seemingly did not want to face the reality that the man before him, whom he was judging, wounded and bleeding with a crown of thorns on his head, was the Lord and Savior of all people. What will you do in this critical hour, the hour of truth. Will you recognize that this is the hour of truth—So we listen to Jesus. 1. As the one whose kingdom is not of this world; 2. As the one who brings us into God's kingdom; 3. As the one who sends the Spirit of truth to keep us in his way.

When Pontius Pilate was assigned as governor of Judea, he found himself on what was probably considered to be the lowest rung in the political ladder of the Roman empire. No one with any ambition wanted to be governor there because you always had to contend with the Jews, their various political groups and especially their strange religion that was looking for a deliverer, the Messiah. And now, in this critical hour of truth, the governor comes face to face with THE man who claimed to be the Jews messiah, but whom their leaders rejected. Like everyone else in Judea, Galilee and even Samaria, Pilate had heard of Jesus, his miracles, his healings and perhaps even knew something of his teachings, if only from the standpoint of acceptable morality.

So when Pilate asked Jesus “Are you the King of the Jews” Jesus invited him to consider this truth when he replied, “Are you asking for yourself, or because others are bringing this accusation against me?” Jesus invited Pilate to consider this question for himself, very carefully. This was not a question to be trifled with purely from his position as the judge of his court case. This was a question that Pilate needed to answer because his eternal future hung in the balance. He needed to answer for himself what it meant if Jesus IS the King of the Jews. Was he some self-styled, self-appointed deliverer, or was he who he claimed to be, the Son of God?

This should have become even more of a concern for Pilate when he received a warning from his wife not to have anything to do with that righteous man, because she had suffered many things in a dream that day because of Jesus. We are not

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completely sure of just what she was asking of him, but the fact that she called Jesus a righteous man, should have been a red flag for Pilate. Jesus should not be condemned. And if he should not be condemned, Is he the Messiah. Is he someone that I should listen to especially because he claims his kingdom is not of this world?

When the priests accused him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God, Pilate becomes even more concerned. You can almost hear Pilate conversing with himself. “This man does not seem to be a lunatic, what is it about him that is so believable? This does not make sense.” So Pilate was not convinced. This stuff about gods coming down to earth was part of Roman mythology about their whole closet full of gods. But we don’t know what Pilate believed about them. Yet Pilate shows himself to be vulnerable, that is, he is does not know what to think, and he has to consider, at least, that what Jesus claims is true.

His kingdom is not of this world. What did that mean to Pilate? What does it mean to us? In the hour of truth, Jesus was telling Pilate that there is life beyond life in this world. There is a God who, has a kingdom that cannot be seen. If it could be seen, Jesus servants would fight so he would not be arrested. But the servants of this unseen kingdom, the angels of heaven, will not attack because they know the Son of God is on a mission to save the world from sin. And he will do it by his death on a cross.

Do you believe in Jesus’ unseen kingdom? Do you believe the only way to save you from the Father’s judgment is for his Son to pay the price for your sins? Do you believe that despite the fact it cannot be seen, Jesus’ kingdom is the only one that will last for eternity? Do you believe Jesus came to this world to bring you into his kingdom? Jesus would do that for you and me, sinners that we are?

Jesus said he had come into the world to testify to the truth. He said that to Pilate while he was on trial. Perhaps Pilate was hoping Jesus would say something that would give him more evidence to silence the Jews and so that he could set Jesus free without a riot. But the truth Jesus was talking about was not truth that would set him free. In fact, it was truth that hit so close to home, truth that struck the sinful nature of every human being right in the face that it was likely to stir up the anger of the priests and teachers of the law even more. The truth Jesus was talking about was that anyone outside of Christ’s kingdom is lost. And no one will escape without a Savior. Jesus himself IS that Savior.

But you see how dead set against this truth Jesus’ enemies really are. They hate him because he told them they were sinners who were not teaching the truth of God’s Word. Their sinful natures seethed with hatred to the point that they looked in vain for a reason to arrest him, or to deceive him with trick questions. But Jesus would call them out for their hypocrisy. When they asked him whether or not it was

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right to pay taxes to Caesar Jesus told them they were hypocrites, and asked them to show him a Roman coin. He asked them whose name and picture were on the coin. They said, Caesar's. So instead of giving them a one sided answer, Jesus told them plainly, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. And when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many people began to follow Jesus, to the point that Christ's enemies wanted to try to kill Lazarus, thinking somehow they would discredit Jesus.

The sad fact is, by their unbelief they had placed themselves outside of God's kingdom and that meant they were lost, condemned to the fires of hell as long as they did not repent.

So when Jesus told Pilate he had come for the purpose of testifying to the truth, and that everyone on the side of truth listens to him, namely Jesus, it was a golden opportunity for Pilate to ask Jesus, "What is the truth you proclaim?" Instead, to his detriment Pilate cynically asks, "What is truth?" He believed there was no absolute truth.

So once again the Lenten season bids us ask the question of ourselves, "What is truth, the truth that Jesus teaches?" Are we willing to accept the fact that we are sinners who are lost, condemned and have no way to save ourselves? Do we believe that if we remain in that condition we are doomed to the fires of hell? And do we believe the truth, greater than every other truth that Jesus is THE one and only Savior who has taken all of our sins on himself, paid the price for them and given us a place in his kingdom freely by his grace? Dear friends, consider the answers to these questions daily. Daily seek our Lord's forgiveness for our sins of failure to acknowledge you have sinned against God, for our futile hypocritical attempts to save ourselves and cover our own sins. The only way we can do that is to seek the help of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promises to send to keep us in his way.

The blessings of knowing the truth come to us only through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts through the Word of God. It is a very sad thing that while Pilate had Jesus in front of him, he had the very word of God in his presence, but failed to recognize this and then seek the truth from Jesus. But this was something the Lord Jesus had said to his disciples on Maundy Thursday evening at the Passover meal, "**When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.**" We come into Christ's kingdom by the power of the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit.

Every believer is an example of the Spirit's work in our hearts. Think of the criminal who died next to Jesus praying to him that he would remember him when Jesus came into his kingdom. The Holy Spirit was at work in the man's heart.

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Think also of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea both of whom buried Jesus. The Holy Spirit brought them to the conclusion that they needed Jesus and that Jesus was himself the way, the truth and the life. They believed only Jesus would bring them into God's kingdom where they would live forever.

What we also need is that the Holy Spirit will keep us in the way of truth. This really means we need to be in touch with the truth every day. We need God's Word to guide us, to teach us, to show us our sins and our Savior every day. When we hear and read God's word, the Spirit is working. We need to receive his truth into our hearts humbly, accept his truth even though we may not understand everything, or even if some parts of God's word don't make sense to my human logic. What God's Word says is true. Jesus said everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth convinces us that we need to listen to Jesus' voice. He said much the same thing in John 10 when he called himself the Good Shepherd. He said, my sheep know me and they listen to my voice; and there shall be one sheep pen and one Shepherd. This is Jesus kingdom.

There are many who, unfortunately reject the truth. But there is only one truth, the truth that we are sinners who have been saved by the only one who can save us, Jesus our Lord. Dear friends, by God's grace, you belong to the truth. You are in the truth; and what a blessing that is because only the truth that Jesus speaks, is the truth that saves. Amen.