

Christ in Crisis: Will The Truth Set You Free?

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John 18:33-38a (CEB)

Pilate went back into the palace. He summoned Jesus and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?"

Pilate responded, "I'm not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here."

"So you are a king?" Pilate said.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice."

"What is truth?" Pilate asked.

Almost 10 years ago, State Farm had a very memorable commercial.

What made it so memorable was how silly it was

But I don't think we would find it as funny today

It opened with a man typing into his phone and a friend comes up and asks what he is doing. He shares that he is reporting an accident in the State Farm app.

His friend says: State Farm doesn't have an app that can do that.

He replies: Where did you hear that?

The Internet.

And you believed it?

Yeah. They can't put anything on the Internet that isn't true.

Where did you hear that?

The Internet.

The sad part is --- for many people it seems that they believe more of what they read on the internet than what is reported in the reputable news.

In our culture today --- Truth is under attack

But that is nothing new.

Truth has often been under attack

Truth is a major topic in the Gospel according to John.

John's Gospel begins by informing us: (John 1:14 CEB)

The Word became flesh

and made his home among us.

We have seen his glory,

glory like that of a father's only son,

full of grace and truth.

Jesus is --- TRUTH

And Jesus wants to make a clear link between truth and freedom: (John 8:32 NRSV)

"you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Jesus is clearly making an assumption here --- that there **IS** something called TRUTH

And not only is there truth --- but we are given choices to make about it, and it is in those choices that determine if we are really free or not.

The question is --- is the converse of what Jesus said also true?

In my life, I have found it to be true --- and it is a continual battle that I wage

Jesus seems to suggest that without the truth

We can easily be held captive to assertions and claims that are false, even lies

--- and when that happens, we can become enslaved to false ideologies and narratives

The truth will set us free --- but lies can and will enslave us.

Maybe more than any previous time in our lives --- knowing the truth is more important than ever

In our text this morning, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus the words that many of us have asked, "**What is truth?**"

Pilate asks this just before he washes his hands of any responsibility for what he is about to do in authorizing the execution of Jesus.

Was Pilate asking a rhetorical question, I don't know.

Or was Pilate suggesting that there is no such thing as objective truth?

Again, I don't know.

What I do know is that we need to ask this question --- **What is truth** --- earnestly and literally.

I am convinced that there is something called the truth.

It is the biblical message when Jesus tells us in John's Gospel (John 14:15-17 CEB)

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the **Spirit of Truth**, whom the world can't receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

The choices we make about truth will determine whether we are truly free.

So, how do we answer Pilate's question today?

In a conversation with Jim Wallis, William Matthews said:

"... it feels like our culture has a hard time discerning truth ... we are so in tuned to salacious rumor as truth that when truth actually shows up, we're lost and we demonize it and we [say], 'How dare you tell us that!'"

Why is it that we value sensationalism over facts?

But again, let me be clear --- this isn't a new problem

In the Second Epistle to Timothy, it is written: (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NRSV)

"For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having **itching ears**, they will accumulate for themselves **teachers to suit their own desires**, and will **turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.**"

When I read that I ask myself ---

When did this get written?

in 2020 or around the year 100?

It feels so modern, as it captures one of our biggest challenges.

Many of us gravitate toward media that will echo what we want to hear

That will affirm our biases and agendas

that will ease our itching ears

If you take some time and read through the texts in John's Gospel that focus on truth one thing becomes apparent.

And there are a number of passages found in John's gospel: John 1:14, John 1:17, John 8:3, John 8:44-47, John 14:5-7, John 14:15-17, John 17:17-19, John 18:37-38

What becomes apparent in reading all these verses is that the meaning of truth is linked with our relationship with God.

For Jesus --- truth is relational more than it is factual or propositional.

And the challenge for us to grapple with is --- what does that mean?

If the truth, as manifested in Jesus life, is more about faithfulness, obedience and loyalty with God --- How does that affect how we live?

I have come to understand that TRUTH is about the choices that we make which determine our spiritual lives.

Let me try to bring some clarity to what I am trying to say.

Dr. Andreas Kostenberger, an evangelical scholar, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, writes:

In John, truth is first and foremost a theological, and perhaps even more accurately, a Christological concept. . . . truth, for John, while also being propositional, it is at the heart a personal, relational concept that has its roots and origins in none other than God himself. . . the only way for us to know the truth is to know God through Jesus Christ.

It suggests that our deepest concerns as followers of Jesus, is not simply the accuracy of the news, or whether the facts being told are actually true.

Our obedience to the truth is bound up in our spiritual identity and personal relationship to God as known in Jesus Christ.

What Kostenberger is arguing is that there is NO knowledge of the truth, unless that truth changes your life.

As Christians, as followers of Jesus, it is more than just getting our facts straight

Truth must change us

Truth must transform us

Truth must enlighten how we live, move, and have our being

Wallis writes:

we must bear witness to the truth of love over hate, to service and sacrifice over domination, to what is the "common good," best for all, and not just the few in power, for our neighbor (as defined by Jesus as the one different from us. . .) over just our tribe, and to nonviolence over violence for what is truly redemptive.

But I will be honest with you my friends --- pitting the power of Jesus' truth against the keepers of, so called, worldly truth is risky business

Wallis continues:

Truth is dismissed or denied by power, and the power of truth is then crucified by the powers that be --- with Jesus and Pilate being the ultimate example.

I hope that I have answered the question that Pilate begs us to answer.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

For the answer is fairly simple

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Jesus and his transformative love

But maybe the even more important question for today seems to be:
How do we speak truth to power?

That question is all the more difficult when we **ARE** the power.

I don't presume to have all the answers, but let me share what I am learning.

To speak truth we must be transformed by it --- first and foremost

But we also must be humble and NEVER think we have it all figured out.

And I will leave you with the three words that have been speaking to me

Listen

Look

Learn

I want to close with these words from Jim Wallis:

White Christians who seek to live out their belief that all people bear the image of God must make an active effort to hear the truths that people of color are speaking in this time of crisis. We must listen widely, listen deeply, and listen to those who are the most different from us in what we already think.

Most of all, at this crucial moment in American history, followers of Jesus need to take Jesus seriously. . . . it is also time to go deeper, to go back to Jesus, and understand how important to everything the truth really is — from democracy itself to our history, to our church and even family life. Truth-telling is central to this moment. Let's turn back to Jesus.

Listen

Look

Learn

Prayer —Jeannie Ewing, Catholic spirituality author

Lord, help me to seek truth today—
To find it in places and people I wouldn't otherwise notice.
Teach me that in truth there is wisdom and understanding.
May seeking truth help me overcome my fears and frustrations.

Lord, help me to strive for truth in all that I do today—
That my thoughts, words, and actions may reflect Your goodness.
Show me that only in truth will I be free—
To live honestly and courageously,

To love wholeheartedly and unconditionally.

Lord, help me to cherish truth—
Knowing that You are the author of all that is beautiful, good, and true.
May truth reign in my heart, no matter what I encounter today—
Lies, mockery, confusion, or betrayal.
Your truth gives me clarity and peace.

Lord, You created truth.
You are Truth.
Help me to know truth when I see it;
Learn truth when I am taught it;
Love truth,
Live truth.

Help me to share truth with others today—
Those who are lost and lonely,
The brokenhearted and weary,
Anyone who is suffering from visible or invisible pain.
When I am a son or daughter of truth, I am free to be
Fully alive
Fully myself
And an honest reflection of You.

Truth leads to greater knowledge
Compassion
Understanding
Respect
Charity
And excellence in all virtues.

Truth strengthens me
Guides me
Leads me
Protects me
Keeps me.
I am constant when I dwell in Your truth.
I am unafraid of what I may face.
I am vigilant and poised for speaking
The witness of who You are in truth.
Amen.