

REVELATION 1: 4b-8 (p. 991)

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JOHN 18: 28-38a (p. 879)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Gracious and Loving God, we ask you to touch our hearts this morning with your Holy Spirit. Guide our thoughts with your Wisdom, as we study together your Word. Help us to see your Truth, the Truth that you offer to each and all. And then, help us to embrace it with every fiber of our being, and share it with the world. In Jesus' Name we ask this, Amen.

"IS HE YOUR KING, OR NOT?"

A large, Multi-National Corporation needed to hire a new Marketing Director. And after advertising the position globally, sifting through stacks of resumes, they finally narrowed the field to just three candidates. Ironically though, none of them had a Marketing Degree, or even first-hand experience! The first was actually a Mathematician. So, the CEO asked him a simple, straight forward question. "What is $2 + 2$?" The Mathematician, a little surprised, thought for a moment. He even wondered if it might be a trick question. But being a Mathematician, he eventually answered, "4". The CEO glanced at the rest of the Board, thanked the man for coming in, and stated that he wasn't the candidate they were looking for.

The next applicant was a Statistician. The CEO asked her the very same question; "What is $2 + 2$?" She paused for a moment, and thought for a bit as well. Then she replied that "statistically, it is a number between 3 and 5". The CEO smiled. The Board was quite impressed. But the candidate was also thanked, and politely ushered out. The last interview was with a Political Science Major. He too was asked the question; "What is $2 + 2$?" And without missing a beat he replied; "What would you like it to be?" He was hired immediately!

What is Truth? That's Pilate's question. And I would dare say it's a question for many! What is Truth? Well, what would you like it to be? Is your Truth the same as mine? Is Truth relative, fluid, you know, variable, dependent on the context or situation? Is Truth just a matter of opinion? Or is it the same for everyone, everywhere? Does "Absolute Truth" even exist, Truth beyond personal experience, Truth beyond self, regardless of how I personally feel about it? What is Truth? That's the question. And you might be surprised at how the answers vary!

A June 2020 Survey, by the Cultural Research Center, at Arizona Christian University titled; *The American Worldview Inventory* found that 58% of Americans, "no longer believe that Truth is found in a source outside themselves. Instead, it is up to the individual to decide what is true and moral." 58%! Roughly six out of ten! 16% Believe that "inner certainty" is the means of knowing Truth. 15% say Truth is based on "scientific proof". 5% say it's based on "tradition", 4% on "public consensus", and 5% say there is no such thing as Truth! 13% of those surveyed admit that they do not know what their "Personal Truth" is based on! But only 42% of Americans today, believe that God is the basis of Truth!

The study went on to say that "belief in Absolute Moral Truth is rapidly eroding among all American adults, whether churched or unchurched, within every political segment, and within every age group." That didn't really surprise me. It's a trajectory that we've been on for some time. According to *Britannica on Line*, the Encyclopedia folks, "Post Modernism, a late 20th century movement, is "characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, and relativism", as well as "a general suspicion of reason"! That scares me! But it doesn't really surprise me. What did surprise me, is that the divide over Truth is clearly evident in the Church as well!

According to the survey, only 48% of “Evangelicals”, defined as “those believing the Bible to be the true, reliable Word of God”, accept that there is “Absolute Moral Truth”. 46%, of “Evangelicals” reject the concept of “Absolute Truth” outright! Only 43% of those who identify as “Born Again Christians” still embrace “Absolute Truth”. And Mainline Protestant Denominations, as well as the Catholic Church, fared even worse!

“Absolute Truth” is defined as “objective Truth—Truth outside of ourselves—Truth designed for everyone, which is true for all people, in all times and places”. For Christians, it is Truth designed by God and witnessed to in Scripture! The opposite of course, is that Truth is individual and subjective, based solely on whatever situation is currently in front of you, determined by whatever it is you want it to be!

So, Truth, for the majority of Americans then, is actually “My Truth”! And “My Truth” is the “only Truth” that matters! Facts are no longer facts! Many people are no longer encumbered by them, at all! Just look around! It’s a pretty common stance! And yet, what Jesus says, as He stands before the Roman Governor of Judea, with His life hanging in the balance is, “Everyone on the side of Truth listens to me”! “In fact, the reason I came into the world, is to testify to the Truth”! To which, Pilate retorts, “What is Truth?”

And I get it! Or at least I think I do! I grew up in the sixties and seventies, right smack dab in the middle of Post-Modern Thought. My generation questioned everything, including Truth! We questioned “the Establishment”! We questioned “the Man”. We questioned anyone over thirty, and absolutely everyone in authority! We questioned every institution—the government, the military, even the Church! Maybe especially the Church! We questioned everything! But as I look back now, I wonder if we were really seeking the Truth back then? Or if we were simply looking for a way around it? Do you know what I mean?

What is Truth? That's the question, Pilate's question, his question to Jesus, specifically, as it pertains to the things of God! Is your Truth the same as mine, he wonders aloud—universal, ultimate, objective? Or is Sigmund Freud correct, Truth is simply relative? Is Truth bigger than me? Bigger than my own opinion? Bigger than “whatever I want it to be”? Because if not, doesn't that actually negate, even the concept of Truth?

I mean, if there are “different Truths” then what would you use to measure it? How would you know which Truths apply to you, and which Truths don't? Better yet, who gets to decide the Truth, especially the Truth concerning God? Oprah is quoted as saying, “One of the biggest mistakes we make is to believe that there is only one way. There are many diverse paths leading to God.” So, does Oprah get to decide Truth? Would you consider Hollywood a Bastion of Truth? There is a growing number of folks joining the “Church of Oprah” these days, choosing to believe that “all paths lead to God”! As well as many who see someone like Dr. Phil as their “Higher Power”! But is that the Truth?

Today is the final Sunday of the Church year. Next Sunday we start to celebrate Advent, the arrival of Messiah! It's New Year's Eve, if you will. And today is officially called, “The Feast of our Lord Jesus Christ the King”! That's a pretty Foundational Truth of the Christian Faith, by-the-way! Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Lord of Heaven and Earth! We hear of His majesty in our first reading from Revelation! Jesus is Lord! That's the Truth for those who choose to follow Him! But it is also the Truth for those who choose not to! And by-the-way, it's the Truth for those who aren't sure, as well! Which is where we, as the Church come in!

Look at Pontius Pilate in our reading today, because I don't think he is really sure! I think he may have been a “Seeker”. He even asks about Truth!

“Are you the King, Jesus? Are you the Promised Messiah, the Lord of all, the One with the Keys to Eternity? Are you the Ruler of the Kingdom of God, of Heaven and Earth, now and forevermore? Some say that you are. And I’d like to know myself! So, is that the Truth?”

I’m not sure Pilate gets a fair shake from Historians, and certainly not from the Church! Historians like Josephus tell us that Pilate was an arrogant political official, one who flaunted his power and authority! I know, that’s hard to believe about a political official! Luke points out that he did disgusting things, like mix the blood of criminals in with the Temple sacrifices! So, he was a wicked man, for sure! And some people say that his question to Jesus that day was meant to be sarcastic or snide. “Are you the King of the Jews?” Some Scholars even suggest that Pilate was in cahoots with the Jewish Leaders, right from the very start! So, we in the Church, usually make him out to be a real creep!

But I wonder! I mean, doesn’t Pilate hold all the cards? With just the wave of his hand he can unleash “Shock and Awe” on this poor Jewish Rabbi! Caesar is the rightful king! Everyone knows that! And Pilate’s job is to uphold that Truth, not to mention the entire Roman Jurisprudence System! Jesus is a direct threat to that authority and power, to the order and stability of the State! There really shouldn’t be a question here at all, should there? And yet Pilate has one! A big one! One that he asks several times! “Are you the King?” “Is that the Truth Jesus?

What if Pilate’s question was legitimate? What if Pilate was actually a Seeker? I know he came up with the wrong answer, and all! That’s pretty clear! But what if he was really searching for the Truth? I mean, just look at the interaction that day!

Just prior to today's early morning interview with Pilate, Jesus was arrested by the Jewish Religious Authorities, remember, and a contingent of Roman guards. He was then taken before Annas, the previous High Priest. And then, brought before Caiaphas, the current High Priest, the son-in-law of Annas. Jesus is a Jew, remember, and all of the accusations against Him concern Piety and Faith. So, the obvious place for Him to be tried would have been in the Jewish Religious Court, right? It just makes sense!

Sure, there is politics involved! There always is! And sure, Pilate has been charged by Caesar with keeping the Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome. But the atmosphere that morning, in the twilight hours just before dawn, is all about religion, ultimate truth!

Only the Jewish Council didn't have the power to execute anyone. And they really want Jesus dead! So, they take Him before the Roman Governor and try to get a charge of treason against Him, or at least sedition or insurrection. We know from Luke that Pilate then sent Jesus to Herod, the Jewish puppet king—who mocked Him and dressed Him up in an elegant robe, and then sent Him back to Pilate. Apparently, no one wants to deal with the Truth! Or with the question! Or with the King! They just want Him conveniently out of the way, much like still happens today! And now we find ourselves in the court of Pilate, don't we, with each one of us asking the question ourselves; "What is Truth?"

Remember, pious Jews weren't allowed to enter the Praetorium, the Palace of the Governor. To do so would defile them, and render them ritually "unclean". It would have prevented them from celebrating the Passover Feast, the very reason many were in town! So, what we have here is Jesus inside of the Governor's Mansion, in chains, beaten and bloody from Herod—and His accusers, the religious leaders, outside in the courtyard. And Pilate, the Prefect, the man in charge on Caesar's behalf, bouncing back and forth between the two like a ping-pong ball!

That's why I wonder if he might have been a Seeker! In the wee hours of the morning, Pilate goes out to the Jewish religious leaders with questions, and then back inside to Jesus with more questions! The most powerful man in all of Roman Judea—an extremely wealthy and famous man, a politically-connected mover and shaker—walks back and forth several times, in fact! Remember who Pilate is! Consider his character, as we have already seen, not to mention the position that he held! Would He have done that if he wasn't desperately searching for Truth?

Pilate asks, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" And he is told, "Well, if He wasn't a criminal, we wouldn't have brought Him here in the first place". Pilate then goes back inside and asks Jesus to His face, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answers, "Why, do you sense it, or has someone told you about me?" Pilate responds, "You are a King then, aren't you!" To which Jesus says, "Yeah! That's the reason I was born".

Two more times Pilate goes out to the crowds and tries to release Jesus. And two more times he comes back in and asks Jesus straight-out who He is, and where He came from! Three times he tells the crowds that he can find no basis for any charges against Jesus. And three times they call for His death anyway! They don't want to hear the Truth! And Pilate is "afraid" we are told. His wife, according to Matthew, has sent word to him, telling him not to have anything to do with the death of this innocent man! In John 19:12, we even read that "from then on Pilate tried to set Jesus free". But instead of accepting the Truth, instead of accepting Jesus as the Truth, Pilate goes and washes his hands!

I honestly think Pilate was seeking the Truth! I think he might have even been sensing it! I think he could tell that something profound was happening! I mean, why else would he repeatedly ask Jesus if He was a King?

Pilate knows that Rome rules the entire civilized world, and that Caesar is king! He knows that Herod is the puppet king of this Vassal State, and that Jesus is just a carpenter from Galilee! He clearly knows who's in charge, right, at least politically! And religiously, it's obviously these screaming crowds and their High Priest who are in charge! So, there is no way that this Nazarene is King of anything in this world! That's as plain as day!

So, is Pilate then asking if Jesus is King of another world? Doesn't it appear that somewhere, deep down inside of his heart, Pilate realizes that this Jesus fellow really is someone special, that he senses the Truth? Could he see that Truth standing right there in front of him? I know he made the wrong choice and all, that he rejected the Truth! But do you think he maybe knew?

If you are not convinced, consider the sign that Pilate had made, and ordered hung above Jesus' head on the Cross. It was written in three different languages, so that all who walked by would know what it said; Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth: The King of the Jews". The Chief Priests protested vehemently and demanded that it be changed from, "King of the Jews" to "Claimed to be King of the Jews". But Pilate refused! In the twenty-second verse, of John's very next chapter, it says, "Pilate answered, 'what I have written, I have written'! I think he sensed the Truth!"

There is an old Mel Brooks/Carl Reiner comedy skit called, "The 2,013-Year-Old-Man." In it, Reiner is an interviewer and Brooks is the 2,013-year-old man. At one point in the conversation, Reiner asks the old man, "Did you always believe in the Lord?" And Brooks replies, "No. We had a guy in our village named Phil, and for a time we worshipped him." Reiner asks, "You worshipped a guy named Phil? Why?" Brooks says, "Because he was big, and mean, and he could break you in two with his bare hands."

“Did you have prayers”, Reiner asks? Brooks answers, “Oh yeah, would you like to hear one? ‘O Phil please do not be mean and hurt us, or break us in two with your bare hands.’”

After a brief pause, Reiner says, “So when did you start worshipping the Lord?” Brooks answers, “Oh, well one day a big thunderstorm came up and a lightening bolt hit Phil. We gathered around and saw that he was dead. Then we said to one another, ‘There’s something bigger than Phil!’”

I believe Pilate could sense that there was something bigger than Phil! In fact, bigger than Caesar, and far bigger than himself! And I think he sensed that that something was standing right in front of him! I think Pilate knew the Truth, or at least suspected the Truth! Or at a minimum, questioned if that Truth was real! That’s also common today! But then Pilate turned and walked away! He washed his hands of the Truth!

So, do you know the Truth? Or suspect the Truth? Or at a minimum, question if it’s real? Do you realize that there is something bigger than you are, something standing in front of you right now? Is Jesus the King, or not? More to the point! Is Jesus your King, or not? It’s a simple question really! Do you sense the Truth? If so, how will you respond to it? And if not, then why not? You’ve heard it spoken by others. You’ve felt it stirring deep within you maybe. You may have even had moments when it was staring you right in the face! But have you embraced it? Are you willing to do so now?

You can’t stay neutral, you know. You can’t sit on the fence. You either publicly proclaim who He really is, take up your Cross daily and follow Him to the best of your ability! Or you publicly deny Him as Lord, wash your hands, and walk away! You have to pick a side, though, because Jesus says, “Everyone on the side of Truth listens to me”!

I'll bet you've heard the phrase, "the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth." Well, "the Truth" is like saying, "Hey mom, I came home late from school today." Whereas "the whole Truth" would be when you add "because I was sent to detention?" Leaving that part out tends to soften the blow, doesn't it? And "nothing but the Truth" is actually what precludes you from adding, "It was really Jimmy's fault. He made me jump up and start talking when I didn't want to."

So, here's the thing. Do we, as Christians, usually tell "the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth" concerning Jesus as Lord? Or do we add something in to soften it some, or leave something out to make it easier to hear? Are we okay, for instance, with the Truth that, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God," but then balk a bit at the whole Truth that, "Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life", or that, "No one comes to the Father except through the Son?" Do we ever try to add something in to soften the blow, such as, "God is Love, so somehow, in some unexplained way, everyone will be together in heaven," or, "All paths must surely lead to God?" Is that really the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth? Because that's not what Jesus says!

Chuck Swindoll writes about when he was mustering out of the Marine Corps and attended a Church near the base. He chose it because of the name, he said. I was a great big stone structure, with great big massive doors! Inside, on the walls of the narthex, he found huge portraits of great people displayed in a majestic panorama! There was Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln. There was Jesus of Nazareth, and one of the philosophers, Socrates he thought. There was even a picture of the current President at the time, Dwight D. Eisenhower! And above them, on a huge bronze plaque, were the engraved words, "You are all sons of God..." Dot, dot, dot, an ellipse, meaning, it's not complete, but that's enough for you to read.

Galatians 3:26 was the quoted reference, so he turned to his Bible and read it. The verse actually says, “You are all sons of God, by Faith in Christ Jesus.” They left out the “by Faith in Jesus Christ”. They left out the whole Truth! ...I, for one, don’t ever want to do that!

Today we too stand in the court of Pilate and confront Jesus. Or more accurately, today we are confronted by Jesus! Today we hear the Lord say, “Everyone on the side of Truth listens to me”, and then “the whole reason I was born was to testify to the Truth”. It’s serious, isn’t it? The Truth always is! Accepting Jesus for who He says He is, is serious! So, like Pilate, each one of us has a decision to make. Will you choose to follow Him as Lord, or wash your hands and walk away! And all of God’s people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

O' Holy and Eternal God, open up your heart to us as we open up our hearts to you, and receive these prayers that we lift up this morning. Hear us Lord, and grant us your Grace. Fill us now with your Holy Spirit. And awaken us to your Presence.

Lord, we Worship you and Praise you, because you are our God. You have created us and everything in this world. You have nurtured us and sustained us in the trials and tribulations of life. And you have celebrated with us as we bask in your Blessings. And one day Lord you will come and gather us together again, to live in your Holy City forever. For all of these blessings, and so many more, in this season of Thanksgiving, we are eternally thankful!

We look forward to that day Lord when you will take our hand and lead us home. But until then, we need your guidance and your strength in our daily walk. Fill us with your Presence Lord, so that we might shine your Glory into the world. Still us with your Peace Lord, so that we will witness to the Truth, in all that we say and do. And help us to discern your Will Father, to know your plan for our lives and our future, so that we will step boldly into it! Teach us what it means to listen to your Son, Father, and then empower us to do just that.

Today, Lord, we once again ask that you will be with those whom we love. Please reach out and touch..... Touch each of them with your own Presence Lord, granting Comfort and Healing as only you can do. Pour out Wisdom and Guidance. Rain down Encouragement and Power. And flood our world with Truth, please—Truth from you, Truth from your Word, and Truth from our own lips. Give Perseverance to those who struggle, and Peace to those who search! And give yourself, freely and completely, to all those who seek, so that all may know the Truth that you are Lord! We ask these things in the Name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as we pray together now the very prayer that He taught us saying, Our Father...