



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Will You Handle the Truth?

The Gospel of John

John 18:28-40

Tim Badal | June 19, 2022

We're in a series we've entitled simply "The Gospel of John," looking at the life and ministry of Jesus. We're learning about Him so we can trust and believe in Him. We not only

need to believe Who He is and what He has said, but that belief also needs to move us to action. We shouldn't allow it just to penetrate our heads, but also our hearts, hands and feet. It needs to impact every aspect of our lives.

We're now in the part of John's storyline where Jesus has been arrested. This is the morning of Good Friday, the day of Jesus' execution. In just a matter of hours, He will be going to the cross taking upon Himself the burden of our sin and shame, then dying our death for us.

However before He does this, He will experience a series of situations during the wee hours of the morning. So far He has already gone through two illegal trials: one at the house of Annas, the other at the house of Caiaphas, the high priest that year in the nation of Israel. In both cases, no witnesses were brought forth, nor were any formal charges made. There was no opportunity for any evidence to be presented. The Jews were aware that they themselves could not put a person to death, yet they wanted Jesus to die so they needed the Romans to accomplish that. That's why they next brought Him before Pilate, the governor of Judea and the "middle manager" for the Roman emperor. It is in this conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders—mainly with Pilate himself—that we'll discover the lessons today's text provides us with.

We don't know a lot about Pilate, but we can tell certain things about him based on what he says in this story. That can also be the case in movies we watch. Many times it's the love story or the action scene that can take our breath away. Yet in other movies, what's most significant is a one-liner that most stays in our memory. Sometimes these statements transcend the movies themselves. Let me give you some examples.

- "Here's looking at you, kid." Many people know that line, but they don't know it comes from the black and white movie *Casa Blanca*.
- Another one that might come to mind is, "If you build it, they will come," a line from the movie *Field of Dreams*. I've heard that line in the business world, the church world, as well as other arenas. In the movie, it had to do with building a baseball field in the middle of an Iowa cornfield.
- Let's try another one. "Life is like a box of chocolates." The reason I came to this as an opening illustration is that I said this very line in a local convenience store. "Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get." The guy said, "I love that motto! I don't know where it's from." I said, "It's from the movie *Forrest Gump*." These are lines that transcend their original context.
- The one that's so appropriate for us today is from Jack Nicholson, when he asks the question, "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth," from *A Few Good Men*.

These are one-liners that transcend time and space. Pilate is going to give us a one-liner here. In John 18, he asks, "What is truth?" That question is way bigger than Pilate could have ever imagined. It's a question that for millennia would be answered the same



way. But in that last 30 years or so, after millennia of humanity believing the truth about truth, it has now been brought into question. We don't know if Pilate was asking this in a scoffing way or if he was actually seeking an answer. Today we live in an age when it seems as though that question cannot be answered because we can't know truth.

One British artist put it this way when she said, "What is truth?" There's Pilate's question. She continued, "Truth doesn't really exist. Who is going to judge whether my experience of an incident is more valid than yours? No one can be trusted to be the judge of that." I want you to know there's not a better definition of truth from the world's point of view than this. The world today says truth is all relative. It's subjective. What you say is true may be true for you, but it's not true for me.

Now, I don't mean to be bombastic here, but I believe this has massive implications and ramifications for us as a society, in our government and in our view of our own identity—and it will shake humanity for generations to come. If there is no truth, we've got a problem. We toy around with this, but I say with all honesty, there is idiocy in making that sort of statement.

Think about building a house. Do you tell the builder there's no truth? "A foot can be to you whatever you want it to be? Do whatever you want with the electric system and the plumbing? It really doesn't matter." No, you know there are standards of truth. There are things that must be affirmed. Yet, when it comes to our being, when it comes to our sexuality, when it comes to all manner of things, we say there's no truth. And to say there is no truth is to destroy the very fabric of who we are as a society. Anarchy will become the reality of the day where there is no truth.

As we toy around with this proposition that there is no truth—with the question Pilate is asking—the Christian has a problem. In a world where they say there is no truth, we realize that there is truth. We're going to see this over and over again in our text this morning. Six times in our passage we'll see Jesus talk about a certain subject: kings and kingdoms.

Jesus has told us, "I am truth." Here's the proposition that all truth is based upon: Jesus is King. And depending on whether you believe this or not, you will be sent on one of two trajectories in this life and in the life to come. Jesus tells us, "I have come into this world and the whole purpose for My being here is to manifest the truth that I am King of kings and Lord of lords. I am in charge" (1 Timothy 6:15). He's also saying, "I know that when you look around, it looks as though I'm handcuffed and subject to your oversight, under your jurisdiction. But I want to make it abundantly clear that I am the One in charge."

Dutch reformer Abraham Kuyper put it this way: "There's not one square inch in all creation of which Jesus doesn't cry out, 'This is Mine.'" Jesus is King. Jesus is in charge. Jesus is the One Who determines what we're going to do and say. We are either going to live under His jurisdiction or He will send us away one day.

So what is truth? The Christian says, "This is truth. Jesus has declared, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' King Jesus is the way we get to God." When we affirm this truth, Jesus says, "That truth will set you free." That's why I like what Vincent Cheung says regarding this worldview: "Within the Christian worldview, Scripture is the sole and ultimate test for truth." God has given us a system of truth through the Scriptures. Since the Bible is God's revelation, it can never be wrong on any issue it addresses. A thorough knowledge and understanding of Scripture is our ultimate safeguard against satanic deception of every kind. The devil takes what God has created and counterfeits it. The devil is trying to build his own kingdom and he's building it on lies. Some of us—and of course the world—are buying into his lies. It's a very, very sad thing. We've got to be careful, as a church and as a people, that we don't fall for those lies.

John records that Jesus stands and declares, "I am King; follow Me." What we see in our text are three groups of people or individuals who look at Jesus, who have heard of His Kingship, and say, "I'm going to leave it. I don't want it." Let's see what happens when they say this.

Jesus is King. Without this truth, we will choose the wrong religious practice.

When we don't buy into, believe and trust that Jesus is King, inevitably we will choose the wrong religious practice. You can be altogether religious and be an enemy of God.

Early in the morning, the Pharisees brought Jesus to Pilate. We read in our text that the Pharisees then stayed out of Pilate's house, so as not to defile themselves, because it was the time of Passover. What the Pharisees should have been doing was praising God because Jesus was the Messiah they were looking for. They scoured the Scriptures, waiting for the Messiah to come

and now they had Jesus right before them. Not only did they not see Him for Who He was—even though He had told them Who He was—now even more, they wanted Him dead. They didn't just want Him in prison; they could have done that on their own. They didn't just want Him flogged; they could have done that on their own. Notice that the reason they brought Jesus to Pilate, in their own words, was, "We can't kill Him. Only you can. So we need you, Rome, to kill Jesus, because it's not in our jurisdiction to do that." They wanted Jesus dead.

How can religious people be such enemies of God? It's because when we put our faith and trust in religion, not Jesus Christ, it elevates us to being king. Jesus was in front of them as the King of kings and Lord of lords, yet they said, "He doesn't meet our criteria." For three years they'd walked around behind Jesus with clipboards. "Well, Jesus didn't do this; Jesus didn't do that." Jesus was failing their inspection. Yet Jesus was perfect, so what was He failing? He was failing in their assessment—which is what manmade religion is—of how people get right with God. That means man has become king and Jesus has become a nuisance.

Let's make some observations about manmade religion

Manmade religion will make you a hypocrite.

Every once in a while on Facebook, I'll see someone I know post, "The church is full of hypocrites." I would agree with them. Many churches are filled with people who are following manmade religion, which only produces hypocrites. Manmade religion says, "I've got a list of do's and don'ts that make me right with God and make you on the outs with God." A person who has a real relationship with Jesus Christ says, "Jesus is King; I am a filthy sinner, lost without Jesus." There's no hypocrisy there.

Here's the quintessential picture of manmade religion: Jesus doesn't pass their tests. There's a problem when Jesus can't pass your test for holiness.

So Jesus had failed their tests and we might think, "These guys are really, really upright guys." Well, they were. They would not even enter Pilate's home in order that they not be defiled during Passover. There was a clause in the Mosaic law in the Old Testament that said during times of festivals and feasts, in order to be ceremonially clean, one had to stay out of the house of a Gentile. It was one of the 613 commandments that are recorded in the Old Testament. Because the Pharisees were in lockstep with these laws, they said, "We can't do this so we're going to stay out here." Pilate had to come to them.

Now here's the problem. The Bible also says, "Do not murder." It also says, "Do not shed innocent blood." They were holding to their rules, all the while giving up on rules they didn't think were altogether that important. That's what makes us hypocrites. We say these things are important and will make someone holy, then the things we don't agree with, we leave over here. We hold people really accountable for these things. Why? Because we've got these things in order. These aren't problems for us, so we make sure we preach on them. But the things we struggle with we keep by the wayside. The Pharisees wanted to be ceremonially clean, all the while they were rotten on the inside. Jesus told them they were a bunch of whitewashed tombs. They were clean on the outside and defiled on the inside.

Part of the ceremonial cleaning is something we do in our day as well. We don't have a temple or the Mosaic law, but looking at you fine people, I'm guessing all of you did something before coming to church this morning. Either that or you look a whole lot better when you get up than I do. At some point today, all of you walked by a mirror. All of you looked in that mirror to make sure you were culturally "ceremonially" clean. As a bald man, I have to shave my head because there's still hair there. I know you've had questions about that. I'm bald by choice. I will ask Amanda, or one of my children, "Hey, how does it look in the back?" Why? Because I don't have a rearview mirror that covers that acreage. I recognize I may have missed some spots and I don't want to be culturally "unclean" to avoid becoming a laughingstock. I want the outside to look good.

We all came to church looking good. Don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with wanting to look good on the outside. God says He wants us to look good on the outside. However, the problem with manmade religion is it focuses on the outside while neglecting the inside. Some of us are worried more about how others will see us than how God sees us. We're more worried about putting our lives together so our neighbor think we are put together, yet we're sinning like crazy and out of control regarding what God sees. That's hypocrisy. When you care more about your outward appearance of holiness than your inward appearance, you will always be viewed as a hypocrite—and rightly so.

So these guys in our passage were as rotten and filthy scoundrels as they could have been, but they looked good on the outside. They were ready to put Jesus to death, shedding innocent blood, but they wouldn't dare make themselves unclean by walking into the house of a Gentile.

Manmade religion will not be honest.

Pilate asked, "Why are you waking me up early in the morning? You know I don't like early mornings. Why are we here?" "We've got a problem." "What's the problem?" "You've got to deal with this criminal." "What has He done?" "Well, why would you think we would bring Him if He wasn't a criminal?"

Notice that they didn't answer the question. They couldn't answer the question. In fact, what they said was a lie. They said He was a criminal. The Greek tense here implies He was a criminal in that present moment. "We caught Him in the act and if we don't do something about it, He's going to create a problem." Well, that wasn't true. They had to get one of Jesus' own followers to betray Him, so they could find the time and place to arrest Him. He was in a garden praying with His disciples; there was no commotion being made.

Last week we read how He told them that He had done everything publicly. Yet no witnesses were brought and no crime was attributed to Him. That meant the people had to connive and manipulate in order to make charges against Jesus. Manmade religion is all about manipulation. Manmade religion is all about working a situation in order to put the right light on it so it looks holy and pure. These guys had nothing on Jesus.

Manmade religion will hinder you from getting close to Jesus.

Probably the worst thing about manmade religion is that it hinders us from getting close to Jesus. He was right there in front of them. He was what they had been hoping and wishing for. They longed for an opportunity to see the Messiah, the Anointed One, and He was right in front of them. What had they done? They had cuffed Him, scoffed Him, punched Him in the face. They let the Romans torture the Anointed One and put Him on a cross.

Because you've built a religion of your own making, you can be so close to Jesus and yet so far from Him. Could it be in this place this morning that King Jesus is being sung about, preached and proclaimed, announced to everyone, yet you're here in this building but far from God? That is religion which will only get you one place—hell. They didn't want to believe the truth.

Jesus is King. Without this truth, we will commit to the wrong pursuit.

What about Pilate? Pilate shows us that not only do we go down the wrong religious path, as the chief priests and Pharisees did, but without that truth we will commit to the wrong pursuit.

Enter Pilate, the governor of Judea, the Roman middle manager under the direct appointment of Caesar himself. Pilate served from 26 A.D. to 37 A.D. This passage occurred about 33 A.D. Pilate has about four more years of leadership. We don't know much about him. We have less than a half chapter of Scripture here in the Gospel of John that even mentions him. There's not much written about him, but history talks about Pilate. He was a lousy leader in a couple ways.

First—and this is going to be really important as we see the narrative unfold—Pilate gave threats, but he was not given to action. He would say, "If you do this, then I'm going to do that." But that never took place. Rebellions rose up because the people knew his threats were idle.

Second, Pilate was such a lousy governor that mismanagement stories filled the editorial page in the Jewish Times. His mismanagement of projects were so bad that he had to resort to theft. He sent his men in to steal from the coffers of the temple in order to get the money he needed because of his mispending or overspending on needed projects. As a result, secular historians tell us that the emperor at that time, Tiberius, gave an ultimatum to Pilate that if he made any mistakes, he would be out.

If you don't know about Roman politics, when you're out, it doesn't mean forced retirement—it means forced death. So Pilate had some big concerns. If we have the chronology right, this ultimatum was given about year or two before this interaction with

Jesus. So when Jesus entered, Pilate had a problem. He was about to have an audience with Jesus, the greatest opportunity anyone could ever have, but it appears he couldn't get rid of Jesus fast enough. His interactions were brief and to the point. He wanted to wash his hands of Jesus, as we'll see in John 19. He wanted Jesus out of there. Pilate didn't have time for Jesus for two reasons: he was distracted by other things and he was seeking to protect his own reputation.

Pilate was distracted by other things.

When Jesus comes into our midst and announces to us, "I am King," we are having an audience with Him through His Holy Spirit. Our response will either be, "Yes, Jesus, You are King. I bow down to worship You; I order my life according to Your Kingdom," or we'll say, "I'm too busy to listen to You."

Pilate appeared to have been too busy to listen. He was preoccupied with and distracted by other things. Might it be that some of you this morning are far from God because you're preoccupied with other things so Jesus has become a nuisance? He's ruined your schedule. He's ruined your timing. He's ruined your plans for the day.

Every Sunday some of you are thinking, "Get on with it, Tim, so I can get on with my day. Let's move on. Enough about Jesus. Enough of all of this. I'm here because my wife (or husband or parents) says I have to be here. I'm here because it looks good on my holiness resume. But let's get on with it."

Some of you have moved on and are already on to the Donuts and Dogs. Let's get there. I hope the second service didn't eat everything. You're on to your festivities as fathers and families.

Like Pilate, we can be altogether distracted by a great many things, then when Jesus shows up, He gets in the way.

Pilate was seeking to protect his own kingdom.

More important than simply being distracted, Pilate was more worried about his kingdom than Christ's kingdom. Can I say this with all love and sincerity? Some of us don't want Jesus to be King because if that's true, then we aren't. Some of us are grabbing hold of our lives right now, saying, "This is my home, this is my car, this is my checkbook, this is my dream, this is my family—this is it. This is my kingdom."

Pilate had this little kingdom in the middle of a bigger worldly kingdom, and he thought, "I can't control the rest of the world, but I can control this." Some of you are white-knuckling it right now, trying to hold your kingdom together. You're weary and burdened because you were never intended to be the king. You're the mom who's trying to hold it all together. You're anxious and worried. Why? Because you were never intended to be the king. Dad, you're lording it over your children, beating them down, because you want to be king. And you're wondering why nobody cares about you, loves you or respects you. You were never intended to be king. Kids, you were never intended to be king.

King Jesus said to Pilate, the religious leaders and to you and me, "All who are weary and trying to be king, I come to give you rest." We can hand over the keys of our kingship and do what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all that you're worried about in your little kingdom will be added unto you." Pilate wanted to be king, just like some of us in this place want to be king. We are weary and burdened because we were never intended to be kings; we were intended to be subjects within the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is King. Without this truth, we will condemn the wrong person.

John 18:38-40 give us one more example. Here's the greatest do-over ever given. Pilate was going to do the unthinkable. He was so concerned to selfishly hold his kingdom that he said, "I don't find any error in this Man. I find no crimes. He should be set free. In fact, because it's Passover, I'm going to set Him free." But the people said, "No, we don't want Jesus to be freed. We want Barabbas." Barabbas was an insurrectionist. He was promoting treason. He was the terrorist, the robber. Everything said about Barabbas, both in secular and biblical history, is all bad. Everything that is said about Jesus is all good. The crowd said, "We would rather have Jesus killed and Barabbas set free."

When Jesus isn't your King, when you do not affirm that truth, you will always condemn the wrong person. So with one voice, the sinners of the world say, "Jesus is the problem. I'm not." Though you and I should stand condemned under the wrath and judgment of God, we point to Jesus and say, "Jesus is the problem. Let's put Jesus to death so we can be king." But here's the amazing thing about God's plan. Jesus laid down His life so that, through the hands of sinful men, He might win us back to Himself.

Let me show you one more thing. At the beginning of this passage, we saw that they would not enter Pilate's house because it was Passover. Pilate says at the end of the passage, "Because it's Passover, I will let one of your prisoners go free." He was trying to give Jesus an out. Passover is here twice, at the beginning and end of this passage. Sandwiched between those two slices of Passover bread is this whole interaction. Why? John is reminding us that God's judgment is at hand. Passover was the celebration of when God's judgment came into Egypt and God spoke this truth: "My judgment is coming. You don't have to experience it if you will believe My words. If you will believe that I am King and that My words are true, then put the blood of a lamb on your doorposts and the angel of death will pass over you." So on this Passover, God was again saying, "I am King. I will have jurisdiction over rebellion in My Kingdom; My judgment is coming. But if you will believe My words of truth, then by faith you will say, 'God, You are King, I am not; I need the blood of Jesus so that Your judgment will pass over me.'" By the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, you and I who believe Jesus to be the truth are set free, made whole and made holy.

That is what King Jesus does. King Jesus is the greatest King. He's the most benevolent King. King Jesus is the most gracious King. He is the most merciful King. For all who have been opposed to His Kingship, Jesus in His patience gives you yet another opportunity so that His judgment will pass over you. This must be received by faith. Is Jesus your King? If He's not, good luck, because you were never intended to rule and reign as king and you will fail. But by the grace of King Jesus, He has come to free you from sin and set you free through His truth.

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