

John 18:38

- What is truth? -

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Context

- ❖ “I would like to know the truth,” about life’s ultimate questions, such as life and death, meaning and purpose of my life, my origin and my destination. Does God exist?
- ❖ “What is truth?” Pontius Pilate asked.” Every politician, lawyer, judge, businessman, journalist, every human should ask himself this question. The answer to this question is not primarily a set of proven facts and affairs, or a philosophical answer, but a person, Jesus Christ.
- ❖ “What is truth?” Pontius Pilate asked.” Was he among the philosophers of his age? It sounds like the ultimate philosophical question, but it is a statement of power. This question reflects the tensions which exist between POWER and FEAR, TRUTH and JUSTICE.
 - Lord Acton wrote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."¹
 - If this is the case, TRUTH and JUSTICE are the first victims of POWER. Whereas power should be subordinated and subservient to truth and justice.
 - Abraham Lincoln, former president of the United States said: “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”
 - The prophet Zechariah wrote: “So he (angel of God) said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: **‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’** says the Lord Almighty.”
 - “What is truth?” Pilate asked.” He was not interested in the answer. He wants to safeguard his own position.

¹ (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2016, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dalberg-Acton,_1st_Baron_Acton

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of John. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context, form and structure

- ❖ John 18:38 is part of the trial against Jesus:
 - The first interrogation by Pontius Pilate (John 18:28-38).
 - First attempt to set Jesus free; Barabbas or Jesus (John 18:39-40).
 - Second attempt to set him free; the humiliation of Jesus (John 19:1-7).
 - The second interrogation by Pontius Pilate (John 19:8-11).
 - Third attempt to release Jesus (John 19:12).
 - Finally, Pilate handed him over to be crucified, under pressure of the Jews (John 13-16).

- ❖ The first interrogation (John 18:28-38):

Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

So Pilate came out to them and asked, “What charges are you bringing against this man?”

“If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.”

Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”

“But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected.

This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

Pontius Pilate	Jesus
Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”	“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”
“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have	Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now

done?"	my kingdom is from another place."
"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.	Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."
"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews.	

Technical notes and theological background

- ❖ Pontius Pilate was a Roman Governor of Judea (A.D. 26-36/37) during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. He is known to have treated Jewish customs with contempt. Josephus recorded some conflicts between Pilate and the Jews. The Jews didn't like him.²
 - He had to keep order and peace under Roman power.
 - He had to uphold justice according Roman standards.

	power – politics	(in)justice
Vs. 18:28-38		"What charges are you bringing against this man?" "I find no basis for a charge against him."
Vs. 18:38-40	"But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"	
Vs. 19:1-7	"Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ... Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him.'"	"As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

² Hoehner, H. (1992). *Pontius Pilate*. In: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (pp. 615-617). Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Vs. 19:8-12	“Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”	“Pilate tried to set Jesus free,”
Vs. 19:12-16	“The Jews kept shouting, ‘If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.’ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat.”	“Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.”

❖ Truth³

- Truth = “**ἀλήθεια**” **1. the quality of being in accord with what is true, truthfulness, dependability, uprightness** in thought and deed; **2. the content of what is true, truth.**⁴
 - Truth is an important theme in the Gospel John:

“For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ.” (Jn 1:17) This is not meant to contrast Moses and Jesus, but to supplement Moses. Ex 34.6 <

Contrary to the Greek background, truth is personal embodied in Christ Jesus, not merely intellectual. Truth is acquired through the revelation of God, not through mental exercise, nor by philosophizing, nor by personal experiences:

Jesus said: “**I am the way and the truth and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6) In this famous saying the words way, truth and life are synonymous. The word “**way**” refers to the Thora, the law given by Moses to Israel.

Exposition

Verse 38

- ❖ This passage is about:

³ Crump, D. (1992). *Pontius Pilate*. In: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (p. 859-862). Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 42)

○ Power

- Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” (Jn 19:10).
- Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” (Jn 19:11).
- When Pilate said: “What is truth?” He was not interested in the answer. “After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them.” He was more worried about his position as a governor and as a judge.

Milne commented: “For a moment Pilate appears fascinated and held, as he faces the issues of his personal destiny. *What is truth?* (38). Is this cynical dismissal? So, famously, thought Francis Bacon: ‘ “What is truth?” asked jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.’ But perhaps it was asked wistfully also, from a lifetime’s struggle as a professional politician, steeped in the daily compromises, the prudential balancing of forces, the application of ruthless power, that half-light world of greys and polka dots where people grope wearily for truth and the soul shrivels and dies. Did Pilate, as his destiny for a fleeting second hung in the balances, catch a glimpse in Jesus of a truer, purer, brighter world? We cannot be sure. What is certain is that if the moment came it also passed. The forgiving moment slipped by as Pilate turned on his heel to report his decision to the Jewish leaders.”⁵

○ Justice – injustice: “I find no basis for a charge against him.” Pilate repeated these words twice:

- “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him” (Jn 19:4).
- “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him” (Jn 19:6).

○ Truth

- **The truth is:** “I find no basis for a charge against him.”
 - But “What is truth?” When there is no basis for a charge and at the same time, we read: “Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified” (Jn 19:16). “Truth” has been rendered void of no value.
- **When Jesus Christ was crucified, the truth was crucified,** the death of truth! Pilate makes clear that in this moment human values don’t count, and what is more important, God’s values don’t count, because God is truth.
- **When Jesus Christ resurrected from the death, the truth was resurrected,** and showed its victory over lies, and injustice. The “truth” was vindicated by God himself. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead proves that he really is:

⁵ Milne, B. (1993, p. 267).

“the life, the truth and the way” (Jn 14:6), and the eternal “WORD of God” (Jn 1:1).

- Jesus Christ came to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). That means he came to testify and:
 - To show the love and reliability of God (Jn 3:16; 8:26).
 - To expose sin and evil (Jn 16:8; Jn 7:7).
 - To show the righteousness and mercy of God (Jn 16:8; 17:25).
 - To judge the world (Jn 8:26; 9:39) and Satan (Jn 12:31; 16:11) and to save everyone who has faith in Him (Jn 12:47).
- Truth requires:
 - Faith. Without truth, faith becomes an impossibility.
 - Obedience. **“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”** (Jn 18:37).
 - Pilate was not on the **“side of truth.”** He didn’t listen to Jesus and finally he handed Jesus over to be crucified.
- Truth aligns with the “light.” “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 19:5; 8:12). “Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light” (Jn 3:21).
 - Truth stands in opposition to “lie” (Jn 8:44), “deception”, “illusion”, “darkness” (Jn 12:46).

Application

- ❖ Glorify Christ, because he is the truth of God. He embodies the truth.
- ❖ Ask the question why people do not accept the “truth” like Pontius Pilate.
 - Is it because they are not interested in “truth” as such?
 - Is it because they think that the “truth” will endanger their position?
 - Is it because the “truth” exposes their hidden sinful lives?
 - Is it because of POWER and FEAR?
 - Is it because man loves the darkness more than the light (“truth”; Jn 3:19)?
 - Truth stands in opposition to “lie” (Jn 8:44), “deception”, “illusion”, “darkness” (Jn 12:46).
- ❖ Pay attention to
 - The fact that the crucifixion of Jesus meant the crucifixion of truth.
 - The same happens when people are persecuted.
 - The resurrection of Jesus implies the vindication and the victory of truth.
 - The truth of God will prevail.
 - The fact that “truth” aligns with the “light.” “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 19:5; 8:12). “Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light” (Jn 3:21).
 - Truth is the core value of love.

- Truth guides righteousness, justice and mercy.
 - Truth protects peace and purity of heart.
 - Truth brings joy and wisdom.
- ❖ When somebody wants to safeguard a (high) position associated with power, then truth, justice and mercy are often the first victims, together with his political foes. There is a saying of Lord Acton, the 19th-century British historian: “Power tends to corrupt.” This is also true for Pontius Pilate. His character was tested, and he failed.
- Pastors who preach Christ, preach “the way, the truth and the life.” That means:
 - The truth (Jesus Christ) opens our eyes to see God in his full glory: Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Quotes⁶

- ❖ “Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters” (Albert Einstein)
- ❖ “I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- ❖ “If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.” (Mark Twain)
- ❖ “When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it--always.” (Mahatma Gandhi)
- ❖ “Above all, don't lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love.” (Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

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⁶ Goodreads. (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2016, from <http://www.goodreads.com>

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