

Sermon Growth Guide

March 28, 2021

To Give His Life - The Truth

John 18:28-40

Key Verse: John 18:36 “Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’”

Big Idea: We crave power in the now, but Jesus comes with truth eternal.

Foundations

Pastor Tim asks a key question this week, “What will you do with Jesus?”

Our passage depicts a bloodthirsty crowd that is being fueled by the Jewish religious leaders who are convinced that Jesus is a blasphemer and ought to therefore be condemned to death.

But why the cross? The Jews had the authority to stone Jesus, but they brought Jesus to Pilate for one purpose, death by crucifixion. They wanted to prove that Jesus was cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23). Pastor Tim is very clear: the Jewish authorities didn’t just want Jesus dead, they wanted his message dead too. So they sought to damn Jesus and His message to death on a cross.

Today is Palm Sunday and we now move into Holy Week. Next Sunday we celebrate the Resurrection. Where curse and damnation were sought, eternal life was born, reconciliation with God through Christ.

The Jews, like us today, craved power in the now, but Jesus came in Truth—that in Him is life and life eternal.

What will you do with Jesus? Open your time together in prayer, asking the Spirit to do mighty works in your hearts.

Understanding God’s Word

According to John 18:28, when is the Passover meal in relation to Jesus being brought before Pilate?

In verse 37, what reason does Jesus give for being born?

Pulling from the whole counsel of Scripture, together as a group respond to Pilate’s question in verse 38.

Applying God’s Word

We crave power in the now, but Jesus comes with truth eternal. A part of this truth is that Jesus is Lord of all. What will you do with Jesus? Will you receive His Lordship over the totality of who you are?

Identify areas of your life that you would like to give over to Jesus more fully. Lift up one another’s desires to God in prayer.

Witnessing God’s Word

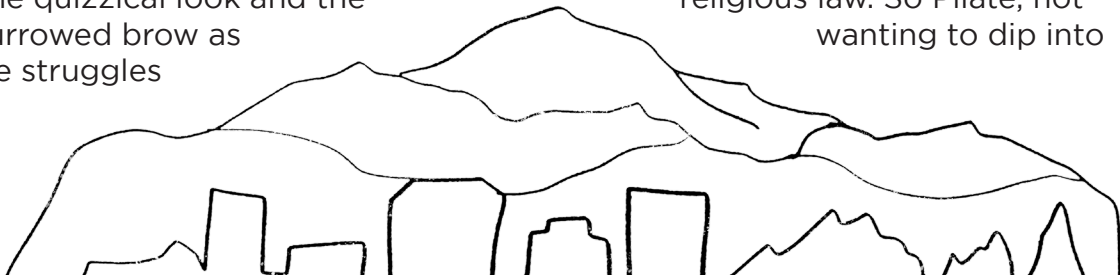
How might you witness to those around you this week that there is Truth, objective truth, and truth is seen most clearly in the acts and claims and person of Jesus Christ? John opens his Gospel by saying that Jesus was characterized by the fullness of “grace and truth.” How can you better model this fullness in your daily interactions?

What to do with Jesus of Nazareth? That's the question today. It's Palm Sunday. We read about Palm Sunday five weeks ago so that we could look more deeply at the week Jesus spent in Jerusalem leading up to His arrest, His death on the cross, and His resurrection, but today is Palm Sunday on the church calendar. Last year we had nobody in the house for Palm Sunday. This year we have some in the house, but most still at home. Last year I suggested that kids pull branches off the houseplants to wave around for Palm Sunday. This year I'm not going to suggest that. I'm going to insist on it! Go get 'em kids! But we are not reading the Palm Sunday passage today. We are reading about Jesus before Pontius Pilate talking about kingdoms, truth and power. On Palm Sunday, the people expected Jesus the Messiah to ride into Jerusalem in power to toss out the evildoers and establish His kingdom by force. Jesus rode in on a donkey. Today the same pattern repeats. Pilate is used to power contests, but what Jesus is doing has him absolutely baffled. What to do with Jesus of Nazareth? What would you do in Pilate's shoes? What will you do with Jesus?

This is a dramatic story, isn't it? You can picture it. You can see the calm posture of Jesus in chains or bound with rope. You can imagine the close-up shots of Pontius Pilate; you can almost see the sweat on his forehead (more sweat drops, yells the producer), the gentle raise of the eyebrow, the quizzical look and the furrowed brow as he struggles

inside himself, and finally the long gaze out the window over the horizon as he finishes with, "What is truth?" It's a dramatic moment. I want to arrange our thoughts around the three questions Pilate asks. What do you do with Jesus? Pilate asked three questions: **(1) Are you the King of the Jews?, (2) Am I a Jew? and finally, (3) What is truth?** What are you going to do with Jesus of Nazareth? You have to do something with Jesus. Each of us does. These three questions are part of the answer.

To catch up, Jesus was taken by force after the Last Supper, beaten and questioned all night, thrown before a cockamamie Sanhedrin council meeting in the middle of the night that had been planned only to incriminate him and charge him with heresy, then dragged to the house of Pontius Pilate, who was the Roman governor of Roman-occupied Judea. Pilate was in town temporarily because the festival of Passover was happening, and that usually caused a lot of social and political unrest. Roman governors frowned on that sort of thing. Pilate would not be surprised to find a backlog of cases waiting for him to adjudicate when he came to Jerusalem, and he would not be shocked to see local authorities calling on him to render judgements, even at the break of dawn. "So Pilate came out to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?'" (John 18:29). Let's get this over with. But they don't have a Roman law Jesus broke, just their own religious law. So Pilate, not wanting to dip into



religious problems, tells them to go handle it themselves. Then the plot thickens. “We would,” they say, “but we don’t have the authority to execute.”

Now Pilate knows, they want this man dead. Get me a cup of coffee; this is getting real. Romans occupied a territory and retained for themselves the authority of life and death for all the people they conquered. Sometimes they deferred that authority to locals. We see that. Sometimes the local authorities could execute someone, but never without the consent of the Roman governor. Right now, they complain, they don’t have the right to do it. But there is more to this. If they executed Jesus, it would be by stoning him. Roman execution is crucifixion. Roman citizens could be beheaded, but everybody else suffered the shame of the most horrific death imaginable on a cross. But there is more still. See, it isn’t just painful death the authorities are looking for, but the curse of being hung on a cross. Deuteronomy 21:23 says, “anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.” That just doesn’t happen to you unless God has named you cursed. What they want is not for Jesus to be dead, but for Jesus to be damned. If they can only get Jesus on a cross, that would discredit His claims. His teaching would die with Him; His followers would give up on Him; power would return to them. Don’t just kill the man; kill the message. “This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die” (John 18:32). What do you do with Jesus of Nazareth? Make Him die a curse.

Now we get to Pilate, rubbing

the sleep out of his eyes. “Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’” (John 18:33). Here’s our first question: **(1) Are you the King of the Jews?** Who are you, Jesus? Maybe Pilate heard some things, maybe he thought there would not be this much upset unless this Jesus was very important, maybe he saw something royal in Jesus’ eyes. It was enough to wonder, just who am I dealing with here? Roman governors dealt with local rulers all the time. The conquered people still had their traditions, their tribal leaders, their royal families, and all that. The important thing was to let everyone know very clearly, if you have a “king,” that’s fine, but the power lies with Rome. Compared to my Caesar, your king is a joke. Within Pilate’s question is a little commentary about how the King of the Jews is doing. “Are you the king of these people? How’s that going? You know, these people, they don’t like you! Your own people dragged you in here! They hate you.”

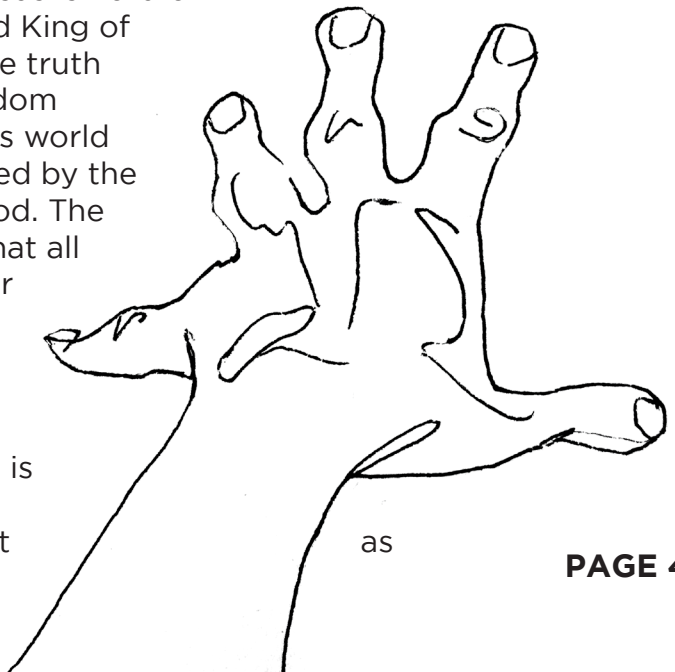
There is no hate like “Jesus hate.” Have you ever thought about that? Anne Rice sat down to research her book on the life of Jesus years ago, before she became a Christian, and she was blown away by the research she found. She opened volume after volume of scholars who devoted their entire lives to discrediting the ideas of Jesus, tearing every historical record of Jesus apart as much as they could. Nobody does this for people they want to study. Plato researchers don’t tear Plato apart. Shakespeare scholars don’t tear Shakespeare apart. Napoleon’s historians don’t even tear Napoleon apart. They

study these people because they are interested in them and think there is something to learn. But with Jesus, it's all about tearing Him down, destroying Him. Why? If Plato's teachings are true, fine, interesting. If Shakespeare spoke truth, fine, interesting. But if what Jesus claimed is true, we have to change our lives. So, Pilate wants to know: Are you the King of the Jews? If so, he knows what to do with Him.

“Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’” (John 18:34). Now we get the second question: **“Am I a Jew?”** Pilate replied. ‘Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’” (John 18:35). (2) Am I a Jew? Pilate asks. Pilate is probably just being a jerk here; it's a snide question, dismissive and a little racist. Pilate says, “I'm not one of you. I'm not part of your people. Am I one of your own?” Pontius Pilate is used to dealing with local rulers, with so-called kings who think much of themselves. But he knows where the real power lies. It lies with Rome. The Roman Empire that has taken the whole world by violence and forced king after king to their knees to kiss the signet ring of the greatest power the world has ever seen: Caesar. Now, Jesus says His kingdom is different, it is not of this world, whatever that means. Pilate thinks in terms of kingdom versus kingdom, and his kingdom definitely beats Jesus' kingdom. That's what Pilate means, but take it a little deeper and ask again. Am I one of your people? That's actually the question Jesus begins to answer.

“You are a king, then!’ said Pilate.

Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me’” (John 18:37). Jesus pivots to truth. The reason I was born, He says, is to testify to the truth. The truth. The truth is bigger than kingdoms. The truth is bigger than power-grabbing Roman governors. The truth is bigger than the Roman Empire. The truth is everything. The truth is reality, the way it is, and Jesus Christ over it all. If Jesus has authority, it is not authority over some worldly kingdom that comes to compete with Pilate's Rome. If Jesus has authority, it is because Jesus is the Truth. Which brings us to the final question, the question producers of Jesus films have been waiting for, the deep, dramatic question (More sweat on the brow! Get that camera in tight!) **(3) What is truth?** Maybe it's an honest question. Maybe it's a philosophical moment for Pilate. But I think he just can't see what truth has to do with anything. It's all about power. It's all about power. If I have the power, I'll tell you what truth is. But Jesus says truth is bigger than that. The truth is that Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. The truth is a Kingdom not of this world established by the Son of God. The truth is that all the power of Rome, or any human kingdom, is about as important



as

an ant or a blade of grass compared to the eternity and majesty of the Kingdom Christ has come to establish. What is truth? Truth is Jesus.

The people on Palm Sunday wanted a Messiah who would ride in and destroy the evildoers, the Roman occupiers. Pilate was used to this sort of ruler, this sort of king. But what did Jesus know? Jesus knew that if He rode in and flashed His sword and destroyed every evildoer and sinner, what? Who would be left? No one. Jesus didn't come to slay sinners. Jesus came to save sinners. He didn't come to overthrow some temporary worldly power. He came to establish an eternal Kingdom in truth. To do that, to save and redeem, not seek and destroy, Jesus knew He had to give His life.

We get to the last part of this passage and we find Barabbas. A revolutionary, perhaps. A murderer, maybe. A criminal. His name, Barabbas, means "son of the father." "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, 'I find no basis for a charge against him. 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?'' They shouted back, 'No, not him! Give us Barabbas!' Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising" (John 18:38-40). Give us Barabbas. The criminal is set free, and the righteous man goes to die. Do you think Barabbas paused when they opened the prison door? Don't imagine he asked any questions. "You're free, Barabbas. Out you go." "Really. Why? I just need

some context here." No. Out like a shot. The criminal goes free, the righteous is condemned. This is a picture of it right here, this is the Gospel right here, this is what Jesus came to do. He came to give His life for us, that we, though guilty and stained, could go free, while He, though perfect and righteous, could take our place. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Three questions. "Are you the King?" Yes, Jesus is the King. His is the power and the glory forever and ever. "Am I one of his people?" You are, if you believe. For this reason Jesus came, that to all who believe in Him, He may give authority to become children of God, to enter His family and be His people. "What is truth?" Truth is the reality that Jesus Christ is Lord. There is no power above or beside. He is Lord. His Kingdom is over all. Truth is the reality and recognition that Jesus Christ is Savior. He has come to redeem you. For you, in truth, He came to give His life. What will you do with Jesus of Nazareth?

