

+ John 18:37-38 + Name of Wondrous Love – The Truth¹ + Lenten Midweek #4 + 6 March 2013 +

Kids are filled with questions. Someone once observed, “One child can ask more questions than ten wise men can answer.” When a child asks, “Why is the grass green?”, it doesn’t take long to answer. When they ask, “Where do babies come from?”, the answer comes more slowly, but they want to know. Curiosity is their middle name. Asking questions is how they learn.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had his questions too. Tonight we consider his most well-known question, **“What is truth?”** You see, Pilate’s problem wasn’t in asking the wrong question, but in not accepting the right answer. Instead of listening to Jesus’ answer, he turned on his heel and walked away.

Earlier on Maundy Thursday evening, Jesus had given his answer to the disciples. **“I am...the truth...”**, he told them. If you listen carefully, note that he didn’t say, “I am truthful.” Of course, he is. The sinless Son of God cannot lie. Nor did he say, “I’ll tell you the truth.” The prophets and apostles did that. They were only mouthpieces, however, proclaiming truths that God gave them. Jesus is so much more than that. He is truth itself. What did our Savior mean? As we listen to the dialogue between him and Pontius Pilate that first Good Friday, we’ll find the answer, and that answer points us to another of Jesus’ **NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE—THE TRUTH.**

Late Thursday evening, the Jewish court, called the Sanhedrin, had already passed the death sentence for Jesus. As a nation subject to Roman rule, however, they could not carry out the death penalty no matter how much they wanted to do so. Their Roman conquerors had wisely reserved that power and right for themselves. So early Friday morning, they hauled their prisoner to the palace of the Roman governor.

...But what accusation would they bring before Pilate? What accusation would stick? The religious charge of blasphemy that they had manufactured in their own court wouldn’t even get a hearing from Pilate. New charges were in order, and their sin-darkened and hell-poisoned hearts rose to the challenge. **“We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.”** (Luke 23:2)

The Jews cleverly knew that the Roman governor had to explore this charge. No official representative of Rome could ignore such a threat to the Roman emperor. When Pilate asked the accused, **“Are you a king, then?”**, Jesus answered, **“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.”**

In response, all Pilate could muster was the jaded question **“What is truth?”** With his weary question Pilate seemed to imply that there was no absolute truth, especially in religious matters. Perhaps we should not expect any other reaction from him. The Roman culture in which he was steeped had abandoned faith in religion and morality. It even laughed at its own gods and paid more attention to things like dreams and astrology. If anything, Pilate was a pagan skeptic, a practical agnostic. For him the answer was simple. There is no truth.

Sound familiar? The unbelieving world still asks the question **“What is truth?”** They insist that absolute truth in matters of morality and religion simply does not exist. What seems true for one generation may change for the next. What seems true for me doesn’t have to be true for you.

Just listen to their so-called “wise” questions: Was the world created in six days by an almighty God, or did it all come into being with an accidental big bang? Did God make humanity as the crown of his creation, or did mankind claw its way to the top of the evolutionary ladder? Are human beings merely advanced animals who can satisfy their sexual desires any which way, or does God have specific roles and boundaries for sex and marriage? Is all mankind sinful and in need of salvation, or is there no absolute moral standard to which we are held accountable? Is salvation something people can work out for themselves, or is it a gift of God? Is it even necessary? “Truth is relative and so is right and wrong” is their slogan. “What is right or wrong for me might not be for you, but that’s okay as you long as you don’t tell me that my truth is wrong,” or to put it another way, “There is no truth.”

We know the right answer to Pilate’s question. By God’s grace from the pages of Holy Scripture, we know the truth of salvation found only in Christ Jesus, perhaps even knowing it from little on. Perhaps for us the question isn’t **“What is truth?”**, but “What is the truth worth?” Again this holy season it’s time to examine our response

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to that important question. What does my hearing of the truth, my reading of the truth, my studying of the truth, my sharing of the truth show about its importance to me?

Did you hear how Jesus answered Pilate's question even before it was asked? ***"I came into the world, to testify to the truth."*** Truth was standing before Pilate that day in the person of the Son of God. Truth always confronts us in the person of Jesus. He shows us what we are—sinful and condemned to eternal death. He shows us what we become through him—forgiven and innocent in God's sight. When it comes to salvation, there's no need for speculation or searching. We have the truth!

Jesus Christ is God's living word of salvation. He is truth in person! If this were mathematics, we'd say, "Jesus = Truth" or "Jesus = Salvation." He is truth in action. He stepped from eternity into time, clothed divinity in humanity, slept in a manger for his cradle, suffered on a cross, shed his blood as the God-man to make himself the truth of our salvation. If we want to know how to be saved, there is only one answer—Christ. If we want to tell others how to be saved, there is only one truth to speak—Christ. We can live without many of the "truths" the world puts forward, but we cannot be saved without Christ.

Pilate had the opportunity to learn the truth that first Good Friday. He had the truth standing before him in person, but he would not listen. Today Jesus the Truth stands before us again in his Word. Through his Apostle Paul, he reminds us of the real wisdom that becomes ours through Christ alone. ***"From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*** (2 Timothy 3:15)

Again through his Apostle, God shows us the only way for us to have access to the Truth. ***"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** (Romans 10:17) Of course, Jesus himself reminds us that he himself is the only source of Truth. ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** (John 8:31-32) Would we know the glorious truth of how sinners become saints, how enemies of God become his precious children, how slaves of sin become servants of the Savior, how people hell-bent become heaven-bound? Then we need to listen to Jesus. We need to drink in his Word. We need to ***"diligently study the Scriptures...that testify about [Jesus],"*** the Truth (John 5:39). We need to be in his Word here in worship, in group Bible study, in personal devotions. We need to study and grow in that Truth!

Children have a way of asking questions. Unlike Pilate, they often listen to the answers. May God help us listen with believing hearts to Jesus' answer to that all-important question ***"What is truth?"*** May God help us treasure Jesus' answer, ***"I am the Truth,"*** because once again that name shows his wondrous love for sinners like you and me. Amen.