JESUS, THE KING OF TRUTH

John 18:28-19:16a

Key Verse: 18:37

“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.”

Before we look at today’s passage, I want to take a moment to think about truth. There’s a question that comes up in today’s passage that I think we should ask ourselves. *What is truth?* I don’t think this is a question that we ask ourselves very often, maybe we maybe even haven’t even thought about at all, but this is a very important question that needs to be answered through our lives. Many philosophers and poets have struggled with this question over the years of mankind’s’ existence, and wondered if there is an ultimate truth. Recently, I’ve been thinking about truth, what is true, and what is real, but I have to confess, not in the spiritual sense at all. I’ve been watching a lot of Animal Planet these days, and there’s a show called, Finding Bigfoot. Basically it is a show all about searching for truth in finding out whether or not Bigfoot is real. There are people on this show who have been investigating literally for 25 years, some that have PhDs in Bigfootology. They present a lot of “eye witnesses” stories, sometimes even find tangible evidence, and it’s really compelling. I used to scoff at the idea at a Bigfoot, but all of a sudden I found myself asking, what is the truth about Bigfoot? I actually started doing a lot of research on Bigfoot, even neglecting writing my message because of my research project. Many of us today, really seek out these truths, does Bigfoot exist? Do aliens exist? Mermaids? Some even seek out social justice truths, political truths, economical truths, and some even create their own truths. The bottom line is, we all search for truths and we build our lives on these truths. But the question is, are these truths real truths? Or are we building our lives on wishful thinking, self-proclaimed ideas, and hollow ideology?

Today’s passage helps us to understand how important it is to know the one ultimate truth, and to really build our lives on it (Him), commit ourselves to it (Him), and stand on the side of it (Him). If we do not know truth, we find our lives are gravely affected and in the same way when we find truths our lives are greatly affected. Today we will look at the passage in 3 parts. First, denying the truth. Second, Committing to the truth. And third, Jesus is the Truth. May we honestly approach God today, allow his truth saturate our hearts, and newly affect our lives.

**First, Denying the existence of Truth (18:28-31)**
In the movie, Men of Honor, there is a famous scene between Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson. In a heated trial, Tom pushes Jack to tell the truth. Jack Nicholson responds by saying, “You want the truth? You want the truth? You can’t handle the truth!” The irony was, Jack himself could not handle the truth, and instead denied his guilt in his actions. Many people want the truth, but honestly can’t handle it, so although they may know the truth they deny it and reject truth in their lives, and within themselves. In today’s passage, we see how this is parallel with the Jewish leaders. Look at vs. 28. After Jesus’ arrest and pretrial before the high priests, the Jewish leaders took Jesus to the palace of the Roman governor Pilate. They had been rallying up and stirring up anger all night, and by now it was early morning, the day before the Passover. To avoid ceremonial uncleanness they didn’t want to enter the palace in order that they could eat the Passover. But what were they doing all night, and what were they on their way to do? They were taking an innocent man to be punished and crucified. It’s so ironic. It’s like if I was scheming to kill everyone here, but waited until Monday to do it in order to keep the Sabbath holy. They were completely blind to the true blemishes of their hearts the real cause of their uncleanness. It wasn’t the Gentile grounds that would make them unclean, but the murderous thoughts they were churning in their hearts. Just to remind you, these aren’t your village idiots, these are Jewish leaders, those who are well educated, and who are considered the religious leaders among society. They are the ones who are revered as holy, and who are the experts on the Bible and God. So what is going on here? Why are they so oblivious to their own sins?

In vs. 29 Pilate asks them, what charges are you bringing against this man? They respond by saying, “If he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you.” Their defensive response reveals the real problem of their hearts. They had no truth within them. The only truth they did have, were their own which they created in their own reality. The real truth was not that Jesus was a criminal, but in John 11:53 we see that jealousy and anger had festered within them to the point that they now wanted Jesus dead. When there is no truth within us, we cannot see the truth about ourselves, the true conditions of our hearts and our spiritual lives. This denial of the truth laid the foundation for the rest of the outcome of their lives. Romans 1:21 says *“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*

 Let’s look at their progression. In 18:31b, the Jewish leaders acknowledged God’s law that they had no right to execute anyone, but in their hearts they already murdered Jesus. In 18:40, they wanted Barabbas, a rebel who caused an uprising, to be set free. What godly people would want such a man to be released into society? But they didn’t care, they just wanted Jesus dead. Their apathy is visible after Jesus was sentenced to sever flogging. When they saw Jesus tattered, bloody, with a crown of thorns and a purple robe, they had absolutely no pity on Him. They hearts became callous, they became inhumane, they went on an animal level, and cried out for more blood, they cried out for Jesus’ death.

Later in 19:7, the Jewish leaders no longer uphold God’s law, but use it to carry out their murderous thoughts. They used the charge of blasphemy against Jesus to have him crucified when the deep down reason was their hatred towards him. Ironically, although they brought Jesus on the charge of blasphemy in 19:15 they claimed that they had no king but Caesar. They blasphemously denounced God as their king, and claimed Caesar as rulers of their lives. We can see that the absence of truth in their lives caused them to be pulled deeper and deeper into lies, and deeper and deeper into Satan’s darkness.

The conditions of their hearts are very alarming. We think that no man could be so heartless, so inhumane, especially religious leaders. But these were real people who maybe at one point had genuine faith, but they slowly began to deny and not apply truth to their lives. Therefore we need to take heed of our own hearts condition, because we are all in danger of losing our hearts to darkness if we intentionally deny truth. When we don’t personally believe truth, and accept truth, we twist it and find loopholes to get away with our sins, and still appear righteous. There’s this story of an older pastor who never really was fully healed of the deep wounds he suffered from. He grew in denial of truth of these wounds, denial of God’s truth in his life, and eventually became blind to the sins he committed in his heart, which lead him to live a double life. He became unhappy in his marriage, and eventually he ended up cheating on his wife with a 15 year old girl. When his wife found out, she decided she wanted a divorce. But he begged her not to get a divorce, because he didn’t want to break God’s law by getting a divorce. Instead he suggested they just live in separation while he continued to date this younger girl. When we do not truly accept the truth in our lives, and we are not healed by this truth, we are dragged deep into the pits of Satan’s lies. We twist God’s beautiful words of life to appease our sinful desires. We try to uphold the law, but our hearts are far from knowing God. We are blind to the true conditions of our hearts. This is a dangerous way to live our lives! And we really have to think seriously about what we are doing with God’s truth. We really need to examine our hearts and ask ourselves, “Am I denying the existence of truth in my life? Am I going through the motions and not really allowing God’s truth to penetrate my heart and my life?” I pray that we may come before Jesus today and commit ourselves to truth. I pray we may allow his truth to penetrate our hearts that we may honestly see ourselves, repent and draw near to Jesus. Amen.

**Second, Commitment to Truth (8:32-19:12)**

As we see through the Jewish leaders, there are some who intentionally deny the truth, but there are others who acknowledge the truth, but cannot commit to it. We all have commitment issues. Especially our generation can’t commit to one job, one location, one hairstyle, one relationship. Pilate also suffered from similar commitment issues, specifically, he could not commit to truth.

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, Jesus immediately knew what he was lacking. In vs. 33 we see that Pilate didn’t have a personal relationship with Jesus, let alone any type of religious upbringing. He did not know truth in his life, nor did he live by truth, because the only truth he knew was that he had a duty to carry out as a Roman Governor. Knowing this, Jesus doesn't even think about his own situation or his pending death, rather Jesus directs all his focus on helping Pilate come to know truth, and to stand by it.

To Pilate’s question, “Are you the king of the Jews?,” Jesus responded, “Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?” (34)  This immediately changed the tone of the conversation. This was no longer an interrogation between an official and an accused criminal, but Jesus made this into a personal conversation between two men. And with this question Jesus turned the tables and really touched at the heart of Pilate’s problem. Jesus boldly challenged Pilate to know for himself where he stands, not to simply follow what others say, not to simply do what other people tell him, but to really investigate, search and make a decision based on truth. This must have really thrown Pilate off. Pilate thought he would be the one asking the questions, yet Jesus flipped the table on him. But Jesus was trying to help him fix the foundation to Pilate’s commitment issues: Pilate needed to seek out truth for himself.

I think it’s important to take a moment to really think about what Jesus just revealed about Pilate. In order to commit ourselves completely to anything we usually have to come to believe in it for ourselves. Some of you may know the story of Lee Strobel. He was an atheist and a journalist for the Chicago Tribune, he was also author of many best seller books. His wife began to undergo some changes in the way she lived and her character, after she accepted Jesus, so he began to investigate for himself what God was all about. Initially he was trying to prove the ridiculousness of Christianity, but through his investigation he came to accept Christ. Through his conversion, his book, Case for Christ came about. He could not commit himself if he did not come to personally seek after the truth, and find it.

 I think in many ways we are similar to Pilate, I know I am. We lack the thirst and hunger for truth. A lot of times we’re so busy with life, we’re not really concerned about what truth is, nor do we actively spend time seeking it out. It’s easier for us to be spoon fed messages, to simply answer bible study questions already all prepared for us, to miss a Sunday service and just download the manuscript to read later, if we even do that. But here, Jesus really points out the importance of seeking truth for ourselves. We ourselves must personally investigate and search for truth. If we don’t establish this foundation of personally reading God’s words on our own, meditating deeply on Jesus, really spending time talking with Jesus, it is impossible for us to stand on the side of truth, and commit ourselves to it. May we earnestly thirst and hunger for truth, and spend the time discovering the riches of his truth on our own initiative and desire.

This lack of foundation in his life caused him to have a lack of identity. Because he was not deeply convicted by anything, he could not take a stance in his life. Because of this, he appears to be a man who is indecisive and very much a people pleaser. Whatever he could do to make people happy he did, but because of this there was no clear distinction of who Pilate was. He was just what everyone wanted him to be.

Pilate tells the Jewish leaders, “I find no basis for a charge against him,” 3 times in this passage (18:38, 19:4,6), and tried many times to free him(18:39, 19:1,12,13,15). But even though he knew Jesus was innocent, even though he found no reason to sentence him to punishment he could not stand his ground on the side of truth. Instead, he compromised his position. Pilate tried to find ways in which he could please the Jewish leaders and still have him set free. In vs. 39, when Pilate suggests releasing a prisoner, biblical historians say that this was not a Roman or Jewish tradition, but this was something that Pilate did to gain the support of others. He offered to release one prisoner, either Barabbas a rebel leader and murderer, or Jesus. He had hoped that they would choose Jesus, yet instead they chose Barabbas. When they once again demanded Jesus’ life in 19:1, instead of standing his ground, Pilate had Jesus flogged very severely. There’s 3 levels of flogging that the Romans carried out, Jesus received the highest level that mutilated people’s flesh, and sometimes even left people dead due to the severity of it. Pilate had Jesus flogged, although he knew he was innocent, because he had hoped that by seeing Jesus in such a suffering state, the Jewish people would have pity on him and demand his release. He compromised his personal position and his personal beliefs, in order to appease everyone. But he did this at the cost of Jesus’ life. Eventually when Pilate tried to set Jesus free the last time, the Jewish leaders threatened him by using his Governor position against him. They threatened to tell Caesar that he was going against him by letting Jesus live. At this, he realized that there was nothing else he could do. He knew that the Jewish leaders were not going to change their mind, and he was too weak to stand on his own. He then had Jesus crucified.

Pilate compromised at the stake of someone else’s life, in order to save his own. Even though he believed Jesus was innocent he couldn’t commit himself to this truth. At this, Jesus physically suffered severely, and eventually sentenced to death. We never think that our own lack of commitment could affect someone else in such a severe way. But we see how directly related our commitment to truth is to the outcome of our own lives, and the lives of others. When we are not committed to truth, when we compromise ourselves, we are literally sacrificing our souls and ultimately sacrificing Jesus in our lives. It’s not easy to commit, I know that personally. When entering college I was all fired up to spread the gospel, change my school, proudly start a ministry at age 18. But my heart was compromised. I still wanted to experience the college life. I also was weak to my flesh, and wanted to be loved. Because of this conflict I never committed myself fully to God, and fully to a wild dorm life. I would try to help people in my dorm, start bible studies, but because of my lack of commitment and my desire to party it up, they began to see the hypocrisy, and this affected their view on me and Christians. My lack of commitment affected their spiritual growth. Like Pilate I tried to please everybody, and in the end displeased everyone. Most of all, others suffered, my soul suffered, and Jesus suffered from my lack of commitment.

Yet on the opposite side, we can see how amazing committing ourselves to truth can affect the lives of others. Looking simply at Jesus’ life, it is through Jesus’ commitment to truth that all people’s on earth are saved. Without his commitment we would not be here. At the staff conference, I actually had a chance to see my father’s Bible teacher, and my mother’s Bible teacher. It was a weird strange feeling to meet them, to think that my parents were once wandering souls, without any knowledge of God. So when I met them, I began to feel this great sense of gratitude. If it were not for their commitment to truth, and commitment to my parents, I may not have been here. Even today, my mom’s teacher sends emails checking up on her health, after almost 40 years of first inviting her to study the bible. Such commitment changed their lives, and in turn, changed my life. This really inspired me to live such a committed life, that this would not only change my personal life, but affect the lives of others after me.

**Third, Jesus is the Truth**

We’ve talked a lot about truth thus far, denial of truth, committing to truth, but now we must come to define what Truth is. Merriam-webster.com defines truth or the word true as being steadfast, loyal, honest and just. Truth is the sincerity in action, character and utterance, the state of being fact, a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality. Truth, never changes. When we hear this definition, it almost sounds like it is directly describing who Jesus is. He is steadfast, loyal, honest, and just. Sincerity in action, character and utterance, he is a transcendent fundamental the true spiritual reality. He never changes. When we look at this passage he was the one being accused of crime, yet he was the only one who was true. He spoke the truth, he committed himself to the truth, and he stood on the side of truth. When we look at what he says about himself, how he lives his life, and what he did for us, we come to see that Jesus himself, is the Truth. So in order to know personally what Truth is, we must come to know who Jesus is.

Look at what Jesus revealed about himself to Pilate. In vs. 35 Jesus says, *“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.”* Jesus makes it clear that he is not an earthly king. By no means was he a king who demanded power and had an army of soldiers waiting to attack and take over the Roman government. Instead Jesus reveals that his kingdom is from another place. Where his kingship comes from tells us the nature of him as a king. Because he was not trying to establish an earthly kingdom, he had no need to use violence to defend himself, so even when he was arrested, and Peter began to chop ears off, Jesus stopped him. Jesus didn’t fight with swords, but with truth, and with love. Even as he stood on trial before the high priests, they began to hit him for no reason, instead of retaliating; he calmly convicted them with words of truth. Even before Pilate, he wasn’t fighting to defend himself, he was loving Pilate. He was trying to plant truth in Pilate’s life. Jesus is the king of truth and love.

He further explains this nature in vs. 37, “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.” Here, Jesus tells very plainly, that he is the Messiah King. Jesus had all authority and power, but left his kingdom and came into this world, for the sake of truth. He gave up his kingship to give his life, for the sake of all people including the very people that were crucifying him. This aligns with his proclamation in John 14:6 when he said, “I am the way and THE TRUTH and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” To come into this world to give truth meant to give not only the words of truth, the gospel, but to give himself, and his life.

Jesus gave his life in the sense, that he gave his heart, his time, and energy in serving and loving people. But he then literally gave up his life, for the atonement of our sins. He was the unblemished sacrificial lamb, who was punished very brutally, although he was completely innocent. The beating, mocking, flogging and spitting he received, was supposed to be for us. It was supposed to be for the Jewish leaders who had evil in their hearts. It was for supposed to be for Caiaphas, who handed him over to be crucified. It was supposed to be for his disciples who abandoned him and every other person who received healing but was not there by his side. We were the ones who deserved such punishment, but he took our place that we may be right with God and have eternal life with him. This fulfills the prophecy in Isaiah 53:5, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” This is the ultimate truth.

The thing we must realize is no matter what happens in this world, no matter what happens in this nation, this state, this city, this community, the truth always remains the same. From the very beginning of creation, to the days of Moses to the days of Paul, to present day today, the truth about Jesus, Jesus himself never changes and will never change. He will always remain King of truth, king of love and compassion. The fact that he lived, he literally walked this same earth we live in, the fact that he did die on Passover day, and through this we’ve received life, this is the ultimate truth that will always exist throughout the rest of history even beyond our existence. What is truth? Jesus is Truth!

Look at vs. 37 again. Jesus says, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Jesus’ life, Jesus’ identity, Jesus’ grace and truth, demands a response from us today. Jesus said himself; everyone on the side of truth listens to him. What does it mean to listen to him? Listening does not stop at hearing, but requires obedience. When we look at last week’s passage, Peter denied Jesus three times, although he lived, ate, slept, heard every word of Jesus. Therefore we can’t simply be present, show up on Sunday’s, go through Bible studies, etc., rather listening requires active obedience in living out the truth. The best way to illustrate what this looks like is to look at, Jesus who set an example for us to follow. He lived out his life completely spent, to give us truth. In everything he did it was for the sake that others would find life in his words, and come to have a relationship with God. He was sacrificial, hardworking, faithful, and most importantly, loving. We are to follow in his footsteps in the way in which he lived. We have to be clear though, some people abuse this verse and think this gives them the green light to be extreme, going on streets rebuking people and condemning them to hell. This is not what standing on the side of Jesus looks like. We are to engage others with love, compassion, truth and grace. Build others up, feed, pray for, reach out to, and empower wounded souls. I believe to listen to him, is to live out this life. When we come to carry out the life of truth, we begin to live out the life that Jesus lived, we begin to see people as Jesus did, our hearts begin to align with that of his. So standing on the side of Jesus may require us to sometimes get out of unhealthy environments or it may require us to stand up and defend Jesus’ name to others, but ultimately it’s all about the heart behind these actions. We want to be changed within, and sincerely live as Jesus did, with his heart, and his vision.

Mainly today, we want to look at Jesus’ life; these are the last moments before his crucifixion. We really want to see and understand what Jesus has done, the truth of who he is. Jesus lived such a beautiful life, and suffered such an unfair death. He didn’t deserve it. But when we really come to accept and understand what he has done, our hearts are moved uncontrollably. This is what I pray would be the fuel for everything we do. The fuel for why we come to church, why we serve God, why we write reflections, why we read the bible, why we stand on the side of truth. It is in response to what Jesus has done and who he is. I pray that we may be ever grateful for the grace he’s shown us. May we live out our lives of truth and honor Jesus and the life he lived by standing on the side of truth today. Amen.