

Pastor Ben Libby  
 Sermon  
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(please rise)

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The text that I would lay upon your hearts for this mid-week lenten service comes to us from the Gospel of John, chapter 18, starting at verse 28...

**John 18:28-38** <sup>28</sup> Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" <sup>30</sup> They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you." <sup>31</sup> Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," <sup>32</sup> that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. <sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." <sup>37</sup> Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

This is the Word of God. Please be seated...

Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
 Dear fellow redeemed...

We are continuing in our series "from Gabbatha to Golgotha". Last week we saw the beginning of that journey that Jesus set out on, that He was bound and led away to Pilate, and the sad account of what happened to Judas. This week's account which we just read continues to follow Jesus down that road which He traveled willingly, and it is the account of Jesus before Pilate.

Pilate was trying to figure out what was going on here, and to get to the bottom of it, he asked Jesus several questions. But one question seems to stand out to me more than the others in this section of Scripture. It really isn't even a question, it was more of a cynical rhetorical remark intended to end their conversation... "What is truth?" To me this always seemed like a very interesting thing for Pilate to say. After all, he was the ruling Governor in the region, and his job involved just that, finding out the truth. When it came to this situation that Pilate was handed, he was the one who should have cared the most about what was true and what was untrue.

"Here it is, the moment of truth..." Have you ever experienced a moment of truth? What is it? A moment of truth is not simply a moment when you discover the truth about something, it is much more than that. [A moment of truth is a time when a person or thing is tested, a decision has to be made, or a crisis has to be faced.] Simply put, it's a time when somethings gotta give. In last week's service we

talked about the phrase “It isn't whether you win or lose; it's how you play the game.” This phrase is of course often brought up around sports. Likewise, the phrase “the moment of truth” (to me at least) seems to be linked with sports. Moments of truth happen all the time in sport. Bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, full count. That is definitely a moment of truth. Same for a last second field goal, a penalty shot or a game winning free throw. These moments are snap shots of the larger picture of the game, and yet they can be clearly pointed to as the moment when the game was won or lost.

Of course, as was stated with the previous phrase, this was not some game to be won or lost. The stakes were much much higher than any competitive event, the salvation of the world hung in the balance here. But make no mistake about it, there were definitely “moments of truth” here, moments when decisions had to be made, where something had to give, and they would result in either disaster averted or a catastrophe realized. We pray that the Holy Spirit would bless our study here tonight.

Before we get to the moments of truth, let us first examine the moments leading up to them; the moments of untruth if you will. There was a lot of untruth going around here, and of course the whole case against Jesus was one big lie. Jesus didn't do anything wrong, He was perfect. To get Him convicted would require a lot of false testimony. Before this trial ended up on Pilate's door step, they put Jesus through the phony show before the high priest. This wasn't a legal trial. All matters of legality had to go through the governing body of Rome. But it was more or less the Jews putting the stamp of approval on His death. Even at this mockery of a trial, they couldn't get their story straight. **Matthew 26:59-61 Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, <sup>60</sup> but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward <sup>61</sup> and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' "** Out of all the false witnesses they produced, the only thing they could get two people to agree on was something that Jesus actually said. Of course, they did not understand what He was really talking about when He said He would be able to rebuild the temple in three days, that He was talking about His resurrection. Even then, this was not a crime. But it brought up the question of whether or not He was in fact the Son of God, and He told them it “**was as they said**”. They considered this to be a blasphemy and a lie, but Jesus was 100% truthful.

And this was what led them to bring Jesus to Pilate, the Roman Governor. The Jews had concluded that He was worthy of death, but they had to go through the proper channels for execution. Pilate could tell that something was going on, these Jews with their bound prisoner sitting outside his Praetorium, which served as his home and his office. **John 18:29-30 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" <sup>30</sup> They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."**

There is clearly a break down of truth from the beginning. They can't even really honestly answer Pilate, rather they give him an answer which is essentially “Trust us, He's evil...” Of course you can't convict someone because you don't like them, but that is what the Jews are doing here. They clearly also have a certain disdain for the pagan Roman government, not daring to defile themselves by entering into the Praetorium before the Passover. But they knew that they needed the OK from this guy before anything could really get accomplished.

Pilate can tell where this is going. **"You take Him and judge Him according to your law."** He didn't want to get dragged down into this. But they wanted the death penalty, and they needed the government to sign off on it. If it would've just been up to them, they would've killed Him by stoning Him to death, which was the punishment for blasphemy that God had instructed. But, by this being a Roman matter, it would be a death by crucifying, for that is how the Romans handed out capital punishment. Jesus foretold that this would happen, and He had said **And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.**

The following questions that Pilate asked Jesus were also moments of untruth. Pilate didn't want

the truth about who Jesus really was. He wanted to know if Jesus could make this situation any easier for him. If Jesus would claim to be the king of the Jews, then Pilate could sing off on Him being a type of insurrectionist. If Jesus would just tell him what He had done that made these people so angry, that would help him out greatly, one way or the other. But Jesus didn't make it any easier on Pilate. He wouldn't defend himself, but He also wouldn't say anything that would make the case against Him any worse, because, well, He was a prefect. There was no wiggle room for Pontius Pilate.

This is where the moment of truth comes for Pilate. **John 18:37-38 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."** <sup>38</sup> **Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.**

Pilate could clearly tell that Jesus was innocent. He said as much. **"I find no fault in Him at all."** That wouldn't be the last time that he would say it. Throughout all of the trial of Jesus, Pilate would state several times that this was indeed an innocent man. Yet the Nicene Creed doesn't read **"He was tried under Pontius Pilate, found innocent, and released..."** but rather states **"and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate."** Pilate was a judge, he was responsible for upholding the values and standards of the government and his position. But what did he do instead? He succumbed to the political pressures of the Jewish leaders, and he gave in to the mob mentality of the Jewish people. He knew that Jesus wasn't guilty, especially of the death penalty, yet that is exactly what He would get.

What is the moment of truth here for Pilate? It is that moment when he realizes that Jesus is innocent. He found no fault in Him AT ALL. It was at this point that Pilate could have made the decision to stop this trial from going any farther. It was a wrongful trial and it should have been thrown out immediately. But Pilate let it go on. He tried to find a way out of it, He tried to compare Jesus to another criminal and have the people choose. That didn't work. He knew that he couldn't do the right thing AND appease the Jews, so he washed his hands clean of the situation and let them do whatever they wished. When Pilate's moment of truth came, he choked, and he is remembered forever as the man who crucified Jesus Christ.

Who's fault is this? Who truly was to blame for this trial? Was it the Jewish leaders who arrested him? Was it the Jewish people who would shout "crucify him!" at the top of their lungs? Was it Pontius Polite for not throwing out the case and letting Him go? What is the truth?

The ugly truth is this: you are to blame for this...I am to blame for this...every person who has ever sinned (all of them) is to blame for this. What is truth? The truth is that every time we break one of God's commandments, we are doomed to death in hell for all eternity. Every time we sin against God's Holy Law, we are the reason for Jesus being on trial. We are the reason for Him not being found innocent, **we are why He was guilty.** The truth is like the hymn put it... **"The sinless Son of God must die in sadness; the sinful child of man may live in gladness; Man forfeited his life and is acquitted- God is committed."**

What was the moment of truth for Christ in all of this? We talked about how Pilate failed to act when he determined that Jesus was innocent. But what was the moment that it all came down to for Jesus? . . . Christ moment of truth was...all of them. It was all of the moments. It was every second of this trial, it was every...single...second. When Pilate asked Jesus what He had done, Jesus replied **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."**

The truth is that this trial is much more than hearing of whether or not Jesus was an enemy of the state or an insurrectionist. This was about more than just political relations and aspirations. This wasn't about the kingdom of Rome or Israel, this was about the Kingdom that wasn't of the world, the kingdom of heaven. If Jesus' kingdom was of this world, His servants would've fought for Him. (As was mentioned in our gospel harmony reading tonight, Jesus could've have 12 legions of angels fight whomever He wished.) No one could have laid a single hand on Him if He were not letting that happen. But this was how the Scriptures were to be fulfilled.

Yes this was not a mere court room battle. It was much more than a political or military battle as well. It was much more than any of those kinds of battle. It was a fight that went way back. It was a feud that started in the garden of Eden when Satan got mankind to rebel against God. But even way back then, God had promised mankind Salvation. **Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.** This was the beginning process of Satan bruising the heel of Christ. It would go on and continue to escalate, culminating finally with Jesus dying on the cross. But, the head of the enemy would be crushed when Christ rose again and completed His work of Redemption!

What was the moment of truth for Christ? It was every moment that He chose to suffer. It was every moment that He allowed this mistreatment to continue. He could've ended it all. But He chose not to. He could have told Pilate to let Him go. He wouldn't need a miracle for Pilate to release Him, He could've just told him the truth. That the Jews had no really evidence, that He had never committed a crime in His life, and this was a unwarranted trial and He should be set free immediately. But He didn't. Instead (just like the prophet Isaiah said) **Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.**

You might say that Christ moment of truth was there in the garden of Eden. It was when God had promised the Messiah in the first place; His trial and crucifixion was simply the last part of that moment. Jesus not defending Himself is just part of that moment of truth and soon it would be all over.

“It all comes down to this, the moment of truth...” In every sports “moment of truth”, there is an underlying quality behind each one. In a game winning field goal, the underlying quality could be leg strength. In baseball, a game winning hit might come down to hand eye coordination. A game winning free throw's underlying quality could be repetition in practice or perhaps mental toughness...

But what about Jesus and His moment of truth. What was the underlying quality that made His moment of truth a winning moment? ... It was what Pilate was looking for and cynically dismissed, it was the truth. It was the Gospel truth that God so loved the World that He sent Jesus into it to rule it. It was for this cause that He was born, and for this cause that He came into the world, that He would bear witness to that truth. That truth's underlying quality was love. Jesus suffered and took all the hate and crucifixion because He loved us! What is truth? **Truth** is that we have a Savior that paid the ultimate price for us. **Truth** is that we have been forgiven. **Truth** is that we will live with Him in Heaven. **Truth IS JESUS.** Amen!