

Names of Wondrous Love—THE TRUTH

Text: John 18:37, 38

Children are filled with questions. As someone once observed, “One child can ask more questions than ten wise men can answer.” When little ones ask, “Why is the grass green?” it doesn’t take long for us to answer. When they ask, “Where do babies come from?” our answer might be slower in coming. One of the toughest questions they ask is “Where did God come from? I usually tell them, the Bible just says, “In the beginning, God. He was just there. The Bible tells me, and I believe it.” Curiosity is their middle name, and asking questions is how they learn.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had his questions too. We remember one of them particularly, his question “What is truth?” Pilate’s problem, though, was not 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 (Jn 14:6). Listening carefully, we note he didn’t say, “I am truthful.” Of course, he is. The sinless Son of God cannot lie. Nor did he only say, “I’ll tell you the truth.” The prophets and apostles did that. They were only mouthpieces, proclaiming truths that were given to them. Jesus is so much more. 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 one of Jesus’

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I. No truth

II. Know truth

I.

Late Thursday evening, the Jewish court, called the Sanhedrin, had already passed the death sentence for Jesus. As a subject nation, though, they could not carry out the death penalty. Their Roman conquerors had wisely reserved that power for themselves. So early Friday morning, it was off with their prisoner to Pilate, the Roman governor. But what accusation should they bring that would stick? The religious charge of blasphemy that they had manufactured for their own court wouldn’t even get a hearing in Pilate’s venue. 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,” they charged (Lk 23:2).

This charge Pilate had to investigate as the Jews cleverly knew. No official representative of Rome could ignore such a threat to the emperor of Rome. When Pilate accordingly asked Jesus, “Are you a king, then?” he received this answer: “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 could not have expected 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?” Absolute truth in matters of morality and religion simply doesn’t exist, they insist. What seems true for one generation may change for the next. Just listen to their so-called wise questions, like: Was the world created in six days by an almighty God, or did it all come into being with a big bang? Did God make man as the crown of his creation, or did man claw his 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 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? “Truth is relative and so then is right and wrong” is their thesis. “What is right or wrong for one might not be for the other,” is their conclusion. Or to put it another way, “There is no truth.”

As conservative Christians who believe that the Bible is God’s word and not that it contains God’s word, do you get bothered at the lack of belief in absolute truth in the world? Does the fact that in this nation, 67 percent of the adults agree that there is no such thing as absolute truth frustrate you? But let’s not be so arrogant as to believe that we can’t have a “no absolute truth” gene swirling around in our DNA.

Have you ever justified or rationalized your actions? Have you ever been quick to excuse your abusive behavior? Have you ever rationalized your absence from weekly worship? Have you ever explained why you lost your temper in such a way as to make it okay? Or have you ever knowingly manipulated someone or played on someone's emotions thinking it was alright to do that? When we do those things, we are really saying that when it comes to those particular actions there is no absolute truth. Truth is what I make it out to be at the time for me and my situation.

Have you ever considered how foolish it is to deny that there is absolute truth? Abraham Lincoln once used a very clever ploy to teach some people about truth. They had come to him with a decision that was based on suppositions rather than truth. After hearing their logic, Lincoln asked, “How many legs would a sheep have if you called its tail a leg?” They quickly answered, “Five!” The President then said, “No, it would still only have four legs. Calling a tail a leg doesn’t make it one.” Denying absolute truth doesn’t just make you look foolish like Abraham Lincoln made those people look. Denying absolute truth can turn you into a fool. Psalm 14 says, “The fool says in his heart there is no God.” Pilate wasn’t just denying that truth existed. Pilate was denying the TRUTH himself. Pilate was denying Jesus as TRUTH.

We know the right answer to Pilate’s question. By God’s grace, many of us from little on have known the truths of salvation found only in Christ Jesus. Perhaps for us the question isn’t “What is truth?” but “What is the truth worth?”

Did you hear how Jesus answered Pilate’s question even before it was asked? “I came into the world, to testify to the truth,” he said. 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. He shows us what we can become—forgiven and righteous. When it comes to salvation, there’s no need for speculation or searching.

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 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 wouldn't listen. Today Jesus the Truth stands before us again in his Word. "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus," he reminds us through his apostle Paul (2 Ti 3:15). "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ," he also reminds us through the same apostle (Ro 10:17). "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free," he who is truth himself reminds us (Jn 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 (Jn 5:39).

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