

Truth and Consequences

28 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. **29** Pilate then went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?”

30 They answered and said to him, “If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.”

31 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,” **32** that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

34 Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?”

35 Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?”

36 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.”

37 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.”

38 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.

Taking the Place of Barabbas

39 “But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”

40 Then they all cried again, saying, “Not this Man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

I. Selective Morality

In social psychology, we find the term “moral disengagement”, which describes the ability of a person to disassociate their actions from any moral evaluation. They can execute a morally wrong action without self-condemnation.

In selective morality, people compartmentalize their moral standards. They can be so very meticulous in guarding themselves against wrong, immoral or unethical actions in certain areas, but then seem to be completely oblivious to the immorality of their actions in another area.

John included an important bit of information in the second half of the 28th verse that is easy to miss. It is as though John had hoped we would catch the irony in the actions of the Jews.

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Annas had passed Jesus on to Caiaphas. John does not record anything that happened with Caiaphas, but immediately moves the story on the Caiaphas sending Jesus to Pilate. The Jews bring Jesus to the palace of Pilate, but refuse to enter into the praetorium because they feared they would be ceremonially unclean and rendered unfit to participate in the upcoming Passover. These are the same people who are scheming and conniving and bringing false charges against Jesus. They are driven by rage and jealousy. They are plotting the execution of an innocent man. No, more than an innocent man – he is their Messiah. In Stephen's sermon before the Sanhedrin, he accused them of being traitors and murderers.

And the irony is that these raging, jealous, traitorous murderers didn't want to defile themselves by stepping inside the praetorium of the Gentiles. But the back story on this source of defilement is that the Jews believed Gentiles were in the habit of aborting babies in their homes and either buried those aborted babies within their homes or flushed the babies down through their primitive sewer system. On one hand, it is respectable that the Jews adamantly opposed this barbaric practice by the Gentiles. On the other hand, it borders on paranoia that the Jews believed merely standing on private Gentile property would make them unacceptable to God.

Nevertheless, the Jews believed they risked being declared impure for seven days, thus missing the Passover meal. But they were already defiled. They were deeply stained in their sins and rebellion. Their uncleanness was not by physical transgression of some ceremonial law. Theirs was an uncleanness in their heart, in the very depth of their soul and spirit. They didn't want to be ceremonially impure and miss the Passover feast, but they didn't mind deviously plotting, lying, manipulating, or ruthlessly crucifying Heaven's Passover Lamb. But Heaven forbid they should set foot inside a Roman praetorium!

And this is a convenient Biblical example of how ridiculous it is when people try to make their own rules about purity and godliness and holiness and religion. It's like a thief having a deep conviction about not stealing on Sunday. But selective morality has been one of the ongoing problems found in the ranks of Christianity. I had a pastor friend who was talking to an acquaintance of his in the small town where he pastored. The young man had admitted he failed to attend his church that past Sunday because he had gotten drunk Saturday night and missed church the next morning. The pastor was incensed. "How is it you consider yourself a Christian and you go get drunk on Saturday night?" The young man replied, "It's not what you think. I was only drinking with my Christian friends."

Many years ago David Wilkerson was holding one of his famous street meetings and two prostitutes came forward at the altar call for prayer. When David prayed with them for their salvation, they stopped him and said, "Oh no, Bro. Wilkerson. We are already Christians. We just want you to pray we can be a good witness to our customers."

II. Spiritual Blindness

In John's account of Jesus before Pilate, we can see the emphasis on two powerful truths - Jesus is the King and Jesus is the Truth. It is not insignificant that these are two truths that John emphasized throughout his gospel account.

Neither is it insignificant that these are the two truths Pilate struggled to understand. Pilate can't quite get his brain wrapped around what it meant for Jesus to be a king. He

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claimed to be a king, but what kind of king. Where is his kingdom. How could he claim to be king of the Jews and them not to recognize him as their king?

A. Blind to the truth about Jesus being King.

Jesus made it clear his kingdom was not of this world and that was even more confusing to Pilate.

Then when Jesus tied the concept of his kingship to his mission – coming into this world to testify of the truth. The king was coming to set his people free. The truth would be available to set them free. In a much deeper sense, Jesus was not just delivering truthful facts, He was himself the Truth. We have to understand Jesus wanted much more for his people than for them to gain head knowledge. He wanted to teach them how to incorporate Divine truth into their lifestyle. John had already recorded that Jesus boldly declared himself to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And coming to truth in its fullest sense is coming to Jesus. And coming to Jesus is the way of coming to the Father. And coming to the Father is the way of finding integrity and meaning in one's life.

B. Blind to the truth about the Truth.

Not only could Pilate not quite grasp in what sense Jesus was a king, but he was completely clueless when Jesus said his mission was to come into this world and testify of truth. And Pilate's response to this is, "What is truth?" It was a statement in which Pilate casually dismisses the importance of what Jesus just said. But this was nothing to casually dismiss. If you miss this, you miss it all. Pilate's attitude was, "Well everyone thinks they have a corner on truth. Nobody can truly possess truth. What is truth? Isn't it just what you want to believe?"

Here is the great conundrum in the world today. They can't know truth if they reject the Truth.

Pilate's skepticism about truth continues on today. Here is how one author describes the 21st century take on the subject of truth:

For 2,000 years the Christian church's view of sexuality has been the same: one man and one woman for life. While there has always been tension over the chastity part of this teaching, the basic blueprint was never challenged.

And then it was.

Over the past couple of decades, and then escalating sharply these past few years, the fundamental premise that God designed the most intimate of relationships between a man and woman has been discarded outside the evangelical church, and sharply questioned within. Every week it seems there's a new evangelical voice saying, as author Jen Hatmaker recently did, that LGBT relationships can be holy.

The author continues –

“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

This is the famous question asked by Pilate after Jesus claims he is a “witness to the truth.” If Pilate lived today, though, he might instead ask “WHERE is truth?”

Influential philosopher Charles Taylor claimed one of the most important cultural shifts happening in current society is an understanding of where truth is located. Throughout human history, truth

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existed external to the person. For an individual to know the truth about themselves, they would look to their family hierarchy, their relationship to the government or the teaching of the church.

Today people still believe truth exists, but they believe it is found by tunneling deep into their feelings and internal self-image. This is why one of the popular phrases today is “live your truth.” Be true to yourself. Listen to your feelings. This *does* mean that truth is relative to the individual, but the answer is not—as Christian apologetics often insists—to attempt to pull people back to a “for the Bible tells me so” view of externally established truth. (Joshua Pease - Church Leaders publication)

It is not only disturbing that this generation has come to the firm conclusion there is not external truth, but even more disturbing is that the author of this article in a Christian publication seems to validate the myth that truth is relative to the individual.

This is the “What is truth; Where is Truth” generation.

C. The cheap way out

Pilate doesn't understand Jesus when he talks about being a King or bearing witness to truth. He doesn't understand why the Jews think Jesus is guilty of anything deserving of capital punishment. But yielding to political expediency, Pilate plays his best card. This is supposed to be his ace in the hole. He plans to force the Jews to release Jesus for Passover season. They Jews spares Barabbas and demands the execution of Jesus. Pilate is shocked the plan backfires. Barabbas was a known murderer and insurrectionist. Pilate thought it impossible that the Jews would be willing to allow such a vile criminal to be set free.

III. Saving Barabbas

This depicts the twisted values of the world. How could anyone possibly choose Barabbas over the perfect and flawless Christ?

If injustice makes your blood boil, then this should send you over the edge.

I know we see what we believe to be gross injustices in our world today. Sometimes DNA tests prove an innocent man has wrongly been sentenced to prison for a crime he did not commit. Sometimes high profile people get away with crimes the rest of us would be sent to prison for.

We live in a crazy world, a world in which people love evil and hate righteousness. I am incapable of explaining why people celebrate and idolize and worship that which is vile and filthy yet have such a deep hatred for God and godly things. In our day and age why are those with twisted values and ungodly perversions heralded as societal heroes? Why are the godly persecuted? Why is a man who turns himself into the physical likeness of a woman and prances around in frilly dresses and high heels voted woman of the year, but those who hold to Biblical values on things like marriage and sexuality excoriated and marginalized as intolerant hate-mongers? What is happening in our world?

It was this same kind of sin-sick insanity that drove the mad mob to vote for the murderer to be set free and celebrate the crucifixion of the Son of God. How cruel! How unjust! How insane!

A. What drives people to this condition?

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1. Selfishness and Lust

Jesus told Pilate he came to bear witness to the truth and everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

That statement tells me something. People who really, truly want the truth will find it in Jesus. But there are people who don't want to hear the truth. The truth is inconvenient. The truth is harsh. The truth is confronts their lifestyle.

Those Jews who freed Barabbas and called for the crucifixion of Jesus didn't want truth. They had an agenda and truth frustrated their agenda. Some people just want what they want and truth is meaningless to them. They are so centered on their own desires, they ignore all danger signals and plunge ahead in their evil schemes.

2. Anger and Jealousy

Rage drives people to insane and irrational behavior.

When Stephen accused the Jews of murdering God's Son, they began to stone him. While being pelted with stones, Stephen looked up and saw a vision. He cried out, "Look! I see Heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then the Jews covered their ears, screamed at the top of their voices and bum-rushed Stephen. They could not stand the truth.

This is why we see so man people choosing Barabbas over Jesus; choosing evil over good; choosing death over life; choosing temporary pleasure over long-term health and well-being. They are driven by anger and jealousy and lust and greed and selfishness. A culture that is allowed and even encouraged to be driven by the passions will self-destruct. They hate the truth because the truth confronts their lifestyle. And that is a also a matter of pride. Truth is absorbed by those who are humble, but cannot penetrate the heart of the haughty.

Lord, speak truth to us. Let our hearts humbly receive your truth. May we be transformed by it.