

## **John #50: The King of Truth (John 18:28-40)**

### **PRAY**

In our recent tech series, we talked a lot about our humanity

And how we need to understand and cling to a biblical view of our identity and purpose  
You know what's even more important than holding on to these things, though?

Understanding and clinging to the truth about *Jesus Christ's* identity and purpose

For if we misunderstand who he was or what he did (or why), we get everything wrong

—Not just about him, but about life altogether

We will devalue or dismiss his death and resurrection

We will end up contending for the wrong kingdoms

And we will be left in the guilt of our sin, without a Saviour

But none of that needs to be true of us, at all... If only we come to know Christ and his gospel

I'd like to try to help us all do this today, again or for the first time—we all need this

So I invite you to **TURN** with me to John chapter 18... John 18 [page #904]

Last week, we looked at Jesus' betrayal, arrest, denials, and the first portion of his trials

And we were amazed at how Jesus moved toward the pain of his suffering and death

While everyone around him was falling back and failing him

We'll pick up the story in v.28 today, with Jesus being moved by the Jewish authorities—

From a sham of a Jewish trial to the local seat of Roman government: **READ v.28<sup>1</sup>**

They were so eager to get Jesus dealt with, they show up dark and early

John notes they wanted to eat the Passover, and we wonder: Didn't Jesus eat it the night before?

Why hadn't they yet? But the Passover feast included multiple meals over several days

And if people wanted to fully participate in the entire feast, they had to make sure  
they stayed ceremonially clean, avoiding ritual contamination

And it was the stance of the day that entering a Gentile's home made you unclean

However, ironically, these people were so fussy about not being defiled

precisely while they were carrying out the most vile, defiling act in all of history

Also notice: they forced Jesus, a Jew, to enter Pilate's headquarters... So was he thereby defiled?

Of course not... This was a man-made rule they added to the law

But there's poetic irony in the pure and spotless Lamb of God entering a place of defilement

right as he's about to take all sin on his shoulders and die in place of defiled sinners

From our cheap seats, we can see the authorities' hypocrisy and judge them harshly

But be careful! Our hands are hardly clean... It was our sin, too, that led Jesus to die

We are the defiled ones who need cleansing—not from ritual impurity,

but from evil, dead works that stain consciences and lead to judgment and hell

Let's ask ourselves if we, like them, honour God with our lips, while our hearts are far from him

And if so, may the blood of Christ purify us again

[tr] The implication here in John is that the authorities were not really avoiding contamination

Meanwhile, Jesus' innocence shines brightly, standing up even under sharp examination

And thus, we are supposed to turn our eyes on Jesus here and see him in his innocence:

## **See the falsely-accused One (v.28-32)**

[r] We need to behold Jesus in this passage as the wrongly- and falsely-accused one

The focus of this whole passage is who Jesus actually was and what he actually did

Was he guilty of some heinous crime, as the Jewish leaders claimed he was?

John's answer—and Jesus' answer—and even Pilate's answer—is no

We meet Pilate, the Roman governor, in v.29: **READ v.29<sup>2</sup>**... 'What charges are you laying?'

A little bit about Pilate, as he appears suddenly here, yet plays a central role in Jesus' death

So much so, that both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, which we confess, specify how we believe Jesus 'suffered' and 'was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate'

Pilate was appointed to govern Palestine probably around 4 years before this

And he held this undesirable post for around 11 years, over the unruly Jews

Pilate is believed to have been a morally weak, indecisive, and pliable leader,

Who tried to hide his flaws through violent force and brutality

The Jewish people loathed Pilate, and he loathed them right back,

Often intentionally offending, provoking, or antagonizing them

This all helps explain why Pilate gave in to the Jews' demands, despite finding Jesus not guilty

While also doing things to seemingly poke at the leaders and intentionally irritate them

He was a weak man with a powerful yet fragile post, under much political pressure

If the Jews ever really revolted, it could spell the end of his career—or his life

And why does he show up in the creeds? Because of the role he played in redemption history

In Christ's death, he was the highest public authority in the position of judgment

It roots our faith in history, while also explaining some of how Jesus died

Alright, back to John... Pilate formally began his judicial proceedings with the question:

**READ v.29b-30<sup>3</sup>**... It seems like the Jews expected an easy, cut-and-dried sentencing

As if Pilate would just rubber-stamp things, ratifying their judgment

This explains their surprised reaction, like: 'Wait, why are you opening a fresh trial?'

'Why do you *think* we brought this evildoer to you?'... **READ v.30b<sup>4</sup>**

The word used for 'evil' here doesn't really refer to moral or spiritual wickedness

But rather to causing trouble or mischief, like a criminal

Even if *their* concerns were mostly theological, Pilate wouldn't care about that

So they framed their accusation in political categories: 'He's a rabble-rouser!'

No matter how clear or unclear they were, their accusations were false

They were the ones doing evil in unjustly trying and accusing an innocent man of evil

I'll add here: Believers in Christ will sometimes follow in his footsteps,

And be falsely accused or slandered or lied about

As 1 Peter 4:12-16 says: "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*"

If you've experienced this, God's Word tells you to rejoice and glorify God  
And if you haven't, make sure you're not suffering as an 'evildoer' or trouble-maker  
But be aware and be ready to suffer like your Lord did

Anyway, Pilate says he doesn't want to hear the case: **READ v.31a**<sup>5</sup>... 'Leave me out of this.'  
He forced the issue... If they really wanted his help, they had to convince him  
They'd have to jump through hoops and recognize his authority  
**READ v.31b**<sup>6</sup>... There it is! What they were really after: 'We want you to kill him for us.'  
Only the Romans were legally permitted to perform official executions  
Pilate could thus gloat, 'Ah, now you need me, do you? Fine, I'll humour you.'

John jumps in with a narrator's note here: **READ v.32**<sup>7</sup>... Hm? How so?  
Back in **John 12:32-33**, Jesus had predicted his death, saying this: "*And I, when I am  
lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" [And John also said there:] **He  
said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.**"

Jesus would be lifted up from the earth—in short, he'd be crucified  
Crucifixion was the exclusive domain of the Romans  
So if Jesus was telling the truth and making a true prophecy, he'd have to be killed by Romans  
And so, when the Jews insisted they couldn't kill him, and Rome agreed to consider doing so,  
It set the wheels in motion to fulfill Jesus' words: This was indeed how he would die  
Notice, though: No matter what was going on politically, if this was fulfilling *Jesus'* words,  
Then it means things were being sovereignly guided by the Lord himself  
This was all part of God's plan, all along... He'd be falsely-accused and crucified

[tr] As the story continues, we're given a fascinating discussion between Pilate and Jesus  
In which Jesus reveals some of who he is... He's far more than just a falsely-accused criminal  
He is a heaven-sent King... I believe what we need to do with this truth is to:

### **Serve the other-worldly King (v.33-36)**

[r] Jesus truly is a king, and we need to serve our other-worldly King

The gospel of Luke records an accusation the leaders did make against Jesus at this time:  
*"We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar,  
and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."*<sup>8</sup> ...Those were some serious allegations  
Which explains why Pilate began his own examination this way here in John: **READ v.33-34**<sup>9</sup>  
Jesus asked back: 'Is this your own idea? You come up with that on your own? Is this hearsay?'  
So, funny: Who's the interrogator now? ...All of a sudden, Pilate's on trial before the real Judge

You can tell Jesus' question flusters Pilate a bit... He gets indignant: **READ v.35**<sup>10</sup>  
Pilate basically retorts: 'You're not *my* king. Why should I care if you're the Jews' king?  
But the fact that *they've* turned you in to me tells me you've done *something*...'  
Imagine for a minute that Canada was violently taken over by a powerful foreign nation—  
A nation that oppresses us and taxes us excessively and hates on us all the time  
Then let's say a popular freedom fighter arose from our own ranks  
Someone who could well be a king, if we managed to overthrow our oppressors  
Would we be inclined to just hand this man over to our enemies?  
'Here you go! Take him! We'd rather *you* keep ruling us' ...No!

Jews handing a fellow Jew over to the Romans... Unheard of! ...Pilate was right to be suspicious

Jesus responds by both easing Pilate's fears and teaching about his kingdom: **READ v.36<sup>11</sup>**

Was he king of the Jews? Jesus says his kingdom was *not* an earthly or Jewish kingdom

Jesus' kingdom was not one that originated on earth... It wasn't *from* the world

And his kingdom was not one that you could see visibly on earth... It wasn't *of* this world

It was an other-worldly kingdom... He was an other-worldly King

This doesn't mean his kingdom wasn't present or active in the world... He *was* bringing it here

But it's the same as we are called to be: In the world, but not of the world

One of Jesus' followers, Peter, had tried to start fighting for Jesus' kingdom the night before

But Christ put a prompt end to that: 'Put away your sword!'

Now Jesus tells Pilate: 'If my kingdom were indeed an earthly kingdom, which you'd need to worry about, then I wouldn't have stopped my followers... They'd be fighting for me now'

Or even, 'I would've mobilized them and incited them to fight!'

No, that he was arrested so easily proved that his kingdom was a different kind of kingdom

**READ v.36a<sup>12</sup>**... This is such an important verse to help us understand Christ's kingdom

Jesus was constantly talking about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven

Though in John, it's only mentioned here and back in chapter 3, in talking to Nicodemus:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3)

The crowds on Palm Sunday hailed him as King, earlier that week: *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"* <sup>13</sup>... So rumours must've flown

But now Jesus sets the record straight: 'I haven't come to be a physical king right now.

I'm not gathering an army... I'm not overthrowing the empire... I'm not taking over land'

Jesus implied that he was indeed a king with a kingdom... But unlike anything they'd imagine

See, it was a spiritual kingdom, where he would reign over his people's hearts

And which would transcend national, political, and ethnic boundaries

Jesus would soon reign from the throne of heaven, over the whole universe

And one day, heaven would come down to earth

And *"The kingdom of the world [will] has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* (Revelation 11:15)

But Pilate didn't need to worry about that back then, no matter what the Jews were saying

Did you notice what Jesus calls his people here? His servants: *'my servants would be fighting...'*

He is our King... He is our leader, our master, our authority... We are called to serve him

But we don't serve him by physically fighting against the world

You might not think this is something we have to worry about

But we have to say it, because countless believers have gotten this *wrong* in history

Trying to set up a physical kingdom now, before Christ's return

Or attempting to make our nations 'Christian' via 'Christian nationalism'

Or imposing a certain form of worship or biblical law on the whole populace

Or taking land by force or fighting literal crusades against barbarians

Or enmeshing the church into civil government, as if *we* should rule *now*

Or having an official state or national church—Roman, Greek, Russian, Anglican

It's not that we should never be involved in civil, military, or political issues—we should  
But don't get things mixed up: Christ's kingdom is not of this world  
It's something else entirely

Someone recently asked me why our church's statement of faith talks about the separation of church and state... This is why... God's kingdom is not the dominion of Canada  
Canada is under his sovereign rule, of course! But Canada is also part of this world  
And we belong, most fundamentally, to an other-worldly King and kingdom

So let's make sure our lives show a primary allegiance to King Jesus  
And that we truly are his *servants*, with lives revolving around his kingdom's work  
If I point-blank asked you: 'Do you serve the King of kings?', how would you answer?  
And if you said, 'Yes', and I said, 'How do you serve him?', what would you say?  
Whether you'd say through sharing your faith, serving the church, ministering in  
the community, discipling your family, or praying... I hope you'd have an answer  
Remember: These things don't make us part of the kingdom... Only being born again does that  
But these things will characterize servants of the King

[tr] So, if Jesus was an other-worldly King, what was he doing in the world at all?  
What was he up to? ...Jesus makes his purpose extremely clear to Pilate:  
He was here on kingdom business, to bear witness to the truth—about everything  
**READ v.37a**<sup>14</sup>... That may be less a question and more an exclamation: 'You are a king, then!'  
Jesus' response might sound ambiguous, but it was in fact quite affirmative: **READ v.37b**<sup>15</sup>  
Like, 'You're right; I am a king... I was actually *born* to a king': **READ v.37c-d**<sup>16</sup>  
And here's how we need to apply the message Jesus was trying to get across... We need to:

### **Listen to the truth-telling Witness (v.37-38)**

[r] We need to listen to Jesus' voice, as he speaks the truth... Listen to the truth-telling Witness

Pastor Troy spoke a few weeks ago on disinformation, and how truth has fallen on hard times  
People honestly believe that what is true for them isn't necessarily true for me,  
and what is true for me isn't necessarily true for you  
Meanwhile, it's getting harder and harder to discern truth from falsehood  
With so many sources of disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, and AI-generation  
But as we defined it then, truth is what is real... It's things that are... It's fact... It's genuine...  
Truth is knowledge that aligns or corresponds with reality and how the universe works  
For many reasons, we believe that there is higher truth that originates outside of this world  
That the universe is governed by supreme, objective realities above it  
But the truth is not just some hidden, mysterious, esoteric knowledge  
Truth is knowable because God and Christ have made it known to us  
Jesus claims: 'I came here to make the truth known... to bear witness to it... to tell you the truth'  
What a breath of fresh air, in a world full of lies and confusion!  
Our world is desperate for some solid ground like this to stand on

Truth, here, is also more than just intellectual facts or the communication of information  
It is nothing less than the self-revelation of God and his Son, who is Truth incarnate  
As King of heaven, Jesus was specially endowed to deliver the truth to us  
And really, testifying to the truth of God, humanity, sin, and salvation

Was the means by which Jesus spread his kingdom into many hearts and lives  
As King of truth, he spoke the truth, which made subjects of the King [ ]  
Following his example, servants of Christ the King should likewise bear witness to the truth

Jesus was like, ‘This is why I was born, and this is why I’m here.’: **READ v.37c**<sup>17</sup>

Remember: we need to get Jesus’ identity and purpose right, or it skews everything  
Because he *is* the Truth, and he bears witness to the deepest truths of reality  
And then he adds: **READ v.37d**<sup>18</sup>... Are you “of” the truth? Reborn into his true kingdom?  
Another version says “*Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*”

Are you on his side? His side is the *only* right side of history

In Revelation 1:5, John calls him: “*Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*” ...He’s the faithful witness and the highest King

Have you heard his truth? Do you love the truth? Do you keep listening to his voice?

We primarily do this through hearing, reading, and meditating on God’s Word

But we also do this through listening to gospel preaching, speaking the truth in

love with fellow believers, and singing and praying the truth back to God

As Jesus said earlier in John: “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” (John 8:31-32)

And listen up: Listening to Jesus is far more than just getting good advice from him

Tim Keller put it well: that many people want Christ to be their Consultant, not their King

Like: You go to Jesus for tips, inspiration, life advice, self-help, or problem-solving

But you retain final authority over your life... You decide which courses to follow

You hope Jesus can help you attain your goals in life... Like a life coach

But if his counsel conflicts with your desires, you’re free to dismiss it

But true Christianity isn’t about adding Jesus to your life as a life coach—

It’s about surrendering to him as your rightful ruler

We acknowledge him as our ultimate authority

And we don’t just seek guidance, we offer allegiance

[Tim] Keller said it this way: “*A consultant gives advice you can accept or reject. A king gives commands you obey... Most people want Jesus as a consultant, not a king. But if he is the risen Lord, you don’t negotiate with him—you bow to him.*”

I hope you’re ready to confess your full allegiance to him today... Pilate wasn’t ready

In response to Jesus’ powerful claims in v.37, he shakes his head: **READ v.38a**<sup>19</sup>

Jesus’ words had contained an implicit invitation: Pilate could listen to him and follow him

But instead of asking Jesus to tell him more about the truth,

He abruptly shuts the trial down and apparently walks out of the room,

While cynically asking, ‘What is truth?’... As if the truth can never be found or known

—While the Way, the Truth, and the Life was staring him in the face! ...Sad

But Pilate’s dismissive attitude is the same as many in our world today, who’ve given up on truth

Thinking it’s too elusive, too subjective, too unknowable, too rigid, or too uncomfortable

Kids, as you seek the truth throughout your life, never come to see it as a hopeless quest

Truth is real... Truth does exist... Truth can be heard and known... Keep finding it in Jesus

[tr] Chapter 18 ends with an initial verdict from Pilate, which confirms Jesus’ innocence:

**READ v.38b**<sup>20</sup>... There was no basis for a charge against him... Not guilty of any crime  
Pilate *found* no guilt in him because there *was* no guilt in him<sup>21</sup>  
And thus, this earthly judge spoke far truer than he knew,  
    Testifying to the sinlessness and perfection of Christ  
He truly was the falsely-accused, unjustly detained, innocent sufferer  
Yet despite how terrible the injustice appeared right then, this was still God's plan  
And in what happens next, we see a foreshadowing of what God was accomplishing...  
Pilate offers to release one man to the people: an innocent one or a guilty one  
And the people insist on the guilty one going free  
I believe all of us guilty ones should take this to heart today, and personally:

### **Be released in exchange for the Sinless One (v.38-40)**

[r] Go free today... Be released in exchange for the Sinless One, who died in your place

Listen to Pilate's offer: **READ v.38c-39**<sup>22</sup>

Had Pilate had integrity, he would've just enforced his not guilty verdict, releasing Jesus  
But instead, for whatever reason, he makes a public offer to release him  
    Maybe he assumed the gathering crowds would support Jesus,  
    So he thought this would be a chance to embarrass the leaders yet again  
He almost certainly was trying to provoke them by calling Jesus 'the king of the Jews'

But this time, the Jews were ready with an alternate request: **READ v.40**<sup>23</sup>

We know next to nothing about this robber, Barabbas  
    Except that he was likely more than just a common thief—  
    But a revolutionary, an insurrectionist from a bloody uprising, or a terrorist  
The point is: The people chose a condemned, guilty man and condemned an innocent one  
And while the sinless man is soon sentenced to die, the guilty man goes free  
Don't you see? This is a picture of the gospel in miniature... This is what happened on the cross  
The sinless Saviour is condemned and dies, while guilty sinners are released by his blood  
    He takes our sentence of death, and bears it all the way to the grave  
    He exchanges places with us by substituting himself for us  
Even the name of the criminal was rife with significance:  
    Barabbas... Bar-abbas... 'son of the father'  
    He was released in exchange for the true Son of the Father  
If you hear this story, and wonder who you should relate to most,  
    It's not Jesus, and it's not likely Pilate or the Jews... It's Barabbas... We are Barabbas.

So I hope you accept the offer today, not from Pilate, but from God the Father:

    You can be released and go free, forgiven of all your sins against his throne  
    Because the Son took our place in death, removing our guilt from us forever  
And if you already believe, I hope you can once again see the freedom Christ secured for you  
    You don't need to live in condemnation or shame or guilt any longer... Be released!

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:1-2)

## **CONCLUSION**

I saw a recent video of an interview with 3 movie actors, including Paul Rudd (no relation to me)

But the interviewer asked them, “If you guys could go back in time and spend a day with anyone from history, who would you choose?”

Paul immediately chirps up: “Oh, that’s a great question. I know my answer: Jesus Christ.”

At which the other two actors burst into hysterical laughter

Then Paul, who is not a believer, goes: “By the way, laugh all you want... He existed, right? We know he did. So, wouldn’t you want to spend some time with him and go, “Jesus, what’s the deal? What’s the deal?””

He quickly convinces his co-stars that this isn’t a joke and leaves them thinking, “That’s a genuinely great answer.”

People want to know the deal with Jesus... Or put another way: They want to know the truth They are spiritual descendants of Pilate, wondering:

Who was Jesus, really? What was his deal? What did he do? What is truth?

I hope Paul finds that he doesn’t need to travel back in time to hear from Jesus

And I hope you can confess today: He is my King... He is the faithful Witness... He is the Truth And because he is the truth, my chains are released and I have been set free—free indeed! If we have gone free, may we now “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.” (1 Peter 2:16)

## PRAY

## Benediction: prayer, 5min, 1 John 5:4-5?

<sup>1</sup> Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.

<sup>2</sup> So Pilate went outside to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?”

<sup>3</sup> “What accusation do you bring against this man?” They answered him, “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.”

<sup>4</sup> “If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.”

<sup>5</sup> Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”

<sup>6</sup> The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”

<sup>7</sup> This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:1

<sup>9</sup> So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”

<sup>10</sup> Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

<sup>12</sup> “My kingdom is not of this world.

<sup>13</sup> John 12:13

<sup>14</sup> Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?”

<sup>15</sup> Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king.

<sup>16</sup> For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

<sup>17</sup> For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.

<sup>18</sup> Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

<sup>19</sup> Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

<sup>20</sup> After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.

<sup>21</sup> HT Sproul

<sup>22</sup> I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”

<sup>23</sup> They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.