

What Is Truth?

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asked.

If you would tour the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, you would see beams going everywhere, stairways leading nowhere, and columns that don't actually meet the floor. It was purposely designed that way to reflect life as being “senseless, incoherent, and incomplete,” and it was meant to invite those who visit the center to question and challenge everything, especially the old, worn-out truths that simple people once took for granted. But there's a serious question that needs to be asked about that building: “Did they do the same with the foundation?” Do you see how the designer's statement and intent fall apart?

It seems that Pilate lived in a culture very much like our own, with multiple groups claiming this, claiming that – a world with various religions and philosophies for life. Who could blame Pilate for questioning, “What is truth?” Whom was he to listen to and believe? Caesar? The Roman gods? The Greek philosophers? The Jewish priests? They all seemed senseless, incoherent, and incomplete. None of them had a foundational answer for the two most dreaded things in life – the guilt of sin and the reality of death. And as a result, all of them left one empty, afraid, and doubting.

But what about this Jesus who stood in front of Pilate? How would he be different? Why would he be different? Pilate would know if he had listened to Jesus. Jesus said to him, **“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”** (John 18:37). But even as troubled as Pilate was by the situation, he wasn't going to do that. Rather, John 19:1 says: **“Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.”**

But what if Pilate had listened to Jesus, what truth would he have heard? I wonder if Pilate's story would have been any different than the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, where Jesus told her every sinful thing she had done, and yet in mercy and grace promised her a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4). Or I wonder if Pilate's story would have been any different than the father whose son was demon possessed, where Jesus said to the boy's father, **“Everything is possible for him who believes,”** and the father exclaimed, **“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”** I wonder if Pilate's troubled heart would have been helped like that father was when Jesus healed his son (Mark 9). Or I wonder if Pilate's story would have been any different than Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, but who secretly met with Jesus, asked him questions, and heard Jesus say specifically to him, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3). I wonder if Pilate would have been there to bury Jesus' body like Nicodemus was (John 19). ...Do you know what? Pilate's story WOULD have turned out differently if he had listened to Jesus. But he wasn't going to do that.

What about us? Are our listening skills any better than Pilate's?

- Because we can become preoccupied with other things in life, do we pretend to listen but really aren't listening?
- Because we can have our own predetermined opinions on what is right and what is wrong, do we even care what Jesus has to say?
- Because we can believe that many things Jesus addresses are other people's problems, do we act like Jesus is preaching to the choir?
- Because we can think that Jesus' warnings won't happen to us, do we fail to take Jesus seriously?
- Because Jesus' promises can sometimes seem too good to be true, do we feel like the gospel of Jesus Christ is pie in the sky?

So many people make truth the issue, when the real issue is listening. If you'd just honestly listen to and humbly compare what Jesus has to say to what everyone else has to say, you'd see that what everyone else has to say are those beams that go everywhere and stairways that lead to nowhere and columns that don't even meet the floor. But what Jesus has to say stands up under every sin that every person has ever committed and every death that every person has ever died. And what he has to say is this: **"Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned"** (John 3:18), and **"Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies"** (John 11:25). How can he say that? Because he backed up his words with his death on the cross and his triumphant resurrection from the grave. The Apostle Paul states clearly, **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"** (Romans 4:25).

One can deny who Jesus is and what Jesus did all they want. Although that hardly makes sense, because the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' miracles, of Jesus' suffering and death, of Jesus' resurrection are undeniable. But even then, if one still wants to deny the truth of Jesus, then they have to admit that they have no real, positive, lasting answer to the guilt of their sin or their inevitable death. So then what foundation do they have to stand on?

Listen carefully to what Jesus has to say on foundations: ²⁴ **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash"** (Matthew 7:24-27).

Dear friends, the truth of Jesus does not change or waver or crumble no matter how much skepticism, pessimism, and cynicism there is in our 21st century culture. The truth of Jesus is backed by the fact that he is the holy Son of God who came down from heaven to be your Savior, backed by the fact that he died on the cross for your sin, and backed by the fact that he rose from the dead to give you peace and promise you life.

What is truth? I realize how pressing and challenging that question is today. But I pray that you clearly realize there's not a single answer to that question that makes sense unless it can provide total exoneration of your guilt and complete certainty of life after death. Only Jesus' cross and the empty tomb do that. Keep listening to Jesus and his truth will always stand on a firm foundation.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. Amen.