

## John 18:28-37 – Pilate and the Truth<sup>1</sup>

**Before teaching:** Make copies of the “Why Jesus Came” handout for the Transformational Exercise.

**Fellowship question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

[Have each class member give one “clue”. Use the categories, if needed.] How can you tell that someone is telling you the truth? What are clues by A) body language? B) voice? C) content?

Name someone in your life that you would consider to be “true through and through.”

### Information

In today’s Bible story, a key subject is “truth”.

- Have a class member read John 18:28-37.

Jesus goes before the religious leaders, including the high priest. Since the time of Lazarus’ resurrection, the religious leaders have been pondering a way to trap and kill Jesus.

- Have a class member read John 11:47-53.

Those associated with Jesus were also at risk.

- Have a class member read John 12:9-11.

What do you think were the motivations of the religious leaders? Were they sincere? Were they just/right? If we give them credit for having good motivations, does that make a difference? (In other words, if they wanted to kill these men simply because of the priests’ reputation or inconvenience – would that be different from killing them because the priests had an obligation to keep the faith pure?)

Someone may be sincere, but wrong. Someone may have good motivations, but be wrong. Someone may fight for a truth that is not a truth at all. On the other hand, someone can do the wrong thing for all the right reasons. Can you share a story of a time someone (maybe even you) acted based on a partial truth or on false information?

Knowing the truth is not always a simple matter. Part of that may be because most of us tell lies every day. What are some of the “little lies” we tell regularly? [We may exaggerate a story. We may tell a partial truth. We may tell outright lies, etc.]

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What are some characteristics of an “honest” conversation between two people? [Write characteristics on the board. These may include mutual trust, mutual respect, integrity, facts, etc.]

Look at the conversation between Pilate and the chief priests in John 18:29-30. Is this an “honest” conversation? [The priests do not lie but they avoid telling the truth.]

Look at the conversation between Pilate and the chief priests in John 18:31. Is this an “honest” conversation?

Look at the conversation between Pilate and Jesus in John 18:33-34. Is this an “honest” conversation? Like the chief priests, Jesus answers Pilate’s question with a question. What is the difference between these two conversations, then?

Jesus could have ended the conversation and the threat to his life had he put a politically correct spin on his answer. Something like, “Sir, we both know I am not the King. But my followers sometimes get carried away and thrust on me titles I do not seek. I apologize if the religious leaders have been confused and overly excited by that. You know how they can be, sir.”

However, Jesus does not deny the title. Is he playing games with Pilate? Is he playing with Pilate’s mind? What deeper reasons might Jesus have for answering as he did?

We might ask, “Who is on trial here – Jesus or Pilate?”

What does this personal conversation teach us about our personal relationship with Jesus? [God sometimes answers our questions with a question. When we come face-to-face with Jesus, there is a sense in which a trial is happening and a judgment is being made.]

Look at the conversation between Pilate and Jesus in John 18:35-36. Is this an “honest” conversation?

Jesus is not intimidated by Pilate. To Jesus, Pilate is an ordinary man living in this world who needs a change of allegiance. Jesus states twice in this passage, “My kingdom is not from this world/here.”

Pilate is stuck in a “this world” mindset. Have you ever been there? Do you ever find yourself there when deciding between the practical, “real-world” way of thinking and Jesus’ “bigger Kingdom” way of thinking? What experience made you convert from a “this world” way of thinking to a “spiritual world” way of thinking?

“That [‘it is not from this world...not from here’] has sometimes been understood to mean that the kingship of Jesus is otherworldly, or ‘spiritual,’ as opposed to being involved with such worldly matters as political or economic power; or private and inward rather than being exercised in the public sphere; or religious as distinguished from political. None of these is true.....John’s transposition of [the phrases ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘kingdom of heaven’] into that of life and love has the exactly opposite meaning to otherworldliness or separating private from public, or religion from politics. It also resists any understanding of kingship as being only future.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 364.

Look at the conversation between Pilate and Jesus in John 18:37-38a. Is this an “honest” conversation?

There is a phrase that Jesus often uses in his sermons and parables. Can you finish it for me... “Let those with ears...” [“Let those with ears to hear, hear.”] What does Jesus mean by that? Does Pilate have the ears to hear Jesus? Why or why not?

In verse 38, Pilate jumps to a philosophical question. Pilate’s jump to a philosophical argument is one defensive mechanism we might use to avoid Jesus’ personal challenge to each of us. It may be more comfortable to talk about an *idea* than to talk about my *relationship* with God.

What other defensive mechanisms might we use to avoid this conversation that Jesus wants to have with us?

“The irony is that Pilate, faced with ‘the truth’ in person, is asking a ‘what’ question instead of a ‘who’ question.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was not interested in talking about politics or philosophy. He was open to talking about a personal, spiritual relationship. What do you think could have happened if Pilate had had an honest conversation with Jesus about their relationship with one another?

### **Transformational exercise**

- Distribute the “Why Jesus Came” handout.

Early in his public ministry, Jesus declared that God his Father had sent him (John 3:16-17). As Jesus approached the cross, he declared more and more clearly why he had come. In verse John 18:37, Jesus tells us again why he was born – his purpose and his end. “For this is why I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

It might be easier for us to focus on the “*means*” that Jesus used to reach his “*end*”, so we debate the mythologies of the miracles or the historicity of Jesus’ sayings, or the inspiration of the Scripture. But the miracles and the teachings and the collection of those stories are the *means* toward Jesus’ larger goals.

As followers of Jesus, we must know our Master’s goal, his *end*. This week, your soulwork-homework is to read these short sayings of Jesus every day, maybe a couple of times a day. These are the reasons found in John’s gospel that Jesus said he came to “this world.” If we are to be “true” disciples, we must have the purposes of our Lord.

Let’s read these statements aloud together, and then have a time of silence before I close us in prayer.

[Read the passages on the handout in unison, or you may want to go around the room, having individual students read a verse each.]

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<sup>3</sup> Ford, 366.

*God, it is easy for us to ignore your Spirit's prompting in our lives by focusing on politics, or philosophy, or a plethora of other things. It is easy for us not to take your words seriously as we deal with "the real world." Help us to believe the very practical truth that you love us and that you love the whole world. Help us to believe the truth that you came to bring us hope, salvation, and joy. Help us to believe the truth that you have an eternal, abundant life for us now and throughout eternity. Amen.*

## **Why Jesus Came**

(The words of Jesus according to John's gospel)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. (John 4:34)

I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me... This indeed is the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. (John 6:38, 40)

I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind. (John 9:39)

I came that they might have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

[As Jesus is considering his impending death:] Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour?” No, it is for this reason that I have come. (John 12:27)

I have come as a light in the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. (John 12:46)

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and so that your joy may be more complete. (John 15:11)

I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling.” (John 16:1)

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world, you have persecution. But take courage; I have overcome the world! (John 16:33)

[Jesus' prayer about his purpose for coming to the world] ...you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:2-3)

[Jesus' prayer, continued...] But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy complete in themselves. (John 17:13)

For this is why I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. (John 18:37)