

4. The Kingdom and The Truth

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's bow our heads together and I'll lead us all in prayer to the Lord. His hands and feet and heart, all three were pierced for me on Calvary.

Our dear Lord Jesus, we remember again the price that you paid, the unimaginable cost that it was to you to rescue us.

And these words we've just sung, dear Lord, remind us that we could not possibly ransom ourselves. We didn't have the money, we didn't have what it might take. We could not. We were bankrupt, sinful men and women.

And then we think of you, the sinless and perfect one, the Son of God, the glory of God, who came to earth for our sake, so that you might, in the end, offer yourself as the sacrifice, the sacrifice of atonement, so that we might be reconciled to God the Father and accepted and forgiven and brought forever into your wonderful presence.

How we thank you for this, dear Lord Jesus. Jesus, please fill our hearts every day with gratitude for this sacrifice of the cross that you went to willingly for our sake.

[1 : 3 0] And our prayer today, dear Lord Jesus, is that you will continue not only to build us up and to help us, but that you will bring your help to those in parts of the world where there is great suffering.

And dear Lord, we want to remember before you especially those who are suffering greatly in the city of Christchurch in New Zealand as a result of this horrible earthquake that has happened there a day or two ago.

Please have mercy upon them, Lord. Please, in particular, send help and strength to those who are searching through rubble, carefully rescuing people who are trapped.

And especially, dear Lord, bring comfort to those who have lost loved ones and turn their hearts to you, we do pray. We ask that many in their distress will find comfort not only in thinking about you, but in truly coming to you in faith and trust and repentance.

And we pray for the Christians, the churches there in Christchurch and that area and ask you to strengthen them. Help them not in any way to lose heart, but help them lovingly and compassionately to hold out the truth to others who are in such great need.

[2 : 4 7] So we commit them to you, dear Lord Jesus, and ask that out of this very difficult, awful time, there will indeed be blessing. And these things we ask and pray too, dear Lord, that you will open our ears and our hearts afresh to your words today, that you'll bring comfort and light and help to all of us.

And we ask it for your dear name's sake. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn together to John's Gospel, chapter 18. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, you'll find this on page 904, page 904.

And over the last few weeks, we've been looking first at the arrest of Jesus in the first 11 or so verses of the chapter. We then looked at Jesus before the high priests and the way that he was questioned by them.

Last week we looked at Peter's denials, his three denials, and now we're going to look at Jesus before Pilate in verses 28 to 40. So I'll read from verse 28.

John chapter 18, verse 28. Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning.

[4 : 07] They themselves, that's the Jewish leaders, they themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. So Pilate went outside to them and said, 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. Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.

The Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death. This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

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?

Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world.

[5 : 22] 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. Then Pilate said to him, So, you are a king?

Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. 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. Pilate said to him, What is truth? After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, 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? They cried out again, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

Amen. The words of the Lord. May they be a blessing to us this afternoon. Well now as we come to this final section of John chapter 18, I want to spend a good deal of our time in verses 36 and 37, because I think they are the centre of gravity of the whole passage.

[6 : 47] But before we get to verses 36 and 7, I think we need to get acquainted a little bit with Pontius Pilate, and this strange situation that the Roman governor faced on this particular Friday morning.

It was no ordinary Friday for Pontius Pilate, and I don't suppose he forgot it in a hurry. So let's find our way into the action and see what's going on here.

Jesus has just been questioned by the high priests of the Jews, by Annas particularly, in verses 19 to 24, and he's then been sent to the house of Caiaphas, the other high priest, who was the official high priest.

And it seems that the high priests have not got much out of Jesus. And we know, because Jesus has told us back in John chapter 11, that the high priests have long since decided that they must get Jesus put to death.

They regard him as a blasphemer, a deceiver, who is claiming to be God. And because he is so popular with the great crowds of ordinary people, they're afraid that he may become the focus of a popular uprising which could bring the heavy hand of the Roman government down upon the Jews and even deprive them of their privileges.

[8 : 02] They were frightened that they might shut down the temple and that sort of thing. So although the high priests put Jesus through a kind of trial in the middle part of chapter 18, it's no real trial because in their minds they have decided the issue.

This man must be put to death. But the Jewish leaders have a problem. Their problem is that the Roman authorities have kept to themselves the power of judicial capital punishment.

The Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin, was able to meet and to try certain cases in which Jews were accused of various crimes under Jewish law.

So they did have certain legal powers, but the Jews were not allowed to impose the death penalty. And this explains the rather odd exchange between the Jews and Pilate in verse 31.

Pilate says to them, you take him yourselves and judge him by your own law, your Jewish law. But quick as a flash, they come back to him and they say, it is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.

[9 : 04] Which means, we think, we're convinced he must be executed. But we're bringing him to you, Mr. Governor, because you only have the power to carry out executions. And then you'll see John adds, a little bit mysterious, verse 32.

This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. And John is referring there to something that Jesus had said back in chapter 12, which was, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

What he meant was, lifted up on a cross. So Jesus, back in chapter 12, had predicted that he would not be stoned to death, because stoning was the normal Jewish method of execution.

He was going to be lifted up on a cross, which was the Roman way of executing common criminals. So going back to verse 28 in our chapter, this explains why the Jewish leaders had to take Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the headquarters of Pilate, the Roman governor.

They would gladly have put Jesus to death themselves. by stoning him. But they knew they'd be in big trouble if they took the law of capital punishment into their own hands. So they march him round to Pilate's house to get Pilate to pronounce sentence.

[10 : 26] Now, John, the evangelist, expects us to realise that Pilate knew what was going on. It wasn't as though this was the first he'd known of it. If you look back to verse 12, you see that Jesus was arrested and tied up in the Garden of Gethsemane, not only by the temple officers, the Jewish temple police, but also by a band of Roman soldiers and their captain.

And it must have been Pilate who'd given permission or given the orders for that detachment of soldiers to go and pick Jesus up. So in verse 28, although it is early morning, Pilate seems to have been up and at it.

He wasn't caught off his guard. There's no suggestion that he had to be woken up by one of his men and given a chance to have his breakfast before he could face this particular problem.

In fact, I read the other day that apparently Roman officials in the Roman Empire at this time were often up very early in the morning and started work at maybe 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. And they finished work at about 10 or 11 a.m.

So their whole day ran very early. Can you imagine laying down your pen at 11 o'clock a.m. and saying, that's me? Anyway, it was for Pilate and others like him.

[11 : 41] So Jesus is brought to Pilate here in verse 28. Now you'll see that the Jews don't actually go into Pilate's house because they were about to eat the Passover and to go into a Gentile's house would have made them ceremonially unclean.

And if you were ceremonially unclean you could not participate in the Passover meal. There's an extraordinary irony here. They are just about to put to death the Son of God, their own Messiah, the most defiling deed in the history of the world and yet they want to keep themselves squeaky clean by not stepping over a Gentile threshold.

I think John means us to notice the irony there. Anyway, Pilate, you'll see in verse 29, humours the Jews on this point of scruple and that's why he's prepared to go outside to them to a place where he could meet them and he says, what accusation do you bring against this man?

And in asking that question, effectively, Pilate is opening the trial. Lay your accusation before this court and we will proceed. That's really what he means.

We then have a brief exchange between the Jews and Pilate and Pilate then leaves them and he goes back inside the house to where Jesus is standing tied up and he calls Jesus across to him in verse 33 and he says to him, are you the king of the Jews?

[13 : 11] Now it's that word king which introduces the real subject of everything that follows. Is Jesus a king? And if so, the question is what manner of king is he?

I don't know whether you've been to the cinema recently and seen this new film called The King's Speech. Just nod ahead if you have. A few of you perhaps have. I went to see it myself last week.

It's about King George VI, the father of our present queen, who found himself thrust onto the throne of the UK in 1936 because his brother suddenly abdicated.

You know the history of that, I'm sure. And of course, George VI had to play the monarch's role during the Second World War. And the film is really all about the king's stammer.

He had a very profound, difficult stammer. And the question in the film is acutely raised, what kind of a king do we have here who hasn't got the power to speak to the nation, especially as the nation enters this dreadful period of war with Germany?

[14 : 15] And the film, I think, very movingly shows how the king with help did overcome his stammer and he was able in the end to address the nation over the radio. He was able to bring comfort to his people at a very dark time.

But the question in a sense in the film is the question what kind of a king do we have? Now on a much greater canvas, that's the question that Pontius Pilate is facing here.

He has heard that Jesus is being called the king of the Jews. And that's why he says in verse 33, are you the king of the Jews? But really his underlying question is, if you are the king of the Jews, what kind of king are you?

Who am I tangling with when I tangle with you? Now you can understand why the Roman governor is concerned with that question. The Herods were the royal line, the royal house of the Jews, the puppet kings under the overlordship of Rome.

And Pilate, of course, knew the current king Herod. So, from Pilate's point of view, might this man Jesus be some kind of a claimant to Herod's position? Might he be threatening to mobilize an army who could rise up against the Romans and try to throw them out of Judea?

[15 : 29] From Pontius Pilate's point of view, it was a very important question. Was this man a threat to the power of Rome? Now I'll pass over verses 34 and 35 because I want us to see how Jesus answers this question of Pilate in verses 36 and 37.

What Jesus says in verse 36 would have brought comfort and relief to Pontius Pilate. He says there, 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. So Jesus is wanting Pilate to see that his activities are no threat whatever to the power of Rome.

He's saying to Pilate, I don't wield worldly power as you understand it. I haven't got soldiers, or weapons, or money. If that were my game, my servants would be armed and they'd be fighting to keep me out of the clutches of the Jewish leaders.

But the kingly power that I have is not that kind of power at all. Not a kingdom of this world. And those words would have brought real relief to Pontius Pilate.

[16 : 44] He'd have realised that he wasn't now going to have to muster troops and put down a nasty insurrection. He knew that he wouldn't have rivers of blood flowing in Jerusalem. And yet, and yet, Jesus had not denied that he was a king.

Not at all. In fact, he was clearly claiming to be a king. My kingdom is not of this world, not from the world. So suddenly, Pilate is being presented with categories of thought that he's just not familiar with.

All he knows is the power of military muscle. Might is right and the Roman Empire is the world's superpower. So what kind of a king is this who speaks of a kingdom from another world?

And that's why Pilate has to put his second question at the beginning of verse 37. You see, he's relieved that Jesus is not a worldly king, but he's intrigued with this strange idea that somebody could be a king without an army.

So now he asks, so you are a king? Meaning, if you are a king, don't keep me in suspense, man. Tell me what kind of king you are. So Jesus answers, you say that I'm a king, which really means yes, it is as you say.

[18 : 07] But now, and let me just do a little paraphrasing here. I think what he's saying is this. Now, says Jesus, I'm going to tell you what kind of king I really am. I was born for the purpose of being king.

And though I'm not a worldly king, I have come into the world to establish a different kind of kingdom. And I exercise my kingly power by bearing witness to the truth.

And my subjects are all those who listen to my voice and to the truth to which I bear witness. Now, we'll return to Pilate in just a moment, but first let's think about these words of Jesus in verse 37.

He's a king, he says. In fact, he is the king. Friends, let's not be deceived by soft pictures of Jesus that we may have been brought up on as we read our children's Bibles at Sunday school.

You know, the sort of pictures, coloured pictures or line drawings that we all have seen of Jesus. A rather delicate looking brown haired man with silky soft hair and rather large soft eyes, maybe holding a child by the hand, perhaps even with a lamb tucked up under his arm.

[19 : 19] Now, of course, the Lord Jesus loves his people very tenderly and he knows each one by name, but he is the king, he's the king of heaven and earth, and one day every power in the universe will be subjected to his rule and those that resist him in the end will be shattered to pieces like a potter's vessel, as it's put in Psalm 2.

So he's an awesome king, wonderful to those who belong to him, but in the end terrifying to those who resist him. Apparently Queen Victoria, who ruled over I guess a quarter of the earth's population in the 19th century, Queen Victoria was once asked what she would do when she met the Lord Jesus, and she said it would be my delight to take off my crown and to lay it at his feet.

Isn't that a lovely picture of the kingship of Jesus? He's a king. But let's notice from verse 37 just how he exercises his kingly power, not by calling people to arms, not by establishing his rule over a particular geographical part of the earth.

His kingdom is not physical and geographical. According to verse 37, he establishes his kingdom by bearing witness to the truth. In other words, by speaking, by testifying, by drawing the world's attention to the truth.

And consequently, still in verse 37, those who are of the truth, those who belong to the truth and want to hear the truth, they are the ones who will listen to his voice, which means that they will recognize that he is the king, the supreme authority, and that what he has to say is the truth in the most important sense of the word.

[21 : 05] what he is really saying is there are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are of the truth, who listen to his voice, those who have the ears to hear and want to follow him.

But then, on the other hand, there are those who have no real interest in the truth and who shut their ears to his voice. So what is this truth to which he bears witness?

Well, first and foremost, it is he himself. Do you remember he says in chapter 14, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

I am the truth is what he says. And it's perhaps odd to people like us to think of the truth as being primarily a person. We tend to think of truth in terms of mathematics or physics or biology or philosophy, words and sentences and propositions which are self-evidently correct and accurate.

So for example, let me give you a couple of examples here. Oak trees from acorns do grow. Is that true? That's an example of a proposition that is true, isn't it? Oak trees from acorns do grow.

[22 : 21] Well, how about this? Dogs are not cats. Is that evidently true? I guess it is, isn't it? That's the way we tend to think of truth. Propositions, statements, if you like. But to think of truth as a person, that's something which opens up altogether new avenues in our minds.

I am the truth, he says. And he means not only that truth resides in him, but also that who he is and what he came to do is the most important thing in the world.

So as we get to know the truth, the many truths about this king, we become subjects of this king, we become his people as we learn the truth from him.

So to give one or two examples of how we learn the truth about him, we learn about his identity, we learn the extraordinary truth that he is both God and man, that he is fully God and fully man, that he is the son of God and the son of man.

Or we learn about his mission, that he came into the world at the bidding of his father. He came as the representative human being. He went to the cross as our representative so that he could bear representatively the penalty that our sins fully deserved so that we should not have to bear it ourselves.

[23 : 43] Then we think of how he was raised from death as the prototype man of the new world. That's what he is, the prototype man of the new creation, the guarantee that all who belong to him will be raised in just the same way with death not able to hold us.

Or think of his destiny. We learn about his destiny. How even now he is seated at the right hand of God the Father. How he will return to the earth and gather to himself all who belong to him.

And how he will then take his people to be with him forever in the new creation, able to worship him and God the Father in that great realm where frustration and sickness and pain and tears and death are no more.

for this purpose, Jesus has come into the world to bear witness to the truth, to speak about it, to persuade people that the truth about him is the most important truth in the universe.

But he then adds this telling final sentence in verse 37 which surely is addressed personally to Pontius Pilate. He says, everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

[24 : 56] I think he's implying that's true of you as well, Pontius Pilate. You may be the Roman governor, you may be a high-ranking official in the Roman Empire, but you too could be a person who comes to listen to my voice and becomes a subject of the true king.

Well, our time is nearly gone, but let me in closing say a word first to those who are not Christians. There may be some here today and I hope there are. And secondly, something to those who are Christians.

If you're not yet a Christian, do look at verse 37 because I think it will show you that to become a Christian is in a sense a process of training your ear in a new direction.

If you're not a Christian, you haven't been listening to the voice of Jesus so far in your life, at least not seriously. You may well have lived by human standards and upright, decent life, but you're not yet a citizen of the most important kingdom.

Your ear may have been tuned to many voices and those voices may be honourable and true in their own way, the voices of reason and art and culture and so on.

[26 : 07] You may genuinely desire to be a useful citizen and a good neighbour, but the truth in the most important sense is something that you don't know yet.

So friend, do let me encourage you to open your ear and listen to the king. Listen to the truth as he teaches it, as the Bible teaches it. And I think you'll realise over time that it's a different kind of truth from any sort of truth you've discovered before.

It's a truth which nourishes and satisfies as no truth ever can, which comes simply from the life of the world. But then for those of us who are Christians, let's rejoice again, friends, that we have a king like this and that we are able to listen to his voice every day and that his truth is real truth.

It means that because of him we're not at the mercy of the spirit of this age. We're not blown around by all the trends of thought and the fashionable isms that come and go.

We're not made anxious by the things that the world is so fearful about. Our security comes from our citizenship of the unseen kingdom, this kingdom which is not of this world.

[27 : 24] Our joy comes from the king himself. We know that he bears witness to the truth. And as we listen to his voice day after day, he establishes his kingly rule of truth ever more deeply into our hearts and lives.

The unseen kingdom is the only kingdom that is worth belonging to in the end. Now Jesus gave Pilate his little window, little window of opportunity.

Everyone who is of the truth, he says to him, listens to my voice. That could be you, Pilate. But all Pilate could say was, what is truth? And having said that, he turned on his heel and he didn't even wait for an answer.

Well let's end with the words of the king and let each one of us be honest and ask ourselves where we stand with him. Verse 37, for this purpose I was born and for this purpose I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

everyone who is of the truth, on the side of truth, listens to my voice. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together.

[28 : 40] Lord Jesus, what a joy it is to us to know that you are the truth and you speak the truth.

And we pray for all of us. For any here who have not yet truly opened their ear to your voice, we lovingly pray that you'll have mercy upon them and help them.

And for those here who are Christians, we pray that listening to your voice and learning your truth will become more and more to us the delight and joy of our lives. And that as each year passes, each decade passes, so we shall come to know you better because you are gracious and loving to us.

Please Lord, continue to teach us the truth for our hearts delight and for our eternal security. And we pray it for your name's sake.

Amen.