
Standing Before The Truth

"Therefore Pilate said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice'" (John 18:37).

When the chief priests took Jesus before Pilate, they were determined to get Pilate to agree with their condemnation of Jesus. They were sacrificing all of their integrity to bring about this crucifixion. Even so, the only charge that they could present to the governor was that Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews. In order to get a conviction, they had to twist His claim into a sinister and evil plot against Rome, phrasing it to mean that Jesus sought to be a rival to the emperor himself.

Pilate did not want to judge Jesus. He had believed from the start that this conflict between the Jews and Jesus was a Jewish problem that the Sanhedrin should handle. He argued that they should have judged Him themselves. Nevertheless, when Caesar was brought into the picture, Pilate had to listen and issue some kind of verdict about Him. No governor of Rome could sidestep any question that dealt with Roman rule.

The initial charge that Jesus claimed to be a king was made before Pilate on The Pavement in front of the palace. The Jewish prosecutors had refused to enter the palace for fear of becoming defiled and being disqualified from partaking of the Passover. Pilate immediately saw that he needed to interview Jesus for himself, but The Pavement was no place for that interrogation.

The riotous nature, the noise, and the confusion of the trial on The Pavement caused Pilate to withdraw with Jesus into the palace. He wanted to enter into a personal dialogue with Him. Therefore, in an inner room, away

from the clamor of the crowd, Pilate found himself engaged in what would be one of the greatest conversations in the history of the world. Job, as he sought to understand his affliction, said, "But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue with God" (Job 13:3). Pilate, as he sought to understand this prisoner who was standing before him, privately quizzed the Son of God. Who can imagine it? John wrote, "Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'" (John 18:33).

Jesus responded to Pilate's question with a question. He said, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" (John 18:34). Jesus' question made Pilate think about the origin of his question. Did it come from his own mind, or did the Jews put it in his mouth? Pilate had to admit to Jesus that he did not understand what was happening. He said, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" (John 18:35). Jesus made Pilate see that he was trying to untie a knot that was too big for him to untangle.

Then, with great compassion and clarity, our Lord gave Pilate the truth about Himself. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36). Pilate must have listened with great interest to what He said, and then he made a remark that was

at once a question and a statement: "So You are a king?" He had heard the truth of God given in a short sentence, and he almost understood it. To make sure that he grasped it, our Lord elaborated upon it: "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). Jesus put the truth about Himself squarely before Pilate. He would have to accept it or reject it. If he chose to accept this truth, Pilate would then have to pay a great price for it. The truth is ever the pearl of great price, as our Lord had earlier taught in a parable. To purchase it requires our all. Pilate, refusing to sell everything that he might possess the truth, said to Jesus, perhaps with a sneer, "What is truth?" (John 18:38a).

Where else could we look to find so much truth packed into so few words as in the answers Jesus gave on this occasion? We could say that the greatest life ever lived in this world, the life of the Son of God, is summarized in Jesus' brief statements to Pilate.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36a). Pilate knew that the Jews wanted a king and a kingdom more than anything else. However, the kingdom they wanted was an earthly, physical, fighting kingdom that would overcome the Roman Empire and give them freedom from Rome's domination. This was the actual point of conflict between Jesus and the Jews. Jesus was a spiritual king, and He would establish a spiritual kingdom—a kingdom that would not be of this world. The Jews were demanding a physical one.

Our hearts usually are so full of what we want that we cannot see what we need. We do not need a physical kingdom; we need a spiritual reign, one that lives in the heart and controls the spirit. A physical kingdom has never been able to offer this world much. It raises the sword, lives a little while, and then dies with clinched fists. Might may win the day, but it cannot sustain the soul and heart for this world and the next.

Jesus said, "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world" (John 18:37). Jesus

came to this earth to lay the groundwork for the establishment of His kingdom. He came to tell us the truth about Himself. The New Testament is really divided into two parts. The first part can be called "The Kingdom-Centered Christ," and the second part can be labeled "The Christ-Centered Kingdom." Jesus was saying, "If you do not understand My kingdom, then you will never understand why I have come. I have come to testify to the truth of Myself and My kingdom."

Jesus was declaring, "What I am telling you is the big truth about life." He gave Pilate not only the truth, but also one of the greatest truths that mankind can know. Jesus said that He had come into the world to bring us the truth. He was letting Pilate know, "If you really want to know the truth, you can." The person who is of the truth is one who really wants to know it. The person who is of the truth will listen to Jesus because He is the embodiment of the truth.

Let us weigh carefully what Jesus said to Pilate. The Son of God put before Pilate the truth about Himself, His kingdom, and those who were going to follow Him. Pilate had an opportunity to listen and understand, but he refused to do so. We, too, are standing before the truth. We have a golden opportunity to receive it. We have the completed revelation of the New Testament before us. We can read it and think about it; then, we can go back and read it again and think about it further. We know how Pilate treated the truth when he stood before it. The big question is this: What will we do with the truth as we stand before it?

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Truth was very close to Pilate, and it is very close to all of us. If we have the desire to know what is true, we can know it. If we actually listen in order to hear the truth, we can hear it. If we actually seek the truth, we will find it. Jesus said, "Your word is truth!" (John 17:17b) and "I am . . . the truth!" (John 14:6).