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## Jesus on Truth

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TEXT: Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."

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Dear friends,

I wonder if you've thought about the tool of a sword lately. You know, young boys are often fascinated when they first encounter a sword fight or pick up a toy sword in a store somewhere. This this tool is just fascinating with the tip on the end and the two edges, and these swords become tools that people have used down through history for many things: to puncture things, to cut things, to divide things. And it's interesting that the Bible often speaks of swords. As a matter of fact, Jesus, when he was talking in Matthew 10 to those that were listening, he said, "Do not think that I came into the world to bring peace, but not peace, but a sword." And then he talked about dividing very personal relationships in people. Why did he say this? What is more important than relationships and being connected in the world today that Jesus was referring to? What is this? What is this sword he came to bring?

I think this sword is referenced in our text today in John 18, when Jesus was interacting with Pontius Pilate. Of course, Jesus was brought by the Jewish leaders before Pilate, and then they were wanting him to be accused of crimes against them and put to death, and they couldn't put him to death. So they wanted Pilate to do this, and Pilate didn't know what to do and he was asking him, "Are you a king?" And Jesus said, "You know, my kingdom is not of this world," and Pilate said, "You are a king then." And Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king." In fact, you could probably cut the tension in the room here with the knife. Just Jesus in Pilate, in the palace together. And Pilate feels the weight of Jesus' life resting in his hands, so he thinks. And Jesus said this: "The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Very poignant statement. I don't know if he was looking Pilate in the eye when he said it or how he said it. But Pilate had a sort of visceral reaction, the scripture says. He retorted, "What is truth?"

Three questions for this text that I want to look at today. One: what is this idea of truth that Jesus is referring to, the answer to Pilate's question "What is truth?" Number two: why was Pilate so flummoxed by Jesus bringing up this idea of truth? And then really, why did Jesus come into the world to testify to the truth? Why did he do this? When Jesus responded to the reality of his kingship with Pilate, he referenced this word, "alethia." The word for truth is alethia. It means the verity, the truth that which is irrefutable, that which is objective, that which is fact. It's no real mystery that in a relativistic or post-modern society like we live in today, we think of truth much

differently than alethia, the verity, the fact. As one article I recently read by Michael McKinney was entitled "Truth is Stranger than it Used to be." Now, I don't know if that's really true. I think it was strange for Pilate in his day. But I think appropriately, Michael writes this:

The quest for truth has taken people in all kinds of creative new directions over the ages, and it has led to seemingly a constant redefinition of the term truth. Sure, there's consensus on truths such as two plus two equals four, and the Earth revolves around the sun. But is there a body of truth, a body of truth in the world that explains the bigger fundamental questions? Is there some reality out there that is actually true? Who are we? Why are we here? What should we be doing? How are we to interact? Is this life all there is?

The truth is stranger than it used to be, but I do think it was strange for Pontius Pilate and his day as well.

Relativism now embraces all kinds of ideas about the truth. It just seems to create more and more confusion in our world. Consider these three ideas about the truth: the idea of normative truth, and that is the idea that if enough people come to believe something to be true and they choose to agree upon it, it becomes the norm, and so then it becomes true. For many years, the normative truth about the world was that it is flat. Many people agreed on this. The problem is, it just wasn't true. It wasn't real. Normative truths can become very powerful, and they can cause people to believe things that just plain aren't real; "normative truth."

There's the idea of subjective truth, very powerful idea of truth in our world today, and that is you have your truth from what you've experienced and you know. I have my truth from what I've experienced and what I know. And if those truths just happen to disagree, that's no problem whatsoever. We can both have our truth, even if they're completely opposed to one another. If you perceive something to be true and you know it's true for you, that's totally fine for you. And if you perceive something to be true, that's totally fine for you as well. Subjective truth: truth is defined by the person who's proclaiming it. Normative truth: groupthink creates something real. Subjective truth: what a person feels and experience and believes to be true is true.

And then there's this idea of narrative truth, that a truth can be created through the telling of a powerful narrative, a story. And if it's told often enough and it resonates in the heart of individuals who listen, somehow it becomes something they believe to be

true and it becomes true for them. Now there's more ideas of truth as well, but it's just a snippet of three of them: normative truths, subjective truth, narrative truth.

When Jesus was referring to the “alethia,” that he came to testify to the truth, it was none of these ideas about truth that he was referencing, Jesus was referencing. And I think maybe the best way to understand the idea behind the alethia is: it is a truth that is the property of being in accord with that which is fact or that which is real. We might refer to this as “objective truth.” And many people in the world don't believe there is a body of objective truth. It's the truth that actually exists, that which is actually real, that which is unchanging, immutable in all of life, in the seen world and in the unseen world. We can very simply identify one objective truth in the reality of gravity. The world itself is filled with realities that cannot be changed. But in all this confusion about truth, it's no surprise that Pontius Pilate was bewildered by Jesus' claim of testifying to the truth. What is the truth? It echoes in the hearts of hundreds, even millions of people today. What is the truth?

And the Bible, I think, gives us insight as to why we have trouble comprehending the truth. It clearly tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that in our current state, cut off from God, sinful in our nature, we have limited vision and insight into what's true. Our fall away from God and our disobedience from him has caused us to often be blind to what's true and what's real. Real truth can be very hard to come by and discern – we are foggy on truth, spiritually, perception-wise, because of our sinfulness. We are now looking through a glass dimly. Our vision, our insight is clouded by sin. We're blinded by sin. In addition to that, not only do we have trouble because of our current nature, but because of our shame and our guilt, there is an active energy working in us sometimes and in the world to suppress that which is true. Our sinful state has us wanting to actively hide or censor out a lot of what's really true because it's shameful to us. Not all truth is liberating and to be celebrated. We want to keep much of what's true in the darkness and not have it exposed into the light because it will accuse us of our shortcomings, our failings, our sinfulness, the darkness of our heart. So, sin blinds us to what's really true, and then some of the truth – because of sinfulness in the world – we just want to suppress, put away, keep in the darkness and hide because it is completely shameful to us.

When I was younger, I was forbidden from riding the vehicles when my folks went into town, (we lived on a small acreage in western Iowa.) One night they were in town and

we had an old green station wagon that was rear wheel drive, has a big engine and strong engine in it, and it was early spring. There was no crops in the fields yet, and I decided to step into that green station wagon, drive out into the field and just have a little fun. And I started peeling around in the field doing figure eights, cutting circles, spitting up dirt as far as I could, just really driving that thing in a strong way, having a lot of fun. And I went and parked it and I started to sense what might happen if my folks were to find out what was true about what I did that night. And I went out into the field and I realized there was no way I could cover all my tracks. The truth was right out there in the open, but every part of me wanted to cover my tracks. The truth is hard to find in the world today because we're blind to it spiritually, and then people hide. We love the darkness more than light. We want to cover all of our shame, all of our guilt, all of our wrongdoings. And so then we lie: we lie to ourselves, we lie to God, and we lie to each other, and the world is filled with lies. It's no wonder that Pontius Pilate threw up his hands when Jesus said, "I came to testify to the truth," and he (Pontius Pilate) said, "What is truth?" Like many in the world today, he scoffs at this idea of there being objective truth, of there being an alethia. It's just fascinating, this tension that's here, and how relevant this is in our world today. Jesus came to testify to the alethia. He did this because he wants us to know what's real. He wants us to know what's real because he loves us! For God so loved the world, he sent his one and only son into the world to testify to the truth, to bring the sword of truth. The scripture says of itself that the sword is the word of God. It is this dividing, penetrating – it is this relational separating – it is a message from God about what's real and because of the battle over truth and lies, it's going to divide family members. It's going to divide people and friends. It's happening and has been happening for centuries. This truth, this sword of truth, the pursuit of truth is a messy, conflicted, powerful pursuit that exists in the heart of human beings. And so is this idea with the evil one, the father of lies, working in the hearts of people to suppress the truth to, to push it down, to keep it under wraps because people are ashamed of what they're doing, they're ashamed of their goals. Their goals might be selfish and dishonoring and so discerning the truth is very hard.

And so God, in his love, sent his son Jesus into the world to reveal to us what is really true. Because of his great love for us he wanted to free us from the enslavement of lies and deception and evil. And this is why, he said in John 8, as he came to testify to the truth, he said then if you will know the truth, if you will know it, it'll set you free. The truth will set you free. He came into the world in our blindness, in our suppression, in

our shame, in our guilt to testify to the truth because he loves us and wanted to set us free from our enslavement to the lies in all of this sin. And he knows that we won't ever really grasp the truth without his help because it's spiritually revealed. The Scripture actually tells us that the secret to really knowing the truth and absorbing the truth in our lives and then experiencing the freedom that comes from it, goes beyond simply listening to a testimony about it. The Bible actually tells us the truth comes to us in a very personal way. Jesus said he came to testify to the truth, but it's more than that. John 1 tells us this: "In the beginning was the word," (the alethia, the truth) "the word was with God, the word was God. He was with God in the beginning, and this word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth. Jesus said this in John 8: "If you hold to my teaching you really my disciples, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." "I am the way and the truth and the life." John 14:6. "And if I set you free the truth, set you free, you will be free indeed." God himself has brought us the ability to grow in our knowledge of the truth by offering us a living and vital relationship with himself in the person of Jesus Christ, a person full of grace and truth, the one who is the truth.

Do you have a relationship with this man? In a world that's filled with lies and deception and evil, are you growing closer to the truth? This is how a person comes to discern what's true in the world in all categories. It's not just spiritual revelation, but he is the truth. He understands all what's true in science. He understands what's true in politics. He understands what's true in family dynamics and relationships. He understands what's true in all of eternity. Do you have a relationship with this man who loves you with an everlasting love, who is the truth full of grace and truth? Can I encourage you today, in a confusing world where nobody knows what the truth is, and narratives that are being told in the subjective truth that's flying around, and the normative truths that are out there? Be in touch with Jesus and his spirit. Seek the one who actually knows what's true. Seek him with all your heart. Pursue after him the truth so that you and your spirit can be open to know what is really true. Can I encourage you to question everything? Don't be gullible in a world filled with narratives, subjective truth, normative truth. Be like the Bereans. The Bereans were more noble-minded than others around them in their day. Acts 17:11 says they received the message with great eagerness, and then they examined the scriptures every day to see if what was said was true. Can you question everything today and ask yourself, prayerfully, what's really true? Are you just listening to the voices that are out there or

are you bringing the information you receive before God and saying, "What is true, Lord? Help me discern what's true." Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time. Thank you for your work in our lives and our hearts. Thank you for the opportunity to open your word and listen to what you've revealed to us there. Help us take it to heart, receive it in. Use your word to divide our soul from our spirit so we can live freely, led of your spirit in the world today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.