



"WHAT IS TRUTH?"

JOHN 18:28-38

*A Sermon BY
Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley*

SEPTEMBER 15

8AM
11AM



Date: September 15, 2024

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley

Sermon Title: "What is Truth?"

Scripture: John 18:28-38 (CEB)

28 The Jewish leaders led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor's palace.^[d] It was early in the morning. So that they could eat the Passover, the Jewish leaders wouldn't enter the palace; entering the palace would have made them ritually impure. **29** So Pilate went out to them and asked, "What charge do you bring against this man?" **30** They answered, "If he had done nothing wrong, we wouldn't have handed him over to you." **31** Pilate responded, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your Law." The Jewish leaders replied, "The Law doesn't allow us to kill anyone." (**32** This was so that Jesus' word might be fulfilled when he indicated how he was going to die.) **33** Pilate went back into the palace. He summoned Jesus and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" **34** Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?" **35** Pilate responded, "I'm not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" **36** Jesus replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here." **37** "So you are a king?" Pilate said. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice." **38** "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

SERMON SUMMARY

In Pastor Wesley's sermon on Sunday, we were challenged to confront the difficult yet crucial question posed by both NPR and Pilate in today's text: "What is truth?" In a politically divided nation, where we are constantly bombarded with ignorance and misinformation, where celebrities share uninformed opinions, and social media influencers spread claims without fact-checking, we must ask ourselves what is truth?

This question is not only one that we must wrestle with today, but it was also a relevant question asked of Pilate in John 18:26-38. In this passage, Jesus has been arrested, a crime punishable by death under Jewish law. The Jewish leaders chose crucifixion the most public and brutal form of execution, but needed the Roman governor's approval. So, Annas and Caiaphas brought Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor at the time, sparking a debate that would impact our eternal salvation.

In verses 33-38, Pilate questions Jesus's identity, asking for the second time, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:34, 37). Jesus responds in verse 37, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice." After this, Pilate asks the question at the heart of Pastor Wesley's sermon: "What is truth?"

In Greek, the word for "truth" in verse 38 is "alētheia" (pronounced al-ay'-thi-a). Alētheia refers to a foundational truth, a belief upon which you build your life. The difference between what is "true" and what is "truth" lies in the fact that while "true" is universal, "truth" can be subjective. In other words, you can live according to a truth that may not be a universally held belief. This means you can build your life on a lie, believing a "truth" that isn't "true."

Pastor Wesley concludes his sermon by emphasizing that Jesus is the only reliable truth upon which we can build our lives. He cautions us against being hypocrites who outwardly display pious actions while harboring evil and wickedness within our hearts. Pastor Wesley reminds us that simply calling ourselves Christians, attending church, and quoting scripture does not free us from the "wrinkles" of evil and spiritual uncleanness.

The answer, then, is clear: Jesus is the truth, and in Him, we find an unshakable foundation. May we always strive to build our truth on the solid foundation and rock of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

KEY POINTS

1. In today's politically charged climate, we need to be mindful of the misinformation and ignorance that is often spread through media and culture.
2. The question of "*What is truth?*" is a question we must grapple with every day of our lives.
3. In John 18:28-38, a conversation between Jesus and Pilate unfolds that significantly impacts our eternal salvation.
4. After Pilate twice asks Jesus if He is the "king of the Jews," Jesus responds by saying He was born to "testify to the truth, [and] everyone who belongs to the truth listens to [his] voice" (John 18:37). This prompts Pilate to ask, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38).
5. Pastor Wesley poses the thought-provoking question, "What makes something true?" He resolves that one part of the answer is "time," meaning that time has a way of revealing all truth.
6. Pastor Wesley differentiates between what is "true" and *alētheia* (truth) by explaining that what is "true" is universal, while "truth" can be subjective. In other words, you can hold a personal truth that may not be based on factual reality.
7. *Alētheia* appears 27 times in the Gospel of John, and each time, "truth" is exclusively linked to Jesus Christ. This suggests that John's Gospel was written to highlight the reality that truth can only be found in Jesus.
8. The religious leaders who orchestrated Jesus' crucifixion were hypocrites. While preoccupied with ritual purity laws to avoid entering the palace, they harbored malice and evil in their hearts. They prioritized outward appearances of righteousness over the true condition of their wicked hearts.
9. Attending church services, practicing religious rituals, and superficially applying the "Febreeze" of religion and scripture on a situation will not absolve you of hypocrisy and wrongdoing. The only thing that can cleanse you from your sin, evil, and wickedness is the truth found in Jesus.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. A popular icebreaker called “Two Truths and a Lie” requires participants to share two truths and one lie about themselves. If you were a participant, what lie would you create and why?
2. What is a common saying in your culture that you grew up hearing or still hear today, which is known to be untrue? For example, when a parent says, “this will hurt me more than it hurts you” before corporal punishment.

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. In [John 18:38](#), Pilate questions Jesus by asking, “What is truth?,” ultimately challenging both His words and identity. Can you think of another instance in scripture where Jesus’s words or identity are questioned?
2. Pastor Wesley highlights that “truth” is mentioned 27 times in the Gospel of John (for example: [John 1:14](#), [John 1:17](#), [John 8:45](#), [John 14:6](#), [John 8:32](#)). Which of these scriptures resonates with you the most and why?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have we or people we know of used church, religion, and the Bible as ‘Febreeze’ for their lives? What have been the results, and what would we do differently next time?
2. Our sermon delineates the difference between something that is foundationally true and a factual truth. What have been some foundational truths that have shaped your faith? What factual truths do they enable, or contradict?

3. In your faith journey, how have you encountered people that challenge your truth? How have you challenged others' truths about you and your communities/identities?
4. Based on the truth of Jesus, what might be true in your life now that was not before you accepted Christ? How has your Christian journey changed what is true for you in each season of your life?
5. Jesus insists that Pilate take him at his word. In what ways do we easily take God at God's word? Conversely, in what ways do we have a hard time doing so, and why might that be?
6. The sermon posits that anything violent, or based on fear and hatred is not of Christ. How can we reject violence done to ourselves and others daily as followers of Christ?
7. The message notes that "hypocrisy is not dealing with the evil in your own heart" both in belief and in actions such as convicting an innocent person. In what ways does confronting ourselves present a greater or lesser challenge than confronting others? How can we walk in our truth as Christians in a self-aware, self-affirming way?

"CAN I PUSH IT?" QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Wesley uses racism as an example of a "truth" that people have built their lives upon to maintain privilege, even though it isn't true. What other "truths" has this country based its beliefs on that are also untrue? (Consider the various "-isms" that affect our nation, such as ableism, sexism, xenophobia, ageism, colorism, classism, heterosexism, adultism.)

2. In a society where marginalized communities often face systemic oppression, how can followers of Christ discern between the “truths” promoted by these systems and the universal truth found in Jesus? How does Jesus’ truth call us to respond to injustice?

FOR INDIVIDUAL OR VILLAGE STUDY

SPIRIT WORK/ACTIVITY

Spiritual Activity: Exploring Truths Through Four Steps

Step 1: Read the Scripture

Begin your devotional time by reading [John 18:28-38](#) aloud:

Step 2: Reflect on Truth and Untruth

1. Meditate on the Concept of Truth

Reflect on Jesus’ statement in verse 37: “For this reason I was born and came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of the truth listens to me.”

Consider what it means for Jesus to be the embodiment of truth and how His teachings guide our understanding of what is true and pure.

2. Personal Examination

Ask yourself if there are areas in your life where you might be believing or acting on untruths. This could involve unforgiveness, biases, violence, gossip, or any other false beliefs or actions.

Use the following questions to guide your examination:

- Do I focus more on the truths of news outlets, social media, family and friends than on what Jesus says in the Bible?
- Do I have any biases or prejudices that affect my judgment?
- Am I engaging in or spreading gossip that may or may not be true?

- Are there beliefs or behaviors I have that are not aligned with the teachings of Jesus?

Step 3: Write in Your Journal

1. Scripture Meditation

Read these scriptures:

- John 14:6: “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”
- Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things.”

Write on how these scriptures apply to your life and the areas you’ve identified.

Step 4: Pray for Guidance and Transformation

1. Prayer Time

Ask God to reveal any remaining untruths in your life and to guide you towards His truth.

Pray for forgiveness and healing in areas where you have recognized false beliefs or actions.

Request God’s help in transforming your mind and heart to align with God’s truth and righteousness.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Wesley stated, “If you find out your truth ain't true, your life falls apart.” Can you think of examples where you or a loved one went through hardship because the beliefs they once held as truth were proven false?
2. In what areas of your life have you built your foundation on misinformation? How could we begin moving ourselves closer to the truth of Christ?

3. How do you ensure that the truths you hold align with the teachings of Jesus in scripture, rather than the influences of culture or media?
4. In what ways do you see misinformation affecting your community or relationships (i.e. co-working relationships, family dynamics, friendships, partnerships, jobs, etc.)?
5. As a parent or guardian, how do you model the difference between “truth” and “what is true” for your children? How do you navigate conversations with your children about the truths they encounter in school, media, or from their peers while grounding them in the truth of Jesus?
6. In your marriage, how have subjective truths or personal beliefs created challenges in your relationship? How can Jesus as the truth help strengthen your marriage?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Want to know more about the Book of John? Then click on the Bible Project below:

 [Gospel of John Summary: A Complete Animated Overview \(Part 2\)](#)