

JOHN 18:33-40  
YOUR KINGDOM COME?

What is truth? It is such a brilliant question! “Fake News” is the claim from the White House about so many stories, that they say are made up by the media to paint Trump in a bad light – what is truth? Propaganda from Russia, about the West and the things that the West say about Russia, and their government will tell people what to think; other governments do the same and there is a story of the person in the corner of the TV screen signing for the deaf when the TV news reader was declaring the election of the new president and how great that was & the signer actually signed “we all know the election was rigged; what will we do about it?” – what is truth? Magazine photos in glamour and fashion magazines, doctored to wipe out all the flaws on the skin of the model or the celeb to make them look perfect; Photoshop is a computer program that edits photos and it has become a word for making people look better; Girlguiding had a petition to have this practice outlawed – what is truth when you look at fashion mags? Then there is claim and counter claim about Brexit – who do you believe? Who is telling the truth? So much of that is tied up with our political allegiance that we will come to different conclusions in answer to that question!

Truth is not a popular idea now! The word of 2016 was “post-truth”; we live in a post-truth world in which it doesn’t matter whether what I say is true or not, I just shout loudly and often till people believe me! Others will tell you that there is no such thing as truth: something may be true for me and another idea, even an opposite idea will be true for you and somehow that’s OK. Into that, we come with the Bible and its idea that truth is something that we can hear, learn, and discover from the Bible; and that at the centre of that notion of truth stands Jesus. He is the truth; He has come to show us what is true about God and about the world and about ourselves!

All of this comes from a conversation between Jesus and Pilate in John 18. The Jews had arrested Jesus and had begun to question Him; it started with the priests and the council, questioning Him about His teaching about the temple being knocked down, and His teaching about the law. They hoped to catch Him out in what He said, but of course Jesus said very little in answer! They wanted rid of Jesus, but “*We have...*” (John 18:31) so they needed Pilate! They took Jesus to the Roman governor of the province to have him agree that Jesus needed to die. Pilate was not interested in the Jewish law and in the finer points of what Jesus might or might not have said. But he was mightily interested when the Jews accused Jesus of being a King! Was Jesus a rival? Was Jesus trying to take Caesar’s place? Was Jesus trying to stage a rebellion as lots of others had before Him? Pilate wants to know!

It was a strange conversation. Here we have two men using the same words but meaning very different things. “*Are you...*” (John 18:33) “*My kingdom...*” (John 18:36) “*You are...*” (John 18:37) “*You are right...*” (John 18:37) Right! It is agreed! Jesus is a King! But they have very different pictures in their heads. Pilate hears “Jesus is King” and thinks “army, power, a throne, challenging Caesar, challenging Rome, challenging Pilate.” He immediately imagines that Jesus will be raising an army in the Judean hills, and His fighting men will come to attack Pilate’s guard and disrupt the life and peace of Jerusalem. He sees Jesus riding at the head of this army and so he might be persuaded that Jesus is a threat and needs to be dealt with. When Jesus says, “*You are right...*” (John 18:37) this is what strikes off in Pilate’s imagination. It is what a king is and does, as far as Pilate is concerned!

But Jesus’ idea of being a king is very different. “*Are you...*” “*My kingdom...*” (John 18:33,36) It is from “another place”! When Jesus admits to being a king, He has a quite different picture in His head. Being a King is all about shaping people’s lives; it is all about having people live in God’s ways, so that Jesus is King of their hearts and minds. He has been teaching people the truth, teaching people what God is like and what God has done; He has been teaching people to see themselves in God’s way; He has been teaching people about faith and a godly

life. He is about to serve the world and die on a cross to change people's hearts by taking away sin. Jesus is a king sent from God to save and change the world, not with armies, power and thrones, but by grace and truth.

So the question was asked "*What is truth?*" In some ways the question is never answered, except in one way. For Pilate, the truth about Jesus is established – He is an innocent man! He doesn't deserve to die and in fact He should be released forthwith! But Pilate also knows that the Jewish leaders are powerful men; he comes up with a clever ruse. He will give the crowd a choice: Jesus or Barabbas, a convicted rebel and murderer. Surely the crowd will see through the priests and choose this good man; they will surely choose Jesus. He hadn't counted on the priests' ability to stir up these crowds, so when he gives them the choice "*Do you...*" (*John 18:39*) they chose Barabbas!

The classic Christian confession of faith is and has always been "Jesus is Lord". We still confess Jesus as Lord of our lives; He is still King of our hearts and minds or should be; it doesn't always work in practice! A friend of mine recently told me of his church that some people were telling him to stop preaching about Jesus; they liked church for its social life but weren't too keen on all this talk of Jesus being Lord! What do we think? Do we see Jesus as Lord? This is our challenge for today – let Jesus be Lord of every part of our lives and live in the ways that He teaches.

*"If you..." (John 8:31f)* There is truth for us to discover about God. There is so much of that truth! Jesus came to show us what God is like; to embody the truth about God. Most of all, He came to show us that God loves us, even when life is messy. Grace is at the heart of what Jesus shows us, a God who is gracious to love and accept everyone. There is a place in His heart for anyone and everyone. The Jews didn't like that idea – they were God's people and only them! But Jesus showed and taught that God is full of grace for the world. This is what God is still like: we worry that God will not like us or love us because we're not good enough or we've not done enough to deserve His blessing. Grace loves us as we are; God accepts us as we are; He cannot love us any more than He already does. This is truth to set us free: we no longer need to be afraid of God; we need no longer to be anxious about "have I done enough? Am I good enough?"

There is truth for us to discover about ourselves, two things, that seem to contradict. First of all, we are sinful people: there is a dark side to human nature and we all share it; we all make mistakes, we all get things wrong at times, we all rebel against God and want to go our own way from time to time. We are all like that, though we don't always like to be told that! Repentance is a quality of life that we should embrace, the desire to change, to be different, to be new people, turning away from sin and embracing what is good and right. The second truth about us is that we are dearly loved children: God has loved us and saved us; we are forgiven; we are His children whom He loves and that is something to celebrate. We are not any more lovable than before, but He has loved us and promised us all sorts of good things and this is just as true of us in Jesus as it is true that we sin.

There is truth about Jesus. He stands at the centre. The truth about Jesus is that He came to set us free and change the world by being and telling the truth. Jesus didn't come to shout the loudest so that people listened to Him. He came to teach His disciples the truth about Himself; He lived the truth; He came to die, to give His life to set us free and truth was at the heart of the way He died. He is an innocent man and Pilate is caught up in the lie that will condemn Jesus. He is God's appointed Messiah, though the Jews didn't see it. He is the Saviour of the world, crucified on the cross, though people still find that idea hard to grasp. Our view of God and our view of ourselves so often stands or falls by our view of Jesus. Listen to Him, love Him, trust Him, and then somehow lots of these other things fall into place around Jesus. He spoke the truth, He lived the truth, He *was* the truth. "*What is truth?*" "*I am*"

We are free! We are free to be ourselves! We've messed up; we've got things wrong; we've fallen short. We know it; God knows it; it's out there and we don't need to worry about pretending anymore! We are free to be ourselves because God is full of grace, because He loves us as we are; He can't love us anymore than He already does; He forgives us, He knows us, He cares for us; we are free to love Him back even in our faltering way, He knows our hearts. We are free to be ourselves because of Jesus, because He has come into the world to be the Saviour, because He has died for us and is raised; because He is Lord who challenges us to be holy and knows what makes us weak and vulnerable. We are free to be ourselves because the truth sets us free. Truth is lived out in Jesus. We share the truth with others not by shouting the loudest or longest, not by making it up, but by living in Jesus' ways. Jesus is Lord: that is a confession of faith; it is a profession of loyalty; it is our way of saying "we will live in Jesus's ways".