

Series: Portraits of Jesus	Reference: <i>John 18</i>	Title: The Truth	Date: 05.31.2020
Website Writeup: Can we have objective truth as it pertains to God? How does He communicated Himself? And can all religions lead to God if He communicates His personhood in a certain way?			

Let's continue to pray for our country in light of recent events. In the spirit of the Gospel, we embrace all people, are pained at injustice & long for the resolution the Gospel brings in all ways including racial reconciliation.

Human law is limited, but we know Jesus can convict & change hearts, even that of the racist, blind to their hurtful attitudes & actions. Human law is necessary & good in that it restrains evil. So, let us pray justice is pursued swiftly without malice & hatred, but for the sake of equity, impartiality & betterment of our society. Swift action would certainly help to assuage past hurt & to begin the long road of rebuilding trust for our black & brown communities who have lost that trust in the system for obvious reason. We can do better together, and it begins in our own hearts.

In the words of my brother in law, Dr. Steady Hatukali Moono, a wonderful African American man & president of SUNY Schenectady, who in addressing his college this week said...
"In the face of all this, let us collectively show our resolve & strength to shine a light on injustice, and to spread a message of unity & peace....In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 'Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality. We need to listen to those who are crying out for equality & fairness. We need to raise one another up & look out for one another.'"

An appropriate message since MLK, operating out of the values of the Gospel, knew that the liberation of the Oppressed was also liberation of the Oppressor from their sin of racism. That is the true march to peace & equality we need given we don't just want restraint of evil behavior which will only resurface later, but of conviction of sin. We long for all people to know Jesus & operate out of His love & value of all peoples.

Micah 6:8, the verse our church is named after says, *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly & to love mercy & to walk humbly with your God."* Our church is composed of all political stances & voices. I've seen & heard it. As your pastor, I'd say, although we do very well in this area, we will always have more work to do at loving each other.

Let's remember our sermon on John 8 where the religious folk intended to stone a woman for adultery. Jesus instructs those without sin to cast the first stone, no one did, then He sends her off forgiven. In the same conviction of our own needy hearts before God, let us be humble & thoughtful as we talk & walk together.

How do we see Jesus in this situation? Remember in John 11 He wept for a broken world. He weeps for the Oppressed engulfed in anguish & despair, as well as for the Oppressor buried in hatred & ignorance, for those who've made their politics an idol & for those who's hearts are too hardened to care. That's the Jesus we know & serve. With countless examples of His compassion for the sick, poor, grieving & lost. Jesus specifically turned His attention to those in need time & time again throughout Scripture. Jesus loves all equally, but Jesus gave special attention to

those in need. As the church, we reflect Christ when we weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15) bearing each other's burdens along the way (Gal 6:2).

You should've received an email in the last day with a directional link to a Prayer of Lament, I urge you to look at that & practice it in the coming days.

Open with the Matrix Red Pill/Blue Pill clip

In chapter 18 John paints a portrait of Jesus as Truth. Just before this Judas leads the authorities to arrest Jesus. Peter denies Him three times as Jesus is questioned by Caiaphus the High Priest. Which brings us to Him being led to Pilate.

Open your Bibles to John 18:28-38...

²⁸Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews didn't enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate came out to them & asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹Pilate said, "Take him yourselves & judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. ³²This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

³³Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus & asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people & your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews & said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."

A poem by John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887)

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad & sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, -"Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant

Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he,
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

I'll save the end of that poem later... For my wife the best season of the year is Spring. That's true for her, but not for the person who lives to ski - they like Winter best. For me Tom Waits is the best musician ever born, but for a teenage boy it may be Drake. Those would be Relative Truth Statements - relative truth based on preference or opinion. Yet, in reference to things factual which are true to everyone, we come into the realm of Objective Truth Statements, such as Rob Shaeffer is a man, or Jason has dread-locks - facts not based on preference.

What is Truth? A philosophers dream question & a great question in todays world as we watch the news. Can we have Objective Truth as it pertains to God? Some think not - some think we're like blind men groping at an elephant. Truth about God is what many 'sense' or 'feel' to be true about God. You feel something to be true, form a belief around a feeling making it a relative truth for you, but not for others. We may pick & choose from various religious thought to form an image of God we *think* to be true. If we're honest, it's only relative truth based on preference. Not based on God's revelation to us, although it may hold some bits & pieces of truth. In the end, we create an idea of God, instead of allowing God to reveal Himself to us. The fear is, what if He reveals something about Himself which I do not prefer, or like? This is why Scripture's vital - studying it, the true picture of God, as He has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, emerges.

Is relative truth bad? Some might think so. Relativism, may be considered the enemy of the Church in a Post-Modern world. But we just saw how in certain things we all have different answers. Relative truth can be damaging, even murderous, but it's often innocuous. What's true to one person about something isn't true to another, it's relative. Yet, Truth's only relative when it's based on things we *can* have preference in, or opinion on. Objective Truth doesn't change, it's true for everyone. So, I can say my favorite color's orange. I think it's best. That may be true

for me (relative truth) - but I can't say my shirt is orange when it's actually blue (objective truth). To say that I'd either be a liar, insane, or colorblind. In reference to God revealing Himself to us, God's an objective reality. That reality, or truth, is objective to who God is. Therefore, we can't point to something else because we prefer it more & say, "That's God," when He reveals Himself to us in a definitive way. You can't point to Dave Christie & say that's Mike Thomas, since Mike's personhood's an objective truth - there's only one Mike. And the world can only handle one Mike anyway - unique perfection like Mike can't be duplicated!

The trap Christians are caught in is that we make claims of objective truth about things which are actually relative, or which we don't have the complete facts on. We hang our hats on the wrong things. Things we believed to be unchanging objective truths, only to find they are untrue. Christians have held so strongly to these things that it's made the Church look foolish.

Everyone once believed the world was flat, yet that assumption, based on our limited observance of nature, was proven to be untrue. Everyone believed it, it was still untrue. The Church once believed the earth was the center of the universe based on some poetic language in the Hebrew Scriptures which speak of the sun & moon revolving around the earth. Poetic language never meant to be scientifically directive.

Galileo proved the Heliocentric model to be true, overturning the long held Ptolemaic model that the earth was the center & was condemned as a heretic for doing so. Everyone was convinced that planets revolved around the earth, but they didn't, Galileo proved they revolve around the sun. Although many believed the former, it was still untrue. So, how do you know Objective Truth when things we were so sure of change? This has undermined our confidence in the viability of Truth & we share Pilate's question, "What is Truth?"

Only objective statements are true. Some say there are many paths to God & believe it to be a truth statement. If you're referring to each person's unique experience in a journey it takes to reach God, yes, this statement can be true. You have your life's journey, I have mine - and God leads us through two separate lives BUT to Himself. But to say all religions reveal the same God & lead to a reconciling relationship with God, that's untrue from the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist perspectives, etc. Christianity isn't the only one to make exclusive claims, all religions do. Their images of God & their paths of salvation are very different. Yet, all other religions share one common distinction, they're works based. You have to work your way to God. Whereas, Christianity alone says salvation is by grace through faith alone in Jesus.

Someone may say, "Well Jesus may be true for you, but I find truth in Islam." If you believe that, you mean to say Truth can be found in different places, yet people confuse Pragmatism with Truth, or Usefulness with Verity. Usefulness or pragmatism are approaches which assess truth of meaning of theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application. In other words, usefulness/pragmatism is based solely on experience, but experiences change - they're not objective. Whereas Verity/Truth is universally the same unchanging experience for anyone.

Yet, if there's one God, sheer logic tells us one path has to be true & others false. They can't all be true, since they make different claims about who God is & how to reach Him. What a person is really saying is, they've found the religion of Islam to be *useful/pragmatic* to them - they *like* the image of God portrayed in it. However, for a Muslim to say you can find God through another religion he *must* deny the claims which Islam makes about itself (5 pillars of Islam; Shahada, Salat, Sawm, Zakat, Hajj). In other words, if we make the claim that Islam & Christianity are both true ways to God, we're either grossly uneducated about Islam and/or Christianity, or we aren't being honest & possibly manipulative. Since both religions make exclusive & different claims about who God is & how to reach Him.

So, when Jesus says I'm the way the Truth & the life, that's an Objective Truth statement. By nature it negates all other paths to God, just like the 5 pillars of Islam, or the message of Hinduism, or other religious claims would. Not that some truth can't be found in other religions, but the Objective Truth about who God is & how to have relationship with Him, is ultimately & only found in Jesus. It's why the writer of 1 John in vv1-4 says, *'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — ² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.* They met Truth in Jesus.

Which says to us that religion isn't a matter of preference or opinion. It's allowing God to reveal Himself to us as He actually is. If I say Jesus is the Truth, that's not just relevant to me, but also to you. It's a bold claim & why Jesus finds himself in this predicament - the Jews & Romans didn't want to hear that. Is it a scientifically provable Truth statement? No & doesn't claim to be, although it can be testified to through the words & life of Christ. Just like in knowing me, you would attest, "That is Jason, there is no other!" It's why we have been given the gift of faith. I can argue the empty tomb, eyewitnesses, fulfilled prophecy & so on (although those should carry weight) - without a divine movement of God's Spirit I can't make you believe.

In this story, we have three players. The Jewish Crowd, Pilate & Jesus. Firstly, the Jews argue from their perspective of truth. Secondly, Pilate, asks the question, "What is Truth," and doesn't wait for the answer, because he doesn't believe there is one. And thirdly, Jesus, who claims to be the Truth.

The Jewish Crowd twists or abandons their truth in this story. Pilate makes his own truth based on his situational need (relative truth). And Jesus, although in chains, seems to be the one in charge - later on when asked by Pilate, *"Don't know know that I have the power to crucify you or not?"* Jesus responds, *"You have no power except what is given you from above."*

The Jews bring Jesus to Pilate, not entering into the palace in order to remain ceremonially clean. They hold onto this rule they've created, although there's nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures to support it. It comes out of the hedge of law they've placed around Scripture & we realize they've made their own truth. In order for a criminal to be brought before Pilate there had to be a charge. There was none. So, why did they bring Jesus to him? Quite simply, they wanted him dead, but didn't have the power to pass the sentence. They bent the truth to have a charge against Him, not answering Pilate they lied. They were in an angry frenzy, their feelings dictated their concept of truth. Later in the story, when asked by Pilate, "Do you want me to release your king?" They answered, "Only Caesar is our king!," something they would never say to be true & is only driven by their situational/relative need to kill Jesus.

Their truth had become a pragmatic/relativistic, what served their desires at the moment. Truth was what they wanted it to be. Namely, they wanted Jesus dead & would compromise belief & value to see that happen. They claimed to be standing on objective truth, but their truth had become relative - they were no longer following God.

Pilate acted out of his own pragmatic/relativistic truth. Between a rock & a hard place, the Jews didn't like him & had already reported him twice to Tiberius for his insensitivity. A third report would've cost him his post, or perhaps his life. They had manipulative control over him. If he didn't follow their wishes, he was in peril. If he did, Jesus' followers may revolt. In light of this, Jesus is kind to Pilate in giving strange answer, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."* In other words, my followers don't fight like the Jews would, they'll pose no problem to you. It was Pilate's out & he took the bait.

Pilate stands before Jesus & Jesus says, *"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* In short, I am the Way, the Truth & the Life. Pilate's confused, weighing the situation. In the end, he'll decide truth based on what serves him best, although the ultimate God of Truth is staring him square in the face.

Then we have Jesus & the question is, what does Truth cost? Jesus has integrity, standing on Truth facing certain death. Eerily silent, He's predicted this. He answers plainly, doesn't fight back & is in total control. He's prayed this cup would pass, yet marches on, knowing His choices will bring about torture & death.

Pilate gives every opportunity for Jesus' to be released, but they're insistent. He says, *"Every year I release one prisoner to you. What would you have me do, release the murderer, Bar Abbas, or Jesus?"* They want Bar Abbas, which is clear foreshadowing. Many believe this man's first name was actually Jesus, which would have been a derivation of Joshua, a common name. The name Bar Abbas is also interesting, it can literally mean *'Son of the father'*. So, it's possible they chose to keep the prisoner, *Jesus, Son of the Father*. And to release a prisoner in His place by the name of *Jesus, son of the Father*. And, after Jesus was scourged & brought back to them, they put a crown of thorns on Him & cloak him in a purple as a king. And when making a legal pronouncement, Pilate would sit on his judgment seat. Yet some scholars believe, for various reasons behind the language in chapter 19, Pilate sat Jesus on the judgement seat & asked, *"Do you want me to release your king?"*

So, here we have Jesus, scourged, sitting on the judgment seat with a crown & robe. The King taking the place of the sinner Bar Abbas, becoming his replacement - placing His name on the worst of sinners & letting him go free. Jesus in control, Jesus as judge, Jesus as sacrifice, Jesus as replacement, Jesus as savior, Jesus as King, Jesus as ultimate objective absolute Truth. The image of the one true God. Jesus claims He is the Truth, and all who know truth listen to Him. When all other things fail us, prove to be relative, false, or fall apart, we can always hold onto Truth in Jesus.

What do you do with Jesus? He's an exclusive, objective reality with far reaching implications in life. What does it cost you to make that claim? Judas denied truth when he denied Jesus & handed him over for money. Peter denied Truth by denying Jesus 3 times because he didn't want his own cross. Will I deny Jesus when I place popularity, money, power, or comfort before Him so that I don't have to face my cross? When my ethics become fluid, I'm double-minded before others based on acceptance, or what will serve me in a certain situation, I deny Truth & deny Jesus. When I want to define morality for myself, I deny Truth & deny Jesus. If God is God, He must be allowed to be who He is. He's not a puppet on a string. Maybe the first cross we face is our own pride when we must give up what we think truth is to start to listen to God's revelation to us in Jesus.

The poem I read is derived from an ancient Indian fable. It communicates, none of us have a grasp on truth. One person sees things one way & another sees truth in a different way. Each of us are holding a part of the truth, everyone's right in their own way, given individual experience. It's used by people to say all religions are the same - we just have different ways of talking about & experiencing God. They say, *"We're all feeling the same elephant, but describing him according to our limited perceptions."* The poem ends this way...

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,

Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

Someone might read this & say all religions are merely an attempt by blind men to grope at truth. But they miss several important problems.

Firstly, if the king were also blind there'd be no one to lead others to the elephant.

Secondly, why did the king only lead each man to one part of the elephant, instead of allowing them to experience as much as they could?

Thirdly, even though some are born blind, most are born with sight. Sight is a gift of God who wants us to see, perceive & come to know Him.

Fourthly, rather than each of them having a portion of truth, they were all completely wrong. What they experienced was not a rope, a snake, or a wall, it was an elephant.

And fifthly, the elephant was still an elephant in spite of what their perceptions were. The elephant was unchanged by their imperfect understanding of what they were experiencing. Their misunderstanding came from their own blindness, nothing else.

In the Matrix Neo 'felt' the Truth, but he had to swallow the red pill to actually come face to face with the objective truth of his reality - he had to wake up. He realized, all he thought was real was false when he saw his true reality. He saw the matrix for what it was. He was a slave, and had to be woken up to be released. Sin, these false notions of reality - our matrix. We have to be woken up by Jesus to the objective Truth that He is God, and only He can save, to be released.

So, how does a blind man recognize an elephant? The King heals his blindness. The King wants him to see. The King leads him to touch the elephant, to see it, to experience it in all of its objective reality & explains it to him. The elephant's revealed in Jesus. God heals our spiritual blindness, revealing Himself in the person of Jesus - the objective reality of the one & only true God. Jesus opens our eyes & leads us to see & experience God the Father in His objective reality. The Word of God outlines for us exactly who God is & how to reach Him. He's gone to great pains to reveal Himself, even to the point of entering our reality as the person of Jesus Christ.

The question is, are we still groping around with closed eyes, or have they been opened to see Jesus? Do we piece together our own image on preference & desire? Will we make up truth to benefit us as these people did? Or, will we go to the cross with Jesus, even though it means a cross for us? At the end of the day, someone can be relative towards Jesus in preference saying, "I like Him," or "I don't like Him." What we can't deny though, is what He puts forth as objective Truth about Himself. That He's the Truth, the Way & the Life, and all who know Truth listen to His voice.

Community Group Questions

1. Icebreaker: What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
2. Pray
3. Read John 18: 28-38. Pastor Jason talked about the three players in the story (starts on pg 4 of the sermon):
 1. The Jewish Crowd, who let their truth become relative to get what they wanted- Jesus charged and dead. See how they manipulated the situation with ceremonial cleanliness and their answers to Pilot in vs. 28-31.
 2. Pilot, who asks, "what is truth?" But doesn't wait for an answer because he doesn't really think there is one, and in the end "judges" a truth based on what serves him best. (v. 38)
 3. Jesus, who claims to be The Truth. (v. 37)
4. As you may know, Jesus' claim to be Truth, led to charges and ultimately His crucifixion. Has truth ever cost you anything?
5. We must believe that God wants us to see, experience and understand Him—just like the King must heal a man's blindness in order for him to see the whole of an elephant, in the sermon's poem example. Studying Jesus' purpose, words and life as revealed in scripture is our way of healing our spiritual blindness so we can see and know our Father God.

In what way(s) do you feel a sense of spiritual blindness? Perhaps in regards to grace, shame, giving, boldness, joy, fear, or something else? Consider this in silence for a moment with personal reflection before God. After a few minutes, share and pray for one another. Receive truth as healing for blindness.