



## **John 18:37–38**

37 ‘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.’ 38 ‘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.’

### **Reflection**

(Today's reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt).

In the 16th Century, Francis Bacon, a philosopher and an author famously wrote:

‘What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.’

Brilliant.

‘What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.’

It's right there in verse 38:

‘What is truth?’ retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there ...

See, he did not stay for an answer. What Pilate did is called lazy searching. And it's not really searching. It's when we want an answer to a question because we are interested, but we want a quick one, or even no answer, because we are not that interested. We aren't interested enough to allow genuine enquiry that may change our minds, our hearts, our behaviours and our lives.

“What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.”

Is that you? We listen, but we don't really listen. We search, but we don't really search. We hope, but we don't really hope. We pray, but we don't really pray.

In medicine, this is called inoculation. You get a little bit in order to resist you from the whole thing. And it is the essence of false religion. Dropping by, but never entering. Asking, but not listening. Seeking, but never finding. Knocking, but ignoring the person who answers the door.

Pilate is fascinating. He wants preferment in Rome. He's trying to keep the peace. I think it's Dorothy Sayers who writes him into a play where he fantasies that in the future; millions will know his fame and call his name. Little does he know then that millions will call his name in church each week by saying that Jesus 'was crucified under Pontus Pilate'. He wanted fame, and ironically, he gets it, but in a way that would horrify him.

The whole section here is about the kingship of Jesus. See, if Pilate can establish that he is claiming to be a king, then he is a rival to Rome and a threat to peace in Jerusalem. Pilate will be able to see that he is trouble and then be freed to have him crucified. He wants the 'Pax Romana' – the Peace of Rome – in Jerusalem. And he believes that peace will come by a crucified 'king'. There's irony all over that.

But Jesus is cagey in the previous verses.

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

Direct question. Empathic, we learned yesterday. If he admits it, then Jesus is trouble. But Jesus dodges the bullet:

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

Pilate is feeling the heat. But he claims racial ignorance.

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

Jesus then effectively claims to be king, but of his own kingdom, somewhere else, but not here. In other words, his kingship isn't a direct threat to Rome or Jerusalem.

36 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.'

That doesn't help Pilate. What kind of threat is a far off kingdom? But he gets his moment:

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

Pilate is asking. Pilate appears to want to know. But he only wants to know so he can get rid of this menace. He's got the Jewish leadership breathing down his neck. He's got a growing and blood thirsty crowd. No doubt, he's got a stack of public policy to work through and a few aqueducts to build. He's living in the real world, he thinks to himself. But Jesus keeps not giving Pilate quite what Pilate needs. He then answers

Pilate, still carefully:

37b ‘You say that I am a king.

But then moves Pilate (and the readers) into the truth column:

37c 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.’

No middle ground, right? I’m guessing this made Pilate squirm. Truth bombs are being dropped. And Pilate is trying to avoid getting hit. So what does the politician say?

“What is Truth, said jesting Pilate, and would not wait for an answer.”



# Think

We live in a post-truth era. We live in a world where fake news has oxygen. We live in a world where preciously held agendas dictate people's grasp of the truth. If you already have an outcome in mind (in Pilate's case it's peace in Jerusalem), then you won't want the truth. You'll look past the truth. And you then avoid the truth.

Jesus said: 'I am the Truth' in John 14:6. Pilate is talking not just to a man. He is talking to Truth. And he would not stay for an answer.

You see, Truth isn't just a set of propositions that accurately describe the world or a part of it. The Truth is a person. Truth,

therefore is personal. And that is because God is Truth. He is the marker of what is or is not true. He is the plumbline through the world we live in. And, as king Jesus says, if you want to be my liberated subjects:

In fact [I love that], 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.'

And Pilate, who would not wait for an answer says: 'I find no basis for a charge against him.'

## **Pray**

Pray for the Truth. Pray that you find the truth about God, our lives and our world.

No one says that they want lies, but beautiful lies are attractive. Like Pilate, we may ask: 'What is truth?', but not really want to see Truth.

But Jesus is standing in front of us. And he is Truth. Stay for the answer. Pray for a thirst for the answer. Pray for courage to believe the truth and side with Jesus. Pray for the Spirit to come and wake you up. Pray for the Spirit to convict you of sin and righteousness and judgment. Pray for peace in your heart. Not the Pax Romana (the Peace of Rome) that Pilate was pulling out all stops to get. But the Pax of the heart. The Peace that surpasses all understanding.

And while you are praying, pray for Western Society and the leaders in it. Wow,

Post-Truth appears to be a thing, where it doesn't matter what is true and what isn't. Ask God that in such a world, you would be a Truth-teller and not a Truth Avoider. Make me less like Pilate and more like Jesus.