

**Series:** Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

**Sermon Text:** John 18:36-38

**Key Words:** Political Leaders

(\*This account is also found in Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-6)

**Our series title** for 18:1-19:15 is, "*No matter how things appear, Jesus is still King!*" It's about the value of believing this when friends fail us (18:1-12), when religious leaders fail us (18:13-27); and when political leaders fail us (18:28-19:15). **Each week**, we're also considering something vital Jesus said about following Him in John 16:33, "*I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" Today, we will continue exploring our third...

**BIG IDEA:** Jesus is still King when political leaders fail us.

Last week, in *verse 36* we learned what God's *kingdom* is NOT when Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.*" *Verse 37* speaks to what God's *kingdom* IS when *Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus replied, "You say I'm a king. For this purpose I was born and have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*" God's *kingdom* is a *kingdom* of *truth*. Jesus refused to let *Pilate* view Him as a typical "*king*." For instance, He didn't need to compete for dominion because it already belonged to Him. We'll call this **Principle #1: Truth invites us to participate, not compete.** This principle was established in Genesis 1 where "God said, '*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...let them have dominion over the fish...the birds...the livestock and over all the earth' ...So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*" God is all about sharing dominion, not competing for it. People of *this world* covet and fight for pieces of the pie, but Christ's *servants* handle conflict differently. Like Jesus, we can relate in non-threatening ways by trusting God to direct our steps. Jesus had powerful forces (e.g., fire, storms, angels) at His command but showed restraint as He invited others to participate in God's *kingdom*. To view life as a competition (e.g., political parties, country of origin, denominations) is to **follow the way** of *this world* that says, "*Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*" But Jesus says, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*" (cf. Matthew 5:43-45). If we're to choose God's way, we must also believe...

**Principle #2: Truth comes from above, not from this world.** *This world* dwells in delusion, so God sent His Son to invite us to abide in **the truth** (a.k.a. reality). His authority comes “*from above*”, which also means He’s the embodiment of **truth** that lights the way to God (cf. 14:6, 20:30). In John 8:23-24 He said, “*You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world ...if you fail to believe that I am he, then you will die in your sins.*” God sent Him to expose how sin blinds all of us, not to find and affirm those who are right (cf. Romans 1:18-32). Professor NT Wright says, “*Truth isn’t something you get out of a test tube, or a mathematical formula. We don’t have truth in our pockets. Philosophers and judges don’t own it. It is a gift, a strange quality that, like Jesus’ kingdom in fact, comes from elsewhere but is meant to take up residence in this world. Jesus has come to give evidence about this truth. He is himself the truth.*” If you think you own **the truth** or arrived at it on your own, you’ll likely use it against those you deem “*less enlightened*” or think it’s your job to make them believe. We see this play out in politics, right? One party thinks they own **the truth**, so they dehumanize, vilify, and go to war with those who disagree. It’s sad and hideous when God’s people act this way, like when churches compete. It’s troubling to hear people say, “*I attend here because it’s the only church around that preaches the truth.*” That’s crazy! No church has **the truth** all figured out. In fact, some of my best realizations about God came from non-Baptist pastors whom I’ve grown to love and view as necessary members of Christ’s body. It’s especially humbling to learn that my presumptions about their beliefs were dead wrong. You know what I mean, right? “*Those Church of Christ folks believe there’s power in the tub!*” or “*Those Pentecostals believe weird stuff about the Holy Spirit.*” Asking rather than assuming has introduced me to spiritual siblings I had no idea was out there! Of course, adopting a posture of curiosity is only possible when we accept that **truth** is a supernatural gift, and that we need every part of Christ’s body, and that we need to upgrade our definition of love, and that complete clarity won’t occur until we’re face to face with Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 12-13). Unity can’t be based on how much we think we know or how good we are, which is why Jesus placed His cross and table at the center of our faith--to remind us that it’s all about what He has done for us. If we’re to choose God’s way, we must also believe...

**Principle #3: Truth is always working in ways we don’t realize.** In verse 38 Pilate said to Jesus, “*What is truth?*” and then without waiting for an answer he **went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.** History reveals **Pilate** had lots of baggage, as we all do. A guy named Philo of Alexandria said he was “*a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as*

*very obstinate.*” **The truth Pilate** was familiar with came by power (my sword vs your weakness) or politics (my **truth** vs your **truth**). Yet, despite his seemingly dismissive and snarky tone, **Pilate** was conflicted and intrigued by Jesus. In fact, another layer of this story is found in Matthew 27:19 which tells us, “As Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.’” We know little about her, yet [Pilate’s wife](#) has become the subject of [scholarly speculation](#). Records suggest she was a granddaughter of Caesar Augustus and may have come to believe in Jesus due to these encounters her husband had. Regardless, my point is that **Pilate** took Jesus seriously and others were watching.

Please don’t miss how people were powerfully exposed to **the truth** by watching Jesus live by faith and not by sight. In one of the most challenging times of His life, while being interrogated and threatened with death, He wasn’t fixated on “winning” the argument. His only concern was to let **the truth** take up residence in this world. It’s what He claimed in *verse 37*, right? “**For this purpose I was born and have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.**” Faith empowered Jesus to humanize an enemy and offer freedom to His captor. Isn’t that ironic? Did you catch it? Revealing Himself as **the truth** was an invitation to co-participate in a better **kingdom**. So, the next time you’re in the fight of your life or your faith is on life support, just don’t forget that your created purpose is to bear (reflect) the image of God, who is **the truth**. Oh, and remember that **the truth** true, regardless of who believes it. It should be making us better citizens **in this world**, not worse. In fact, if your beliefs are making you a terrible human, they’re not from the Spirit of God. According to Galatians 5:22-23, His fruit looks more like “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...”

**Let’s pray:** Father, sanctify us in your truth, your word is truth (i.e., set us apart in this world as your holy and unique people. Guard our hearts from reducing your infinite glory to copy-written content we sell to others and from viewing relationships as transactions where people must affirm stuff that we’re still trying to wrap our minds around. We need your Spirit to keep us from hating those who disagree with us, so we can love them into your kingdom. Help us to look for evidence of your Spirit in others, so that together we can get to know you and experience the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17--a oneness the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have shared since before we were created. May your kingdom increase its rule over our hearts, so you get glory in all we think, say, and do. Amen.

**Let’s sing:** “My Life is an Offering”

So, what’s your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

### Quotes related to this passage:

- **Caiaphas and Pilate:** “Caiaphas held office for eighteen years, the longest time of rule for a high priest from the period of Herod the Great to the fall of Jerusalem. And ten of those years he shared with Pontius Pilate. Curiously the same year that Pilate was removed from office, Caiaphas was deposed as reigning high priest.” Professor Gary Burge
- **Pilate’s dance with truth:** “For a moment Pilate appears fascinated and held, as he faces the issues of his personal destiny. What is truth? (38). Is this cynical dismissal? So, famously, thought Francis Bacon: ‘ “What is truth?” asked jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.’ But perhaps it was asked wistfully also, from a lifetime’s struggle as a professional politician, steeped in the daily compromises, the prudential balancing of forces, the application of ruthless power, that half-light world of greys and polka dots where people grope wearily for truth and the soul shrivels and dies. Did Pilate, as his destiny for a fleeting second hung in the balances, catch a glimpse in Jesus of a truer, purer, brighter world? We cannot be sure. What is certain is that if the moment came it also passed. The forgiving moment slipped by as Pilate turned on his heel to report his decision to the Jewish leaders.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Pilate’s dilemma:** “In Mark, following the condemnation of Jesus, Pilate is ‘amazed’ about these events (Mark 15:5). In Matthew, Pilate has ‘great amazement’ (Matt. 27:14), receives a warning message from his wife (27:19), and washes his hands of all responsibility (27:24–25). In Luke, Pilate states three times that Jesus is innocent (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). When we come to John, Pilate not only affirms Jesus’ innocence, but he shows a determined effort to free Jesus (18:38–40; 19:12a) and only agrees to the crucifixion when his loyalty to Rome is questioned (19:12b). All of this seems to shift the blame to the Jewish leadership...But to say that Rome was the only player in the Passion story is not historically respectable. Nor is it correct to say that the Jewish leadership was solely responsible for Jesus’ death. It is better to say that many people played a role in this conspiracy. As Carson notes, it is the people in power who can do the persecuting, and everyone must agree that in Jerusalem in the mid-first century, the Sanhedrin leadership held power...But the shared responsibility of Jewish leaders here is no license for racism. The earliest Christians who wrote the Gospels were Jewish. Their debate with the temple or synagogue leadership was not along racial but theological lines. ‘Anti-Semitism’ is a historically inappropriate label for their thinking. The tensions that run through the Gospel’s Passion story is an inner-Jewish tension, springing from inner-Jewish debates about Jesus’ messiahship. As we will see, moreover, it is incorrect to argue that John simply blames ‘the Jews’ for the death of Jesus. One of the most prominent themes in John’s story is the high-profile role of Pilate. His soldiers figure conspicuously in this story, and Pilate not only spurns the truth, but we see him as a pathetic, powerless figure whom Jesus must instruct and direct.” Professor Gary Burge
- **The ways and rewards of God’s kingdom:** “Jesus didn’t come to lead the Hebrews in a military or political uprising, yet the coming of God’s kingdom would, in fact, change everything. Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was a threat to the rule of Rome. He was, but not in the way Pilate feared. Kingdoms of earth are founded upon power—military might, intellectual prowess, political cunning, financial abundance, social advantage. The kingdom of heaven is

founded upon truth, and the arrival of the Messiah on a lonely Bethlehem night was an invasion. Consequently, each individual must choose which kingdom he or she will serve: the kingdoms of earth or the kingdom of God, kingdoms founded upon power or the kingdom founded upon truth. ‘What is truth?’ indeed! The Roman world was not much different from ours today. Pilate didn’t rise to power and prominence by championing the cause of truth. The Romans were relentlessly pragmatic. Truth is the tool of expediency. In their minds, ‘history is written by the victors’ and truth is whatever the powerful say it is. But according to Jesus, choosing between truth and expediency is how one chooses which kingdom he or she will serve. Jesus presented Pilate with a choice—the same choice He offers us: compromise truth and advance your status in the kingdom of this world or walk in the light of truth and receive unseen rewards of God’s kingdom.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll

- **Truth:** “Having said what his kingdom is not, Jesus can now say what it is—a kingdom of truth. His mission began in heaven and so he possesses a divine charge: He has come to unveil the truth to the world—not to point out true things as he finds them, but to unveil himself, his voice (which is God’s voice), and his words (which are God’s words). Therefore ‘truth’ does not refer to a commitment to truthfulness (or honesty) in the first instance. Rather, truth is a theological term. ‘Truth’ is what we see when we see God. Jesus is thus ‘the truth’ (14:6; 1 John 2:20–23). It is reality lived out in divine light, which by virtue of its spiritual link with God is thereby genuinely truthful and honest. Of course, ‘truth’ is no foreign idea to Pilate. Everyone wants at least to claim that his or her efforts are true. Thus, Jesus’ revelation that he is working for the truth serves as an invitation for Pilate to join him. For Pilate to condemn Jesus is for him to condemn the truth. Jesus has thus reversed positions with Pilate.” Professor Gary Burge
- **The trial before Herod:** “John does not record the Lord’s fifth trial before Herod Antipas. According to Luke 23:6-12, Pilate tried to pawn off his problem by sending Jesus to Antipas, son of Herod the Great and the current ruler of Galilee. But Antipas would have none of it. After humiliating Jesus, he returned Him to Pilate wearing one of his own royal garments as a joke. Pilate’s gesture had gained him a much-needed friend in Antipas, but Jesus remained his problem to solve.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Christ’s invitation to Pilate:** “In 9:29 Jesus said that he came into the world for judgment, unmasking the heartfelt dispositions of humanity. Ironically Jesus has been asking Pilate questions from the beginning. Now Pilate has been challenged (Will he side with truth or falsehood?) and now he carries the burden of response. But his cynical question, “What is truth?” reveals his true position, that he cannot recognize the things of God and will avoid the light (3:21). He is not among those given to Jesus by God (17:6). He waits for no answer to his question because he does not believe there is any. He then leaves the room.” Professor Gary Burge

#### Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God’s) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.

- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it’s “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be ‘the life’ of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

**Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us about many other resources.

- [The Pour Over Podcast](#): “Stay informed while remaining focused on Christ with The Pour Over. New episodes every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.”

### **Direction for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

### **Let’s prepare for our sermon from John 18:36-38.**

- After reading this passage a few times, what differences do you discern about God’s kingdom and the kingdom of this world and about Jesus and Pilate?

### **Let’s apply our sermon from John 18:36-38.**

- In John 10, Jesus referred to Himself as the “Good Shepherd” who lays down His life for His sheep and aims to create one flock. How have some betrayed this mission in their pursuit of the truth? Would you consider yourself more of a unifier or a divider? How can virtues like love and humility help us remain aligned with Christ’s purpose as we pursue the truth?

- In what ways is the truth shaping you? How are you different today than when you first met Jesus? Where has His Spirit been nudging you to grow, and who have you asked to help you work that out in your life?

**Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...**

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>