

Bearing witness to the Truth

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, James. And yeah, do keep that passage open in front of you if you've got a Bible there as we look through it together. The concept of truth and the protection of what is true and the idea of seeking out the truth is something that across humanity we all recognize the importance of, I think.

And that's going to be a big theme of what we're looking at this morning. But even in our day and age, we worry, don't we, about fake news or we want things fact-checked when we're trying to decide between different options, different opinions.

Really, what we're trying to find out is, well, what is the truth of the situation? And even those we might wildly disagree with, you can think of the most kind of crazy conspiracy theories that you've come across.

We still, in some ways, share that common thread of seeking to find the truth, even though we might disagree with people's conclusions in certain areas.

But the importance of truth for all of us seems to be kind of wired into who we are. And the opposite is true as well, isn't it? The idea of bending the truth or ignoring the truth or jettisoning the truth if it's inconvenient.

[1 : 1 0] These are attitudes that we always kind of view negatively. You know, think of a film. That is what the bad guys do, isn't it? Where the heroes are those who seek out the truth and stand for truth, whatever the cost might be.

So truth is important to us, and rightly so. And truth is at the heart of our passage this morning. The whole Bible, we believe, is true.

But this passage in particular helps us to consider the nature of truth and how we respond to that. As John continues to slow down here at this passage in this section of his gospel and show us the detail and the significance of the cross, we're going to see how it reveals to us how the cross shines the ultimate spotlight on the truth of who Jesus really is and what he came to do.

And that truth in itself reveals a far bigger truth, really the ultimate truth in terms of eternity of God and of the universe that we exist in. And so with all that said, the truths that we're going to see in some ways in these verses this morning, we could say are the truths that define our reality.

You know, the stakes could not be higher than the truths that we're looking at in this passage. And it means that if we get to grips with the message Jesus is teaching us in these verses, that we can have that assurance that we are living in light of the truth if we respond rightly to him.

[2 : 5 0] And that's an incredible offer. We're going to see what incredible security that brings to be living in line with what is ultimately true. So let's look at that together. We're going to have two sections, each looking at the true identity of Jesus, as I think it's presented to us in this passage in two distinct ways.

And the first way is this, the true identity of Jesus. And that's that Jesus is the true Passover lamb. Jesus is the true Passover lamb.

And we've not yet spoken about this over the last couple of weeks that we've had in John. But this idea of Passover, the feast of Passover, is vital in these chapters for understanding John's presentation and description of what is happening at the cross.

And you see it in the section that we're looking at in these verses. We begin and end with mention of the Passover. It's there in verse 28. The Jewish leaders won't enter Pilate's headquarters so that, it says, they would not be defiled but could eat the Passover.

And we're reminded of it again in verse 39, where Pilate is willing to release one of the prisoners because it is the Passover. The cross and the Passover are deliberately held together in parallel, side by side in John's gospel to help us make sense of what is going on.

[4 : 22] And so with that in mind, it's worth saying, well, what is the Passover? Why is that significant? And really, the Passover was the central feast and celebration in the Jewish religious calendars.

They think of kind of Christmas and Easter and everything else all rolled into one as the people traveled from all over the country to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem.

That's what's happening at this point in time in John's gospel. And they're doing that because God instructed them to do that. And God instructed them to do that as a reminder of the great rescue he had carried out for his people right back in the book of Exodus, back in the Old Testament, the second book of the Bible.

We have this account of how God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. He had acted miraculously to redeem them.

And it is recorded in that book in great detail. And we can go back and look at that. But the night of that rescue, the people, God's people, had gathered in their households.

[5 : 31] They'd been instructed to kill a lamb and eat it together. And they'd also been told to put the blood of that lamb over the doorposts, over the doorframe of their homes, as a sign that that lamb had died so they would not die.

The big point being that the lamb dies in their place so that they can go free. That is what the Passover was all about. And even as you read it back in Exodus chapter 12, even as it's happening, even as the people are still in Egypt awaiting this night of rescue, God explains how sacrificing and eating this lamb in a certain way is going to be a festival for generations and generations to come and remembrance of his salvation and rescue of them.

And so this is this feast that God had prescribed. You know, you could look all through the Bible. It won't tell you that we're supposed to have turkey at Christmas, although that is the best meal for Christmas.

But we do find very specifically the details of the Passover laid out, how they were to celebrate year after year. And at the heart of that is this lamb.

This lamb, which it repeats, is to be spotless. This lamb, which is to be perfect. This lamb, which died in the place of the people. This lamb whose blood was shed instead of theirs back in Egypt, that they might go free.

[7 : 01] And which they now ate annually as a memorial of that great rescue. So there's the background to the Passover. It's really important in John's gospel.

As we say, it runs alongside everything that's happening here at the cross. And really the key significance, all this is pointing us to this key fact that Jesus goes to the cross as the true Passover lamb.

The one whose blood will be shed in the place of his people, that his people might go free. John's been preparing us for this right through his gospel, right back from chapter one.

John the Baptist's words as he sees Jesus, Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus, the true Passover lamb.

And what's emphasized here again is Jesus' perfection. Jesus' innocence enabling him to carry out that role. Just as that lamb had to be one without spot or blemish, perfection was required.

[8 : 08] In Jesus, and only in Jesus, we see that perfection is met, that perfect sacrifice. And we see it in these verses that we're looking at. Verse 29, do have a look there.

We see there is literally no case against Jesus. It's almost funny, I think. Pilate asks, What accusation do you bring against this man? And they say, Well, if we were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.

It's not like the strongest legal argument you've ever heard, if you've watched many courtroom dramas. You know, just trust us. It's fine. Just do it. But there is no case.

Because there is no crime. Because there is no sin. And we see it kind of bookending at the end of our passage as well. Verse 38, After Pilate has tried Jesus, what's his verdict?

I find no guilt in him. And again, I think Pilate is speaking sort of legally here, we might say. But John, again, uses his words to show the far bigger truth and reality of the situation, the sinless perfection of Christ.

[9 : 15] And what we're seeing here is that Jesus is the true, Passover lamb, the true perfect sacrifice, who dies so that imperfect people like us can be forgiven.

Because Jesus was perfect, that means he's not dying for his own sins. He's not dying as the consequence of his own actions. He's not facing the punishment he deserves.

Instead, he's able to die for our sins, take the punishment for the consequences of our actions, that we deserve. Again, that we might go free. And we get a brilliant kind of picture of this at the climax of our verses.

Verse 39, Because it is Passover, we see how Barabbas, Barabbas who was the criminal, it says Barabbas was a robber.

In our translation, that word I think can be stronger than that. It can mean a rebel, it can mean a terrorist, but he is a guilty man, a sinful man. And yet we see here, he goes free, because Christ, the true Passover lamb, goes to the cross.

[10 : 20] A great picture, John is giving us there, of the work of Jesus, and who he is. And it all makes, verse 28, the start of our passage, just so kind of full of irony, doesn't it?

Because we read there, that as the Jews hand Jesus over, that he might be killed, they won't enter Pilate's headquarters, they won't step into that place, as they don't want to be barred, from the Passover meal.

And yet in handing over Jesus, they are confirming, their rejection of the very one, who is the fulfillment of everything, that festival, and that feast, had been pointing toward.

I suppose it's almost like, if you got a kind of a golden ticket, for a Buckingham Palace banquet. I don't know if they are gold, I've not had mine yet, but I imagine they look pretty impressive.

It's something that you would treasure, that you would hold on tightly to, that you'd want to look after. And yet it's like, as if you do that, but then once the day arrives, the hour comes, refusing to hand over that ticket, to gain entry.

[11 : 25] And instead saying, but this ticket is so precious. This ticket is so important. I don't want to lose this ticket. And yet because of that, missing out on the very thing, that the ticket is about.

That's what the Jewish leaders are doing here. They are missing the substance. They are missing the reality. Because instead, they are holding on to the accessories, to the signpost, to the shadow, that God has given, in order to reveal, and point to the substance, that has come in Christ.

The Jewish leaders want a ceremony, and not a savior. They want an annual box, that they can tick off, not to be brought face to face, with their sin, and their ongoing need, of a redeemer.

And so because of that, they keep hold of the signpost, of the pointer, and yet they reject, the fulfillment, Jesus himself. Again, it's easy for us to be, kind of shake our heads at that, look down on that.

But it's a helpful warning as well, I think, for us to remember, to make sure, that we never let, never let religious things, Christian things, even those things established, by God himself, as the Passover was, as gathering as a church is, as baptism, and the Lord's Supper, as reading our Bibles is, that we never let those things, stand in the place, of Jesus himself, and his sacrifice, on the cross.

[12 : 57] That we make sure, that Jesus is always, the heart of our faith, and the only grounds, of our hope. That he is the lamb, who dies, in our place.

And that we remember, that everything, in the Christian faith, is designed, to point us to him. And that's what we want to do, as a church. Not just turn up, to tick a box, and go home, but turn up, to point one another, to Christ.

Because that is where, our hope is found. That's what we want to do, when we read our Bibles. Not just to say, that's good, God will be very, pleased with me, and owes me a good day today. But to be reminded again, of the gospel, that has Jesus, at the heart of it.

Because that is what we need. He is who we need, to sustain us, day by day, as his people. As we think about, the importance of, truth then, let's make sure, that that truth, remains at the center.

The truth, that Jesus, is the only one, in his sinless perfection, who can offer, the forgiveness, that we all need, as he goes to the cross, as the true, Passover lamb.

[14 : 05] If you're here this morning, and you're, still kind of thinking, about Christianity, still asking some questions, not quite sure, what it's all about, please do hear that, and please do understand that, and please do remember that, that it is all about Jesus.

It is all pointing to him, and it's all about, his suffering on the cross, because that is where, forgiveness is found, and that forgiveness, is our greatest need, and available to all of us, if we put our trust in him.

And so that's the first, kind of truth, here about Jesus. Jesus is the true, Passover lamb. We see that, I think in these verses, and as we said, in some ways, that's also the big picture, that's the context, that hangs over, the whole of these chapters, and John's presentation, of the cross, and revelation, of who Jesus is, as he goes to the cross.

Jesus is the true, Passover lamb. The second aspect then, of Jesus' identity, that we see here, and here we're kind of, zooming in more, on these verses in particular, as we see here, that Jesus is the true king.

Jesus is the true king. From verses 33 onwards, really the language of king, and kingdom, take center stage. That is at the heart, of the charge, that Pilate lays, before Jesus.

[15 : 26] So Pilate entered, his headquarters again, and called Jesus, and said to him, are you the king, of the Jews? And that was the charge, that the Jewish leaders, had passed on, to Pilate.

Again, a bit of some history, that the situation was, that the Jewish leaders, had been allowed, to keep their, their religious authority, and a degree of religious autonomy, by the Romans, and yet that did not extend, as far as being able, to put people to death, as they so desperately, and deliberately, wanted to happen, to Jesus.

And so they have to, make their accusations, to the Roman authorities, in language, that would seem like a threat, to Rome, and to its authority. And in that situation, the Romans would be very happy, to put people to death, and protect their authority.

And so the religious leaders, speak of Jesus, to Pilate as a king. They present him, as a rival, a threat, an upstart, pushing against Roman authority.

So Pilate lays the charges, before Jesus, are you a king? And really what we get here, in Jesus' answer, is that he says, yes I am a king. He speaks about his kingdom. He says, yes I am a king.

[16 : 46] But then he goes on, to explain what kind of king, and what type of kingdom, and how this is not, what Pilate has in mind. Maybe it's just me, I always remember, of that line, from the princess bride.

You keep using that word, I do not think it means, what you think it means. That's maybe a niche reference, but that's what, that's what Jesus, is telling Pilate here, yes I am a king. But that word, does not mean, what you think it means.

Verse 36, my kingdom, it 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. Now this is not, the kind of, of earthly, authority, that Pilate, is worried about.

And Pilate, grasps that. That's why, as we saw earlier, Pilate ultimately says, I find no guilt in him. This man is not, a civil threat. Jesus is not about to, raise an army, or take up arms.

[17 : 47] And before we, we go on, and we see what kind of, King Jesus is, I think it's good for us, just to think about that, and just to, to remember that, to dwell on that. Historically speaking, there have been, terrible events, where people have, confused, Jesus' kingdom, for being an, earthly kingdom, that advances, through earthly, means.

Perhaps, going back in time a bit, you know, the Crusades, would be the most famous, example of that. The idea of, of conversion, at the point of a sword, as if, God grows his kingdom, in that way.

That would be a, it's good for us to recognize, that that is not the case, that that is not true. It's okay for us, to look back in history, at times when we're, ashamed of the, of the actions of the church, and say Christians, have messed up in this area, because that's not us saying, well there's a flaw, in Christianity, that's not evidence, against the gospel, we're actually saying, it's when people, have stopped listening, to Jesus, in passages like this, that problems like that, have arisen.

All that really, lends weight to, is the fact that, the issue is with, humanity, and as Christians, we are really happy, to accept, there is an issue, with humanity, past and present, that is why we need Jesus, and that is what, the gospel is all about.

So we can look back, if those kind of, historical accusations, are thrown at us, to say actually, we fully agree with that, that that's not okay, that there are present versions, of that same misunderstanding, as well.

[19 : 21] If we put all our hope, in a political party, or an individual, if we think that, Jesus' kingdom, is going to be voted in, if we just get, the right people, in the right places, or even the right systems, of government.

And again, it's good to be engaged, with politics, the Bible tells us, governments are established, by God, and for our good, but it's really important, to be clear, that is not, how God's, kingdom grows.

Again, that is to, to misunderstand, Jesus' kingdom, as an earthly kingdom, established then, by earthly means. Jesus says, his kingdom is not like that, my kingdom, is not of, this world, he says.

So then, what is it? What is it? And we come perhaps, to the key verse then, in the whole, of this passage, verse 37, do have a look down there, then Pilate said to him, so you are a king.

That's just after, Jesus has said, that he has a kingdom. So you are a king. Jesus answered, you say that I am a king, and for this purpose, I have come into the world, to bear witness, to the truth.

[20 : 31] Everyone, who is of the truth, listens, to my voice. Jesus here, is saying that he is, indeed a king, and he is saying, what kind of king?

Well, the hallmark, of his kingship, his purpose, his role, as a king, is to bear witness, to the truth. It is the king, who declares, how things, truly are.

Jesus came then, to reveal, as the king, the truth, the fundamental truth, regarding the universe, which we all live in. And what is that truth?

This is the truth, that Jesus displays, throughout the whole, of his life, and ministry. Listen to how, a few various authors, describe the truth, that Jesus bears witness to.

One says, truth is what Jesus tells us, about God, and eternity, through his words, and works. Another says, to testify, to fallen man, the truth about God, about sin, about the need of a redeemer, about the nature of holiness.

[21 : 36] The third, is nothing less, than the self-disclosure, of God, in his son, who is the truth, disclosing the truth, of God, of salvation, and of judgment.

Those are all, consistent descriptions, of the truth, that Jesus bears witness to. That truth is, that we live in, in God's universe.

That this is a moral universe, because he is a moral God. That truth, that there is a judgment, on sin, and that in our natural state, we are subject, to that judgment.

That as we saw, through those, catechism questions, that we need a redeemer, and that Jesus himself, has come, as that redeemer, to bring salvation, to all those, who trust in him.

That is the truth, the truth about our universe, the truth about our existence, that King Jesus, comes to reveal, to us, in his life, in his words, in his works.

[22 : 40] We live in a world, that provides all sorts, of competing, truth claims, competing ultimate, truths, that we're called, to shape our lives around. There is the idea, that the truth is, that we need to, define who we are, for ourselves.

That there is no, greater power, to give us an identity, that is something, that we need to, construct internally. Although, those who would, ultimately say, the truth is, it all boils down, to money, or on power, and success.

And that whoever, has gathered, the most of that, by the time that we die, they are the winner. Or perhaps, the understanding, of the truth, that lies behind, many people's lives, is just that, there is no purpose.

You know, the truth is, there is no hope. That life is just, a string of, frequently, unfortunate, and maybe, unfair events, which we struggle through, and making it, to tomorrow, or next week, is the best, we can hope for.

And although, they might not use, that language, those are the, ideas of truth, that so many people, are building their, lives upon.

[23 : 53] Those are the ideas, of truth, that all of us, are tempted, to share in, as they're, they're all around us, they surround us, and we hear them, from every angle. And yet, all of them, for various reasons, are deeply, unsatisfactory.

And lives, built on those truths, will be deeply, unstable. And yet, the great news, is that Jesus, has come, and through him, we can know, real truth.

He gives us, a real foundation, to build our lives on, as he reveals to us, the reality of God, of the world he created, of the problem of sin, why our world, is not the world, that we long for, and desire, why we are not, the people that we want to be.

But it also lays, before us, the solution, of a saviour. And as we come, toward the end of this passage, really the question is, will we listen, to that truth?

Now, what is truth? Pilate, famously replies, I don't think that's him, being a sort of, post-modern, university student type. It's, you know, it's a statement, really of indifference. We read in the passage, he asks the question, and then he turns away, he doesn't wait for an answer.

[25 : 08] And again, that's a warning to us, perhaps that's our situation, this morning, I'm sure we can think of others, who would fit that category, a refusal to engage, a refusal to make the adjustments, to our life, which the truth requires.

George Martin says, in one of his novels, people often claim, to hunger for truth, but seldom like the taste, when it's served up. You know, that idea, we say that truth is important, we've talked about that already, and yet for so many people, and often, so often, in our kind of day-to-day lives, when it comes to the one, who claims to be the truth, to embody the truth, to reveal the truth, and the God, who created our universe, we can be so indifferent.

And we see that, from Jesus' day, we see that right through to today, and it's a tragic thing. And when we see that, it should bring us to our knees, in prayers for others, in prayers for ourselves, that we might seriously investigate, the truth that Jesus reveals.

So there is that real challenge, there's that warning here, and yet Jesus also gives this great encouragement, doesn't he? Everyone who is of the truth, listens to my voice, that people will hear, and respond.

Jesus is the king, who builds his kingdom, not through military power, or political power, but through his message of the truth, through the revelation of the truth.

[26 : 40] As people come to accept the truth, and in doing that, gratefully accept Jesus, as their king, and their Lord and Savior. These are the people, the Bible says, who are living in the truth.

The truth that Jesus reveals to us, and that we can rely on, as that is God himself, showing us the way things truly are. So Jesus is both the Passover lamb, Jesus is the true king, and as we close, this is worth mentioning as we close, these are not kind of contradictory, or unrelated, or entirely separate things.

in fact, in the Bible, that the lamb as the king, is fundamental. The book of Revelation, the very end of the Bible, again, a book all about revealing how things truly are, it regularly speaks of the lamb on the throne.

It says in chapter 17, the lamb is the Lord of lords, and king of kings. And really, the logic, or the link is this, that Jesus is the king, as we've seen in this passage.

At the heart of this kingship, he says, is this revelation of the truth, of a holy God, a God who will deal with sin, and also a loving God, a God who will provide rescue, for sinful people.

[27 : 57] And the ultimate revelation of that truth, is as Jesus goes to the cross, as the lamb, who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus goes to the cross at our place, that God's judgment, that God's righteous and just, and holy anger at sin, can be dealt with, that justice can be done. And yet also, that we might be free, we might be forgiven, and that we might enjoy, relationship with the holy God, as our loving heavenly father, now and forever.

Jesus the lamb, who goes to the throne, via the cross, is the ultimate revelation, of God to us. And so if we want to be genuinely serious, about the truth, the end result is, that we have to keep on looking, to Jesus, to accept him, as the true Passover lamb, who dies in our place, to accept him, as our king, to accept the outworking of that, that Jesus says, as it means verse seven, that we listen to his voice, that we arrange our lives, in every aspect, around what Jesus says, how Jesus calls us to live, the forgiveness, that Jesus has made possible, the relationship, with God we have, through Jesus and his work, that we keep, listening to those things, keep on coming back, to those things.

One of the biggest regrets, or complaints, that people would have, is if you ever, hear someone say, that they've been living a lie, just what a tragedy, that is, the great news of this passage, is that in Jesus, and in listening to him, we have the truth, a truth to build our lives on, a truth we can depend on, and a truth we can share, as Jesus comes, to reveal that to us, that a truth, that we are able to live in, to know that we have, that certain foundation, because it is based upon, the truth of the reality, in which we live, and the God who has made it all, the God who is the creator, of all things, we recognize the truth of that, and yet the God also, who is the redeemer, of his people, we recognize the truth of that, because Jesus, the true Passover lamb, came to suffer in our place, the true king, to reveal to us, the reality of the world, we live in, so that we might live, as his people, according to his will, now let's pray together,

Father, Heavenly Father, we thank you, for the incredible truth, that Jesus reveals to us, the truth of who you are, the truth that you, deserve our worship, the truth of your holiness, which deserves our reverence, the truth of your mercy, and grace, that you have sent, a redeemer, and the truth, that through him, through Jesus, we can live as your people, now, and for all eternity, Lord, in a world, that is so full of people, searching for meaning, searching for purpose, searching for understanding, ultimately, searching for truth, we thank you, that you have revealed, all of that to us, through Jesus Christ, and we ask that we would be encouraged, if we are accepting that truth, and having Jesus as king, that in him, we have a strong, and certain foundation, that it doesn't mean, that all the challenges, and struggles of our world, will disappear, but it will mean, that we are depending, on what is true, and real, and Lord, we ask for those here, and for those who we know, who aren't yet sure, of that truth, we ask that we would be eager, to share it, that they too, would come to see, that what they need, is fulfilled in Jesus, and that he would reveal to them, the reality of the universe, we live in, that it is your universe, and that the way to, satisfaction, the way to hope, ultimately, the way to eternal joy, and eternal life, is by living, in relation to you, in relation to the truth, through the work of Jesus Christ, and Lord, we thank you, above all for the cross, where the truth, of who you are, and all that you have done, comes into, sharpest focus for us, we ask you, to help us, remain fixed on the cross, and the truth it reveals, we ask that we would continue, to depend on, and be pointed back to, and point one another, back to Jesus, as our Passover lamb, time and time again, and in response, to all of that, would live confidently, as your people, and for your glory, and pray all this, in Jesus name,

[32 : 32] Amen. Amen.