

King of Truth

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I'm going to share something with you just for a few minutes before we sing another couple of songs.

We read the Nativity stories there, Joel and Jess read these stories and we've been singing about them in the various carols and I have to say, I can't believe I'm going to do this.

I'm actually going to do something that I've never done before at a carol service and I'm kind of depending on your good will and on your grace and your generosity to allow me to do this.

I'm not going to talk about anything to do with the manger or with Jesus as a baby. I'm not going to mention the fact that there's no room in the inn. I don't think I'm going to speak about or mention angels or shepherds.

I'm not going to sing Hark the Herald. You'll be very grateful that that's the case. It's completely outrageous. I'm not going to do any of these things this evening. There's not going to be a camel anywhere in sight, not a donkey.

[1 : 0 6] So I ask for your apology already at this point. I beg of your forgiveness because I'm going to take you somewhere that I don't think that you're going to want to go.

I want to take you this evening beyond the brilliant music which we've enjoyed and you've participated in and added to, obviously, yourselves and the anticipation of feeling warm and fuzzy inside which these events are encouraging us to feel.

But I hope you'll get that from the Mint's pies and the Muldwine later on downstairs. What I am going to do is I'm going to take you to a courtroom. I'm going to take you, I'm going to transport you to the last week of the grown-up baby Jesus' life.

His young life, he was probably only about 33 at this point. And I want you in the darkness of the hall here to just close your eyes and use your imagination a little bit about the scene.

There's a baying crowd outside the courtroom and there's an inconvenience to judge on the inside having to deal with Jesus Christ, this baby who had grown up.

[2 : 1 6] He was the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. And I want you to just think about the scene and Thomas is going to read from John chapter 18 which depicts and speaks about the scene.

And you'll see the link, I hope, to the birth of Jesus in it. Your Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus answered, Do you say this of your own accord? Or did others say it to you about me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me.

What have you done? Jesus answered, 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. Then Pilate said to him, So you are a king. Jesus answered, You say that I am a king.

[3 : 25] For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

One who is of the truth listens to my voice. Pilate said to him, What is truth? And after he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in him.

Okay, so that's the kind of courtroom scene that we have at the end of John's Gospel. And it does bring us face to face with a massive question and a staggering claim.

And all that I would ask that you would do this evening for a few moments is take time to consider if a question asked by a powerful political leader and a claim made by a condemned innocent man or claims made by a condemned innocent man 2,000 years ago can change your life to its very core.

So that's just for a minute or two this evening, that's what I want to look at from this part of the Gospel where Jesus refers to the reason for him being born, which we've been singing about this evening.

[4 : 42] And Pilate asks that remarkable question, doesn't he? What is truth? It does seem a little bit like a throwaway comment from Pilate when Jesus speaks.

I don't know if it was a throwaway comment, but he asks that huge question when he's interrogating Jesus. The biggest question really in the universe, what is truth?

Is there such a thing as truth? It's a huge question. It's a really deep theological, but also philosophical question. And I think all of us, even if we don't think about these kind of illogical reasons or logical strata, we do consider that there is truth.

We live our lives on the assumption that there is truth and it matters. We know that on a personal level, don't we? If someone you love lies to you and breaks trust with you, that's a hugely significant thing because all our relationships are based on honesty and on loving one another in such a way that doesn't involve lying.

It matters. When your integrity at work is questioned, you care about that, don't you? And I care about that. It's not just someone's opinion against someone else's, we care about that.

[5 : 59] At a scientific level, certain truth is measurable. There are laws. There are absolute laws. If I climbed up that pillar there and fell down from the top, the truth of the law of gravity will hit me as hard as the ground that I fall onto when I come down.

Facts are real. They're observable and they're verifiable. We know that. What do we wonder if there is truth beyond observable or verifiable facts?

Is there truth behind the universe? Is there ultimate meaning? Is truth simply what we can measure in a scientific way or is it, if it's more, will it never go beyond being true to ourselves?

I'm not even sure if I know what that means, really. What about being true to others? And what do we base that authenticity? What's our standard? How do we count?

I count for the universality of love and of the irrationality of hatred and the innate sense of fairness and justice and the purpose of living.

[7 : 07] What is truth? It's a huge question for us. And I think it's a particularly big question for us today in the era of fake news and conspiracy theories and competing worldviews and questions.

There's lots of people asking that question of what is truth. The pilot brushed aside, he brushed aside his moral dilemma with what to do with Jesus by just shrugging his shoulders and saying, well, what is truth?

And he abandoned his responsibility to consider the claims of Jesus and his innocence. And I would plead with you not to do the same.

So Jesus, we have that question of what is truth, and then Jesus made a couple of really significant statements at this point. Thomas read from this passage, and Jesus said a couple of things.

The first thing he said, you're right in saying I'm a king. In fact, for this reason, I was born. So Jesus is basically saying I was born to be king.

[8 : 10] I was born to be king. So the baby in a manger that we've been singing about and that we recall and recount at this time of year had a very specific reason for being born.

And he wasn't just born, he came into the world. It was something that is very deliberate, it was very deliberate. It was planned and it was purposed.

And there's something absolutely organized and purposed about this statement he made, especially in the light that it came from someone who was about to face crucifixion.

He had no army, no evident power, no apparent kingdom, and no intention of avoiding his fate.

Some king, strange king. You know, in his 33 years, he claims to be divine. He has power over creation. He heals the sick.

[9 : 05] He raises the dead. He speaks the very words of God. No one finds any fault in him. He drew crowds, but after a while these crowds left him and he was abandoned at this point by even his closest of friends.

He had no home, no money, and no one to represent him. Some king. The paradoxical really isn't it? He's about to be judged as guilty on pain of death.

He is in the dock, but he is there deliberately and he's there willingly to receive the penalty that he claims is our due.

This harmless baby from the manger nailed shortly to a cross. Some king, eh? A king who says he's done it for you and for me, and the king who claims authority over your life and mine, even if we don't recognize it yet.

So his first claim is that he is born to be king. And the second claim in this passage is that he came into the world, he was born to testify to the truth that everyone on the side of truth will listen to me.

[10 : 25] That's a remarkable statement, is that Jesus claims to be truth. Now a few chapters earlier he says to his disciples, I am the way, the truth, and the life nobody comes to the Father except through me.

He says he's here to testify to the truth and if you're on the side of truth, you're on his side. That's what he's saying. And in his short life, his very short public life, it was only about three years, public teaching life, he taught that, and he was teaching that God is love, that God is God, that God is just, that God is holy, he's patient and generous and kind and creative.

He was teaching that we as a human race are estranged from Him by the very dint of our broken human nature, by our choices, by our rebellion, by our sin.

He claims that death isn't just a natural separation from life and existence, but is a spiritual penalty for our sins, separating us from the hope of a sweet existence.

And he knows and he knew that we can't reach up to heaven and live, but he says, I have come down for you. That is why I have come.

[11 : 44] He loves us and he loves you enough to die in your place. That is why he claims he was born. You know, it's a huge claim, isn't it?

Claiming to be truth. It's absolutely mind-blowing to forgive, to give purpose, belonging, to take away fear and guilt, to rescue from what death stands for.

It's big stuff what Jesus claims. And so the response that we give to Jesus can sometimes be a bit like Pilate.

You know, we can either shrug our shoulders maybe, till next year, maybe back here next year, or I'll maybe think about it when I'm older, or we can just ask the question, well, who knows what truth is?

We might even bury our heads in the sand. We might do a pilot, or we might do an ostrich, one or the other. But his claim to truth is a universal claim.

[12 : 42] It's an absolute claim. And he's either mad, bad, sad, or he is who he claims to be. He simply can't ignore, or it's not good if we misrepresent him.

So Jesus Christ is our King as we worship, as believers, as Christians, as this community, gospel community here. And I would really encourage, I would love you if you're not a Christian, if you don't normally think about Jesus Christ, or the gospel, or the Bible, or church, or anything like that, to investigate the claims of Jesus.

I really would love you to do that. I came to faith in Christ, well, nearly 40 years ago. I loved Jesus Christ as my King and Savior.

I believe He's the ultimate truth in which I find my true destiny as a human being. Through Him I've come to know God, the Father. He's proved an incredible source of joy, a challenge, hope, and transformation for my selfish, proud, and rebellious heart.

And it has been really tough at times, and it still is tough. But I do believe is the only hope, not just for me, not just for religious people, not just for a faction of humanity, but for all of humanity.

[14 : 02] He's not just what works for me. He claims that there is no one else that we can go to, nothing or no one else who is worthy of that first place in our hearts.

And so I would encourage you to consider and think about His claims if you don't normally worship with us, or if you've never really considered His claims, or if it's only second hand knowledge you might have, or maybe an accepted stereotype, I would love to invite you to come any Sunday to church here at 11 o'clock in the morning, or at 5.30 in the evening.

Or if you speak to a friend who invited you, maybe they come to church, maybe they're Christians themselves and they'd be happy to speak to you. Speak to me afterwards, I'd be very happy to speak with you. Or the bulletin that you've received, I hope you've received it if you haven't.

If you haven't, there's some details there and we can make sure that you know other details. We are absolutely delighted to have you all as guests here this evening.

We don't normally have quite this many, or week to week. So I know there's lots of friends here today, and it's really brilliant. We're absolutely delighted that you're here, and we do hope and pray that you'll be challenged to consider this great Savior, Jesus Christ, who's changed our lives and transformed us for ever.