

Searching for truth (John 18:33-37)

This John text causes us to directly contemplate the nature of Jesus' truth claims.

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Jesus claims to testify to the truth. He is clear that truth is not a religion, not a philosophy, not theological assertion or ecclesiastical doctrine. As Andreas Köstenberger said, truth is a "personal, relational concept that has its roots and origin in none other than God himself."

In Psalm 31:5, the psalmist says, "you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." In Isaiah 65:16, the text proclaims, "so that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth."

John's Gospel unequivocally follows this testimony from the Hebrew Bible and decrees that God is truth; therefore, it follows that God's Word is truth. Jesus is the truth, because he has been sent by God to reveal God as truth and carry out God's salvific purposes in human history.

When Pilate asks whether or not Jesus is a human king, Jesus replies, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Jesus has come before Pilate with his life in the balance because others consider his claims to be false and want to kill him. The writer of John's Gospel clearly demonstrates the veracity of Jesus' claims. Jesus is the son of God.

Pilate must decide the veracity of Jesus' claim. Every reader of the Gospel of John must make the same decision Pilate has to make. Pilate's response is the response of many of us: "What is truth?" Each of us, especially preachers, must answer the question.

Here is my answer to the question.

I searched for truth for a long time. I was a philosophy major in college—Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche—but the truth that I was looking for was not to be found there. I went into Afrocentric thought—knowing my Black history and heritage. I discovered some truth there, but not the totality of what I was looking for. I went to seminary, seeking truth in the tracks of theology and the original languages of the Bible. I almost found truth. I began to pastor, and I thought that in the fellowship of the saints I could find truth. I found some, but my soul was still not at rest. I went into counseling and therapy, thinking that if I resolved what wounded me in my childhood I would find truth. It helped me, but after I found out what messed me up, I did not have the power to forgive anybody.

It finally dawned on me that my very first Sunday school teacher, Miss Monroe, an older White woman who taught Black kids Sunday school on the south side of Chicago in a transitioning neighborhood, told me what truth is: "Truth is a person, and his name is Jesus. Jesus loves you," she said. And at eight years old, I believed what she said. I believed Jesus.

I find no fault in Jesus. Do you believe Jesus?