

“Jesus, the King of Truth”

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, **“You are right in saying I am a king.”** This is the only time, that we are aware of, that Jesus said this so matter of fact, but he certainly alluded to this many times over his three-year ministry through his bold statements, miracles, and pointed criticism of the politics and religious views of the time. When someone makes a statement like that, **“I am a king,”** it gets your attention. Imagine the headlines Jesus would have created in our modern media world by making a statement like this. Even pre-modern media, Jesus made headlines as people had to decide was Jesus claim reality or fake news?

Our sermon lesson for today is from John 18. In order to truly appreciate the conversation that Pilate and Jesus had the morning that Jesus died on the cross I think it is helpful to understand some history that led up to it. From about 720 -140 B.C., the nation of Israel did not enjoy being a free people. During those years they were always subject to foreign nations more powerful than they were – the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Greeks. During those years, the Jewish people continued to fight for their independence and they hung their hat on the hope that the Messiah, a special King, would come and win them freedom and peace from their enemies. For about 100 years, roughly 160-60 B.C., Israel did enjoy freedom. Under strong Jewish leadership – Israel won its independence from the Greeks through what is now known as the Macabbean revolt. This is what Jews today still celebrate when they observe Hanukkah. That peace and freedom didn’t last though. Toward the end of that 100-year period of independence, Julius Caesar and the Romans started to threaten their freedom. During a 30-year period, 67-37 B.C, at least 150,000 Jews/Romans died in Palestine due to conflict. After 30 years of conflict, the Romans were now in control. In addition to their military defeat, in 31 B.C. the Jews experienced an earthquake that killed 30,000 people and much livestock. The spirit of the people was low, their financial resources were poor, and most of the country lay in ruins. Now that they had control, the Romans put their puppet king, Herod the Great, in charge of Israel. Herod witnessed the Romans not only killing Jewish men, but also women and children in their houses, in the market, and even in the temple. Herod is quoted once as asking a Roman general, **“Would the Romans deprive the city of Jerusalem of all its inhabitants and possessions and leave me a king of the wilderness?”** Herod the Great was able to rebuild Israel and make it prosperous again, but he was still the chosen Roman leader holding them back from enjoying peace and freedom. Many in Israel were still waiting for God to send the Messiah, a king to deliver them.

Our country just had another election which reminded us again how divided we are. Just like the United States is divided into different political and religious viewpoints on how to deal

with our problems, the nation of Israel was no different at the time that Jesus was born. The Essenes were the pacifists. They wanted nothing to do with Roman rule, but they also weren't about to revolt, so they retreated to caves in the wilderness. They thought the Roman invasion was a punishment from God, so they hoped through rededicating themselves to spiritual purity, they would encourage God to send the Messiah. The Zealots were the exact opposite of the Essenes. They specialized in acts of political terrorism against the Romans. It's possible Barabbas was a zealot. The Sadducees were humanists. While religious, they didn't believe in eternity or divine intervention, so they relied solely on human reason to solve earthly problems. One of their main ways to solve problems was to side with the most powerful. When the Greeks were in charge they sided with the Greeks. When the Maccabean Jews won freedom from the Greeks they sided with the Maccabeans. When the Romans were in charge, they got on the good side of the Romans. Whatever would benefit their lives on earth in the best way, they did. The most popular group was the Pharisees. They found themselves on the fence between separating from the Romans or collaborating with them. The Pharisees picked their battles carefully, enjoying the limited power the Romans gave the Jewish people within the Sanhedrin (Jewish Ruling Council), but at the same time they would revolt and put their lives on the line when necessary. The Pharisees had high standards for following God's Old Testament laws and they were passionately looking forward to the Messiah. However, they weren't too quick to follow after any imposter or miracle worker who might bring disaster on the nation. Pontius Pilate would represent people who seemed to be uninformed and/or indifferent about the political or religious views/situation of their world. With that background, listen now to our sermon lesson – John 18:33-37.

²⁸ Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. ³² This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Christ the King entered into a world that was divided. Everyone had their own truth, their own worldview and solution to what ails the world. Christ the King didn't fit the Essenes worldview as he was a man who gathered with the people, even undesirable people, instead of cutting yourself off from civilization and living in the wilderness. Christ the King didn't fit the worldview of the Zealots as he didn't come to lead military conflicts and free Israel from Roman rule and oppression. Christ the King didn't fit the Sadducees worldview because while they had a form of godliness they were more concerned about having an easy life not a life of sacrifice. They were quite content with the lavish lifestyles they lived under Roman control. Christ the King was actually a threat to their comfy way of living. Christ the King didn't fit the Pharisees worldview either as he constantly questioned their understanding and application of Scripture and the effect their false views were having on other people. Christ the King didn't fit Pontius Pilate's worldview either as he didn't really even want to form an opinion about Jesus.

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate asked. (vs. 37-38a). Pilate makes it seem like truth is relative. The political/religious worldviews that Jesus was born into made it seem like truth is relative. The political/religious worldviews that we live in today makes it seem like truth is relative. Even Christian people like us behave, at times, like truth is relative as, depending on the day, we float between all the different political/religious viewpoints we discussed today. There are moments where we think the solution is to be like the Essenes as we try to hole up in our WELS bubble and not engage the world around us. There are moments where we think the solution is to be a Zealot and enlist the power of the government to enforce our Biblical worldview. There are moments where we think the solution is to be like the Sadducees, religious, but not too religious because I want a comfy life on this earth and not one of sacrifice. There are moments where we think the solution is to be like the Pharisees, motivated by fear and guilt rather than motivated by love for Jesus. There are moments where we think that the solution is to be like Pontius Pilate, indifferent to the whole situation as I just focus on my own life. Whether we realize it or not, everyone has their own truth, their own worldview to solve what ails the world. Yet truth isn't relative. That is fake news. The truth, the solution to what ails the world, is this – Jesus is the King of Truth. **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”** (vs. 36-37). The truth is that while Jesus controls all things, his kingdom is not an earthly one. His kingdom is eternal and heavenly. And his eternal/heavenly kingdom impacts the earth as Jesus rule is seen in the hearts and lives of Christians like us. So let's listen to the Word of the King of truth, so that we can follow the King of truth. We do that by letting Jesus love, forgiveness, peace and promises rule our hearts and lives. We do that as we make earthly sacrifices in order to make a difference in this world as we tell people the truth about Jesus,

the one who changes lives and offers solutions to problems. Jesus is the King of Truth. Let's believe that and live that truth like John the Baptist did, like Mary and Joseph did, like Simeon and Anna did, and like so many others did before us until Jesus, the King of Truth, returns on the last day. Amen.