

The Truth

April 10, 2022



PURSUE

BUILDING FOR PEOPLE. BELIEVING FOR MORE.

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 18:33-40

Session Outline

1. The Way of Suffering (John 18:33-34)
2. Absolute Truth (John 18:35-38)
3. A Picture of the Gospel (John 18:39-40)

Theological Theme

Christ's work on behalf of sinners led Him to submit to human authorities, endure unjust accusations, and undergo an illegitimate trial. He stood before a pagan governor as a criminal and accepted this humiliation for our sake.



Leader Guide

The Truth

Introduction

- ❓ What was the most recent sporting event you attended in person, whether professional or youth sports?
- ❓ How important would you say the scoreboard is in this setting? What role does it play?

One thing that all organized sporting events have in common is a scoreboard. Officials keep meticulous record of the points that are scored. That score is reflected on the scoreboard for all to see. It is the standard and all claims concerning the outcome of the sporting event must be measured against the official scoreboard. It doesn't matter how anyone feels about the game. It is of no significance how this fan or that fan interpreted the outcome. The score is the score and that's what matters.

Likewise, the truth is the truth and Christians must not lose sight of the fact that their standard of truth is the Scriptures, no matter what the culture around them might say. In our text today, we will consider Pilate's questions, "What is truth?" The answer to this question is critical, especially in light of the Western perception of truth and reality.

Session Summary


Jesus had warned His disciples that He would face persecution and death, but they hardly understood what He meant. They were bent on seeing Jesus ride into Jerusalem as a conquering king who would overthrow the oppressive Roman regime who ruled over not only Israel, but virtually the entire world at that time. They knew the prophecies concerning the Messiah and they were sure Jesus had come for this purpose. Who else could do the wonders that Jesus of Nazareth had done except the Anointed One of God? They may have neglected to give as much attention to other prophecies, such as Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him."

By the time we reach John 18, maybe this reality was beginning to dawn on the disciples. Jesus did ride into Jerusalem, but on donkey's colt. He told them at the Passover meal that the bread represented His body that was to be broken and the wine represented His blood that was to be spilled. He was arrested in the garden, taken before the Sanhedrin, and now He was being tried before the Roman authorities. Maybe, the disciples finally began to understand Jesus must be put to death and that only by His stripes would they be healed.


In this account of Jesus's trial, we can see three key principles: Those who follow Christ should expect to suffer as He did. There is absolute truth even if it isn't approved by popular vote. Christ is the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners.

1. The Way of Suffering (John 18:33-34)

Our text begins with Jesus being questioned by Pilate, a man who worked for the Roman government and did not fear the one true and living God. This man worshiped the emperor and an array of Roman gods. Yet here, Jesus Christ submitted to his authority.

 Many people view this time as the beginning of Jesus's suffering. What are some ways Jesus had already suffered up until this point?

Christ underwent great humiliation. His suffering certainly culminated on Good Friday, but He suffered humiliation from the very beginning. Humiliation is when a person goes from a high status to a low status. This is exactly what the Son of God did when He took on flesh. Everything He went through from the moment of His human conception was beneath Him. He suffered greatly in His adulthood. He did not have a luxurious dwelling to rest in. He was hunted by the Pharisees and Scribes. His disciples misunderstood Him and often failed Him. The people sought to manipulate Him. He was reviled and hated by many. One of His own disciples betrayed Him. Now, He was being put on trial for no just cause.

 Why did Jesus suffer? What does that mean for those who believe in Him and follow Him?

The idea of the Jesus, as God, suffering at the hands of sinners is difficult for some and unimaginable for others. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, refused to believe that this could be true. He saw it as problematic and decided that it didn't actually happen. According to Islamic teaching concerning the crucifixion of Jesus, God the Father took Jesus off the cross and replaced Him with Judas. The problem with this teaching is not only that it is anti-biblical, but it makes the gospel null and void. If Jesus did not truly die as a payment for sinners, then there is no hope for sinners

in the death of Christ. And if there is no hope in the death of Christ for sinners, then there is no hope at all, for there is no other place for sinners to find relief from the punishment that is due them. The Bible is clear that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins, the wages of sin is death, and the soul that sins will die (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:22).

Others believe that because Jesus suffered, we will not. It is a great error to believe Jesus suffered as a man on earth so that we would not have to suffer. This teaching is a part of what is known as the prosperity gospel and is contrary to the clear teaching of the Scriptures. Paul wrote to Timothy that, “all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12), and Jesus told His disciples, “You will have suffering in this world” (John 16:33).

When a Christian suffers trial and tribulation, it isn't because the Enemy of God is triumphing, and God is too weak to protect His own. The Father has appointed all things in the lives of Christians for their good and for His glory. The affliction that comes upon those who want to live a godly life is meant for the good of those who suffer and endure. Christians must remember and rejoice that their times of sorrow, affliction, and persecution are for their good and the glory of God. Furthermore, Christians should remember that Christ did not eliminate all sin and evil in the world at His first coming. This will be His business when He returns. Jesus's mission in His first coming was to do away with the sins of all who look to Him for mercy.



Application: If you are a devoted follower of Christ, how have you suffered for His sake?

2. Absolute Truth (John 18:35-38)

The West was largely Christian for centuries. While this Christianity may have been largely cultural, it still meant that Christians, Christian churches, and Christian values enjoyed a prominent place in society. However, this has shifted dramatically over the past several decades. Christians are increasingly looked upon with disdain and labeled as bigoted, narrow-minded, and intolerant.

When Pilate began his line of questioning, Jesus revealed something critically important about His purpose. He said, “I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (v. 37). This statement is full of meaning. First, Jesus alluded to His incarnation, stating that He was both born and that He came into the world. He also made it clear that His teaching ministry was foundational to His purpose on earth. Not only was

He to die for sins, but He had rightly and truthfully taught the crowds throughout His ministry. This was part of His prophetic ministry. Jesus claimed that He spoke the truth when He taught. Implicit in any truth claim is the assertion that anything which contradicts it is false.

- ❓ How would you answer if someone asked you if it is possible to know absolute truth?
- ❓ What do you base your answer on?

Pilate responded to Jesus's statement by asking the question: "What is truth?" (v. 38). With this question, Pilate perfectly summed up the spirit of this present age in the West. Truth was once a static reality that was believed to be knowable, counted upon, and passed along to others. Truth was truth no matter how others felt about it. These ideas have fallen on hard times. Many Christians have fallen prey to the post-modern doctrine that everyone must live by their "own truth" and to claim that your belief system is correct while another is wrong is intolerant, unloving, and unlike Christ.

What a person believes is important. The idea that each person has their own truth and that they should live according to it is based on a false premise. That philosophy of life assumes all belief systems have equal value. The fact of the matter is that there is absolute truth, meaning some things are not true. There may certainly be a variety of opinions, preferences, or perspectives, but it is impossible for two opposing views to be true at the same time.

Christians are often reviled, mocked, and accused of intolerance in today's culture because of this very teaching. The contention of popular culture in the West today is to assert that any claims on exclusivity of truth are intolerant. In fact, Jesus and the apostles would likely be accused of hate speech today. Jesus said clearly, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).


- ❓ Application: Do you believe Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven? Why or why not?

3. A Picture of the Gospel (John 18:39-40)

One of the most astounding aspects of the attacks on Jesus of Nazareth was that He deserved none of them. That is hard for us to imagine because we don't know anyone who is perfect. We may disagree with how someone is being treated, but we also know that if we dig deep enough, we will find that the person who is being mistreated has mistreated others and rebelled against a holy God. No person living today is truly blameless.

Jesus Christ, however, was blameless. He was perfectly pure and pristinely innocent when He stood before Pilate. He had done nothing deserving of death or any punishment whatsoever. Jesus always did what was right, at the right time, and in the right way. There are many adjectives we could use to describe Jesus's life, but none are more appropriate than "holy." Jesus lived a life that was set apart for sacred purposes, not profane. To state it differently, Jesus did not sin. Peter said, "He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).


Jesus lived a sinless life. This matters for several reasons. If Jesus sinned, He isn't God. And if He isn't God, then He is a fraud. Further, if Jesus sinned, He is unable to offer Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf.

 How does this scene with Barabbas give a picture the gospel?

Son of the Father

Barabbas means "son of the father" (Gk bar-abbas). Ironically, people wanted Barabbas released rather than the true Son of the Father—Jesus.


It was custom that the Roman government would release a Jewish prisoner during the feast days. Pilate saw his chance to be rid of this very difficult situation in which he felt pressured by the Jews to execute a man in whom he found nothing worthy of death. Pilate thought Jesus could be released according to the custom. Yet, when he suggested this, the crowd shouted, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" So Barabbas—a man who had rightly been convicted of a crime—was released, while Jesus, who was without any sin, was held captive and then prepared for the cross. This is what Jesus does for sinners even today.

 Why do people need a Savior today? How does the condition of Barabbas give us further insight into our own reality?

Scripture makes clear the standard God expects of His creation and reveals that all have fallen short of His glorious standard. The consequences of this are not to be taken lightly. The consequences that lay upon every person for his or her sin is death—a physical death but also spiritual death. Yet the Bible also reveals that we have hope. The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus lived a perfect life and died a substitutionary death in our place. The promise is that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have ever lasting life.

Jesus was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He earned unspotted righteousness. It is this righteousness that clothes those who are in Christ. Jesus's perfect, sinless obedience to the Father (His righteousness) is what God sees when He looks at those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. The righteousness Jesus earned in the flesh is what has been credited to the account of believers (and their sin




to His). This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians, “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

-  Application: Why was it necessary for Jesus to die for you? Where do you see the need for a savior in your life?

Conclusion

John recorded this account of Jesus’s trial to show us Jesus’s obedience to the Father, even unto death. He was unjustly treated by wicked men. Yet, all of this was a part of God’s plan for salvation of people from all tribes, tongues, and families. We are all Barabbas—in desperate need of a substitute sacrifice. We have been proven guilty and are awaiting punishment. But Christ has offered Himself up as substitute.

Those of us who are in Christ cling to the same hope and promise John wrote about in his first epistle. We have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1) who intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). As the writer of Hebrews said, “For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He doesn’t need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself” (Hebrews 7:26-27).

-  In what ways have you suffered in your life? What was the cause of that suffering? How does God help and sustain those who suffer for His name’s sake?
-  What is your standard of truth? What should the Christian’s standard of truth be? How do we encourage one another in truth as a group?
-  How might you use the account of Jesus and Barabbas to have a gospel conversation with someone close to you this week?

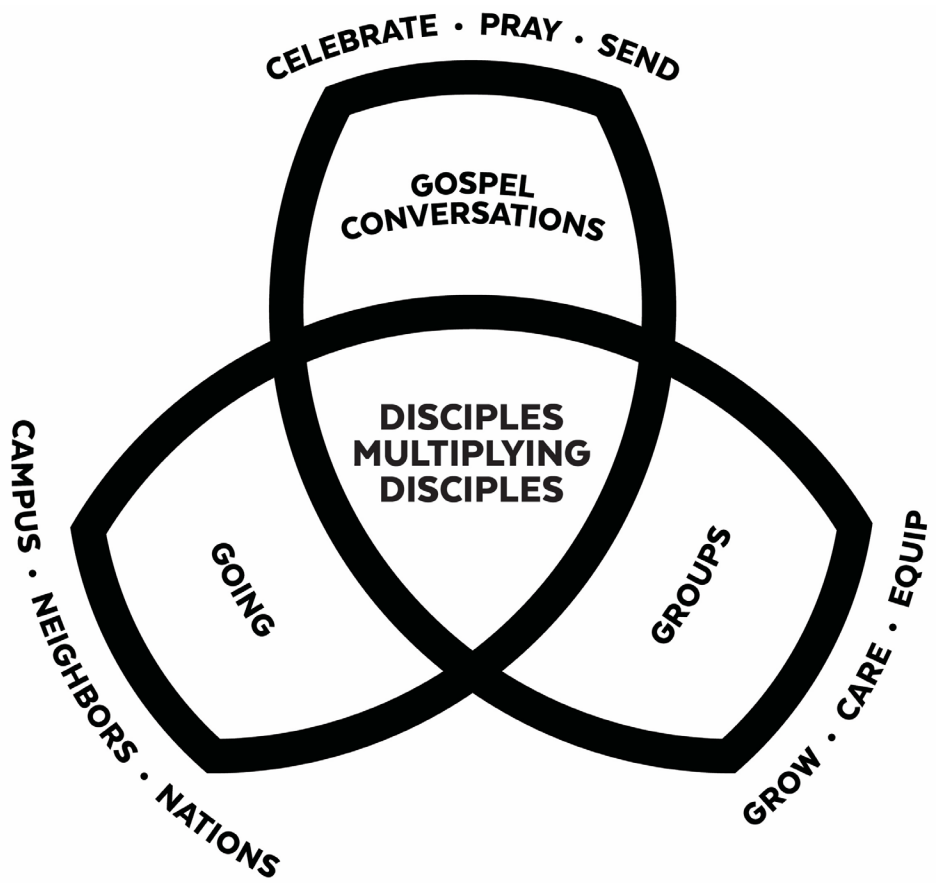
Prayer of Response

Close in prayer, thanking God that there is an absolute standard of truth that He has revealed. Thank Him for the gift of Jesus, given in our place, just as He was for Barabbas.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter and John Wredberg
- *John: Swindoll’s Living Insights Commentary* by Charles Swindoll
- *John* by H.A. Ironside

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Memorize

³⁶ *“My kingdom is not of this world,” said Jesus. “If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I wouldn’t be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”*

- John 18:36

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 18:33-40

18:33–37. The incredulous Pilate could not imagine this broken and beaten man before him was the king of the Jews. But Jesus would not give him the satisfaction of claiming or disclaiming such an office. All this turned Pilate’s disdain for the Jews up another notch in verse 35. He characterized this entire trial as petty religious bickering among these Jews whom he was authorized to control.

Verses 36–37 offer poignant truth from the lips of the Lord. All earthly kingdoms find their source with sinful humanity, but Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. It needs no human defense. Jesus was not referring to the ultimate millennial kingdom; his spiritual kingdom of truth represents the lordship of the King over the lives of his people. Who forms this kingdom? Everyone on the side of truth listens to me, said Jesus.

Once again Jesus set truth as the dividing standard for right and wrong. But if truth was all he cared about, he posed no threat to Rome. Pilate would have to weasel out of this situation in some other way.

18:38–40. In effect, Pilate declared Jesus innocent: I find no basis for a charge against him. Nevertheless, to appease the Jews, he let them select a prisoner of choice for release at the Passover. He seemed to be saying, “Let’s be done with all this foolishness. You don’t seem to care much for this king of the Jews fellow, but you certainly don’t want Barabbas back out on the streets, so let’s make that choice and get on with life.”

But one should never underestimate the popularity of a folk hero, even a guerrilla who had participated in a rebellion against Rome. Pilate got caught in his own trap.

In this chapter we see intelligent and religious people warped by hate, much like the Nazis and neo-Nazis perverted the minds of their followers. We also see a fascinating play on the name Bar-Abbas, which means “son of the father.” One son of a father was released, and the other, Son of the Father, went to death row.

As we look at these four characters, we may ask ourselves where we find a personal likeness. Do we see ourselves in Malchus, an innocent bystander watching the proceedings? Like Peter, who denied the Savior and warmed himself at the enemies’ fire? Like Annas, who illegally put Jesus on trial? Or like Pilate, confused and wanting to be rid of religious hassles as quickly as possible? One thing is clear from these four witnesses and their four decisions: there is no place to hide when it comes to Jesus. We either decide for him or against him.¹

References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel and Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

Author Bio

Kenneth Gangel (John)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Matt Carter (Exalting Jesus in John)

Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, which has grown from a core team of 15 to over 8,000 attending each Sunday since he planted it in 2002. Matt has co-authored multiple books including a commentary on the Gospel of John in The Christ Centered Exposition Commentary series. Matt also co-authored a novel of historical fiction, Steal Away Home which tells the real life story of famed pastor Charles Spurgeon's unlikely friendship with former slave-turned-missionary, Thomas Johnson. Matt holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a Doctorate in Expositional Preaching from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife Jennifer have been married for over 20 years, and they have three children, John Daniel, Annie, and Samuel.

John Wredberg (Exalting Jesus in John)

Josh Wredberg has served on the pastoral staff of churches in Michigan, Illinois, and North Carolina, and as teaching pastor at Redeemer Community Church in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. He is a graduate of Maranatha Baptist University and Shepherds Theological Seminary. Josh has also earned a doctorate in preaching from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Cari, have three boys, Jack, Max, and Caed.

Charles Swindoll (John)

Charles R. Swindoll is the founder and senior pastor-teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas. But Chuck's listening audience extends far beyond a local church body, as Insight for Living airs on major Christian radio markets around the world. Chuck's extensive writing ministry has also served the body of Christ worldwide, and his leadership as president and now chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary has helped prepare and equip a new generation of men and women for ministry. Chuck and his wife, Cynthia, his partner in life and ministry, have four grown children, ten grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

H.A. Ironside (John)

Henry (Harry) Allan Ironside (1876-1951) was an American Bible teacher, pastor, and author. Authored more than 60 volumes as well as many pamphlets and articles on Bible subjects. For 18 of his 50 years of ministry, he was pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. He is buried in Purewa Cemetery, Auckland, New Zealand.