

# WHAT IS TRUTH?

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ August 28, 2016



<sup>16</sup> Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). <sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. <sup>19</sup> Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. <sup>21</sup> The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” <sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” <sup>23</sup> When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. <sup>24</sup> “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did. <sup>25</sup> Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. <sup>28</sup> Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” <sup>29</sup> A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. <sup>30</sup> When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:16-30)

I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain,

This is a very unusual circumstance. There are certain accounts in the Bible that we hear at certain times of the year. We hear the Christmas story, the account of Jesus’ birth in December, around Christmas. We hear about Jesus rising from the dead on Easter and we hear about Jesus ascending into heaven 40 days after Easter. So too, the account we have before us this morning in our summer series. Usually, we hear about Jesus dying on the cross on a certain day – Good Friday to be exact, a few days before Easter. And so to hear about it now, at the end of August could seem a little unusual.

It certainly doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with hearing about it at this time, and it certainly fits into some of the important events that happened upon mountaintops, or at least in this case an elevated location. In fact, this is the most significant mountaintop experience in all of the Bible. All of the other mountaintop experiences we’ve looked at this summer have been great stories, but they were only advancing the purpose of God’s ultimate plan. It is God’s ultimate plan that is fulfilled on Mount Calvary. Because it is the cross of Jesus that drives a wedge between those

who believe what it accomplished, and those who don't. And it all has to do with the question, "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

1. Is it a claim? or
2. Is it a reality?

(1)

At first when we take a look at Jesus dying on the cross, it might seem out of place in our Mountaintop experiences series. When we take a look at the other mountaintop experiences, they are a collection of happy events, special moments, great victories. But when we look at the cross with just our physical eyes, we see something gruesome, we see something ugly. It doesn't seem to be a good time, it doesn't seem to be a special moment, and it doesn't seem to be a great victory. Any other story about someone's death would be considered an utter defeat. So what makes Jesus' death so different? What makes Jesus' death something we're still talking about today, almost 2,000 years later?

Even though it's gruesome, even though it's not something we like to spend a lot of time talking about, let's take a look at the crucifixion of Jesus. First of all, Jesus' crucifixion was unusual that the governor who authorized it, a man by the name of Pontius Pilate, never actually found Jesus guilty of a crime. The reason he allowed the crucifixion was because he was strong-armed by the religious leaders who were calling for Jesus' head. And in part because of this lack of crime, and in part to get back at the religious leaders, Pilate fixed a sign upon Jesus' cross. Usually this sign, or notice recorded the crime of which the victim was guilty. But since Jesus didn't commit a crime, Pilate had written, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It was a placard the Jewish leaders didn't care for, and they let Pilate know it.

**"Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews!"** This was the religious leader's big beef with what Pilate did. But why? First of all, it was because everyone who was traversing in and out of Jerusalem could look at the sign and see what it said, it was written in not only the language of the people, but also Latin and Greek. And the Jewish leaders did not want the people to see the sign saying Jesus was King of the Jews. Think of how embarrassing that would be. This is how the king of the Jews is treated, he is killed in a public, humiliating way.

But the Jewish leaders were not just concerned with a public image perception, they were concerned about religious ideology. What I mean by that is this. The focus which surrounded every facet of the Jewish religious life was God's promise of a Messiah, God's promise of a Savior, God's promise of a king. In short, Jesus did not match their idea of who this Messiah, this Savior, this king would be. This was the reason they wanted to get rid of him, this was the reason they thought he was deserving of death. And to have Pilate write, and have everyone read that this is who Jesus is, was more than the religious leaders could stand.

"Jesus claimed to be the Savior, he claimed to know the truth, but we don't believe him, because Jesus doesn't fit the truth we want to believe." What was true 2,000 years ago, is still true today. The Jesus of the Bible doesn't fit with what people want to believe. The Jesus of the Bible doesn't always fit with what Christians want to believe, and yes, the Jesus of the Bible doesn't always

fit what Lutherans want to believe. How many of these sound familiar? Jesus wouldn't really tell someone what they're doing is wrong, that would be unloving. God wouldn't really send someone to hell for one sin. Or perhaps we think the other way, God wouldn't let "that" wicked person into heaven, or God wouldn't let someone who's not a Lutheran into heaven.

Whether we like to admit it or not, whether we've said these exact phrases or not, we've at least thought similar ideas. The underlying reason Jesus doesn't fit our picture, it's because we have something called a sinful, selfish nature. It's only natural for us to think about things from our perspective. Take kids for example, you don't have to teach them to be more selfish. And so we think about how Jesus lines up with what we like, what we think, what we believe. When we do that, we make the truth all about perspective, we make the truth subjective. Instead of looking at the truth for what it was, instead of looking at Jesus for what he accomplished on the cross, we think about how much we like it.

And for many, when they see a Savior dying on the cross, when they see a Savior who called a sin a sin, when they see a Savior who calls for them to not live for themselves but for him, many are not apt to follow. In fact, we all were not apt to follow, that's the reason Jesus went to the cross in the first place. He went to the cross not just for the wicked actions of people, but for wicked people themselves. And the Bible lumps us into that group of wicked people. "Hold on a minute pastor!" "Are you calling me a wicked person? You don't know me, you don't know what I've done." But I don't just include you in that group of wicked people, but I include myself as well. God says in his Word, **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** and also **"There is no one who does good, not even one."** **"We are sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."**

That's because God doesn't judge us based on our own biased standard, but he judges us based on his perfect Word. It is his perfect word that condemns us all. This is the reason Jesus was up on that cross – not just for our wicked actions, but our very beings. The even more amazing part is that Jesus wasn't up there because he was forced to be up there, Jesus went up to the cross willingly because he knew that was the only way to save us.

(2)

Jesus' entire life was leading up to this moment. He lived a life in line with the demands of a holy God, and then we suffered a horrific death on the cross. But it wasn't just the pain of the nails piercing his flesh, it wasn't the draining of his emotions that provided the worst of Jesus' suffering. It was the full wrath of God the Father unleashing his justice for sins upon his one and only Son. All of the wrath that you and I and everyone else deserved was funneled out upon Jesus. For three hours, the land was covered in a physical darkness, as God turned his back on Jesus. This is what we hear from the other gospel writers.

John, presuming his readers knew all of this simply adds the conclusion to the story of Jesus death. **"Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished!' With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."**

Three simple words in English, but only one in Greek, "It is finished" or "Tetelestai." Jesus was indicating that not only was his life going to be coming to an end here shortly, but that his mission, his goal, his purpose would be finished, it would be complete. That mission, as many of you know, was to pay for the sins of the world. That's what we say in John 3:16, the most famous passage in the Bible, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes might not perish but have eternal life."** As Jesus died on the cross that is exactly what happened. The debt that each human being had accumulated, whether they lived before Jesus or after was now paid. This is the glorious gospel news.

What does this mean? It means that before you were even born God forgave the sins you hadn't even committed. It means that before you even believed your sins were forgiven. It means that anything that you think you need to do – reach a certain sorrow for sins, live a certain way, make a decision for Christ – you don't need to do, because Jesus said, "It is finished."

That's not to say we can live any way we want, that's not to say we shouldn't believe, that's not to say that we shouldn't be sorry for our sins. But anything that we do, doesn't change what happened on the cross. And what a comfort that is, that our salvation is not dependent upon us. One of the best ways I've come to understand this wonderful truth is with a simple banking analogy. Imagine if Warren Buffet or Bill Gates put \$1,000,000 into your bank account. That money would be there whether you believed it was there or not. What changes when you believe that money is there? Not the money in the bank, but your perspective changes, you might actually begin to use the money in your bank account.

God has put something far more valuable than \$1,000,000 in your spiritual bank account. He has given you eternal life in heaven. He has done that for each and every person. Not just each and every person in this room, but each and every person in the world who has ever lived. This is what Jesus accomplished, this is what Jesus finished. Those who don't believe this, do not reap the benefits that God wants them to have. Who benefits from this gift? Those who believe it. They make use of the eternal life God has given them even now. One of the ways they make use of that gift is by telling others about what God has done for them, what God has given to them.

This is what Mount Calvary means for us. It makes all the difference in the world. It evokes a wide range of emotions. How can we not help but be unmoved as we witness the pain and suffering of the Savior. And yet there is great joy in knowing that Jesus willingly took our punishment upon himself to free us forever from the chains of death and hell. Believe this news, share this news. Amen