

## JOHN 18:33-38—THE TRUTH, THE KINGDOM, AND US

**INTRO:** Many people say things like “what is true for you is not true for me.” Or they may say “there is no truth, or no one can know the truth.” Or they may say things like “you have your beliefs and I have mine; you can’t say that your beliefs are better than mine or yours are true and mine are false because everything is relative.”

While everyone of course has his or her own beliefs, is it true that you can’t say that some are better or worse, right or wrong, true or false? More fundamentally, is there truth and, if so, can we know it? If there is truth and we can know it, what is it and what are the implications of it for my life? These are profoundly important and practical questions.

Today’s passage—**John 18:33-38**—raises these issues head-on. As we look at the passage, I think we will see some amazingly important implications of the answers to these questions. [READ]

**PROP:** The truth is a person who relates to us.

**O/S:** We will see how the truth is a person who relates to us as we consider (1) Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” and (2) what Jesus says about the kingdom. Although in the passage the discussion of the kingdom comes before Jesus’ statement that he came into the world to testify to the truth, we will be considering the issue of truth first and then the kingdom, because logically the truth is the foundation and the kingdom flows from it.

### **I. What is truth?**

In v.38 Pilate asked that question, but he didn’t stay for the answer. One can almost infer from this that Pilate was a lot like modern people who think that “everything is relative” or “there is no truth.” But we know that the statements “everything is relative” and “there is no truth” are both false. How do we know that? We know that because both statements on their face are self-contradictory and self-refuting. What do I mean? Both the statement “everything is relative” and the statement “there is no truth” on their face purport to be universal statements of truth! “Everything is relative?”—including that statement? “There is no truth”—including that statement? But if the statement that “there is no truth” is not true, then you’re saying that there *is* truth. You can’t escape the fact that truth exists.

Obviously we can know truth. I sent an email awhile ago stating that I would be preaching today at this address. Those of you who got the email and are here in essence are testing my claims against reality. And you find that my beliefs about where I was going to be and what I would be doing at this time and place are true.

Some may say, “Well, those are just physical truths—but in the area of morals or religion either there is no absolute truth or we can’t know it.” Again, the statement that there are no absolute or universal truths regarding morals and religion cannot be correct. Just say to the person, **“How do you know that?” “What is the basis of your claim?” and “Your own statement that there are no absolute or universal truths regarding morals and religion is itself a statement of absolute and universal truth regarding morals and religion—so it is self-contradictory and self-refuting.”**

Further, nobody lives or can live as if morals or religion are all relative. Everyone believes that certain things are wrong in and of themselves—for example, things like child abuse, rape, genocide, cutting me off in traffic, or butting into line in front of me. Greg Koukl points out, **“To say something is evil is to make a moral judgment, and moral judgments make no sense outside of the context of a moral standard. . . . Evil can’t be real if morals are relative. Evil is real, though. That’s why people object to it. Therefore, objective moral standards must exist as well.”** With respect to the different possible *sources* of moral standards, Koukl adds **“a morally perfect God is the only adequate standard . . . that makes sense of the existence of evil to begin with.”**

Even atheists admit this. Atheist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre admitted, that it is **“extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. . . . It is nowhere written that ‘the good’ exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky once wrote: ‘If God did not exist, everything would be permitted’. . . . Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.”**

Non-Christian philosopher Richard Taylor similarly concludes: **“The modern age, more or less repudiating the idea of a divine lawgiver, has nevertheless tried to retain the ideas of moral right and wrong, without noticing that, in casting God aside, they have also abolished the conditions of meaningfulness for moral right and wrong as well. . . . The concept of moral obligation [is] unintelligible apart from the idea of God.”**

That brings us back to Jesus. In v.37 Jesus said **“I have come to testify of the truth.”** So, first he is saying that truth does exist. In **John 14:6** clarified this by saying, **“I am the truth.”** Jesus claimed to be God, God come to earth as a man. That’s the very reason the Pharisees wanted to kill him, because they said it was blasphemy to make yourself out to be God. And the Pharisees were right—if Jesus was not God become a man. But if Jesus was telling the truth, then that means that, ultimately, truth is not a principle or a mathematical formula—but truth is a person.

One of the implications of this is that, at its core, the universe is *personal*, not *impersonal*. Many people feel lost in this vast sea of space. But they needn’t feel lost, because in back of, and guiding, and within, and ruling over this vast sea of space is a *person*—the person of Jesus Christ. Another implication of Jesus’ claim to be the truth—to be God come to earth in the flesh—is that we can know what the moral standard for right and wrong, good and bad, is. That standard is Jesus.

All people have various standards by which they govern their lives. Muslims look to the example of Muhammad. Buddhists to Buddha. They were just men. Most people in our society have a hodge-podge of values gleaned from their parents, their education, their life experiences, the music they listen to, the culture in general. But doesn’t it make sense that if there is a God who became a man and spoke to us about these things and lived out what he said to show us how to do it—doesn’t it make sense that he would have to be the ultimate standard, as opposed to all these other lesser sources of authority? That stands to reason, it seems to me.

But can we really know that Jesus is God in the flesh, that he is the truth? The answer is, “Yes, he is; and yes, we can know it.” How? There are lots of things we could say, but I want to mention only two pieces of evidence—but evidence that I think is clear beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus is exactly who he says he is. Those two pieces of evidence are (A) fulfilled prophecy; and (B) the resurrection.

- Fulfilled prophecy. There are scores of prophecies in the OT concerning the Messiah. These prophecies were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. The prophecies include all kinds of things—things he couldn’t “fake” or consciously try to fulfill—including his family tree, birthplace, manner of death, mode of burial, etc. In my ECLEA book on *Biblical Theology* I list 60 messianic prophecies, show where they are located in the OT and where they are fulfilled in the NT.

Many years ago Peter Stoner wrote a book entitled *Science Speaks*. It can be downloaded online if you are interested. In his book he takes 8 of those prophecies and then uses probability analysis to calculate the probability that all 8 of the prophecies could have been fulfilled by chance. Stoner concluded that the odds of those 8 prophecies being fulfilled by “chance” are one in 10 to the 17th power. To visualize what that means, Stoner used this example. He says, **“Suppose that we take 10<sup>17</sup> silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom.”** He went on to say that to fulfill 48 OT Messianic prophecies by chance would be 1 chance in 10 to the 157th power, which is more than all the electrons in the universe. IOW, in fulfilling Messianic prophecy, Jesus demonstrates mathematically that God exists and who that God is. God is the God of the Bible, and Jesus is that God come to earth—there can be no other. Or, as Stoner puts it, **“Any man who rejects Christ as the Son of God is rejecting a fact proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world.”**

- The resurrection. Jesus said, in essence, “I am God (become a man), and I will prove it by doing what is impossible for anyone else, namely, I will be killed and truly die and then, in three days, I will bodily rise from the grave, alive again.” Note that his resurrection is a matter of historical fact—either he did or he didn’t. If he didn’t then Christianity is untrue, as even Paul points out in **1 Corinthians 15**; however, if Jesus did rise from the dead, then that validates who he is and everything he said. Consequently, you may look to the evidence, aided by your reason and logic, to help you answer that question. The Bible itself a reliable first-hand account of the resurrection. I summarize the historical evidence that demonstrates the fact of the resurrection in my ECLEA book *Christianity & Islam*.

Because of time, let me only mention three pieces of evidence why we know the biblical accounts of the resurrection were not made up and are believable. The first piece of evidence is who the first witnesses were. Who were the first witnesses? All of the gospels record that the first witnesses were women. Why is that important? It’s important because in that society women were looked down on; they either were not competent to act as witnesses in court or there were significant limitations on the testimony they could give. The fact that the Bible records that women were the first witnesses shows us that the biblical accounts were not made up, because if the accounts of the resurrection had been manufactured after the fact, women never

would have been included in the story, particularly as the first witnesses. Historian Michael Grant concurs. He points out, **“The early Church would never have concocted, on its own account, the statement that this most solemn and fateful of all discoveries was made by women.”**

The second piece of evidence is the fact that the disciples from the beginning began to proclaim the resurrection in Jerusalem itself. They didn’t go to some remote region, but said they saw Jesus and touched Jesus in the very place where his Jewish and Roman enemies crucified him. Why is that so important? The Jewish and Roman authorities had the means, the motive, and the opportunity to crush the early Christian movement, and they wanted to do so. They easily could have and would have done so—and would have decisively disproven the resurrection—had they simply gone to the tomb, removed Jesus’ dead body, and paraded it for all to see. But they did not because they could not, because he had risen from the dead.

The third piece of evidence is the birth of the Christian church itself. Belief in the bodily resurrection was a tremendous change in people’s worldview. Timothy Keller points out that **“a massive shift in thinking at the worldview level ordinarily takes years of discussion and argument in which thinkers and writers debate . . . until one side wins. That is how culture and worldviews change. However, the Christian view of resurrection, absolutely unprecedented in history, sprang up full-blown immediately after the death of Jesus. There was no process or development. His followers said that their beliefs did not come from debating and discussing. They were just telling others what they had seen themselves. No one has come up with any plausible alternative to this claim.”**

Remember that the earliest Christians were Jews. To them Saturday, the Sabbath, was sacred—the only day of worship. Yet almost overnight, they all began worshipping on Sunday, the day of the resurrection. Can anyone come up with *any* plausible account to explain this massive shift of worldview and practice—and a worldview and practice that now subjected them to persecution? Can anyone plausibly explain this other than the explanation they themselves gave, namely, that Jesus had risen from the dead. No other explanation plausibly accounts for this at all. When we look at the evidence, we really can know that Jesus is God in the flesh, and that he is the truth.

This is of vital importance, not just in the abstract but for us *practically*. What do I mean? What I mean is, how we live is based on what we believe and what we value the most. A simple example that I know some of you can relate to: If you value spending time in the woods, you will take the time to go camping and may buy a cabin or a tent or a camper. This principle applies to all areas of life. And this gets us back to Jesus and the *kingdom*.

## **II. What about the kingdom?**

In **vv.36-37** Jesus acknowledges that he is a king. However, his kingdom is not of this world. IOW, his kingdom is a different kind of kingdom than the kingdoms most of us are familiar with. In most kingdoms, whether they are political kingdoms, business kingdoms, or other kingdoms of the world, people fight to maintain control, advantage, power, wealth, position, or status. The values in Christ’s kingdom are virtually the exact opposite of the values of the kingdoms of the world. That’s why elsewhere Christ summarized the essence of his kingdom values by saying, **“The greatest among you shall be your servant.” (Matt 23:11)**

Jesus’ whole mindset, his whole value system, his way of life, his kingdom, is counter-intuitive and is contrary to the norms of the world. Yet, even though Jesus’ value system and kingdom are contrary to many of the things we and our culture value, if Jesus is who he says he is—and we have seen powerful evidence that he is—then it is worth yielding our lives to him and living as he says. A guy named Jason Helopoulos in an article entitled “Worth It” says, **“It is worth yielding ourselves to the King and His Kingdom, not just in the moment of saving faith, but in all of life. . . . We will never regret the time that we spend sacrificing for others for the sake of the Kingdom. We will never regret the effort employed in fighting sin for the sake of the Kingdom. We will never regret the energy spent seeking righteousness for the sake of the Kingdom. Whatever we give for the Kingdom we will never regret. I dare say, we will never want a refund, never want to exchange this Kingdom for something else, never want a redo, because its value far surpasses all that we would so-call sacrifice in the here and now. I am no prophet, but I would give you this guarantee, if you invest in the Kingdom you will never walk away disappointed. Never.”**

Those might sound like extreme statements. How can he claim to give such a guarantee? Helopoulos goes on to explain why he can give such a guarantee. He says, **“First, history and experience prove it. I have never heard of or read about a Christian lying on his deathbed wishing that he had never given himself to the Kingdom, or held a little more back from the Kingdom, kept a little more in reserve, been a little less passionate, a little less serious about his faith, a little less concerned about the things of God, a little less time spent with Christ, and a little more selfish, a little more worldly, been a little more invested in a few other things. I have never heard it, never read it, and never will—because it doesn’t happen. Every citizen**

of the Heavenly Kingdom knows--as Peter said--that we have, ‘an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading’ (1 Peter 1:4). It is worth selling everything for, it is worth giving everything to, because everything else pales in comparison.”

Helopoulos concludes: “I can give you this guarantee because the Kingdom is worth every investment, every sacrifice, and every loss because the treasure is so great. Nothing can surpass the worth of Christ. Above everything else that He promises those who follow Him, He promises to give Himself to us. Give yourselves wholly to the Kingdom in faith and in discipleship. It is worth it. It is worth the investment. You will never walk away disappointed.”

Do we really believe this? What Jason Helopoulos says must absolutely be true if Jesus is, in fact, who he said he is. As we saw earlier, Jesus is, in fact, who he said he is—and we know that is true mathematically beyond any reasonable doubt from the fact of fulfilled prophecy. We know Jesus is who he said he is historically beyond any reasonable doubt by his resurrection from the dead. The *facts* are not reasonably or plausibly disputable. The only real question is what are we doing about it.

In v.37 Jesus said, “Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.” That echoes what he said back in **ch.10** when he said, “My sheep hear my voice.” To “hear his voice” means to respond, to obey him, to follow him, to live for him, to be a servant to others, to submit to his leadership of our life. That will affect how we spend our time, what we do with our money, how we treat people, all kinds of things. He may be speaking to you now in this area or that area of your life. Whatever he is telling you to start doing or to stop doing, do it! As Helopoulos says, “It is worth it. You will never walk away disappointed.”

**CONCL:** The issues raised by today’s passage are the most fundamental issues of life. They are the most fundamental issues of life because they go to the very core of life: What is truth? How can we know it? and How does that affect my life? The answer we have seen is that the truth is a person who relates to us. That is good news, because the truth is not just an abstract proposition. The truth is a person. And he is a person who has done everything for us. He proved how he relates to us by dying for us on the cross—IOW, bearing on himself our sin, our estrangement from God, and the punishment we deserve for our sin; paying the price for our sin that we could never pay; dying to himself so that we could have life; then rising from the dead to prove that his sacrifice was effective and had been accepted by the Father. He gives new life to all those who will come to him and enter his kingdom. So come to him. Let him be your living Lord in a new, more vibrant and all-encompassing way. You will never regret it.