

Confronted by the Truth



What is Truth? (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you Keys to Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

The theme for my talks this week is a question—a very searching and penetrating question: What Is Truth?

But first, let me say thank you to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So please take time to write—even if it's only a brief note.

Now back to the question which is our theme for this week: What Is Truth? This is a very far-reaching question. Perhaps one way to grasp its implications would be to consider some of the possible words that are opposite in meaning to truth. Words such as error, deception, falsehood. Obviously we don't want to be caught in any of those opposites. We don't want to be in error, we don't want to be deceived, we don't want to live a life that is based somehow on falsehood. Because if we find ourselves in that situation, the end is going to be disappointment and frustration. So we need to be able to answer this question satisfactorily for our own sakes. What is truth?

Truth is something that embraces the totality of human experience. I heard a person make a remark once about something that he'd heard somebody else say. What he said was, "That's true, but it's not the truth." I wonder if you can understand what he meant. It's true in its given context—in the given situation you can say, "Yes, that's true." But if you will relate it to the totality of the universe and the totality of our experience, it really doesn't fit in with everything. So it's true, but it's not the truth.

So we come back to this question: What is truth? This question has been asked by many different people in many different contexts. But the context in which we are going to look at it today is one of the most dramatic and significant confrontations recorded in human history.

Jesus is being examined by Pontius Pilate concerning the charge that He has set Himself up as King of the Jews. In His reply, Jesus focuses on the issue of truth. I'm going to read the account of this confrontation in John's gospel, chapter 18, verses 33 to 38:

> "Pilate therefore entered again in the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, 'You are the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?' Pilate answered, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'" (NASB)

We don't know with what tone of voice Pilate asked that final question. Was he cynical? Was he taking the stand of the typical man of this world, a man whose concerned with politics, with the practical; not with abstract philosophical issues? Or was he perhaps, as many of the people in that situation in that time were, was he perhaps something of a philosopher? Had he been influenced by Greek philosophy? Before I became a Christian that was my special field of study—Greek philosophy. So when I encounter something that relates to that field it always speaks to me in a special way.

At any rate, Pilate kind of parried what Jesus was saying with a question: What is truth? Now I want to offer some comments on that question that Pilate asked, the question which is the theme of our study this week: What Is Truth? It seems a very simple question. But I have to tell you as a professional philosopher by my background, that Pilate's question has never yet been answered satisfactorily in the history of human philosophy. Philosophers have never come up with a satisfactory definition of what is truth. The human mind when confronted with this question, always thinks in terms of correspondence between something and something else. Truth is when a statement corresponds with something. But when we try to define what corresponds with what, we run into all sorts of logical and metaphysical problems. It's not my purpose to go into those problems in these talks today because I am not presenting philosophy. I'm presenting the Word of God. But I just want to point out to you as a matter of historical fact which of great interest, that Pilate's question, though it seemed so simple, actually never has been answered satisfactorily merely on the level of human reason and understanding.

Then I want to point out in connection with this confrontation between Jesus and Pilate, how much importance Jesus attached to the truth. I want to read again the words which He said. "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." For that very purpose Jesus was born. For that very purpose He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. That obviously gives the truth the most tremendous importance. It was one of the great objectives for which Jesus came. And then He says, "When you hear the truth, it's going to bring out something in you and it's going to do something which will indicate where you yourself stand in relation to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

What Jesus is implying is that the world needs to have the truth identified. We need to know in the midst of our confusion what is the truth. We need to have something firm that we can grasp and lay hold of and say, "This is the truth!"

I want to say that on the basis of what Jesus Himself told Pilate, it is kingly to stand for the truth. The question was, "You are a king, then?" And in His answer Jesus said, "Yes, I am a King, and for this purpose I was born and came as a King to bear witness to the truth." This is something that moves me deeply. It is kingly to bear witness to the truth.

In a certain sense you may say this issue of what is truth brings out what is kingly in human nature. It is cowardly to compromise. It's not worthy of a king of a ruler chosen for the purpose of directing the affairs of humanity—it's not worthy to be afraid to stand for the truth. You see that was, I believe, Pilate's problem. He didn't want to get committed to the truth. He was in the position of a ruler. He was responsible but when confronted with this issue, he didn't like it. But Jesus said, "I'm a King and as a King I'm here to bear witness to the truth. I stand for the truth. I will not compromise." Jesus knew full well that to say yes to that question was going to cost Him His life. But He would not deviate one hairs breath from the truth under political pressure, or under any other kind of pressure. And so let me say again, let me emphasize this to you, it is kingly to stand for the truth. It's unworthy and cowardly to compromise on this issue of what is truth.

And then one final comment, which is really penetrating, I think. At that moment that Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" the truth was standing there in front of him in the very person of Jesus. I wonder if he realized this. We'll never really know perhaps until eternity, but bear that in mind. When Pilate asked the question he was, for the first time in his life probably, confronted by the total truth in the person of Jesus. Why did he ask the question? My answer is, his question was an evasion. He didn't ask because he wanted to know the truth. He asked because he wanted to avoid confronting the truth.

And I want to read something about what Pilate did that's recorded in Matthew's gospel—Matthew 27, verse 24:

> "When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'" (NIV)

What I want to say is this, washing his hands did not relieve Pilate of his responsibility and it will not relieve you or me of our responsibility. When we are confronted by the truth, it's no good saying, "I don't want to get involved, I don't want to get committed. I'll stay on the sidelines. I'll wash my hands. I'll not accept responsibility." That is not acceptable.

Well our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be giving you the Bible's answer to this question: What is truth?

Radio Program

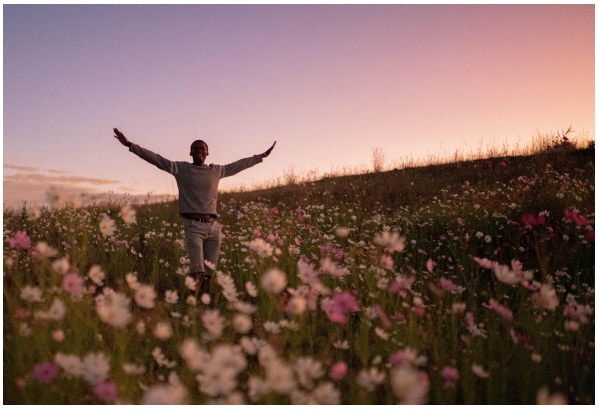
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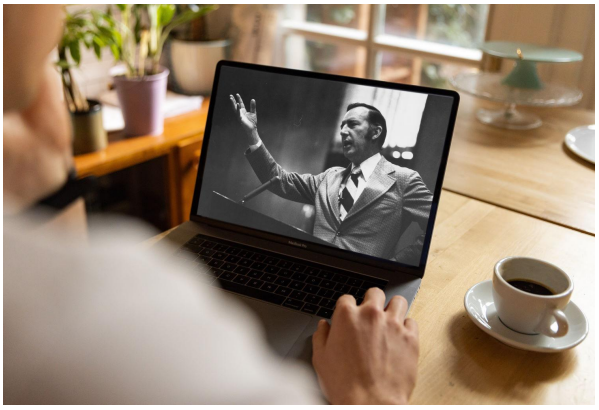
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