

What Is Truth

JOHN 18:28-40 (BSB) · TEACHER GUIDE · DIGDEEPER.AI

THE BIG IDEA · SAY IT AT LEAST FIVE TIMES

Jesus, the true King, asks whether your answer about him is your own.

Open with it, bring it back after every section, close with it. By the end they should be able to finish the sentence for you.

- Before this passage (day 24): John 18:15-27, I Am Not. Its big idea: While Jesus stands true under blows, his friend says, 'I am not.'
- After this passage (day 26): John 19:16-30, It Is Finished. Its big idea: The crucified King finished his work; nothing is left undone.

Open

Recall last time (John 18:15-27): in the courtyard, Peter was asked about Jesus and kept saying "I am not." Ask: Have you ever repeated an opinion about someone you'd never actually met? Where did it come from? Read John 18:33-34 aloud. Pilate asks, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answers with a question: "Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about Me?" Big idea: Jesus, the true King, asks whether your answer about him is your own. Ask one person what stuck from last time.

Run Sheet

1. Careful at the Door (John 18:28-32, about 10 min)

The one thing: Jesus' accusers guard a doorway but cannot name a crime.

Ask: Why might careful, religious people still hand Jesus over without naming a crime?

2. The King Inside (John 18:33-38a, about 15 min)

The one thing: The prisoner questions the judge and claims a kingdom that comes by truth, not force.

Ask: Jesus turns Pilate's question back on him. What would it take for your answer about Jesus to be your own?

3. Not This Man (John 18:38b-40, about 10 min)

The one thing: The innocent King is refused, and a violent rebel goes free in his place.

Ask: Barabbas fought Rome. Jesus refused to fight. Why do you think the crowd chose Barabbas?

Close (never cut it)

Land on who this passage shows Jesus to be: the King born to testify to the truth, declared innocent, refusing to fight, standing where a rebel should have stood. Then read v34 slowly and let his question sit in quiet, with no one asked to answer aloud. Next time we follow him to the cross in John 19.

PROTECT THE ENDING

If section 3 starts late, drop its discussion question, read v38b-40 aloud, and go straight to the close.

KIDS SIDE ANSWERS

Story order: 4, 1, 5, 2, 3 (top to bottom) · Feelings: Pilate worried, The chief priests worried, The crowd happy, Barabbas happy · Code: LISTENS TO MY VOICE

Act it out: Put a tape line on the floor for the palace door. Kids playing the leaders stay outside. The teacher, as Pilate, walks in and out between them and an empty chair for Jesus. The teacher asks the questions, and at the end the kids shout "Barabbas!"

1. Careful at the Door

JOHN 18:28-32 · ABOUT 10 MIN · SECTION 1 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- At early morning, the accusers will not enter the Roman governor's hall before Passover.
- Pilate asks for a charge. They give none, only "If He were not a criminal."
- They need Rome to execute Jesus, and that fits what Jesus had already said about his death.

The leaders stayed outside to avoid being DEFILED.

This fulfilled what Jesus said about the kind of DEATH He would die.

Discuss: Why might careful, religious people still hand Jesus over without naming a crime?

Jesus' accusers guard a doorway but cannot name a crime.

MUST COVER

- v28: They keep themselves clean for Passover while seeking an innocent man's death.
 - v30-32: They have no charge, and they need Rome to execute. John says this fits Jesus' own words.
- Earlier, in John 12, Jesus said he would be "lifted up," pointing to a cross.

IF THERE'S TIME

- Background: Rome ruled Judea through a governor. Pilate held the post around AD 26-36 and controlled the courts.
- They protect their Passover meal while handing over the one John earlier called the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

Illustration idea: Someone checks the dress code carefully for a meeting where they plan to get a coworker fired on a made-up complaint.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: They had already decided and weren't looking for the truth.
- Listen for: Rules and habits made them feel right while they did wrong.

If it drifts: If talk turns to hypocrites today, go back to v30. Notice they never actually answer Pilate's question.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

They brought a verdict with no charge, borrowed and unexamined. Jesus asks whether your answer is your own.

Short on time? Skip the Roman background. Keep v30 and v32.

Bridge → Pilate leaves the crowd at the door and goes inside to question the prisoner himself.

2. The King Inside

JOHN 18:33-38A · ABOUT 15 MIN · SECTION 2 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Pilate asks, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus asks a question back.
- "My kingdom is not of this world," so his servants do not fight.
- Jesus was born to testify to the truth. Pilate asks, "What is truth?"

Jesus asked, "Are you saying this on your OWN?"

Everyone who belongs to the truth LISTENS to My voice.

Discuss: Jesus turns Pilate's question back on him. What would it take for your answer about Jesus to be your own?

The prisoner questions the judge and claims a kingdom that comes by truth, not force.

MUST COVER

- v34: Jesus asks whether Pilate's question is his own or secondhand. He wants a personal answer, not a report.
- v36-37: His kingdom is not of this world. He was born to testify to the truth. Those who belong to the truth listen to his voice.

IF THERE'S TIME

- v36: No fighting servants. Compare John 6:15, where crowds tried to make him king by force and he withdrew alone.
- In 1 Timothy 6:13 (a letter from Paul to a young church leader), Paul points back to this moment as Jesus' good confession before Pilate.

Illustration idea: Recommending a restaurant you've never eaten at because a friend raved about it. Sooner or later someone asks, "But have you been?"

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: Most of us just believe or doubt what our family or friends told us.
- Listen for: It would mean reading about him ourselves and actually listening.

If it drifts: If it becomes a debate about whether truth exists, go to v37-38. Jesus ties truth to his own voice. Ask: what did Pilate do right after asking?

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

Pilate asked his question standing in front of the answer. Jesus asks you too: is your answer your own? Short on time? Skip the servants-fighting point and the optional cross-references. Keep v34 and v37. Bridge → Pilate asks his biggest question and walks out without waiting for a reply.

3. Not This Man

JOHN 18:38B-40 · ABOUT 10 MIN · SECTION 3 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Pilate declares: "I find no basis for a charge against Him."
- He offers to release "the King of the Jews" for Passover.
- The crowd chooses Barabbas, an insurrectionist.

Pilate said, "I find no BASIS for a charge against Him."

"Not this man," they shouted, "but BARABBAS!"

Discuss: Barabbas fought Rome. Jesus refused to fight. Why do you think the crowd chose Barabbas?

The innocent King is refused, and a violent rebel goes free in his place.

MUST COVER

- v38b: The Roman judge himself says Jesus is innocent.
- v40: A rebel goes free while the innocent King stays bound. Isaiah, a prophet writing centuries earlier, pictured an innocent servant carrying others' wrongs (Isaiah 53:6-7).

IF THERE'S TIME

- Barabbas is the kind of king whose servants fight. The crowd picks force over the King who came to testify.

Illustration idea: A driver finds the fine on their windshield already paid by a stranger. They walk away free because someone else covered it.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: Barabbas offered what they wanted: a fighter against Rome.
- Listen for: Crowd pressure. The leaders stirred them up.

If it drifts: If blame turns toward Jewish people, note that John and Jesus' first followers were Jewish. Every group here fails: Rome, the leaders, the crowd. Then return to v38b-40.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

Pilate found no charge and still walked away. The true King still asks: is your answer your own?

Short on time? Skip the discussion question. Read v38b-40 aloud and make the substitution point.

Bridge → Leave Barabbas walking free and Jesus still standing there, and move to the close.

With One Friend, Over Coffee

ABOUT 30 MINUTES · FOR A FRIEND WHO IS CURIOUS, OR NOT SURE

1. Set the scene. Read John 18:28-32 together. At dawn, Jesus' accusers won't step inside the Roman governor's hall, yet they want him executed. Ask what stands out.
2. Read the conversation. Read v33-37. Point out that Jesus answers Pilate's question with a question. Then he claims a kingdom not of this world and says he was born to testify to the truth.
3. Take the objection seriously. Admit it: anyone could claim an invisible kingdom. But notice what can be checked. He raised no army, and his servants did not fight. The hardened Roman judge found no charge. Jesus points to his voice, not to a map.
4. Watch the ending. Read v38-40. Pilate asks "What is truth?" and walks out. The crowd picks Barabbas, a rebel, over the innocent King.
5. Leave his question. Read v34 again: "Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you about Me?" Say it's their question to carry, and you're glad to keep talking whenever they like.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HEAR

"Isn't 'not of this world' a claim nobody can check?"

Partly, yes. But his behavior is checkable. He had no army and no fighting servants, and his judge found him innocent. He invites you to listen to him, not just to take a claim on trust.

"What does Jesus mean by 'truth'?"

He ties it to himself and his voice, not just to ideas. Elsewhere in John he says he himself is the truth. So the question becomes whether we'll listen to him.

"Does this passage blame the Jewish people for Jesus' death?"

No. Jesus, John, and the first disciples were Jewish. A Roman governor, temple leaders, and a crowd all share in this. Sadly, Christians have misused these words, and that was wrong.

"Why would a crowd choose a violent rebel?"

Barabbas fought Rome, the kind of king people expected. Jesus offered truth instead of force. Most of us would rather have what we want than what is true.

Evergreen Principles

Four standards every week. The rest rotate: each lesson brings the few that fit its passage best.

EVERY LESSON

1. Pray before you prepare

Teaching the Bible is spiritual work first (John 15:5).

If you're new: Pray for your class by name during the week.

If you've taught for years: Pray for the one person you find hardest to reach.

2. Study the text first

Understand the passage yourself before any help.

If you're new: Read it in two translations; write your own questions first.

If you've taught for years: Don't lean on old notes. What did you miss last time?

3. Teach one big idea

People remember one sentence, not four points.

If you're new: Write it in 12 words or fewer before anything else.

If you've taught for years: Test every story against it. If it doesn't serve it, cut it.

4. Point to Christ

All of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27).

If you're new: Ask: what does this show about Jesus?

If you've taught for years: Show grace as the reason for obedience, not just the rule.

FOR THIS LESSON

1. Ask good questions, then wait

Jesus himself asks the key question in this passage.

If you're new: Ask v34's question once. Count to ten silently before saying anything.

If you've taught for years: Contrast Pilate, who asked and didn't wait. Model the opposite by leaving real silence.

2. Plan for the skeptic and the grieving

Newcomers and drifters will find "not of this world" hard to trust.

If you're new: Have the coffee-card objection ready, with one honest sentence in reply.

If you've taught for years: Invite the doubters to voice the objection first, then work through v36-38 together.

3. Let the passage land the way it lands

This passage shows who Jesus is. It does not hand out tasks.

If you're new: End on Jesus and his question. Add no homework.

If you've taught for years: Resist the urge to turn Pilate into a moral lesson. Keep the King at the center.

BEFORE CLASS

- ☐ Read the passage three times
- ☐ Big idea in one sentence
- ☐ Opening and close chosen
- ☐ Know what you'll cut
- ☐ Handouts, pens, extra Bibles
- ☐ Prayed for the class by name

Openings, Closings & Hard Moments

Pick one opening and one close; rotate so class doesn't get predictable.

OPENINGS

- ask a real-life question: Have you ever repeated an opinion about someone you'd never met?

- start in the text: Read v38: "What is truth?" Ask: why would someone ask that and then walk away?
- raise a problem: These men won't step on a Gentile floor, but they will hand over an innocent man.

How does that happen?

CLOSINGS

- restate the big idea: Jesus, the true King, asks whether your answer about him is your own.
- allow quiet reflection: Read v34 slowly, then give one minute of silence with no discussion.
- call back to the opening: We started with secondhand opinions. Pilate had one too. Jesus asked for his own answer.

WHEN CLASS GETS HARD

- Someone hears "the Jews" in this passage as blame on Jewish people.: Say plainly that Jesus and John were Jewish, and that Rome, leaders, and crowd all share in this. Name the past misuse of these words as wrong, then return to the text.
- A drifted believer admits their faith was always secondhand, or that they, like Pilate, walked away.: Welcome it. That is exactly the question Jesus asks in v34, and he asked Pilate rather than dismissing him. Don't press for more in the group. Offer to talk afterward.
- Silence after a question: Wait. Then rephrase simpler, or ask them to talk to a neighbor first.
- One person dominates: "Thanks. Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet." Talk privately if it continues.
- A question you can't answer: Say so, write it down, bring an answer next week.
- A tangent takes over: "Great question. Let's catch it after class so we can finish the passage."

READ THIS WEEK

- John 6:15 (Jesus refuses a throne taken by force)
- Isaiah 53:6-7 (the innocent servant carries others' wrongs)
- 1 Timothy 6:13 (Paul recalls Jesus' confession before Pilate)

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/john/18-28-40/lesson

What Is Truth

JOHN 18:28-40 (BSB) · WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? · DIGDEEPER.AI

Key verse: "For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice." John 18:37

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus, the true King, asks whether your answer about him is your own.

1. CAREFUL AT THE DOOR · JOHN 18:28-32

- At early morning, the accusers will not enter the Roman governor's hall before Passover.
- Pilate asks for a charge. They give none, only "If He were not a criminal."
- They need Rome to execute Jesus, and that fits what Jesus had already said about his death.

The leaders stayed outside to avoid being _____.

This fulfilled what Jesus said about the kind of _____ He would die.

Discuss: Why might careful, religious people still hand Jesus over without naming a crime?

2. THE KING INSIDE · JOHN 18:33-38A

- Pilate asks, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus asks a question back.
- "My kingdom is not of this world," so his servants do not fight.
- Jesus was born to testify to the truth. Pilate asks, "What is truth?"

Jesus asked, "Are you saying this on your _____?"

Everyone who belongs to the truth _____ to My voice.

Discuss: Jesus turns Pilate's question back on him. What would it take for your answer about Jesus to be your own?

3. NOT THIS MAN · JOHN 18:38B-40

- Pilate declares: "I find no basis for a charge against Him."
- He offers to release "the King of the Jews" for Passover.
- The crowd chooses Barabbas, an insurrectionist.

Pilate said, "I find no _____ for a charge against Him."

"Not this man," they shouted, "but _____!"

Discuss: Barabbas fought Rome. Jesus refused to fight. Why do you think the crowd chose Barabbas?

Read this week: John 6:15 (Jesus refuses a throne taken by force) · Isaiah 53:6-7 (the innocent servant carries others' wrongs) · 1 Timothy 6:13 (Paul recalls Jesus' confession before Pilate)

For Kids: What Is Truth

JOHN 18:28-40 · NAME: _____

Big idea: Jesus is the true King who tells the truth.

1. PUT THE STORY IN ORDER! NUMBER THE BOXES.

- ☐ Jesus says he came to tell truth.
- ☐ Leaders bring Jesus to Pilate at dawn.
- ☐ The crowd chooses Barabbas instead of Jesus.
- ☐ The leaders stay outside the palace.
- ☐ Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you a king?"

2. HOW DID THEY FEEL? CIRCLE ONE.

Pilate: happy · sad · worried

The chief priests: happy · sad · worried

The crowd: happy · sad · worried

Barabbas: happy · sad · worried

3. WORD SEARCH

B N V J S O N P O
A P H E H G R O K
R T K S B H N B I
A R I U P S C O N
B U N S R F F O G
B T G D B D U V D
A H V O I C E D O
S P I L A T E B M
P A S S O V E R C

JESUS · PILATE · KING · TRUTH · KINGDOM · BARABBAS · PASSOVER · VOICE

4. SECRET CODE

1=C 2=E 3=I 4=L 5=M 6=N 7=O 8=S 9=T 10=V 11=Y

4 3 8 9 2 6 8 9 7 5 11 10 7 3 1 2

5. DRAW IT!

Draw Jesus standing calm in Pilate's palace, with a crown above him to show he is the true King.

6. MEMORY VERSE

"Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice." John 18:37 Say it to a grown-up: ☐ ☐ ☐

Jesus is the King who... _____