

Can You Handle the Truth?



the people put Jesus to death because of the things he said.

Hating the Truth

The chief priests and the Pharisees – the religious conservatives of their day – hated what Jesus was saying. He said they were liars and fakers, and of course they hated that. He said:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do (Matthew 23:2-3).

At other times (see Matthew 12) the Pharisees tried to catch him out in debate, failed, and then plotted to kill him. You can see that in debates today too. Instead of trying to learn from each other, people become more determined to defend their position – whatever it takes. They don't want the truth, they just want to win.

Sometimes it even sounds as though the Pharisees knew Jesus was from God. But they shut their eyes to it. His message was so offensive to them that they didn't care if it was true or not – they hated it.

The Unpopular Truth

What was Jesus' message? What truth was he here to share? Here's a good summary, from the apostle Paul:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Timothy 1:15).

ISN'T truth under attack these days? We hear about fake news and alternative facts; an inconvenient truth, the unbelievable truth, post-truth. Do we even know what truth is anymore?

But if we look into the Bible, we can see that truth has been under attack for a long time. In fact, almost all God's prophets were attacked for speaking the truth.

Attacked for Telling the Truth

Jesus came to speak and show the truth about God – and he was crucified for it. During his trial he told the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who was judging the case:

For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice (John 18:37).

Jesus had a particular purpose: to witness to the truth. People had a choice – to listen, or not. Most people chose not to. Most people preferred darkness to light. Instead of listening,

The Pharisees could not accept this truth. They didn't want to accept that they were sinners who needed saving, or that the people they considered to be real sinners were worth saving at all. And they certainly didn't want to believe that this ordinary man, not grand at all, was God's chosen king – 'Christ' means 'anointed'.

Paul was a Pharisee. He didn't accept this truth at first. He could only accept it when he realised that he was a chief sinner: that he was not as righteous as he thought he was.

We might find it hard to accept too: first, that we are sinners who need saving; second, that God is just as happy to save even the very worst people as He is to save us. No matter how well behaved and good we might have been, we need Christ just as much as the very worst people do.

The Pharisees hated it when Jesus criticized them or told them they were doing anything wrong. And they hated it when Jesus met and befriended publicans and sinners.

Some people say, "the truth hurts". The truth was certainly too painful for the Pharisees to accept. They wouldn't listen to Jesus' voice, accept their position as sinners, and be saved. They conspired to kill him instead.

Who Cares About Truth Anyway?

And that's where Pilate came in. The Jews couldn't put a man to death in this way without Roman approval, so they took him to Pilate. He had to decide whether to give them permission to execute Jesus or not.

Pilate asked some questions. He couldn't see anything particularly wrong with Jesus, but he wasn't that interested in his message either. He wasn't interested in things like sin, or being

saved, or all that spiritual stuff. He cared only about what worked in the 'here and now'. Jesus was looking further ahead, and he said:

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here (John 18:36).

Jesus could have escaped the chief priests and Pharisees, easily. But that wasn't his mission. He wasn't here to win at whatever cost. He was here to give witness to the truth. So the record continues:

Pilate therefore said to him, "Are you a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38).



Pilate wasn't interested. He couldn't find any fault in Jesus. But he couldn't find any great value either. He knew the charges against Jesus were a lie, but he thought it would be better all round to give the Jews what they wanted. So he did. After all, when you get right down to it, "What is truth? Who cares?"

Brave Enough to Live It?

There was one man at Jesus' trial who had listened to the truth, accepted it, and accepted Jesus as the Christ – the one who had come to save sinners. When Jesus was arrested, Peter had tried to protect him.

When Jesus was led away, Peter followed. He watched. Until someone recognized him:

The servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not" (John 18:17).

Jesus had even told Peter that "before the cock crows, you will deny me three times". We've already seen the first.

They said to him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed (John 18:25–27).



Peter was devastated by what he'd done. He wept bitterly. He realized he'd failed to stand up for the truth. And Jesus forgave him, just as he'll forgive everybody who listens to his voice.

Is God's Truth for You?

We all sin, and we all need Christ Jesus if we want to be saved. If you can accept that you



are a sinner, if you are willing to see yourself as no better than anybody else – and no worse either – then Christ Jesus came to save you. And he will save you, if you live by his truth and seek his forgiveness where you fail.

As Peter would proclaim openly just a few weeks later:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:38–40).

Peter witnessed to the truth, just as Jesus Christ had done before him.

Like all generations, the one in which we live is crooked. It is full of lies and corruption. Many people care little about truth. Some even hate it. But those who love it can still listen to Christ's truth, follow it, share it with others – and repent and be baptized to be saved.

David Barnes