

A moment of destiny

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[0 : 0 0] Now we've just had Easter, of course, and Easter's still fresh in our minds. And of course, we should not only think about Easter and the cross and the things that happened around the cross and the cross event and the time of the cross only at Easter time.

We should be thinking about it all the time. So now a week after Easter, I want to take your mind back again to that moment when Jesus Christ was brought by the Sanhedrin, the leaders of the Jewish people, when he was brought before Pontius Pilate and when he was presented to Pilate.

Now, there was one reason why the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate. They had already considered Jesus worthy of death. They were scared of Jesus. They were frightened by Jesus.

They were confused by Jesus. They were puzzled by Jesus. They were threatened by Jesus. They felt that Jesus was undermining their power as an elite group in the Jewish community.

And they convinced themselves that Jesus was a blasphemer because people were calling him a king. And so they wanted Jesus dead. But they had no power to actually execute anybody.

[1 : 0 6] To get that, they had to go to the Roman governor. Do not forget that the Jewish people were under the heel of Rome. They were ruled by Rome at that time. Judea was a Roman province.

And a very troublesome province it was because the Jewish people were monotheists. And they were always rising up against the Roman power. So the Roman governor of Judea had a very bad time of it.

And nobody wanted the job of Roman governor of Judea. But it fell to Pontius Pilate. And so early one morning, they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate. They had already beaten him. They had already assaulted him.

They had already judged him. They had already had illegal trials, even by Jewish rules and standards. And they had sentenced him to death. And they wanted Pilate to verify the sentence.

They wanted Pilate to crucify him. And crucifixion was a terrible death, not only because of the way in which it was done, but because of the terrible shame that was associated with crucifixion, because it was reserved for the worst of criminals.

[2 : 0 4] No Roman was ever allowed to be crucified. Only non-Romans were crucified. And the word crucifixion in certain Roman company was not allowed to be even mentioned.

It was considered to be such a shameful death. This is the death that they sought for Jesus Christ on that fateful morning. So they had had their moment of destiny with Jesus. And they had failed miserably.

Now they were bringing Jesus to Pontius Pilate. And Jesus stands before Pilate. And Pilate stands before Jesus. And a moment of destiny unfolds.

Now you must remember, if you can cast your mind back to these 2,000 years, that in those days when Jesus walked the earth, he was an enigma to many people.

He was a puzzle to many people. They did not know quite what to make of him. Even the very disciples of Jesus did not know exactly what to make of him. They only understood things progressively.

[3 : 00] They understood that he was the son of God at a certain point. They didn't understand what he was going to do. When he told them that he was going to Jerusalem to die, they didn't quite know what to make of that. They couldn't understand it.

Because within their categories of thinking, there was no room for a Messiah, a king, to die. The Messiah that the Old Testament prophesied about was going to be a great victorious king.

He wasn't going to be a king that was going to die. So the disciples themselves were confused about who Jesus really was. And so Jesus was an enigma to many people. And here he's facing Pontius Pilate, and he's an enigma to Pilate as well.

Then don't forget that Pilate himself, as a Roman governor, if you Google him, you'll find this out, that he was a very bad Roman governor. He'd had lots of problems with the Jewish people, and the governors at Rome and the emperor at Rome were not pleased with him, and he was already in a lot of trouble, and he was not a happy chappy.

He wasn't happy being in charge of Judea, because he had to keep on putting down riots, and he had done things wrongly. He'd made errors of judgment. He was accused of certain massacres, and he was a very unpopular governor.

[4 : 10] Now, this unpopular governor is brought out of bed in the early hours of the morning to meet this enigmatic Jesus, whom he had heard about but never met, and he's asked to make a crucial decision about this Jesus to put him to death.

For him, it was a moment of destiny. You know, my dear friends, you may come into a church service at random on a Sunday morning and suddenly be confronted in God's word with a moment of destiny for your own soul, as you hear God's word explained.

And who knows, but this morning may be a moment of destiny for you. And in the interchange that follows, in the scenario that follows, there's no time, of course, to flesh it all out for you, but what I'm going to do is just lift out of the context.

I'm going to lift five questions that Pilate asked on that fateful morning. Five questions that all of us should be asking about Jesus Christ and about the Christian faith.

And five questions that all of us should have an answer for, because we'll have to have an answer for it on the day of judgment. And here's the first question that Pilate asked. You can write it down on your notes.

[5 : 13] Here's the first question. He said, are you a king? That's the first question that Pilate asked Jesus. Are you a king? And you'll see that in chapter 18 and in verse 33.

Now, the way Pilate put it, of course, was, are you the king of the Jews? And Jesus answered that in the affirmative. He said, if you say so, I am, but I'm not a king the way you think I am.

So first of all, look at the notion of kingship. You know, the ideas of kingship in Jesus' day were different to our ideas, because if Jesus was a king, in the earthly sense of the term, it would have meant something to the Jewish people.

And if Jesus was a king in the earthly sense of the term, it would have meant something different to the Roman people. They would have thought that he was an upstart. They would have thought he was a troublemaker.

They would have thought that there was a rebel leading an army against Rome, and they would have dealt with him with their armies. But the sort of kingship that Jesus presented wasn't like that at all.

[6 : 12] Jesus said, I am a king over a kingdom that's not like your kingdoms. I'm a kingdom over the hearts of men. I am a king over the hearts of men and women. My kingdom, he said, is not of this world.

It's a spiritual kingdom. It's a kingdom that is different to the kingdoms of this world. And so the ideas of kingship were very different in those days. And the nature of Jesus' kingdom was a spiritual kingdom.

His kingdom was made of people of the spirit. His kingdom was made up of the renewed hearts and minds of men and women who would live forever. You can't see the kingdom of God when you live in this world.

You can't touch it. You can't enter it with your feet. You can't ascertain where the kingdom of God is. It is revealed to the people who believe in Jesus Christ.

But the truth is this. All of us do need a king. And you know, my dear friends, there's not one man or woman, not one little child that walked through there today who does not need a king in their lives.

[7 : 14] In other words, we need an authoritative voice to tell us what to believe and how to live and how to spend our lives and how to end our lives. We need somebody who's got authority to tell us that.

Do you know something, friends, that if you do not have a king in your life, in other words, some overarching principle, some overarching idea in your life that is controlling you, if you do not settle on that, it will settle in on you.

And there are many people today who, because they're not ruled by God, because they're not ruled by Jesus, they are ruled by other things. They are ruled by money. They are ruled by greed.

They are ruled by immorality. They are ruled by sport. They are ruled by pride. They are ruled by self-righteousness. They are ruled by ambition. And so as a result of all of these things, there are many people who make shipwreck of their lives.

And I want to say this to you today, that the little children that we usher through here today, if we do not teach them who the true king is, there is a king that will assert its rule over them. There's a prince of this world who will assert its rule over them.

[8 : 23] And their lives may well be wrecked along the way. And you, my dear friends, you may look back on 30, 40 years of living and say to yourself, who rules my life? You can ask yourself that question today.

Who rules my life and what has he done for me? What have my ideas done for me? There are people today who think they can rule their own lives. What has it done for you? It's done for you absolutely nothing.

You know, the king who rules your life is a king who's going to bring you hope. It's a king who's got to bring answers to your questions. It's a king who's going to tell you about the future. That's the king that you need in your life.

And this is the king that stood before Pontius Pilate. But he couldn't see it because like many of us, like the mist this morning when we got up, our eyes can't see through the spiritual mist. We can't see the truth of it all.

And Pilate couldn't see the shape of things to come. And so he says to Jesus, are you a king? That is the question that you are going to be asked one day when you stand before God in the day of judgment, as I will be.

[9 : 19] Did you know that Jesus Christ was a king? Are you a king? Put that down in your paper. That's the first question you've got to be concerned about. Was Jesus Christ a king? And the answer that Jesus gave is yes, but I am the kingdom of something better than you can ever think about.

My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, said Jesus, they would fight. We are not here to fight. We are not here for armies. We are not here for militancy. I am the king over the hearts and souls of people who believe in me.

Here's the second question that Pilate asked that you can put down in your paper. And this is it. He said, what is truth? And he says that in chapter 18 and in verse 38.

Jesus said to him, you are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason, I was born. And for this, I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

And Pilate says, what is truth? And with this, he went out again to the Jews. Now, let me explain to you why Pilate said that. You must remember that Pilate was a Roman and the Roman people believed in a whole lot of different gods like the Greeks did before them.

[10 : 31] So for the Romans and the Greeks whose culture they had inherited to a large extent, there was a whole panoply of gods out there. For the Greeks, the gods always lived on the mountains. They were always fighting.

And for the Romans as well, the gods were fighting with each other. The gods were immoral. The gods were stealing each other's wives. The gods were having immoral children. They were having children out of wedlock.

The gods were having immoral affairs. The gods were all out there. All these gods had to be worshipped. And there was a whole panoply of gods out there so that the Roman Empire was a highly superstitious empire with all kinds of idols in it.

Now, intellectual and thinking Roman people knew that it was all a lot of hogwash. And so they never knew where to find the truth. So some people and some sect and some religion would present itself to the emperor or they'd belong to some other religion or their families would belong to some other religion.

And so the notion of final truth was far removed from them. And that's why Pilate said, what is truth? It's just like the people of our day and age today. Haven't you met them? People who say, who say you were right?

[11 : 39] What about the Muslims? Aren't they right? What about the Hindus? Aren't they also right? What about the Jehovah's Witnesses? Aren't they right? Isn't it okay just to be sincere and to believe what you want to believe?

That is what Pilate was really saying. What is truth? And the Lord Jesus Christ gave him no answer to that question. Do you know why? Because there's enough evidence in the world today for you and me to know that real objective truth resides in the person of Jesus Christ in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know when Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, he had a three-year history behind him of working of miracles. He had a three-year history behind him of teaching in public.

He had a three-year history behind him of a public ministry which Pilate would have heard of. There was enough evidence for anybody who wanted the truth to see it displayed in Jesus Christ.

But when Pilate stood finally face to face with Jesus and his moment of destiny came and he said to the King of all truth, to the one who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, when he said to him, what is truth?

[12 : 46] Jesus gave him no answer. Do you know, my friends, that there will come a time in the lives of people who constantly push away the truth from themselves when they don't receive any answers from God.

You may remember the same thing happened to Herod, the Herod that Pilate sent Jesus to when he didn't know what to do with Jesus. He said, take him to Herod. He comes from Herod's jurisdiction. King Herod was a half-Jewish king who ruled over a certain portion of Judea.

And so Pilate said, look, he comes from that area. Let Herod make a decision about him. But that Herod was the Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist. And he'd heard the truth from John the Baptist.

He had conferred with John the Baptist. He went down to the prisons where John the Baptist was kept. And he talked to John the Baptist. And John the Baptist told him the truth about his soul and the truth about repentance and the truth about knowing God.

And in the end, Herod had him beheaded. So now that he's got the opportunity to come face to face with Jesus, he says to Jesus, work me a miracle. Let me see what you like.

[13 : 47] And Jesus answered him, not a word, the scripture says. There are some people in this world who will never get another prompting from the Holy Spirit. They will never get another iota of light from God.

They will never get another opportunity to repent. They will never get another word from heaven. They will never get another prompting in their heart to move toward God because their moment of destiny came and their moment of destiny went.

Pilate says to Jesus, what is truth? And then he goes out and he says to the people, I don't find any basis of any charge against him because Pilate, you see, didn't understand the Jewish way and he wasn't bothered with their little religious arguments that they were having.

He said, as a Roman governor, I find no reason at all to crucify Jesus Christ. And there was Pilate, cynical about his world, cynical about Jesus and most of all, he was confused about what the truth was and so he left his moment of destiny and he walked away from Jesus.

My friends, do you know that I meet in my life of ministry, my long years of ministry, I have met people. You know, just recently, this very week, I heard of somebody, somebody told me a story this very week.

[15 : 07] In fact, one of my own family members told me a story of a young woman whom she had spoken to about her soul and about her need for Jesus because this young woman was about to turn her back on the truth and to turn her back on the church and turn her back on the gospel for her boyfriend.

And so my family member sat next to her in a restaurant with a cup of coffee and said to her, look, I feel I failed you. I haven't actually explained the gospel clearly enough to you and I want to talk to you again about the Lord Jesus Christ and about your moment of destiny with him.

And this young woman said to her, you know, no, you haven't failed me. You have told me the truth and I've understood it but I'm telling you now that I'm choosing the other way. Do you know there are people like that today?

There are people in your family groups like that today. There are people in your street where you live who are like that. There may be people in your own context who are like that. They may just deliberately turn their back on Jesus because that is the world we're living in, a world where Satan is rampant, blinding the minds of those that do not believe.

But do not let it be you. You sitting here today, do not let it be you. Don't tell me that you're a Christian but you don't live as a Christian. Rather, obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit and become a true believer today.

[16 : 25] Do not sit in your pew and say, well, I became a Christian when I was young and therefore I'm okay. You're not okay. Not if you're not living for the Lord Jesus Christ today. It's not him who says, Lord, Lord.

Lots of people who can say, Lord, Lord, sing the choruses, say the prayers and be in church. It's not even the Sunday school teachers and the people who lead the music who are necessarily Christians. The Christian is not someone who just says, Lord, Lord.

The Christian is the one who does what the Lord Jesus tells him to do. And the most important thing of all is to trust him as your only savior and to embrace him as the one who died on the cross for your sins and stop thinking that God will accept you on any other basis.

And so Pilate says to Jesus, what is truth? And he turns his back on the very one who is the center of all truth and the center of all ultimate reality.

He turns his back on him. There's a third question that Pilate asked Jesus and this is it. He said, where do you come from? Now he says that in chapter 19 and in verse 8 because by this time in the proceedings, Pilate is very confused about what he should do.

[17 : 35] He's torn between his Roman duty of only pronouncing a verdict of crucifixion on a truly guilty culprit. But he knows Jesus is not guilty but the people are shouting for it and he cannot afford to have another right because he loses his job.

And so he's now terribly confused by it all. And in his confusion, he goes to Jesus and when he says, he was, it says in verse 8 of chapter 19, when Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid and he went back into the palace and he said, where do you come from?

He asked Jesus. But Jesus gave him no answer. You see this, my dear friends, there's no answer. You know, Jesus, we know that Jesus came from heaven.

Pilate didn't mean that. Pilate said, Pilate meant, what village do you come from? What clan do you come from? What tribe do you come from? What philosophy are you embracing?

Where do you come from? Where are your people? And what's your background? He was saying to Jesus. And he could not understand, not even if Jesus explained it to him, that his background was heaven and he came from the Father.

[18 : 48] He came into our world to die for our sins. He came into the world to accomplish a purpose. Jesus said to Pilate when Pilate asked him if he was a king, for this purpose I came into the world, Jesus said.

He's come to be the king and he's come to be the king by earning his right to be the king. Not only was he the king from heaven, but he earned his right to be the king by dying on the cross for us and there shedding his blood for us.

And so, here Pilate says to him, where do you come from? And you see the danger of that question? There was no answer to it because the moment of destiny was coming and going for Pilate.

The dynamic of that question is very clearly laid out for us. It says Jesus gave him no answer. There was no answer to Pilate at all. And then finally, Pilate's delusion.

Do you see what Pilate says to him? Pilate says to Jesus, he says, don't you realize that I have power either to free you or to crucify you?

[19 : 48] In verse 16. And we know what Jesus says to him? You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from heaven. Do you know, my friends, how many of your people and your friends and perhaps someone sitting here today thinks that they've got power over their own lives?

Do you know that there are many people today who think they are masters of their own destiny? In their pride and in their arrogance, they walk the streets of Cape Town thinking they are masters of their own destiny, think they can rule their own lives, they've got the right to think what they believe.

Of course, you've got the right to think whatever it is that you want to believe and you've got the right to reject God. Yes, you've got the right to reject God. You've got the right for all those things. But do you know, my dear friends, that you can walk down the streets of Cape Town one day with all your rights intact and suddenly you feel a little itch in your throat that you don't know what it is and you can't get rid of it and you go to the doctor and he says you've got cancer of the throat and suddenly you discover that you're not the master of your own destiny.

Suddenly you discover that you aren't in fact ruling your own life, that there's a power much higher than yours that is ruling your life. And so Pilate's third question was where do you come from?

And the answer is Jesus comes from heaven, although Pilate did not get that answer from Jesus. Here's the fourth question that Pilate asked and this time he didn't ask it of Jesus, he asked it of the crowd.

[21 : 08] He said to the crowd, what crime has he committed? And you know why it is put like that in Matthew 27 and Matthew, Matthew 27 and verse 23, what crime has he committed?

And in Mark chapter 15 and verse 14, it's put like that to remind those of us who read it today that Jesus Christ went to the cross as the innocent, unblemished, sinless son of God.

You know, in the Old Testament system, the lamb that was offered up for sacrifice had to be unblemished. Our Savior had to have no sin of his own. Do you know that if Jesus had one sin of his own, he would have died only for his own sin.

But because the Lord Jesus Christ had no sin of his own, he could offer himself up as the Son of God to be the Savior of the whole world. He saves people today, the only Savior, because he's the only one who's got the right to offer himself up in our place, your place, and my place, because he was utterly sinless.

He spoke no evil word, he thought no evil thought, and he did no evil deed. And so it is recorded for us in this way in the Gospels, in this meeting with Pilate and Jesus, this moment of destiny.

[22 : 25] It's recorded in this way so that we will be reminded when we read this centuries later that Jesus Christ died an innocent man. What crime has he committed?

And the answer is none. He committed no crime at all, but offered up his sinless life for you and for me. So we have a worthy Savior, we have the right Savior, we have the powerful Savior, the only Savior who can offer himself up for you and me.

Oh, friends, to believe in anything else, to believe in the inventions of your own mind is so foolish, to believe in the God that we think up in our own mind is so futile, to believe what people tell us out there, to believe the little bits of literature that the various cults and sects put into our letterboxes is so foolish.

The Bible tells us clearly that the one who went to the cross for us was one who committed no crime because he was the son of the living God. He came to us from heaven, pure and undefiled.

He lived a pure and undefiled life and offered himself up as a pure and undefiled Savior. And he is the one in whom we are to believe. And here's the last question that Pilate asked.

[23 : 37] You can write it down on your note there. And here it is. Here's the last question. And it's not recorded here in John. It's recorded in Matthew chapter 27 and in verse 22.

And it's recorded in Mark chapter 15 and verse 12. And in many ways, it's the most telling question of all. And this is what it is. What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

And so here comes the great moment of truth. He's met with Jesus. He's talked with Jesus. He's interacted with Jesus. He's interacted with the crowd.

He's tried to get rid of Jesus. He's tried to do everything he can to get out of it. But he cannot get out of it. And here's the moment of truth. Pilate, what will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

Will you do the right thing? Will you respond correctly to him? And Pilate turns to the crowd, says to the crowd, what will I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

[24 : 35] And here at last, it comes down to that great personal decision that everybody has to make about Jesus Christ. And that question, you will notice in all of the Gospels, is put down as something intensely personal.

What should I do with Jesus who is called the Christ? At the end of the day, Pilate, you can't blame the crowd. At the end of the day, Pilate, you can't blame the Jewish leaders.

At the end of the day, Pilate, you can't blame Herod. You've got to make the decision. What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ? Let me ask that question to you today. What have you done with Jesus who is called the Christ?

I'm sure that the majority of you who are sitting here today will say that I have received him as my personal savior. I'm glad that you say that today, but let me ask you this question.

If you say that, is he ruling in your life? He's the king, remember. Does he rule? Did he rule in your conversations at home this morning? Does he rule in the way you deal with your children? Does he rule in the way you deal with your money?

[25 : 38] Does he rule in the way you deal with your friends and your family and your job? If you have received Christ as your personal savior, oh, it's a personal, personal question. And it's a powerful, powerful question because you can see Pilate wrestling with his conscience and at the end of the day, not knowing what to do, he takes a bowl of water and he washes his hands and he says, I'll have nothing to do with this man.

But you see, Pilate, you can say that as much as you want to. You can say, I'll have nothing to do with Jesus, but God will have a lot to do with you. Oh, yes, my friend, you can put it off as long as you like.

I can put it off as long as I like. I can say, I don't want to get involved. I'll sit in the fringes of the church. I don't like to be involved in everything. I like to sort of sit light. But God will not sit light on you, my dear friends.

There will come a moment when the washing of your hands in the bowl of water will not help. We will stand before God and God will say to you as he will say to me, what did you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

And so you can see how pertinent that question is because Pilate is talking in the present sense. What shall I do with Jesus now who is called the Christ? Crucify him, the crowd shouts out, crucify him.

[26 : 51] And Pilate says, you see to it and washes his hands and he walks away. But it never escaped his conscience. My friends, you will listen to many sermons here.

You may walk away from here today saying, that old guy, don't invite him back again. That's what you may say. But I'll tell you what, the truth that is expounded from this pulpit today is the truth of the word of God and it will root itself in your mind.

You will not escape it. You can walk out there and be relieved that the service is over, have a cup of tea, go home and push it to the back of your mind. But you will not escape it.

Did you put that last question down on your piece of paper? Keep it in your Bible. You may not feel anything moving or stirring you now, but in six months time one day you will open your Bible and find it there and suddenly you will see the question, what shall I do with Jesus?

And suddenly you will discover that you have got to fall down on your knees before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and here are the questions that Pilate asked and you will go through them all and say, I've got to ask those questions.

[28 : 01] You know, who is this man? Where does he come from? What crime is he committed? What will I do with Jesus? Who is called the Christ? And what have you done with Jesus, my dear friend?

He's called the Christ. What have you done with him? What have you done with him? It's no good saying I believe in him. Almost everybody out there will say they believe in him.

They say they believe in him, but do you follow him? Are you his disciple? Have you embraced him? Or have you managed to do what the world does today to divorce what you believe in your head from your daily dealings?

What have you done with Jesus who is called the Christ? I'm asking you that question today. And you know what I'm asking you to do? I'm asking you to bow your heart to Jesus and to ask him to become your savior not only in word but in deed.

Indeed. So that from this day onward you will be not a half-baked Christian but a true Christian. a Christian in your soul in your heart ready to face God the moment he summons you.

[29 : 13] What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ? Will you turn to him today in that way? Now will you bow with me in prayer? Now here's a little prayer that I'm going to pray and that you may feel echoes how you feel in your heart.

and if you feel it does then make it your prayer. Say Lord what that man is saying is what I'm saying to you. And here it is. Almighty God I confess to you that I've left Jesus on the edges of my life.

I have said that I believe in him but he is not my king. please forgive me. Forgive all my sins.

Help me today to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the true king of a spiritual kingdom.

Make me one of your children in word and deed. Please do it today.

[30 : 34] For Christ's sake. Amen.