

Explore: Our King condemned!

January 20, 2014

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Feb. 2 focuses on John 18:33-19:3, 9-11.*

Two truths stand out in almost all Bible passages. First, the passages still speak to our current culture and address ideas we confront daily. Perhaps even more significant, the Bible continues to penetrate the hearts of God's children. As we meditate on what God is telling us in his word, our hearts begin to see truths that ultimately change our attitudes and actions. We can see both these truths in this week's passage.

It's my fault

One of the most unusual parts of the passion narrative has to do with a tradition invoked by a desperate Pilate. When he was unable to convince the crowd Jesus had done nothing wrong, Pilate tried a different approach. He brought out another prisoner, Barabbas, and gave the people a choice. He said Jewish tradition allowed one prisoner each year to be released.

I do not know about you, but every time I hear this portion of the story, I scratch my head. I believe this might very well have been the worst tradition ever. Can you imagine this in our world today? It's difficult for prosecutors to gather evidence on a potential criminal, take the case to trial and get a conviction. There is no chance they would then let one of these convicted men or women back out on the streets and into society.

This is exactly what happened in this passage. Barabbas had been convicted of taking part in an insurrection and even of murder. Why would Pilate allow him to go free? In the Gospel of Matthew, we find another interesting twist to this story. In Matthew 27:16, we find Barabbas' first name also was Jesus. It could have been Pilate really was asking, "Which Jesus should I release—Jesus the Messiah or Jesus Barabbas?" Because the

people were stirred with emotion by the Jewish leadership, they called for Christ to be crucified. From our perspective, the people's reaction that day to release a murderer and have Jesus put to death seems unreal and unacceptable.

As a matter of fact, all of Jesus' arrest and trial was a shame. I find myself wondering, "How could they do this to my Jesus?" But every time I allow myself to get caught up in this, I am reminded of what we studied last week. Jesus volunteered to go down this road for us. No one took his life from him; he willingly gave his life.

Ultimately, it was not just the people of that day who were guilty. Jesus died for the sins of the world. That means he died for my sin and yours. It is our fault Jesus had to die on that cross. And while the circumstances of his trial, arrest and crucifixion may seem unjust in the way they were carried out, they certainly satisfied God's justice in that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted by God the Father.

What is truth?

A question in this passage speaks directly to our culture today. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" I cannot imagine a time when this phrase so well defined a culture as it now does. Other generations have searched for truth or even tried to change the way we define this word.

However, current culture has moved past these ideas and chosen instead to embrace all kinds of concepts as being "true." Even when ideas seem diametrically opposed to each other, they can be respected as "truth" because of the sincere acceptance by their adherents. Just as when Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" and then walked away without waiting for an answer, our current culture seems lost in the fog of tolerance.

Ultimately, however, we know Pilate actually was asking the wrong question altogether. Truth is not a "what"; it is a "Who." In John 14:6, Jesus

told his follower: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus always has been “the Truth.” This is what John meant in chapter 1 when he called him “the Word.” John told us the Word had been there from the beginning, and this Word became flesh and dwelled among people. He went on to tell us Jesus was the True Good Shepherd (John 10) and the True Vine (John 15). Jesus is the Truth—the clear representation of the Father here on this earth.

As long as the people in our culture continue to seek truth as an object or a thing, they always will miss the point. Truth is a Person who opens our eyes to all the other truths in this life. Once we have found Christ—or have been found by him—we can see he brings us the satisfaction, joy and peace we have been searching for all our lives.

We also will know there can be only one Truth. As disappointing as it is to the world around us, we must continue to lift up this truth for all to see. As John 8:32 tells us, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” There is no other way to find this freedom, so we must continue to proclaim the One and Only Truth: Jesus Christ.