

THE KNOWABILITY OF JESUS

by Steve Hammond, Sunday, January 13, 2019

John 18:36-38 at NFBC

//36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." 37 Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." 38 Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

//After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him.//

—John 18:36-38 ESV

When it comes to our knowing God, God has supplied us with everything we need – in Jesus Christ. As I pointed out last week, we have a verse in Jesus' High Priestly prayer of John 17 that should stand out among all the truths we know.

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ---John 17:3

For salvation, God has given us Jesus. So what we need to focus on is getting to know him. And the good news is: Jesus is very knowable.

Last week I pointed out two ways in which Jesus is very knowable.

- 1) **The saving Gospel of Jesus is basically a story**, which makes it interesting to follow and easy to remember. It's even filled with mini-stories. It's also a love story. And who doesn't love a love story?
- 2) **There is also a Spirit to Jesus, and his story**, that is Holy and dedicated solely to the knowing of the true God. He is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of Jesus. But we more commonly know him simply as the Holy Spirit.

I likened the Holy Spirit to the theme song of a movie, which can kind of give a person the whole story from beginning to end and make everything more properly understandable throughout. But of course he's more than that. I'm just using that image to help you realize how accessible, how knowable Jesus is because of this great Gift from God. Just imagine how helpful it would be to a character in a movie if he or she could actually be in touch with the theme song! Instead of being the bad guy out of step with what's really going on, you'd be able to be in step with what the movie is all about.

Well, now I have a third way in which Jesus is very knowable for the purpose of our salvation and the knowing of God. Along with Story and Spirit, there is also Stubborn History.

3. We can know God through the stubborn history of Jesus.

Here in our text is a historical ‘snap shot’ of Jesus talking with Pilate.
37 Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”
---John 18:37 (ESV)

One of the things I find interesting here is what this looks like now, centuries and centuries later, and what it must have looked like on that day. On that day Pilate was the man; Jesus was an upstart nobody. Pilate represented Roman power and authority; Jesus seemed laughable when he told Pilate he represented a kingdom not of this world. Pilate held the power of life and death over Jesus; Jesus seemed to have nothing to offer Pilate, except a political headache. Pilate would surely be the obvious figure expected to go down in history; Jesus would seem to be near total erasure from history as he approached his destiny with crucifixion in the shadow of Roman and world history.

But today . . ., today the truth seems to be just the opposite of those appearances. Jesus is the main historical figure from that very time in antiquity onward. Pilate is actually a background figure to the story. Very few people today would have ever heard of Pilate had it not been for this upstart nobody called “Jesus.” The kingdom Jesus spoke of and Pilate dismissed, we know now, went on to turn Rome upside-down (or right-side up) as it officially became “Christian” in the year AD 323. Completely unthinkable on the day of this snap shot.

How often do we think history works against our ability to know Jesus? We think the only way to really know what Jesus said and did and who he really was is confined to the people who lived back in that very day. Well, just the opposite was true for Pilate. He was historically too close to Jesus. He might have been better off to have viewed the man standing in front of him from a historical distance of 500, a thousand, or a couple thousand years away.

Which, by the way, is where we stand today.

My point is that history does not necessarily distort or even distance us from knowing who has lived or what has happened years and centuries ago. Sometimes history actually works to improve one's view by the distance it provides. And in the case of Jesus, history gives an ever increasingly miraculous view of this man and what God has done in his name. And continues to do, as that name continues to rise higher and higher in historical elevation, with no signs of retreat.

Then there's one more thing about history, which is both obvious and obscure at the same time.

History is as solid as today's reality.

This is one reason I referred to it earlier as "Stubborn History." It is not something that is subject to change. The reason should be obvious. History is what actually has happened in the past and it is literally what has brought us to our present position in time. So, as much as we may fight about interpreting history or efforts may be made to distort it, none of that can actually change history. And what a good thing that is. Because secured in the very center of our history, God has established the cornerstone of our salvation.

I just ran across this quote from a friend online as she used it to introduce a 1 hour and 24 minute podcast. I won't find out who said it until I listen to that program, probably on Monday. But I must give it to you now in temporary anonymity. It speaks of that solid (may we say "stubborn"), historical way in which God has worked through Jesus.

"As the crucifixion makes plain, God did not save us invisibly. God did not send a message, even a prophetic message. God did not announce a change of mental framework— eg, 'Now you can start thinking in a new way about heavenly matters or, even better, about yourself.' No— God saved us through the blood of his Son's cross." (a quote from a podcast introduction from the Thomistic Institute.)

Do you hear the power of those words? The power of that historical, eternal event? When Jesus cried, "It is finished!" it was not merely a cry of relief that it was over and lost to history behind him. No. This was the finishing of our forgiveness, our redemption, our salvation— once and for all time— from this rock solid eternal position now in human history.

And you and I can know this truth. It's history. It's there forever. There's no changing it. And rather than it's fading further and further

away, it is actually growing louder and louder as history unfolds. This doesn't guarantee that everyone will receive it for the truth that it is. For we can still question truth in our day just like Pilate did in his day, even when it's right in front of us. But it does mean it is accessible; it is knowable. It is as knowable as Jesus himself. For it is a package deal.

When you hear the name of Jesus, you hear of the cross. And the way of salvation opens to your ears by putting the two together in the simple Gospel message that "Christ died for our sins," and "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Jesus said to Pilate, and to us today:

"...For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ---John 18:37b

Do you hear that truth? Do you hear it today as clearly as it was uttered two thousand years ago? Maybe even more clearly?!

If so, then take it to heart as your knowing the very voice of Jesus, the very Son of God and Savior calling you to eternal life with God. Yesterday, today and forever.