

## Return to the Truth

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Holy Week - Return to the Lord / Crucify; Forgiveness; Jesus' Death; Truth / Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 4:14–16; John 19:1–16

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- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Crucified King. Amen.

Last Wednesday, our Gospel tailed off with Pontius Pilate asking a cynical, rhetorical question: “What is truth?” But it turns out that he was asking the wrong question. The real question is not “*What* is truth?” but rather “*Who* is truth?”

Today, we look on as the truth hangs on a cross, bearing the sins of the whole world in order to reconcile us to God the Father. Truth was incarnate in Jesus Christ, and He willingly walked this path for you.

Our sermon series throughout this season of Lent has centered on God’s call through Joel for His people to **return to Him**. To admit to your sinful nature and to come to the One who is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,” the One who loves you, who provides for you, and who sent His Son to die for you, because He “relents over disaster.” His call today is for you to **return to truth, to turn to Jesus Christ**, for He is your life and your salvation.

The Chief Priests and the Scribes and the whole Council had delivered Jesus over to Pontius Pilate. They insisted that He had done evil and deserved punishment, even death. Pilate was onto them; he knew they were driven by **selfish motivations**, but he was backed into a corner. His choice was **impossible**: put an innocent man to death or lose control of the town as the population erupted in a riot.

Everything was **according to plan**, but it was not the plan of the chief priests. It was a plan that God Himself had put together. A plan of salvation necessitated

by mankind's fall into sin at the temptation of Satan. A plan that included a battle between the offspring of the serpent and the Offspring of the woman. A plan that required that the **heel** of the Son of Man be **bruised but would finally be complete as the head of the serpent's offspring was crushed**, and death was **stripped of its power**. This plan would play out on the cross, and **Jesus was the focus of the whole thing**.

Pilate tried to placate the accusers. He had Jesus flogged and tortured, mocked and insulted. Beaten to within an inch of His life. Dressed in a purple robe in a sarcastic nod to his divinity. **How could Pilate stand** before the people and point to Jesus, bloodied and bruised, and say with a straight face, *"I find no guilt in Him"*? As if, perhaps, he had been trying to beat it out of Him.

But the plan was already in motion, and there would be no changing the outcome. Jesus had to die. **"Crucify Him, crucify Him"** John tells us it was the chief priests and the officers who cried out those words, but it was not just they. *It was you and I.*

Our sinful nature rises up even as Christ demands our attention. The Law proscribes our actions, and we want no part of that. *"You shall have no other gods."* Fine, I'll have only one god, and it will be me. This man, this "Son of God," wants first place? **NO! HE MUST DIE. "CRUCIFY HIM!"**

*"Do not take the Lord's name in vain"?* Ha! this man has blasphemed and made Himself the son of God. **CRUCIFY HIM!**

*"Honor the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy"?* You can't tell me what to do. **CRUCIFY HIM!**

*Honor your Father and Mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not covet.* **CRUCIFY HIM!**

You chafe at God's leading. Your sinful nature wants nothing to do with it, because it is "hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's Law; indeed, it cannot." Your sinful nature rise up before the truth and closes its ears and shouts, **CRUCIFY HIM!**

But the truth is not so easily silenced. The truth echoes in your ears even as it hangs lifeless on a cross. The truth slips past your defenses, and the Word softens your heart. You may cry out in anger, **CRUCIFY HIM**, but the *truth* whispers gently in your ears, “Yes, crucify Me. For that is only way out of this mess. Someone has to die for all you have done, and I have come for just that purpose. **CRUCIFY ME.**”

Look at the Cross! Look at the One who hangs on it, bearing your sins, taking your punishment.

**English Standard Version Chapter 52**

his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,  
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind

**English Standard Version Chapter 53**

He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

Look at this man. Look at Your God. Beaten. Bruised. Bleeding. Suffering. Dying.

**English Standard Version Chapter 53**

Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;

**English Standard Version Chapter 53**

But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;

*He dies for you.* He carries your griefs, your sorrow, your sin, your guilt.

But why? Why did it have to be like this?

**English Standard Version Chapter 53**

it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;

**English Standard Version Chapter 53**

he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

**Your Savior. Your Lord.** Who died for your sins. Who made intercession for you. Who willingly poured out His soul to death so that you would have life. He is, “the way, the truth, and the life,” and “no one comes to the Father except through Him.”

And so your heart, led by the Holy Spirit, finally relents and cries out, **CRUCIFY HIM.** But not in anger. NO, now it is because you see that there is no other way.

**English Standard Version Chapter 64**

all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment  
and you can't fix it. You can't be good enough. You can't be without sin. You can't win your own salvation. Whatever good you might manage to pull off is completely overshadowed by your sinful nature.

**English Standard Version Chapter 19**

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

With God, you can be saved. But someone must endure the penalty. God's wrath must be satisfied. The wages of sin must be paid. Someone has to die.

And that someone is Jesus. He lived the perfect life you could not. He has taken all of your sin on Himself. He took all of it to the cross to satisfy God's wrath. And He gives you His own righteousness in return, asking only that you can trust Him and leave the work to Him.

Today, as you “*survey the wondrous cross ON which the Prince of Glory died,*” may you hear God’s call to **return to Him...to return to the truth...**to trust in the One who has promised you salvation and eternal life.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet

Sorrow and love flow mingled down!

Did e’er such love and sorrow meet

Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

- › May the peace of God, granted through the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ, keep you focused on the One who lived, died, and rose again to secure your salvation and eternal life. In the name of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.