



How do you know something is true? How do we decide between truth and error? I am not talking about insignificant matters, but eternal issues related to faith and life. We are in John 19 this morning. How do we know that Jesus was crucified, let alone know that he was raised from the dead? How do we know he was who he said he was? The last time I preached we were in John 18 where Pilate asked the same question.

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?”

What did Pilate mean when he said, “What is truth?” What is it a philosophical question? Was he asking whether or not truth is even knowable? I have heard this passage interpreted this way, but I think that gives Pilate too much credit. I think that Pilate knew that Jesus was standing before him on trumped up charges. He knew full well that the religious leaders had set him up. He saw the truth in Jesus’ words or at least the fact that Jesus was innocent, but he chose to look the other way. Political expediency and a fear of man won the day. I hate to quote Al Gore, but this really was an inconvenient truth. It was a truth Pilate could not handle so he brushed him off with a curt phrase.

In 1966, TIME magazine had the provocative cover title asking the question, Is God Dead? Then two years ago they attempted to recapture the same idea with the title Is Truth Dead? They used the exact same layout and font, so you know they were imitating their own cover from 51 years prior. They always come out with these crazy cover stories right around Easter.



The pursuit of truth is the core of who we are as believers, especially when we are celebrating the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. What is truth? How do we know something is true or not? And what are the implications of vital truths? Here's the outline.

1. TRUTH
2. ALLEGIANCE
3. WORSHIP

I won't be reading all of John 19 but keep your Bibles opened to it.

1. TRUTH—*I believe*

One way we can know something is true is by fulfilled prophecy. If I told you that in exactly fifteen seconds lightning was going to strike on the north side of the building and then it happened, you would know that not only did I tell the truth, I was able to predict true and actual events. This is the confirming nature of fulfilled prophecy. And we have several in John 19.

²⁴ “They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.” (Psalm 22:18)

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” (Psalm 69:21)

36 For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” (Psalm 22:17)

37 And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.” (Zechariah 12:10)

And then there are several other fulfilled prophecies about Jesus' crucifixion that are NOT recorded in John but are found in the other gospels.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 22:1)

Into your hands I commit my spirit. (Psalm 31:5)

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; (Zechariah 13:7)

And they made his grave with the wicked,
and with a rich man in his death, (Isaiah 53:9)

These are eight very specific fulfilled prophecies that are just about Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Someone much smarter than me figured out the mathematical odds of eight prophecies being fulfilled in one man? Here's the answer: 100,000,000,000,000,000. That's one in one hundred quadrillion!¹ But of course there are far more than eight prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. This same man discovered 108 fulfilled prophecies in the life of Jesus. Do you want to know the mathematical odds of 108 prophecies being fulfilled in one man? The answer is 10¹⁴⁷

Moreover, all of these fulfilled prophecies are in line with what Jesus said in John 18:4 “Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” He knew all that would happen to him. He knew all of these small, specific details would come true.

And these details are here to convince us that all of this is true. Right in before John recorded two of the fulfilled prophecies, he wrote this. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. John is referring to the fulfilled prophecies but he was also an eyewitness to Jesus’ death.

There’s an old skeptic’s theory out there called the “swoon theory” that says that Jesus just fainted. He was in a coma like state but didn’t die. The he woke up while he was in the tomb. I won’t go into the brutal details of a crucifixion. You have probably heard that all before, but notice what happened before John wrote this verse. “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.” Not only was Jesus brutally crucified but he also had a spear thrust through his side. Most people believe this penetrated his heart. He died that afternoon and John was a reliable witness of all of it.

But he was also a reliable witness to Jesus’ entire ministry, as he told us in chapter 21. “This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24) There is so much evidence for the truth of these events.

But Christians are faced with an interesting paradox when it comes to truth. Our truth is based on historically reliable facts. Lots of it. We believe things based on facts and eye witness testimony but the things we believe are supernatural and miraculous. That’s the paradox, do you see? Much of our culture has an anti-supernatural bias. They outright reject anything that is supernatural. They don’t believe in miracles, not because of evidence, but because they decided in advance not to believe. For example, just this past week I heard a crazy explanation for the burning bush. This guy said that the burning bush was an acacia tree that gave off hallucinogenic fumes, which made Moses believe he was talking with God. Without God’s miraculous intervention, these sorts of people will never believe. But we have mountains of evidence that supports ordinary events in the Bible as well as miraculous events. From a human perspective, Jesus’ death was ordinary, like any other Roman crucifixion, but his resurrection was miraculous. We have sufficient evidence to believe both. Do you believe?

2. ALLEGIANCE—*I obey*

Jesus is our king. This was also prophesied in the Old Testament. And you see all sides of this question in this chapter. The soldiers used his claim to be a king as an excuse to mercilessly mock Jesus. ³They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. Then they put a crown of thorns on his head and robed him in royal purple. Clearly, they did not believe he was a king.

He was still wearing the crown and the robe when Pilate first brought him out. When he announced Jesus to the crowd, he said, “Behold the man!” But then a little while later he said to

the Jews, “Behold your King!” Immediately after that, the Jews freaked out. 15 They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

What was Pilate doing here? He was toying with them. He knew they had Jesus arrested on trumped up charges. He knew that they had effectively tricked him into crucifying an innocent man. This Roman governor had been duped by his enemy and he wasn't happy. So when he presented Jesus as the king of the Jews, he was goading them. He's was doing all that he could do get under their skin. The final jab at them came in the form of the sign hung above Jesus' head. 19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Of course, the Jews wanted Pilate to change it, but he refused. This political battle had the effect of further solidifying their rejection of Jesus. It caused them to cry out for his crucifixion. It led to a mob reaction of utter hatred.

But when Pilate hung that sign above Jesus' head, it was the most truthful thing Pilate had ever done in his life. To Pilate, it was politics. To us, it is ironic. But in reality, it was a truthful announcement of the king.

The high priest Caiaphas also an incredibly ironic statement about a week before this.

49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” 51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they made plans to put him to death (John 11:49-53).

They rejected Jesus as their king, but we know that to be a grievous error with eternal consequences. He is our king and therefore, we owe him our allegiance. No earthly king would ever allow such treachery and disloyalty we show to our king. I think it is helpful to label our disobedience as treason.

Do you know what the greatest real estate deal in US history is? The Louisiana Purchase gained us 512 million acres at a cost of less than three cents per acre. This amazing land deal is also associated with one of the greatest acts of treason in US history. Vice President Aaron Burr contacted Great Britain to inform them that the residents of recently purchased Louisiana would welcome British protection.² The ink on our Constitution was barely dry when he offered one-half of the United States back to a nation from whom we had recently won our independence. In current dollar amounts, he sold out his nation for a mere \$30,000.

It is easy to be shocked at such obvious treason but at the same time we fail to see that we commit treasonous acts against our king. We have gained our freedom from slavery and tyranny only to sell out to our former enemy. Our allegiance to our king should bring about obedience. But not merely grudging obedience, but rather worshipful obedience.

3. WORSHIP—*I delight*

We get a beautiful picture of worship obedience through Joseph of Arimathea. Mark tells us that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, Matthew tells us that he was rich. Luke tells us that he was looking for the Kingdom of God and John tells us he was one of Jesus' disciples. But he also tells us that he was secretly a disciple. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he was in company with the most powerful organization in all of Judaism. And the crazy part is that he was actually present during the mock trial. Matthew tells us that the whole council was present along with Caiaphas. But after this day, no longer was his belief in Jesus a secret. Because he was a member of the Sanhedrin, he was able to gain access to Pilate and ask for Jesus' body.

Think about the courage this would have taken. At that moment in time, Jesus was the most hated man in Jerusalem. Pilate himself had signed his death warrant. And this secret disciple courageously approached Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. If that were not enough, Nicodemus, who was also part of the Sanhedrin, joined him. Early in Jesus' ministry when Nicodemus went to Jesus at night, it is quite clear he was not yet a follower of Jesus. But he was a serious seeker. One wonders if Nicodemus is the one who told Joseph about Jesus. Someone told him and who would Joseph have been more likely to listen to than a fellow Sanhedrin member. Somewhere between John chapter three and John chapter 19, both of these men became believers of Jesus. Did Nicodemus witness to Joseph or was it the other way around? Either way, these two almost certainly had regular but secret conversations. Today we would refer to these two friends as "secret believers."

We can criticize Joseph and Nicodemus for being secret disciples of Jesus, but they did what no one else was willing to do. They risked their reputations and their very livelihood by asking for Jesus' body. But then they did something even more amazing. They carefully wrapped his body with linens and spices and laid it in a tomb. This was not the normal work of wealthy members of the Sanhedrin. Even touching a dead body would have made them unclean. This was a job for women and poor people. For these two men, this would have been the epitome of humility in action. All of this served to illustrate their deep worship of Jesus.

Think about the process of preparing Jesus' body for burial. This was Jesus, after all. Not an ordinary man. They knew him as the God-man. Before they wrapped the body in linen cloths and spices, they would have cleaned his body. And of course Jesus' body would have been caked with blood and dirt. I can imagine them with a basin of water gently scrubbing away the blood; maybe picking out pieces of bone and metal that had stuck in his flesh from the scourging. They would see the wounds and the bruises and perhaps the most visible would have been his side where he was pierced—a gaping hole with dried blood.

Here's what I imagine could have happened next. As they were involved with this intimate, worshipful task, suddenly Isaiah 53 came to mind.

But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶We all like sheep have gone astray;
each of us have turned to his own way;

and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

They were not merely believers in Jesus. They did not just give their allegiance to Jesus. They worshipped Jesus with their reputations and with their money bags. While these three—belief, allegiance and worship—are not mutually exclusive, they seem to grow to a crescendo. There's a certain development that takes places with these three. You start with simple belief. That leads to allegiance which in turn grows into genuine worship.

A lot of the Bible is intimidating to me for various reasons and Psalm 119 is one of those. It is intimidating because it is sooo long. In fact, in my Bible reading plan I just mark off each chapter that I read and I skip around from book to book. As I was working way through the Psalms I came to chapter 119 and I thought to myself, "Not today. I don't have time for that long chapter." So I circled it and went on to the next, much shorter chapters, fully intending to get back to 119. Well I finally did last week and I discovered something I had not seen before.

When you read this Psalm you will see that almost every single verse is about the Word of God and it's foundation in the Psalmist's life. But it's so much more than that. All throughout the Psalm is a pure delight in God's Word. But not just a delight of words on a page but of God himself.

¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

²⁴ Your testimonies are my delight;
they are my counselors.

³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.

⁴⁷ for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.

⁷⁰ their heart is unfeeling like fat,
but I delight in your law.

⁷⁷ Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.

⁹² If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.

¹⁴³ Trouble and anguish have found me out,
but your commandments are my delight.

¹⁷⁴ I long for your salvation, O LORD,
and your law is my delight.

¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!

Heart is mentioned 15 times! Love appears 19 times. Here are a few more examples.

²⁰ My soul is consumed with longing
for your rules at all times.

⁷² The law of your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹³⁶ My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your law.

Not only is delight, love and wonder woven throughout this Psalm but so is believe and obedience. Believe. Obey. Delight.

I have a challenge for your encouragement I am calling 22 days of delight. The format of Psalm 119 is an alphabetic acrostic, meaning that the first letters of each line in Hebrew follow through the alphabet, 8 verses per letter. The challenge is to read one 8 verse section every day for the next 22 days. I am confident you can read eight verses per day. But you're not just reading these eight verses. You are seeking belief, obedience and delight in these words. It's so short, you can read it, mediate on it and pray through it in a few minutes—or longer if you want.

We are delighting in the God-man who was led like a lamb to the slaughter for you and for me.

Rich Maurer
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¹ <https://christinprophecy.org/articles/applying-the-science-of-probability-to-the-scriptures/>

² <https://historycollection.co/20-acts-of-treason-in-american-history/2/>