

Truth — What is it?

John 18: 36-38.

Seekers for Light.

Fourteen Addresses to Edinburgh Students.

by W. T. P. Wolston, M.D.

Chapter 2

Truth — What is it?

Pilate's question, "What is truth?" is, I believe, the great question of the moment. It is of vast importance to have the truth. It is a profound mistake not to have it, if it is to be had. Many a man has it not. The Christian has it. The believer in Christ has it. I remember many years ago one of the Professors of this University, with whom I was very intimate, and at whose house I was one evening, after a long conversation, turned, and said to me, "Look here, doctor, I am earnestly seeking after the truth." "I have got it, sir," I replied. "What do you mean?" "I mean this, I have Christ, and He is the truth."

Christ is the truth, and I want to draw your attention tonight to these precious words of the Saviour which I have read — uttered by Him when surrounded by everything that the enmity of man could bring against Him, when betrayed, denied, blindfolded, and passed on from one careless high priest to another, and then trundled away to the judgment-seat of a godless man, as Pilate undoubtedly was. Yet in the face of all this, what was His attitude? Look at Christ! Look how quiet, how calm, albeit how sad. Then it was He said: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Pilate carelessly says "What is truth?" and then turns his back on Truth personified. Ah! my friends, there is many a man doing that today. Pilate is not the only man who has turned his back on the Truth.

What I greatly desire, in this course of meetings which I will hold with some of you, is that the truth, God's truth, may simply pass before us, and I shall make no apology for Scripture. I believe it to be the Word of God. I believe it to be a revelation from God, of His mind, of His thoughts, of His purposes, and of His counsels; that we have in the Scriptures the truth written, and that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ we have truth incarnate. The result is, that the man who receives the truth of Scripture, in the power of the Holy Ghost, will invariably be brought into contact with Christ, who is the Truth.

First then, you may ask me, "What is truth?" I do not know that I can make it plain to you; but so far as I can grasp the meaning of truth, it is this: Truth is the exact, the perfect, and absolute expression and delineation of that which is. It is the identity of the statement and the fact stated. I could not say, that God was the Truth. He is true. God is true, but of the Lord Jesus Christ it is said, "That grace and truth came by him" (John 1: 17). Nay, more, He Himself has said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14: 6). He was the Truth; and I hope to show you that He was the truth about everything — the truth about God; the truth about man; the truth about the heart of God, the nature of God, and the claims of God; and the truth, moreover, about man in every possible relation of his being. He was no mere man, for He was verily God; nevertheless He was a real, true, perfect man. Get hold of that, I implore you. That Jesus, whom we have read about, was a real, true, perfect man, as much a man as I am standing here before you this evening, sin alone excepted. As man He was in this scene to declare God, and to divinely meet man. "To this end," He says, "was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." None could reveal God, none could unveil the love of God, or declare the heart of God, other than He who came from God. There was none who knew the claims of God, and could meet those claims, except the One who came from God. He must come from God, if He is to bring God to me, and He must be a man, a veritable man, to bring me to God; because I am a sinful man, a sinner. So are you. Sin carries its consequences and merits judgment, and the truth as to this alone is seen fully in Christ.

In the Lord Jesus Christ the absolute truth about everything is beautifully blended. The perfect and whole truth about everything is seen in every part, and not one side of the truth more than another. We get the truth that "God is love," for instance, and see the reality of the truth of God's love in Christ's self-sacrifice, for He gave Himself that He might unveil the heart of God to us, and bring us to God by His death.

In the scene before us Pilate is in the presence of Jesus, the Truth, and, when He speaks, turns his back upon Him. I trust you will not imitate him; because we live in a day when men are slighting Christ. I find many young men who are Pilate's followers; in fact I speak the truth when I say that perhaps nine young men out of ten whom I meet are not believers, but, alas! are serious doubters. I want to know if they are happier, if they are better, or if they are holier men; I have never found it to be so yet I can recollect, when I was an unconverted young man, and when the truth was unknown to me. I know, too, what I was after I was converted. I know what a wonderful change came over me when I came to know the Truth, and was brought into contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence I want you to get into contact with Christ.

Now observe this, if Jesus be not what He said He was, if He be not what He declared Himself in the Gospels to be, you must repel Him, and everything about Him altogether. Jesus said that He was the Son of God. Was He the Son of God? He says, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Only the Son could make the Father known. Surely, as He Himself says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John 3: 13). This claim must either be accepted or rejected. I must either own what He says, I must acknowledge the truth that He came from heaven, or refuse absolutely to believe it, and proclaim Christ to be not an impostor, but One who knowingly spoke what was not true. If He said a single word which was not true, then He cannot be the Truth. I do not mince matters, for I must either own

Him to be what He said He was, or else deny Him all right to the allegiance of my heart and conscience.

Although I thus speak, I delight to acknowledge, and heartily believe that He is what He said He was; and I have proved Him to be what He said He was — a Saviour. If you have never known Him as your Saviour, let me now urge you to put Him to the test. You accept the truth of that which He says concerning Himself, and then you will find out that you need a Saviour, and that He is that Saviour, and He alone. I know well that men would like to set aside His claim on the ground that they do not need saving. But you have to meet God, and where are you going to spend eternity? How are you going to meet God? You have to go into eternity! Where will you spend it? Serious questions these! Again, are you tonight fitted to meet God? Is your conscience purged? Are your sins purged away? Are you fitted to pass into the presence of a God of infinite holiness? I tell you frankly you are not, unless you have had to do with Christ. If you have had nothing to do with Him, you are not ready. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," said the Lord Jesus, and then He adds immediately, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

I come therefore to the question, an important one for you and myself — Have I got the truth? If I am not of the truth, I have not heard His voice. The man who has not heard the voice of the Son of God does not possess the truth. You can hear other voices; for there are plenty of voices nowadays. The voice of the truth is that of Him, who could say, "I am the truth," and who could say to the man, who told Him, he had power to put Him to death, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." He it is who says, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Then, have you heard His voice?

Well, you say, I do not know that He exists. You would soon know that He exists if you heard His voice. Oh, but, you say, I was never brought into contact with Him. More the pity; because He says, "Every one that is of the truth hears my voice." The confession of a man, that he has not heard the voice of Jesus, is a tacit confession that he has not got the truth. Now, I say again, above all things get the truth. I do not care what things I lose, or what I have not got, if I have got the truth. Give me the truth — the truth about everything, about God, about myself, about righteousness, about the claims, and the heart of God. "God is love!" How do you know that? you ask. He gave His Son. "God is light!" What is the meaning of that? Light reveals all that is unlike, or opposed to itself; it touches the root of things, because light makes manifest "God is love." The birth of Jesus, and the cross — the death of Jesus, prove the love of God. They are the demonstrations of that wonderful truth. "God is light." Will He pass over sin? Impossible! The Word of God is simple and plain upon this point "All have sinned;" furthermore it says, "The wages of sin is death." People try to explain death away, but you cannot. You may gild your hearses, drape your coffins with costliest flowers, decorate your graveyards, and put up magnificent monuments on your tombs, but you cannot get rid of death; and death, we are told, entered into the world by sin (Rom. 5: 12) — the sin of the first man — Adam.

But death is not the end of man. If death were the end of man, then there would be no resurrection; but, I have learned the truth of the resurrection, through Christ. The man Christ Jesus, for God's glory, and the blessing of sinners, reached death and the grave as the end of a

pathway of perfect obedience and dependence. God could not do otherwise than raise, and glorify Him, and He has done it. The first man reached the grave as the fruit, and penalty of sin, and if you go into death, you will lie there, just because you are a sinner. But I know a Man, who went into death, and came out of it.

I hear His voice tonight, saying, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." I have also heard Him say, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead" [in their sins, of course] "shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (John 5: 25). Oh! what a wonderful thing this is, a man springs into life, into eternal life, by hearing the voice of the Son of God!

The first great truths I learn then, are these, that, "God is love," and "God is light." All is made manifest in Jesus. The end Christ had in view is here stated. He comes down into the scene, and finds man a sinner in his sins, under the sentence of death, and passing on to it, and He passes into death for him, that he might be saved.

Supposing death were to overtake you, what then? You may not be terribly afraid at the thought of death, but what comes after death? No man can tell that, you say. I beg your pardon, I know what comes after death. I know One who has been into death, and has come out of it. The Christian — if he die — departs to be with Christ, who has been into death, and is now at the right hand of God, a living mighty Saviour, who leads the one that trusts in Him, into eternal life, and sets him down in the glory, where He now is. Every one who is of the truth hears His voice. That is it. It is very simple. Until I hear His voice, it is quite clear, I have not got the truth.

Now let us inquire, What is the truth about man? Man is a sinner. "The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost" (Luke 19: 10). Is it true that man is lost? It must be true, or Christ has told a lie. He says, "The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost" You might turn to me, and say, But who are lost? All, without exception. Have you heard His voice? Have I heard His voice? If not, I am yet lost; you are yet lost. You may say, But surely you do not put us all down as lost? The Son of God says it, and He makes no mistakes.

Not long ago, a friend of mine was preaching in this town to a very large audience. At the close of the meeting, I came in contact with an excessively intelligent, and withal earnest young fellow, one of your own set. I got into conversation with him, and asked him if he were saved. He said, "How can I know?" "Well," I replied, "I know that I am saved, thank God. Don't you know it?" "No," he replied, "but I am doing my best to live a proper, moral, straight, and square life." "Quite right," I said, "that is exactly what you should do." "Won't that have some weight with God?" he asked. "Won't that curry favour with God?" "Well," I said, "stop a moment. Will your life compare with the life of Jesus?" He thought a minute, and then said, "What do you mean?" "I mean this — Do you think your life will compare with the life of Jesus?" After thinking a little, he replied, "I could not say that. I am doing my best to live a moral, proper, and square life, but I cannot say that it could compare with that of Jesus." "Well then," I said, "you won't do for God; because only one man will suit Him, and that is Jesus; He is the Truth. He is what a man should be. A man should be holy, spotless, sinless, undefiled, absolutely devoted and true to God. That is what Jesus was." He thought a moment, and then turning round sharply to

me, said, "If what you say is true, every man is lost." "Yes," I said, "you have hit the nail on the head this time. That is exactly what Scripture says. Every man is lost, and 'the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost.'"

So you see, my friends, Christ brings out the truth as to our state. We are sinners; and, if sinners, we are under sentence of death, and lost. If you will turn to another portion of Scripture, where, in parabolic guise, the Lord brings out the truth, whether it be the shepherd who sought his sheep, the woman who lost her money, or the father receiving his son, you will find that the one word He uses is "Lost." The sheep was lost, the silver was lost, the prodigal was lost. It is man's state before God, and, what I urge upon you is, that He comes to you this evening, and bears witness to the truth of the condition of man — hence your condition.

Pilate turns from Jesus with the question, "What is truth?" Contemptuously, he turns his back upon Him, who is the Truth. Pilate certainly desired to save Jesus. He did not want to put the Lord to death. I do not believe he had any animus against Christ; but, mark, Pilate got an opportunity of knowing the truth, and, missed it. That is the point. I do not say he was not touched. I do not say he was not roused. I think he was; he wanted to let the Lord off. He had a feeling of awe, a feeling that he had better not touch Him. At length, when he had made up his mind that He was guiltless, and three times had said, "I find no fault in him," he pronounced sentence against Him. "I have found no cause of death in him; I will therefore chastise him and let him go," gives evidence of how impressed Pilate was. But the Jews clamoured for his death, so he gave way, and was about to sign his death-warrant, apparently, when there came a message from his wife, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matt 27: 19). After this, I think, he desired more strenuously than ever to let Jesus go. When he met Jesus, He gave him the opportunity of choosing the truth, but he failed to take it. He then thought he might release Him to the people, for at that time, as an expression of his clemency, he allowed a prisoner to go free. But the people would not have Him: "Not this man, but Barabbas," they cried. They would not have Christ, and Pilate yielded to their demand, for he was afraid of the world.

I will tell you one thing, which would be most difficult for you to do, and that is, for you to stand up for Christ. You would fearlessly expose yourself to disease, you would lead a forlorn hope, and go boldly up to the cannon's mouth, with the chance of having your head blown off; but you would find it next to impossible to stand up for Christ among your comrades. How do you know? I will ask you this question, Have you stood up for Christ? Has the Lord said of you, "There is a man that is really for Me"? I will tell you, by so much, as we are influenced by the world, just so much are we under its thumb. Just, by so much, as one wants the favour of the world, so much are we governed by it. Pilate was going to let Jesus off, but the Jews, whom he professedly governed, really governed him, as they cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Ah! Pilate did not want to lose the patronage of Caesar. He did not want to lose the favour of the world. Satan knows the weak spot in every man's heart, and knows how to touch it too. The world's approval was worth more to Pilate than the possession of the truth. Caesar's friends must side with Caesar, and Jesus' friends must side with Jesus. Pilate preferred the friendship of Caesar, and, making up his mind irrevocably, parted with Christ. He got a splendid chance, but lost it. Do not you imitate him. You have the chance tonight of taking Christ's side; you have an opportunity, every man in this hall has an opportunity. "Every one that

is of the truth heareth my voice." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10: 9, 10). The man who will take his stand for the Lord Jesus Christ will find what God's salvation is.

Pilate then dooms Him to die. Jesus goes forth wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. He, who was the Truth, wore upon His head the emblem of the curse. One thing comes out clearly in the cross of Christ, and that is His self-sacrifice. He goes to the cross, and there Jesus brings out the truth as to God's nature when sin is in question. He who knew no sin was made sin, and on that tree God forsook Him. We read elsewhere, "From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour, and about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli! Eli! lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27: 45, 46). He was then bearing witness, as to what the truth regarding God's judgment of sin was. It was this, that sin could only separate the soul from God. He was forsaken by God, when He was bearing the sins of many. In the very moment of bearing those sins He made atonement for them. He presented His precious life to God, and He who knew no sin, was made sin, that He might put it away by the sacrifice of Himself.

Then we notice Jesus cried out, "It is finished." What was finished? By His death He met all the claims of God in righteousness, and consequently can meet all the claims of our consciences. "He suffered for sins once, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18). Christ has accomplished redemption by His sacrifice. He has borne our sins, and put them away. He has annulled death, and met the claims of God. He, as man, went into the grave, and God has taken Him out of the grave; and He is now at the right hand of God, and the Holy Ghost has come down to tell us that He will quickly come again. Have you then heard and believed the gospel of your salvation? Have you heard the Word, believed the Truth, and received the gospel of your salvation? Oh! tonight may you hear Him. I have heard Him, and my heart bows down with gratitude when I hear that dying Saviour utter the words, "It is finished." I believe it as I hear it. "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

Well, I am brought down by the sense of my need as a sinner, and, as a sinner, look to Him, and get the knowledge of what He has done. It is all finished, and now the question is very simple, Is Christ to be your Saviour? Are you to be Christ's, is He to be yours. Will you hear His voice tonight? "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Oh! wonderful fact. He that heareth His voice is of the truth. What have I heard Him witness? To this — that man was lost, undone. And then I get the other side of the truth, the love of God has come out in the giving up of His only Son to become the substitute of sinners, that He might save every one who believes on Him. Do you think it is a poor thing to become a Christian? You never made a greater mistake in your life. It is the grandest thing in the world. Ah! but you say, "You are old and grey-haired." Well, I was converted when I was twenty, and I am deeply thankful that I have known the Lord all these years. I never regret that I was won for Jesus when I was just turned twenty. You turn to Jesus just now. You could not have a better opportunity, and I implore you, hear the voice of the Son of God. Do not forget this, "Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice." Have you heard it?

