

Small Group Guide: Jesus on Trial

Based on John 18:27-40



Opening Prayer

Begin by asking God to open hearts and minds to His truth, and to help the group see Jesus more clearly through this study.

Icebreaker Question

What was a significant cultural moment or TV show from your growing up years that "everyone" knew about? How does that compare to today's fragmented media culture?

Sermon Summary

This passage explores Jesus' trials before Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate—a web of political intrigue involving competing powers all trying to maintain control. Yet in His apparent weakness, Jesus remained fully in control, fulfilling prophecy. When Pilate asked, "What is truth?" the Truth Himself stood before him. The world, relying on human systems, fails to recognize truth even when it's right in front of them.

Key Takeaways

1. **Jesus was in control even in His weakest moment** - The religious and political leaders thought they were manipulating events, but they were actually fulfilling Scripture.
2. **We are guilty of the treason Jesus died for** - We all try to sit on the throne of our own lives instead of submitting to God.
3. **Human systems will always fail to recognize truth when they rely on themselves** - Pilate couldn't see truth standing before him because he was depending on his own judgment.
4. **Jesus was traded for Barabbas** - The innocent Son of God was exchanged for a guilty son of man, picturing the gospel for all humanity.
5. **Our hope must ultimately be in Christ, not political systems** - While we can be involved in our communities, our ultimate trust must be in the King of Kings.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. **What surprised you about the political backdrop of Jesus' trial?** How does understanding the competing interests of Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate change your view of this passage?
2. **Why did the Jewish leaders bring Jesus to Pilate instead of judging Him themselves?** What does this reveal about their motivations?
3. **What did Jesus mean when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world"?** How does this statement challenge or comfort you?

Personal Reflection

4. **Pilate asked, "What is truth?" while Truth stood before him.** When have you struggled to recognize God's truth in your own life? What kept you from seeing it?
5. **The sermon mentioned we are guilty of "treason" against God—trying to sit on the throne of our own lives.** In what areas of your life are you most tempted to be your own king rather than submitting to God?

6. **Jesus was traded for Barabbas (literally "son of his father")—an ordinary guilty man.** How does this picture of substitution deepen your understanding of what Christ did for you?

Application

7. **The sermon discussed how politics has become our "pop culture."** How can we stay engaged as citizens while keeping our ultimate hope in Christ rather than political systems?
8. **The example of Nigerian Christians was mentioned—they didn't engage politically and now face persecution.** How do we balance political engagement with keeping our primary focus on the gospel? Where is that line?
9. **"The world, when relying on itself, will fail to see truth when it's standing right in front of them."** How can we help others see Jesus as the Truth in our fragmented, skeptical culture?
10. **Jesus' sheep "know His voice."** What practices help you recognize and respond to Jesus' voice in your daily life?

Practical Applications

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to this week:

- **Daily Truth Check:** Each evening, identify one moment where you tried to be "king" of your own life instead of submitting to God. Confess it and thank Jesus for His sacrifice.
- **Media Fast:** Take a break from political news/social media for 3 days and replace that time with Scripture reading, focusing on who Jesus is.
- **Voice Recognition:** Set three daily reminders on your phone. When they go off, pause and ask, "What is Jesus saying to me right now?" Write down what comes to mind.
- **Substitution Meditation:** Spend 15 minutes reflecting on the Barabbas story. Journal about what it means that Jesus took your place.
- **Pray for Persecuted Christians:** Research what's happening to Christians in Nigeria (or another country) and commit to praying for them daily this week.

- **Truth Conversation:** Have a conversation with someone this week about what "truth" means to them, looking for an opportunity to share that Jesus claimed to BE the truth.
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Closing Reflection

Read John 18:37-38 aloud together:

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." "What is truth?" retorted Pilate.

Silent Reflection (2-3 minutes): In the quiet, ask yourself: *Am I listening to Jesus' voice? Do I recognize the Truth when He speaks to me?*

Closing Prayer

Pray together, thanking Jesus for:

- Being the Truth that stands firm when all human systems fail
- Willingly being traded for us (like Barabbas)
- Defeating death so we can have new life
- Being the King of Kings who never fails

Ask Him to help you recognize His voice and submit to His kingship in every area of your life.

5-Day Devotional: Truth Stands Firm



Day 1: When Truth Stands Before Us

Reading: John 18:28-38

Devotional:

Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" while Truth Himself stood before him. How often do we search for answers while ignoring the One who is the Answer? In our world of competing narratives and political systems, we can become so focused on human solutions that we miss the divine presence right before us. Jesus declared, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Are we listening? Today, examine where you're seeking truth—in news feeds, political movements, or human wisdom—instead of in Christ. The world's systems will fail, but Jesus remains constant. Truth isn't a concept to debate; it's a Person to know. Open your heart to hear His voice above the noise.

Day 2: The Trade We Didn't Deserve

Reading: Mark 15:6-15; Isaiah 53:4-6

Devotional:

Barabbas walked free while Jesus took his place. The guilty was released; the Innocent was condemned. This exchange mirrors the gospel itself—Jesus Barabbas, "son of a father," traded for Jesus Christ, Son of the Father. We are all Barabbas, deserving judgment for our treason against God's throne. Yet Christ took our place. Isaiah prophesied, "He was pierced for our transgressions." This wasn't a mistake or political maneuvering gone wrong; this was God's sovereign plan. The very cowardice and manipulation of religious and political leaders fulfilled Scripture perfectly. Reflect today on the freedom you've received through Christ's sacrifice. You were the guilty one released. How does this truth change how you live?

Day 3: Treason Against the King

Reading: Genesis 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19

Devotional:

From Eden forward, humanity has committed cosmic treason. We've wanted to sit on God's throne, to be our own moral arbiters, to determine truth for ourselves. Satan's ancient lie—"you will be like God"—still echoes in our desire for control and autonomy. Jesus was accused of the very sin we commit daily: claiming kingship that belongs to another. But He was innocent; we are guilty. He stood trial for our rebellion. Consider the areas where you've crowned yourself king—your finances, relationships, decisions, morality. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world's systems, but it demands our full allegiance. Today, step down from your self-made throne and bow before the rightful King.

Day 4: Sheep Know Their Shepherd's Voice

Reading: John 10:1-18, 27-30

Devotional:

In an agricultural society, shepherds could call their sheep from mixed flocks, and their sheep would respond to their voice alone. Jesus says His sheep know His voice and follow Him. In our age of information overload, countless voices compete for our attention—media, influencers, politicians, even religious leaders. But do we recognize our Shepherd's voice above the noise? Truth isn't found in the loudest voice or the most persuasive argument. Jesus is Truth personified, and those who belong to Him discern His call. Spend time today in silence, asking God to tune your heart to His voice. What is He speaking to you? His sheep don't follow strangers—are you following voices that aren't His?

Day 5: Hope Beyond Human Systems

Reading: Daniel 2:31-45; Revelation 11:15

Devotional:

All human kingdoms—political systems, religious institutions, cultural movements—will ultimately crumble. Daniel saw a stone "cut out without hands" that would crush earthly kingdoms and establish God's eternal reign. While we live in this world and can participate in its systems, our ultimate hope cannot rest there. Nigerian Christians face persecution partly because they withdrew from civic engagement; yet Western Christians often place too much hope in political solutions. The balance is engagement without idolatry. Jesus' kingdom is coming, and it won't arrive through elections or revolutions, but through His return. Until then, we're ambassadors, not architects of earthly kingdoms. Where have you placed hope in human systems? Redirect that hope to the King of Kings whose kingdom will never end.