

## Truth Is Tougher Than Nails!

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Mark Croston: Hello, everybody. Hey. I'm so glad to see each and every one of you. So excited to be here on today. We want to welcome those who are joining us from Coral Gables, downtown, online, Miami Springs, Palmetto Bay, Redland, and West Kendall. I'm so excited about what is happening here in this place and what Pastor Rick is leading us in this particular sermon series on today.

If you have your Bibles, going to ask you to stand with me for the reading of the word of God. We're going to start with John chapter 18 and verse number 28. The word of the Lord reads like this, "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They did not enter the headquarters themselves. Otherwise, they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover. Pilate came out to them and said, 'What charge do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man weren't a criminal, we wouldn't have handed him over to you.' Pilate told them, 'You take him and judge him according to your law.' 'It's not legal for us to put anyone to death,' the Jews declared. They said this so that Jesus' words might be fulfilled, indicating what kind of death he was going to die."

"Then Pilate went back into the headquarters, summoned Jesus, and said to him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Are you asking this on your own or have others told you about me?' 'I'm not a Jew, am I?' Pilate replied. 'Your own nation and chief priest handed you over to me. What have you done?' 'My kingdom is not of this world,' Jesus said. 'If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews, but as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' 'You are a king, then?' Pilate asked. 'You say that I'm a king,' Jesus replied. 'I was born for this. I have come into the world for this, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' 'What is truth?' Pilate said."

As we talk about this series today, Tougher Than Nails, I want us to think about this idea that truth is tougher than nails. You may be seated.

Let's bow and pray.

Father, now we thank you for this day that you've given to us. We thank you for this time that we have to share together. God, we just pray in these moments that you will open up your word for our hearts and for our lives today. Speak to us, God, we pray even in these moments at the point of our greatest need. Make us better for having come here today and allow these moments to give your name, which is worthy, glory and honor and praise. We thank you for the privilege, in Jesus' name, amen.

You know, one of my favorite movie scenes is from the 1992 movie A Few Good Men. In this movie, Tom Cruise plays a young Navy lawyer who is defending two men in a courtroom. In the climatic courtroom scene, Tom Cruise is making some questions to Jack Nicholson who plays a superior officer who is on the witness

stand. Tom Cruise fires and confronts him and says, "I want the truth." Jack Nicholson fires back and says, "You can't handle the truth."

Well, maybe that's where we live today. Maybe we live in a world that really can't handle the truth. We watch television and we watch people spin the truth. We are fascinated by this new phrase where we misspeak the truth and where we fabricate the truth, we ignore the truth, and sometimes we just make up our own truth.

Well, I want you to know that truth was as important in the multicultural world to which John writes as it is in our multicultural world today. In John's time, the Greeks, when they thought about truth, would say that it was the accurate perspective of reality. That was their definition, the accurate perspective of reality. When the Romans talked about truth, they would say that it is a factual representation of the events. That's the Roman idea, a factual representation of the events. In the Hebrew mind, truth primarily conveyed the idea of faithfulness. In particular, they would illustrate this talking about the faithfulness of our almighty God. Truth was very, very important to the people in that society in which they lived.

It's interesting to note that the Oxford English dictionary, the 2016 word of the year they have declared is the word post-truth. Isn't that something? It's a new word, post-truth. It is the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true rather than the concepts or facts known to be true. We live in this world, our new word is post-truth. Well, that really causes some difficulty for us, doesn't it?

See, one of our problems is that society has become so fake, that the truth absolutely bothers people. We live in a time, in an age, where it just seems like nobody really wants to hear the truth. We just want to hear about how wonderful we are, how great life is, and how everything that we do is really okay. I'm okay and you're okay and we're all okay. Would you just touch the person next to you and just tell them right now, "You're okay."

Well, the truth is we're not always okay. We're in a time like Romans chapter 1 verse 25 speaks of when it says, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the creator who is praised forever, amen." Without truth, we live in a time like that spoken of in the book of Judges in 21:25 which declares, "In those days, there was no king in Israel," and listen to this, "and everyone did whatever seemed right to him." Well, the question is: How can you have a civilized society and a good life in a time like that?

I want you to see through our conversation today that we all need the truth and that the truth, in spite of every assault that may come against it, the truth is tougher than nails.

The storyline that picks up here in the text is difficult. Jesus has been arrested and is in court, going through trial. Some of you may have some experience with that. I don't know. Well, look at what happens in the midst of this scenario. First, we see

that the truth gets ostracized. It says in verse number 28 that they led Jesus to Caiaphas who was the high priest at that particular time, to the governor's headquarters. Pilate was the governor. It says it was early in the morning. Now, listen to this. It said they did not enter the headquarters themselves. Otherwise, they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover. Now, isn't this something? Did you get that? See, it was okay for them to desire to kill somebody. That was going to be okay, but it was going to defile them if they walked into the governor's headquarters. This is just way off the chain here.

In this passage, notice that not only has the idea of truth ostracized by these religious leaders, we see that, but Jesus is ostracized as well. He is the truth, you know. He has been betrayed by his friend, Judas. He was deserted by his disciples. He was cut off by his family. Now he is being cut up by the religious leaders. Sometimes when you stand for the truth, unfortunately, you may have to stand alone. Don't be surprised by that. Often the truth gets ostracized.

Second, we see not only does the truth get ostracized, pushed to the side, but often the truth is scandalized. Look at verses 29 and 30. It says, "Then Pilate came out to them and said, 'What charge do you bring against this man?'" More doubletalk by the religious leaders in verse number 30. They answered, "If this man weren't a criminal, we wouldn't have handed him over to you." Now, what are you talking about? They didn't really have any charge to bring against him and so they simply give this religious doubletalk and say, "Well, if he wasn't a criminal, we wouldn't have handed him over to you."

Look at verse 31, "So Pilate told them, 'Well, you take him yourself and judge him according to your laws.'" Then listen to what they said. "They said, 'It is not legal for us to put anyone to death,' the Jews declared." They didn't really have the idea of truth and justice and the American way in their minds at all from the very beginning. All they really wanted to do was to kill this man and so they didn't care what the charge was, they didn't care what the issue was, they didn't care what they had to do, all they knew was that they wanted to find a way to kill Jesus Christ.

Look at verse number 32. God knew this and God always has everything under control. I like that. When things seem absolutely out of control and out of place, God still has everything in life under control. Look at verse number 32. It says, "They said this so that Jesus' words might be fulfilled, signifying what kind of death he was going to die." Even when they are trying to trump up these charges and work this thing out and scandalize the truth, God is still working it out. Touch your neighbor and just tell them, "God is still working it out." I'm glad about that. I'm glad to know that on life's worst days and when nothing seems to be going right for us, that Romans 8:28 still works and we know that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose. Even when the truth is scandalized, God is working it out.

Notice next we see that the truth gets criticized in verse number 35. It says, "'I'm not a Jew, am I?' Pilate replied. 'Your own nation and chief priest have handed you

over to me. What have you actually done?" Pilate now begins to ask Jesus, "Is there some reason why you ought to be crucified?" The truth is there was no reason for Jesus to ever be crucified. All Jesus ever did was good. All he ever did was help people who were sick and feed people who were hungry. All he ever did was to give sight to people who were blind and give hope to people who were hurting. That's all he ever did. If Jesus now had spoken up for himself, what was he going to say? "Well, here's the reason that they want to crucify me. Because I gave Bartimaeus sight, because I gave brother 38 at the Pool of Bethesda the ability to walk, because I raised Lazarus from the dead, because one day I fed 5000 with two fish and five loaves of bread. You know, stuff like that is why they're coming after me. Oh, yeah, and just the other day, I healed a soldier's ear." The truth is that all Jesus ever did was good and, yet, they're coming after him because often the truth will be criticized.

Then finally we see in this text that the truth gets patronized in verse number 37. It says, "'You are a king then?' Pilate asked. 'You say that I am a king,' Jesus replied." Listen to this, "'I was born for this and I have come into the world for this, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" I want to talk a little bit about that later on, but I just want to say that Pilate wasn't listening to any of this right now. All Pilate says when he gets to the end of that is, "What is truth?" Jesus says, "Everyone who listens to the truth, listen to your voice," and Pilate simply replied, "What is truth?"

I don't know how you felt, but sometimes when you have tried to do what is right in your own life and you have tried to live by the truth, I'm sure I have some people who are listening to me today who can testify that sometimes when you have just tried to do what was right, sometimes you have been ostracized and sometimes you have been scandalized, sometimes you too have been criticized and sometimes you too have been patronized because people do not want to listen and follow the truth. We live in this time, Pilate seems to sum it all up in this idea, this post-modern age that we live in, as he raises this question that is floated through the ages, "What is truth?"

Well, we live in this time that people call a postmodern culture. A postmodern culture is a time where everybody has the truth. You know, when most of us were growing up, who are older, if you have some gray hairs in your head, you know what I'm talking about. Most of us who have any gray hairs in our head grew up in a time when there was only one truth. There could only be one truth. It was either the truth or it wasn't the truth. Today, in this culture we live in, we live in a time and a society where many believe everybody can have a truth, where everybody is right, where everybody is okay. What they're really saying is, "I want you to stay out of my stuff." We live in this time where you can have a truth and I can have a truth and your truth can be diametrically opposed to my truth but it's okay because that's your truth and this is my truth. Even though my truth and your truth conflict, they believe that that's okay.

Well, the truth is that it's impossible to have a whole bunch of truths and all of

them be truly true. How do you like that? Let me talk about relative truth, which is where we live. You can see it in the picture that is displayed up here. Postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races and, instead, focuses on the relative truths of each person.

It is like the old story of a group of blind men who went to an elephant to kind of declare what it was that they saw. Really, it depended on where they were and where they touched the elephant. I don't know if you can read that, but one touches an ear and says, "It's a fan." Another touches the tusk and says, "Well, no, this thing is a spear." Another touches the trunk and says, "It's a snake." Another one grabs hold of the leg and says, "It's a tree." Another one gets on the side of the elephant and says, "It's a wall." Then finally one grabs onto the tail and says, "No, what we're talking about is a rope here." Each one of them described what they felt in that particular moment but none of them had the big picture of what was really going on.

We can see this again in this second illustration where sometimes it depends on how you're looking at the picture. If you look from one side, one guy says four. The other guy says three. If you look at the picture from the guy who says four, from his perspective, it's four. From the guy who says three, from his perspective, it is three. The truth is that neither one of them has the whole picture.

As long as you want to live your life with just a portion of the picture, you can always come up with whatever truth you want. It's only when you get the big picture about what life is really all about, when you stop looking at your tiny little world and your tiny little perspective, that we can begin to see what the real truth is that is around us.

Now, here's the problem. GK Chesterson said it like this. "When people cease to believe in God, they do not believe in nothing. They believe in anything." Do you hear that? "When people cease to believe in God, they do not believe in nothing. They believe in anything."

Just to think about this, just a few days ago, I was talking to a woman whose brother had joined a religious group that is quasi-Christian. One of the things they have now taught him to believe is that the earth is flat. Huh? Now, how many of us would think that that's absolutely ridiculous given all of the scientific information that we know and that we have flown in airplanes around the globe and we have gone out into space and we have been able to take pictures back of the earth? Yet, this particular group today, I'm talking about 2017, believes that the earth is flat. Why is that? Because when you lose sight of the big picture, when you only want to look in your small world, you will begin to believe just about anything somebody puts down in front of you if you want to convince yourself that you believe that.

In John's gospel, as we look through it, for John, truth is of the utmost importance. We can see it in the gospel of John because he uses the Greek word truth *aletheia*,

which is truth, 48 times in his gospel where if you take Matthew, Mark and Luke combined, they only use the word truth ten times combined. But in John's gospel, 48 times he hammers home this idea about the truth. Why, John, is truth so important for you?

Well, just think about it. Just think about if we lived in a world where there really was no truth. If there was no truth, we wouldn't be able to hold our marriages together. If there was no truth, there would be no kind of friend or other relationships. If there was no truth, our government would fall apart. If there was no truth, we wouldn't be able to have any businesses because who wants to shop from a place that is known not to tell the truth. Who wants to eat at a restaurant where they're known not to tell the truth? We can't have any kind of business. Our society will fall apart if there is no truth. Even our faith falls to the ground if there is no such thing as truth. That's why Jesus came into the world and that's why this passage is so vitally important for us to remind us in a skeptical day like the day in which we live, where not only Pilate but many of our neighbors and friends are asking the same question, "What is truth?" Jesus Christ came into the world to declare that he is the truth. We can see it all through the gospel of John.

Look in John chapter 1, talking about Jesus. It reminds us that truth is instructional. John chapter 1 verse 14 says, "The word became flesh and took up his residence among us and we observed his glory, the glory as of the one and only son from the father who is," what? "Full of grace and truth." What does that tell us? It tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal God. The truth reveals God to us. The Bible reminds us we can't know God except God reveals God. God put on human flesh. God was born of a virgin. God walked the dusty streets of Palestine. God lived in the body of Jesus Christ because God reveals God. He is the truth and he came to reveal God to every single one of us. He was full of grace and truth.

Second, truth is directional. Look at chapter 3 and verse number 21. It says, "But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light so that his works might be shown to be accompanied by God." What that reminds us of is that truth guides us in the right direction. You can't walk or live in the right direction without some truth. I mean, every time you tell your GPS to take you from one place to another, you expect that your GPS is telling you the truth. When we don't know where we're going, we need somebody who can guide us and this passage reminds us that Jesus, who is the truth, will always guide us in the right direction.

Third, truth is adorational. Look at John chapter 4 verse 24. It says, "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Spirit, not just having a good hallelujah time, but also in truth. Truth causes us to reach out to God in worship because when we're confronted with the truth about life, we recognize that there's got to be something greater, there's got to be something more, there's got to be something that was here before the earth began, and even though we talk about the Big Bang Theory and sometimes people talk about the idea that all of creation came from one tiny amoeba and one big bang somewhere, the truth reminds us that somebody had to be there to make the big bang. Something had to

be there before the first amoeba, before the oscillating universe oscillated. Somebody had to be there. When we really get down to the brass tacks and down to the real bedrock, that there has to be a God who initiated all that there is and who is worthy of our worship, our adoration, and our praise. I'm glad about that.

Look at chapter 8 and verse number 32. It reminds us that the truth is powerful. In verse number 32, it says, "You will know the truth and the truth," listen to this, "and the truth will set you free." See, we live in a time, in an age, a society where people are still in bondage, where everybody wants to put us in bondage to one thing or another, in bondage to guilt sometimes, in bondage to gossip, in bondage to greed or a thousand other things sometimes. That wonderful passage reminds us that God is the truth and when you really know the truth, he said that's the only time you can really be free. He said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." When we see God in Jesus Christ, he does not come to bind us up and to keep us from life, he comes to set us free and to allow us to experience life. John 10:10 says, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it to the full." I'm glad about that, how powerful truth is.

Next we see in John 14:6 that the truth is helpful. In John 14:6 it says Jesus told them, listen to this, "I am the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me." What does the truth do? The truth shows us the way of eternal life. If we want eternal life, if we want something greater than that which we have been experiencing, if that which is in us which calls us to a higher place is real, then we will only find that truth in Jesus Christ. He says, "I am not a way among ways, but the way. I am not a truth among truths, but the truth. Not a life among lives, but the life." Truth shows us the way of eternal life.

Six, in chapter 17 verse 17, we find out that truth is practical. It says in chapter 17 verse 17, Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane and he says, "Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth." The word sanctify, remember, is the idea that we're becoming holy, that we're becoming more and more like God. When he says, "Sanctify them by your truth," it is a reminder that the only way we can get better is to know the truth. Hear what I'm saying? We would never want to think that we could get better by people just telling us we're already okay.

I can remember one time we were at the church and there was a reception going on and my oldest sister, Valerie, had come out of the ladies room. When she came out of the ladies room, she had a trail of toilet paper running behind her skirt. I mean, we could have just told her she looked okay and that there wasn't really a problem, but that wouldn't have helped at all, would it? No. That wouldn't help one little bit. The only way to help her to be better was to tell her the truth. Sometimes people don't like to hear the truth. The only way we can be better, Jesus reminds us, is to know the truth. He says, "Sanctify them by the truth."

Your children will only get better when you tell them the truth. Your marriage relationships will only get better when you talk about the truth. Your life in business will only get better when you profess the truth. It says, "Sanctify them by the

truth." The truth helps us to make us more and more like God.

Finally, remember that the truth is attractional. Back here in chapter 18 where we started, as Jesus is talking to Pilate, Pilate says in verse number 37 says, "So you are a king then?" Jesus had already told him, "See, look, my kingdom is not of this world." He said, "If my kingdom were of this world," he said, "my servants would fight." He said, "I know I'm standing in front of you, Pilate, and you think you got all the power and authority, but you don't have any real authority over me." He said, "If my kingdom were of this world, I wouldn't be standing here in front of you right now." He said, "But my kingdom is not of this world." Then Pilate responds in verse number 37 and says, "Then you are a king?" Pilate asked. Jesus responds and says, "You say that I'm a king." He said, "Listen, I was born for this." He said nothing is out of God's ultimate control is what he's saying. "I was born for this. I was born to die. I was born to give his life as a ransom for many."

When we talk about the truth being tougher than nails, remember that. It wasn't the nails that held Jesus on the cross, it was his love for each one of us that held him on the cross. The old scripture says he could have called 10,000 angels and, yes, the angels of God were ready to come to his defense, but it was not the nails that held him there. He was tougher than nails. It was the truth that held him to that old wooden cross. He is love for each one of us. His desire that we would be forgiven of our sins, that we could have eternal life, that is why he stayed on that old rugged cross.

He says here, "I was born for this and have come into the world, for this, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth," he says, "listens to my voice." In John 10, he says, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand." Why? Because only the truth will draw people to God.

I mean, I could tell you that you can get a bigger house and a bigger bank account and that might draw you to the church but it won't draw you to God. Only the truth will draw us to God. The truth is that my Bible says that we are sinners and we are in need of salvation. My Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. My Bible reminds me that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life. That reminds me that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life because the truth, only the truth, will draw people to a personal, vital, powerful relationship with God almighty.

John chapter 3 verse 14 and 15 says it like this, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the son of man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." He reminds us of an Old Testament passage and time when Moses was in the wilderness with the children of God and people were getting sick and many were dying. Moses took a serpent and lifted it up in the wilderness and God told them that if they would look at the serpent, they would be healed. Jesus says, "I'm like that serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness." He

says, "I'm going to be lifted up." He's lifted up on Calvary's cross. He says that people who look to him as the son of man must be lifted up, everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

Friend, I don't know what you've been looking for in your life and I don't know who you've been looking to and I don't know where you've been trying to find your answers and who you have been believing, but I want you to know that there really is only one truth and that the real truth is embodied in God's son, Jesus Christ. He really is, even today, the way, the truth, and the life and nobody comes to the Father but by him.

Friend, I want you to know that God has you listening today because God wants to speak this word into your life. He wants to be real and powerful in your life. He wants you to know that the word of God is true and that you can depend on his holy word. I wonder if there's somebody here today who's never put their hope and their trust and faith in Jesus Christ and would be willing to put their hope in Jesus Christ today. The truth is we can't do it by ourselves. The truth is that God loves us in spite of who we are, in spite of where we've been, and in spite of all the things that might have gone wrong in our lives, God loves you. The truth is that today God wants you to make a faith decision for him through his son Jesus Christ.

I want us to pray in just a moment. As we pray, I want to ask you to think about your own life, to think about whether or not Jesus Christ really is the truth that guides your life. If you've never given your heart and your life to Jesus Christ before, I wonder if you would pray with me this prayer and ask Jesus Christ to come into your life and to make you his child. He'll do that if you'll pray to him today. Let's bow in prayer.