

Faith in the Marketplace

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[0 : 00] Well, we're starting this series on Luke chapter 23 today, and we're going to, if you have this card in front of you, you will see that we work our way through the whole of the gospel of, that's the 23rd chapter of the gospel of Luke, and that ends just the week before Easter with the story of the crucifixion.

And so, and this is really the buildup to it, the part that we're looking at today is Luke 23, 1-5, and you'll have that on a piece of paper in front of you, I hope.

And then I've added in the other two verses that have to do with Pontius Pilate, and so that we can sort of look at him under the heading of today's talk, which is the politics of power.

However, the trouble with the Christian faith essentially, I think, is the person of Jesus Christ.

Christianity has so many good concepts, so many ideals, so many patterns of moral behavior, so many really good ideas, that many people are attracted to Christian faith because of its good ideas, its moral precepts, all those things are very attractive to people generally.

[1 : 24] The thing that stumbles everybody is the man, Jesus Christ. And while we trace this through the 23rd chapter of Luke, you'll see something of why this is a problem.

So, yeah, I mean, most of the, most of the, I would like to make this just as a conjectural statement about which you can have any length of discussion that you want.

But essentially, I would say that Jesus Christ is the founder of most of the world's religions today, mostly because they object to him and think there must be a better way of doing it, and so they set out to do it.

But the stimulus comes from the fact of the man, Christ Jesus, so that, you know, when the Christian missionaries first went to India, they created a massive revival of Buddhism and Hinduism, simply because of the impact of Christian teaching on that country.

So, I think he's a highly controversial character, and to see how controversial he is, we're looking at this particular passage, which comes from Luke 23. If you go back to the passage that just precedes this, the end of chapter 22, you will see that Christ is in the Garden of Gethsemane, and there he is in prayer, and there he is with some of his disciples, and the crowd come out to arrest him.

[2 : 49] Judas comes up and would kiss him to identify him, and then the chief priests and the elders gathered around, and they come in to arrest him and to take him away to the house of Annas the high priest.

When I was in Jerusalem a couple of years ago, the only time in my life, on Maundy Thursday evening, we went to a little Russian Orthodox church, which was at the site of the Garden of Gethsemane, and they had a three-hour service there, of which I took in one hour, and they chanted 12 gospels during that time.

But then when that was all over, they left the Garden of Gethsemane and walked down into the Kidron Valley, which is now filled with a four-lane highway, and up along the highway, and then to the old city through the great stone walls, and then along the echoing walls of old Jerusalem to the house which they think was the house of Annas the high priest, and there they had a service to commemorate this event.

So it's easy to picture in your mind, or for me to picture in my mind, having been there. That was the process that took place, and when they got Christ there, there was a kind of night trial.

And in the night trial, they, I think, abused the person of Christ. They put a blindfold on him and struck him on the face and asked him who struck him, and in various ways, they insulted him because they already had, in their own minds at least, found him guilty and were waiting only for the formal procedures to begin to have him put to death.

[4 : 47] So that the paragraph immediately before chapter 23 says, In the morning, and in the morning the whole of the Sanhedrin were gathered together, Christ was stood in the midst of them and asked the question, you know, are you the Son of God?

And he said, You say that I am. And this is apparently a somewhat enigmatic or idiomatic statement that he makes, but it's translated by J.B. Phillips and by, in his paraphrase, and by others as saying that Christ's answer is, Yes, I am.

Now you may know that modern scholars keep debating this point of whether Christ ever said that during the course of his life. You know, because part of the controversy that surrounds the person of Christ is whether he thought he was who we believe he was or is.

And so they ask him this question, Are you the Son of God? And he says, You say that I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of power.

And so he gave a powerful picture of himself as the man who was seated on the right hand of power.

[6 : 11] And of course, those who heard him said, We need to hear no more. We have the witness of his own lips. They had tried during the night to bring false witnesses in to witness against him.

Now they felt they had the evidence in terms of what he had said about himself. So off they went to Pilate. Look at your sheet. The whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate.

And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? And he answered, You have said so. That same kind of enigmatic reply, which again is translated in some by saying, Yes, I am.

Which I think is what's contained in that. Pilate said to the chief priests and to the multitudes, I find no crime in this man.

[7 : 19] But they were urgent, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place. So there you have the case against Jesus, as the Jewish Sanhedrin saw it, and how they brought it to Pilate.

Now this is where you begin to see how politics work. You see that the accusation they brought against him, We found this man perverting our nation.

Well, you know, there's one other person who perverted the nation badly, and that was Pilate. So it was interesting that that was the accusation that they brought against him. Pilate had got into great trouble for there are three things that are recorded in contemporary historical documents about Pilate.

One is that he brought Roman shields into the palace of Herod in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a city which they had designated to be totally given to the worship of the Lord.

So anything that was brought into the city which was not of the Lord was blasphemy. And so Pilate had this great battle going with them because he said there's no religious significance to these.

[8 : 41] The Jews said there is tremendous religious significance to those. Get them out! Pilate said there's no way I'll get them out until he got orders from above that they had to be taken out.

On another occasion the Roman armies brought in the insignias of the Roman army the kind of insignias that they carried the regimental insignias that they carried in their parades and they brought them into Jerusalem and again he had the same reaction and again he was forced to take them out.

So there wasn't a lot of love between this nation and Pilate. The third thing he did was he had sent troops in on a particular religious festival when Galileans had come down from the north and were worshipping in Jerusalem offering their sacrifices and Pilate's troops were turned on them and put some of them to death so that their blood was mingled with the blood of their sacrifices and a bitter enmity arose between Pilate and Herod who was the tetrarch of Galilee and that enmity is spoken of later on in chapter 23.

So Pilate was not getting along very well with this nation but listen to what they say to him about Christ. They said we found this man perverting our nation forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar which must be a reference to the place you know that should we give pay taxes or not and Christ said give me a coin he was handed a coin and said and whose superscription is on this and they said Caesar's and Jesus said give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God they took that and presented it here as Christ's teaching that they were not to give tribute to Caesar.

Now I don't think that that's what happened but that's the way they chose to interpret it. The third thing they did they said that Christ is he himself is a king that he claims to be a king and of course this was this was sedition and this was treason and this was an overthrowing of the established authority and that was the accusation they brought against him and a very interesting accusation because Pilate picks it up immediately and says to him are you the king of the Jews and he answered you have said so.

[11 : 13] Well Pilate said to the chief priests and to the multitudes I find no crime in this man but they were urgent saying he stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea from Galilee even to this place so that even the teaching of this man was unacceptable and certainly his person was unacceptable.

Now the the interesting thing is that this first question that Pilate asks him ends up as being the superscription which is on the cross.

Remember that he says are you the king of the Jews and then he had a sign put up in Hebrew Latin and Greek on the cross saying this is the king of the Jews.

So you have a fairly clear indication from the from the scriptures that Pilate regarded Jesus as being who he said he was the king of the Jews but Pilate was primarily a politician so if you look at verse 13 you'll see how a politician handled the problem.

my mind suddenly triggered on this one but Bill Clark who is an eminent Vancouver politician comes to church and says St. John's has always given trouble to the politician I would like to suggest that it's not St. John's that's given trouble to the politicians it's politics that gives trouble to the politicians and that's just recorded here so I I feel just a little sensitive about this point but Pilate saw what the political issue was now I mean what a politician has to do whether it's George Bush or Brian Maloney or Mulroney that was I didn't mean to do that no matter who it is their job is to gauge what they can get away with to know the people they're working with what they will respond to what they will react to and they have to know how to do that and a successful politician is one who does it well well

[13 : 45] Pilate in verse 13 called together the chief priests and the rulers of the people and said to them you brought me this man as one who was perverting the people and after examining him before you behold I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him neither did Herod and this we will deal with Herod next week but he sent him back to us behold nothing deserving death has been done by him I will therefore chastise him and release him to you and so what you have is you have Pilate putting together a political solution to the problem and that's how he does it he does it very well he recognizes that Jesus is who he says he is but he has to deal with his constituency and in order to deal with his constituency he does it in

I think there's four ways that he does it one way that he does it is he sends him off to see Herod saying that this isn't under my jurisdiction we'll send it to another court so to speak he sends it to Herod and that doesn't pay off so he comes back the second way that he deals with it is that he says I will chastise him and release him which means that he will subject him to a scourging and that will satisfy the blood lust of the people who are bringing this accusation against him they will be satisfied and then they will have seen that he has suffered and been terribly hurt and perhaps that they will allow that to be sufficient and of course that wasn't sufficient and Pilate then the third thing he did was to offer them Barabbas or Christ and Barabbas was a known murderer and again they chose Barabbas so the terrible vindictiveness of this group that this crowd that was confronting

Pilate kept pressing for the death sentence the final thing that Pilate did was to take remember that silver bowl and to wash his hands in front of them all saying I disagree with you all but for political reasons I will therefore submit him to your will and he commanded him to be taken out and to be crucified now there you have a powerful clear political decision and how it's made he was under pressure he had to make the decision but the difficulty is of course that it's a personal issue and for all of us it's a personal issue what we have to do with the person of Jesus Christ you can't make it a political issue now what what happens then is that you get these kinds of problems you see what happens with there's four things that

Charles Colson points out about political power which I think are perhaps throw some light on this he said political solutions are not personal solutions you know he says when you go to fight with dragons be sure you don't become one and that's how he described his own life when he went into the White House to fight with dragons and he became one of them and that's what happens that's the sort of picture of the corrupting influence of power and that's how politicians develop if you're going to fight with dragons be sure you don't become one the second thing that he points out is that you're going to be judged by the one whom you judge I mean this is the particular poignancy of reading the story of Pontius Pilate who stood with Christ on trial before him and you recognize that this man who is standing on trial in the light of subsequent revelation in the

New Testament is the man whom God has appointed to judge the world so you have in this instance you have Pontius Pilate standing or sitting in judgment on the one who ultimately will judge him now I think that's a very important kind of principle of human existence and that is the probability that the people whom you and I judge will ultimately end up judging us and that gives to the whole human community a dynamic responsibility one for another because the one whom we judge will ultimately judge us and God in demonstrating his authority did it without exerting his power in other words he didn't come in and say I am the judge he came in and said I am prepared to be judged and to be condemned but ultimately I will judge you and the authority

[19:16] I will have in passing judgment on you is that I will myself have submitted to judgment and that's that's why this sort of the personal dimension of this is so important I think a third thing which I don't think I can blame this one on Charles Colson but it really struck me as forceful as I was thinking about this one of the things you should do is listen to your wife you remember that Pilate's wife had a dream on this night and she sent word to him have nothing to do with that just man now I think in our male female society sometimes we become used to making political judgments you know we see the expediency we balance the powers that are at work we see the influence of the people we're working among and we come to a political conclusion while close beside us is one who isn't aware of all those things but has an entirely different sensitivity to the same problem to the same issue and

I think that one of the things we need in moving from making living in a sense behind a political facade coming to some kind of personal encounter is to be able to listen to that person who is closest to us who knows us best and whose advice we generally respect least that's not the case with me and my wife but I suspect it is with you when you are there's something there that helps to reduce us I think to the recognition of when you're confronting this person of Jesus Christ you need to be very sensitive this thing then just in conclusion that the Christian goal is not power but justice you see the whole system from the

Jewish courts the Jewish chief priest the Jewish Sanhedrin and then the Roman governor the Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee the whole legal system was entirely in place but came to absolutely the wrong conclusion when they committed Jesus Christ to be crucified all the machinery was in place all the accumulated wisdom about human justice was given expression to in the structures of the judicial system to which Christ was subject but they came to the wrong conclusion quite obviously they came to the wrong conclusion and you see the difficulty of course I think is that that there is at the heart of this a personal element and that personal element is why I think Christianity is so very difficult for people not difficult in terms of being complex difficult because it demands a personal encounter with Jesus

Christ a personal response to him you can't hide from him behind your political authority behind your prestige behind your power behind your wealth influence or success you have to at a very deeply personal level be confronted by the person of Christ even as Pontius Pilate was and he was quite incapable of being he just didn't he wasn't there at the moment he needed most to be there he wasn't there as a person and only by the grace of God is it going to be possible that for us in our lives and in our circumstances that we can be there when we are confronted with the person of Jesus Christ and not hide behind the various facades of legal structure or political power or self aggrandizement or whatever it may be that make us think that we can pass judgment on him without ultimately being subject to judgment by him well we'll go on and look at

Herod next week let me say a prayer father that which has been according to your will and word in what's been said and thought here we ask that you will by your Holy Spirit work into our hearts and minds and help us to work out in our lives and we ask this in the name of him whom you have appointed to be the judge of all the world even Jesus Christ our Lord Amen Thank you