

# Looking For A Sign

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[ 0 : 00 ] I have a friend, Tom Harper, who writes for a Toronto paper, and you may even have seen him in the province. I went down to visit him when he was religious editor for the Star, and I asked him about some of the editorial policy.

He said the main fact of editorial policy is that this paper runs for the purpose of the classified ads department, and any news is simply additional. And now with Tom Cooper here, I suspect that...

You'll take that, aren't you? Here we are in Luke 23, and we're looking at the person of Herod.

Last week we looked at the person of Pontius Pilate, and this week in verses 6 to 12, Jesus has been taken by Pilate and is sent to Herod, and this is the story.

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he... And Jesus is referred to all through this 23rd chapter as the man.

[ 1 : 19 ] Here he is. Whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at the time.

Jerusalem... Herod had a residence in Jerusalem. He could come down from his... From Galilee, and he was here for the... He was in Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he'd heard about him. He was hoping to see some sign done by him.

So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. He said, Herod is introduced in chapter 1, verse 5 of Luke's gospel as the king of Judea.

In chapter 3, verse 1, as the tetrarch of Galilee. And you may know that one of the constructive principles of the Roman Empire was they tried to get people congenial to the Roman Empire and to the country they had conquered in order to rule.

[ 2 : 56 ] And so they set up puppet kings. The puppet kings were the Herodian family. And Herod the Great was the greatest of them, a contemporary of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra.

This was his son, Herod. He had many sons by various wives, sons and daughters. And Herod was one of the three sons that took over the kingdom, and they divided it from being one kingdom with a monarch to three kingdoms with tetrarchs.

And so Herod was in town for the Passover, and Pilate heard of him and sent Jesus over to him. And this was no doubt a great honor to Herod because he was recognizing, as he hadn't always done, Pilate was recognizing that Herod had jurisdiction.

And since he wanted to unload this problem, he thought, one way I could unload it is to send him to Herod. And so that's what he does. Herod had heard of Jesus a good deal.

You read in Luke chapter 3, verse 19, that among the other evil things that he had done, he'd shut up John the Baptist in prison and subsequently beheaded him.

[ 4 : 13 ] And I noticed in the Globe and Mail that the opera Salome is doing very well this week in Toronto. They have a lovely girl dancing and singing the part of Salome, and it's caught the theater crowd of Toronto and delighted them all.

So this story is very contemporary, at least on the theater page of the Globe and Mail this morning. And Herod and the famous lady who danced for him, Salome, and the famous compromise he came to when she was offered in response to the loveliness of the dance.

Anything up to the half of my kingdom you can have. And Salome, with the advice of her mother, said, I want the head of John the Baptist flag. And she got it.

John the Baptist was the man whom Jesus had said was the greatest man born of woman. John the Baptist had gone before Jesus, and I suppose even at this time was considered by many people to be even a greater preacher and a greater public figure than Jesus became during his lifetime.

John the Baptist was so important that one famous and contemporary commentator on the Gospel of John says that one of the functions of the Gospel of John, and you might find it interesting to read it in his life, one of the functions of the Gospel of John is to persuade the continuing disciples of John the Baptist, who were many, that Jesus was in fact the one to whom John the Baptist was pointing.

[ 5 : 50 ] That they should now give their faith and loyalty and become disciples of Jesus. And you know that throughout the New Testament, there were still those who were followers of John the Baptist.

He was a very great man indeed, and because he spoke out on moral issues, which is why preachers don't speak on moral issues anymore, he had his head cut off, and the result of that, I mean, it's a, he is a powerful, powerful, powerful, faithful, John the Baptist.

If you just read the story of this man and his, his, his extremely ascetic life, and the power with which his preaching swept through the whole country and prepared the way in a unique way for the coming of Christ.

Christ, when he came into Galilee and with his disciples and sent them out on a mission and they went everywhere preaching and healing and performing miracles, such an impact that they have that John, that, uh, Herod heard about it and desired, we find out, to see, uh, this man, Jesus, who, uh, who, uh, who, the whole fuss was around this man.

The whole mission seemed to stem from him. And subsequently, the Pharisees came and warned Jesus that he was in the territory of, uh, uh, Herod, and that he should be very careful because of what had happened to John the Baptist.

[ 7 : 24 ] That was where Jesus called him that fox. And said, indeed, I must go to Jerusalem because it's, uh, it's wrong that the son of man should suffer anywhere but in Jerusalem.

And he goes on to Jerusalem. Then this 23rd chapter is the first place where we see Herod again. Here you see men who had known each other through most of the past years come together and confront one another in the person of Jesus and King Herod.

Well, what happened was that, uh, that Herod had, was glad to see him. He'd heard about him. He hoped to see a sign. And he questioned Jesus at length and received no answer.

You can imagine the embarrassment that was created by this because here was the king. Here was Jesus. Here was a stream of questions. And there was no answer.

Now, I, I, I would like if there was time to talk about this, why there was no answer. And, uh, because I think a lot of people, when they, when they confront Jesus Christ, find that he doesn't speak to him.

[ 8 : 43 ] He doesn't say anything. And, uh, if you imagine what Jesus was thinking when he faced the murderer of John the Baptist.

I guess he thought that if he wouldn't hear John the Baptist, he's not going to hear it from me. There is nothing more that needs to be said.

And he's heard all he needs to hear. And I think we come to that place, you know, and I think that's one of the dangers of exposing yourself to preaching and teaching about Jesus.

Because there comes a time when nothing more is going to be said. And, uh, and that's a serious time. I think it's a serious time for anybody.

Certainly it was here. The silence created by Jesus refusing to answer seemed to stir up the chief priests and the scribes. And they vehemently accused Christ.

[ 9 : 45 ] Brought accusations against him. And, uh, so keen were they in a sense to stir the mob hatred against this man, Jesus, and to get rid of him.

And, uh, frustrated as they were by Pilate sending him off to see Herod. They vehemently accused him. But all that was the reply, all the only reply was this terrible silence.

An embarrassing silence. And you see what happened as a result of that. The, uh, Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him.

So you, in a sense, uh, you get this, this process of, of mocking, beginning. It says that the way that they did it was that they arrayed him in gorgeous apparel.

And send him back to Pilate. So that you get, you get this sort of little man, as of wearing this magnificent apparel. And this, this is the man, Christ Jesus.

[ 10 : 49 ] And he's, he's dressed up in this magnificent apparel. Sure makes me wonder as an Anglican minister why we're so keen on gorgeous apparel. But, uh, I won't discuss that with you because you probably already have your opinions about it.

But the purpose of this was to ridicule the person of Christ. He, uh, he had to be, to be mocked. And, uh, the result of this was that it says Herod and Pilate became friends that day.

When, uh, Pilate received back Jesus robed in this gorgeous apparel. He came back. Herod and Pilate became friends that day.

It might be interesting to think for a moment about why they would become friends. Partly because, as I said, Pilate acknowledged Herod's jurisdiction by sending Jesus to him.

Even though Herod had no jurisdiction in Jerusalem. But then they both shared a joke. The joke was Jesus. And they found something they both understood wordlessly.

[ 12 : 06 ] They couldn't, they couldn't articulate what it was. But somehow, Jesus drew them together. I almost wonder if you could take it as a kind of positive thing that Jesus drew them together.

Jesus has that effect, I think, on his enemies as well as on his friends. The people in their enmity with Christ are drawn together. Perhaps in a, in an unproductive way.

But that's what happens. Jesus makes friendship flourish among those who believe in him. And among those who don't believe in him.

I think he is so imposing a person. That people tend to look for others.

Who treat him with contempt. In order to bolster their own flagging spirits. And bonds are created between them. Because of their mutual mockery and contempt for Jesus Christ.

[ 13 : 16 ] I know that when somebody convicts me and hurts me. My first reaction is to attack them. And to see that what they said was not really something wrong with me.

But something wrong with them. That they would launch such a vicious attack on such a nice person as me. And then I go and look for a friend who will console me.

And tell me, yes, that's right. It's them. It's wrong. And then we're friends. Because we both agree it's not me. It's somebody else. And I think Jesus created that kind of bond between Pilate and Herod.

The other thing that happens here is that it says that Herod was anxious to see some sign done by him.

Now, the sign, I think that, I mean, it's very simple. A sign points somewhere, you know, that it's got direction to it.

[ 14 : 28 ] And it's not a miracle. The word doesn't suggest that it's a miracle that Herod wanted to see. It was a sign.

Now, the nature of a sign is that something was spoken of in the Old Testament was fulfilled. Miracles in the New Testament do not point to themselves.

They point beyond themselves to something else. So that miracles are used always in the New Testament as signs that point to something beyond themselves. So this sign that Herod was looking for was a sign that pointed to something beyond himself.

And I think there were two signs given to him in that interview with Jesus. He may not have seen them because I don't think, well, I think the nature of signs is that when you come to know Christ, then you understand the signs, then you understand the signs.

But until you know Christ, you can't make anything of the signs. You don't know what they mean. And I don't think Herod understood what they meant. But there were two very distinct signs that were given.

[ 15 : 36 ] One was that Jesus was dumb. That is, he didn't speak a word. Now, if you go back into Isaiah 53, Isaiah says, this is going to be one of the signs.

Like a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. Now, that is technically what the Bible means by a sign.

So Herod, who was looking for a sign, got one, but failed to recognize it. The second sign, which I think was there, is in Herod's mockery of Jesus.

And again, from Isaiah 53, it was said that we despised him, we held him of no account, a thing from which men turn away their eyes.

And so the second sign was the mockery. That the one who was to come was one who would be mocked. And so both these signs happened with respect to the person of Christ.

[ 16 : 47 ] So two signs were given. None were seen, as far as Herod was concerned. Though Luke has recorded them, in order that you will see that these signs that Herod was looking for were given.

And Herod didn't recognize them. The you, you know, in its, Luke is very, I mean, it's prodigious what he does, I think, in putting this before us in the way that he does.

Well, let me just say a little bit about this. In this morning's Globe and Mail, there is that wonderful young fellow, Joe Clark.

It isn't a Globe and Mail, it's the problem. It's with a pair of flowered Hawaii shorts on with designs all over them like that. And Joe Clark is there, and he's got his arm out in this sort of position like this, you know, with a little pimple of a muscle right there.

And it says, yo, South Africa, you know. He's going to attack it single-handed and sort it all out. And this is deliberate political mockery.

[ 18 : 01 ] And I suspect that, apart from Joe Clark's feelings that I wouldn't want to offend, it's probably a very good thing to do. That we take people in power and we use cartoons to mock them.

You know, and if you read the cartoons, and I mean, there's very famous cartoonists that do this all the time. Now, I think the secret of it is this, and I thought about this a lot.

The danger for us, basically, is that we tend to worship power and mock weakness.

So that, you know, you get Joe Clark and they're sort of ridiculing him. He's actually a very powerful and very important person in this country. But we keep that power under some kind of restraint by mockery, you know, to hold it in place.

But in terms of good and evil, the problem with our world is that we tend to worship the demonstration of power, which is actually weakness.

[ 19 : 13 ] And that's Satan. We worship his power. And we despise the weakness of Jesus Christ. The demonstration of power we worship.

The demonstration of weakness we despise. And the whole story here, I think, as Jesus is presented to us in this picture, is does he invite our mockery?

I mean, you must know, as I do, that it's not hard to create mockery. I mean, I go to the movies and I'm very sensitive to how clergy are portrayed in the movies.

And they are ridiculous. Invariably, they are ridiculous. They are stupid. They drip over their feet. They're full of pompous things. They're always ridiculous.

Now, I take it that it is ultimately because they have something very powerful to say. That they are clothed in weakness.

[ 20 : 13 ] And that's the way the world sees them. As weak and despicable. Such are the... Such is Jesus Christ. He is weak and despicable. And can be ignored.

While the power of evil, which is ultimately powerless because of what Christ has done, we revere and we honor and we respect and we speak about in hushed tones and we bow and we make all sorts of obeisings to the power of evil, which is ultimately powerless and despise the Son of God.

Who is ultimately to judge the world. And that's what happened. I mean, that's how Herod and Pilate became friends. They decided to despise this man, Jesus.

And they found a certain camaraderie in that. And that's a camaraderie that would be very prepped in the downtown of any big city. Let's get together and do a little despising to build up our echoes a little.

If you'll join with me and I'll join with you, we'll be all right. But in the very act of that, we are despising what appears to be powerful and ultimately is of no consequence.

[ 21 : 31 ] And we are mocking the one who appears to be weak and insignificant and ultimately is all powerful.

As Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 7, the thing you've got to remember is that ultimately one of the great realities of life is that God is not mocked.

Amen. Even in his Son, Jesus Christ, or in those who serve him. Amen. Can I just say a prayer?

Father, Father, as we confront again the person of Jesus Christ, as we identify with Herod and the perspective he had, perspective that he persisted in, and that he is not the same.

We ask that you will allow us in these words again to see Jesus Christ in his weakness, see him mocked and treated with contempt, and that we might come to acknowledge him as judge of all the earth, as the one whom you have appointed, as the one in whom we find ourselves.

[ 23 : 00 ] We ask this in his name. Amen.