

Luke 23:1-25 "God on Trial, Part 2"

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- You'll open your Bibles again to Luke. We are in Luke 23. This morning we are looking at, again, the trial of God, round two.
- I'm going to be reading Luke 23, verses 1, all the way down through verse 25, so you can follow with me as I read.
- Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.
- And Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him, You have said so. Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, I find no guilt in this man.
- [1 : 1 9] But they were urgent, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee, even to this place.
- When Pilate heard this, he asked 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 that time.
- When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him.
- And he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So we questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.
- The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers, treated him with contempt, and mocked him.
- [2 : 1 9] Then arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this day, they had been at enmity with each other.
- Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, You brought me this man as one who is misleading 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, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish him and release him.
- But they all cried out together, away with this man and release to us Barabbas, a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection, started in the city, and for murder.
- Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, Crucify! Crucify him! A third time he said to them, Why?
- [3 : 3 3] What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him. But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified.

And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that the demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked.

But he delivered Jesus over to their will. Let's pray that God would send his spirit to give us understanding of this portion of his word.

Father, we pray that you would speak to us. We need your spirit to speak. It's not just in our minds that we need understanding.

We need hearts that are receptive to what you would speak to us. So would you pour out your spirit, soften our hearts, that we might have a clearer understanding of Jesus and all that he is.

[4 : 52] So come, teach us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So as I said, this is the second trial that Jesus undergoes.

The Jewish leaders that we saw last week have already found him guilty. but they are under Roman rule.

And being under Roman rule, one of the privileges Rome has kept for themselves is the power of execution of criminals. So the Jews can pronounce him guilty, but that's as far as they can go.

So they have to. If they're going to get him put to death, they've got to have Rome do it. So now they come to Pilate. And the question before this court is the same as the last court.

It's not about things that Jesus has done, but it's about who he is. Who does Jesus claim to be?

[6 : 05] Is Jesus the king of the Jews? That is the question that Luke highlights for us here.

And it's the question that Pilate and really everybody involved has to deal with. And so what we're going to do this morning is look all through this.

The way that Luke writes is that he's really good at highlighting characters in his story and holding them up sometimes in contrast and comparison to each other.

But here, in this story, he kind of shines the light on about six different people and groups and how they respond to this question.

But first, let's take a brief look at just exactly what's going on in this trial. Pilate, we were introduced to him back in Luke 3.

[7 : 11] Pilate is introduced as Luke begins to set the stage at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He gives us a date, basically, when Tiberius was emperor, Pilate is governor, Herod we're going to see in just a minute.

Pilate is a time of beginning of Jesus' ministry. But Pilate, his tenure in Jerusalem was brutal and the Jews hated him.

Well, he didn't like the Jews either. Because we see back in Luke 13, as we've already seen, we hear that there were a group of Galileans that were slain by Pilate and then their blood, he mixed into the blood of the sacrifice in the temple.

Totally defiling the worship in the temple. that's what he thought of the Jews, which led to what the Jews thought of Pilate.

But now the Jews have to come to Pilate with this issue. So they come and notice how they frame their charges.

[8 : 41] It's a different issue than what they dealt with before because they know that just dealing with these religious controversies is not going to prick Pilate's interest.

And so they frame it in such a way that he will see Jesus as not just a threat to the Jews but actually a threat to Roman rule itself.

See what they said? He said he's an insurrectionist basically. He's forbidding us to pay tribute to Caesar which he never did but they're building this case so that if Pilate sees that Jesus is a big enough threat that he'll deal with him.

When Pilate hears that he is a king he kind of takes him off to the side. We see in some of the other accounts if you pull all four of the gospel accounts together that this is a longer conversation than what Luke has here.

Luke only is focused on one question. Is Jesus king of the Jews? And so Pilate that's the only thing he was interested in.

[10 : 06] Jesus doesn't answer any of the accusations of the Jews. He just stands there kneels down and you know he's been beaten to within a hair of his life.

I'm sure he looked very impressive before Pilate. But this is the only question. So when Pilate asked him are you the king of the Jews? He answers using the same phrasing that he did with the Jewish leaders.

Basically saying yes I am. in John we see he expands that a little bit but it says it's not a political kingdom.

It's a spiritual kingdom. And so hearing that Pilate sees no threat to Rome and so he attempts to dismiss him but then he hears that Herod is in town or he hears that Jesus is a Galilean and Herod oversees Galilee so he sends him to Herod to let him question him and maybe we'll make further progress here.

Well Herod doesn't find out anything so he sends him back. The amazing thing in this story here is three times Pilate attempts Jesus.

[11 : 38] Maybe not with all the gusto he should have but he attempts to release Jesus. He sees there's no guilt here and so he's trying to release him.

He just wants this problem to go away but the Jews will have nothing of that they want Jesus dead period.

Nothing short of that is acceptable. And so they put pressure on Pilate. They get the crowds involved and with that threatening a riot Pilate's had enough.

He said okay have it your way. and he relents and turns Jesus over for execution. Now as we look at this scene again there are six characters here or groups that Luke mentions and we're going to go through and look at them because it's interesting how each of them responds to this king.

And as we look at them I think it could be insightful for us as we consider how we should respond to this king.

[13 : 14] And whether you're a believer and or whether you are here just examining or curious about Jesus about Christianity here's the question for all of us what are you going to do with Jesus?

So again there are six here don't worry even though there's six I'll get you to work on time tomorrow. First let's look at the Jews and we'll look at them briefly because we saw them last week the Jews note here one of the things that Luke brings out when he talks about the Jews is that they're not only angry they're passionately angry they are in a sense in a froth over wanting Jesus to be put to death and I've said you know this is kind of a clue for us and I've said probably many times if you want to know where your particular idolatries are there's a trail you can follow first look at the anger and that anger is probably going to lead you to something you fear and that fear is going to tell you what it is that is threatening you but where your idols probably can be found so what did the

Jews fear they feared exposure they feared exposure if they were to respond properly to Jesus what should they do they needed to get naked now I had a lady sweet little lady named Louise in my very first church that told me you can never use the word naked from the pulpit you can do it in the fellowship hall but not in the pulpit which is why I stood over here they had to get naked you know there's a story in 2 Kings 5 and it's a story of a Syrian general named

Naaman Naaman was the big dog in Syria only second to the king himself but Naaman had a problem he had leprosy and Naaman heard in Israel that there was a guy that could cure him his name was Elijah and so he went to be cured and Elijah wouldn't even come out and recognize him he just said Naaman I thought was hoping for him to come out and wave his hand over the spot or do something magical but all he said was go wash in the Jordan River seven times you know what that meant for Naaman for him to wash in that river he had to strip down all that he wore that designated him as special as someone high above everyone else had to come off and a naked general looks just like a naked private except maybe a little older but something else that leprosy was going to be exposed and that leprosy was going to cause him to be alienated isolated rejected and so forth but he did and he was cured the

Jews had a leprosy that they could not cure but it wasn't a skin disease it was a heart disease the only cure was for them to take off all that they used to make them look righteous to make them look special all of their good works they need to despair of all of their rituals that they thought made them good they needed to despair of and come to Jesus owning their sickness so that the Savior could cure it completely and this might be some of us some of us it might be time for us to strip down and then come clean that was the Jews then there's

[18 : 56] Pilate Pilate Pilate was in a place he didn't want to be he was in Canaan in Jerusalem in a city that was notorious for insurrections for rebellions and so forth and he didn't like it the Jews were extremely hard to govern so he just tries to dismiss this whole thing but he can't you know maybe what he fears here that the Jews are just gonna again here comes another riot another resurrection but Pilate seems like he just wishes things would be normal quiet let's just get along I know we don't like each other but we can just get along it's kind of like families at special dinners where the matriarch of the family typically all she wants is everybody just to be happy together and have a good time never mind about

Uncle Ed's addictions never mind about the daughter who's covered with ink and wishes she wasn't there never mind about all the relational tension that underlies here all this matriarch wants is to look let's just sit down at the table let's smile eat dinner and be happy that's kind of the way I picture Pilate here in this situation all he wants is normalcy and peace you know just after I came to Christ I remember sitting on the front porch of this big resort where I used to work in Virginia with a friend that was instrumental in leading me to Christ but we were sitting there together with my brother and we were talking about

Jesus and my brother as we talked about Jesus and his need for Jesus my brother understood something very clearly and his response to us was but if I come to Jesus then I'm going to basically have to give up all my friends my life is going to totally change he said I don't know if I want that or not my brother understood Jesus demands that we turn from all that's normal to something of much much greater value because see in our normalcy our pursuit of normal we're looking for security we're looking for predictability we we're looking to appease our fears and what

Jesus tells you is that normal will not work the only thing that can bring real peace or shalom is Jesus because Jesus does not just keep the lid on the pressure cooker he makes all things new and this is what he comes to do your normal is a facade Jesus is everything real so Jesus comes to make everything right but before that the normal has to go what about

Herod our next character here Herod Herod was ruthless this is not the Herod that we saw at the birth of Jesus who murdered all those children this is another Herod but this Herod was not much better Herod was the one that had John the Baptist arrested and eventually beheaded simply to please this tantalizing young woman but while he before that time after he had been arrested while he kept John in prison Herod used to sneak down to the prison and listen to John now he hated what John had told him because John said your current marriage is unlawful but still Herod liked to listen to John you know something about his preaching was tugging at him but we know of course that was very shallow because

[24 : 55] John ultimately lost his head but now Jesus is around Herod thinks maybe this is John raised from the dead he doesn't know but he's heard a lot and so he wants to see Jesus maybe Jesus will do a trick for him I don't know Herod seems to be dabbling kind of skirting around the edges of the kingdom has a little bit of interest but that's about as far as it goes because see Herod really was all about himself and dabbling in the kingdom would never penetrate that self a lot of folks dabble in religion we joke about priests you'll see a lot of them in a few weeks priests are those who show up on

Christmas and Easter Christ sometimes we show up every now and then but church religion seems to be something that we tack on to life maybe given legitimacy to life there's a curiosity we have about it but yet it's it never gets down to the core we cannot come to Jesus by way of dabbling when we come to Jesus it's all or nothing it's like an engagement when I got engaged to Gail it was 37 years ago at St.

Patrick's Day I was so glad I did that on a holiday that I could remember when I asked her and she said yes we committed ourselves to each other that meant if I had any all the pictures of the other girlfriends would have to go no more dating around no more play in the field I was hers and hers alone and that's kind of a scary thing because you know you do you shut off everybody else but what I found was such a treasure this is what we're called to it's all or nothing but what you find in

Jesus what we find in everything else is just a fake plastic pearl but in Jesus we get the pearl of great price and there will be no regretting coming to Jesus what about the soldiers well we're not told a lot about these guys they're just in a sense kind of mentioned here but it's Luke draws our attention to particularly what they do we do know that Roman soldiers were these were men these were big strong probably not real pretty you wouldn't want to meet one of these guys alone they were strong and brutal and obviously from what they're doing here to

Jesus weakness was despised so now before them this so called king who presented this image that was just pitiful he's bleeding he's been beaten he's God you're nothing and so they begin heaping abuse on this pathetic example of a king and I imagine when Jesus was silent that just inflamed them even more being strong for a lot of us is a very desirable place to be it's also a very insecure place to be

[30 : 16] I think this is really at the root of a lot of what we would call you know spousal abuse physical abuse even sexual abuse where the strong preys upon those who are weak because somehow their sense of manhood or being strong is threatened and they need to prove themselves that they are somebody I think this is also why many of us do not come to Jesus we are taught to be more applicable to men though I don't think it's exclusive we are taught to be strong we are taught to be capable we are taught to be sufficient we are taught to be able to control and manage everything weakness is not acceptable it's not desirable it should be avoided at all cost you know

I've known men who will not come to Christ because their idea of Christianity is that it's just a religion for weak old women strong men don't need a crutch coming to Jesus is not for the strong and that's true coming to Jesus is for the weak and for us to come to Jesus we need to come and embrace our weakness Jesus is for the weak unless we are willing to bow before the all powerful all sufficient king we cannot come because

Jesus the king wants to be the benefactor he wants to be the source of all that we need all that we would ever desire he wants to be the good giver of all things and for us to receive we can't have clenched strong fists they need to be open we need to be asking this is how we come to Jesus where we despair of our ability and we turn to him for everything that's the soldiers so the road to Jesus the road to glory begins at the bottom not the top all right let's look at the crowds in verse 13 we finally see that it's not just the

Jewish leaders in verse 13 we see now that the Jewish leaders have gotten everybody involved and the crowds are now working with them and how quickly they have turned because just day or two before Jesus was their hero and now they're declaring him the great villain who needs to die what happened well I mean it's pretty amazing how powerful a force is public opinion psychologists sociologists have done all this research they all do these tests and they'll show you a picture of three lines two of them are the same and one of them is very obviously shorter than the other and they want you to pick out the shortest line well if it's just an individual they get it every time but for a lot of them they're told that people have chosen one of the other two and it's amazing how they will turn from what they see clearly and agree with the majority even though it's clearly wrong doesn't matter they want to be with everybody else they want to be relevant being out of touch invites ridicule rejection you know today

I mean think about it just a couple of decades ago there were certain particular in the area of sexual morality there were so much that was taboo that we wouldn't even think about was appropriate and now even believers have no objections it's okay we love relevance we're addicted to relevance social media make sure make sure we conform so we're relevant because if you're not there you go you're going to be cast out and this may be the bad news of the gospel but if you're going to come to Christ you need to know something Jesus is not relevant he is not culturally or socially relevant yes he speaks into our life clearly it doesn't matter what culture what time but what he says you won't find in popular opinion in fact

[37:10] Matthew 5 11 and 12 Jesus promises us this he said blessed are you note that first word blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and other all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven allegiance to Jesus means we enter into opposition with everything that's relevant everything that's popular everything that flows with popular opinion and culture and society because he comes to bring a different kingdom and we may lose here but there's a promise whatever you lose here is nothing compared to what you're going to gain because we may lose what is fake and false here what is unable to keep us secure and he will make us sons and daughters of heaven and give us everything everything so which are you going to choose finally the last character is

Barabbas first time only time he's ever mentioned Barabbas was a insurrectionist he was a murderer but Barabbas is interesting he's the only guy who very tangibly gained his life because Jesus took his place and I've always wondered whatever happened to Barabbas after that when he realized what happened we can only speculate we don't know but the question is really not how Barabbas responded but how we respond because we are the convicted insurrectionists we are the rebels we are the murderers we are the guilty and this king who voluntarily he convicted himself in this court he gave himself up this king who calls you to himself he doesn't just command your allegiance he wins it because the death you should have died because of your crimes he died the life that you could not live he lived he became just like you so that you could become like him he took all of your guilt he and he gives you glory glory this is what who this king is so how are you going to respond to the one true king where are you today

I don't know are you dabbling are you angry because of your self righteousness are you fighting having to come clean fighting to avoid weakness come come Jesus invites you to come because in your weakness he will replace it with divine power he will cover your disease and heal it and make you beautiful Jesus gives us life instead of death isn't that the better choice let's pray

Lord Jesus we pray that you would help us to see and understand would you open our eyes give us clarity open our hearts that we would embrace the great true king come we pray in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org what means we and