

Moore College Mission Joshua Russel

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[0 : 00] Today I want to tell you, first of all, about a building called the Domus Gelatiana, which was unearthed in 1857, and it's in Rome.

It's on the Palatine Hill in Rome. And in the building there's a picture which dates from about the 3rd century. I wish I had it for you, but in the picture there's a young man to the left who is making some kind of gesture with his hand, and he's looking at a man to the right, a figure who is hanging on a cross and has the head of a donkey.

And underneath the picture, written in Greek, but I'll translate it for you, according to Wikipedia, it says, Alexa Menos worships his God.

What an embarrassment. How cutting. No one else has to follow such an embarrassing leader. The atheists follow intelligent scientists.

The Muslims follow the mighty Muhammad. The Buddhists follow their peaceful, liberal Dalai Lama. And the Hindus have so many to pick from, one of them has got to suit your tastes.

[1 : 15] But for Christians, nothing is going to change the fact that we worship a pretty stupid-looking God, a pretty pathetic-looking leader.

No one else follows such an embarrassing God. Whoever heard of a God who was caught by his creatures and killed on a cross, naked as the day he was born, he was the laughingstock of the nations.

Yet Paul writes, I am not ashamed of the gospel. And his worshippers still sing, thank you for the cross.

And we celebrate Good Friday. In fact, we're on mission together this week, just so that everybody knows that we follow this embarrassing God.

So as we look at Luke chapter 23 together, tonight we're going to remember why. And you will want to have it in front of you, because we're going to move fairly swiftly through the story.

[2 : 19] In verse 1, the time has come, the moment the scribes and the chief priests have been waiting for. As Jesus had predicted, and as they had planned, they handed Jesus over to a Gentile, a Roman governor.

The story then unfolds in three trials. In trial 1, Jesus stands before Pilate. That's in verse 1 to 5. In trial 2, Jesus stands before Herod.

And in trial 3, he's back in front of Pilate again. Now as we look through these three trials together, there are two main themes that Luke highlights for us.

I'm going to flag them right up front, and we'll see them as we go through. Okay, firstly, Luke shows us that Jesus is king. So look out for that. And secondly, that he is innocent. Okay, those are the two themes, that Jesus is king, and that he is innocent.

Take a look at verse 2 in the first trial. Although Jesus is accused of several different things, they all boil down into one issue, and that's Jesus' claim to be king.

[3 : 23] You see, Jesus is accused of misleading the nation. How has he been doing that? By opposing payment of taxes to Caesar. Why has he been doing that? They say, because he claims to be king himself.

Now in verse 3, Pilate asks, are you the king of the Jews? And Jesus' response is surprisingly vague. Because, I think it's because, Pilate doesn't know what he's asking.

Really. Pilate wants to know whether Jesus is out to overthrow the Roman rule. Is Jesus an insurrectionist, a terrorist, trying to arouse a rebel army? Now the answer to that, of course, is no. Jesus says in John, my kingdom is not of this world. And actually, if you look back as to whether Jesus opposed payment of taxes to Caesar, he didn't. But Jesus says, you have said so, because that isn't the full story, is it?

Jesus is in fact the king of the Jews. And that's exactly Luke's point. Now, whatever Pilate thinks this means, he obviously doesn't think that Jesus is a threat to the civil order.

[4 : 36] In verse 4, he announces his verdict. You see it there? It seems to be a fairly clear-cut case. Pilate says, I find no basis for a charge against this man.

And this is the first declaration of Jesus' innocence in the chapter. It is certainly not the last. We've already seen our two themes, haven't we? Jesus' kingship, is the issue in contention.

And Jesus' innocence is obvious. That should have been the end of the story. But instead, the mob shout louder to get their point across.

They say, he stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here. Now, during their little speech, however, Pilate spots a way out.

If Jesus is from Galilee, he is under Herod's jurisdiction. So, Pilate sends Jesus off to Herod, who happens to be staying about 10 minutes down the road. And with that, we come to the end of trial one.

[5 : 37] We've seen those two main themes. Jesus' kingship, Jesus' innocence. Before we launch into trial two, which goes from verse 6 to 12, let me just give you a taster of what's happened previously between Herod and Jesus so far.

Okay, previously on Herod and Jesus. In chapter 13, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, leave this place and go somewhere else.

Herod wants to kill you. Jesus replied, in his usual calming way, go tell that fox, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day, for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

So, meek and mild, Jesus trying to smooth everything over. How do you think the trial between Herod and Jesus is going to go down then? You know?

Look at verse 8. Knowing the background certainly puts a different spin on verse 8, don't you think? When Luke says that Herod was greatly pleased to see Jesus because for a long time he'd been wanting to see him, it sounds more like a spider pleased to have just caught a fly in his web rather than a distant admirer.

[6 : 48] meeting his celebrity hero. But perhaps Herod is a genuine fan. I mean, look at what Luke goes on to say. Herod wanted to see Jesus perform a sign of some sort.

Maybe that's not so sinister after all. But that's only if you haven't read Luke 11 recently. Now, some of us may have, but for the rest of us, let me remind you what Jesus tells us about sign seekers.

You might want to turn there. You don't have to, but I'm going to be reading from verse 29 if you look at Luke 11. As the crowds increased, right, Jesus is becoming very popular, and to keep the crowd on side, he says, this is a wicked generation.

It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was assigned to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.

The Queen of the South, or the Queen of Sheba, if you've heard that name, the Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

[7 : 58] The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. So do you see what Jesus says about sign seekers?

This is a wicked generation. See, Herod's sign seeking is not such a positive thing after all, is it? Luke tells us that sign seekers are evil because, the reason in Luke 11 was, because they do not, in fact, listen to God's messengers, do they?

Did you see that? They want to be amazed and entertained, but not taught, when signs are actually about teaching. Herod is a typical sign seeker, just like the crowds of people in Luke 11.

When he meets Jesus, he wants to see magic tricks, but he has failed to notice that he is standing before a prophet even greater than Jonah and a king even greater than Solomon.

Jesus actually did many, many signs which attested to who he was, who he is, but sign seekers don't pay attention to what the signs actually say.

[9 : 13] They just want to see magic tricks. Herod should repent of his sins like the Ninevites did when Jonah came to them. He should bow down in honor of the king as the queen of the south did when she met Solomon, but that's not what he does.

Let's keep reading. In verse 9, he bombards Jesus with questions. Jesus gives no reply. Why do you think that is? I don't think Herod will be listening. You see, sign seekers don't listen to God's messengers anyway.

What is the point? Even worse though, when Jesus refuses to answer his questions and after the chief priests and the teachers of the law have had their go at accusing Jesus again, Herod begins to mock Jesus' kingship.

Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him, dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. Now, I think the robe reminds us of Solomon again.

Did it ring those bells for you? You see, Solomon, clothed in all his splendor, is the archetypal Old Testament king. You know, he's the bee's knees king of the Old Testament.

[10:27] The robe is certainly royal and kingly. And you see, the awful mistake that Herod and his soldiers have made, and the terrible evil that they are committing, is that they are standing before a king greater than Solomon, yet they mock him as if he were a common jester for their entertainment.

Not a king at all. In fact, though, the mockery that Jesus endured that night only further confirms his identity as God's anointed king.

You'd think a palace and a robe and all that kind of thing would confirm someone's identity as king. But you see, the Old Testament foreshadowed a king who would come and who would be mocked and spit upon and treated badly.

That's why we read from Psalm 89. Now, Psalm 89 was long and I hope you were able to follow all the way through. If not, go over it again. It's rockin' awesome. Anyway, back to Psalm 89, the psalm, the mood of the psalm radically changes halfway through.

Okay, so in the first half, the psalmist begins by recounting God's amazing promises to David, the promises he gave to David in 2 Samuel 7. Okay, that one of David's sons, one of David's descendants would sit on his throne forever and would conquer all his enemies and so on and so forth.

[12:04] Would reign over this perfect kingdom forever. Okay. But halfway through the psalm, the mood changes dramatically because the Lord does not seem to be keeping his promise.

Let me read from verse 49 of Psalm 89. Lord, where is your former great love which in your faithfulness you swore to David? Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies, Lord, have mocked, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.

Do you see how what God's anointed king is experiencing in the psalm is fulfilled in Jesus' experience before Herod?

The mockery that Jesus endured in Luke 23 only further confirms that Jesus is God's anointed king because that's what God's people are always taught to expect.

Now, before we move on to trial three, let's just think about this just really briefly in the 21st century for a moment. We still have sign seekers and mockers, don't we?

[13:28] People who say, I will only follow Jesus if he shows me a sign or shows me a miracle or appears to me in some way. And when he doesn't, they mock us, his people.

which Jesus takes personally. They mock us. But friends, remember that Jesus is the king. He has already given us plenty of evidence of that.

It is just that sign seekers will not listen to God's words, to God's messengers. Well, finally, let's go to trial three.

The third and final trial begins in verse 13. And much of the same ground is repeated again. I'm not going to cover it in detail for the sake of time. But you see, in the first half of verse 14, Jesus is accused again.

In the second half, Pilate declares his innocence again. In verse 15, we are told Herod's verdict agrees with Pilate. So even Herod says Jesus has done nothing to deserve death.

[14:36] That's the third statement of Jesus' innocence. And in verse 16, in light of all this, we're told that Pilate wants to punish Jesus and then release him. It seems absurd that he even wants to punish him, doesn't it, really?

But he wants to release him. And from this point on, there's one major question that begins to overhang the whole story. Okay? And that question is, who will be released?

A prisoner called Barabbas is introduced. And it's either him or Jesus. As it becomes more and more apparent that it will be Barabbas, our two themes turn into two tragic ironies.

We've seen as we've gone through these trials that Jesus is king and that Jesus is innocent. In the last scene, we see that the crowd want Barabbas to be released even though he's not the king and he's not innocent.

Now, the first irony then is hidden in the meaning of Barabbas' name. Barabbas actually means son of the father. Bar meaning son and Abba meaning father.

[15:49] Right? Now, you see, the irony is that the title son of the father is a title often used of God's anointed king. If you can think back to the Old Testament again, and we've already been talking about 2 Samuel 7, you might remember when God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne over God's kingdom forever, God says of that descendant, of that son, I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.

But Barabbas is not the true son of the father, is he? Not in that kingly sense. Jesus is the true son of the father, the true king descended from David who will rule over God's kingdom forever.

Yet the crowd don't want their king. They demand that Barabbas be released, the unworthy son, the son whose name only underscores how inadequately he has lived up to it.

Now the second irony relates to our second theme. Jesus is innocent but the crowd want Barabbas, the guilty one, to be released.

In verse 19 you'll see Luke gives details of Barabbas' crime. He actually did pretty much exactly what Jesus is being accused of.

[17:10] He was thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder during that insurrection. This was a crime deserving of crucifixion but the crowd want Jesus to be crucified.

You see in verse 20 we're told that Pilate appealed to the crowd again wanting to release Jesus but they kept shouting crucify him, crucify him. For the third time he spoke to them why?

What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. That's at least the fourth time Jesus has been declared innocent. Who will be released?

Pilate says again therefore I will have him punished and then release him. But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified.

And their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder.

[18:16] Notice how Luke's already spelled that out. He doesn't just call him Barabbas. He spells out again the guilty one. The guilty one was released because he was the one they asked for and they surrendered Jesus to their will.

And with that we come to the end of our passage. I want to close with just two implications that come out the two main themes and the two tragic ironies that we've been looking at.

Okay? So these three trials have shown us that Jesus is innocent and that he is king. That is clear as day, right? Let's look at the implications of Jesus' innocence and the implications of Jesus' kingship.

Number one, the fact that Jesus was innocent means that when, means that he was not taking the punishment for his own sin. That is the heart of the good news that we find in this passage.

Barabbas is a wonderful picture of that, isn't he? Jesus took the punishment for Barabbas' sin, didn't he? And what the Bible tells us is that this is actually what he's done for all of us, for all those who trust in Jesus.

[19:30] Just like Barabbas, we have all been inadequate sons of our heavenly Father. And we have all rebelled against his rightful rule over us.

Because of that, we all deserve to be punished by him. But Jesus, when he died on the cross, he died in our place as our substitute.

All those who trust in Jesus get to go free because Jesus has taken our punishment. It's just a simple swap.

It's not too complicated, really. Children do this on the playground. It's a simple swap. See, we are treated as innocent because he was treated as guilty.

This is the only way to be freed from the punishment you deserve. last of all, let's talk about the implications of Jesus' kingship.

[20:39] Because Jesus was and is God's true son, death could not hold him as the Old Testament also foretold, and Jesus rose from the dead on the third day to take his place on his

throne until the time when he will return to judge all the world.

On that day, the Bible tells us, no one will be at all embarrassed or ashamed to be associated with Jesus. In fact, all those who had judged Jesus unworthy of their honor and respect will find that when he returns to judge them, the sheer sight of him will terrify them.

And that will be only the beginning of their eternal suffering. I'm afraid we've got to end here. There is a day coming, says the book of Revelation, chapter 1, when Jesus Christ, who is the true ruler of the kings of the earth, isn't that a scary title for Herod and Pilate, who is the true ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, will return.

And he will come with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the peoples on earth will mourn because of him.

Do you see? King Jesus will not put up with rebellion forever. forever. So I plead with you, if you haven't already, before it is too late, show him honor.

[22 : 28] I'm not mucking about. I'm not just preaching because I have a slot. And it almost, I'm not forcing you, but it is going to happen.

You know, we need to be prepared for this event that is going to happen. Show this one honor. Bow down and adore him for his love towards you. Lest when he returns and you have yet refused him, you will weep and wail and suffer eternal torment at his hand.

He will be gentle with you now, but there comes a day when he will not be. If you have already bowed the knee to King Jesus, first of all, make sure that you live that way by obeying his word. You are in his kingdom. You have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into his good kingdom. Live that way. It's a good way to live. You don't live that way to get into the kingdom, but you live that way because you are in this good kingdom.

kingdom. So live that way. Secondly, remember that he loves you. Think about what he has done for you. Thirdly, pray for your friends who don't yet know him and warn them.

[23 : 51] Please pray this week as we go together on mission to the lost. This is wonderful. Please use this. This would be great to focus your prayers on, especially, where is it?

If you look at it, especially Friday the 22nd, the last bullet point, that guy there in desperate need of your prayers.

Please pray for this Joshua Russell fellow. Anyway, please pray for us. Pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom.

Pray that it will come soon. because at that day, every eye will finally see that Jesus deserves praise and honor and glory. Amen and amen.

Come, Lord Jesus. Let's pray about that now. Gracious Father, we thank you so much for sending your Son, who though he was innocent, he bore our punishment.

[25 : 04] Though he was king, he was mocked and treated scornfully. Father, we know that he is coming again and will gather to himself all those who have bowed the knee to him.

We pray that you would speed that day and that there would be many people on that day worshipping him, praising him for his love towards them. We pray that you would help us to take the gospel to those who do not yet know him, to bring them into his kingdom before it's too late, before they are crushed under the force of his kingdom.

We pray for his glory and for their good. Amen.