

Who is on Trial?

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Sermon series: Watch and Pray

Luke 23:1-12

At night, in the house of the High Priest, Jesus was mocked, humiliated, beaten, spat on, made fun of. Then in the morning, the same humiliation continued with the Sanhedrin (high court). They needed a verdict that could put Jesus in trouble. They needed a statement from the mouth of Jesus to take him to the Roman authorities. Why? Death sentences would be given only the Romans.

Let us go to the passage:

Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. (Luke 23:1 ESV)

The whole company, I assume the Sanhedrin, all the Jewish leaders, priests, teachers of the law, elders, High Priest... the entourage!

Let me remind you **the inquiries**.

Notice that both questions focus on **Jesus' identity**.

“If you are the Christ, tell us.”

“Are you the Son of God, then?”

Jesus' answer is not a direct affirmation. But He is not denying what they said. We see Jesus being more silent than defending himself.

-Pontius Pilate

We are facing Pilate, a Roman governor who was stationed to rule Palestine. “He was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea, serving under Emperor Tiberius from 26/27 to 36/37 AD...The Jewish historian Josephus, the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, and the Gospel of Luke all mention incidents of tension and violence between the Jewish population and Pilate's administration. Many of these incidents involve Pilate acting in ways that offended the religious sensibilities of the Jews.” ¹

Pilate wanted to keep the law and order and collect taxes.

Strange, Jewish leaders did not like Pilate, yet they took Jesus to him.

Philo of Alexandria, says Pilate was a harsh, but a weak man. He feared that any wrong report that goes to Tiberius would jeopardize his position. And we will witness his weak character today.

What are the Accusations?

² 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.” (Luke 23:2 ESV)

According to NIV commentary: The heart of the case is a threefold accusation:

- (1) Jesus subverts the nation;
- (2) he opposes payment of taxes to Caesar; and
- (3) he claims to be Christ, a king.

For Pilate the most dangerous charges are the second and third, though the first charge may suggest Jesus is a source of public unrest.²

Please notice the accuser never uses name of Jesus; but says “**this man**”. (*Is he afraid to use Jesus’ name?*)

1. The first charge Jesus is accused for is “misleading the nation”. In reality, Jesus is leading the Jews to the right path. Pilate is not concerned about the internal affairs of the Jews, as long as there is “peace”, or, more importantly, they pay taxes.
2. The second charge does interest Pilate; it is important that the taxes were collected. When do we find Jesus telling his audience not to pay taxes? When? “Whatever is Caesar’s, give it to him.” (Luke 20:20-26); Yet the Jewish authorities were falsely accusing Jesus knowing this could put Jesus in danger.
3. The third charge is a dangerous one. They accuse that Jesus is a revolutionary; he claims he is the “new king”, causing a riot against Rome. Then Pilate needs to act. But as you see, he will not see Jesus a revolutionary man. We witness here the Jewish leaders are manipulating the words of Jesus to make him a political king, a political Messiah, a threat against Rome!

-Questions by Pilate

³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” (Luke 23:3 ESV)

Jesus answers like he answered the Jewish leaders before. “You have said so.”

“Jesus is saying yes, but not quite in the sense Pilate intends.”³

Pilate’s question again reminds me how God is control of the situation. Over and over, we will hear this question; “Are you a king...?” In fact, in the end, Pilate eventually writes on the cross “**The King of the Jews.**” The authorities object to Pilate, but he does not change his mind.

The result:

⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵ 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. ⁷ 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” (Luke 23:4-7 ESV)

Pilate **does not find** any guilt in Jesus. This should end here, right? **Wrong!**

As I mentioned before, Pilate was a weak and insecure leader. When he saw the people insisting on their accusation, and when he heard the word Galilee, he came up with a solution. “Let this problem be solved **by Herod**; Galilee is his region.” “Now any decision Pilate makes will have Herod’s consultation, and Pilate will be protected either way. Political courtesy and passing the buck are both possible here.”⁴

Don’t you love politicians?

Illustration: I think about Artsakh. Russia sold us to Azerbaijan. The Western world ignored the issue so the oil will flow from Azerbaijan. Don’t you love the political arena?

-Why in the world is the Jewish leadership so eager to get rid of Jesus?

They were in control of Jerusalem, the Temple, the religious practices. Jesus did not play by their rules. Jesus ate with sinners, tax collectors, allowed women to talk to him or wash his feet, opened the eyes of the blind man, healed a man on the Sabbath, accepted sinners...

The religious leaders are threatened. Jesus needs to be removed. He should be killed.

-It is Herod’s Problem

⁸ 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. (Luke 23:8 ESV)

Well, someone is glad to see Jesus, right? (Let us see)

N.T. Wright explains the relationship of Herod and Jesus.

“We will not understand Luke’s scene between Jesus and Herod unless we sense that quality in it. Herod has been in the background throughout the gospel. Only Luke tells us that he had wanted to hunt Jesus down and kill him much earlier, during Jesus’ Galilean ministry (Luke 13.31); only Luke now gives us this scene where they meet at last, the present and precarious ‘king of the Jews’ face to face with the real and coming King.

Herod had longed for this moment. He saw Jesus as a combination of **John the Baptist**, who had fascinated him with his talk but frightened him with his warnings, and the kind of circus artiste who can do magic stunts to order.”⁵

You think Pilate has security issues; Herod is worse. The entire Herod dynasty is full of “lunatics.” People who even kill their wives or children in order to stay in power. Herod thinks Jesus is the genie that came out of the bottle.

“he was hoping to see some sign done by him...”

⁹So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.” (Luke 23:8,9 ESV)

Jesus is silent.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7 ESV)

The silence of Jesus, so powerful.

He knows exactly what is going on...

-Why would Jesus answer Herod? Herod is not interested in answers. Herod wants to see signs and wonders.

-It brings back to my memory the Gospel according to John. How many times Jesus warned them that signs are not magical things; signs and miracles Jesus performed to heal and help people physically. Signs also show the power of God.

In feeding the 5000 Jesus said: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”** (John 6:26 ESV).

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,(John 12:37 ESV).

If one continues reading the passage, it says they saw who Jesus is but they refused to believe., why?

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of

the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. (John 12:42-43 ESV)

John in his gospel stresses that signs fail to generate belief.

In fact, they ask Jesus in the same passage for a solution:

Answer of Jesus: “**This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.**” (John 6:29 ESV)

-Back to humiliation, mocking and sending back to Pilate

¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. (Luke 23:10-11 ESV)

“In the face of Jesus’ silence, Herod and others react with more mocking. They dress Jesus in some type of regal clothing (whether white or purple is debated)⁶ and make fun of the “king,” who in their view possesses so little power. Then they send him back to Pilate.”⁷

-How sad is this. None of the politicians find a reason to kill Jesus. They are trying to “wash their hands” from this issue. Pilate to Herod, Herod to Pilate.

The Result:

¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other. (Luke 23:12 ESV)

Both of these “lunatics”, “power seekers” became friends. I am not sure how politicians become friends.

Application:

1. What can I learn from Jesus’ walk facing opposition.

Jesus was silent.

Richard Rohr describes the suffering of Jesus:

Jesus receives our hatred and does not return it. He suffers and does not make the other suffer. He does not first look at changing others, but pays the price of change within himself. He absorbs the mystery of human sin rather than passing it on. He does not use his suffering and death as power over others to punish them, but as power for others to transform them.”⁸

His silence was for me, for our redemption. He absorbed all the hatreds on his shoulder.

I can only worship Him, and thank Him for his presence in our lives.

2. The Cross brings reconciliation between God and us and between humanity. If Herod and Pilate became friends for wrong reason (political), how about us, we need to learn to reconcile with people under the shadow of the cross.⁹

So, my title of my sermon: **Who is on Trial?**

We are on trial. Because of my sin, Son of God is taking my shame and sin on his shoulder representing me. Instead of me facing judgment of sin, Jesus is taking on his shoulder. Yes, Jesus is on trial, but in reality my sin is on trial.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate

2. Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Study Bible Commentary Luke*, P 584

3. Blass, DeBrunner, Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), sec. 441.4. It is taken from NIV commentary Luke p 585

4. "Pilate had developed a record of insensitivity to the Jews by placing Roman shields in Herod's palace, an insult to the Jews (see Philo, *Legation ad Gaium* 38.299–305). This may be political expediency here to reverse his recent reputation." Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Study Bible Commentary Luke*, P 584, 585

5. N. T. Wright. *Luke for Everyone* P 275

6. Oepke, "λάμπω, κτλ.," *TDNT*, 4:17; Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, 366. There is no way to decide.

7. Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Study Bible Commentary Luke*, P 585

8. Richard Rohr, *Hope Against Darkness*, (Franciscan Media, Cincinnati, 2001), 31

9. N. T. Wright. *Luke for Everyone* P 277