

Sunday, January 26, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 17 | Luke 23:1-12 | "The Shepherd and the Wolves"

Last week, we saw the Lord was subjected to a kangaroo court. Though the man never broke Mosaic law, he was tried as a *heretic*. Though he never transgressed Roman law, he was convicted as an *anarchist*. The worst miscarriage of justice in history occurred over two thousand years ago in the judicial system of Jerusalem, and the Son of God was the target. But, as we saw, Jesus was no *victim*; he *volunteered*. And through that passage, we learned how to act when we're suffering unjustly. First, **while the mistreatment of Christians is uncalled for, it ought not to be unexpected**. And second, **honor awaits those who declare the truth, while dishonor awaits those who deny the truth.**

READ: Luke 23:1-12 (ESV)

¹ Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. 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." ³ And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 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."

⁶ 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. 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. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.

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. ¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

In Matthew 10:16-18, Jesus said to his disciples, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be **wise** as serpents and **innocent** as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles." The Lord

warned his followers that while they should have a dove-like *countenance*, they also ought to possess a snake-like *intelligence*. This is because the world is a dangerous place for Christians; they are like “sheep in the midst of wolves.”

To be clear, Jesus did not describe a situation that he himself was not willing to experience firsthand. In today’s passage, the Lord will show his flock what it looks like to “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” as he faces off against both an impulsive governor and an ill-tempered king. Through his example, we’ll learn how to conduct ourselves when confronted by predators who hold positions of great power and authority.

As we’ll see, the sheep need not fear the wolves. For the Good Shepherd has faced such foes before and triumphed. To paraphrase the 23rd psalm, even if we should be led to dine at a table in the presence of our enemies, we don’t have to be afraid because the Lord is with us; his rod and staff comfort us.

I want you to notice **two** things:

i. Vs.1-5 – Jesus’ **stance** before a Roman governor.

Luke tells us that the “**whole company**”—i.e., the Sanhedrin—hailed Jesus “**before Pilate.**”

Of the fourteen Roman governors of Judea, Pilate was the fifth. He headed the military in this region, supervised the judicial system, and oversaw the finances.¹ For those familiar with history, it may strike you as strange that Pilate is in Jerusalem. Roman officials usually lived seventy-five miles northwest on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in a town called Caesarea (cf. Ac. 9:30; 10:1; 12:23).² But during Jewish festivals, *especially Passover*, they'd make the trek to the city. This was a not-so-subtle reminder that Rome was still in charge, and their presence would discourage any rebellious activity.

At this point, Pontius Pilate had been governor of Judea for about seven years, and his tenure in this region had been contentious (cf. Lu. 13:1).

Early in his reign, Pilate set up votive shields in Jerusalem. Votive shields had the image of Tiberius emblazoned on the front and, as such, were objects of pagan worship in the Roman Empire. Considering the Jews had a ban on all such images, especially those of the idol-worship variety, this act upset the Sanhedrin.

¹ Edwards (2015), p. 663

² This is not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi, which was situated on the base of Mount Hermon fifteen miles north of the Sea of Galilee (cf. Matt. 16:18).

So much so that they staged a five-day nonviolent protest outside Pilate's home in Caesarea and sent a complaint directly to Tiberius Caesar. Ultimately, the Emperor sided with the Jews, who then made Pilate take them down, humiliating him in front of all Israel.³

Later, he took temple funds to build a twenty-three-mile aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem.⁴ As with the shields, this act was equally unpopular, resulting in a riot wherein many Jews were slain by Roman soldiers, and others were trampled to death in the crowd's attempt to flee.

But Pilate wasn't only unpopular with the Jews. Three years after Jesus' crucifixion, in AD 36, Tiberius removed Pilate from office after reports had reached the Emperor that the governor had slaughtered Samaritans on the slopes of Mt. Gerizim. Since the people killed were doing nothing more heinous than a religious pilgrimage, his actions were deemed too extreme, even by Roman standards. Needless to say, Pilate wasn't well-liked in Palestine or Rome. Philo, a Jewish writer and contemporary of Pilate, said that the governor was "inflexible, stubborn, and cruel."⁵

Regardless, considering it was illegal for anyone but Rome to put someone to death (cf. Jn. 18:31), the Jews needed Pilate's consent if they were going to get Jesus crucified. And the only way they could get Pilate's consent was to defame Jesus. This is why the Sanhedrin says, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."

This isn't **three** accusations but **one**. The Jews said that Jesus claimed to be "Christ, a king," and, according to them, this meant that he was "misleading" Israel and "forbidding" Jews from paying their taxes. The irony here is that while the Lord claimed to be the Christ, as we talked about last week, he **didn't** promote tax evasion and **wasn't** leading the nation astray. In fact, he said the exact opposite. When asked, "Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not," Jesus got a denarius and asked, "Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They, of course, say, "Caesar's." And then the Lord says, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Lu. 20:22-25).

³ Keener (2003), 2:1128.

⁴ Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18.55-62.

⁵ Edwards (2015), p. 663

So, the Lord was innocent of all charges but the charge of being Christ. The only hope the Jews had in condemning Jesus was to manipulate the facts so that Jesus was made out to be a criminal.

Ignoring the charge of misleading the people and tax evasion, Pilate asked Jesus, “[Are you the King of the Jews?](#)” And the Lord said, “[You have said so.](#)” This is similar to his answer to the Sanhedrin when they asked if he was Christ (cf. Lu. 22:70). As we established last week, Jesus’ response is similar to how we might say, “You said it!” Far from denying the accusation, this phrase confirms and agrees with whatever the speaker has said.⁶ Even though the Jews had manipulated the situation, making such a claim seem rebellious, Jesus was the Christ. Even if it got him killed, he would not relinquish his title.

With Jesus confirming that he was “[the King of the Jews,](#)” we might expect Pilate to have taken the Lord right then and there. Instead, we’re told, “[Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.”](#)” Though the Lord did not deny being the Christ, Pilate didn’t think the man standing before him was a threat. This is because, according to John, their initial conversation was more lengthy than the version presented by Luke. And in John’s account, Jesus convinces Pilate of his innocence.

READ: [John 18:33-38 \(ESV\)](#)

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, [he went back outside](#) to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.

⁶ Edwards (2015), p. 671, “It was not typical of rabbinic speech, and its ten-odd OT occurrences invariably *affirm* [author’s emphasis] what a speaker has said. Its closest and most dramatic OT referent may be the reply of Moses to Pharaoh, “As you have sad [Heb. *Kēn dibartāh*], I shall not see your face again!” (Exod 10:29).

So, we see Jesus asking Pilate what he means by the phrase “King of the Jews,” when he asked, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” The Lord’s point was that such a title can be misconstrued as threatening Caesar. But, as Jesus says, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” In other words, “Pilate, I am no threat to you, Caesar, or any other kingdom of this world.” The only people who would find him a threat would be those who cannot bear to hear “the truth.” To which Pilate famously replies, “What is truth?” Rather than consider the implications of Jesus' words, the Roman governor would rather dodge the question.

So, what’s the takeaway? Untempered skepticism becomes denialism.

READ: Proverbs 14:15 (NASB)

The naive believes everything, but the sensible person considers his steps.

READ: Proverbs 12:15 (ESV)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Asking, "What is truth," and not waiting around for an answer is the same as saying, "There is no truth." If Pilate didn't know "what" truth was, then neither would anyone else. For the governor, the truth was unknowable. Even if the embodiment of truth itself was standing in front of him, he wouldn't recognize it. Just as life can crush the human spirit, it has made Pilate distrustful. The passage of time had led him to believe that there was nothing of substance in the world; the poor man had given up hope. And not even Jesus himself could get through that jaded and callous heart. **Pilate only wanted to ask questions; he didn’t want answers. It was better to remain ignorant than face an uncomfortable truth, better to believe a lie than come to grips with reality, better to think you're okay than admit you're not and have to change.** No. Pilate liked the so-called "truth" he had made for himself; sure, it was subjective, but it was also comfortable.

However, lest we distance ourselves too much from the Roman, we must admit we can relate to him. Given Pilate’s question, we know he thought truth was an *object* instead of a *person*; he assumed *something* would give his life meaning rather than *someone* (cf. Matt. 10:39).⁷ And such a belief can make one cynical (*read the book of Ecclesiastes*). And we are no different. How many of us have tried finding meaning in a job, money, pleasure, or anything else? Only a relationship with God can give life meaning (cf. Eccl. 12:13). Consequently, one wonders how

⁷ Klink (2016), p. 767.

different things might've been had Pilate asked, "Who is truth?" Jesus might've answered, "Me." Or, if he had asked, "Where is truth?" The Lord might've pointed to himself and said, "Here." Even the question, "What is truth," already had an answer: *the Son of God is truth* (cf. 14:6). The security of truth is found only in the arms of Christ. The question is, do we have ears to hear truth's call? Or has unbridled skepticism made us deaf to her pleas?

After this conversation, Pilate is not **threatened** by Jesus Christ. At the very least, Pilate knows that Jesus is not the kind of man the Jews are claiming him to be—i.e., a violent insurrectionist, threatening the stability of the Roman empire. So, he announces his verdict: "I find no guilt in this man." Though condemned by the Jews, the Lord was supported by Pilate, a gentile.

ii. Vs. 6-12 – Jesus' **silence** before a vassal king.

But the Jews were not pleased. They doubled down, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place." This is, yet again, a false accusation. Jesus had not fomented rebellion anywhere. Pilate, of course, was not fooled. But something the Jews had said piqued his interest: *Jesus had been in "Galilee."* And not just that, but Jesus was a "Galilean." This revelation sparks an idea. Herod, who presided over the jurisdiction of Galilee, just happened to be in Jerusalem for Passover. Considering that Jesus, being a Galilean, was under *Herod's* jurisdiction, Pilate could send this man to Herod and have him deal with this whole ordeal. Thus, as he had dodged Jesus' statement about truth, he got out of dealing with Jesus, at least for a moment.

The "Herod" being referred to here is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, the king who murdered all the firstborn children in Bethlehem, trying to kill the baby Jesus (cf. Matt. 2:16-18). He was also the same Herod who was condemned by John the Baptist for marrying his sister-in-law (cf. Lu. 3:19).

Strictly speaking, Herod wasn't a king in the fullest sense of the word—i.e., autonomy, sovereignty over a region, etc.; his position was that of a vassal king. In other words, Herod served at Rome's discretion. In fact, he is better thought of as a tetrarch or someone who governed one-quarter of a province.

Luke says, "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." But after questioning Jesus "at some length," the Lord gave "no answer" to Herod. Admittedly, Luke doesn't tell us why Jesus stonewalled Herod. It may have had something to do with the fact that Herod had John the Baptist beheaded (cf. Lu. 3:19). John the Baptist was not only Jesus' cousin but the last prophet of the OT. Thus, killing John the Baptist was a grievous offense, and,

as such, Herod was owed nothing but silence. However, the more likely reason is that Herod didn't respect the Lord; he wanted Jesus to perform "some sign" before him. Herod thought of Jesus as nothing more than an entertainer. But the Lord did not pander to the crowd, even when it might've saved his life.

So, what's the takeaway? The King of Kings does not pander to peasantry.

READ: John 6:25-36 (ESV)

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

You cannot fool the Son of God. He knows if all you wanna do is use him. If you only want Jesus for what he can do, you'll miss out on who he is; his identity is more important than his abilities (e.g., Prosperity Gospel). Is Jesus more than a grocer to you? Or, like Herod, are you only interested in him for what he can do rather than who he is? The Lord can do great and mighty things. But he will not cater to your whim. He is no jester. Jesus is the King of Kings and deserves to be worshipped; he ought to be our everything. Come to Jesus for his worthiness, not his wonders; he should be all the bread we need.

After Jesus' interaction with Herod, Luke tells us, "The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him." Doubtless, they said the same things to Herod that they said to Pilate—i.e., troublemaker. Afterward, Luke says, "Herod with his soldiers treated [Jesus] with contempt and mocked him." Also, after "arraying him in splendid clothing," Herod sent Jesus

“back to Pilate.” But as a result of this exchange, “Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been enmity with each other.” Thus, this proves the old adage, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Video Description:

Holy Week | Week 17 | “The Shepherd and the Wolves” (Luke 23:1-12)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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