



**August 30, 2020**

**Luke 23:1-12**

<sup>23</sup> Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."

<sup>3</sup> So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

<sup>4</sup> Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

<sup>5</sup> But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

<sup>6</sup> On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

<sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. <sup>9</sup> He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no

answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

## COMMENTARY

**23:1-6.** After His condemnation by the Sanhedrin, Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate, who alone possessed authority in Judea to exercise capital punishment. Although the seat of the Roman government was located in Caesarea, Pilate was in Jerusalem during the Passover festivities. This was wise policy because Passover was a time of heightened nationalistic hopes and memories. If trouble were to arise, the odds were that it would take place during the Passover and in Jerusalem. At this point Jesus, having been “rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law” (Luke 9:22), was “betrayed into the hands of men” (9:44) and “handed over to the Gentiles” (18:32). Soon He would be mocked and ridiculed (cf. 23:11; 18:32).

The charges brought by the Sanhedrin against Jesus were transferred from the religious grounds, for which Jesus was condemned, to political ones, for which Pilate might condemn Him. The general charge found in Mark 15:3 is spelled out in Luke 23:2. Jesus was accused of (1) subverting the nation, (2) opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and (3) claiming to be the Messiah, i.e., a king. The first charge is a subjective judgment that Jesus could just as well have leveled against His accusers. The second, the reader already knew, was false because of 20:20-26. The third is partly true. Jesus is indeed a king, and the sign on His cross would proclaim this (23:38; Mark 15:26; Matt 27:37; John 19:19), but He was not a political threat as king, as Luke 20:20-26 reveals (cf. John 18:36-37). Nevertheless it is clear from the crucifixion and the sign that Jesus was crucified on the political charge of claiming to be Christ, a king.

Pilate asked Jesus directly if He was the “king of the Jews.” Jesus replied with the same guarded affirmation as found in Luke 22:70. Luke then added that Pilate pronounced Jesus’ innocence to the chief priests and crowd. They, however, insisted that Jesus was unsettling the entire nation by His teachings.

**23:6-12.** The account of Jesus’ appearance before Herod Antipas is unique to Luke. It is mentioned only here and in Acts 4:27-28. Exactly why Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, however, is unclear. Was it to “pass the buck” in that he believed Jesus was innocent and did not want to order His execution? Was it to bring about a reconciliation with Herod by honoring him with the opportunity to make this decision or by seeking his counsel (Luke 23:12)? Was it to seek Herod’s aid in making a decision due to his familiarity with Jewish issues (23:15)? Luke’s purpose in recording this account is much clearer. Herod would provide a second ruler’s testimony to Jesus’ innocence (cf. 23:15). Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea from the death of his father in A.D. 4 until the Roman Emperor Gaius deposed him in A.D. 39. This meant Herod ruled over

Capernaum and Nazareth and the other territory around Lake Galilee but not the territory east of the lake. Perea included land east of the Jordan River southwards to Moab. Perea reached eastward to Philadelphia, Gerasa, Arabia, Heshbonitis, and Medeba. Apparently, Perea reached to the north almost to Pella, north of the River Jabbok. The Wadi Jabis may have been the boundary line. Thus, both the Galilean and Perea ministries of Jesus played out in territory that Herod controlled. This gave Pilate an excuse to send Him to Herod.

## **MAIN POINT**

Jesus, the innocent One, was delivered over to death, in our place, so that we, the guilty ones, could be free from the wrath of God.

## **INTRODUCTION**

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**Have you ever been summoned to court for a traffic violation or other similar misdemeanor? Were you given the opportunity to defend your case? What was the end result of your hearing?**

**What lessons did you learn from the experience? How did it impact the way you lived in the months that followed?**

Hearings or trials before governing authorities for even the most minor offenses can still be nerve-racking, if not life-altering. The experience of being held accountable for our actions by those who have power over us serves as a test of our character. Similarly, Jesus' character and commitment to the will of God was tested through His intense trials before the high priest and Pilate. Through injustice and persecution, Jesus remained humble and steadfast in His obedience to the will of the Father, which led Him to the cross for our sake.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

- Have a volunteer read Luke 23:1-5.

**What charges did the chief priests bring against Jesus in verse 2?**

In Luke 20:20-26, we read that the Jewish leaders had failed to trap Jesus into opposing Roman taxation policies. Rather, He taught the principle of loyalty to government in the

realm of government but loyalty to God in everything. Then they used His title, Christ or Messiah, to charge Him with political rebellion, claiming He was a king opposed to Caesar.

Jesus had radically proclaimed a new kingdom, the kingdom of God. He had implied in various ways that He was the new King. The Jewish people wanted Him to be the new king who would overthrow Rome. However, Jesus did nothing to encourage military action. He did nothing to advocate governmental change. In verse 3, we read Pilate's blunt question to Jesus in response to the accusations, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

**Did Jesus answer Pilate's question? Explain your answer.**

**In John's account of this scene, he recorded a more detailed response from Jesus. Read John 18:33-37. How did Jesus' introduction of the concept of His kingdom answer Pilate's questions about Jesus' supposed kingship?**

**What does it mean that Jesus' kingdom is not from this world? What implications does this have for the nature and impact of His kingdom on this world?**

Jesus answered Pilate's opening question with His own question. Pilate's response indicated that as a governor who was responsible for the "just" conduct of trials, he recognized he was being challenged by the defendant. Pilate also found it ironic that Jesus' own people turned Him over to the Romans. What kind of king is rejected by his own people? The fundamental attribute of Jesus' kingdom is that it is not derived from or out of this world.

Pilate gave a clear verdict: innocent of all charges (Luke 23:4). He directed his answer both to those making the charge and to the emotionally charged crowd. Jesus was not an enemy of Rome, despite the religious leaders' attempts to paint Him as one.

**The chief priests weren't pleased with Pilate's verdict, so they kept pressing. What new charge did the chief priests add in verse 5?**

- Have a volunteer read Luke 23:6-12.

**What did Pilate's referral to Herod show about the seriousness with which he viewed the "threat" Jesus posed?**

**What do you learn about Herod's character from verses 8-11?**

The chief priests' chance reference to Galilee gave Pilate an out. He could turn the decision over to the administrator in charge of Galilee. After all, Herod just happened to be in town for the Jewish Passover celebration. This was Herod Antipas. He had

inherited rule over Galilee and Perea from Herod the Great, his father. He had married Herodias, his brother's wife. This led to John the Baptist's rebuke that resulted in Herod beheading John (Luke 9:7-9). Herod knew about Jesus and His wonder-working reputation. Now Herod wanted to instigate a sideshow with Jesus as the star. Herod used provoking questions to try to force Jesus' hand so he could see a miracle. Having survived Pilate's court, Jesus wanted no part of Herod's trial. So He gave him no answer.

**Why do you think Jesus refused to respond to Herod? What do we learn from Him in this scene?**

**Read Luke 19:45. In that scene, Jesus confronted injustice with action, but here He was silent. Why?**

**What particular form of injustice makes your blood boil? How do you decide when to fight for what is right, and when not to? How have you faced that decision recently?**

**Luke's account emphasizes that both Herod and Pilate found Jesus innocent. Why is this detail important for us to know?**

## **NEXT STEP**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**Read Romans 5:6-11. Why did we need to be reconciled to God? What separated us from Him? How did Jesus accomplish this ministry of reconciliation?**

**What can you do this week to keep the reality of your reconciliation present in your thoughts?**

**How might your week look differently if you do?**

## **PRAYER**

Praise God for His reconciling work through Christ that brought you to Him at the right time when you were hostile and helpless. Pray that you would understand your need for a Savior and trust fully in Christ because of the price He paid for you. Pray for your group to encourage one another in your walks with the Lord and that you would share the good news of reconciliation with non-believers.