# Luke 23 (Part 1): 1-25 • Jesus before Pilate and Herod

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We're starting the 23rd chapter today, Luke chapter 23. We're going to read through the first 25 verses and let's see what the Lord has for us today. Luke chapter 23. And beginning with verse 1, here we go.

*"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* (Messiah) *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 longed to... excuse me,) *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* (to) *that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.*

*13 Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. 15 Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. 16 I will therefore punish and release him.*

*18 But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas" - 19 a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. 20 Pilate addressed them once more, desiring*

*to release Jesus, 21 but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" 22 A third time he said to them, "Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him." 23 But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. 25 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."* (ESV)

Let's stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You today that we can gather to be in the Scriptures today, just like we typically do on a Sunday. And even though we're in very different circumstances, we thank You, Father God, for the technology that exists that allows us to do this live over the internet and into the homes of people, literally, all around the world. And we're thankful, Lord God, for every single one.

And I pray, Father God, for every single person who's watching today. And I ask You, my Father, to be with them in a very special way. To reveal Your presence and to shield them, Lord God. To keep them in peace and hope. The peace and hope that come from You and from no other source.

I thank You my Father, for this new day. And just pray that you would fill us all Lord God, with Your Spirit. And teach us and help us to understand Your Word. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

Chapter 23 here of Luke begins with the Sanhedrin bringing Jesus before Pilate, Pontius Pilate. His name is well known. He's been spoken in creeds for centuries by the church. He was the Roman governor over Judea. They called him a procurator and it was his job to essentially keep the peace and to exercise Roman justice.

Now, since Israel was at this time under Roman occupation, the Jews were obligated to bring a case like this to the Roman governor. And you might wonder, well, why can't the Sanhedrin just take care of this on their own? Well, the reason was, is because under Roman rule, the Jews could not put a man to death. They had been stripped of their right to execute someone for any sort of a crime. And they had to bring him to the Roman governor to have that charge stick.

But that wasn't their only problem. They also knew that Pilate didn't care a snit about their religious laws. And they had to somehow convince this man that

Jesus had violated Roman law and they had to make it serious enough that it warranted the death penalty. And that meant somehow trying to convince Pilate that Jesus was guilty of sedition or if you will, treason.

It says in verse 2, if you look with me there again in your Bible. It says, they began to accuse Him, saying, *"We found this man misleading our nation."* A charge that was totally false. They also said, He forbids us to give tribute to Caesar. Again, completely false. And - their other charge - saying that He, Himself is Christ, a king. Okay. That part of it is partially true.

In actuality, Jesus never did say it publicly except to His disciples. The people are the ones who declared it. You'll remember on the Sunday previous to this, when Jesus came into the city on what we call Palm Sunday the people were proclaiming Him as Messiah. And of course, Jesus didn't deny it. Why should He? It was true.

You'll notice that their last charge concerning Jesus, was that He proclaims Himself a king. And of course, that's what's going to prick the ears of Pilate. And he says in verse 3, he asked Him, *"Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so.""*

Now, this is a very, a difficult phrase in the Greek to translate. And that's why, if you have a different Bible translation, you might find that the translators have treated this a little bit differently. In the Greek, it literally, is simply the words you say. And according to this Greek rendering of what the conversation Jesus is having with Pilate, Pilate says, are you a king? *"Are you the King of the Jews?"* And Jesus's response is, you say.

And it's a noncommittal response that assumes the predetermined bias on the part of the person asking the question. And this is the very same response Jesus gave to the Sanhedrin earlier in the day when they asked Him if He was the Son of God. But whereas the Sanhedrin considered that response to be a reason to condemn, Pilate considers it a reason to acquit.

And you'll notice in verse 4, *"...Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds,* (He says, and this is his first rendering. He says,) *"I find no guilt in this man."* I find no guilt. And this is Pilate's verdict. And, interestingly enough, he never changes his mind related to that verdict.

In fact, you saw, as we read through these verses, Pilate remains steadfast that this man did nothing to warrant death. At least according to his understanding of

Roman jurisprudence, this man was innocent. And yet he desperately wanted to pass the buck on this situation.

As the religious leaders kept talking and kept accusing and so forth. You'll notice that they go on and Pilate is going to find an open door to do just that - pass the buck. It says in verse 5 that, they were urgent with him. And they were saying, *"He stirs up the people."* In fact, he's been stirring them up all the way from Galilee all the way here to Jerusalem."

And Pilate heard that, he goes, oh from Galilee, huh? Is He a Galilean then? And when he found out that Jesus was considered to be a Galilean, he thought, ah, here's my opportunity. Herod's in town. I'm going to send him over to Herod. And this was just Pilate's attempt at trying to avoid the drama or being stuck in a situation. It's Herod's problem. Let him deal with it.

Now, there are several kings in the Bible, who are referred to as Herod. There were several in history. This is Herod Antipas. This is the son of king Herod, who murdered the babies in Bethlehem when he found out through the magi or the wise men that they were following a star that heralded the birth of a king. This is his son Antipas, who beheaded John, or had John beheaded in prison. He was Tetrarch of Galilee. And therefore, it seemed natural in Pilate's estimation to let Herod handle this.

In verse 8, it says, *"When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him."... he had heard about him,...*" Everybody had heard about Jesus. But it tells us here at the end of verse 8 that Herod was wanting Jesus to perform a miracle in his presence.

In verse 9, it says, *"So he questioned him at… length."* And that means for a long time, a protracted period of time. Herod is questioning Jesus. But I want you to notice what it says at the end of verse 9, *"but he made no answer."* Very interesting.

And all this while we find out in verse 10, that, *"The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him."* But let's come back to that just for a moment. Let's come back to that fact that Jesus said nothing to Herod. That has to be a pretty serious thing, don't you think? Because remember, Jesus is God. He is God in human flesh. And it's interesting that God has nothing to say to king Herod.

And we're wondering why? I mean, it begs the question, doesn't it? We naturally wonder: Why did Jesus remain silent? Why did He have nothing... I

mean, Herod kept plying Him with questions. Question after question, after question, after question. And Jesus remained silent the whole time.

Well, a very good portion of the answer to our question: Why did Jesus remain silent? It's found in the very next verse. Look with me in verse 11. *"And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then arraying him in splendid clothing,..."* And what that means is they dressed Him up in mock clothing. Or if you will, the mock clothing of a king. And then *"he sent him back to Pilate."*

Do you see here why Jesus said nothing in response to all of Herod's questions? It's pretty simple from the text anyway. Herod wasn't listening. Herod was asking questions but he wasn't listening to the answers. This is such an important lesson for you and I to get a hold of. Because, just because someone asked you questions about God, or about the Bible, or about your faith, that doesn't mean they necessarily want to hear what you have to say.

I don't know if you've ever had somebody do that to you. And started asking you questions about going to church, or what you believed about the Bible, or what you believed about God, or heaven, or something like that. Only to find out in the midst, or after that conversation was over, that it didn't feel like you got anywhere. You talked, but you didn't really get anywhere at all. Because they really didn't have any desire to listen to what you had to say. They asked you a lot of questions. But they weren't listening.

And if that's ever happened to you, then you faced the very same situation that Jesus faced here in His interview with Herod. And I think, frankly, a lot of Christians fail to recognize this when it does happen. And part of it is because we want to do good. We want to share our faith. We want... We're looking sometimes even, praying sometimes for opportunities to share our faith with people. And tell them about Jesus. And how to be saved.

And yet we fail to see that the person that we're talking to sometimes doesn't care about what we have to say. They don't care about hearing the truth. We come to find out that their eyes are closed. Their ears are closed. And they're not listening.

And what we end up doing is, we end up pouring out all this information that we've learned in church, and in Bible study, our own... through the Word. And we give it all to them. And they end up turning and ridiculing us just like Herod did to Jesus - mocking, ridiculing.

And then we wonder, what did I do wrong? What did I do wrong? I guess I'm just not a good evangelist. I mean, other people, they have the gift of evangelism. And it just seems like they can do it so easily. Just rolls off their tongue. But I don't know. Something about the way I do it. I mean, I probably didn't study enough. I really, I don't know my Bible well enough to really be able to defend my faith. I guess, maybe I just probably shouldn't be one of those people who talks to people about God. Tells people the way to be saved. That's for other people to do.

Have you ever had that happen? Have you ever even entertained some of those thoughts? Let me just tell you, don't stop sharing your faith. Because the only mistake that you made in that particular situation, if that in fact happened to you. The only mistake was not recognizing that the person to whom you were speaking wasn't listening. And like Herod, people can ask all kinds of questions. But care nothing about the answers.

And let me... I want to show you some very important passages here that I think speak to this situation about talking to people but yet not really connecting with them. And the first is for Matthew chapter seven. Let me show you this on the screen here. This is Jesus speaking. He says,

**Matthew 7:6 (ESV)**

*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.*

*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.*

Now people sometimes read this passage and they're like, that's... I don't know, rude language to call people dogs and pigs. The point isn't to be rude. The point of this passage is to recognize that dogs and pigs are incapable of recognizing and appreciating things that have value. That's the point of what Jesus was saying.

For example, if you presented your dog with something that was really special in your family and even holy, if you will. And the word holy means, set apart for very special use. You present that to your dog, well, he's probably, likely to chew on it and rip it to pieces. Right? Doesn't matter. He doesn't know the value of that thing. He doesn't know that it's important to you. He's just going to chew it up.

And, if you present pearls to pigs, the only thing they're going to know about those pearls, it's they can't be eaten. Because that's really all a pig really cares about. And that's just going to make them mad. That's what that passage is really all about. Dogs and pigs can't understand things of value. And Jesus is saying that there are some people that we witness to who can't understand the value, of the beauty, of what you're sharing with them.

And people try to comfort themselves when they have a bad situation like this. And they try to say to comfort themselves, well, hey, I sowed the seed of the Word, and we'll see what the Lord does with it. And sometimes I ask myself the question, well, you may well have sown the seed of the Word, but did you take note of where you sowed it?

Let me show you another passage from Matthew chapter 13. And Jesus here, and you'll recognize this: The parable of the sower. It says,

**Matthew 13:4,19 (ESV)**

*And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sewn in his heart. This is what was sewn along the path.*

*...as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them."* (And then He explained what that meant later on, saying) *"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it,* (because their heart is hard. Their eyes are closed. Their ears are closed. It says,) *"the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sewn in his heart.* (And) *This is what was sewn along the path.*

And sometimes again, we try to comfort ourselves saying, well, I sewed the seed. Well, yeah, you did. And I think that that is an act of faithfulness at its root. But we need to be careful where we're sowing it. You'll notice that in Herod's case, Jesus did not sow any seed among him. When He was plied with many questions, Jesus held His tongue. Because Herod wasn't listening. And there's another passage from 1 Corinthians, that people often forget. Let me show you this.

**1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)**

*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

Paul writes here saying, *"The natural person..."* And by that, he's talking about an individual who is unsaved and does not have the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit operating in their lives. *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit (Why?) because they are* (pure foolishness, or if you will)*, folly to him."* He says, that's foolish. It's ridiculous. *"And* (in fact, Paul goes on to say) *he's not able to understand those things because they require a spiritual discernment."* All right.

Well, as we get back to this situation of Jesus and Herod, we understand that Herod represents for us the natural man. He heard about Jesus. He was even excited to talk to Jesus because he'd heard so much. But he had no interest in hearing the truth. And in the end, all Herod really wanted was to be entertained. He wanted to see a miracle.

You might ask the question after we've talked this much about this sort of a thing. You might be saying, well, okay. When I'm witnessing, how can I know if the person that I'm talking to really wants to hear the Gospel? Well, that's just it. Many times you and I don't know. And that's why when we see a connection starting to happen where somebody perhaps is asking us questions or talking to us about the Bible, you and I need to be praying. Just in our own heart and mind.

Even as we're listening, we're praying, and saying, Lord, open this person's heart but give me discernment. Give me discernment Lord, to know just exactly what this person is willing to hear. Or, if they're willing to hear anything at all. Because I don't want to cast my pearls before swine. I don't want to give dogs things that are holy. Because they don't have any appreciation. And I want to respond to this person, where they are. And we need to have the Lord give us insight into someone's receptivity. Right? Their ability to receive. Their willingness to hear at the moment.

Now it goes on here. And we're told in verse 12 that because of this situation, Herod and Pilate actually became friends with each other starting on this day, and then onward. They had been rivals. They had been even enemies to some degree. It says that there was a bitterness. There was actually a hatred between them. But now they had something in common. And that was their mutual rejection of Jesus.

It was back to Pilate for Jesus. Verse 13 tells us that after Jesus was brought back to him, he called again, the religious leaders, all the chief priests, rulers, and so forth. And he confronts them here in verse 14. He says, listen, you brought me this man. I've examined him. And I've determined that he is not

guilty of any of the charges that you've brought against him. And frankly, he says, Herod thought so too because he sent Him back to me.

He says in verse 16, I'll *"punish* (him) *and release him."* Now I want you to notice again, in those verses. Pilate is clear about the fact that from his standpoint of understanding Roman justice, Jesus had done nothing to deserve any punishment, and certainly not death.

But I want you to notice that you can already see a crack in Pilate's armor. Because, did you notice that he revealed here in his comments that he wants to pacify the Jews. It's all found in verse 16 when he says there, *"I will therefore punish* (him) *and release him."*

And you read that and you say, excuse me? You're going to do what? You're going to punish him. You just got done saying you found no basis of a charge against this man and yet you're going to punish Him. For what will you punish Him? Right?

Well, you can see it, can't you? He wants to do something to get in the good graces of... And by the way, punish doesn't mean we're going to take a ruler and crack it across His knuckles. He's talking about being flogged in the Roman form of flogging. Which by the way, some people died from. Right?

Now, as we move on here, there's a note that I want to make. And that is regarding what might appear in some of your Bibles, as verse 17. If you have a New American Standard Bible, maybe you're looking at a New King James version, you're going to have a verse 17 in your Bible. But it's not... It doesn't appear in the ESV, which is the translation that I'm reading from here this morning.

However, the statement that is given in verse 17, which is, *"Now he was obliged to release one man to them at the festival...,"* does appear in Matthew and Mark's account.

And it appears that a scribe, at some point, added that in. Because that comment in Luke's Gospel account does not appear in the most reliable Greek manuscripts. And that's why you don't see it here. Or, if you do see it, there's a footnote in your Bible, saying that some of the manuscripts, and the most reliable ones, actually don't contain it. But I do believe that statement is true. Because we see it born out. And we see it in the other gospel accounts.

Verse 18 goes on and it says, "*they cried out.”* All the people - the religious leaders and the people. They literally just said together, *"Away with this man, and release to us* (a murderer).*”* They wanted Barabbas to be released. We were told in verse 19 that he was guilty of insurrection and for murder. And Pilate comes back and talks to them again. And it says in verse 20, that he wants to release Jesus.

Now what Luke doesn't tell us at this point is an interesting tidbit of information that is included in Matthew's account. Let me show you this on the screen. From Matthew 27, that says,

**Matthew 27:19 (ESV)**

*Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."*

*Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat,* (look at this) *his wife sent* (him) *word…* (saying) '*Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.'"*

That has to be raising Pilate's blood pressure in terms of this whole ordeal and the desire to set him free. But in verse 21, "...they kept shouting, 'Crucify him, crucify him!'" And their voices got louder and more intense. "And a third time Pilate said to them, *"Why? What evil has he done?"* But you know what Pilate is trying to do? He's trying to inject reason into an unreasonable mob. They want him dead. And they don't care about it being a reasonable, justifiable decision.

Here's Pilate continually asking the question. Why? Why do you want me to kill him? Well, it's not a matter that comes down to some reason of justice. He says, *"I found in him,* (look at this again) *no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him."* Again, he tries to pacify the Jews by punishing an innocent man. *"But they were urgent."* It says in verse 23, *"with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed."*

By the way, this is something that every politician learns at some point in their political career. And that is, that it is not truth that prevails. It's the loudest voice. If you can just raise your voice. And if it doesn't... If it isn't raised in terms of decibels, it is raised in terms of performance. Or frequency - how often it gets out to the people. How big of a headline it can demand. That's what will prevail. It doesn't have to be true. It just has to be loud. It just has to be in the ears of the people. And that's all it takes. The loudest voice wins the day. And

that's what happened here. And the loudest voices prevailed. And Pilate caved to the pressure.

I want to read for you an insight from this very moment that is... This is now taken from the gospel according to John. Let me show you this. From John chapter 19, it says,

**John 19:12-13, 15 (ESV)**

*From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting. "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." And when Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement, (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.*

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In verse 24 of our text here in Luke, it says, *"So Pilate decided that their demand* (In other words, the sound of their voice, the loudness of their voices together.) *should be granted. He released the man* (and that's talking about Barabbas,) *who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they had asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will."*

We looked a moment ago about the fact that Herod, represents the natural man who lacks any real interest in the truth. Pilate represents a different attitude. He knew... Pilate was smart enough to know innocence when he saw it. And you'll notice that he never actually declared Jesus guilty of anything. He knew Jesus was innocent. He just simply lacked the backbone to stick to his convictions about what he knew to be true. He compromised.

I want to show you here what one of my favorite biblical commentators or authors, said about this very thing. His name is Harry Ironside. And here's what Ironside wrote.

The trouble with Pontius Pilate was this: he was so filled with selfish ambition, a desire to win the favor of the powers above him and even of the people whom he ruled, that he did not have the manhood, the conscientious principle, to stand up for what he knew to be right. He was fearful he might be censured and so lose his position which he held by Caesar's favor. - H.A. Ironside

The trouble with Pontius Pilate was this: he was so filled with selfish ambition, a desire to win the favor of the powers above him and even of the people whom he ruled, that he did not have the manhood, the conscientious principle, to stand up for what he knew to be right. He was fearful he might be censured and so lose his position which he held by Caesar's favor.

It's interesting, isn't it? We look at these two pictures that we have of these men, Herod and Pilate, and what they represent. And it's easy, I suppose, for us to read this story and look at it and say, how could they? I read this story and I say, I know how they could. I know how they could."

You see, I've been like Herod. I've been at a place in my life where I didn't care. I might've even engaged a few people in talks about the Bible or God. But I didn't really want to hear anything about God. I just wanted to see if I could get them to sound like an idiot. And often I prided myself in thinking that I achieved my end. I've been Herod. I've been that man that didn't care.

I've also been like Pilate. I have had situations in my life where I knew what was right. And I didn't... I mean, had you ever asked me, is that a wrong thing? I would have said, yes, that's a wrong thing. And yet I've turned around and I've done that very wrong thing for whatever reason. Caving into the pressure, giving into the pleasure, walking simply in the influence of the world, or whatever it may be. I've been there. I've done that. I understand these men.

And I understand that Jesus died on the cross for people who act sometimes like Herod and sometimes like Pilate. There's coming a day when Pontius Pilate is going to stand before God. The Bible tells us it will be at the - what it calls - the Great White Throne Judgment. John talks about it in the Book of Revelation. I saw a great white throne," he says. And the people of the world were brought before that throne. (Revelation 20:11)

And Pilate is going to be there with many, many other people. But Pilate is going to find that that throne and that judgment seat is occupied by the One who once stood before his judgment seat. The One whom he pronounced repeatedly as innocent of all the charges and yet whom he sentenced to be crucified.

But lest we end our time here this morning thinking that nothing but a great tragedy took place on that day. Let me end with one final quote from Harry Ironside that ought to put things back into biblical perspective. And here it is.

> ...there was no power on earth or in hell that could have forced Jesus Christ to die as He did. He need not have died at all: He was the sinless Son of God. But He chose to die as our substitute. - H.A. Ironside

He writes, ...there was no power on earth or in hell that could have forced Jesus Christ to die as He did. He need not have died at all: He was the sinless Son of God. (Make no mistake about it.) He chose to die as our substitute.

I like that final perspective. Because it helps you and I, to understand and to read into the narrative that Luke is giving us here, that this was God's purpose. This was God's will, as we read in the Book of Isaiah, yet it was God's will to punish Him. It was God's will. ...but by his wounds we have been healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5) By His wounds we have been healed.