

Last week, when we left Jesus, he was standing before Caiaphas in his court. And this evening we are continuing his passion by talking about his next trial, the trial before Herod. And because Luke is the only one of the four Gospels that actually records this for us, we're going to be focusing this evening on Luke chapter 23, starting in verse one. So if you want to follow along, you can open up to there. Luke 23, starting at verse one.

Because at this point in the passion story, it is now early morning on Good Friday. And the Jews have dragged Jesus away from Caiaphas and brought him to Pilate. And they've accused him of many things, things that if true would make him very dangerous to the Romans. Because we hear in verse two that they accuse him: "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ, a King." If any of that was actually true, that would make him a rebel. Someone who is trying to stir up an insurrection, someone who is basically saying you shouldn't pay taxes to Caesar, someone who is even saying I am a king and Caesar is not. If any of this was true, Pilate would be very, very interested to know that it was true. Because Pilate, to preserve the peace and to keep order, would have to put him down. But don't you find it interesting that Pilate, who has all of this interest in finding out the truth of the matter, finds Jesus innocent? He knows that there is nothing that Jesus has done wrong. He knows in this case that this is a man who is not stirring up trouble. This is a man who is not trying to cause problems for Rome. This is a man who should be set free. And so what Pilate should've done right then and there was to set him free, to say, "There's no case here. You have nothing really against this man. I'm going to say, if you want to accuse him, come back later when you actually have something, but until then I don't want to hear it." But he doesn't do that. Why doesn't he do that? It's what he should have done. He should have set him free. It would be the right thing to do. Why does he not set him free?

It's because, Christians, we know from history that Pilate at this point is skating on extremely thin ice politically. Because we know from sources other than the Bible that Pilate was a very cruel man. And he had done several things to the Jews to make them very, very angry with him. So angry, in fact, that in the past they had actually appealed to Caesar and said to Caesar, "Pilate is causing problems for us. He's not respecting us. He's not respecting our religion. Do something about this!" And so Caesar wrote back to Pilate and said to him, "You better shape up or you're going to lose your job! You're not going to get to be governor anymore if you anger the Jews again." So Pilate is stuck, in other words. He wants to let him go. He knows it's the right thing to do. But he also knows that if he does let him go, he's going to lose his job. So what's he going to do? How is he going to get out of this situation?

He's looking and he's looking and he finds an opportunity that's presented to him. The Jews say to him in verse five: "'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.' But when Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 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." Here's his opportunity! Here's his way out, and he's going to take it. He's going to send him to Herod, because this will give him lots of things that he wants. The first thing that it'll give him is that he will keep the Jews happy. Because he's not just dismissing it. He's not just saying, "Okay, you have no case. Go away." He gets to say, "Okay, fine. Herod will take care of the problem." The second thing that he gets out of this is that it's no longer his problem. He doesn't want anything to do with it. "If I sent it over to Herod, then Herod can be the

one who condemns him. Herod can be the one who tries him. It won't be my problem anymore!" And the third thing that he can get out of this is a political ally. Because Herod was actually one of his most dangerous opponents. Herod was one of the ones who complained about him to Caesar. So if he can get Herod on his good side, he has also gained a political ally. Because Pilate is, for all his cruelty, a very clever man. He kills three birds with one stone to keep the Jews happy, that he doesn't have to deal with it, and that he gains a political ally all at the same time. So Pilate uses Jesus, then, for his own personal gain, and that's something I want you to keep in mind as we go forward and talk about Herod.

But as we talk about Herod, there's one thing that I want to make very clear right at the outset. This is not the same Herod that we meet in Luke chapter 2, that we meet at Christmas. That was Herod the Great. This is Herod Antipas. Herod the Great is Herod Antipas's father. Because after Herod the Great died shortly after Jesus was born, all of his sons took over his kingdom, and Herod Antipas became the ruler of Galilee. And so he has come down from Galilee to be in Jerusalem for this feast. And because he's the ruler of Galilee, he has certainly heard about Jesus. Because if you remember, Jesus does almost all of his miracles in Galilee. Jesus does almost all of his teaching in Galilee. And Jesus even grew up in Galilee. Nazareth is a village in that region. So Herod certainly knows who Jesus is, and he's also heard all of the stories that people tell about him, all of these miraculous things that Jesus has done. Are they true? Now he has an opportunity to find out for himself. In verse eight, it says that: "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." C'mon, Jesus! Do a miracle for me! Do this miracle. Prove to me that all of these stories are true. Herod isn't looking to Jesus to believe in him. That's not what he's asking here. Herod is looking to Jesus to more or less entertain him. Prove to me! Prove to me that you are this miracle man. Prove to me that you can do all these things. Prove to me that the stories are true.

But Jesus is not a miracle on demand service. Jesus is not someone that we can force to just do something for us whenever we want him to. And that's what Herod learns when Jesus remained silent. And so because he doesn't get to see his miracle, Herod becomes angry. "This guy's obviously a fraud! If he can't even do one little miracle right here for me right now--that I maybe even would've let him go for--well, the rest of the stories must be false too. So I'm just gonna dress him up in some nice clothes to make fun of him some more, and I'll send him back to Pilate." But isn't it interesting that even Herod who thinks that Jesus is a fraud also thinks that he's innocent? Herod does not consider him to be guilty of anything. He's disappointed in him, certainly, but he knows that he is an innocent man. And so he sends him back to Pilate because he doesn't want to deal with him anymore.

Herod had tried to use Jesus for his own personal satisfaction, his own personal gain in that sense. And that's really the whole point that we hear in this passage over and over again, that Pilate and Herod both tried to use Jesus for different reasons. Pilate uses him for political gain, so that he can advance his own career, so that he can keep the peace, so that he can stay governor without really being concerned about the truth of the matter. He's not concerned if he's innocent. He's not concerned if he gets set free. He's only concerned about his job. And Herod uses Jesus or tries to use Jesus for entertainment. To say, "Jesus, you have to prove yourself to me that you are who you say that you are."

And the question that we have to ask ourselves this evening, Christians, is this: why are you here? Why have you come to worship the Lord? Why do you go to the Lord in prayer? Do you go to him to worship him, to give him thanks for all that he has done? Or do you come to him because you want something, that you want to get something from the Lord? And there's a real easy way, I think, to test our own hearts in this. Think of all of the things that you pray for and put them all into different categories. How many would you put into the category of asking for something, asking the Lord to do something or asking the Lord to take care of something? And how many would you put into the category of giving thanks for the things that he has done? Is it lopsided? Is it all on one side or the other? Do we spend more time asking God for things and then forgetting to give thanks for them? Because that's really the temptation here, Christians. To use Jesus in the same way that Pilate and Herod did, to only come to him when we need something. Lord, please heal me! But then we forget to give thanks when he does. Lord, take care of me! But then we forget to recognize his hand in taking care of us. Or maybe we would even say, Lord, if you would just do this one thing for me, I would never ask you for anything again. Is that how we want to approach the Lord? To treat him as one from whom we can only get something and not one to whom we owe all things?

Because Christians, Jesus is not just our personal miracle man. Jesus is our Savior. Jesus has done all of these things for us so that we might be set free from the captivity to sin. Yes, Jesus wants us to ask him for things, and we should do that with all boldness. But we should also give thanks to him for all that he has done. Because if we think about even some of the things that God has done for us--that Jesus became one of us, that he suffers for us, that he goes to the cross and dies and sheds his blood to forgive our sins, that he rises again on the third day that we might live with him, that he hears us in heaven--just one of those things should make us break out in thanksgiving for the things that God has done for us. To give thanks to the Father for sending us his Son. To give thanks to the Son for giving himself for us. To give thanks to the Holy Spirit, that he has given us a living faith. That's what it means to be a Christian, to give thanks to God in everything. Because God is our Savior. God does all of these things for you, so that you may be set free from sin.

So Christians, as we gather this evening, let us give thanks to him, thanks for everything that he has done. Not falling into the temptation of Herod and of Pilate and using him just for what we want, but to give thanks and to come to him boldly. Because Jesus is our Savior, the one whose mercies are new every morning and whose faithfulness is great.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your many mercies that you have shown to us. We give you thanks for the blessings of your Son. We give you thanks for the blessings of this day. We give you thanks for everything that you continue to do for us. And we give you thanks for the blessing of your Holy Spirit. Watch over us this day, that we may always remember the things that you have done for us, that our hearts may be ever thankful; through your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.