

This morning, I am in the thirtieth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "Meeting Jesus." I am making my way through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. Jesus has just been betrayed and arrested by the religious leaders. This morning, we are going to be in Luke 22:63 – 23:25, looking at Jesus on trial before the religious and political authorities.

Luke 22:63 – 27:25 - The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. ⁶⁴ They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to him. ⁶⁶ At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. ⁶⁷ "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, ⁶⁸ and if I asked you, **you would not answer.** ⁶⁹ But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." ⁷⁰ They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You say that I am." ⁷¹ Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ² 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." ³ So Pilate asked Jesus, "**Are you the king of the Jews?**" "You have said so," Jesus replied. ⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." ⁵ 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." ⁶ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was **also in Jerusalem at that time.** ⁸ 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. ⁹ He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they **sent him back to Pilate.** ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies. ¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him **and then release him.**" ^[17] ¹⁸ But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an

insurrection in the city, and for murder.) ²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” ²² For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds **for the death penalty**. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” ²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Let me briefly summarize what is going on in this passage: Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested at night and brought before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, the highest court of law among the Israelites, consisting of Pharisees and Sadducees. But according to Jewish law, they have to wait until daybreak for a trial to occur. During the night, Jesus is subject to police brutality while he awaits trial. And so, when daybreak came, the assembly gathers and finds him guilty of blasphemy before handing him over to the government authorities. Herod and Pilate question him but find no basis for a death sentence. But the crowd sways Pilate, and Jesus, thought innocent, is sentenced to death, while another prisoner, Barabbas, is set free.

Jesus stands before three entities – the religious authorities, the governmental authorities, and the crowd, and at each moment, there is something paradoxical that happens. There are things happening that seem to be in contradiction or contrary to logic, but when you take a deeper look, you see something truly important.

1) The Judge is on trial

The section begins with Jesus before the religious authorities. The guards are mocking him, blindfolding him and asking him to prophesy who hit him. And when he stands before the court of elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, we see three titles attributed to Jesus. First, the religious authorities ask Him whether or not he is the Messiah, the anointed one, promised in the Old Testament to come and save Israel. And Jesus responds by calling Himself the Son of Man.

Luke 22:67-69 - Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, ⁶⁸ and if I asked you, you would not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

The Son of Man is a reference to Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:13–14 - “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

The Son of Man is not a reference to his human nature; it is a claim to divine authority. The religious leaders understand what Jesus is claiming here, and so they reply with this:

Luke 22:70–71 - They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”

They ask if He is the Son of God. They recognize that Jesus is claiming not just to be one of God’s children, but to be equal to God, to be the divine ruler and judge, the God-man. And so, they are convinced that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy, of making himself out to be God, and therefore worthy of death. As Matthew’s gospel puts it:

Matthew 26:63–66 - But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” ⁶⁴ “You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered.

In fact, in v. 65, the word translated as “insulting” is the Greek word “blasphemountes,” which is also used for blasphemous.

Luke 22:63–64 - The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. ⁶⁴ They blindfolded him and demanded, “Prophecy! Who hit you?” ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to him.

Even though Jesus is claiming divine authority, the religious authorities are sitting in judgment on him. They are judging him, but one day they will stand before Jesus, and he will judge them. Here are three of many verses that tell us this truth:

John 5:26–27 - For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Matthew 25:31–32 - “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the one who possesses divine authority to judge everyone, the one before whom everyone will stand. And here are these religious rulers, sitting in judgment on him, deciding whether or not he is worthy of death.

We may live a couple of thousand years later, but some things haven't changed. We still sit in judgment, deciding who Jesus is, who God is, deciding what we like and don't like about him, what we will accept and what we will reject. Think of Thomas Jefferson cutting the miracles out of the Bible, Gandhi accepting Jesus as a great teacher but not as the Son of God, the Jesus Seminar evaluating Jesus by modern scholarly criteria, and people today deciding that they like Jesus but reject his ethics on sexuality, or money, or the exclusivity of His claims to be the way to God.

And what about you? Do you sit in judgment on God, deciding whether he really is just or loving or good based on what you see from your perspective? Or do you realize that you are sitting in judgment on the divine judge before whom you will stand one day?

As C.S. Lewis put it, “The ancient man approached God as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock.” (the dock is where the accused person stands while on trial).

We have no right to sit in judgment on the Creator and Judge of the universe; He is the one who alone has the right and authority to judge us.

2) Jesus is – and isn't – a King

The religious leaders have found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, but unfortunately for them, blasphemy is not a Roman crime, and the Jews do not have the authority to put anyone to death. And so, they bring Jesus to the governor, Pontius Pilate and accuse him of treason, or being a political subversive, a threat to the throne.

Luke 23:1-2 - Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ² 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.”

Blasphemy is not a crime, but they know that by saying that Jesus has claimed to be a king, that will get Pilate's attention, because then he would be a threat deserving of death. And so, he asks Jesus

Luke 23:3-4 - So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “You have said so,” Jesus replied. ⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

Despite their claims that Jesus is a king, Pilate looks at him and sees not threat. There is no army, no hint of a powerful military leader. And so, when he finds out Jesus is from Galilee, he passes the buck to another ruler, the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas, who also finds nothing wrong and sends him back to Pilate, who then tries to release him.

Luke 23:13-16 - Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

If Jesus had been any kind of threat, you had better believe they would have killed him. After all, Herod Antipas had been part of killing John the Baptist, and would eventually murder James, the brother of Jesus and one of the leaders of the church of Jerusalem. He had no problem killing threats to his power.

The question posed by Pilate to Jesus is, are you a king? And Jesus answers, “You say,” two words in the Greek. What kind of answer is this? A deliberately ambiguous one. He does not deny it, but he does not answer in the clear affirmative

either. That is because yes, Jesus is a king, but not a king in the manner they would understand.

Has he come with an army to overthrow the government? Decidedly not.

John 18:36 - Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

But is he a threat? More than they could ever know. He will not upend things through power, but through sacrificial love, through bringing people from spiritual death to spiritual life, through serving and dying.

Christianity is not a political movement. One of the great dangers that the church faces in every generation is believing the lie that we can change the world through political power. Remember, the Jews believed that the Messiah was going to be a political leader who would overthrow the Roman oppressors and restore Israel to its former glory. We see that in the way that the disciples responded to Jesus after his resurrection.

Acts 1:6–8 - Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The temptation in every generation is to marry our faith to politics, out of the belief that that political power will lead to greater godliness, and that this is the way to change the world. In fact, even in this passage, we see the crowd asking Pilate to release to them Barabbas:

Luke 23:18-19 - But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

Jesus Barabbas, which means Jesus, son of the father, was guilty for trying to overthrow the Roman government with violence, and that is the one the crowd cries out for, NOT Jesus, the one who seems to pose no threat at all to the Roman government through his love and nonviolence. But it will be the way of Jesus, not

the way of Barabbas, that will eventually be the undoing of the Roman Empire and will change the world.

As the historian Rodney Stark put it about the rise of Christianity in a hostile Roman world: “Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violence and ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.”

And as the Roman Emperor Julian in 4th century put it: “The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.”

Politics and laws have their place. Good laws can curb sinful behaviors like murder or theft or racism. But you can change laws without changing hearts. You can enact laws that curb murder, but you can’t stop hatred in people’s hearts. You can try to enact laws that make racism illegal, but that won’t change people’s prejudices. You can try to curb stealing, but only God can rid your heart of greed and make people generous. Our call is to a greater kingdom and a greater power, one that can change hearts, and through changing hearts, can change society and the world.

2 Corinthians 10:4 - The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Don’t trust in politics, and don’t put your hope in politicians. If we call ourselves followers of Jesus, then I believe we are called mainly to not align ourselves with a worldly political party or leader but to stand outside of politics as a prophetic voice calling people to turn from the methods of power and violence and greed and division and hatred to an ethic of love and service. And as we do that, we will find that although we are not a political movement, we can not help but influence politics and laws and our country towards a godlier end.

Jesus is the king, but not like the kings and politicians of this world.

3) The innocent man is killed and the guilty man goes free

Luke 23:20-25 - Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” ²² For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” ²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

The crowd, however, wants him dead, and convinces them to release Barabbas. As Peter put it in his Pentecost sermon:

Acts 2:23 – “This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

And so Jesus, the Son of God, who is accused of insurrection and being a threat to the Roman government, is punished, while Jesus Barabbas (Jesus Son of the Father), the one who actually committed insurrection and murder, goes free. The cross that was meant for Barabbas is given to Jesus.

This is such a picture of the gospel. One day we will stand before the Judge, and we are all guilty before Him. But the good news is that very judge has taken our place; the innocent Son of God has died in our place for our sins, taking the punishment and guilt that we deserved and giving us His freedom and innocence. Jesus takes our cross, and we, like Barabbas, go free.

Isaiah 53:4–8 - Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the **iniquity of us all**. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

And as Paul put it:

2 Corinthians 5:17–21 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Worship Him! Put your trust in Him! Do not put your trust in the politicians and leaders of this world, but trust in Jesus, and follow the King's example of preaching the gospel and loving sacrificially, for that will change hearts and change the world!