

Luke 23 — Part 1

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Previous trials of Jesus:

#1 BEFORE ANNAS, THE RIGHTFUL HIGH PRIEST.

#2 BEFORE CAIAPHAS, THE ACTING HIGH PRIEST.

#3 BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL OR SANHEDRIN.

The previous verses:

They all shouted, "So, are You claiming to be the Son of God?" And He replied, "You say that I am." "Why do we need other witnesses?" they said. "We ourselves heard Him say it." Luke 22:70-71 NLT

#4 - JESUS BEFORE PILATE

(23:1.) Then the entire council took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor. (2) They began to state their case: "This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming He is the Messiah, a king."

- This was not the first clash that **Pilate** had with the Jews. **Paul Butler** supplies the details: "When Pilate first came to Palestine,

he wanted to abolish all Jewish laws and customs, but found this politically impossible. He brought effigies of Caesar to Jerusalem and set them up at night. When the Jews heard, they came by the hundreds and camped around his palace at Caesarea imploring him to remove them. He refused, called them to his judgment seat, surrounded them with an army in ambush, and threatened to kill them. They refused and threw themselves down on the pavement baring their necks to the sword. Pilate had to retreat.

Another time he ordered an aqueduct to be built to improve Jerusalem's water supply and attempted to pay for it with Temple treasure. The Jews rioted, Pilate ordered them slain, but had to face continued hatred of the Jewish populace for having used "sacred" funds.

Later, he ordered some Galileans slain as they were in the act of offering sacrifice (cf. Lk. 13:1) for some reason known only to him. This may have been the reason he and Herod Antipas were at odds with one another."

- Jesus had been before the High Priest, but now the **entire council** officially took Jesus to the Roman governor **Pilate**. Because they wanted the death penalty, they could not carry out the punishment themselves. The Romans would not be interested in the charge of blasphemy, so they needed some different charges.
- There were two accusations:
 - He was **telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government**. This was a political charge and would be necessary to get **Pilate** involved. The charge was a complete lie. What Jesus had said was:

"Show Me a Roman coin. Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Well then," He said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."
(Luke 20:24-25 NLT)

- The other charge was that He was claiming to be **the Messiah, a king**. This is a half-truth. Jesus did not claim to be a political leader of any kind. He had already evaded an attempt to make Him a king:

When Jesus saw that they were ready to force Him to be their king, He slipped away into the hills by Himself. (John 6:15 NLT)

(3.) So Pilate asked Him, "Are You the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "You have said it." (4) Pilate turned to the leading priests and to the crowd and said, "I find nothing wrong with this man!"

- So Jesus was brought before **Pilate** bruised and bloody after He received beatings and was asked if He was the **King of the Jews**. He was no threat to **Pilate!**
- **Pilate** ignored the first charge. He had no evidence that Jesus was forbidding paying taxes to Caesar. The second charge was a curiosity so he asked if Jesus was **King of the Jews**. He may have found this humorous, but not illegal. **Pilate's** judgment: *Not guilty.*

(5.) Then they became insistent. "But He is causing riots by His teaching wherever He goes — all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!"

- The leaders expanded on their first charge. Jesus was competing with their authority all the way from **Galilee** to **Jerusalem**. This comment brought to light a way out of the sticky problem for Pilate. That's next:

(6.) "Oh, is He a Galilean?" Pilate asked. (7) When they said that He was, Pilate sent Him to Herod Antipas, because Galilee was under Herod's jurisdiction, and Herod happened to be in Jerusalem at the time.

- **Pilate** was in charge of Judea and Samaria, but **Herod Antipas** of the old Herodian Dynasty ruled in **Galilee**. And he was in **Jerusalem** for the Passover. This is the same **Herod** who had John the Baptist beheaded.
- Since Jesus was raised in **Galilee** and much of His teaching had been done there, it was legal to have Him tried by **Herod**. **Herod** maintained a residence in Jerusalem for times when he would visit such as the Passover festival.

#5 - HEROD'S CONTEMPTUOUS QUESTIONING

(8.) Herod was delighted at the opportunity to see Jesus, because he had heard about Him and had been hoping for a long time to see Him perform a miracle.

- There was genuine motivation for **Herod** to see **Jesus**. He had wanted to see Him for a long time and especially **see** one of His **miracle**. This would be *informative entertainment* for the king. **William Barclay** says, “Herod regarded Jesus as a joke. He jested at him; he clothed him in a king's robe as an imitation king. To put it in another way—he refused to take Jesus seriously. He would show him off to his court as an amusing curiosity but there his interest stopped.

The plain fact is that the vast majority of men still refuse to take Jesus seriously. If they did, they would pay more attention than they do to his words and his claims.”

(9.) He asked Jesus question after question, but Jesus refused to answer. (10) Meanwhile, the leading priests and the teachers of religious law stood there shouting their accusations.

- Herod himself asked lots of **questions**, but Jesus was silent. He made no response. When **Jesus** spoke, He always humiliated His opponents and won. It was God's plan for Jesus to die, so to answer either Pilate or Herod would have been counterproductive. This fulfills Isaiah 53:

He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open His mouth.

(Isaiah 53:7 NLT)

- Herod had refused to repent when John the Baptist preached to him, so he was not going to change his mind now. His marriage violated the Law of Moses.
- The Jewish leaders were there **shouting their accusations**. They had come over from the interview with Pilate and did not want Jesus found innocent.

(11.) Then Herod and his soldiers began mocking and ridiculing Jesus. Finally, they put a royal robe on Him and sent Him back to Pilate.

- Both **Herod** and his guards treated **Jesus** with contempt and **mocked** Him. They **sent Him back** to the Roman governor Pilate wearing a **robe** fit for a king; probably purple.
- **J. W. McGarvey** says aptly, "who can measure the grace of God or the depravity of man?"

(12.) (Herod and Pilate, who had been enemies before, became friends that day.)

- While Luke has not said why the rulers were **enemies**; the execution of several of **Herod's** subjects by **Pilate** may have contributed to the animosity.

About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. (Luke 13:1 NLT)

#6 - PILATE'S VERDICT: INNOCENT

(13.) Then Pilate called together the leading priests and other religious leaders, along with the people, (14) and he announced his verdict. "You brought this man to me, accusing Him of leading a revolt. I have examined Him thoroughly on this point in your presence and find Him innocent.

- Luke makes it clear the officials were involved, but so were others. It was **the religious leaders** and also the **people** demanding death. **Pilate** handed down the verdict that Jesus was **innocent** of the charges brought against **Him**.

(15.) Herod came to the same conclusion and sent Him back to us. Nothing this man has done calls for the death penalty. (16) So I will have Him flogged, and then I will release Him." (17) [Now it was necessary for him to release one prisoner to them during the Passover celebration.]

- Not only did the Roman Governor Pilate find Jesus not deserving the death sentence, but **Herod** Antipas, the Jewish king of Galilee did not either.
- Pilate's weakness is shown in his agreement to **flog** a man against who there were no valid charges.

(18.) Then a mighty roar rose from the crowd, and with one voice they shouted, "Kill Him, and release Barabbas to us!" (19) (Barabbas was in prison for taking part in an insurrection in Jerusalem against the government, and for murder.)

- Any punishment short of death would not satisfy this crowd. The crowd wanted to bargain: **Kill Him, and release Barabbas**.
- **Barabbas** was in **prison** for leading an **insurrection** and **murder**. He was a dangerous criminal. His crimes had been against the laws of Rome. **The crowd** demanded to crucify Jesus, an innocent man, and release a man that was guilty—Barabbas.

(20.) Pilate argued with them, because he wanted to release Jesus. (21) But they kept shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (22) For the third time he demanded, "Why? What crime has He committed? I have found no reason to sentence Him to death. So I will have Him flogged, and then I will release Him."

- The pagan jurist **Pilate** wanted to **release Jesus**, but the Jewish mob demanded **death**. The call was for more than simply **death**, it was for the torture of **crucifixion**.
- Pilate asked for evidence of any **crime** (vs. 22), but the mob wasn't bothering with evidence.
- We must keep in mind that Jesus was doing this voluntarily.

No one can take My life from Me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what My Father has commanded. (John 10:18 NLT)

He could have called the angels of heaven to end this trial in a moment. All of heaven must have been watching to see if "their man" was going to hold on to His goal of dying for all sinners.

- **David Guzik** illustrates **Pilate's** decision with this comparison: "But if Jesus is an innocent man, why even this? Could we imagine a judge saying, 'You're innocent, so you only need to pay a \$10,000 fine?'"

(23.) But the mob shouted louder and louder, demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their voices prevailed. (24) So Pilate sentenced Jesus to die as they demanded. (25) As they had requested, he released Barabbas, the man in prison for insurrection and murder. But he turned Jesus over to them to do as they wished.

- **The mob prevailed.** They out-shouted **Pilate** and he gave in. **Barclay's** comment: "This is an amazing passage. One thing is crystal clear—Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus. He was

well aware that to do so would be to betray that impartial justice which was the glory of Rome. He made no fewer than four attempts to avoid passing sentence of condemnation.

- 1) He told the Jews to settle the matter themselves (John 19:6-7).
- 2) He tried to refer the whole case to Herod.
- 3) He tried to persuade the Jews to receive Jesus as the prisoner granted release at Passover time (Mark 15:6).
- 4) He tried to effect a compromise, saying he would scourge Jesus and then release him. It is plain that Pilate was coerced into sentencing Jesus to death."

JESUS WAS LED AWAY TO BE CRUCIFIED

(26.) As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

- This was a public execution and would take place outside of Jerusalem. Luke identifies it as the place of the Skull in verse 33 (next lesson), Matthew, Mark and John also mention the Skull.
- **Simon** was probably Jewish and was attending the Passover from the area now known as Libya where many Jews lived. Acts 2:10. Jerusalem had a synagogue that included **Cyreneans**.
- There has been a dispute as to whether the entire cross was carried or just the crosspiece with the upright being at the scene of the crucifixion already.

(27.) A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women.

- Not everyone in Jerusalem was in favor of the mob's



decision.

(28.) But Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. (29) For the days are coming when they will say, 'Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed.' (30) People will beg the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and plead with the hills, 'Bury us.' (31) For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

- Jesus warned the **daughters of Jerusalem** that their tears were misplaced. They should be crying for **them- selves and their children**, not for Him. The reason is the suffering that would be coming when **Jerusalem** was destroyed. It would be a greater blessing to **not** have children than to watch them die in the coming destruction.
- Note that in verse 30, Jesus endorsed the prophet Hosea by quoting him:

And the pagan shrines of Aven, the place of Israel's sin, will crumble. Thorns and thistles will grow up around their altars. They will beg the mountains, "Bury us!" and plead with the hills, "Fall on us!" (Hosea 10:8 NLT)

Jesus is telling us that God speaks through this prophet.

- Verse 31 is obscure, but it may mean that some women are crying now (vs. 28) because of actions here in **Jerusalem** when the city is in its prime (**green**), what will it be when the full force of God's punishment falls on the city when it is no longer in its prime (**green**) but **dried** out from wars and famine?
- **Paul Butler** gets the focus where it belongs, on the moral suffering more than the physical suffering: "Evidently these Jewish women were not believers — only sympathizers. They wailed because they took pity on His fleshly torture, His

physical weakness is all they saw, however. They had not seen His deity.

May we suggest that we too may be overly inclined to show pity only for the physical torture Jesus had to endure and may miss focusing our contrition in the right place. What we should lament is our sin and the injustice of the perfect Son of man having to be “made sin on our behalf.” If we come to the cross and pity His physical suffering primarily, we have not really grasped the deepest truth concerning His sorrow.

As G. Campbell Morgan said: “In the last analysis, Jesus is never an object of pity on the part of sinful, condemned humanity. He is the Object of wonder and of true worship, as He is seen moving in regal splendor towards His Cross.” It is nothing short of awesome that Jesus, in these hours of severest psychological and physical torture, could take time to show concern and deep sympathy for the Jewish nation and warn them once more of the heinousness of their evil. These are the only words He spoke between Pilate’s judgment and the cross!”

(32.) Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with Him.

- Jesus was **led** with **two criminals** doomed to death. Hear the Prophet Isaiah:

Unjustly condemned, He was led away. No one cared that He died without descendants, that His life was cut short in midstream. But He was struck down for the rebellion of My people. (Isaiah 53:8 NLT)

Dying without descendants normal meant the end of the family line. Jesus received something far better than descendants. He received willing subjects as a King. He received brethren endlessly.

We continue with this drama of the ages in verse 33 next session.