

“When Things Aren’t Fair”

Luke 22:63 – 23:12

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Well, for the past two months we have been with Jonah as he struggles to figure out what it means to be a prophet of God and to have compassion on people as the Lord does. Now, we are going to fast forward 750 years, and return to the gospel of Luke. Over the next four weeks we will be exploring the 23rd chapter which culminates with Jesus dying on the cross. Luke, like me, believes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the most significant events in the history of the world. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he is very intentional about what he tells us happens in about a 15-hour period. Now much of what we will read is familiar to many of us. Don’t let that prevent you from seeing what the Lord has for us today in His word. The truth found in this chapter has almost unlimited significance for our lives, for your life. We need to grasp with both our minds and hearts what these words mean, and what they mean for our lives today. Let’s pause and pray that happens this morning.

Ok, quick review...After three years of His public ministry, the Jewish leaders decided enough! Jesus has to go. He has to be kicked. The temple priest in Jerusalem, mostly of the Sadducees party, see Jesus as a threat to the status quo and their political power. Many of the Pharisees, religious teachers from all over Israel, hate Jesus because he continually exposes them as hypocrites. So the priests and Pharisees, often political enemies, are untied I their desire to eliminate Jesus. Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Passover festival knowing that he will be killed. In the upper room they celebrate the last supper and then go to pray in the garden of Gethsemane where He is arrested. He spends Thursday evening with His disciples in jail surrounded by the temple guards and some allies.

Jesus is taken to the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest, who is in charge of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Peter follows, and this is where he ends up denying he knows Jesus, three different times. And this leads us to the first part of our text, the end of chapter 22

Luke 22:63-65 The men who were holding Jesus started mocking and beating him. After blindfolding him, they kept asking, “Prophecy! Who was it that hit you?” And

they were saying many other blasphemous things to him.

The men are part of the temple guard, essentially a private security force, and they are not very nice men. Though Jesus could certainly have identified which one of his tormentors strikes Him, that is not what He chooses to do. It is ironic that the temple priests accuse Jesus of blasphemy, when it is their men and really themselves who are the blasphemers.

Luke 22:66 When daylight came, the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the scribes, convened and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

This is the Jewish ruling council, made up of 70 members. The high priest is the presiding officer. Matthew and Mark’s gospels tell us there were actually two meeting of the Sanhedrin, one during the night at Caiaphas’ residence, and the second, the official one, in the early morning. Luke seems to give us an abbreviated summary.

Luke 22:67 They (most likely the chief priests), said “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I do tell you, you will not believe. And if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right had of the power of God.” They all asked, “Are you, then the Son of God?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.”

Jesus has made remarkable claims about His role as Messiah, God’s chosen savior, and His identity as God’s son. The priests are convinced this cannot be true. They refuse to believe Him. That is why Jesus’ answer to their questions, though truthful, seems a bit evasive. The priests, however, see plenty of claims of deity in Jesus’ works. The phrase “son of man” points to His divine nature. The Jewish leaders hear those phrases and are appalled that Jesus would use them for Himself.

Luke 22:71 “Why do we need any more testimony,” they said, “since we’ve heard it ourselves from his mouth?”

In their view, Jesus has committed blasphemy against God by falsely claiming to be God’s Messiah and son. Such blasphemy deserves death under the Old Testament law. However, they have

a problem. Israel is under the rule of the Roman Empire and their authority over judicial matters is limited. They do not have the legal right to execute anyone...but Pilate, the Roman governor does. So that leads to their next move.

Luke 23:1 **The their whole assembly** (the ruling council) **rose up and brought him before Pilate.**

(Pontius Pilate is the Roman governor of Judea, of Southern Israel. He will be the focus of the sermon next Sunday) **23:2** **They** (the chief priests) **began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.”** The duplicite and manipulative scheme of the Jewish leaders is becoming clear. Before the council, the charge against Jesus is blasphemy, violating Old Testament law. Before Pilate, the charges suddenly change. Jesus is supposedly guilty of sedition and insurrection, no against God, but against Rome. Now, they heard Jesus say, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,” an endorsement of paying taxes to the occupying government. Yet, the Jewish leaders are twisting Jesus’ words or simply fabricating the charge. The they put a political spin on Jesus’ claim to Messiah, equating it with a king who would compete for political power with the emperor. They understand Pilate will not be terribly concerned about Jesus violating an Old Testament prohibition of blasphemy, but encouraging insurrection against Rome, that is a whole different story.

Luke 23:3 **So Pilate asked Jesus, “are you the king of the Jews? He answered him, “You say so.”**

Pilate is concerned about Jesus being a threat to the empire. Jesus could have said, “I am the king, but not in the way you think.” Yet, his answer apparently convinces Pilate that Jesus really does not intend to overthrow the emperor.

Luke 23:4 **Pilate then told the chief priests and the crowds,” I find no grounds for charging this man.”**

The Jewish leaders don’t like that verdict.

Luke 23:5 **They kept insisting, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he started even to here.”**

They are trying to painting Jesus as a rabble rousing insurrectionist. They maybe don’t see their mention of Galilee as significant, but Pilate does.

Luke 23:6 **When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean.**

Indeed, this Jesus of Nazareth, from the region of Galilee... Northern Israel

Luke 23:7 **Finding that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days.**

Will Rodgers once said, “American History can be written in two phases, the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck.” And that is what Pilate is doing, “passing the buck.” This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who ruled as tetrarch over Northern Israel from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D., who covers Jesus’ entire lifespan on earth. One of the things for which he is remembered is arresting and eventually beheading John the Baptist. Though not a devout Jew, he has come to Jerusalem for Passover.

Luke 23:8 **Herod was very glad to see Jesus; for a long time he had wanted to see him because he had heard about him and was hoping to see dome miracle performed by him.**

Back in Chapter 13, Luke told us that Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Since that time he had become more intrigued by Jesus and His ministry and now wants to see one of the miracles he has heard so much about.

Luke 23:9 **So he kept asking him questions, but Jesus did not answer him.**

Jesus apparently does not find the questions sincere. His silence fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7 that the Messiah would be silent before His accusers.

Thinking that perhaps Herod will be the one who would condemn Jesus to death,

Luke 23:10 **The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.**

I assume they make the same type of accusations as they had to Pilate.

Luke 23:11 **The Herod, with his soldiers, treated him with contempt, mocked him, dressed him in bright clothing, and sent him back to Pilate.**

Herod does not condemn Jesus to death. He realizes the charges being made against Him are gross exaggerations. Yet, he is an ungodly and cruel man. He has little concern for the truth. He delights in mocking this poor rabbi as a king. Herod likely believes it is absurd to think Jesus could be any kind of threat to his power. But he finds pleasure in tormenting those he thinks are

weak. Luke then concludes this section with this note.

Luke 23:12 That very day Herod and Pilate became friends. Previously, they had been enemies.

This section is peculiar to Luke, meaning the other three gospels don't mention Jesus going before Herod. Thus, we don't have other information about why they became allies. It seems Pilate take Jesus more seriously, but what I think unites them is a contempt for the Jewish Leaders. I suspect both Pilate and Herod resented the efforts of the chief priest to pressure and manipulate them. When they got together they likely compared notes on how much they despised the people over which they ruled.

Okay, that is our text. What is the Lord saying to us today though this portion of His word?

Number 1 – The bible can be trusted. Luke's gospel provides an accurate historical account of the life of Jesus Christ. The many details found in our text point to Luke doing a careful investigation, based on eyewitness testimony. Yes, the Holy Spirit did inspire Luke, which gives us further confidence in the trust-worthiness of everything he says. Yet, even from a secular perspective Luke is a very reliable historian. Of course, many portions of this gospel point to this truth, but it is important to remind ourselves frequently of the bible's trust-worthiness. Why? Because many people today deny this. Some say the bible is full of fanciful fiction and the gospel accounts have no connection with what really happened. Even more common is the claim we don't know what Luke even wrote because the bible has been changed so many times over the centuries. That is simply not true, but a lot of people still believe that to be the case. If we want to know what really happened when Jesus died. The four gospels, including Luke, are the place to turn.

Number 2 - Innocent people can be victims of great injustice. Think of all the unjust things Jesus endured in just a few hour period. It starts with the temple guard abusing Him when He is arrested, the night time trial before the Sanhedrin is clearly illegal. Mark tells us that the trial included supposed witnesses who had been paid to give false testimony. When Jesus goes before Pilate, blatantly false accusations are made. Yet, the judge, Pilate, essentially finds Him innocent. However, His accusers don't like the verdict, and

are granted another hearing, in a new jurisdiction. The charges are basically dismissed there as well, but Jesus is remanded for a second hearing before Pilate. As the account continues, which we will explore next week, we find that Pilates, the judge, essentially caves to the wished of Jesus' accusers and the crowd. He doesn't believe Jesus is guilty, but orders Him flogged and crucified anyway, just to appease Jesus' opponents.

Friends, I am convinced our American Judicial system is one of the most fair and just in human history. But...it is not without flaws. There are plenty of stories of individuals who appear to have been wrongly convicted. According to the Innocence Project 375 people in the United States have been exonerated by DNA evidence, over the last 25 years, including 21 who were on death row. These people served an average of 14 years in prison before they were released. Yet, I doubt any of these cases involved such clear injustices as Jesus faced. What makes Jesus' case uniquely unjust is that fact He was the only truly innocent person to ever live on this planet. Those 375 people were exonerated of the crimes for which they had been convicted. But that doesn't mean they were necessarily good people. Some of them had probably committed even more heinous crimes for which they were not convicted. And even if these people were not guilty of felonies, they had certainly lied, been greedy or selfish, and had lustful thoughts, at some point in their lives. Jesus is the only person who never sinned, in thought, word, or deed. He was **Hebrews 4:15b tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.** Totally innocent, yet a victim of great injustice.

Friends, some of us have been victims of injustice as well. Oh none of us are sinless, and you probably have not been incarcerated for a crime you didn't commit. But some unjust and painful situations have you convinced that life simply is not fair. So far, that is okay, because that is reality. Life is not always fair. The problem comes when you are bitter about what you think is unfair or unjust. And the problem is even worse when you blame God and are bitter against Him for the perceived injustice. And people do that. Sometimes very blatantly and intentionally and sometimes a bit more subtly.

Now, folks, most of us have figured out the Joe is maybe not a real person, but he represents a lot of

people. I am not free to use the names of these individuals, but they are bitter about the unjust or unfair things that have happened in their lives. Some of these people are your friends or family members. Some of these people might be you. Yet, when someone asks, so where was your loving God when my sister got raped?, or when my little boy was diagnosed with cancer?, or when I had to live in six different foster homes when I was growing up? We can answer this way... God was in the same place He was when His son was mocked and beaten by the temple guard, the same place He was when His son was falsely accused and repeatedly tried even after He was found innocent. God is in the same place He was when His son, though 100% innocent, was brutally flogged by Roman soldiers and when He was nailed to the cross and died. Friends, I know your pain is very deep. I agree that you have suffered some real injustice. But I also know the only way to truly find healing for that pain, the only way to experience true justice, is by trusting in God and in what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. As Christians we don't pretend all is well with this world. Innocent people can be victims of great injustice. Yet, we do insist that the only hope for this world, the only hope to find healing and true justice, is through Jesus Christ.

Number 3 - When life doesn't seem fair, we need to remind ourselves of God's promises and trust Him. How did Jesus deal with the horrible injustice He experienced? Listen to **Hebrews 12: 1b, 2** **Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, (a great goal for every Christian) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

"For the joy set before him." He looked ahead! He looked ahead with hope to the promises God the Father had made. He experienced full measure of that hope through His resurrection and ascension to heaven. For us, we can always have hope that God will somehow work to enable us to experience justice right now. In fact, it is good to pray for and work for justice, fair treatment, for ourselves, for those around us and really for everyone everywhere.

Yet, we always need to remember that it is only in the next world, in God's kingdom, that we will experience true and full justice. That is the joy set

before us. It is where Revelation 21:4b There will be not more death or mourning or crying or pain That is our hope. That is what God has promised. That is what we look forward to. Oh, when things are tough, and don't seem fair at all, I know that we may want an immediate hope than "heaven." But this is a big part of what faith involves, trusting the Lord to work out His purposes and promises in our lives, both today and for eternity. As we saw earlier this morning, Christ is indeed our only hope in life and in death. May the Lord help us keep that perspective each and every day.