

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 15:1. And while you're doing that, if you could find Luke 23, as well, we're going to end up there this morning; so you'll have plenty of time to find it.

As we continue with Mark, a third of the gospels have to do with the last week of Jesus' ministry; and of that third, 75% focuses on this day - the crucifixion and then the resurrection that would follow. And there's a lot to learn about God's love, about His devotion to you and me. We've tried to go as slowly as we can through the procedures, if you will, leading up to it so that we can learn everything that the Lord has set before us. We've gone through the three trials - the religious trials that the Lord faced during the night.

And this morning we are coming to their deliverance of their prisoner - Jesus - by these religious folks with charges that they hope will move the hand of Rome to have Him killed. And so that's where we start this morning - the civil trials. They go from Pilate who tries to give it up to Herod, who sends Him back to Pilate. And it may be 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning by now. By 6:00 Pilate will hand Jesus over to be crucified. And so we want to focus this morning on Pilate's and Herod's meeting with Jesus and ask the Lord to teach us about not only His sacrifice but what we can do in terms of making a decision to follow Him today. Because we find a lot of folks around the cross deciding otherwise.

Verse 1 says, "Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate." Luke 23:1 tells us that there was a multitude of people that were in this group to take Jesus to Pilate. It really was a show of force. It was an intense kind of time. It was Friday morning. It was early. I'm sure that they got Pilate out of bed, knocking on his door, if you will, to have them be heard. It was Passover, one of the most holy days on the religious calendar; a time when there were hundreds of thousands of people in town to worship God and celebrate the deliverance that God brought to His people when He brought them out of Egypt, when they had that first Passover, when that lamb that was slain protected those in the house under the blood of the lamb that had been slain. And rather than preparing for that, these religious men were out plotting a murder.

Oh, they would not go into Pilate's chamber because that would defile them. And later that day, they would be in the temple worshipping with their hands raised. But for now they were up early, trying to have an innocent Man killed. It's an interesting picture, isn't it, between the two.

Pilate was the governor of Judea beginning about 18 B.C. through 36 A.D. We have a lot of history on Pilate so we know a lot about him. He was sent there by Rome to watch over a very troubled area. There was lots of upheaval in this area. This was a religious center, if you will; lots of zealous kinds of religious contingencies were here. No easy task. But Pilate had, over the years, made it extremely difficult for himself. In fact, we know that when he came to power, he rode into town (in his inauguration) behind soldiers that were carrying flags that had the picture of Caesar on them. And the Jews in town, having learned (if nothing else) that idolatry was not something that God allowed, cried out, protested; and when he didn't listen, they followed him all the way to the coast in Caesarea where his palace was, and they stood out, screaming against him. He came out in his new power and threatened to slit all of their throats, to which they pulled down their shirts and said, "Do it." And he backed down, and they filed a complaint against Pilate to Rome. Later on, in his oversight, Pilate wanted to bring better water service - an aqueduct to Jerusalem - for the citizens there. But in order to pay for it, he robbed the temple treasury, had the soldiers take the money out of the place of giving, and, as you might suspect, there was a riot up on the Temple Mount. People were clubbed to death and stabbed to death. The historical records tell us that the Roman soldiers were brutal in quelling the rebellion. And again, an official complaint was registered in Rome against Pilate, and Pilate was on unsteady ground, even just in the first few years of his rule. There's another incident that is mentioned in the Scriptures (in Luke 13:1), where the people that were with Jesus mentioned to Him about how Pilate had mingled the Galilean blood with their sacrifices; and they had asked Jesus about that. We don't have any clue as to what that was. There's nothing recorded historically. But Jesus said, "Do you really think that those who died in that slaughter under Pilate were more culpable or more sinful than those who were not?" And Jesus is making the point that everybody is responsible for their sin, and one sin is not greater than the other in the sense of trying to explain this horrible thing that Pilate did.

Suffice it to say Pilate was on thin ice by the time we get to these trials. In 36 A.D., when he is removed from office, there were a bunch of Jewish fanatics that went up to Mount Gerizim (in the middle of the country) demanding to have access

in going to look for what they said were artifacts left by Moses years earlier. Pilate stepped in, dispersed the zealots, a riot followed, many people died, and the Samaritans complained. Pilate was recalled to Rome, and, on the way to Rome, he mysteriously died. No explanation. He just died. Eusebius, an early church writer, wrote that he became his own slayer. So, mean guy, proud guy, self-seeking guy; more interested in his position than in justice. He knew right from wrong. He just chose to do whatever served his own benefit. It is important, though, I think as we read through, that you understand that Pilate already had two strikes against him (if not more); that the Jews were very well aware of the fact that they had him "over the stove," if you will. He was going to get cooked. There was no way that he could wiggle out. They were sure they could push him in every direction that they wanted. And he really is between a rock and a hard place, which might explain why he gets up at 5:00 in the morning and even answers them at all; not just telling them, "Hey, office hours are.....I'll see you then." So, throughout the process you will find Pilate saying this of Jesus, "He's innocent. Let Him go. He's innocent." He will say it as well as Herod, as well as Pilate's wife, as well as the thief on the cross, the Roman centurion standing nearby that was part of the crucifixion detail. "He's innocent."

So they took Him to Pilate. John gives us a little bit more information. I'll read it to you out of John 18. It says (verse 28), "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover." Pilate lived in Caesarea on the coast. If you have gone with us to Israel, it is our first stop - the amphitheater in Caesarea. He was in town because these were feast days, and there was trouble. On the Temple Mount area, there's a place on the northwest side of the Temple Mount called the Antonia Fortress that had been built by Herod the Great; was named for his buddy, Marc Antony. It was where they kept the soldiers all the time but especially in these troubled times, in these religious holidays. If you go to the Temple Mount today, you'll still find the same thing. There's a Hebrew police headquarters up on the Temple Mount; there is a Muslim police headquarters as well. So John tells us that they brought a multitude with them to bring Jesus to Pilate but that they wouldn't enter his judgment hall, if you will, because they thought that would make them unclean. And so they knock on his door. Verse 29 of John 18 says, "Pilate then went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' They answered and said to him, 'If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.' " So Pilate is very accommodating to these guys because he's been in trouble with them

before. In fact, if you read through John 18 and 19 - those two chapters - you will find Pilate seven times going out to see them (because they won't come in), back to talk to Jesus, back to talk to them. He's like a yoyo. This man has no backbone. He certainly has no personal conviction. And he finds himself kind of as putty in the hands of these men.

His first question about Jesus (when He's delivered) is, "What are the accusations against Him?" And notice the sarcastic way that these Jewish leaders answer. "Hey, look, if He wasn't a bad guy, we wouldn't have brought Him to you. Don't ask us questions. We'll tell you what to do." Right? It was kind of the way that they responded - slandering Jesus, who had only done good; He had only healed the sick and fed the hungry and preached deliverance to the poor and the captives and delivered those that were possessed and showed every man the love of God. But, if your heart is wicked and hard, things that God has done may very well not move you. And it hadn't moved them.

In verse 31 of John 18, Pilate, hearing them say He's an evildoer, "said to them, 'You take Him and judge Him according to your law.' Therefore the Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.' " Pilate immediately tries to get out from under this whole deal. He can just see this is going nowhere well. And, "Hey, if He's done something wrong, you deal with Him. You've got a law. You can deal with Him according to your law." But their motives are very clearly and quickly fleshed out because they said, "Yeah, we can't kill Him. We'd like to kill Him, but we can't kill Him." And so that's their heart. They're not there for dealing just with, maybe, an evildoer; they're there with the intention of killing Him.

Now, the Jews killed by stoning, and they had for generations. When the Romans came in years earlier and took power, they removed from the Jews their ability for self-determination or the practice of applying law that way. The rabbis, we read in history, wept in the streets because back in Genesis 49:10, Jacob had said that until the Messiah would come, the scepter (or the rule) would not depart from the nation until Shiloh (the Messiah) comes. What they didn't understand was that growing up, there in the north, was a young Man, Jesus, who had come. But they weren't aware of it yet. They weren't aware that He was growing up there in Nazareth. It could have been assigned to them had they listened to Jesus. But they didn't.

So, they're asking Rome to put Him to death which is the very thing that, throughout the Scriptures, the Bible talks about the way that the Messiah would die: not at the hand of the Jews in that regard, but at the hand of the Romans who were the only ones really practicing (at the time, on a world scale) crucifixion, and they did it a lot. You read Psalm 22:16, and it talks about them "piercing My hands and feet." Or in Zechariah 12:10, "they will look on Me whom they pierced." Or in John 12:32 where Jesus said, "And I, If I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." So there're plenty of verses that talk about how Jesus was to die. And had this not been the way that it worked - had the Jews been given authority to have Him killed - they'd have stoned Him, and all of the Scriptures would have fallen short. But God had a plan. This didn't escape His plan. So, "We can't carry this out, Pilate. We're no longer able to." Later on, you might remember that the Sanhedrin, in their anger with Stephen, stoned him to death (Acts 7). It wasn't legal, but they overcame that worry, and they just went after him under the leadership of Saul as well. But they wanted to look civilized now; they wanted to look law-abiding now. The place was filled with folks from all over the country now.

Luke tells us in chapter 23:2 that "they began to accuse Him" of things that He hadn't done. " 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.' " Only later would they add (in John 19:7), "He also said He's God." But for now they tried to stick with things that they thought the Romans would be interested in. "He's misleading the nation, He's forbidding to pay taxes." And if you remember Mark 12:14, they tried having Jesus say that (just a couple of chapters earlier). "Hey, should we pay taxes or not?" They tried to get Him to vocalize His opposition; so they were planning to accuse Him and had failed. So, He was the King for sure but not in any kind of political sense. And He was not at all what they expected. And I would say to you if He was a king as they said, I don't think they'd have turned Him in; I think they'd have lined up behind Him. That's the guy they were looking for as the Messiah. They didn't want a Savior; they wanted a political deliverer. They would have not handed Him over, they would have applauded Him and supported Him. But they didn't. So Matthew 27:18 tells us that Pilate, being a pretty astute guy, saw right through all of this and said, "You're just here because you're jealous of Him. You're envious of His popularity. You've delivered Him to me out of jealousy."

Well we read, here in Mark 15:2, "Then Pilate asked Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' He answered and said to him, 'It is as you say.' " Back in John 18:33, Pilate

went back in, and he said, " 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' " In the little talks that Jesus has with Pilate, one of the things that I think stands out is Pilate's on trial, Jesus isn't. And you see the heart of God in wanting to reach a man that was very far removed from the gospel. The Lord did everything He could to bring Pilate to confront his own behavior and his own decisions, to challenge him to consider what he's seen and what he's heard. And you find Jesus being, constantly, the soul winner in these kinds of places. Pilate had never met anyone like Jesus. I think Jesus frightened him by His demeanor, certainly. But it was up to Pilate to respond like it's up to us to respond when we have the information. Pilate couldn't ignore the charges of the Sanhedrin. Those were serious charges - subverting the government. But when he went back to ask Jesus about it, it didn't look like He was much of a threat. "Are You the King of the Jews?" "Yep." But He was beaten, He hadn't slept, He was bloodied and bruised. He looked like anything but a King. He looked like the victim of a crime. And Jesus' answer, I think, helps to draw Pilate out because He says to Pilate, "You want to know if I'm a king, or did someone put you up to that? Is this your concern or not? Is it in your heart?" And I'm sure that he had heard of what Jesus had done during the week. News travels fast. The soldiers were in the streets. "Do you really want to know more about Me, or are you just asking for somebody else?" I find sometimes that people ask questions not to get the truth out but to disprove you. Things like, "Did Adam have a belly button?" I don't know. Or, "Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it?" He can do everything. Just not really interested in the truth. And Jesus kind of put Pilate on the spot. "Are you questioning Me because of those guys standing by the door, or are you interested in the truth?" Pilate's response (in John 19:35) was, " 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?' " "How have You made them so angry?" And Jesus' response was (verse 36), " 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' " It's the voice of truth.

So Pilate's not really interested in talking to Jesus about his attitude. He was a proud Roman. "I'm not a Jew. It's Your own nation." But he was suspicious of the people. And Jesus cleared up for him that He wasn't at all what they accused Him

of. "Look, I'm a King but not to take over here. Not here to take over, in that sense of political defiance or insurrection. But I'm not helpless. If the kingdom was going to be built here, we'd be fighting and so would My servants. But it isn't a militancy that we're looking for. I'm not here to build an earthly, physical kingdom." And Pilate said, "Well, then, are You a king?" and He said, "Absolutely. I've come to be the King. I was born to be the King. I was born to bring the truth to man. If man will hear the truth, he'll have life. He'll have truth." I like the way Jesus put this. He said, "I was born," and then He wrote, "I came." He's both God and man. "I was born, and yet I came."

Well, to that, Pilate just throws up his hands, and he walks away, and he said (John 18:38), " 'What is truth?' " That's been discussed for generations among the religious folks. "Who knows what the truth is? I just want to get You out of here and get back to bed." And so he throws up his hands, and he goes back to the folks standing outside on the steps, and he says this (according to John 18:38), " 'I find no fault in Him at all.' " "Whatever you're accusing Him of, I can't do anything with Him. There's no way."

We read, here in verse 3 of our chapter, "And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!' But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled." Luke 23:5 tells us that they became "more fierce," these men at the door. They began to shout and to say, " 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.' " And they were angry, and whatever came to mind (since they thought they had lost their cause), they began to scream. And Jesus says nothing. And Pilate looks at Him with wonder. "Do You hear what they're saying?" And Jesus says nothing. Why? Well, a couple of reasons. Number one - He'd already been declared innocent. No sense to defend Yourself when You haven't done anything. So He says nothing. For another, we read in Isaiah 53:7 that, "as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" in self-defense. When He opens His mouth, it's always to witness, to minister, to reach out; not to defend Himself. Which I find that to be very telling for us as well, that if you're going to open your mouth, forget about defending you. Just go and preach Him. Let people know who He is. But Pilate realizes there's this envious, hateful crowd; and then he looks at Jesus very calmly standing there, and he marveled (which is really the Greek word for he admired Him). Wow! To see what He is doing.

But here's Pilate. He's in the pressure cooker, isn't he? In times past, his run-ins with these guys have led to fueling the fire. The right thing to do is let Jesus go. But he thinks that's going to cause a riot, especially on the religious feast day when there's so much fervor in town, and so he didn't want another letter being written to Tiberius. And so with the noise and the accusation, in the midst of it he hears this, "He came down from Galilee." And he thought to himself, "That's awesome because I don't rule Galilee. Herod does." And so this buzzword of, "Oh, my gosh, He comes down from Galilee" couldn't be more important, couldn't be more helpful.

So the good news for Pilate was that Herod was in town; just happened to be in town, staying at that place that everyone would stay at - the Antonia Fortress. And so, again, Pilate does this, "I'm out from under it. I'm going to escape the easy way out. I don't need to satisfy my conscience to do the right thing - let an innocent Man go free, risk the consequences of my job - so I'll just pass the buck," which is exactly what he seeks to do. Understand that Pilate had already said, "He's innocent," but he shirks his responsibility, and he punts. Right?

Well, if you've found Luke 23 by now, we're going to end up there this morning. If you'll go there, beginning in verse 6 of Luke 23, we read this, "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him." Herod (this Herod) is the son of Herod the Great. History tells us that he began ruling at the time of his father's death (4 B.C.), and he would rule pretty much in the north for the next thirty years. This was the same Herod (you might remember from your Bibles) who had married his half-brother Philip's wife. Her name was Herodias. He had taken her for his own wife, and it was that relationship that John the Baptist, when he was arrested, had spoken out against. He would eventually be tricked by Herodias, his wife, and her daughter to have John beheaded. But the Bible says some interesting things about Herod that you might remember back in chapter 6, when we were way back there (it's been a while ago). But it said that when John spoke to Herod and said, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife," Herodias (the woman that was in the picture, so to speak) said to her husband (this Herod), "We should have him killed." But Herod didn't want to kill him. In fact, you read in Mark 6:20 that "Herod feared John." He believed that he was a just man and that John was a holy man; that he protected him against his wife in all of those plots.

It says, "he heard him gladly," and when he did many things, he listened to him with joy. So there was a relationship, for a while, between John the Baptist and this Herod, that found him listening (to what John was preaching) with joy. You have to believe John was letting him have it, talking about "Jesus the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sins of the world. There He is!" And John had been imprisoned by this Herod; his wife (not really his wife) wanted him dead because he'd spoken out against this illicit relationship. But, look, for a long time John had Herod's ear. I don't know how close he got to repenting and turning to the Lord, but you have to believe that John laid a pretty heavy-duty witness upon this guy and spoke of repentance, spoke of the coming kingdom and all.

Later on (both in Matthew 14 and in Luke 9), as Jesus was ministering in Galilee - when that centurion's servant was healed, when Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead - Luke tells us that Herod, hearing all of this, thought that maybe John the Baptist was back; the guy he had been tricked into killing, he liked as a friend, but he had no choice. He had to save face in front of his friends when he made the promise to his wife and her daughter - that he was going to be haunted. And so from liking what he heard, later on to fearing that maybe John had come back, and there was trouble - and he was in trouble, to (in Luke 13:31) when Jesus makes His last trip through Galilee, where Herod rules, there are people who come to Jesus and say, "You'd better get out of Dodge, Man. Herod wants to kill You. He's out to kill You." So he goes from listening to God's Word and the testimony of Jesus to being fearful about what he's gotten himself involved with to finally just saying, "I'd just like to have Him dead and be done with this thing."

So here on Good Friday, the first Good Friday, is the last meeting between Herod and Jesus. And notice, from verse 8 here (Luke 23), that he was thrilled to meet Jesus. He hoped for a show. He wasn't thrilled because his sins were many. He had heard about the miracles of Jesus. He wanted to see one for himself. The Bible doesn't allow for that. I mean, Jesus doesn't do any miracles - that I can see - just to satisfy the curiosity of others or to entertain them. He wouldn't even do miracles to meet His own needs. But He did so to meet the needs of others, to glorify His Father, to give credence, if you will, to His Word.

But we read in verse 9 here, this, "Then he questioned Him with many words," (he really let Him have it) "but He answered him nothing." Again, who's on trial here? "Do something for me. Don't You know I have Your life in my hands?" I don't know what he said. He questioned him with many words, and Jesus said nothing. "I'm

innocent, and I'm not about to entertain this wicked man who has gone so far from the truth." Again, who's on trial? You know, a lot of folks who tell you about Jesus or draw near with curiosity without a deep sense of need, the Lord doesn't really have anything to say to you until you're in need. And then He'll help. But if you don't see it, He can't help you.

So we read in verse 10, "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him." So they followed Jesus over from Pilate's to where Herod was. And notice they're just not giving up. "We want him dead. Whoever can give us what we want." And so they yelled and screamed and accused. And verse 11 tells us, "Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been an enmity with each other." So Herod is embarrassed in front of his troops. He treats Jesus with contempt. He treats Him as if He means nothing. He belittles Him. He treats Him with no value or reputation. And I don't know if Herod was afraid of Jesus because of what happened with John. He kind of sends Him back, but first he kind of puts Him in His place (or so he thinks he does). He mocks Him. He puts a royal robe on Him. He calls Him, "Lord." And then they send Him back to Pilate, who now becomes friends; at least Herod's attitude towards Pilate changes. "You took me in." Pilate, I don't know if he liked Herod any better or not because now the trouble is back on his doorstep. The tragedy of Herod's life is here's a guy who was sincerely interested in the things of God at some point - protected the messenger, heard him gladly, went to seek him out for counsel (even though others wanted to destroy him), kept him safe for quite some time, was told about the Lord and the Messiah and His kingdom and sin and all; and yet somehow, over time, his flesh got the upper hand, and now we find him, in his last appearance, mocking Jesus and beating Him and trying to lord over the Lord, if you will, forgetting about sin, forgetting about the Messiah, forgetting about the words that he has heard. He went from gladly hearing to mocking, all in about a year and a half. Which is why it's so important, I think, when you hear God's Word that you act accordingly, you respond to it. Because you can get hard to it, and it can just go in one ear and out the other. You were sensitive at one point but not anymore. So from the place of attraction and listening and closeness to hateful rejection, here is his last meeting. And Jesus has nothing to say. I always find that very interesting - that when the Lord doesn't have anything to say to you, that's a bad spot to be in. Isn't it? Because He's got plenty to say, and all of it's good - if we'll only listen.

Next week, we will pick up with Pilate who thinks he's dodged a bullet - only to find that the gun was pointed right at him.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson

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