

Matthew 23-03-12b

We pick up our study in Luke chapter 23, and we see here that the Jews, having done their three trials, have sent Jesus to Pilate. Pilate has inquired and doesn't find much grist for the mill here. He seems to be deeply suspicious of the charge because you would imagine that when they say, we found this fellow perverting our nation, forbidding to pay taxes, saying that he himself is Christ the King, Pilate's response, which isn't recorded here, could easily have been, where are your witnesses? Where is the evidence? Why am I only hearing about this now? How long has this been? You say he started in Galilee, and he's been up and down the country and come to Jerusalem several times.

Why am I only hearing about this now? Well, of course, they have no answer for that, and the historic reputation Pilate has as being cruel and insensitive is something we'll address in a moment as a warning to ourselves. But for now, when Pilate, in verse 6 of Luke 23, heard that the man were a Galilean, then he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Herod saw Jesus.

This is so fascinating that both of these men are visitors. The resident government is local. It's Jewish.

And so they have now sent Jesus to the visiting Pilate, who is sending him to the visiting Herod, and you have every phase of government from that which might be most sensitive. You would think that an oppressed people would never turn over one of their own, however badly they disliked him or wanted him off the scene. Would you really consciously and purposefully put him in the hands of your mortal enemies, the the Romans that you find heinously offensive? There are historic records that indicate that Pilate, during his ten years or so of governorship, made the Jews angry on a couple of different occasions.

One time he brought Roman troops into Jerusalem with banners that had a picture of Tiberius the Caesar on them. And you know the the Jews take the thou shalt not make it under the any graven image very seriously. They don't want their coins to have pictures on them.

And so the locally minted coins and Pilate made some of these coins. They're kind of badly struck and they're ugly. They're not much of a collector's item, even though they're old, but they only have inscriptions.

They don't have pictures and which makes it doubly significant in the tax discussion when Jesus says show me a coin whose picture is on it and they say Caesar. These these coins were disliked and you couldn't spend them at the temple because they had pagan pictures on them. And that's why you've got money changers.

Well, you can't go in and you know buy sacrifices or supplies or anything with these coins. You've got to have kosher coins, if you will. And it's so odd that they bring up this idea of taxes when it is they who brook under the Roman taxes.

They're the ones that that hate them. They are the ones who privately among themselves don't want to pay taxes to Caesar and have been incensed when they were forced to pay them and when those taxes were increased. But they push their guilt and their attitude off onto Jesus who never discouraged people from paying taxes on the infrequent occasion that it came up.

He said render to Caesar what belongs to him. His pictures on the coin, give that to him. And in a way, this would be harmonious because if the coins got a picture on it, give it to the Romans who are okay with pictures.

Give to God what belongs to God which and they they might think at first blush. Well, he's talking about non-picture coins and they would say well that that's what we do. We must be okay because we're changing money into an acceptable form that we can give to God.

But again, like a parable, if you only understand it at the literal level, you don't get very far in enhancing your understanding and therefore your ability to live in a way that pleases and serves God. So this is significant in that sense, but there's another very fascinating what you would call a coincidence if you didn't know better, with this co-location of Pilate and Herod. Turn back ten chapters in Luke to Luke chapter 13.

And this bears on what I mentioned in the first session regarding when was Jesus born? How old was he when he began his ministry? What year are we in? Amazingly, with this being the most significant event in history, we don't know exactly when it took place. There are people who would like to tell you they know when it was, but they really don't and I really don't. We can we can estimate, we can we can guess, but almost supernaturally convenient that you can't go You know, Luke gives some pretty detailed time instances.

But take a look. In fact, just just to confirm that, keep your finger in Luke 13 and go back to Luke chapter 1. When Luke opens this gospel and he is addressing it to Gentiles, he gives time references. And so he says, I have set in order this narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us.

Those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses in verse 2 of chapter 1, ministers of the word, delivered them to us seemed to me good also, having had perfect understanding of all things. Perfect means complete. Of all things from the very first to write to you an orderly account that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

So after the account of the ministry and birth and ministry of John the Baptist and so on, chapter 2 came to pass in those days, the decree went out from Caesar Augustus. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria and so on. And then you have the inception at chapter 3 and this is where you have the most detailed information anywhere in the Gospels to help us ascertain the year of the crucifixion and the other years associated with it.

It is the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Aeturia and the region of Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. You think well, that's triangulating it, you know, two or three different ways. The problem being that Tiberius Caesar had a co-regency at the beginning of his reign and this lasted a year or two.

And so when it says the 15th year of Tiberius, well, does that include or exclude the co-regency? For their glory and longevity, most rulers in the ancient world would add on anything they could possibly shoehorn in. So if it is the 15th year and it includes the co-regency, that puts it earlier. We'll talk about that more closely, but it says Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea when John the Baptist begins his ministry.

And it seems that John ministered for about a year before Jesus came to the Jordan. But we don't know how long John preached before Jesus arrived. It was long enough that people all the way up in Galilee had heard about it and Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip and them had come down to hear him and were staying in the region of the Jordan for that.

But turn back to chapter 13 now. It says that was present at that season. And when you talk about at that season, you see that Jesus is in the... You've got to go all the way back to chapter 11.

And trying to find where he is. He is basically traveling around the towns and villages in Galilee, but it says he is heading for Jerusalem. So you'll find this also in chapter 13 verse 10, but there was present at that season and this is the season preceding him going down to Jerusalem for the feast.

You find it again in chapter 13 verse 22. He went through the cities and villages teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. Same thing in verse 10, teaching one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

And by the time he gets to chapter 14, he's in the house of a Pharisee and so on. Here's the point. Chapter 13 verse 1. There were present at that season some who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

So Pilate has been in office prior to the appearance of John the Baptist during the time

that Jesus is ministering in Galilee and he has had time to deal with this issue of Galileans, which is otherwise unattested. We don't have any historical record except Luke. Not even the other Gospels detail this.

So what would it mean that Pilate mingled the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices? Well, Pilate is the governor in Judea, not Galilee, right? So sacrifices means these Galileans have come down to Jerusalem ostensibly to sacrifice, but Pilate believes they are up to no good. You remember the back in the days of the early disciples down by the Jordan, can any good thing come out of Galilee? Galilee was noted for independence, for sort of a rebellious and recalcitrant attitude and evidently there were Galileans who were in fact troublemakers, who were in fact stirring up the people, who were in fact creating a problem. And so when they came down to Jerusalem and they're rabble-rousing and allegedly, you know, their cover is, well, we are here to sacrifice, probably at one of the assembly feasts.

Pilate arrests them, tries them, convicts them, slays them, and then the sacrifices under cover of which they were coming to Jerusalem, he pours their blood on their sacrifices, which of course renders them unable to be sacrificed. But their animals that were there for sacrifice have this blood poured on them instead. So he mingled their blood with their sacrifices.

So Pilate has had time enough. I mentioned last week that he seems to be relatively early in his governorship and he is still kind of figuring things out. But think about this.

These are Galileans and the normal practice in these times was if someone was creating problems, you would have them judged by the government in their home state, if you will. So these Galileans probably should have been judged by Herod Antipas. Instead, Pilate arrests them, tries them, convicts them, executes them, and makes a spectacle of them, horrifying everybody in Jerusalem by polluting their sacrifices with human blood, their own blood.

So no doubt this gets back to Herod. And so Herod is going to say, you know, you don't even have jurisdiction. If these guys are rabble-rousers, I ought to judge them up in Galilee.

And that would be background information for chapter 23. But before we leave chapter 13, look at the end of the chapter, down in verse 31, 1331 of Luke. On that very day where Jesus says, strive to enter through the narrow gate, you will see many coming from the northeast, south, and west, sitting down with Abraham in the kingdom of God.

Earlier, the master of the house has risen up and shut the door, verse 25. You knock at the door, Lord, Lord, open for us. We ate and drank in your presence.

You taught in our streets. You will say, I do not know you, where you are from. Depart

from me, you workers of iniquity.

On that very day, verse 31, some Pharisees came, saying to him, get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill you. Where is he? Verse 22. He's going through the cities and villages of Galilee, Herod's domain, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.

Pharisees come, saying, get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill you. And Jesus said to them, verse 32, go tell that fox, go tell that fox. This is interesting because the word for fox here is feminine.

It's not a male fox. We would say in English, vixen. You know, you call a female fox a vixen and so he basically says, go tell that vixen, behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

Nevertheless, I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. I personally believe, and I would have to go back and listen to myself when we got to this portion of Luke years ago, but I really think looking at it now and with our study of this morning's trials, that Herod didn't really know anything about Jesus and the Pharisees have invented this threat that Herod wants to kill him. You don't get any notion ten chapters later in 23 that Herod wants to see Jesus.

Now I can finally kill him. He wants to see signs and wonders and his interest in Jesus, it would have been the same as it was in John the Baptist. He wants to see miracles.

He wants to hear more of this strange new teaching as it were. But the Pharisees say, you need to get out of here because Herod is after you. Herod wants to kill you.

And when Jesus says, go tell that vixen, it, I think that is a loaded phrase because things that are abstract, things that are conceptual and or even imaginary, things that are thoughts and not substantial, are put in the feminine, especially in Aramaic and Hebrew. Insubstantial things are often referred to in the feminine. This fox is conceptual.

It is a suggestion. You only hear about this from these Pharisees and you get the idea that they are trying to scare Jesus out of their realm, out of their region. And so, well, the government's after you.

You need to get out of here. Look at Jesus' reply. This is why I think what I think.

Look at Jesus' reply. Go tell that female fox. Look, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow and the third day I shall be perfected.

I shall be finished, would be maybe a more understandable translation for us. Today, tomorrow, third day, I'll be finished. I cast out demons and perform cures.

What are the two things that the religious leadership in Israel cannot do? By whom do

your sons cast out demons? If I'm doing it by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons? Well, your sons can't cast them out at all. Nor can they perform cures. Right? This is something unique to Jesus and it is prophetically significant.

Casting down Shaitan, casting down Satan and his minions, his demons, casting them out, casting them down, dominating them, subjugating them and performing cures, this fulfills Old Testament prophecy. This is significant to the Pharisees who have memorized these prophetic passages. And the third day I shall be finished.

How many times in prophecy do we see references after two days? We will rise on the third day. We will live again. This is significant to the Pharisees.

Every word of what he says is a hammer on the hard head of these Pharisees. Third day, I shall be finished. Nevertheless, I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following.

It cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, this is the Pharisaical capital, right? It's not the Roman capital. It's not Herod's capital.

It's not Pilate's capital. It's the Jewish capital. And it is a stinging rebuke to these Pharisees that, as he points out in other places, you have acknowledged that it is your fathers who slew the prophets.

Fill up then the measure of your fathers. A prophet will not be slain except in Jerusalem because it's going to be you all who do it. So Jesus sort of very elegantly pokes a finger in their eye.

Herod is not the problem here. You are. But notice in the same chapter, Luke 13, that Pilate is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter in verse 1 and Herod is mentioned in verse 31 and 32.

Herod and Pilate, both of whom will be in a position to judge the Lord Jesus at the behest of these same Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, and rulers of the people. They are in league with the secular oppressive and hated government because they hate Jesus more if that were possible. These are the ones Pilate not only put banners with the picture of Caesar on them in Jerusalem and it really raised an insurrection and he got in so much trouble for that.

Emissaries were sent by the Jews to Rome to Tiberius who then sent a rebuke back to Pilate and made him pull that stuff out. Even more interestingly in this regard it appears from the Roman records, the scant ones that we have, there were five governors of Judea of whom Pontius Pilate is the one we know the most about. But he was evidently able to secure this post through the advocacy of a man named Sejanus in Rome who was Pilate's friend and interceded for him with Caesar and got him appointed as governor.

Sejanus in circa 30 or 31 is found to be plotting seditiously against Tiberius in Rome and is executed for it. And so now Pilate who formerly was the protege of Sejanus and Sejanus had argued that he's a good guy. He's my friend.

Let's make him governor in Judea. Sejanus turns out to be a rascal in Caesar's eyes and Caesar executes Pilate's mentor around 30 or 31. So that is sort of an oblique argument that these events and the arrest and trial might be closer to 30.

It's all speculation, but when they say if you don't execute this Jesus, you are no friend of Caesar, that would put mortal fear into Pilate if he's heard about what happened to his mentor and friend Sejanus in Rome. The threat of more emissaries going to Caesar and saying this guy isn't doing a good job, that would be a problem. So it is possible, but even the beginning of Pilate's governorship is, there are some scholars who think it began as early as 19 or 20, AD 19 or 20.

It's because they think there's an error. All of this largely hinges on Josephus and his records and he says that Pilate was there for 10 years, but there's some other evidence that suggests he might have been there longer. I say that to say this, back in Luke chapter 23, these same two individuals, it's striking to me that you have one individual, a second individual, and then a group in the Jewish trials.

You have Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, right? In the Roman trials, you have Pilate, Herod, and the mob incited by the religious leadership. And none of them are qualified, none of them are on solid ground. The Mishnah, which was compiled and put in writing a couple of hundred years after this, is our source where rules were in place that the Sanhedrin could not convene at night, they could not issue a death penalty in a single session, and they could not convene on the night before Passover, all of which they did.

And so, were they consciously violating those rules on this night? Or is the Mishnah recording measures that were put in place as a result of episodes like this where injustices were done? And those might have been later rules that were developed because they saw that this was so easily abused and just wasn't right. It's hard to know. But here's what we do know, and we always want to bring this around to how should I then live? How should we then live? The first point I would suggest, looking at all six of these trials and the outcome of them, is to make a judgment and draw a conclusion based on incomplete and sometimes incorrect perceptions and evidence is such as is common to man.

All of us have done it, all of us do it, but it is something as believers who are dedicated to the way, the truth, and the life it is important for us to reserve judgment. We shouldn't take testimony from a single source. It is a biblical principle that you need to talk to or hear from or assess and incorporate multiple witnesses for anything.

We should keep our peace. We should refrain from snap judgments. And wait till all the evidence is in, prayerfully consider what we have heard.

And then secondly, as with the Lord Jesus, sometimes it is evidence against us. Maybe we're hearing that we have fouled up, that we have fallen short, that we are guilty or culpable in some way to take time to be judicious, to be considerate, to try to incorporate the law of love, the law of supreme sacrifice, and to exercise the fruit of the spirit. And as we try to draw a conclusion about anything, it can be a supreme court decision, it can be an indictment, it can be political, it can be social, it can be a news story.

People will tell us a story and we're convinced that things are one way. Then we hear facts that were not a part of that first presentation and we're swung completely to the other side. Oh, well, if I had known that that was true, that this was the reason.

I'll give you an example. There was recently some additional footage released from the January 6 incursion, let's call it, into the Capitol. Breaking and entering and shattering government property is always wrong.

Going places you're not supposed to go, taking down barricades and pushing past policemen is always a bad idea. If you listen to one side, they say, well, it was just peaceful and people were rightfully upset. They didn't like the way the election turned out.

Well, there are on record injuries and assault wounds and hospitalizations for over 140 Capitol policemen. So you can't believe people that say it was a vicious armed insurrection and that there were shots fired and that five Capitol policemen were killed, which is the narrative from one side. No Capitol policemen were killed.

No Capitol policemen died. Not a single one on January the 6th. Not one.

The ones who did subsequently die one died of medical conditions that were declared in his autopsy and by the coroner to be unrelated to anything having to do with work. It was natural causes on the death certificate. Not injury, no fire extinguisher to the head, no pepper spray.

But the narrative will say, well, five Capitol policemen were killed. It has been repeated by people all the way up to the president of the United States, and it is a lie. It is not true.

On the other hand, to say that it was largely peaceful when over 140 Capitol police were treated for injuries. Some injuries were so severe that they still have not returned to duty because they're incapacitated. These guys were hit, they were brick batted, they were trampled, they were crushed, and that's not right.

You need to hear from all sides, hear advocates and hear opponents, hear defense and hear prosecution. This is why our system of adjudication, our American system of justice, flawed though the results may sometimes be, is designed to allow for hearing from all sides and trying to weigh evidence and trying to establish what is pertinent and what is not. It is not pertinent, as I was on a jury one time, and here's a guy that is caught in a sting operation peddling drugs to have his mother come on in the sentencing phase and say, but he's always been a good boy.

It doesn't matter what his mother thinks of him. The issue at hand is, was there a crime committed? What is the penalty for that crime described by law, prescribed by law, and are there any mitigating or extenuating circumstances? Oh, my mama loves me, like Paul Simon sings, loves me like the rock of ages. That is neither here nor there when it comes to adjudicating penalties in a trial, but the appeal to emotion, the appeal to a narrative, oh, he comes from humble circumstances.

He was dropped as a child. He fell off his tricycle or whatever. It doesn't pertain.

The law doesn't say, well, if he fell off his tricycle at the age of three, then you need to reduce the punishment. We need to be examples of thoughtfulness, the fruit of the spirit, patience, long-suffering, gentleness. Look at any pictures of swarming mobs coming right up and breaking windows and entering doors during a session of Congress when they're not supposed to be in there.

It's wrong. There's no way that is not wrong. If you want to stay behind the barricades and wave signs and shout and use bullhorns, prance up and down with your Viking horns and your face paint, great.

You even have the freedom to be egregiously wrong by mixing Christianity and politics and saying that God sent Mr. Trump to be the savior of America and mixing Christian and patriotic symbols and so on, the extremes of Christian nationalism and so on, is wrong. Look at your list of the fruit of the spirit. If you claim to be a Christian, read your scriptures.

Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self-control. As soon as you see behavior that does not reflect those, whether it is in a discussion between two people in a household, whether it is in the workplace, whether it is in a school classroom, whether it is in any other endeavor of life, up to and including politics. If someone claims and wants Christian support, but their behavior betrays that, now we need to be careful.

We need to be cautious. I can support someone whose personal behavior I despise, but whose performance in the job is acceptable or better than the alternatives, but to go beyond that is to do the same kind of bad judgment as you have here. It starts with an individual, sometimes a visiting individual, and then it is shared.

I'll share responsibility with another individual. It's not just Caiaphas. It's also Annas.

It's not just the Sanhedrin. It's also the mob. And we will go beyond the law.

Remember, in both the Jewish and the Roman trials, Jesus is beaten. He is blindfolded. He is abused.

He is struck and slapped, and people say, who struck you? They pull out his beard. In what construction of the law of Moses is that acceptable? Nobody stops that. Nobody stands up and says, this is wrong.

And if the group is capable of that behavior, how righteous is their judgment during the formal part of the trial? Nobody thinks that's right. So we can't fix what went wrong at the Jewish trials. We can't fix what went wrong in the Roman trials.

We can't fix what has gone wrong in any of the court cases in our nation, be they Supreme Court or investigations and conclusions that are drawn by committees and so on. What can we do? What can we fix? What is within our power? What have we been given the grace and the resource to do? I can fix my judgment. I can look at these examples, be they contemporary or historical, and say, there but for the grace of God go I. But by God's grace, I am not going to pervert justice.

I am not going to find people guilty who are not guilty. I am going to assume that perhaps I don't have all of the facts. I am going to give people the benefit of the doubt in Christian love.

Even if there has been wrong, let me absorb it. Let me take the hit. If someone asks you for your coat, give him your cloak also.

If he asks you to carry his pack a mile, take it too. If there's going to be an injustice, if there is going to be a wrong, I want to be the one who receives it, not the one who inflicts it. It is true in conversations.

It is true in allegations. It is true in assumptions. It is true in attitudes.

Well, I don't want to have anything to do with so-and-so because I heard or I had one experience. We don't know what kind of day that person has had. We don't know what trials they are laboring under.

And as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, it's not just nice for us to do. It is commanded for us in love for one another to be the one that absorbs the wrong. Look at the example of the Lord Jesus.

If you don't get anything else out of these 24 hours, beginning in the upper room and extending through the crucifixion and placing in the tomb, look at the Lord Jesus who suffers these horrendous injustices, indignities, actual physical injury and harm,

ultimately death, with full power to refute, full power to answer questions in a way that they could not answer or respond to. Call 10,000 angels to destroy the world and set him free, as the song says. Instead he died alone for you and me.

He is our example. We are his body. What should his body absorb and be willing to endure in this life? Jesus who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.

Where is he now? Seated at the right hand of the Father. Do you want a momentary shallow victory here? Or do you want an eternal weight of glory? There. Think about these six trials.

We're going to be moving forward next week into the crucifixion itself, but human judgment is so error-prone, so easily perverted, so easily distorted, so easily fooled, so easily corrupted, and used for evil ends by evil people. Jesus answered him nothing. Wanted to see a wonder? What do you think would have happened if Malchus had been standing there and Jesus waited until Herod interviewed to put Malchus's ear back on? Herod might have gone to Pilate and said, Yeah, I find this guy fascinating.

Let me take him back to Galilee. I'll keep him up there kind of like I did John the Baptist and I'll deal with him. Just turn him over to me.

The whole course of God's plan, the cup that the Father asked the Lord Jesus to drink, is bypassed. And you think, well, good for Jesus. He doesn't have to endure the cross and the shame.

But the goal of being a blessing and fulfilling a greater and grander plan with a far more significant and earth-shattering purpose is lost. Do I really want my gain and my benefit, my vindication and my self-satisfaction to be the issue and not what God wants to do in me and through me, in us and through us, to glorify himself, to make an issue of the kingdom and the king and the eternal future? Even if it is just, even if it is right, even if it is true that we shouldn't be suffering what we suffer, if God has a purpose in it and we can't see the purpose, now it's a matter of faith, right? Do I trust that God knows what he's doing, that he has let these things through the wall of fire, that I am a victim here for a purpose? I will trust God for my vindication. I will trust God for my salvation, my temporal salvation, as well as my eternal salvation.

If we trust him for one, we should trust him for the other. The Lord Jesus places his spirit into the hands of his Father. Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit, as he had done throughout his earthly life.

And when he could no longer be consciously possessed of it, he places it in his Father's hands, as should we, as should we. In this world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world, Jesus says.

Father, thank you for this incomparable, unparalleled example in the Lord Jesus our Savior, our head, as members of his body, as brethren in the church, in this age of the Holy Spirit, this age of opportunity, this age to learn and grow and be prepared to enter and serve and function in the coming kingdoms. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, your Holy Spirit will help us to see clearly the difference that they can and should make in our own hearts and in our own lives so that we can be true disciples, true followers of the Lord Jesus, taking up our cross and following him where he went so that we can arrive where he has arrived, in your presence, reflecting your glory. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.