

# **To Seek and to Save the Lost**

## **Jesus Before Pilate**

*Luke 23:1-12*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

April 24, 2016

# Jesus Before Pilate

## Scripture

Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the religious authorities in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He was taken to the high priest's house where Peter denied knowing him three times before the rooster crowed. Then Jesus was subjected to a religious trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin where he was found "guilty" of blasphemy. But since it was not lawful for the Jews to put anyone to death (John 18:31), they sent Jesus to Pilate for a civil trial.

Kent Hughes summarizes what happened next, "A political trial under secular Roman authority and law was necessary. Thus came the most infamous trial in history, a weird, twisted thing that began before Pilate, the careerist Roman politician, then detoured to the tetrarch Herod, the half-Jew puppet ruler, and finally returned to Pilate where the awful judgment was rendered."<sup>1</sup>

Let's read about Jesus before Pilate in Luke 23:1-12:

**<sup>1</sup> Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. <sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." <sup>3</sup> And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." <sup>5</sup> But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."**

**<sup>6</sup> When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and**

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 361.

**he was hoping to see some sign done by him. <sup>9</sup> So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.**  
(Luke 23:1-12)

## **Introduction**

On Friday, April 15, 2016 a judge vacated the murder conviction of 76-year-old Jack McCullough. A prosecutor says McCullough was wrongly convicted in the 1957 killing of an Illinois schoolgirl. This means that one of the oldest cold cases to be tried in U.S. history has officially gone cold again.

McCullough was sentenced to life in prison in 2012 for the death of 7-year-old Maria Ridulph in Sycamore, about 70 miles west of Chicago. In a review of documents last year, a prosecutor found evidence that supported the former policeman's long-held alibi that he was 40 miles away in Rockford at the time of Maria's disappearance.<sup>2</sup>

The Illinois judicial system worked well to free an innocent man who had been wrongly convicted of a crime.

Jesus was innocent of any crime. He had never ever done anything wrong in his entire life. And yet, the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus sentenced to death. But, because they were not able to impose the death penalty on anyone, they had to get the Romans to convict Jesus of a capital offense, and thereby get him sentenced to death.

## **Lesson**

The civil trial of Jesus in Luke 23:1-12 shows us the innocence of Jesus.

---

<sup>2</sup> See <http://triblive.com/usworld/nation/10317089-74/mccullough-maria-brady>.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Accusations Against Jesus (23:1-2)
2. The Question of Pilate (23:3a)
3. The Answer of Jesus (23:3b)
4. The Verdict of Pilate (23:4)
5. The Disagreement of the Sanhedrin (23:5)
6. The Referral to Herod (23:6-7)
7. The Derision by Herod (23:8-11)
8. The Friendship of Enemies (23:12)

## I. The Accusations Against Jesus (23:1-2)

First, notice the accusations against Jesus.

The religious trial of Jesus concluded shortly after dawn. As far as the Jewish Sanhedrin was concerned, Jesus' admission that he was the Son of God was blasphemous and deserving of death (Luke 22:70; cf. Mark 14:61-64). But since they lacked the political ability to do so, they had to arrange for Jesus to have a civil trial. **Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate** (23:1).

Pontius Pilate was the Roman Procurator responsible for maintaining law and order in the region. His normal headquarters was at Caesarea. However, since it was the Passover, and tensions ran high during the Jewish feast, Pilate was in Jerusalem to ensure that law and order was maintained.

**And the Sanhedrin began to accuse Jesus of three charges, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king"** (23:2).

The first accusation against Jesus was that he was misleading the nation. This was the most subjective of the three accusations. Jesus taught that he was sent by God to show the nation God's way, which was of course different than the religious establishment's way. But Jesus was simply teaching the people a correct understanding of God's truth rather than the perversion that was being taught to them.

The second accusation against Jesus was that he was forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar. This accusation was patently false. Jesus specifically taught that the people were to pay their taxes to Rome when he taught, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:25).

And the third accusation against Jesus was that he was calling himself a king. This accusation was actually true, but not in the sense that religious authorities meant. I want you to notice the subtle but very important change in this accusation against Jesus. In his religious trial, Jesus was found “guilty” of blasphemy, that is, the improper use of God’s name. However, the Jewish leaders knew that Pilate had no interest in their religious law. And so the Jewish leaders changed the accusation from *blasphemy* to *insurrection*. They said to Pilate that Jesus was “**saying that he himself is Christ, a king.**” They knew that “Jesus’ claims to kingship would be a direct challenge to Caesar.”<sup>3</sup> And they knew that this last accusation would be one that Pilate would have to address.

## II. The Question of Pilate (23:3a)

Second, observe the question of Pilate.

**And so Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?”** (23:3a). Pilate was not interested in their Jewish religious law. But he had to ascertain if Jesus was a revolutionary, which is what the Jewish Sanhedrin implied in their third accusation. If Jesus was a revolutionary trying to rebel against Rome, then Pilate would have to take action against him.

## III. The Answer of Jesus (23:3b)

Third, look at the answer of Jesus.

**And he answered him, “You have said so”** (23:3b).

---

<sup>3</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2009.

Jesus' answer in Luke's Gospel was short and cryptic. In John's Gospel there was an extended exchange between Pilate and Jesus on the issue of his kingship. Jesus concluded that exchange by saying that his kingship was not of this world, meaning that he was not a political or military revolutionary. His kingship was a spiritual kingship.

#### IV. The Verdict of Pilate (23:4)

Fourth, notice the verdict of Pilate.

**Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man" (23:4).** Although the interaction between Pilate and Jesus did not last very long, Pilate believed that Jesus was not a threat to Rome. And so he declared Jesus not guilty of any crime against Rome. In fact, during the course of next hour or so Pilate declared the innocence of Jesus three times (23:4; 14-15; 22).

Commentator Darrell Bock notes, "His verdict should have ended matters, but it does not. Jesus is portrayed as rebelling against Rome, but the irony is that it is the leadership that is rebelling against God's Chosen One."<sup>4</sup>

#### V. The Disagreement of the Sanhedrin (23:5)

Fifth, look at the disagreement of the Sanhedrin.

**But they, that is, the Jewish religious leaders, were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place" (23:5).** The Jewish leaders were pulling out all the stops. Nothing was going to stop them from getting Jesus sentenced to death. And so they wanted Pilate to see that Jesus was a political threat. Their tactic was to suggest that a good governor would not let Jesus go free. They were clearly slandering Jesus.

Bishop J. C. Ryle reminds us that "false witness and slander are two favorite weapons of the devil. When he finds that he cannot stop

---

<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1812.

God's work, his next device is to blacken the character of God's servants, and to destroy the value of their testimony."<sup>5</sup> This is what the religious leaders did to Jesus. False witnesses, slander, and character assassination were tools they used against Jesus.

How should we respond if we find ourselves in a similar position as Jesus? Again Bishop Ryle says,

Nothing is too bad to be reported against a saint. Perfect innocence is no fence against enormous lying, calumny [defamation], and misrepresentation. The most blameless character will not secure us against false tongues. We must bear the trial patiently. It is part of the cross of Christ. We must sit still, lean back on God's promises, and believe that in the long run truth will prevail.<sup>6</sup>

## VI. The Referral to Herod (23:6-7)

Sixth, observe the referral to Herod.

The Jewish religious leaders had said that Jesus was teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to Jerusalem. **When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time (23:6-7).** Frankly, Pilate did not want to deal with Jesus. But he was getting enormous pressure from the Jewish leadership.

Commentator Philip Ryken said,

But maybe there was some other way for Pilate to get this case out of his in-box, and when he heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he seized his chance. Under Roman law, a person could either be tried in the place where he was accused or in the province where he came from. Jesus was from Galilee, and it just so happened that the ruler of Galilee was in Jerusalem for Passover. The Galilean ruler was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who had been the king when Jesus

---

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 448.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 449.

was born. Antipas was only a tetrarch, but the territory of his jurisdiction included Galilee. So off Jesus went to yet another trial – one Pilate probably hoped would end in death.<sup>7</sup>

## VII. The Derision by Herod (23:8-11)

Seventh, notice the derision by Herod.

Jesus was marched to the palace where Herod was staying in Jerusalem for the Passover. **When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him** (23:8a). We are not surprised that Herod had heard about Jesus because Jesus was immensely popular in Galilee. His fame would undoubtedly have spread to Herod himself.

I want you to see a four ways in which Herod ridiculed Jesus.

### A. *Herod Sought the Spectacular (23:8b)*

*First, Herod sought the spectacular.* The reason Herod was glad to see Jesus is because **he was hoping to see some sign done by him** (23:8b). Herod may have thought that Jesus was some kind of magician or con artist. And he wanted to be entertained by Jesus.

### B. *Herod Bombarded Jesus with Questions (23:9)*

*Second, Herod bombarded Jesus with questions.* Luke said that Herod **questioned him at some length, but Jesus made no answer** (23:9). Someone has noted that Herod is the only person that Jesus never answered. Perhaps it was because Herod was not really interested in the truth. He was simply trying to ridicule Jesus, and so Jesus refused to answer him.

There is a lesson in here for us. Jesus does not answer the person who is not sincere in seeking the truth. Herod was ridiculing Jesus,

---

<sup>7</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 549.



and Jesus never said a word to him. Imagine Herod's surprise when he died and learned that Jesus is indeed the King of kings and savior of sinners. But then it was too late for Herod to repent and be saved.

*C. Herod Allowed False Accusations Against Jesus (23:10)*

*Third, Herod allowed false accusations against Jesus.* Luke said that **the chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him** (23:10). It is noteworthy that earlier in verse 2 the religious leaders merely accused Jesus; now they were **vehemently accusing him**. Clearly, Herod did not seek the truth because Jesus said nothing.

*D. Herod Treated Jesus with Contempt (23:11)*

*And finally, Herod treated Jesus with contempt.* Luke said that **Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate** (23:11). One commentator said that the **splendid clothing** was probably a reference to one of Herod's own, previously-used coats. They put it on Jesus in order to mock him.

Interestingly, although Luke did not state it in this passage, Herod, like Pilate, found Jesus not guilty of any wrongdoing. After Jesus had gone back to Pilate, Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him" (Luke 23:13-15).

What Luke wanted to emphasize as clearly as possible was the complete innocence of Jesus of Nazareth. He had never done anything wrong in his entire life, and even people like Pilate and Herod found Jesus not guilty of any wrongdoing.

## VIII. The Friendship of Enemies (23:12)

And finally, look at the friendship of enemies.

The relationship between Pilate and Herod had been strained. But after Herod's interaction with Jesus, **Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other** (23:12).

Bishop Ryle said, "We know not the cause of their enmity. It was probably some petty quarrel, such as will arise among great as well as small. But whatever the cause of enmity, it was laid aside when a common object of contempt, fear, or hatred was brought before them. Whatever else they disagreed about, Pilate and Herod could agree to despise and persecute Christ."<sup>8</sup>

By way of application, Bishop Ryle reminds us:

The true Christian must not count the enmity of the world a strange thing. He must not marvel, if like St. Paul at Rome, he finds the way of life, a "way everywhere spoken against," and if all around him agree in disliking his religion. (Acts 28:22.) If he expects that by any concession he can win the favor of man, he will be greatly deceived.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the civil trial of Jesus in Luke 23:1-12, we should remember that Jesus' innocence covers our guilt before God.

Pastor Dan Meyer says that years ago he traveled to Ecuador and spent a couple of weeks traveling in the mountains. The Quechua Indian people he met there lived amidst the most mind-numbing squalor. The disease and disfigured bodies were heartbreaking. The bugs and stench were everywhere. People were living in a hole in the ground and calling it a house. They were feeding on rotten food and

---

<sup>8</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 451.

<sup>9</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 452.

prizing garbage as possessions. *But they didn't know it.* Why? Because everyone lived that way. They had never been given a picture of what it means to be a genuinely healthy human being. They did not know what an abundant life truly looked like.

Pastor Meyer says that is our problem, too. We don't get how sick and undeveloped we are spiritually. In Psalm 14, David says that the one fully-healthy Being in the universe views the human race as we might view those Quechua villagers – only the gap between his life and that of our village is so much larger. "The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. But all have turned aside. They have together become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one." In other words, we are condemned, and we don't even know it.<sup>10</sup>

Yes, we are all condemned before God. Every one of us is sinful.

Jesus, on the other hand, was completely innocent. He never did anything wrong in his entire life. He never thought a sinful thought. He never uttered a sinful word. And he never committed a sinful act. And yet, on that day we call Good Friday, Jesus was condemned for a crime he never committed. But he allowed the human injustice to go forward because he knew that it was part of God's plan for divine justice to be met against sinners like us.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. He who was innocent bore the punishment for our sin so that we might be set free and be reconciled to a holy God in heaven.

Oh, let us turn from our sin and believe in Jesus, who paid the penalty for our sin by dying on the cross in our place. Let us repent and believe so that we might find life. Amen.

---

<sup>10</sup> Dan Meyer, in his sermon "Why Remember the Passion?" [www.ccobtv.org](http://www.ccobtv.org) (4-9-04).



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be  
found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz)

## **Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)**

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, we thank you for your Son, Jesus.

Though he was innocent, he became sin for us so that he might pay the penalty for our sin. How grateful we are to you for sending your Son to seek and to save the lost.

If there is anyone here today who has not repented or believed in Jesus Christ, will you grant repentance and faith? Will you turn us from our sin to you so that we might walk in newness of life.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!