

# The Passion

*And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”  
(Luke 23:3 ESV)*

*Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And  
having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46 ESV)*

## **A Tale Of Four Trials**

**April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023**

**Luke 22:63-23:25**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 22.

Today is Palm Sunday – a day which marks the beginning of Holy Week. On the Sunday before his crucifixion, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
righteous and having salvation is he,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9 ESV)

The crowd recognized Jesus as the Messiah King, and they waved palm branches as they celebrated his arrival with resounding shouts of “Hosanna!” That’s how holy week began. That’s how the week that ended with a bloody cross and an empty tomb began. Most years, we would set apart this day to consider that Palm Sunday scene.

But this year, we are taking a different approach. For the last five weeks, we have been slowly making our way through the final events of Jesus’ earthly life, and this morning – rather than rewinding to an earlier episode – we will be picking up where we left off.

Our passage this morning takes place five days after the Palm Sunday celebrations. The roar of celebration has subsided, and a new roar – a roar of hatred and violence – is about to erupt.

In our text today, King Jesus will be put on trial.

We are dealing with a large reading this morning, so we are going to break it into sections as we consider this tale of four trials.

## A Tale Of Four Trials

Look with me now to Luke 22. For our first section, we will read from verse 63 to the end of verse 5 in chapter 23. Hear now the reading of God's word:

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. <sup>64</sup> They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"<sup>65</sup> And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

<sup>66</sup> When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, <sup>67</sup> "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, <sup>68</sup> and if I ask you, you will not answer. <sup>69</sup> But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." <sup>70</sup> So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." <sup>71</sup> Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

**23** 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." (Luke 22:63-23:5 ESV)

Let's stop here and take a moment to consider the first trial that we will be considering this morning. Here we find the trial before the Sanhedrin.

## Before the Sanhedrin

Now, we know from our passage last Sunday that the true enemy in this scene – the animating power behind this opposition – is the Devil himself. It was the Devil that came into Judas before

he betrayed Jesus, it was the Devil that had tempted Peter, and it is the power of darkness that is driving this mock trial. As Jesus declared:

But this is your hour, and the power of darkness. (Luke 22:53b ESV)

So, at the most foundational level, SATAN is the one who is leading this opposition.

But, humanly speaking, the instigators of Good Friday – the ones who put the plan in motion to send Jesus to the cross – were the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem.

This is another one of those times where our familiarity with this story prevents us from recognizing the shock of what we're seeing. Imagine reading through the Old Testament for the first time – reading about God's institution of the priesthood and His plan to use these men as conduits to teach and to bless His people – and then coming to this scene.

The Promised Messiah – the Saviour who God's people had been longing for – the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets – GOD IN THE FLESH – stood before the Sanhedrin. These were the men who had been entrusted with the responsibility of studying and teaching the Scriptures! They should have been the FIRST to recognize Jesus! They should have been the FIRST to wave palm branches and shout "Hosanna!" This trial should have turned into a worship service!

That's what should have happened. But, instead, these men saw in Jesus a threat to their power and position.

And so they ambushed him in the night. They blindfolded him. They insulted him. Their guards punched him in his blindfolded face. And then, these prideful religious men took their seats and subjected Jesus to an illegal, mockery of a trial.

The trial centred around two questions. We find the first question in verses 67-68. Look there again with me:

"If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, <sup>68</sup> and if I ask you, you will not answer. (Luke 22:67-68 ESV)

Their first question was:

### **Question 1: Are you the Christ?**

We are so familiar with the word “Christ” that some people wrongly assume that it was simply Jesus’ last name. But “Christ” is not a name – it’s a title. It means “Anointed One.” It is a title for the long-anticipated King in the line of David who would come to set his people free. So, the religious leaders are asking: “Is that you, Jesus? Are you the Lion of Judah? Are you the child of the promise? Are you our King?”

And that would be a wonderful and insightful question if they actually wanted an answer!

But they didn’t want an answer.

They had already heard his answer. They heard him teach with unparalleled authority. They saw his signs and wonders! And yet, their hearts were hard. Do you remember the time when Jesus called four-days-dead Lazarus to walk out of his tomb? Listen to how these men responded to that sign:

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ... **So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.** (John 11:47-48, 53 ESV)

“Are you the Christ?” they asked. They didn’t care! They already had all the evidence they would ever need! But, even though every scrap of evidence pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, there was one obstacle that could not be overcome: If they acknowledged Jesus as the King, then they would need to bow.

In Romans 1, Paul reminds us that this is what our sinful, prideful hearts do. We suppress the truth. These men who had been absolutely immersed in evidence had the audacity to stand before Jesus and to say, “Convince us to believe.” But Jesus saw their hearts. He sees our hearts too. As one pastor notes:

Here is the hardest heart of all: the heart that refuses all proof and reason, the heart that refuses to admit what it knows.<sup>1</sup>

So, Jesus looked back at these arrogant men through his bruised and swollen eyes and declared:

But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” (Luke 22:69 ESV)

In saying this, Jesus was clearly identifying himself with the “Son of Man” prophesied in Daniel 7. Let me read this to you so that we can understand why these men became so enraged at his response. Daniel 7:13-14 says:

“I saw in the night visions,

and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came **one like a son of man**,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.

<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;

**his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.** (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)

When Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, this is the image that he was invoking. “I am the one who will come on the clouds of heaven. I am the one who will receive dominion, glory and an eternal kingdom. That’s who I am.”

And this prompted the second question. Look with me at verses 70-71 where we read:

<sup>70</sup> So they all said, “**Are you the Son of God, then?**” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” <sup>71</sup> Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.” (Luke 22:70-71 ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 339.

## Question 2: Are you the Son of God?

They understood the implications of what Jesus was claiming. When he first arrived upon the scene, they had entertained the hope that Jesus might fulfil their expectations of a king to lead in the revolt against Rome. They entertained the hope that Jesus might increase their political reach and fulfil their longings for autonomy and power. When he first arrived on the scene, they entertained the hope that he might fulfil their expectations.

But Jesus came to fulfil the promises of God, not the expectations of man.

Because Jesus is more than the king of the Jews – Jesus is the Son of God.

He is the one who rides on the clouds and who reigns forever in glory. Mark gives further elaboration on Jesus' answer to their question. There, after Jesus was asked if he was the Christ – the Son of God – he answered:

“I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:62 ESV)

"I'm not your pawn. I'm not your ladder to power. I am the Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. And you will see me seated at the Father's right hand when I return on the clouds of glory."

At this, they shouted:

“What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.” (Luke 22:70-71 ESV)

And with that, they accused Jesus of *blasphemy* and demanded that he be given the death sentence.

Except, they had no authority to put him to death. Living as they did under the thumb of the Romans; they needed the help of the state in order to carry out their sentence. So they brought Jesus to Pilate, who quickly passed Jesus off to Herod who was in charge of the district of Galilee. This brings us to the second trial in our scene which took place before Herod.

## Before Herod

Look with me at verses 6-12:

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 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 23:6-12 ESV)

This second “trial” was more of a mockery than the first, so we will move through it quickly.

Herod is one of the most despicable characters in the New Testament. He was the one who had John the Baptist arrested because John condemned Herod for marrying his brother's wife, and who then had John beheaded because a beautiful dancer asked for a favor. Herod was like a man-child – carried through life by his carnal desires.

If the Jewish leaders who led the first trial were blinded by their pride and their lust for power, then Herod was blinded by his foolishness and his lust for pleasure. When given the opportunity to investigate Jesus, all Herod was interested in was entertainment. “Do a trick for me, Jesus! Heal somebody! Turn the water into wine! Entertain me, magician!”

The Jewish authorities were at least serious in their opposition of Jesus. But Herod simply played the fool. He was not interested in truth. He was not interested in justice. He certainly was not interested in determining whether or not Jesus was truly worthy of his worship. Herod was only interested in pleasure.

Herod was like that kid in youth group who was only there for the girls and the games. He wasn't a serious person, and he didn't even have reasons for not believing. He simply had no time for spiritual things. There were parties to be had! There were dancers to be enjoyed! There was sin to be delighted in! The trial before Herod reminds me of Proverbs 1:22:

How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?  
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing  
and fools hate knowledge? (Proverbs 1:22 ESV)

As commentator I. Howard Marshall observes:

Herod is presented as a frivolous person, hoping to see some amusing tricks performed by one whom he probably regarded as some kind of magician. **To such a person Jesus had nothing to say.**<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is not a magician or a clown and he refused to play Herod's game. But Herod would not be denied his fun. He undressed Jesus' and then he clothed his broken and swollen body in royal clothing for one last laugh. He and his guards mocked and abused Jesus for a little while longer. Then, they sent him back for his third trial. The trial before Pilate.

### Before Pilate

Technically, Pilate's trial began in verses 1-5. The Jews came to Pilate and accused Jesus of misleading the people, forbidding them to pay tribute to Caesar and of claiming to be the King. The first two accusations were patently false, and the third was misrepresented in such a way as to force Pilate's hand. Pilate seemed to recognize that this case was going to cause him trouble, and that is why, upon hearing that Jesus was from Galilee, he happily sent Jesus to Herod essentially saying: "This isn't my problem!"

Pilate's initial response was delay and deferral.

But now, Herod has returned the prisoner with the verdict of "not guilty", and Pilate is forced to declare where he stands in his assessment of Jesus. Look with me at verse 13:

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him.<sup>16</sup> I will therefore punish and release him."

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall et al. eds., *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1017.

<sup>18</sup> But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— <sup>19</sup> a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.<sup>20</sup> Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, <sup>21</sup> but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” <sup>22</sup> A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” <sup>23</sup> But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:13-25 ESV)

The other Gospel writers devote more attention to the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, but Luke intentionally omits those details to emphasize his point. Luke wants us to see here that Pilate’s real challenge was not in discerning whether or not Jesus was guilty – he knew that he was innocent! And so too did Herod!

Pilate’s real challenge, then, was in determining what he would do with the innocent man before him.

He has been entrusted with the responsibility to uphold justice, but he has a crowd threatening to lodge a formal complaint if he doesn’t go along with their plan. Pilate’s trial has nothing to do with weighing evidence and everything to do with trying to wiggle away from Jesus without feeling any guilt.

So, he tried to Jesus to Herod. But that did no good.

Then, he tried to appease the crowd by giving Jesus another lashing. We see this in verse 16:

Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. <sup>16</sup> **I will therefore punish and release him.** (Luke 23:15b-16 ESV)

“Look, he’s innocent! But I’m willing to compromise. I’ll go ahead and have the soldiers whip this innocent man, and then you can all be on your way. How does that sound?”

But the crowd demanded more blood than that. So, finally, Pilate pulled out one last attempt. He told them that they could choose between releasing Jesus – an obviously innocent man, or

Barabbas – a guilty murderer. He assumed that this would be a no-brainer. Barabbas was guilty of all the things that they were falsely accusing Jesus of! Surely, they would stand down!

But they chose Barabbas. And then they cried out for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate was perplexed! He asked:

“Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” (Luke 23:22b ESV)

Once again, Pilate offered to beat Jesus to appease the crowd, but they wouldn’t settle for less than the cross. Finally, we read in verse 23:

And their voices prevailed. (Luke 23:23b ESV)

Pilate ignored his conscience and gave the people what they wanted. He knew that Jesus was innocent, but if he chose to side with Jesus, he would find himself sided against the world. After some thought, he determined that Jesus was not worth the cost. As G. Campbell Morgan notes:

He went wrong where many a man goes wrong, when he sold his conscience for convenience and safety, when he spat in the face of justice, and adopted the way of policy.<sup>3</sup>

Pilate was a company man. A pragmatic man. A man of high position. As Pilate came face to face with the hatred and contempt that was directed at Jesus, he decided that he wanted no part of it.

In these three trials, we find three snapshots of how we attempt to stand in judgement over Jesus.

The self-righteous reject Jesus as King, and they reject him as Divine, because they want to be little kings and queens and gods unto themselves.

The foolish treat Jesus just like they treat everything else in life – flippantly and carelessly.

The worldly feel a slight draw to Jesus, but they defer and deny because the cost is too high.

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<sup>3</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According To Luke* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 260-261.

And with that, these sinful, finite, created beings stood in judgement over the sinless, divine, Author of life. And they sentenced him to die.

A crown of thorns was forced upon his head. He was beaten, mocked and scourged. Then, he was stripped naked, and he was nailed to a cross where he hung between two thieves.

Three trials.

But I told you that we would be considering four trials this morning. As we conclude, turn ahead with me in your Bibles to Revelation 20. Jesus stood on trial before the self-righteous, and the fools, and the worldly men, but the day is soon coming when all of them – and all of us – will stand before the fourth and final trial: The trial before God.

## **Before God**

How is it that Jesus was able to suffer such horrific injustice without retaliating? How did he bite his tongue while the soldiers punched his blindfolded face and laughed:

“Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” (Luke 22:64b ESV)

Consider the tragedy of the scene when the Jewish leaders – those who had been commissioned to teach the law – broke the law in order to murder the Law Giver. Consider the tragedy of the scene in Herod’s court as Herod dressed Jesus up like a king and mocked him, when really Herod was the dressed-up imposter who sat before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! Consider the tragedy of the scene when Pilate chose to wash his hands of the God who made the world so that he could attempt to hold onto the world at war with God.

In each of these trials, Jesus watched and observed, and it must have grieved his heart. He knew that the lies would eventually give way to the truth and that injustice would finally give way to justice. Jesus saw beyond the mock trial, and Herod’s palace, and Pilate’s court to the final trial – the only trial that matters.

We read about this trial in Revelation 20:11-15. Look there with me:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15 ESV)

The man who struck Jesus in his blindfolded face will fall before the throne as the books are opened. Every man and woman that shouted in unison “Crucify him” will bow before the throne. The man who spent a lifetime suppressing the truth will bow. The woman who decided to reject Jesus so that she could keep her sin will bow. The people who spent a lifetime deferring and delaying, and putting Jesus off for later will bow.

The priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Herod, Pilate, the guards who performed the flogging, the guard who swung the hammer – they will all fall down on their faces and listen with horror as the King recites the evidence against them.

And, in this trial, nothing less than perfect justice will do.

For the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23 ESV)

The One who was accused will rise to judge.

You spent your whole life judging Jesus, then you die and wake up standing in your flesh before HIS BAR. The day is coming when every knee will bow. What are you going to say then? Whatever it is, I suggest that you say it now. Fall to your knees now and confess him as God and Christ. Now is better. Now is easier. Now is the road that leads to life.

Bow now. Live forever. Let's pray.