

May 31, 2020  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Luke  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## **RULERS TAKE COUNSEL AGAINST THE LORD** **Luke 22:63 - 23:12**

The ongoing pestilence named Covid-19 has given me opportunity to think, meditate, and come to the wonderful conclusion that God was once again spot-on when He declared that the authorities of earth rage against Him.

Throughout this whole process we have heard conflicting theories about origination, treatment, and response. The stories have changed like the weather. The experts disagree. But the one constant, unchanging theme through it all is, “Trust science. They will discover the truth and find an antidote.” This mantra has given me reason to pause and think about whether I am willing to bow the knee to the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent god named “science.” The vast majority of people in the world worship this god, being fully convinced that given enough time the scientific community will find all answers to all problems and develop cures for all diseases and, thereby, eradicate all sickness and disease from the world.

I refuse to buy into this idea for a very good reason. The scientific community has, as a whole, rejected the first and most foundational truth: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)*. Because the icons of human wisdom have rejected the most basic of all truths, are they able to discern the work and will of the true God, Creator, and Sustainer of all things? No.

There is another truth that is repeated in various forms many times in Scripture. It was stated by the prophet Jeremiah as he declared God’s infallible promise to stubborn Israelites: “*And when they ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword, to the sword; those who are for famine, to*

*famine, and those who are for captivity, to captivity’” (Jeremiah 15:2)*.

This threat of death by pestilence, war, and famine because of disobedience was the precise fulfillment of the promise God gave to His people before He put them in the Promised Land. He warned through Moses that if His people disobeyed Him, *They shall be wasted with hunger, and devoured by plague and poisonous pestilence; I will send the teeth of beasts against them, with the venom of things that crawl in the dust” (Deut. 32:24)*. Notice that the pestilence and other trials were not coincidence. Rather, God sent these things as judgment against sin.

Now consider the application of our current worldwide pandemic. Covid-19 is just another manifestation of the principle of sin. When Adam (and yes, he was real) brought sin into the world through disobedience, he opened a Pandora’s Box of diseases and problems that anyone can face at any time. But Scripture clearly reveals that God freely uses anything from that Pandora’s Box as particular judgment against sin of an individual, of a nation, or as we see in the Revelation, against the whole world. God’s purpose in using pestilence as judgment is to arrest the attention of sinners to help them see that they are in rebellion against Him. It is a gracious act.

However, as we see in this current application, humanity as a whole and leaders in the political and scientific spheres are not about to acknowledge that reality. God’s will, work, and purpose is fairytale stuff to human authorities because they rejected the first principle of Genesis 1:1. Indeed, the nations still rage, and the rulers still take counsel against the Lord because they reject the first principle about His authority.

That is the story of our text from Luke’s account of the Good News. The religious and political rulers rejected the first truth about Jesus of Nazareth. They refused to acknowledge the truth that He was the Son of God, God come to earth having taken on human form. Because they refused to accept that Jesus was God, all their conclusions were wrong and they were found raging against their Creator.

We must learn from this text that when we reject the truth that God is our Creator and, therefore, supreme authority to whom we

must give an account, we will see no need for a Savior from sin. If we refuse to acknowledge our need of the Savior, we, too, will reject Jesus just like the religious and political authorities did according to this part of the Bible.

### **Religious Authorities Reject the King (22:63-71).**

The religious authorities busied themselves with making new and greater laws all the time. But in their interaction with Jesus they viciously broke the law (vv.63-66). It was against their own laws for the law-makers to beat the innocent man. *Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" (vv.63-64).*

This situation took place while the "men were holding Jesus in custody" at the home of Annas (John 18:12-13). Sometime around midnight the band of guards took Jesus to Annas' house. He had been the high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15 when the Roman governor removed him from office. But Annas was succeeded in office of high priest by five sons and one grandson. And the current high priest, Caiaphas, was Annas' son-in-law. So guess who was the power behind the puppet priests?

At this time, according to both Roman and Jewish law, Annas was in no position of authority. Therefore, his questioning of Jesus was illegal. It is also obvious that the line of questioning was an attempt to get Jesus to incriminate Himself. That too was illegal, not to mention the illegality of the beating and mockery of the innocent man Jesus.

Not content with beating and mocking, the religious leaders also blasphemed Jesus. *And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him (v.65).* This was still at the meeting at Annas' house. John filled in a lot of the details about this trial beginning in 18:19. *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said these things, one of the officers*

*standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" (John 18:19-23).*

To blaspheme is to revile, to shame, to injure the reputation of someone. That is bad enough when it is aimed at a fellow human. But to seek to injure the reputation of God is incredibly foolish and dangerous. But that is what the wicked authorities were doing when they rejected Jesus as the Son of God. If Jesus really wasn't God, the blasphemy was just human to human. Because Jesus was God, the religious authorities made a fatal error in rejecting that truth.

Furthermore, we learn from Luke how the interpreters of the law broke their own law. *When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes (v.66a).* Unable to get Christ to incriminate Himself, they led Him to Caiaphas who, after holding his own trail against Jesus, called together the Sanhedrin. This was the final Jewish authority on matters of judgment. They were like our Supreme Court. There were 70 members. The high priest and former high priests were generally Sadducees. The elders were family leaders who were generally secularists. The scribes were typically Pharisees.

In this setting, the ruling religionists broke even more laws. No trial was to be held at night. The fact that Caiaphas called together the Sanhedrin in the morning proves that the trial at Annas' house was before morning. No trial could be held in a private house but was to be at the temple. But already Jesus had been tried at Annas' house and Caiaphas' house. No trial could be held on a feast day, but this was Thursday night into Friday morning, exactly when the Jewish leaders would have been observing Passover.

People who cannot discern truth seldom have problems breaking rules and laws, even the rules and laws they make (vv.66b-71). Maybe you have heard or read about double standards that are applied to others by leaders. As they questioned and accused Him, Christ the real King pointed out the rulers' aversion to truth. *And they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer" (vv.66b-68).*

At this point in Luke's story, Jesus was standing in the presence of the Sanhedrin who were pummeling Him with unjust questioning. The trial before the council, after two illegal trials before Annas and Caiaphas, was a charade. The intent and motives of the leaders were already obvious. They were simply going through the legal maneuvers to make it look to the public like they were following their own laws. In reality, this phoney hearing was an attempt to get Jesus to incriminate Himself. Matthew wrote, *Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death (Matthew 26:59)*. But because their case was built on falsehood, the authorities could not find any credible witnesses. *But they found none, though many false witnesses came forward (Matthew 26:60a)*. *For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree (Mark 14:56)*.

The closest they could come to keeping the law, as when two witnesses agreed to what Jesus said about His body (which they misunderstood), was, *At last two came forward and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days'" (Matthew 26:60b-61)*.

Intent on getting Jesus to incriminate Himself, the rulers demanded, *"If you are the Christ, tell us."* That sounds like a strange request in light of the fact that He had been teaching that very truth about three-and-a-half years. Again, they were looking for a statement from Jesus they could use to justify their hatred. We have seen similar facades where the legal system was used to vilify a victim, a conduit through which hatred is poured. Many times, even to this day, the servants of Christ, the messengers of the good news, are run through a kangaroo court that simply serves as a facade for so-called justice. In reality, it is just a cover for the hatred people have for King Jesus—still.

Jesus' answer to the authorities' demand revealed the truth. *"If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer" (vv.67-68)*. Jesus had already taught repeatedly that He is the Christ and performed enough miracles to prove it. The truth was that the religious leaders steadfastly refused to submit to God's plan, God's self-revelation. Therefore, there was nothing more to say. We can go back to Jesus' conversation with the same kind of people (if not some of the actual people) in 20:1-8 where He answered their accusing

question with a question. That put the religious leaders between a rock and hard place and they refused to answer because whatever they said would incriminate them.

All three of the trials Jesus faced from these rulers argued from a faulty conclusion. It was the truth about who Jesus was. Was He really the Son of Man? The Son of Man stated truth that He will possess all the authority of God. He eventually told the rulers, *"But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (v.69)*.

The words, *"from now on"* signal a change. Jesus of Nazareth would no longer be the Rabbi from Galilee to them. He is the Son of Man and will fulfill all that the title contains. It was Jesus' favorite title for Himself, found first in Daniel's vision. Daniel wrote, *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. 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)*.

Here the "Son of man" is the divine ruler who possesses all divine authority but who is also associated with humanity. He will reign in power and glory forever. Now Jesus picked up on that idea again and said to His accusers, *"That's Me."*

Because He is the Son of man, Jesus also has to be the Son of God. *So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am" (v.70)*. Proving that their intent was self-incrimination, they asked Jesus to say again that He was equal with God. They understood that the claim to be "Son of God" was a claim of equality with God. That is a truth that many cults try to skirt or reinterpret.

Jesus refused to incriminate Himself, and put the onus back on His accusers, *"That is your conclusion."* That answer implied, *"And you are right."* Hear J.C. Ryles' observation about this statement. *"Here we see our Lord telling them plainly who he was, and telling them in words which would convey even more to a Jewish mind than they do to ours. And yet the confession had not the least good effect upon the Jews! Their hearts were hardened by prejudice. Their minds were darkened by judicial blindness. The veil was over the eyes of*

their inward man. They heard our Lord's confession unmoved, and only plunged deeper into the most awful sin." (J.C. Ryle, Luke, p.444.)

It really didn't matter to the rulers what Jesus said, as long as He incriminated Himself. They had already decided against truth. *Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips" (v.71).* According to their law, a defendant was not allowed to be condemned by his own words. Furthermore, Jesus had no representative or public defender, which broke their laws. None of that mattered because this was all a sham because the religious authorities had already decided against truth.

Far and away, the vast majority of religious authorities today have already decided against God. They use religious and "God-kind-of language." They speak of being kind and doing social good like Jesus. They make rules and laws that supposedly will open the door for people to get into God's heaven. But they deny the very clear and simple truth of the Bible. They reject God as their Creator and relegate Jesus to the position of a secondary prophet. They deceive and mislead billions of people to a Christ-less hell. But this same Jesus will be their eternal judge.

### **Political Authorities Reject the King (23:1-12).**

The political authorities were as bad as the religious authorities because they neglect their responsibility to the innocent (vv.1-5). We read from Luke that the religious authorities misrepresented the true King before earthly political authorities. They are called *the company*.

*Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate (v.1).* Nearly all the religious leaders were united in their hatred of the Christ. It is likely that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (if they were actually part of the council) were opposed to this horrific miscarriage of justice.

This "company" hauled Jesus the King to Pilate who was the Roman-appointed political authority. They did this in spite of the fact that they despised the Roman's authority over them. In fact, the whole scene is ironic because the Sanhedrin, being split between Pharisees and Sadducees, seldom agreed on anything. They so despised the Roman government that they would do anything

possible not to ask for a favor. But now they were in whole-hearted agreement to beg the man they hated almost as much as they hated Jesus to do them a favor by validating their perverted verdict.

Jesus had just endured three illegal trials. One at midnight at the house of Annas. One in the morning at the house of Caiaphas. And then one before the council, the Sanhedrin. Now He was going to be dragged through three more trials. One before the prefect or governor Pilate. Then one before King Herod. And finally back to Pilate who would ultimately condemn Him. How arduously the powers of darkness (Luke 22:53) must work to promote untruth.

We witness this every single day by religious, political, and media authorities in our culture. We are misled, lied to, jerked around. I truly feel sorry for people who do not trust the Word of God. It is our only rock of truth in a turbulent sea of lies and deception.

Having taken Jesus to the political authority, the company of hypocrites leveled accusations against Him. *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" (v.2).* They had evidence of Jesus committing political deception? We have to wonder what it was in light of the fact that no one in the previous three trials could agree on anything except that Jesus claimed to be equal with God.

They also accused Jesus of forbidding the people to pay taxes. Actually, Jesus taught exactly the opposite of this claim. When they asked about the appropriateness of paying taxes, *Jesus said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25).* The company's accusation was about as wrong as it can get.

They accused Jesus of claiming that He was the Christ and, therefore, the promised King. It is true that Jesus did indeed claim to be the Christ. And the rulers acknowledged that the promised Christ was to be the King. However, Jesus came the first time to establish the spiritual kingdom. But even that did not matter because they didn't want Jesus of Nazareth to be their king in a physical or a spiritual sense. They just did not want Jesus. They hated Him. No one desires for Jesus to rule them until they are redeemed by the miracle of regeneration.

The political ruler made the mistake of allowing the loud and vitriolic talking heads to influence him. First, the judge asked for and received testimony from the defendant. *And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so" (v.3).* Part of the Prefect's responsibility was to judge the people. Therefore, Pilate would need to know if this "criminal" was guilty. The prosecutors had just accused Jesus of claiming that He was the Christ, who is indeed the King of the Jews. Was that true? Pilate's question followed many vehement accusations by the accusers which Jesus did not answer, to Pilate's surprise. *Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" (Matthew 27:13).*

Again, Jesus refused to incriminate Himself but affirmed that Pilate admitted the truth by his question. Here also we find that John's account adds much to complete the picture. *So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him" (John 18:33-38).*

The judge drew a conclusion and conveyed his verdict. *Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man" (v.4).* But then, having drawn a conclusion, the judge allowed the prosecution to sway him contrary to truth. *But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place" (v.5).* Pilate should have judged on principle not on ideological pressure. But remember even Pilate admitted that he did not have a grasp on truth.

It is impossible for political authorities to arrive at the right conclusions when they have no spiritual discernment (vv.6-12). Spiritual discernment would have made it very clear that Jesus was innocent. But rather than stand for truth, the governor passed the buck. He was looking for an out. *When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean (v.6).* Pilate picked up on the mention of Galilee. Galilee was outside his jurisdiction. So the governor discovered a convenient way of escape. *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 (v.7).*

Herod, the earthly king, played the fool by trying to convict Jesus the Heavenly King. Herod, like most earthly kings, was focused on passing things. *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 (v.8).* This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who ruled over Galilee and Perea 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. Other than the Herod at Jesus' birth, this is the Herod referred to throughout the Gospels. He was the Herod who killed John the Baptist. When Jesus' fame grew, Herod was afraid that John had risen from the dead (Matthew 14:2).

Like many political leaders, Herod knew enough about Jesus to act like a fool. Under his jurisdiction, the Heavenly King was like a lamb led to the slaughter. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer (v.9). Herod tried to get evidence to condemn Jesus. Jesus remained silent like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep silent before its shearers (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus did not even respond while the religious authorities continued their vicious blaspheming. *The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him (v.10).*

Unable to get what he wanted out of King Jesus, Herod and the political authorities abused their position. *And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate (v.11).* A strange conclusion to this part of Luke's text is that the enemies become friends when they agree to fight God. *And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other (v.12).*

Like actors on a stage, religious and political leaders grab the limelight, play their part, pretend to be knowledgeable and authoritative. But if they reject the truth of God revealed in His Word, they are nothing more than blinded fools deceived by Satan. It is easy for us to become very anxious, disturbed, or disillusioned because such fools seem so powerful. But we need to see King Jesus, standing before authorities like that, being in complete control. None of those so-called authorities took His life from Him. He laid it down for us that we might have eternal life through His death. Every one of Jesus' accusers has died and is living forever in eternal suffering while Jesus reigns, seated at the right hand of God, just like He said He would.