

I would like to begin this morning by making a statement... with its corollary... and then ask you to evaluate them... to see whether or not you believe they are **true**. Here they are:

Every emotion you experience is based on a thought.

That thought is either true or false.

Do any of your fears... take off in a mad **sprint** ... due to a thought that opened the starting gate...? Has a **lie** about your future... or a seemingly insurmountable **problem**... ever been the source of a fear that has tormented you for days... weeks... or even years...?

The man who mentored me for ministry... when I was in seminary... Bill Perkins... sent me his weekly blog... as part of his mailing list. His blog was based on his latest book... *The Jesus Experiment*. In it, Bill presented that statement and it's corollary as a **truth**... which quite frankly... I don't think that I have ever considered deep enough... but I am now - **savoring** it's implications.

Bill suggested that whenever we have a strong emotion... that we consider what our **thought** - behind it - is... He suggests that we **evaluate** the truthfulness and also the consequences of the thought. After we discover what the thought **is**... there is more pondering we should do... ... Here is what Bill wrote... in part:

You then need to ask a second question: What purpose is this thought serving? I concluded that I was imagining the worst possible outcome of my situation in order to prepare myself for the inevitable. Of course, such a prediction was based on a lie. Furthermore, all I was doing was suffering in the present the pain of a future event that might not occur. Indeed, it will not occur. I was obsessively dragging

tomorrow's clouds into the present so I could sit under them today to prepare myself for a storm that might not happen.

After I identified the purpose those thoughts served, I decided such thinking didn't prepare me for tomorrow's disaster. Indeed, it depressed me, fogged my thinking, and robbed me, and those around me, of the Lord's joy and confidence. Once I realized the thoughts that fed my fear were lies and the purpose they served was bogus, I determined in the Lord, not to think about them. The relief I felt from fear was almost immediate. Once I sopped the toxic thinking, the toxic emotions subsided.

Our passage of study today in the Gospel of Luke... presents a truth that contradicts a series of lies... that often get **lodged** in our thinking... and those lies open the gate to a flurry of wild... and needless **fears**. The verses we are about to study... illustrates the point... that the author of Hebrews has expressed in Hebrews 4:14-16. ... So before we open our Bibles to Luke... lets first look at the precept that Luke is going to illustrate...

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV)

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus **sympathizes** with yours and my weaknesses! **He** has been tempted and has experienced far more **injustice** and **trials** than we will ever be able to **imagine**.

Sometimes the thought behind our fears... goes something like this: “*The problem that I face in my life right now is mine... and I am facing this problem alone.*” ... Very quickly other thoughts glum on... The gist of them might be something like... “*In order for this problem to be resolved... the answer has to come from me... and I have to find the strength from somewhere within myself... to solve it. ... Christ cannot identify with me... He is of no help... I am on my own...*”

As we turn to this morning’s passage in Luke 23... my prayer is that God will give us all... an unyielding foundation of **appropriate** thinking... which we may have to switch-out... for the **lies** that we habitually latch onto... whenever trials and unjust circumstances loom over us.

My challenge to you as we study this... is that you would hold up a current struggle in your life... and see if it would make a difference... for you to know that Jesus sympathizes with your weakness... and that you can draw near to the throne of grace with confidence.

Luke 23:1-5

Jesus had just emerged at dawn from his **religious** trial before the Sanhedrin... where its enraged members had concluded that he must **die**. His admission that He was the Son of God... a blasphemous admission in their eyes... launched them into a murderous... robe-tearing rage. ...They would have killed Him right then and there... but they lacked the **political** power to do so. ...The right to inflict the death penalty could **only** come down from a **Roman** court. The Jews had to appeal to their occupying Roman oppressors... who they hated.

Early that morning... Jesus' accusers rushed Him to Pilate. ...The high priests and the teachers of religious law saw Jesus as very dangerous. ...He simply had to be eliminated. ...Therefore... they did not shrink from presenting completely false charges against Jesus. ... Pilate saw through their blatant lies. ... He knew Jesus was innocent.

Pilate was the governor of Judea... where Jerusalem was located. ...Pilate's normal residence was in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea... but he happened to be in Jerusalem because of the Passover festival. ...With the large crowds who had flocked to the city for that celebration... Pilate and his soldiers came to help keep the peace.

Pontius Pilate served as governor of Judea from a.d. 26 to a.d. 36... at which time he was recalled to Rome... and then passed out of official Roman history. (There is no further mention of him.) ... He was hated by the orthodox Jews... and never really understood them. ... Once he aroused their fury by putting up pagan Roman banners in the Jewish temple... and he was not beneath sending armed spies into the temple to silence Jewish protesters. On another occasion... Pilate had **pilfered** the temple treasury... taking those funds for an aqueduct project of his.

The visit to Pilate would be early in the morning... because Roman officials met the public only from sunrise to noon. ... The appearance Jesus first had to make before the Sanhedrin... probably did not last very long. Roman officials were usually up early and at their duties... but Pilate was probably surprised that morning to learn that he had a case involving the death penalty... on his hands... and on Passover at that.

The Jewish leaders knew that their religious laws meant **nothing** to a Roman official... so they emphasized the **political** aspects of their indictment against Jesus.

The Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus... and tried Him by the High Priests... and the the Sanhedrin... on **theological** grounds — blasphemy... but now they had to manufacture **political** accusations. ... So... **First**... they gave an accusation of **corruption**. ... "*Perverting the nation.*" ... The Sanhedrin were the corrupters. ... Christ was just the opposite. ... **Second**... the accusation of **conspiracy**. ... "*Forbidding to give tribute to Caesar.*" ... That was also a lie. They had tried but failed to get Christ to forbid paying taxes...

Luke 20:20-26 (ESV)

So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.

So... now... here... before Pilate... since they could not get Jesus to say it... they simply lied and said Jesus forbid it. ... It was like what ABC News has been caught doing lately. ... **Third**... they manufactured an accusation of what He **claimed to be**. ... "*Saying, that he himself is Christ a King.*"

...This accusation is true... but not in the way the accusers meant it. ...

But over-all...the charges against Jesus in the Roman court were rebellion and treason.

Now Pilate focused on the accusation about Jesus claiming to be a king.

... Pilate asked his prisoner... “Are you the King of the Jews?” ... This question is identical in all four Gospels... and in all four the word “you” is emphatic. (“Are **YOU** the King of the Jews?”) ... Jesus answered the question, “Yes, *it is as you say.*”

To have said otherwise would have been to lie. Jesus **was** a king... but His kingship was not a threat to Pilate or to Caesar... and Pilate **knew** that the Jews’ claim was **bogus**... and these religious leaders just wanted to get rid of a personal threat to their livelihood ... so he said “*I find nothing wrong with this man!*”

Pilate’s reluctance to prosecute Jesus was undoubtedly due more to his contempt for the **Jews** ... than for any particular consideration of Jesus.

But the Jews’ plan was unraveling. ... Pilate wasn’t playing into their hands as they had hoped... and they became **desperate**. ... So they came up with **more** trumped-up charges. ... They claimed that Jesus was *causing riots everywhere*. ... Because Pilate was mainly charged by Rome to keep the **peace** in his region... he would **HAVE** to be interested in dealing with a man who was causing riots. ... However... If this charge were true... I’m sure Pilate thought that he would have heard about Jesus long before this.

The Jews rejected Pilate's verdict of innocence... and began to accuse Jesus all the more. ... When they mentioned Galilee... Pilate... astute politician that he was... immediately saw an opportunity to get Jesus off his hands. ... He sent Him to Herod Antipas... ruler of Galilee... the man who had murdered John the Baptist... and who was anxious to see Jesus. Perhaps the wily king could find some way to please the Jews.

Luke 23:6-7

Herod may have been **delighted** to finally see Jesus... but he had already **closed** his window of opportunity to hear the message. ... John had spoken to him... Herod had **killed** John. ... Herod's motivation here was only to see Jesus perform a miracle. ... He apparently saw Jesus as no more than an amazing **circus** act. ... When Jesus was brought before him... Herod asked Him questions... but Jesus **refused** to answer. ... Herod is the **only** person to whom Jesus said nothing at all. ... Herod had not listened to **John**... Jesus had nothing to **add** to what John had said. Cold and cruel... Herod had a hard heart. ... Jesus **knew** this and remained silent.

Luke 23:8-12

It was not Herod who was judging **Jesus**... it was **Jesus** who was judging Herod.

The king finally became so bold as to **mock** Jesus... and permit his soldiers to dress Him in "an elegant robe"... the kind that was worn by Roman candidates for office. ... Herod did not issue an official verdict about

Jesus... but it was clear that he did not find Him guilty of any crime worthy of death.

The only thing accomplished by Jesus' appearance before Herod... was the mending of a broken friendship. ... Herod was grateful to Pilate for helping him to see Jesus... and for honoring him... by seeking his counsel. The fact that Herod sent Jesus **back** to Pilate without issuing a verdict... could be interpreted as... "*Since we are not in Galilee, Pilate, you have the authority to act, and I will not interfere. Jesus is your prisoner, not mine. I know you will do the right thing.*" ... Finally... the fact that the two men met over a common threat (or enemy) helped them to put aside their differences and become friends again.

Herod did not take the task of trying Jesus seriously. Jesus stood before him... and he felt nothing... So he neither released the prisoner nor made a judgment about his guilt. ... He simply sent him back to Pilate. ... Herod and Pilate had a rather tenuous relationship. ... But because neither man knew what to do in this predicament... their common problem made them friends that day.

It is possible for a human being to be so jaded that he or she can stand face to face with Christ and feel nothing. ... This is a real possibility for any nonbeliever. ... Most who descend to this level do not perform the outrages of Herod. ... Most do not verbalize their opposition. ... They are simply indifferent and feel nothing.

If you are not a believer... if you presently like to listen to God's Word... if you have a reverence and fear for God... do not be content to simply go on

hearing His words — do what His words call you to do! ... If you go on hearing the gospel but neglect it... you invite a fog over your eyes that in time will shut out all the light.

The silence of Jesus is an extreme and dramatic warning not to trifle with Christian truth... not to suppress the appeals that the Holy Spirit has been making to you. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"

Luke 23:13-25

Now... let me go back to how we began this morning.

Is there an issue... perhaps a fear of impending doom in your future...? Do you need to replace some wrongful thinking... with truth... that you have a great and High Priest... Who is fully able to sympathize with your struggle...?

Are you praying with confidence that Christ knows what you are going through and is willing to assist you...? Are you focused on His grace... instead of a wrongful thinking that you somehow need to **earn** God's favor... otherwise He is not going to help you...?

One of my siblings... an older sister who lives in California is currently going through a very difficult struggle. ... The trial has its roots that go back for years... .. (She gave me permission to speak of this... so please don't think that I am betraying her trust.)

This week we have spent considerable time through text messages... phone calls... and emails... But she is contending with an issue that has resulted in the loss of her job... and she is a single mom with two teenage

kids that she adopted. Issues of her past have converged on her current problem... as well as unfulfilled desires she has had for years. It has all come crashing down on her as a heavy weight.

She kept asking me why in the world would God help her... when so much of the problem... she feels... was brought on by her **own** poor choices.

Perhaps you can identify with those thoughts. *“God is not interested in helping me. I made this bed... and now I have to lie in it...”*

This is... in part what I wrote to her...

“... do not think that God intervenes on our behalf on the basis of our deserving it. You know that NONE of us ever have deserved it, even if we suffer for a while. He is not looking at His child _____ and saying, “Oh, she really blew it. I will not act on HER behalf...”

Confess any mistakes that He reveals to you and then throw yourself into His grace. He acts in grace to all of us... not our worthiness. The more unworthy we are... the more His grace shines forth.

I am asking Him to flood you with His grace, that He would increase His fame tremendously by showing a mighty display of His grace toward you.

Our passage today shows the extent to which Christ was willing to be mistreated – so that He could intervene in our lives... and bring us into a relationship with Himself.

It is just wrong to face your current struggle with an unnecessary fear that God is unsympathetic to your need! Confess any wrongs that he reveals to you... turn away from them... and throw yourself into His grace.