

Luke 23:1 - 25

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[0 : 0 0] and we're going to focus on verses 1 to 25. And before we focus on these, I suppose if I was thinking about one message overall that I want us to hear is that Jesus must be your king.

Jesus must be your king is the kind of main point I will be trying to make today. Anyway, I don't know if you guys have had the misfortune of, well, stumbling across Undercover Princes on BBC3.

It's quite an old show and it was on a few months ago. And I would recommend if you see it that you switch over immediately. It is a pretty straightforward and simple show.

Basically, we have three main characters and this might take some time to pronounce these names. We have Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, Prince Afrika Zulu, and Prince Remigius Kanagaraja.

I probably butchered their names, but I give it my best shot. And each of these princes need a princess. As you can probably imagine, these are fairly small players in the global royal scene.

[1 : 1 5] They're not exactly the sons of the king of Spain or Sweden. And as such, they're not that easily recognizable to your average Daily Express reader. Nonetheless, they desire a Brighton bride.

And so they try to blend in with the good people of Brighton. They strip off all their royal garbs. They put on the finest high street fashion. And off they go on the hunt for a princess.

Their royal identity is masked. It is hidden. And as they come face to face with the people of Brighton, the good people of Brighton have no idea who they are.

There's no security service around them. There's no royal cordon. There's no entourage. Their royal status is hidden. And the people just don't see it. They just think they're nice, slightly odd people from afar.

What we read of in Luke is a situation where the king of kings is not identified. He is not recognized for who he really is.

[2 : 2 0] Rather than receiving the praise that was his due, he is mocked. He's derided. And he will eventually pay the ultimate price for claiming to be the king of kings.

And before we begin to look at this passage, we must get to a feel of what's going on at this time. What's the climate? What's the situation into which we've just read?

After many claims to divinity, the religious leaders have finally decided to bring all their planning and scheming to an end and have Jesus killed.

His stock is rising amongst the people. The common people are loving Jesus. And the religious leaders are afraid that because he is becoming more popular and his message against the Pharisees, that the Pharisees will lose control of the situation, that their grip over the people of the regions will be lost and Jesus will rise.

And so the religious leaders must act, and they must act decisively against this man, Jesus. It is agreed that they can't lock him up. They can't expel him to another place.

[3 : 32] What they need to do is they have to get rid of him once and for all. And so they agreed to concoct the charge of blasphemy. This charge will certainly get Jesus executed under Jewish law.

Towards the end of chapter 22, verses 66 to 71, we have the religious trial, the Jewish trial, where Jesus throws the assembled leaders into an orbit because he claims to be the Son of God.

It is at this point, from verse 71 into chapter 23, he's frog-marched by the Jewish leaders into Pilate's domain.

And so we have, from chapter 23, verse 1, another farcical trial that will be Jesus' experience over the next few hours.

And today, what I would like to do is, I would like to focus on the identity of who Jesus is and learn something of how we should respond to Jesus Christ.

[4 : 43] We can divide chapter 23, 1 to 25, into five sections. Verses 1 to 5, we have Jesus before Pilate, and there we have an innocent king accused, falsely accused, sorry.

Secondly, in verses 6 to 12, we have Jesus before Herod, and there we have a king scorned or a king mocked. And finally, from verses 13 to 25, we have Jesus before the people, and there we see an innocent king sentenced.

And the three headings I would like to look at with you this morning are, first, Jesus is king, verses 1 to 5. Second, Jesus is the promised lamb of God, verses 6 to 12.

And finally, Jesus is the innocent sacrifice, verses 13 to 25. First then, Jesus is king, verses 1 to 5.

As we pick up the story in verse 1, we join in the narrative of Jesus' trial, and the action is fast and unceasing. What we have before us is the Jewish council that found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, knocking down the door of Pilate to try to get this man executed.

[5 : 56] They mean business. And it is hoped that their weight in numbers will add some strength to the rather flaky charges which they have put against Jesus. No longer, you'll notice, is Jesus accused of blasphemy.

What's he accused of, verse 2? He's accused now of three new charges. He's accused of first subverting our nation. Secondly, he's charged of opposing payment of taxes to Caesar.

And the third thing he's charged of is that he claims to be a king. The Jews are playing a very clever political game here. They're trying to make Pilate notice.

They're trying to concoct charges which Pilate will listen to. Pilate's going to dismiss this Jewish charge of blasphemy. Pilate will only deal with laws or with accusations which will have a direct relevance to him.

And so what we have presented to Pilate is a rabble-rouser and a traitor to Caesar and Caesar's rule. Seen in the light of Pilate's responsibilities, these charges are serious, especially since the Jewish leadership portrays itself as sensitive to Roman concerns.

[7 : 13] Politically and personally, these charges are pushing all the right buttons. So Pilate moves to examine Jesus. Now, Pilate's a shrewd operator.

And he knows that he can ignore the first charge, the charge of subversion. He can ignore that. And yet he knows also that he can kind of, what shall we say, that he can clear up the second charge by coming to a conclusion on the third charge.

And so Pilate's focusing on Christ's claim to be a king. And so Pilate in verse three asks Jesus, are you the king of the Jews?

You hold your breath. You're waiting for a strong statement from Jesus. Yes, I am the king of the Jews. However, we get this rather non-committal statement which kind of has this feeling, yes, it is as you say.

It's like, yeah, whatever. Why this response? Why did Jesus give this rather non-committal response? Well, in a sense, he is the king of the Jews, but his kingship was much greater than that.

[8 : 29] He's not simply a king over the Jews, but he's a king over all people, not simply the Jewish people. When we look at the parallel passage in John chapter 18, you find there a more detailed account of this debate and this interaction between Pilate and Jesus.

There we have Jesus explaining to Pilate that he was a king, but he was not bringing a kingdom about through physical force or physical power.

Rather, the kingdom he was going to bring about was going to relate to testifying to the truth. Jesus' kingdom and mission on earth was not to set up a separate state, but he was going to establish God's kingdom here on earth, which is based on truth.

Pilate, with all his military and political financial power, can easily dismiss this Jesus and his claims to kingship as Jesus displays none of the power that will threaten Pilate and which Pilate believes are necessary for successful living.

How often do we do this, though? We, like Pilate, can dismiss Jesus and his claims over our lives. We can think, we can use our own power to kind of furrow out our own path, that we can rely on our own success and strategies for successful living.

[10 : 05] We gain a bit of money and life becomes a bit more comfortable. Who needs Jesus? We gain a promotion. Who needs Jesus? We gain another academic qualification and our status goes up a little in society.

Who needs Jesus? The message of these verses is that Jesus is king over all people, not simply the Jews, but over me and you.

And he is the one under whom we all must answer to. He reigns over all creation. And as part of that creation, we must bow the knee to King Jesus.

Are you willing to submit? Are you willing to let Jesus reign? Are you willing to bow down and honor him? Or do you still think, like Pilate thought, that you can rely on your own status, your own success, your own power for successful living?

But we move on. Verses 6 to 12. Jesus is the promised Lamb of God. The color of celebrities all around us. It dictates our buying and refocuses our aspirations.

[11 : 18] Our society is obsessed with the hope that one day we will have our moment on the X Factor. One day, Sir Alan, will say you're hired. The cult of celebrity is not a new thing.

If we roll back the years and we look into the time of Jesus, they had their own celebrity figures. And you know what? Jesus was one of them. Look at the interaction between Herod and Jesus.

Herod is really keen to see Jesus. Herod is desperate to see this Galilean. He's heard all about him. He wants to know more. But why? Why is he so keen?

Has his conscience been pricked? And he now wants to make amends for all he's done wrong in the past? Remember, this is the Herod who ran off with his brother's wife Herodias.

This is the Herod who was roundly condemned by John. This was the Herod who had become so bothered by John's preaching that he had John beheaded. It was this Herod who, with the spell of Herodias dancing, enabled John's head to be taken off.

[12 : 23] Is his conscience bothering him? Is he going to plead for forgiveness to the Son of God? Unfortunately, this is not Herod's desire. He wants Jesus to perform a few party pieces from him.

He wants a miracle. He wants some dazzle and razzle. He wants to be amazed by Jesus and this power. Look, he sees Jesus as this great entertainer.

That's all he sees Jesus as. Verse 8, When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.

He wants Jesus to be a family entertainer. Just do a couple of things for me, Jesus. Impress me and that'll be fine. Herod has no thought or inkling towards repentance.

He just wanted to be in the company of this celebrity from Galilee. Jesus, however, has the measure of this man. He knows Herod's heart.

[13 : 23] He knows Herod's heart. And he knows his motive. Verse 9 is a sobering verse. We find that Herod applied Jesus with many questions.

But what does Jesus do? Jesus says nothing. Jesus is silent. You can sense the increasing frustration in Herod.

Nobody dares stay silent before Herod. Herod has the power of life and death over this man and over every man under his rule.

This is the only account in the Bible where Jesus refused to speak to somebody.

It is as if Jesus is saying to Herod, you've had the truth proclaimed to you. You've heard the truth from John the Baptist many times.

[14 : 29] And still you come with questions which seek to make a mockery of your God. However, we must remember that if we come to Jesus with genuine questions, with questions that are troubling us, Jesus never turns us away.

He will answer them. We have nowhere recorded in the Bible Jesus turning away anyone who came with a deep desire to know more. Remember the disciples.

After hearing so many parables, they didn't get it so often. What does Jesus do? He lovingly answers them. Likewise, the rich young ruler comes to Jesus.

Jesus answers them. This is in itself amazing. Now when we ask a question, when we ask a question to the king, King Jesus, he will answer us.

We can be sure that he will not turn us away, that we will not be put on call waiting, that he will not put us on hold. Go to Jesus with all the questions you have, which have been burning in your mind.

[15 : 44] Go to God and ask him, what would you have me do, God? Where would you have me go, God? Who would you have me serve, God? Who would you have me witness to, God?

Who would you have me to help, God? Go to him and wait patiently for his answer. The second thing about this silence is that it fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah 53 verse 7, where we read that the lamb will be silent as he is led to the slaughter. Christ is the lamb of God.

He is the one who will be perfect in obedience to the father's will. It was because of this that Jesus, who was the lamb that was silent, was led to the sacrificial altar of Calvary, who through his sacrifice made it possible for us to come back to God.

How do we treat Jesus? Are we like Herod and we wish Jesus to serve us? Do we want Jesus to perform for us?

[16 : 59] Do we want Jesus to serve us rather than us serving him? Are we treating Jesus as some kind of weird genie in a bottle who will pop up when we need him? Are we living our lives with little reference to Jesus, but maybe just going to him now and again when maybe we're in a bit of trouble or when we need our conscience soothed?

Or are we committed to this king? This passage urges us to take Jesus seriously. Remember that this king Jesus is the one who endured the mockery of Herod and the injustice of a kangaroo court so that through this miscarriage of justice we may all have life, that we may all come back to God.

The great news of the Bible is this. Jesus takes your predicament seriously. Jesus takes your situation seriously.

So seriously does Jesus take it that he is willing to be silent before a kangaroo court. He is willing to be silent in the face of injustice.

That's how seriously he takes us. And when we take Jesus seriously, we have some wonderful promises that we can hold on to as believers.

[18 : 27] Jesus says to those who accept him in John 10.10, I have come that they may have life and life to the full. God's ultimate purpose for our lives is that we will be blessed.

God's purpose for our lives is to enrich it, to make it blessed. Life in this world, life with Christ is life in HD. And when it comes to the next world, it is life beyond anything we could ever dream of.

Finally, Jesus is the innocent sacrifice from verses 13 to verse 25. Jesus is the innocent sacrifice.

As we pick up the action again, we find that Pilate's problem has returned. He has tried to get rid of his dilemma. He's tried to send him off to Herod. He wants Herod to deal with him, but Herod sends him back.

Pilate has to deal with this man, Jesus, and his claims once and for all. He is going to have to decide whether or not he is going to let him live or whether or not he is going to hand him over to the Jewish people to do as they would.

[19 : 40] In verse 13, we have Pilate readying the people for his pronouncement. You can just imagine the buzz of excitement that's going on around this as they're waiting for this speech.

They're hopeful for a truly historic moment. The religious leaders are all their eyes focused on Pilate and his pronouncement, and the verdict is not guilty.

There is nothing on which this man, Jesus, can be accused. Innocent, innocent, innocent. There is nothing on which Jesus can be charged. The innocent verdict is the special focus of Luke.

To add weight to his claim, Pilate declares, I have found him innocent, and even Herod has found him innocent. Nothing can be said against Jesus.

He is the perfect example. Those who wanted to find fault with him can't. They can't find anything wrong with Jesus. He is squeaky clean. So, Pilate's going to release Jesus then, isn't he?

[20 : 45] He's going to send him off. Free man. However, we are dealing with a governor who is not interested in justice, who is not interested with innocent or guilt.

All he cares about is his own political career. All he cares about is meeting his own needs and pushing himself forward politically and in terms of power also.

Pilate understands that to release Jesus would be politically foolish. We have seen throughout that Pilate is politically savvy.

He knows how to cut deals. He is aware of how to play the game. He is absolutely clear what releasing Jesus would mean. If he releases Jesus, this will mean trouble in Jerusalem.

There will be riots. The people will be in uproar because the religious leaders will stir things up. The ramifications of these will be that he will no longer be in Caesar's favor because news of this riot in Jerusalem will eventually reach Caesar and Pilate will more than likely be removed from power.

[21 : 57] A restless people will topple a governor and Pilate can't afford unrest in his own backyard. So, what does he do? In the light of all the evidence, he crumbles to the will of the people.

The innocent one is punished while a guilty escape. Pilate allows Jesus, who he has on three different occasions declared to be innocent, to be handed over to the Jewish authorities so that they may crucify him.

Pilate saw Jesus and understood enough about Jesus to realize that he was innocent, that the charges against her were symbolic. Pilate is afraid of what other people will think.

He is afraid of how others will react. If he lets Jesus go, Jerusalem will be in chaos and more importantly, this will be the end of his rule. He is desperately trying to hold on to something that will not last, namely earthly power.

For a time, he will be able to hold on to this feeble power, but in the end, he knows it will go, so he's desperately trying to cling on to his power.

[23 : 08] And so often, we can be like Pilate. We like to rely on our own ingenuity and our own strength rather than rely on the sacrificial lamb of God. For those who may not be Christians, I would urge you to think again about where real power is, where the authority is held.

It is not in the physical powers of the world. It is not in your bank account. It is not in your job. It's not in your health. It's not in your family. It's not in your friends.

It's not with our government. These things are transient. These things slip and slide. They change. They don't have real power. Real power does not have its rest in this world.

It is beyond this world. Real power is found in Jesus. The real power lies in Christ. It lies in the one who remains, who does not change and will never change, the one who sits on the throne of heaven and who will one day judge the world.

For those of us who are Christians, do we rely daily on the sacrificial lamb? Or are we sometimes tempted to reject his power?

[24 : 22] How often do I rely on my own knowledge rather than go to the Bible? How often do I rely on my own emotions, my own feelings, rather than going to the truth of Scripture?

How often do I think I can figure out the problem rather than going to God in prayer? How often do I try to work things out and only as a last resort do I ever go to God?

How often do I do that? Let me urge each one of us to go to God quickly and to go to God first of all. Go to the innocent king, the one who has power, the one who we can rely on.

Copy Christ's humble submission and kneel once more before the throne of God and seek his power over your own life. Now verse 25 is an interesting verse and it's first very important to Luke.

Verse 25 explains, one man is condemned, yet one man goes free. Barabbas is freed. Why is this so important? Why does Luke tack this on at the end of this account?

[25 : 32] Well, at the time of Passover, it was customary for a prisoner to go free. So when the option is given to the people, Barabbas, Barabbas the insurrectionist, terrorist, murderer, or Jesus, the people choose the terrorist.

They choose the murderer as the one they want to release. And they ask that the sacrificial lamb of God is crucified. Why does this happen?

What is the point of this event amidst the turmoil of this trial? Why does Luke just put this in in the end? Well, I believe this event was for Jesus' encouragement.

In this act of releasing Barabbas, God the Father was showing to Jesus in a very small way what his death and resurrection would mean for other people.

God the Father is showing Jesus the result of what his sacrificial death and resurrection might mean for others. One man dies, another goes free.

[26 : 44] Before Jesus goes to the cross, he sees that in action in a very small way. We are Barabbas. We are heading to the cross.

We are deserving of punishment for all that we have done wrong. But God steps in. God steps in and stops our march to judgment and offers us a way out.

God steps in, steps in and says, there is one way in which I can still be just, but you can be released. And the justice which needs to be done is to substitute our life for the life of God's Son.

Barabbas is substituted for Jesus. Barabbas no longer receives the punishment of the cross. Jesus takes that for him. Barabbas is freed. Jesus goes on, faces the cross.

We are Barabbas. Jesus comes, pays the price of our sin. We can go free. Incredible, amazing grace. As Jesus sees Barabbas walk off, he sees the gospel in miniature.

[27 : 58] His death achieves freedom. And his death would achieve freedom for millions to come. It would free many, many, many people.

It would free me from judgment. I was Barabbas. Jesus steps in. He takes it for me. He takes it for you. It frees us from the wrath of God's judgment.

That's why Luke puts it here. Because Luke wants us to see the gospel. In conclusion, as Pilate's pronouncement went out, all knew that Jesus was innocent.

Yet, he willingly accepted the injustices of Rome and sets aside his glory and allows us to be free.

He carries our sin and we are freed. Jesus is the king. He is the one who, when faced with the mockery of the courtroom, remains silent.

[29 : 02] silent. In humble submission to his father's will. And he became the innocent sacrifice for us. Let us respond to Christ and his work appropriately by ensuring that he reigns over every area of our life.

That he reigns over all, not over some, not over part. Amen.