

Luke 22:63-23:25 - The Trial: A Place of God's Will

We live in a world of trials. Turn on the television and, frequently, some major trial is underway. O. J. Simpson, Timothy McVeigh, the Unabomber, Michael Jackson, Saddam Hussein, President Donald Trump ... you can almost chronicle the passage of time by watching the major cases and trials on TV. More interesting, however, is the way these cases are told. Have you ever noticed how on television a trial is turned into a drama? It really is not about the facts of the case at all. Instead, the reporters are more interested in the strategies of the lawyers, the emotions of the people, the intentions of the witnesses, the biases of the judge. Impartial observation. A clear statement of the facts. These things are strange in court reporting today. Instead, we find families of the victim sobbing out their story. This keeps us watching. It provides a sense of drama, but it doesn't advance our understanding of the case. Today, drama brings ratings, and so we are taken from facts into feelings. Justice no longer sits blindfolded and impartial. Now she holds a TV camera in one hand and a list of ratings in the other.

Since this is the way we tend to see trials today, we would expect that Luke's account of the trial of Jesus would strike us as radically different. Luke begins his Gospel by saying that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He tells us he desired to write **"an orderly account."** We would expect Luke to present the trial of Jesus in a less dramatic, more reasoned fashion. After all, he didn't have a TV camera, was not concerned about ratings, and the courtroom drama had not become his hearer's standard fare. Surprisingly, however, Luke's account doesn't sound all that different. As Luke records the trial of Jesus, he spends a great amount of time telling us about the people, the emotions, and the behind-the-scenes movements surrounding the case.

Luke tells us about the relationship between the judges, Herod and Pilate. Enemies before, they became friends this day. Luke tells us what Herod wanted. What Pilate wanted. And, all the while, Luke never lets us forget about the anger of the chief priests and teachers of the law. Why does Luke spend so much time on this drama? Today, it occurs to keep people watching. For Luke, I think there is another reason.

Have you ever gone to look out a window, and suddenly you see a reflection of yourself? You go over to the kitchen window to check on the flowers in the backyard, and for a moment all you see is your own reflection. It's a work of the light. You see yourself, anxious, frazzled and worried about

the situation in our world. This is the third evening in a row you're not looking forward to having dinner at home and not going out. There hasn't been a break for you and you're tired of watching the news and seeing the drama unfold in our state, country and world. You see yourself as being in reasonable shape, no health issues, enough food in the house and you haven't gone broke yet. You're wondering about loved ones, people living far away, even the folks you only hear from at Christmas and you don't know if they are or will be OK. Sure, God says He will take care of them, but can you really be sure? You, however, are the one who isn't all right. Looking out the window to check up on your flowers, you find yourself looking within, checking up on yourself. In a way, Luke's record of the trial works like that window. He causes us to see ourselves by a work of the light.

You read this trial expecting to look into the facts about Jesus and, instead, Luke teaches you the facts of a fallen world. You read this trial expecting to establish the truth of Christ's claims, and instead, Luke asks you to confess the truth about yourself. Luke knows that the trial is not about establishing Jesus' innocence. That is firmly established. Pilate himself finds no reason to crucify this man. The matter in question is "Why is an innocent man condemned to die?" And to this, Luke gives an answer in the last sentence of this section: Pilate **"delivered Jesus over to their will."** **"Their will."** That is the fact, the glimpse of the fallen world that Luke gives us. It is the will of a fallen world that its God should die. Luke invites us to look within the human heart this evening and confess the facts of a fallen world. It affects Jesus then, and it affects Him now.

Have you ever found yourself willing one thing in the church but doing another in the world? Have you ever wanted to tell of God's love to your neighbor but then talked about the weather instead? Although Jesus has rescued us from the sin that lies in us by nature, there are times when we find ourselves acting like we are still part of the fallen world. Jesus says, **"the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."** Luke's account of the trial helps us to call sin *sin*. It shows us where such willfulness leads us, and it gently encourages us to confess our plight. It's easy in church to will the peace of God for all people; it's harder, however, to act on that when you have not been promoted because of the color of your skin. It's easy in church to want to help the poor, but it's hard to do that when you see an advertisement for that new TV ... besides, you worked hard for the money you earned. And the more and more we go through this changing will, the easier it becomes to simply come into church and say one thing and then go out into the world and do another. And that, dear friends, is sin.

But this trial is not the end of the story. The trial of Jesus is about more than the changing will of humans; it is also about the eternal will of God. Tonight, God enters a place filled with the battles of human wills and transforms it to be a place of His eternal will. At the very beginning of the story,

Luke tells us what happened to Jesus at the hands of the men who were holding Him. They blindfolded and beat Him and cried out to Him **"Prophecy."** They mocked Jesus as a false prophet, and yet what they were doing fulfilled the very prophecy of God. Jesus had predicted His Passion. He had even predicted this mocking. The death of Jesus is part of God's eternal will. God so desires to save all people that He sends His own Son to suffer in their place. This is the will of God: a love stronger than death; a word more powerful than sin; the death of Jesus that brings forgiveness to all people. Even here. Right now. Every time we gather, Jesus comes and forgives us our sins and then sends us out, forgiven, into the world.

Our world is indeed a world of trials. These are the trials you will see on TV. The greatest trial, however, is the trial of our Savior. It goes on all the time. It happened there in Jerusalem and it happens today. Week after week, people make judgments against God. Sometimes, it receives national attention as courtroom dramas debate the rights of Christians to witness of their Savior. Other times, it goes unnoticed. In the office, around the lunch table, during the first year of college. People repeatedly subject Jesus to a trial of consideration and deny Him to be their Lord. A great teacher? Perhaps. A revolutionary? A prophet? A figment of the Church's imagination? These are their verdicts. But God? No. For the world around us, Jesus is not God, and He certainly is not the only way of salvation.

Luke, however, teaches us to confess Jesus. To confess His death and resurrection as the only way of salvation for all people. As Luke tells this story, we see the mission of God. Wherever people with a changing will fight against God, God comes among them, fighting for their salvation. Here in the courts of Jerusalem, there among the nations, here at Grace and here in Holiday Island are the people for whom God has offered His Son, our Savior. They are lost in the grip of an ever-changing will. Their actions might offend you. Their conversation might be rude. You may get tired of trying. Become angry at their words. They hold Jesus up to trial and declare Him to be foolishness. But God continues to seek them in His love. Week after week, even tonight, in this place, He works the wonder of His love. Certain of our Savior, certain of His salvation, we go now to a world that waits in need of its God.