

Luke 23:1-5; Psalm 2; The Charges Made Against Jesus I. Misleading our Nation II. Forbidding Tribute to Caesar III. Claiming to be King

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live in the midst of a wicked and crooked generation- but so did Jesus! The plots and schemes of mankind are nothing new- when we see the political power plays and the deceitful actions of our rulers- we acknowledge that there is nothing new under the sun! Today as we enter Luke 23, we are entering a new realm- a new arena. We are moving from courtyard of the HP Caiaphas to the presence of Pilate- the same Pilate whose name we recite every week when we confess that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Now Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea under the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Pilate was not a fan of the Jews- and the Jews hated Pilate as well. Pilate was known for erecting Roman, religious symbols all over Jerusalem- for caring little about the common people of the land. He was corrupt- he was good at playing the political game. It was Pilate who would have appointed Caiaphas as HP- Pilate had a weak, moral character and he was happy to use his power and influence to get what he wanted. Normally he would not reside in Jerusalem- but because of the threat of a riot during the Passover, Pilate finds himself in Jerusalem during this holy week. So today we find Jesus handed over to Pilate as religious rulers seek to condemn Jesus. We look at this theme; the false accusation against Jesus proves man's hatred and rejection of the truth. When Jesus is brought to Pilate, there are 3 charges or accusations made against him. Remember, that that these charges needed to be political in nature- religious charges would not interest the Roman Pilate. So what offense does this company of men lay against Jesus?

I. Misleading our Nation

The first charge given in v. 2 is that Jesus is misleading our nation. Jesus is distorting the truth, they say. Jesus is teaching corruption- turning the hearts of the people away from their God and away from the Roman. He is stirring up the people as v. 5 puts it- teaching all over the place that the Israelite people should rebel. Now earlier they had accused Jesus of releasing the restrictions of the Law. For example, in Matthew 12 the disciples were picking and eating grain on the Sabbath. And the Pharisees accused Jesus of allowing His disciples to break the Mosaic Law. But as Jesus clearly taught in Mt. 5:17- He did not come to

abolish but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Jesus was not loosening or cancelling the Law, rather He was rightly interpreting and applying the Law! God desires mercy- and the Jewish leaders had forsaking the heart and spirit of the Law. But in our text, they accuse Jesus of leading a revolutionary party. They claim that Jesus is provoking the nation to depart from Rome- to rise up in insurrection against Caesar. The allegiance of the people was being diverted- instead of following Rome they followed Jesus- that was their claim. Now it was true that the disciples of Jesus may have thought this way- the disciples were often caught thinking of earthly kingdoms and the throwing off of Roman yoke. For example, the disciples asked Jesus in Acts 1- will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? So His own disciples may not have understood how the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world relate- but Jesus was always very clear. As we will find again in point 3- Jesus stated that His Kingdom was not of this world. Jesus was not the leader of an insurrection- He did not teach His disciples to forsake and reject the rule of Rome. Jesus was in no way deceasing or misleading the nation of Israel! The opposite was true, Jesus is leading in the way of righteousness and teaching in the way of truth! Jesus was clearly teaching who we are called to be- living in this world but not of this world. The heart of the question is this- who should Israelites serve and obey? Jesus was teaching rightly- how the people might be saved! In fact, it was these leaders who were standing in the way of truth- these leaders were misleading the people! As Jesus states in Luke 11, woe to you Scribes and Pharisees! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering! The Scribes and Pharisees were making it hard- difficult to follow Jesus! They made the way to salvation impossible with all their rules and human regulations! They were hindering others from entering the Kingdom of God by their objections and persecution! But the teaching of Jesus is clear- come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest! But The religious leaders were misleading the people- telling them that salvation was something you needed to work for and attain! It is Jesus who clearly speaks the truth and reveals how we might be graciously saved from our sins- as He freely offers the way to salvation by grace through faith in His name! We always need to be on guard against making the way of salvation harder than it is. Lest we be found to mislead people- we must always

keep the free and gracious offer of salvation before us! Jesus is the way, the truth and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Him! And anyone who comes to Him, will never be turned away!

II. Forbidding Tribute to Caesar

But the leaders have rejected Christ- they have shut up and refused to acknowledge the truth of His Word- so they continue in v. 2 with their second accusation. Jesus was forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar. Jesus was telling us not to give our taxes to government- Jesus was instructing His disciples to throw off the Roman rule. Jesus was hindering and preventing the lawful gathering of dues- and by the way- that would mean less money for Caesar and for you- Pilate! Now this claim was easy to refute- Jesus had already made it clear when He answered their question back in Luke 20:22. The question asked by scribes and the chief priests was- is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not? Jesus' response was- give to Caesar what is Caesar's. And give to God the things that are God's. So the very people that asked the question back in Luke 20 are now accusing Jesus in our text! They had the answer- but they still accuse Jesus without grounds! The truth of the matter was that Jesus never undermined civil order, paying taxes and giving honor to human and earthly rulers. In fact, He made it clear that this honor and tribute was due- and should be given! He did speak of another Kingdom- a Kingdom above that had come. He wanted his disciples to see their citizenship in the Kingdom of God to be sure. But they were also called to submit to those whom God has placed over them- since their leaders were agents of God as Rom. 13 puts it. So there is a calling to honor and respect our earthly leaders- to acknowledge the civil government as appointed by God. As a reminder, this is not always easy to do! It gets harder when our leaders are ungodly and unjust- but we are still called to support them with our taxes and even pray for their protection and wisdom so that we might live peaceful and quiet lives as I Tim. 2 says. But it is also true that we must refrain from looking to these leaders as our saviors- lest we ever trust in man for our surety, safety and salvation! As I Peter 2 puts it- fear God and honor the emperor. So this charge is not true- Jesus is not standing the way of truth- He alone is speaking the truth concerning our responsibilities and obligations! He alone makes it clear how we are to live as residents in a

country who are also citizens of the Kingdom above! Still in this world- but also belonging to another! But what these religious rulers did not acknowledge was the truth of Jesus statement- the second part was denied as well. Yes- give your honor and taxes to your human rulers. They have a right to be supported and honored because of the position that God has put them in- but there is a higher power that needs to be seen and submitted to! Give to God what is God's! Submit to Him and honor Him above all and with your all! God deserves your total and absolute allegiance! Instead of appealing to Pilate- these leaders should have appealed to the King over Pilate! Not Caesar- but the King of Kings!

III. Claiming to be King

This brings us to our last point- the final accusation against Jesus us that He is making himself out to be a king to rival Caesar. That Jesus is claiming to be the King of the Jews- and thus Caesar, Herod and Pilate cannot be the rightful rulers of men. But remember back to what Jesus said! Yes, He is King- but what kind of King is Jesus? Calling Jesus "a King" is true in so far as Luke 22:70 goes. As we saw last week, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God. So He is clearly claiming to be a King- but what kind of Kingdom does He reign in? From where does He rule? Let's read from John 18:33-38. Jesus clearly states, His Kingdom is not of this world! He is not looking for a throne in Rome- not even the seat of Pilate or Herod. No- His Kingdom is a heavenly kingdom- His throne is beside the Father in glory! His army is not made up of men with their swords- but angels who are His misters of flaming fire! Jesus is not planning on rivaling Rome- at least not in the way they expected. As Jesus encountered back in John 6:15- the people had tried to take Jesus by force to make Him their King. But Jesus withdrew from them. Jesus refused to be the pawn of the people. Taking a step back- we can see that on the surface of this issue- Herod had no reason to fear the King of the Jews back in Matthew 2. When the King of the Jews was born- it was not an attack on His position per say. And in our text for today, Pilate, Herod and Caesar have no need to fear this King of the Jews. Jesus is not exalting Himself to rival these leaders- he is not a political, earthly king! But on the other hand, it is also true that Herod, Pilate and Caesar should fear Jesus! They should rightly acknowledge Him-

for the Kingdom of God and His Son is a Kingdom that lasts! His rule over all is one that endures and is established! As Daniel 2 teaches, the Kingdom of God ruled by Jesus will be the rock that crushes all other kingdoms! Every kingdom of man will fall- being reduced to dust- as Jesus brings them all to an end! The kingdoms of this world rise and fall- but Jesus is the true, lasting and eternal King! His Kingdom is over all and lasts forever! He is, as Luke 22:69 says, seated at the right hand of the power of God- and He will come on the clouds- and every knee will bow before Him- for there is only one true King of Kings!

But for the time being- in this particular context- the Romans did not have a rival in Jesus. A cursory glance at Jesus- simply looking at his attire, His followers and His teaching, would be enough to convince even the hardest and corrupt judge of Jesus' innocence. How exactly Jesus was planning on overthrowing the Roman government and making himself the King of the Jews when he stood here- alone- without a single supporter? That is why Pilate has to say- I find no guilt in this man! He has done nothing deserving of death! But his foes will not rest until they have his blood- thus the trial continues as we see next week.

To conclude, in appealing to Pilate these leaders attempted to go over Jesus' head. They were finding rulers that could outrank Jesus in their mind- so that their plot to kill Jesus might be carried out! Oh how foolish mankind and their rulers are! As we read in Psalm 2- the nations and their rulers plot, plan and scheme in vain! They take council together- plotting in vain! You had better kiss the Son lest He terrify you in His wrath! We do have kings, governors, princes and presidents in this life- of this world. But let none forget to acknowledge the King of Kings and Lord over all lords! The false accusation against Jesus proves man's hatred and rejection of the truth. What these religious leaders said about Jesus reveals more about their own heart- they hated and despised this man because the people considered Him a prophet- no longer listening to or following them. It was envy and pride that moved these leaders to formulate charges- not the actions of Jesus- but their own hard hearts. Let us all humble ourselves- to bow the knee and confess before men- that this is the King of King who rules over all- all power and authority are now in His hands! He alone is the King whose dominion will have no end.