

NO FAULT FOUND // LUKE 23:6-17

From the series, The Gospel of Luke

At Jesus' first appearance before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5), the Roman governor declares that he can "find no guilt" in him. He is pressed between the wish to avoid condemning an innocent man and his desire to appease the Jewish leaders, so he seizes on a politically expedient technicality—Jesus is Galilean, and under Herod's jurisdiction (v. 6). Pilate, plastic and pathetic, will put the burden of dealing with Jesus on Herod's shoulders.

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, the ruler who killed the innocent male children of Israel in an attempt to destroy the Messiah (Matt 2, Mark 6), has already been seen in the gospel of Luke. This Herod, illicitly married to his half-brother's wife, beheads John the Baptist, who had been speaking out against Herod's sinful choices (Matt 14). Now Herod is in Jerusalem during the Passover celebration for the optics of the occasion, and this puts him in a position to be involved in Jesus' trial (v. 7). He doesn't know much about Jesus, but Jesus knows much about him.

1. Herod's desire (v. 6-8)

Herod "had long desired to see" Jesus (v. 8). His desire is born, not out of spiritual insight, but out of carnal curiosity. He wants to see "some sign" or wonder done by Jesus, of whom he had clearly heard such things. For him, Jesus is a show, a source of potential entertainment. Do we feel the same way? Why do we seek Jesus? Is it for his own sake, or for what he can do?

2. Herod's disappointment (v. 9-10)

Despite being questioned at length, "Jesus made no answer," (v. 9) a sore disappointment for Herod. Jesus' silence is chilling. Any word spoken by him is a form of grace. His refusal to speak is a severe judgement. For Herod, Jesus' refusal to perform is anti-climactic. He is not fulfilling the use Herod wanted to make of him, so he is disposable.

3. Herod's derision (v. 11-16)

Herod holds Jesus in contempt. He will beat and mock him, giving him a repetition of the treatment he had already suffered in the Jewish court. Since Jesus will not give him a sign, Herod will find some way to make Jesus entertaining and beating and mocking him suffices, concluding with "arraying him in splendid clothing" (v. 11)—decking him in kingly robes as a form of humiliation. Herod is in the presence of the Son of God, and he is missing his moment because he does not recognize it.

Herod returns Jesus to Pilate, his former enemies who is now a friend. Luke's juxtaposition of these two leaders is significant. He is likely drawing on Old Testament instructions in making judgements—two witnesses have to be in agreement (Dt. 19:15). Pilate and Herod are now in agreement—Jesus is an object of scorn, but he is also found to be without fault by each.

Jesus died in our place as there was no fault found in him. We must confess: Jesus was an innocent man, and we are very guilty. God will treat Jesus the way he should treat us so that he can declare us righteous. When Jesus goes guilty, we go free.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between wanting Jesus for himself and wanting Jesus for what he can do? How can we discern this difference in our own desires?
2. Why is Jesus' refusal to speak a form of judgement?
3. What are some ways we see Jesus mocked or made a spectacle in our own culture?