

Playing Games with Jesus

Luke 23:6-12; John 20:29

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When people hear the gospel, they will usually have one of three reactions. **Like Caiaphas** many will be angered by the claims of Christ and condemn Him. "O man of Galilee, who do you think you are claiming to be the Son of God?" they exclaim. Or **like Pilate** many will consider the risk too great to their reputation to receive Him by faith alone as their own Savior. These proclaim, "Look at what it would cost me to become a Christian!" Or **like Herod** many will be more amused by the miracles they have heard He has performed and will not receive Him because He will not perform a miracle for them. These declare, "I played my flute but Jesus would not dance to my music or play my game!" They all refuse to trust in Christ because salvation must be on their terms.

This Lord's Day, we shall consider how Herod was amused by Christ as he interrogated Him, and how even we who profess faith in Jesus Christ can also fall into the same awful sin. Let us consider the following main points from our text: (1) Jesus Is Sent to Herod (Luke 23:6-7); (2) Jesus Is Interrogated by Herod (Luke 23:8-10); (3) Jesus Is Mocked by Herod (Luke 23:11-12).

I. Jesus Is Sent to Herod (Luke 23:6-7).

A. As the first phase of Christ's civil trial before Pilate, the Roman governor, ends, Pilate heard the Jewish Sanhedrin accuse the Lord Jesus of spreading His teaching from GALILEE to Jerusalem (Luke 23:5-6). Pilate asks Christ's accusers if He is a Galilean, to which they respond He is.

1. When Pilate learns that Jesus is from Galilee, Pilate sees this as his chance to pass responsibility for trying the case from himself to King Herod. Pilate thus sends Jesus to Herod who happens to be in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Luke's Gospel is the only account we have of this second phase of Christ's trial before Herod.

2. Here was a slick political move by Pilate to escape the pressure he felt from the Sanhedrin. Pilate would pass Jesus off to Herod and would let the Jews make their case before him. After all, Jesus was from Herod's own jurisdiction of Galilee over which Pilate had no jurisdiction.

B. Who was this Herod to whom Pilate now sent Jesus?

1. Herod Antipas (before whom Christ now stood) was the son of Herod the Great, that despicable ruler who had murdered the male infants and toddlers of Bethlehem in an attempt to murder the young Jesus whom he thought to be a rival king to himself. The son was no better than the father as we shall see. The Herod before whom Christ was tried was an immoral ruler devoid of all righteousness.

a. Herod seduced his brother's wife, Herodias, and married her (which John the Baptist declared to be an incestuous relationship contrary to the Law of God as found in Leviticus 18:16).

b. This is the same Herod who imprisoned John the Baptist (for saying his marriage was incestuous) and who was seduced by the dancing of his stepdaughter to have John beheaded and John's head brought on a silver platter.

c. When Herod learned of the ministry of Christ and how the masses of people followed Him, Herod believed his worse fears had befallen him: Christ was a resurrected and reincarnated John the Baptist! Herod's immoral cunning and scheming to retain power and riches were also recognized by Jesus who earlier in His ministry called Herod a fox.

d. This is the very judge before whom Christ now appears in the second stage of the Roman trial. What blindness is cast over his eyes! He is in Jerusalem for the Passover, and he does not

even recognize God's Passover Lamb who now stands before him.

2. Here is the picture of a spineless, immoral ruler who had the power to deliver John the Baptist from death and had the power (or at least influence) to deliver Jesus from death if he had chosen to use it. But by his lack of moral courage he joined with Pilate to fulfill the desires of the Jewish Sanhedrin in putting the Lord Jesus to death.

a. Dear Christian men, you are called to be leaders in the home and in the church, how will you use your leadership? Will you (by God's grace) humbly set a straight course for your family, always being guided by Scripture, or will you be guided by the world, by family, or by your own interests and emotions? The frustration that often comes from wives and children in regard to our leadership in the home is not from setting a straight biblical path which we patiently and lovingly teach to them, but rather from their not clearly understanding why that path has been chosen. Men, instruct in love, and then lead by your example.

b. Wives and children, be careful that you avoid manipulating your husbands and fathers by your tears, by your temper, or by your silence. If you would be a help to him, let him know that you only want to do what is right and agreeable to God's Word. Let him know that you are there to study with him. Let him know that you are there to encourage him. Let him know that you are there to pray with and for him.

II. Jesus Is Interrogated by Herod (Luke 23:8-10).

A. When Herod heard that Pilate had sent Jesus to him, Herod greatly rejoiced. He did not rejoice because he would now have the opportunity to hear the truth from the Son of God. He did not rejoice because he wanted to receive by faith the Savior. He rejoiced because he had heard of all the miracles that Christ had performed and Herod wanted the Lord Jesus to entertain him with some miracle (Luke 9:9).

1. Herod wanted to be impressed by Christ's miracles, but not changed by Christ's truth. In a similar manner, Herod had taken great joy in listening to John the Baptist, while John was his prisoner for a season (Mark 6:20). Perhaps Herod, being the weak immoral coward that he was, found himself fascinated by men of real moral courage, who would not compromise the truth, even to save their own lives, like John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Herod had been in the presence of one of the greatest witnesses to the truth (John the Baptist) and in the presence of the greatest witness to the truth (Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the truth). And although he enjoyed hearing the power of their words, he rejected the truth of God which they proclaimed.

2. Dear ones, be not like Herod today—hearing the truth of Jesus Christ, but rejecting it. It is so easy to sit back and listen to a sermon, and then do nothing with the infallible truth of Christ. Dear ones, if you do not embrace the truth of Christ by faith, if you do not love it and treasure it as a precious gift from your Savior, if you do not go forth and practice it in your life seeking (by God's grace) to be conformed to it, you show yourself to be like Herod in being willing to hear it, but unwilling to receive it by faith and practice it in love and in obedience. Such a sin is more aggravated than those who refuse to hear the truth at all.

B. Note next concerning this second phase of the Roman trial (in Luke 23:9) that Herod questioned Christ with many words. The emphasis of the verb "questioned" is not that he asked a single question, but rather that Herod continued to question Christ with many words (the imperfect tense of the Greek verb). Knowing Herod's character from previous accounts of him in the Scriptures, it was not the truth which he sought, but more likely questions concerning the source of Christ's great power to perform miracles (like Delilah did with Samson), and repeated questions about Jesus performing some miracle for him to observe.

C. But the Lord Jesus said absolutely nothing to Herod. Not only did Jesus not perform a miracle for Herod, He did not even give Herod a word of response. The mere curiosity of Herod would not be satisfied

by the Lord in the least. The Lord Jesus did not come to satisfy the curiosity of unworthy sinners, but to satisfy the holy wrath of God against unworthy sinners. And if that does not cause you to fall upon your face in awe and wonder, no miracle will do so.

1. So many people are attracted by any news of miracles. Like an amazing stunt performed at a circus, the news of alleged miracles draws its crowds. But people have missed the whole point of miracles. Genuine miracles sent by God were never intended to satisfy one's curiosity. When God acts above and beyond the ordinary laws He has established in nature (that's what a miracle is), He does so in order to humble us before Him. Miracles are to show us our weakness and God's almighty power, our need and His abundance, our insufficiency and His all-sufficiency. Miracles that are given and approved by God always point to Jesus Christ and the truth of His gospel. God-given and approved miracles exalt Christ as the miracle-worker rather than man (I must decrease and Christ must increase). Read John 20:30-31.

2. The resurrected Jesus actually commended those who trust in Him without needing to see a miracle (John 20:29). Faith in the miraculous will not save a person from hell. Only faith in Jesus Christ, who lived and died to save guilty sinners, can justify the ungodly.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ, who mercifully healed the blind, the deaf, the mute, and the lame, multiplied a few loaves and fishes to feed thousands, cleansed the afflicted of dreaded leprosy, and raised the dead from the grave, would not gratify the mere curiosity of Herod with miraculous acts of power. Likewise the Lord will not intervene on your behalf to satisfy your curiosity, but will only intervene on your behalf when you are humbled before an almighty Christ and place your trust in His righteousness, in His mercy, and in His power to rescue you.

D. The Jewish Sanhedrin was not about to allow Herod to question Jesus without their input (Luke 23:10). Having begun this travesty of justice in their own fraudulent courts, these Jewish leaders dog Christ every step of the way until He is finally crucified. And in spite of the many false accusations brought against the Lord Jesus by these religious leaders, we yet have the testimony that Herod found Christ guilty of no crime (Luke 23:14-15). Judas told the Jewish leaders that he had betrayed innocent blood (Matthew 27:4). Pilate told the Jewish leaders that he had found Christ innocent of any crime and Herod likewise. There was no just cause for any human court to condemn Christ to death. This testimony is for your benefit. The Lord Jesus voluntarily offered His sinless and holy life as a sacrifice for ungodly sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. His willingness to suffer the cruel wrath of man and the just wrath of a holy God was due to His everlasting love for His elect. May that love break your heart and lead you to live your life as an expression of gratitude to Him for such mercy.

III. Jesus Is Mocked by Herod (Luke 23:11).

A. Receiving no miracles as he had desired, Herod resorted to the lowest and most degrading form of insult: mockery of Christ and His office as King. Jesus would not play Herod's game, so Herod would play with Christ as a toy. Herod and his soldiers teased and taunted the King of kings and Lord of lords; they mocked their Creator by placing upon Christ a splendid robe of royalty. How the tables will be turned on that final Day of Judgment when Herod and these soldiers (as all of us) will stand before Christ (the King of kings) to give an account of themselves before receiving their just sentence of judgment. To show anger toward Christ (as did the Sanhedrin) was to at least treat Christ and His claims seriously. However, to mock the Lord Jesus (as did Herod and the soldiers) was to treat Christ as a joke, who could not be taken seriously. Christ was a mere curiosity to them (a mere toy to play with).

B. Dear ones, do you take the Lord Jesus Christ seriously? How would anyone ever know whether you do or do not take Christ seriously? They will consider your words whether you defend Him, or consider your silence as denying Him. Will others see your willingness to speak about an actor, musician, athlete, or

politician, but your unwillingness to speak about your allegiance to Christ and His kingdom?

1. Dear ones, you can hardly take Jesus seriously when He is seldom in your thoughts, when you merely go through the outward motions of worship, when your prayers in Jesus name are a mere uttering of words, when His sacrifice upon the cross does not move you to faith, love, and obedience to Him. Dear ones, are you merely curious to know the Lord's will for your life or merely curious to know what has been prophesied in Scripture to occur in the future, and yet continue to live the way you want to live? Or do you want to know His will and understand prophetic events in order to show your faith in Christ, your love for Christ, and your obedience to Christ? How much of Herod is there in your life and mine? May God reveal the Herod in all of us that we may repent of such an insult to our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Dear ones, are there areas of your life to which you yet cling as your own, and thus do not take Christ seriously in that part of your life (whether in work, sports, movies, music, your speech, the lusts of your heart, your family, or the keeping of the Sabbath)?

3. Herod played with Christ. My friend, do not play with the Lord Jesus Christ. He will either be your redeeming Savior or He will be your condemning Judge (there are no other options available to you). He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no other way to the Father or to heaven—except through faith alone in Christ alone. He is not a million miles away. He is as close and as near as the Good News that you now hear preached unto you. Don't first seek to clean up your life before coming to Jesus Christ. Come as you are with all your sin and cast yourself as a sinner upon Him who alone can make you clean. God doesn't justify the godly, but the ungodly.

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