



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 6, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Lenten Midweek 4

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 2A CW²¹

Passion History: [Reading 3](#)

Sermon Text: [Luke 23:1-12](#)

God on Trial Misconceptions

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

In our world today, there is a lot made about misinformation. You don't know what to trust and what to think about. Even more than that is sometimes our own **misconceptions** or our own preconceived notions about things. When we look at our reading today, we see that there are many people who have **misconceptions** about Jesus. They have preconceived notions about who He was and were misunderstanding what He had said and what He had come to do. You could almost say, in the verses that we read, there was no one who really understood Jesus. They all had these **misconceptions** about Him.

You can start with that whole assembly, the people that come and are accusing Him. They heard that Jesus was confessing to be the Son of God and they hated that. They deemed Him worthy of death. So they had to take Him to Pontius Pilate in order to carry out that death sentence. The Jews did not have the ability to do that. But when you look at what they were accusing Jesus of, there are really two lies and what you might say is a half-truth.

The first thing was that they said He was misleading the nation. That was the accusation against Jesus. Jesus was misleading the nation. How was He doing this? In fact, He was doing the opposite of trying to bring the nation, bring the people, bring the religion back to its correct place in following God and understanding grace and God's mercy and love instead of what? The assembly, the religious leaders, they were misleading the people. Jesus talked about how the Pharisees had put an unfair yoke on the people by telling them to keep these laws, which they themselves could not do. So they accused Jesus of misleading the nation, but it was in fact them who were doing that.

Then the second lie. They said that Jesus was telling the people to oppose paying taxes to Caesar. We know that is certainly a lie because when they came to trick Jesus and to ask "Who should you pay taxes to," what did He do? Jesus takes a coin and says "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Give to God what is God's." ⁽¹⁾ He never says don't pay taxes to Caesar so again, another lie.

What is the half-truth? They say that He was claiming to be the Messiah, the King. He was doing that, but the truth was He wasn't "claiming" to be that, he in fact was the Messiah. He was greater than they could ever imagine. Though they were saying He was a threat to Rome, this was not true. He was not setting Himself in opposition to Caesar and Pilate and the ruling authorities of this world. In fact, He had a spiritual kingdom. He was the Spiritual Messiah, not this earthly messiah.

The assembly certainly had these **misconceptions** about Him. What about Pilate? Pilate also misunderstood who He was. Pilate had probably heard about Jesus, but hadn't met Him and didn't really know what He was going to be like. As he is told "This is the King of the Jews," that's what he asked. "So you're the King of the Jews?" But what does He look like. Here He is, beaten, not wearing fancy clothes, disrespected, so the question probably in his mind, not more of asking Him if this is true or not and saying "Are YOU the King of the Jews? This person that they hate and they disrespect and that looks this way? Could you really be the King of the Jews?" Of course, Pilate would not believe that He would be a king.

We'll hear more about that discussion with Pilate and Jesus next week. But Pilate certainly would not have seen Jesus as a threat to Caesar. But when he hears that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate is encouraged. He says "This is really hard to handle. I'd love to pass this off." Because He is from Galilee, He is able to go and pass Him on to Herod.

Herod has another **misconception** as well. Herod is actually really excited to see Jesus. What is interesting is that Herod had a very interesting relationship to Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. He kind of liked John the Baptist around to talk with, but he also kind of wanted to kill him. It was this weird relationship. Then finally, he does kill him, when he makes an oath to someone who deceives him. So in the same way where he kind of liked having John the Baptist around but didn't really like what he had to say, because John the Baptist had condemned him, Herod wanted to see what Jesus could do. "John the Baptist said these nice things. Maybe Jesus could do a miracle. Maybe He could show some neat things; show me and perform for me, like a magician of some sort." But Jesus doesn't submit to this. He doesn't show "I can perform on your command." In fact, when questioned, Jesus gives no answer. He doesn't want to support these **misconceptions** that He is at Herod's beck and call to perform some miracle. We see that previously in Scripture where people ask Jesus, "Just perform another miracle. Show us who you are by showing us some little miracle." Jesus refuses to do this.

I think we see these different people in these texts that have these **misconceptions**. Herod was anticipating this and he is turned down. The people were accusing Him. They didn't want anything to do with Him because they didn't like what He had to say. Then there is Pilate, who is kind of confused, but doesn't like the idea that He might be someone opposing the king but really sees no threat in Him.

I think it is true today that many people see Jesus and they have these **misconceptions**. They don't understand who He is. There are many that feel threatened by Him. They see Him and they know that He is something special, He is something different, but they don't really know what to do with Him. Others, through apathy, just don't believe or say "He's not flashy. If Jesus was God, He would do this and He would help. My God would look this way." So many people, through **misconceptions**, different views, struggle with who Jesus is. They don't like the fact that He teaches something that might oppose what they think is true. So there are all these **misconceptions**.

Those are many people in the world, but where do we fit in? Who do we seem like in this text? Is it true that there are times when we might even connect with Herod? One who wants to see Jesus do the things we want Him to do. "Jesus, if you really love me, you would do this in my life." "I have this problem, can't you just fix that?" Maybe we'd say "I've been really faithful. I'm in church all the time. I read my Bible. I deserve this. Jesus, just do this for me." I think there are times when we see Jesus as our spiritual vending machine. We can put in our good works and put our coins in and then select what we want Him to do in our lives.

We know that being a Christian doesn't mean that everything goes how we want or plan in our lives. There is trouble. There is hardship. There is sadness. So we can get frustrated with that. We can struggle. We can struggle with the cross and struggle with who Jesus is and what He is in our lives. So we too, as Christians, need to see that we, like those people, so often are inward focused. That's really what each of the people in this lesson was doing.

The Jewish leaders were thinking about their political and cultural influences. There was Pilate, who was looking like Herod, to be entertained. Pilate was thinking about his job. But we, like all of them, are sinners and we are so often focused inwardly about what is best for me and what can make me comfortable and what can make me happy. But we see that is not what Christ was about. Though all of us often are focused on ourselves like the people in the texts were, we see that Jesus was not. Jesus, in fact, was focused on you and me. When He was accused, what did He do? He kept quiet, unwilling to perform, to do tricks for Herod. When He did speak, He spoke respectfully to those high priests, to those in the assembly, to Pilate, and He spoke the truth. He spoke the truth even if it meant death for Him. He was steady and perfect and He didn't care what the **misconceptions** were. He was going to speak the truth about what He came to do and who He was and who He was concerned about—you and me and the whole world.

We see that this is true. As He defended Himself or didn't say anything, we see what Pilate says about Jesus. He sends Him on to Herod, and then we're going to see later that what He tells the people is "I found Him to be innocent." There was no reason to punish Him. There was no reason to harm Him. There was no reason to send Him to die. We see even in the midst of this that Herod and Pilate agreed on this. They agreed that He was innocent. They became friends over this.

In the same way, we have to understand that this innocence that Jesus showed, His perfection, is now something that we get to share and we get to wear, because we know that we aren't perfect. We make mistakes and are sinful, but Christ came to be perfect in our place. Don't let Jesus and His Words and His actions slip into the background. Keep your eyes focused on Christ and His work and His path to the cross because He did it for you. He is your sacrifice, your substitute, your Savior. But we know this is the Jesus that we want the world to see. The One who comes and is not here to be that spiritual vending machine to take away all our problems is, in fact, here to take away our biggest problem—to save us from our sins, to wash us clean and to give us eternal life. He frees us from sin, death and the power of hell. He says that we are His.

How do we then present Jesus to the world? How are people confused about Jesus? There are so many **misconceptions** about Jesus. We are reading C.S. Lewis on Sunday nights, a book called The Screwtape Letters. He gives this simple summary about the **misconceptions** of Jesus. Many people like Jesus. They like to like Jesus. But the truth is there are really only three conclusions you can come to about Jesus. He is either Lord (our Savior), or He is a liar or a lunatic. If He says He is God, if He says He is the Savior and He knows He is not, He is a liar. Or if He was a man and He thought He was God, then He is crazy. But we know the truth is that He is our Savior. So the **misconception** is that there are many people that just like Jesus and say "I can listen to Him. I can say He is a good teacher and what He says is great, but I don't have to believe that He is Lord." If you knew someone was a liar or a lunatic, would you listen to him? Would you say their teachings were good? We know that He is our Lord and what that means for us. His teachings are good, but more than that, it's who He is and what He came to do. He came to be our Messiah, our Savior.

We need to patiently and lovingly help people see what it means that Jesus is our Lord. Many people come with preconceived notions about the Bible, about Jesus, about religion, but we get to, patiently and joyfully and compassionately share who Jesus is. As we speak the truth, we know that it won't always be easy. Like when Jesus spoke the truth, people won't like it because they have those preconceived notions. But that shouldn't hinder us. We should continue to share that Gospel message knowing that the Holy Spirit works through His Word. We know that while **God is on trial**, that Jesus is on trial and many people will accuse Him and think differently about Him, we know

that He is our Lord and Savior. He has come for you and for me and to forgive the sins of the world. That gift is ours and we want to share it with others. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.

(1) Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25