

## “Faith for a Complicated World” – Pr Jim Sprengle Lent Midweek 4 – March 13, 2024

- I. **Luke 23:1-25** – previously read
- II. **The world is a complicated place.**
  - a. We always like to make things simple whenever possible, but life is often complicated and difficult to understand.
  - b. For example, we deal with suffering and pain, we see injustice around us, we watch the news and see all the trouble in the world... and it doesn't make sense.
    - i. Unfortunately, it's been that way since the first people sinned against God... and it hasn't changed.
  - c. Sometimes, we Christians put on our rose-colored glasses and look around us like the world is not a complicated place.
    - i. Sometimes you hear Christians talk about the world like they sort of have everything figured out.
    - ii. Here is something I've heard before that sounds good, and even has a good intention behind it, “When God closes a door, He always opens a window.”
      1. That's not in the Bible by the way.
      2. We mean well when we say something like that, but it's so much more complicated... we really don't know why life is so hard and difficult...
    - iii. Another example is people saying, “I believe in the power of prayer.”
      1. I'm not saying that we shouldn't believe in prayer, but usually what people mean by that is prayer gets them what they want.
      2. What about what God wants?
        - a. When we pray for something that seems to have no answer from God, or doesn't happen, is that a “no”?
        - b. I'm guilty of putting a more positive spin on it by saying what Pastor Bohren used to say, “God doesn't say no, He just gives us something better.”
          - i. As a 3-year-old, we might be reaching for a knife on the counter, and as a parent we give our child something better – like a cracker or a toy.
          - ii. God may not give us what we want, but we receive what's best, and what's in His will.
      3. The point is, we try simplify the complicated... we are trying to understand why we don't always get what we want, and why we sometimes suffer.
    - d. So, God's ways are hidden to us... but we still believe that He is at work for our good... even in the middle of suffering.

- i. God is at work... we believe that... and yes, we pray in faith because God is a good Father who hears our prayers.
    - ii. And yes, even with the evil in the world that is all around us, we trust that God is working against that evil... in fact, He can even take that evil and use it for His good purpose.
    - iii. Now, that's complicated... or challenging to understand... but we trust that God knows.
  - e. It seems like a pretty tall order to trust in God when we don't have all the answers... when we don't understand... but we believe.
- III. **Our reading in Luke 23 shows us how God works in an evil world.**
  - a. Again, evil of all shapes and sizes came down on the one person... the only person ever... who we can honestly say, "He didn't deserve that."
  - b. Here are some different players in this account: the chief priests, Pontius Pilate, and Herod.
  - c. The chief priests, as I said last week, were already convinced that Jesus deserved death – and nothing was going to get in their way.
    - i. Their blind ignorance... their unbelief... was evil.
    - ii. They conspired against Jesus because they could not believe that He was God's answer to sin.
      - 1. They could not see how Jesus was the only way to be forgiven, and that following the long-held traditions of the Law was not the answer.
      - 2. The people might fall for Jesus' teachings, but the chief priests were obligated to reject and remove Him from influencing them.
      - 3. They just keep pressing and pressing... until they finally get their way... and evil was working them as a group.
  - d. Pontius Pilate is another player in the evil against Jesus.
    - i. Especially in today's world, it's easy to just write this off as another government official doing evil... what do you expect?
    - ii. Pilate is the governor of Judea and Samaria, and his boss is Tiberius Caesar – the Roman emperor.
    - iii. Pilate's job is to take care of his little part of the empire by keeping the peace and collecting taxes.
      - 1. The Jews are no easy group to govern, and he has to walk a fine line of allowing them some religious freedom, but still maintain order.
    - iv. What we do know is that Pilate is the top dog of this place, and he holds all the cards when it comes to crime and punishment.
      - 1. Rome would not allow anyone to be executed without their authorization... so Pilate is the prosecuting attorney, the defense attorney, the judge, and the jury all wrapped into one.
    - v. All the accusations from the chief priests are serious, but the last one really matters... claiming to be king.

- vi. Yet, Pilate isn't convinced, so when he finds out Jesus is from Galilee, he decides to send Him to Herod, who rules that area.
- e. Herod becomes the third player in the evil against our Lord.
  - i. He isn't convinced of all these accusations from the chief priests either, so he treats Jesus like a source of entertainment or something.
    - 1. He wants Him to perform a miracle, but Jesus is silent.
    - 2. Herod just mocks Him and sends Him back to Pilate.
- f. So, the chief priests have gotten Jesus in front of both Pilate and Herod, and now Jesus returns to Pilate for a final ruling.
  - i. Neither Pilate or Herod see a reason to execute Him, but in the end, Pilate uses his God-given authority, and decides to crucify Jesus.
    - 1. Yes, I said God-given... as all rulers and authorities are only in place by God's will.
    - 2. We are learning this in Romans 13 in our Adult Bible Class.
    - 3. God gives the authority to govern, and He expects government to be responsible to care for people properly – and He will judge those who do not do the right thing.
    - 4. We don't expect much from our rulers, but God does.
- g. So, a murderer named Barabbas is released free and clear, and a perfect Man is sent to the cross instead... does this make any sense?

IV. **What kind of world was that?**

- a. The same kind of world we live in today.
- b. We live in a world of evil people who want to destroy Jesus and those who follow Him... and they will use whatever means necessary to resist God.
- c. Leaders in our midst are pressured to follow the masses, and many do not do the good that God commands.
- d. Yet, they are not tricking God or catching Him by surprise... because God knows everything, and whenever these people meant evil, God meant it for good.
- e. This brings us to the other player in our reading, Jesus.
  - i. How can we understand the work of God as He chose to give His Son over to these corrupt and evil people?
  - ii. Jesus' trial and execution was a travesty of justice, all so we would not have to face God's wrath on the Last Day.
    - 1. By the injustice, the mocking, and false accusations that Jesus faced for no reason, we have a completely different outcome... forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- f. Even when nothing seems to make sense, Jesus knows.

V. **Yes, our world is complicated.**

- a. I am reminded of the needle points that my mom used to make... as we look at the back of it, the mess of strings and knots are a total mess.
  - i. Yet, when we look at the other side, a beautiful picture or phrase is clearly seen.

- ii. The evil, the brokenness, and the suffering we experience might not make any sense to us, but on the other side we believe God is at work to bring about a beautiful picture.
- b. We can remember a couple of things as we go from here...
  - i. We may not understand how all these things fit together, but we have each other to walk through it with God's help.
  - ii. And, our God knows how to take evil and use it for good. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sermon based on: "You Meant It for Evil, but God Meant It for Good: An Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday Sermon Series Based on the Gospel of Luke", Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, Concordia Seminary Publishing, St. Louis, 2022