

OUR LORD'S FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

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A SERMON
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“Pilate...said unto them, I find in him no fault at all.”
John 18:38.

I SHOULD like, if God spares us, to present to you on Sabbath mornings the full story of our Savior's sufferings. We began last Lord's day by going with Him to the hall of Caiaphas, and it was a sadly solemn time when we beheld the Prince of Peace a prisoner, heard Him falsely accused and unjustly condemned, and then saw Him abused, till servants and abjects did spit in His face and make a mockery of Him. I hope that you will not be wearied with this subject. If so, it will be the fault of the preacher, for the subject is ever full and fresh, or if the preacher be not to blame, there will be something of censure due to his hearers.

If we do grow tired of the story of the cross it will be a sad indication of secret soul-sickness, and it will be well to observe the symptom and hasten to the great Physician for healing. To true saints in a healthy condition there is no place more attractive than the place of our Lord's passion, where He accomplished the glorious work of our redemption. They love to linger along that *Via Dolorosa* which leads from Gethsemane to Golgotha, let us linger with them.

When I stand and view my Lord, like the bush in Horeb, burning but not consumed, I hear a voice saying to me, “The place whereon you stand is holy ground.” Nothing is more holy than the person of our divine Master, it is, therefore, well to be with Him. The anguish which He endured when He devoted His person as a sacrifice for us is holy too, and so it is well to be with Him in His sufferings. His sorrows have a most sanctifying influence upon all who consider them with believing love. I am persuaded that if we lived more in the atmosphere of the cross sin would lose its power, and every grace would flourish.

When we draw very near to Him and have fellowship with Him in His sufferings we raise a hue and cry against the sin which slew Him, and resolve to be revenged upon it by departing from it ourselves, and by warring against it whenever we see it in others. The cross is that holy implement with which we make war with sin till it is utterly destroyed. Blessed and holy, then, are the thoughts which are aroused by our great sacrifice.

Nor is it only so, but the medicine which brings us health is in itself, a joy.

*“Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
 Which before the cross I spend,
 Life, and health, and peace possessing,
 In the sinner's dying Friend.”*

Here is no noise as of them that make merry over their wine, no shout of them that triumph, no song of them that feast, but here is a grave, sweet melody as of hearts that have found rest. At the cross we find a substantial joy, a far-reaching satisfaction, “the peace of God, which passes all understanding.” Here, you restless ones, is the cure of restlessness, here shall you say, “O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise.” I shall not, therefore, make any excuse, even if for weeks to come I should lead you to the place of dragons where your Lord was sorely broken, and help you to

drink of His cup, and to be baptized with His baptism. May the Spirit of God come upon and open our eyes to read the sacred heart of Him whose sorrows are unrivalled—sorrows borne for love of us.

Let us go to the narrative at once with loving and lowly carefulness. Our Lord was condemned by the chief priests for blasphemy because He declared Himself to be the Son of God, and told them that they should hereafter see Him coming in the clouds of heaven to be their judge. Rending his garments, the high priest said, "What need have we of any further witness? You have heard his blasphemy." When the morning light had come, and they had gone through the formality of a set trial by daylight, having really condemned Him in the night, they led Jesus away to Pilate.

According to tradition, He was led with a rope about His neck, and His hands bound, and I can fully believe in the tradition when I remember the words of Isaiah, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter." It was a strangely sad procession which moved through Jerusalem a little after six in the morning. Those men of the Sanhedrin in all their pomp and power surrounding this one poor victim, whom they were about to deliver to the Gentiles with the one design that He might be put to death! Those wicked men of pride were as the dogs of whom the Psalmist sang when the hind of the morning was his tender theme.

When they came to the house of the Roman governor, they would not themselves enter within its doors. It is said to have been one of the many magnificent palaces which Herod the Great built for himself, the architecture was gorgeous, the floors were inlaid with choice marbles, and all the chambers were richly gilded and furnished with Oriental splendor. Into the great hall these scrupulous hypocrites would not enter because they must by no means be defiled by the touch of a Gentile, for they had already commenced to keep the Passover. So they waited in the courtyard, and Pilate condescended to come out to them, and learn the pressing business which brought them there so early in the morning.

The Roman governor was proud, and cruel, and abhorred the Jews, but still, knowing their fanaticism and the readiness with which they broke loose at Passover times, he stood at his palace gate and heard their demands. He soon ascertained that they had brought him a prisoner, evidently a poor man, and in personal appearance emaciated, weary, and suffering. About Him there was a mysterious dignity combined with singular gentleness, and Pilate for this and other reasons evidently took a singular interest in Him. Fixing his gaze first upon the extraordinary prisoner, he turned to the angry priests and demanded, "What accusation bring against this man?"

The one objective of the priests in bringing Jesus to Pilate was to get Him put to death, for when Pilate told them to go and judge Him according to their law, they replied that they would gladly do so, but that the power of life and death had been taken from them, implying that nothing but His death would content them. They were, however, very anxious at this stage to lay the responsibility of His death upon the Romans, for the fear of the people was still upon them, and if they could secure his death by Pilate, then they might in after days protest that they merely handed Him over to the Roman governor and could not foresee that He would be handled so roughly.

They had not yet bribed the populace to cry, "Crucify him," and they were willing to be on the safe side should the people make an uproar on His behalf. Humanly speaking, they could have put Him to death themselves, for He was entirely in their power, and they frequently forgot the Roman law and slew men in riotous fury, as when they stoned Stephen. They had frequently attempted to stone our Lord Himself, so that they were not always so mindful of Roman law.

They might have taken His life on this occasion, but they were led by a mysterious impulse to desire that the actual responsibility of the deed should rest on Pilate. Further on they were willing to join with the fickle throng in sharing the guilt of His blood, but as yet they would fain throw it upon others. During their great festivals if they took innocent blood, their hypocrisy made them wish to do it by forms of law and by an alien hand. To do this they must bring an accusation, for no Roman ruler would condemn a man till an accusation had been made.

We shall, this morning, consider *the two accusations* that they brought, and after that we shall hear *the verdict of acquittal* which Pilate gave in the language of the text, "I find in him no fault at all."

I. The first accusation, if you will turn to the chapter and read the thirtieth verse, was that He was A MALEFACTOR.

“They answered and said unto him, If he was not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up to you.” He was said to be a malefactor or doer of that which is evil, a person of such a mischievous life that he ought not to live.

Upon which we remark, first, that *it was a novel charge*. It was hot from their mint, for when He stood before Caiaphas nothing was said of any evil that He had *done*, but only of evil that He had spoken. They charged Him with saying this and that, but not with doing any evil deed. The accusation of evil speaking had broken down, and they did not venture upon it a second time, because they knew very well that Pilate did not care what the man had said, all he would attend to would be some actual breach of law by act and deed.

The Romans were a practical people, and so when Pilate led our Lord into the audience chamber he said to Him, “What have you *done*?” He did not say to Him, “What have you taught or preached?” but, “What have you *done*?” For this reason, the priests brought forward this newly-invented accusation and totally unfounded charge that He was a bad doer, which might mean little or much, as the hearer chose to interpret it—malice is seldom specific in its charges. The accusation of being a malefactor grew out of their malevolence, and not out of any action of our Lord's perfect life.

One is surprised that even hate should be so blind as to assail His perfections. Whatever men may think of our Lord as a teacher, candor demands that they admire His example and award it the highest merit of honor.

Observe, the priests herein brought against our Lord *a charge which they did not attempt to sustain*. How craftily they evaded the task of supplying proof! They brought no witnesses, their evil perjurers were left behind, they even refrained from specific charges, but the general statement that He was a malefactor was supported only by their reputation. “If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you,” as much as to say, “You must take it for granted that He is guilty, or we would not say so. Here is our high priest, can it be supposed that such a gem of an individual would bring a false accusation? We also are the chief priests and the scribes, and teachers of Israel, can it be imagined that persons of our station and sanctity could by any possibility have brought an innocent person before you to be condemned!”

This style of argument I have heard even in these days, we are expected to give up the faith because scientists condemn it, and they are such eminent persons that we ought to accept their dicta without further delay. I confess I am not prepared to accept their infallibility any more than that which hails from Rome. The Roman governor was not to be overridden by priests, neither are we to be led by the nose by pretendedly learned men. “If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you.” Oh, the hypocrisy of this speech! They had tried to bring witnesses, and no witness had been found.

They had suborned false witnesses, but these had so differed in their testimony that the whole thing broke down. They, therefore, go upon another tack, and put their own names at the back of the indictment, as if that were quite enough, and inquiry need go no further. I think I see the scornful glance of Pilate as he bade them judge Him themselves if that was their style of justice, as for him, he must hear an accusation or dismiss them to do their own pleasure if they dare. He knew that through envy they had brought Jesus to him, and he loathed the hypocrites as he heard the wretched syllables sibilating from their sanctimonious lips.

They could not have sustained the charge, and so far they were wise in not attempting the impossible. They might be foolhardy enough to wrest His words, but they hesitated before the task of attacking His deeds. Before His awful holiness they were for the moment out of heart, and knew not what slander to invent. O Lord, we marvel that any men should find fault with You, for You are altogether lovely, and there is in You no spot for falsehood to light upon. But I want to call your attention to this remarkable fact, that although this charge of being a malefactor was a grievous one, a trumped up one, and unsustained by any evidence, yet *it was never denied by the Lord Jesus Christ*.

It was useless to deny it before the priests. He had already challenged them to find fault with His life, saying, "I spoke openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why ask you me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said." His appeal had been unavailing, for it was as useless to argue with them as for a lamb to enter into controversy with a pack of wolves eager to devour. But there might have been some use, one would think, in his answering to Pilate, for Pilate was evidently very favorably impressed with his prisoner, and if the Savior had deigned to give a full account of His life, and to prove that instead of being a malefactor He had gone about doing good, might He not have escaped?

The answer is this, our Lord had come on earth on purpose to be the substitute for guilty men, and so when He was called a malefactor, although it was not a truthful charge, yet He patiently bore the shame of it, as it is written, "He was numbered with the transgressors." He was willing to stand in the transgressor's place, and when they put Him there He did not stir from it. "He is dumb, he opens not his mouth." He says nothing because, though in Him is no sin, He has taken our sin upon Himself.

The question that Pilate put, "What have you done?" was one which Jesus might have grandly answered—"What have I done? I have fed the hungry, I have healed the sick, I have raised the fallen, and I have restored the dead. What have I done? I have lived a self-sacrificing life, caring nothing for Myself or My own honor. I have been the vindicator of God and the friend of man. What have I done? Certainly nothing for wherefore they could put Me to death, but everything why they should accept me as their Leader and their Savior." We hear not a word of this. The exculpation would have been complete, but it was not spoken.

He might have baffled His enemies as He had aforetime vanquished those who came to take Him, so that they went back to their masters, saying, "Never man spoke like this man." He might have cleared Himself before the Roman procurator and by coming forth in triumph, He might have escaped from their teeth, but because He would stand in our stead, therefore when men imagined mischievous things against Him He was as a deaf man, and as a dumb man He opened not His mouth. Let us adore and bless Him for His gracious condescension, His matchless grace in standing in our stead.

Yet further, our Lord willed that by being counted as a transgressor by Pilate He might die the death appointed for malefactors by the Roman law. If the Jews had put our Lord to death for blasphemy, it would have been by stoning, but then, none of the prophecies concerning the Messiah spoke of His being dashed to the ground by stones. The death ordained for Him was crucifixion. John says in the eighteenth chapter at the thirty-second verse, "That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying what death He should die." What was that saying? Is it not the saying in the twelfth chapter of John's gospel at the thirty-second verse, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This He said, signifying what death He should die."

Being lifted up from the earth on the cross was a death which could only come from the Romans, the Jews, as I have said before, executed men by stoning, therefore He must be condemned by the Romans that His own words may be fulfilled. He had spoken even more expressly in a passage recorded by Matthew, in the twentieth chapter at the seventeenth verse, where He had declared how He would die. "And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem: and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again."

In order that the word which He had spoken might be fulfilled, our blessed Master refused to plead before Pilate anything in answer to the question, "What have you done?" He stands as a transgressor, to die a transgressor's death, wherefore forever blessed be his adorable name for His voluntary endurance of penalty for our sakes.

When I think of that word "malefactor," another word leaps to my lips directly. Call Him not malefactor, but **BENEFACTOR**. What a benefactor must He be who in order to benefit us allows

Himself to be branded as a “malefactor!” Only think that He who at this moment sits in the center of adoring angels should have been called, “malefactor,” that He from whose inexhaustible store of goodness all the saints in heaven and on earth are fed should yet be called, “malefactor,” that He who never thought of harm to men, but whose very soul is love, whose every word and thought has been kindness towards this fallen race, should yet be called “malefactor.” O earth, how could you bear so grave a lie against the infinite goodness of the Son of God! And yet, forever blessed be His name, He does not hurl back the charge, for that would have been to ruin us. He meekly bears the scandal for our sakes.

Should not this sweeten every title of reproach that can ever fall upon us? What if they call us ill names! They called the Master of the home “malefactor,” can they call us anything worse? Shall we look for honor where our Captain found nothing but shame? Wherefore let it be our glory to bear shame and reproach for Jesus' sake. So much for the first accusation.

II. Secondly, when the priests and scribes found that merely calling Him a malefactor was not sufficient, these wretched men changed their tactics, and according to Luke, they charged Him with setting up to be A KING.

They said that He wrought sedition; that He forbade to pay tribute unto Caesar, and made Himself out to be a king. These were three great lies, for Jesus had preached peace, and not sedition, His example was submission, not rebellion, His spirit was that of a servant, not that of a turbulent party leader. He had never said that men were not to pay tribute to Caesar, on the contrary, He had said, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's,” and submitted Himself to every ordinance of authority. He had never in their sense set Himself up to be a king, if He had done so, many who were now His accusers might have been His partisans.

The charge against Jesus of setting up to be a king in the sense in which they desired Pilate to understand them *was utterly false*, for when the multitude had been fed, they would have taken Him and made Him a king, but He hid Himself. Nay, so far from wishing to be a king, when one said to Him, “Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me,” He said, “Who made me a judge or a divider over you?” He put aside any approach to interference with the reigning powers. His accusers must have known that if He had willed He had power at His back to have supported His claims, even as He said to Pilate, that, if He had been a king of a worldly dominion, His servants would have fought for Him.

His followers had been brave and courageous, and enthusiastic, and they would, no doubt, have given no end of trouble both to the Jews and to the Romans if their leader had claimed a temporal sovereignty. But our Lord had made Peter put up his sword into its sheath, and healed the wound which he had given. All His life long He had preached peace and love, and a kingdom which is righteousness and peace. He was no rival to Caesar, and they knew it.

And please to notice that this charge of Christ being a king *did not come from the governing power*. When Pilate asked our Lord, “Are you the King of the Jews?” our Savior wisely replied, “Say you this of yourself, or did another tell you it of me? Have you any reason to think that I am a leader of sedition? As the governor of this nation you have to watch carefully, for the people are seditious. Have you ever seen or heard anything of Me that looks like an attack on your authority? Have you anything of your own knowledge that would lead you to bring a charge against Me?”

Pilate, knowing nothing whatever against Him, and indeed scorning the idea that he knew anything about the Jewish people, whom he detested, replied haughtily, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and your own rulers have brought this charge against you, not I.” A great point was gained when Pilate said this, the charge was shown to be a mere invention, since the eagle eye of the Roman procurator had never seen the slightest grounds for it.

It was a frivolous charge on the very face of it. How could that harmless, forsaken man be a peril to Caesar? What had the Roman legions to fear from that solitary sufferer? He was too meek and pure to threaten warfare and strife in the domain of Tiberius. Look at Him, and realize the absurdity of the

situation. Moreover, it would seem a strange thing that the Jewish people should bring before the Roman governor their own king. Is this the way that subjects treat their monarchs? If He be a leader of sedition He does not seem to have succeeded with His countrymen, for the heads of the people are seeking His death. There could be upon the face of it no chance of danger whatever from rebellion which was so summarily put down by the Jews themselves. If they had not been besotted by their rage, they would themselves have shrunk from so absurd a position.

But yet I want you to note very carefully that *the Lord never denied this charge* in the sense in which He chose to understand it. He first explained what He meant by His being a king, and when He had explained it then He openly confessed that it was even so.

First, I say, *He explained what He meant by being a king*, and notice carefully that He did not explain it away. He said, "My kingdom," and also when Pilate said, "Are you a king then?" He said, "You say that I am a king." He was there and then a real king, and He avowed it without reserve. We are constantly told that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom, and this saying is true, but I would have you take heed that you do not spirit away His kingdom as if it were only a pious dream.

Spiritual or not, the kingdom of Christ on earth is real and powerful. It is real none the less, but all the more, because it may fitly be called spiritual. Jesus is even now a king. He said, "I am a king." Some say that His kingdom is not yet, but is reserved for the latter days, but I aver that He is a king today, and that even now JEHOVAH has set Him as king upon the holy hill of Zion. I bless God that He has translated us, "Into the kingdom of his dear Son." "You are the king of glory, O Christ." When I say, "Your kingdom come," I do not mean that it may begin to be set up on earth, but that it may continue to be set up in new places, may be extended and grow, for Jesus has at this very moment a kingdom upon the face of the earth, and they that know the truth belong to it, and recognize Him as the royal witness by whom the kingdom of truth has been founded and maintained.

You remember the remarkable saying which is attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte in his later days at St. Helena, "I have founded a kingdom by force, and it has passed away; but Jesus founded His empire upon love, and therefore it will last forever." Verily, Napoleon spoke the truth—Jesus, the right royal Jesus, is Master of innumerable hearts today. The world knows Him not, but yet He has a kingdom in it which shall ere long break in pieces all other kingdoms. True and loyal hearts are to be found among the sons of men, and in them His name still wakes enthusiasm, so that for Him they are prepared to live and die.

Our Lord is every inch a king, He has His throne of grace, has His scepter of truth, His officers who, like Himself, witness to the truth, and His armies of warriors who wrestle not with flesh and blood, and use no carnal weapons, but yet go forth conquering and to conquer. Our Lord has His palace where He dwells, His chariot in which He rides, His revenues, though they be not treasures of gold and silver, and His proclamations, which are law in His church. His reigning power affects the destiny of the world at this present moment far more than the counsels of the five great powers, by the preaching of the truth His servants shape the ages, and set up and cast down the thrones of earth. There is no prince so powerful as Jesus and no empire so mighty as the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord also said that His kingdom came not from this world, for that, I take it, is the more correct translation of the passage, "My kingdom is not of this world." It came not from this world, it is a substantial kingdom, but it did not spring from the same sources as the kingdoms of the world, neither is it supported, maintained, or increased by the same power as that which the kingdoms of the world depend upon. Christ's kingdom does not depend upon the force of arms, He would have His followers lay these weapons all aside. Christ's kingdom does not depend, as earthly kingdoms too often do, upon craft, policy, and duplicity.

It used to be said that an ambassador was a gentleman who was sent abroad to lie for the good of his country, and I fear it might still describe full many an ambassador. What is the science of diplomacy but the art of deceit? When statesmen are thoroughly honest, and are guided by principle, they are generally suspected, and an outcry is raised that the interests of the country will be sacrificed. But there is no

diplomacy in Christ's rule, everything like crooked policy is of the devil, and not of Christ. He comes to bear witness to the truth, and it is by the truth, not by force nor by craft, that His throne is established among the sons of men, and therefore it is not from this world.

To be a king is indeed so little wrong in the sight of Jesus that it is the ultimate purpose of His coming to earth. He came to save men, did He not? Yes, but still He says, "For this purpose was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," which is another way of saying, "that I might be a king." This is His ultimatum. Christ is a teacher that He may be a king, Christ is an exemplar that He may be a king, Christ is a Savior that He may be a king, this is the great end and objective that He has in His life, His death, His resurrection, and His second coming—that He may set up a kingdom among the sons of men to the glory of God. Oh that this great objective of His mission might be furthered in our time, and consummated speedily in the long-promised age of gold.

The Master tells us that the main force and power of His kingdom lies in the truth. He came to be a King, but where is His scepter? The truth. Where is His sword? It comes out of His mouth, He bears witness to the truth. Where are His soldiers? They are men of truth. Jesus Christ leads on a band of whom He says, "And you are my witnesses." His kingdom consists in witnessing to the truth, and who are they that become His subjects? Why, those that are of the truth, men who, hearing the truth, know the joyful sound and accept it, and feel its power.

Dear hearers, let each one of us ask himself, "Do I belong to His kingdom? Will I have this man to reign over me? Do I desire to get rid of everything in myself that is not true? Am I anxious to put down around me everything that is false and wicked? Do I wish to uphold God's laws, for they are truth? Do I desire to spread the principles of love and kindness, for they are truth? Am I willing to learn, and so become the disciple of the greatest of all teachers, and then, am I willing to bear witness to what I have learned, and so spread the sway of the truth? If so, then I am of His kingdom.

I know that I address many who desire in their hearts today that Christ and His truth may triumph, and they little mind what becomes of themselves. Let but His gospel spread and the principles of righteousness prevail, and as for us, let us live or die, it shall be a matter of small concern. O King, live forever, and we shall find our life in Your life, and glory in promoting Your glory, world without end. Such a spirit is of the truth, and we may assure ourselves that Jesus is our King.

Our Lord, having explained His meaning, confessed that He was a King. This is that to which Paul refers when he says, "The Lord Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession." He did not draw back and say, "I am no King." Pilate might have delivered Him then, but He spoke boldly concerning His blessed, mysterious, and wonderful kingdom, and therefore it was not possible that He should be set free. This, indeed, was His accusation written over His cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews."

Poor Pilate, he did not understand our Lord, even as the men of this world understand not the kingdom of Christ. He said to Him, "What is truth?" and without waiting for a reply he went out to the Jews. Ah, brethren, let us never ourselves deny that Jesus is a king, but we shall deny it if we do not live according to His bidding. Oh you that claim to be Christ's, but do not live according to Christ's laws, you practically deny that He is a king.

I dread the men who say, "We believe, and therefore we are saved," and then do not live in holiness, for these divide our Lord's offices, setting up His priesthood and denying His kingship. Half a Christ is no Christ—a Christ who is a priest but never a king is not the Christ of God. Oh brethren, live as those who feel that every word of Jesus is law, and that you must do what He bids you, as He bids you, and because He bids you, and so let all men know that unto you Jesus is both Lord and God.

III. I conclude by noticing THE ACQUITTAL which Pilate gave to our Lord Jesus.

He had heard the charge of being a malefactor, to which the prisoner pleaded nothing, he had heard the charge of his being a king, which the prisoner had most satisfactorily explained, and now Pilate coming out to the people said, "I find in Him no fault at all." Pilate, you have well spoken. Your verdict is typical of the verdict of all who have ever *examined* Christ.

Some have examined Him with an unfriendly eye, but in proportion as they have been candid in the observation of facts, they have been struck with His life and spirit. It is a very rare thing to hear even the infidel rail at the character of Jesus, in fact, some of the foremost skeptics as to our Lord's teaching have been remarkably impressed with admiration of His life. No character like that of Jesus is to be seen in history, nay not even in romance.

If anyone says the four gospels are forgeries, let him try to write a fifth, which shall be like the other four. Why, you cannot add an incident to the life of Christ, its details are unique, the fancy cannot imagine a fresh incident which could be safely joined on to that which is recorded. Every critic would cry out, "This is not genuine." The life of Jesus is a roll of cloth of gold, of the manufacture of which the art is utterly lost. His spotless character stands alone and by itself, and all true critics are compelled to say they find no fault at all in Him.

Let me add that this verdict of Pilate is the verdict of all that have ever *associated* with Christ. One disciple who was with Christ betrayed Him, but he spoke nothing against Him. Nay, the last witness of Judas before he hanged himself was this, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." If there had been a fault in Jesus, the traitor would have spied it out, his unquiet conscience would have been glad enough to find therein a sedative, but even he was compelled to say, "I have betrayed the innocent blood." "Which of you convinces me of sin?" is the challenge of Jesus, to which there is no reply.

Some of us have *lived with Christ spiritually*. In the course of His providence He has brought some of us very low by sickness, or by bereavement, or loss. Everyone saved by our Lord has come under the discipline of His house, for "whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Now, what is the verdict of all here present who know Jesus, our king? For my part, I find no fault at all in Him. He is everything that is lovely. He is all my salvation and all my desire. Do you not think that out of the millions of Christians who have lived hoping in Christ some one would have told us if it is His habit to disappoint His people? Out of so many believers who dwell with Him surely some one or other of them, when they came to die, would have told us if He is not all that He professes to be. Would not some one or other have confessed, "I trusted in Christ and He has not delivered me, it is all a delusion"? Surely, out of the many we have seen depart, we would have found some one or two that would have let out the secret, and have said, "He is a deceiver. He cannot save, He cannot help, He cannot deliver." But never one dying believer throughout the ages has spoken ill of Him, but all have said, "We find no fault at all in Him."

Mark you that will be the verdict of everyone among you. If any of you reject Christ, when you shall stand at His judgment seat to be condemned because you believe not in Him, and when that withering word, "Depart, you cursed!" shall consign you to your everlasting portion, you shall then be obliged to say, "I find no fault at all *in him*." There was no failure in His blood, the failure was in my want of faith, no failure in His Spirit—the failure was in my obstinate will, no failure in His promise—the failure was that I would not receive Him, there was no fault at all in Him. He never spurned me. He never refused to hear my prayers. If my Sabbaths were wasted, it was no fault of His, if I defied the gospel, it was no fault of His, if I have perished, my blood is at my own door. "I find no fault at all in him." From all parts of creation shall go up one general attestation to His perfection. Heaven and earth and hell shall all join the common verdict, "We find no fault at all in him."

I will send you away when I give you three practical words to think of. The first is this—Beware of an external religion, for the men that called Jesus malefactor and falsely accused Him were very religious people, and would not go into Pilate's hall for fear of polluting themselves. They were strong in rituals, but weak in morals. None are so inveterate against the principles of the Gospel as those whose religion consists in form and ceremony but does not affect their hearts.

I charge you rend your hearts and not your garments. Follow Christ spiritually, follow Christ in your very souls, or else sacraments will be your ruin, and even in trying to keep yourselves from ceremonial defilement you will be defiling yourselves with hypocrisy.

The next thing is to charge you, dear friends, and to charge myself also, to shun all proud worldliness like that of Pilate. Pilate treats the whole matter cavalierly, he is a proud and haughty Roman, he hates the people whom he governs, and though he has a conscience, and at first he shows a tenderness towards his prisoner, yet his chief end and aim was to keep his office and amass money, and therefore innocent blood must be spilt. He must please the Jews, even if he murders the "Just One."

This selfish worldliness in which a man makes his gold and himself his god always treats religion with contempt. The man minds the main chance, and sneeringly cries, "What is truth?" He knows what money is and what power is, but what is truth? It is a dream, a folly to him, and he despises it. There are persons around us now, clever time-serving men, with grand notions of their own abilities, and to them Jesus and His Gospel are matters for old women, servant girls, and what they call a Puritan crew.

Such topics are not for gentlemen of thought, culture, and understanding, like their high and mighty selves. "What is truth?" say they. They are rather favorably inclined to religion, that is to say, they do not persecute, but they despise, which in some respects is worse. They say, "We are agnostics, we have no particular views, we are large-hearted, and let every man think as he chooses, but still there is nothing in it, it is all matter of opinion. One man says this is the truth, and another says that is the truth, and how are we to know? The fact is, there is no such thing as fixed truth at all.

***"For differing creeds let graceless zealots fight;
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right. "***

This is this great man's conclusion of the matter, and yet it so happens that this gentleman's life is not in the right at all, and therefore on his own showing he has not much joy of his pretty rhyme. I think I see him as he turns on his heels with, "What is truth?" Let him be a warning to you. Come not near to such arrogant trifling. Be always foolish enough to be willing to judge candidly. Be so little clever as to be willing still to learn. Be so little certain of your own infallibility that you will at least hear reason, and will inquire whether these things be so. Alas, I fear that through worldly pride many will have it said of them, as it is said of the Roman governor every day in the creed, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." Oh, how many times has Christ suffered under just such people as Pontius Pilate!

Last of all, let us all submit ourselves to Jesus our King. Wayworn and weary, emaciated and broken down, with His face more marred than that of any man, yet let us bow before Him and say, "All hail, You King of the Jews. You are our King forever and ever." If we are willing thus to acknowledge Him as our King in His shame and derision, He will by and by honor us when He comes in the glory of the Father, and all His holy angels with Him. Then shall He cause it to be seen that He has made us who follow Him to be kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign with Him forever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 18:28-40, PSALM 2

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—414, 431, 360

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