

“THE KING OF THE JEWS”
NO. 3123

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*“And Pilate wrote a title, and put in on the cross. And the writing was,
JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.”*
John 19:19

IT was the usual custom of the Romans, when a man was put to death by crucifixion, to affix to the cross, somewhere where it might be read, an account of his crime. His name and title would be given, and the accusation that had been brought against him, so that all who passed by might read the reason why he had been put to such an ignominious death.

Our Savior, therefore, being numbered with the transgressors, must be treated in all respects as they were. If their accusations were published, so must He have His accusation published among the sons of men. How wondrous was the condescension that He, whom all heaven adored as the ever-blessed Son of the Highest, should be hanged upon a tree, and that He should have His accusation written up over His head just as if He had been a common malefactor.

I wish we could realize both the dignity of His person and the shame to which He was exposed. If we could realize this we should be filled with grief for Him, and with thankfulness to Him that He condescended to die the death of the cross. I wish it were possible for us to now stand at the foot of the cross with Mary, and John, and the other disciples, and to hear the ribaldry and scorn for a moment, and then to look up, and see that sorrowful face, and that tortured body, and to read in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.”

It was a very remarkable thing that Pilate should have written, as Matthew and Luke say that he did, “This is the King of the Jews,” and we do not at all wonder that the chief priests said to Pilate, “Write not, the King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.” But Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

Divine providence always has its way. It matters not who may be the persons concerned, God knows how to work His own will with them. It was His purpose that His Son should not die upon the cross without a public proclamation of His innocence, and an official recognition that He was what He had said He was, namely, the King of the Jews.

Who was to put up such a notice over His head as He hung there? Peter might have been bold enough to attempt to do it, but he would certainly not have succeeded, for the Roman legionaries jealously guarded every place of execution. Even John, daring as he might have been in such a crisis, could not have achieved the task. It was best that it should be done by authority, done by the Roman governor, done with an official pen, and so secured that no envious chief priest dared to pluck it down, and no hand of a scoffer could be uplifted to blot out its testimony.

It was privileged writing because it was written by the pen of a Roman official, and there it must stay, under the authority of the Roman law as long as the body of Jesus hung upon the cross. See what God can do. He can make the vacillating Pilate to become stubborn, and He can make him resolve to do what one would have thought would have been the last thing he would have done. Though his motive probably was to ridicule the Savior, yet the thing was done as God would have it, and Jesus on the cross hung there proclaimed by Roman authority as “the King of the Jews.”

It may appear to you, at first sight, that there is not much importance in this fact, but I think I shall be able to show you that there is if you will sit down now, at the foot of the cross, and look up to your crucified Lord, and read this writing again. I shall ask you to read it in two lights, first, *in reference to man*, and secondly, *in reference to Jesus Christ Himself*.

I. First, read Pilate's proclamation IN REFERENCE TO MAN.

This is a *picture of how the world rejects the Savior*. The Savior had truly come into the world. That He might be known to be a Savior, He had taken the name of Jesus, that is, Savior. That He might be known as one who was very humble and lowly, He had condescended to dwell among men of the very humblest kind, and therefore, He had chosen to dwell at Nazareth, and to be called the Nazarene. Thus He was known as Jesus, the Savior, and as Jesus of Nazareth, an approachable and lowly Savior.

Jesus had come into the world to save men, and He had commenced His mission by saving many from diseases which had been regarded as incurable. He had opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, given speech to the dumb, cleansing to lepers, and He had even raised the dead to life. There were many also whom He had healed of spiritual infirmities, for He had given faith to the faithless, and holiness and excellence of character to those who, until then, had lived in sin.

He was indeed Jesus the Savior, but how did men receive Him? Did they come and fall at His feet, and kiss the very dust He trod upon? One might not have been surprised if they had done so, but they did not. Did they gather around Him with joyful clamor, all sick ones eager to touch the hem of His garment that they might be made whole? There were a few who did so, "a remnant according to the election of grace" who received Him, and to them "He gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name."

But it was not so with the mass of mankind, discerning in Him something strange and singular, seeing in Him no enmity, no sinful anger, no pride, no bitterness, seeing in Him only superlative love, yet they must treat Him most foully, for His life was spent in poverty and reproach, and at last He was condemned to die on the accursed tree.

The world hung Him up upon the felon's gibbet, and in doing so, men said, "This is the Saviour, the Nazarene, and this is how we treat Him. We do not want to be saved from sin, for we love it. We do not want to be saved from rebellion, and to be brought into peace with God through Jesus Christ, so this is what we do with God's Ambassador. This is how we serve Him who comes with words of reconciliation and grace upon His lips, we hang Him up to die, for we do not want Him." This is only a specimen of what all sinful hearts do, till they are changed by grace, they will not have the Savior to rule over them.

"Oh!" says someone, "you bring too harsh a charge against me!" Is it so? Have you received Jesus? Do you believe in Him? Has He become your Savior? If not, why not? Can you give any justifiable reason for your unbelief and rejection of Him? It seems to me, and I leave your conscience to decide whether it is so, that by remaining in unbelief, you do practically say, "I prefer to be damned forever rather than believe in Jesus Christ!"

At any rate, that is your choice at this present moment, and if a man will show his objection to Christ to so great an extent that he would be cast into hell sooner than let Jesus save him, you may depend upon it that there dwells in his heart sufficient enmity to Christ to hang Him up again upon the gibbet if He were here once more.

Christ would be hanged tomorrow if He came here among unregenerate hearts, ay, by the very people that hang their ivory crosses about their necks, and put them on their prayer books, and fix them on their walls. They would cry, as their predecessor did of old, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." To this day, when substitution is preached, and the blood of atonement, and salvation by simple faith in Jesus, and not by "sacraments" and priests and good works, men foam at the mouth with rage, for they still hate the Christ, the only Savior of the sons of men.

Next I see here that *man slays the incarnate God*, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." Whether Pilate intended to indicate that He was the Messiah, at any rate the Jews saw that this would be the

meaning attached to His inscription over Christ’s head, it would be said that their Messiah was crucified, consequently they desired that the writing might be altered, but Pilate would not alter it.

Now, the Messiah of the Jews was none other than God in human flesh. Did not Isaiah speak of Him as Immanuel, God with us? He was that promised “Seed of the woman” who was to bruise the old serpent’s head. This was He of whom David said, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” He was David’s Son, yet He was also David’s Lord, and there He is, He has come among men, and as God He came to tabernacle in human flesh, and dwell among men.

It is a wonderful story that tells us how He was found as a babe in Bethlehem’s manger, where the shepherds came to adore Him, and how He grew up among men as a man like other men, working at the carpenter’s bench in the shop of His reputed father, yet all the while He was God veiled beneath the humble form of the Son of Mary. Even when the time came for His manifestation unto Israel, He was still veiled, though His Godhead every now and then flashed through the veil of His humanity.

He bade the sea be still when its wild uproar threatened to engulf the vessel in which He and His disciples were. He worked such wonders that it was clear that all things obeyed Him. The fish came in swarms from the deep to the net which He had bidden His disciples cast into the sea, and the loaves and fishes were multiplied in His hands and theirs, through His miraculous power. Men could not help seeing that He was more than man, and that He was indeed the Son of God, as He claimed to be.

Yet the husbandmen, to whom He was sent by His Father, to ask for the rent of the vineyard that had been let to them, said, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.” In other words, they said, “This is the God-man, let us do with Him what we would do with God if we could,” so they hanged Him up like a felon, and put a label above His head, as much as to say to God Himself, “This is what we have done to One who was more like You than any man we have ever heard of before, and One who says that He and You are One.”

O sirs, this wicked world never went so far in wickedness as it displayed on that occasion. The essence of every sin is enmity against God, and when any sin is analyzed, it is always found that its essence is this, “No God.” Sin is a stab at the heart of God. Every time we sin, we practically say, “We do not want God’s government, we do not want God’s laws, we do not want God.”

I once heard an eloquent divine, who had been accusing men of great sin, finish his indictment by using this remarkable expression, “this deicidal world.” There he reached the climax of truth, for this is a deicidal world. It cannot actually put God to death, but it would do so if it could, and in putting Christ to death it showed the enmity towards God that was really in its heart.

The world would not put its own god to death, the god that men imagine, the god that their own intellects fabricate, the god like themselves, of whom I spoke this morning [See Sermon #1206, Heart-Knowledge of God], but as for the God of the Bible, there are millions of men who would be glad to put that God out of His own universe if they could, yet He is JEHOVAH, the one living and true God.

Thirdly, I see here that *man’s chief objection to Christ is His authority*, for the pith of that inscription was, “Jesus the *King*.” Pilate did not write, “This is Jesus the Teacher,” or many might have said, “Let Him teach what He pleases, it is no concern of ours. We do not care what the seers see, or what they say.” Pilate did not put up, “This is Jesus the Priest.” Many would be quite content to let Him be the great High Priest if they also might be priests.

But Pilate wrote, “This is Jesus the King,” and that is the target at which they shoot all their arrows. You remember that the writer of the second psalm says, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

The resolve of human nature until it is renewed is always this, “We will not have this Man to reign over us.” Men might be willing for Christ to save them, but not for Him to reign over them. Such laws as these—“Thou shalt love your neighbour as thyself,” “Thou shalt forgive till seventy times seven,” the law of love, the law of gentleness, the law of kindness—man says that he admires them, but when these

laws come home to him, and lay hold of the reins of his ambition, cramp his covetousness, and condemn his self-righteousness, straightway he is offended, and when Christ says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," when He begins to teach the necessity of absolute purity, and to say that even a lascivious glance of the eye is a sin, then men reply, "His rule will never do for us," and they hang Him up to die because they will not submit to His authority.

Once more, we learn from this narrative that *man ridicules Christ's kingdom*. Pilate did not hate Christ, he probably did not think enough of Him to expend any of his hatred upon Him. I have no doubt that he thought that Jesus was a poor enthusiast, who had been living alone so long that He had addled His brains. He was well meaning and perhaps clever, but at the same time, not the sort of man for a Roman governor to dispute with. He was very sorry to have to put Him to death, for there were so many good points about the poor creature that he did not wish to let His enemies destroy Him.

When the question of Christ's kingdom came up, I can imagine how scoffingly Pilate asked Him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" How contemptuously he must have looked down upon such a poor emaciated creature, who seemed to be despised by everybody, as Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world," and Pilate asked, "Art thou a king, then?" half laughing as he spoke.

He must have felt as if he could fairly laugh Him to scorn, and I have no doubt that it was in that spirit that he wrote, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews," doing it in a vein of grim sardonic humor, first towards the Jews, and secondly, towards Christ Himself, as much as to say, "This is the great King that the Jews have been looking for. They are going to fight Caesar and get free, and this is the ringleader who is to help them to defeat all the legions of haughty Rome."

Amongst the ungodly, at the present day, the idea of a spiritual kingdom is quite beyond their comprehension, they cannot make out what it is. The relation between church and state will not be settled by the statesmen of any political party. There is a very singular relation between the two, though they are as dissimilar as materialism is from spirit. The realms of the two often overlap one another, you cannot draw a line and say, "So far is the state, and so far is the church."

The fact is the true church of God is never subordinate to the state, it moves in another sphere altogether, and rules after another fashion. A spiritual kingdom, according to some people, means certain laws and regulations that are drawn up by the bishops and synods and councils, but that kind of kingdom is no more spiritual than an Act passed by the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

It is only another kingdom of the flesh, an ecclesiastical state of a similar kind to the secular state, but as for the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, it is not a thing that you can see with your eyes or understand after the manner of men. "Ye must be born again" in order to get into it, or even to see it. [See sermon #3121, The Necessity of Regeneration].

It is too ethereal to be checked by human legislation. It is a mighty power which Christ has set up in this world, a power mightier than all secular states combined, a kingdom like the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which will break in pieces every other power, and fill the whole earth in God's appointed time.

Oh, that we saw its power more manifest nowadays in the hearts of men, the power of that kingdom of which Christ is the King, and this blessed Book is the law, and the Holy Spirit is the great Executive, and each of us is a servant in the courts of the great King living and acting according to His will.

"Oh!" you say, "this is ridiculous." Yes, I thought you would say that, that is what the world always says of the kingdom of Christ, that it is ridiculous. They can understand a kingdom in which there is a head like the Pope, and in which there are cardinals, bishops and priests, they can understand the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Archbishop of York, and all that appertains to Episcopalians, but to know that we are one with Christ, that He has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, that His saints are to reign with Him forever, and that the weapons of our warfare, though not carnal, are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds"—they do not understand it, nor do they want to understand it.

This is why they still hang up Christ the King, and say, "If this is His kingdom, we do not want to belong to it, and we do not believe in it. Away with it, it is not worthy of our consideration, it is only a few low-minded fellows who will always be the subjects of such a kingdom as that."

This is "as it was in the beginning," and "is now," but not as it "ever shall be, world without end," for the King is coming, a second time, in all the splendor of His glory, and He will let the world know that although His kingdom is not like others, and is not to be kept up by gold, and pomp, and rank, and dignity, and physical force, yet it is a kingdom which shall last when earthly princes and thrones shall all have passed away, and everyone who belongs to that kingdom shall possess a crown and a glory before which all the pomp of this world shall pale forever.

II. Now secondly, I have to ask your attention to the subject in quite another way, IN REFERENCE TO CHRIST. What did that inscription over His head mean?

It meant, first, that *Christ's honor was clear*. Look at the inscription over the head of that thief who is hanging on the next cross. "Put to death for robbery in the mountains, where he was taken red-handed, having stabbed one of the guards who attempted to arrest him." You quite understand that inscription, and you pass on to Jesus, and you want to know about the crime of which He has been guilty, you are quite sure that they will put over His head an account of the worst thing He has ever done.

There are the chief priests and scribes, and a multitude of the Jews watching to see what is written, and there is Pilate wanting to excuse his own conscience. If he can write anything that will exonerate him from the guilt of putting Christ to death, he will be sure to write it, so he takes his pen in his hand, and he writes, "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews."

"Well," you say, "is that all that can be brought against Him, that He is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews?" Yes, that is His only offense, they cannot sum up His guilt in any other words. His crime is that He is what He is, that He was a Savior, that He dwelt at Nazareth, and that He was the King of the Jews.

Now, no exoneration of His character could be better than that of this official accusation against Him, and if this accusation brings nothing against Him, think how much may be said in His favor by His friends. When a man is brought before the judge, his accuser is quite sure to say all he can against him, and when Christ was about to be put to death, those who were responsible for that colossal crime had to make out as grave a charge against Him as they could.

But this was all they could do, they could not bring anything else against Him except that He was Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. See then, how absolutely without blemish and without spot was the Lamb of our Passover. See how He "knew no sin," though He was made a sin-offering for us, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Exult, Christians, in this public and official testimony to the spotless purity of His whole life and character.

Next, as far as Christ is concerned, we may view this inscription as *the explanation of His death* as well as the clearing of His character. Keep that superscription clearly in your mind's eye, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." That is the reason why He died. Jesus died, first because He was Jesus, because He was the Savior.

That is the meaning of it, not that He might be made an example merely, not that He might bear witness to the truth only, but that cruel death means atonement, and salvation by atonement. Let us all look up to Him upon the cross. If we have done so before, let us look up to Him again, and say, "Yes, blessed Lord, we see that You did die, and that You did die to save us, and we magnify You because this was the cause of Your death, that You were the Savior."

The whole title that Pilate wrote signified that Christ was the Messiah, and He died because He was the Messiah. "Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself." This was the wonderful language of the prophet Daniel, "cut off, but not for himself," cut off because He was the Sent One of God, the Anointed of the Most High. The prophet Zachariah had also recorded the words of JEHOVAH, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts."

There, beloved, you have the whole reason for Christ’s death condensed into a sentence. Jesus dies because He is the Savior, the anointed and prophesied Messiah, sent of God to be the King of the Jews and of the Gentles too.

But thirdly, as far as Christ was concerned, this inscription over His head was *a claim which was there and then announced*. He is hanging on the cross, and there is no trumpeter to make a proclamation of His kingship, but He does not need any such herald, for the same soldiers who fasten His hands to the wood fasten up an inscription which is the best proclamation possible, for it is in three different languages that all mankind may read it, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.” He claims to be King, so stand at the foot of the cross, I pray you, and acknowledge His claim.

If you would have Jesus to be your Savior, you must have Him as your King, you must submit to His government, for He claims the right to rule over all who acknowledge Him to be Jesus, yea, more than that, He claims to rule all mankind, for all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and we are bidden to proclaim His kingdom throughout the whole world, and to say to all men, “Jesus of Nazareth is your King, bow down before Him.

Ye kings, bow before Him, for He is King of kings, ye lords and nobles, bow before Him, for He is Lord of lords, and all ye sons and daughters of men, bow at His feet, for He must reign, and even if you are His enemies, He must reign over you, in spite of all your enmity and opposition, you must be brought to lie at His feet. The claims of Christ therefore, were published even from the tree on which He died, so do not resist them, but willingly yield yourselves up to Jesus now, and let Him be King to you henceforth and forever.

And then, not only was a claim of His sovereignty made by the affixing of this title, but *His reign was there and then proclaimed*. In an earthly monarchy, as soon as one king is gone, it is usual to proclaim His successor, and by that accusation written up over the head of Christ, a proclamation was made throughout all the earth that Jesus had assumed the throne, and He has never ceased to reign. He went back to His Father and returned again to the earth, and dwelt here for forty days, and then His feet left mount Olivet, and He ascended to His throne, and there He sits “expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.”

His kingdom is established, do you all belong to it? It is a kingdom that, in a certain sense, was recognized on the cross by Pilate’s proclamation, though it had existed long before, for His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Do you belong to it, or are you outside of it, opposed to it, or indifferent to it? Remember that he that is not with Christ is against Him. Those who are not on His side, He reckons to be on the other side.

Are you, my brother or sister, in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, I know that you look with delight upon that inscription, and as you trust to the blood of Christ to cleanse you, you cast your eye up to that dear head that was crowned with thorns, and rejoice to think that Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, is also your King and Lord and Savior.

I want to make just this other remark about this inscription. Inasmuch as Pilate would not alter it, it seems to me *that God set forth to mankind that He would never have it altered*. Pilate could have sent for that inscription, and with a few strokes of his pen, could have inserted the words that the chief priests wanted, “*He said*, I am King of the Jews.” But Pilate would not do it, and the High Priest could not do it, and the devil could not do it, and all the devils in hell, and all the wicked men upon earth, with all their rage, cannot do it now.

God has said it as well as Pilate “What I have written, I have written.” “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.” He must reign, and no power can ever take away His kingdom from Him! His church still prays, “Thy kingdom come,” and that kingdom is yet to come in all its fullness when the whole of Israel shall be gathered together, and shall accept Him as their Lord and King. Yea, more than that, for “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.”

Dearly beloved friends, this is the conclusion of the whole matter, *let us cheerfully accept Him as our King*. Have we done so? Then let us try to push His conquests on yet further, and seek to extend the boundaries of His kingdom. Are you doing this? Then, do it yet more earnestly, and do it with the right instrument, for the great weapon of conquest is the cross. It was on the cross that the proclamation was first lifted up and it is by the Cross that it must be carried to the ends of the earth—not by human learning or eloquence, not by bribery, or the help of the state, and I know not what besides, but by the setting forth of Christ evidently crucified among the sons of men.

The cross is its own battle-axe and weapon of war. “In this sign shalt thou conquer.” Let the whole church preach Christ more, and live Christ more, and then the proclamation of His kingdom, which was first fastened up on that cross, shall be emblazoned throughout the whole world, and the power of His kingdom shall be felt to the very ends of the earth.

I looked into the darkness, and I thought I saw a cross before me, and I saw Him who did once hang upon it, but as I looked at it, that cross seemed to grow. It seemed to become a tree, and I saw it strike its roots down deep, until the lowest depths of human misery had been touched and blessed by them. Then I saw that tree tower on high, piercing the clouds, passing through the very firmament up above the stars, lifting believers up upon it, and bearing them to the very throne of God by its majestic power.

Then I saw that tree stretch forth its mighty branches on every side. Their shadow fell across this highly-favored land of ours, and also fell across the land on the other side of the sea. As I watched, the blessed branches stretched out to Europe, to Asia, to Africa, to America, and to Australia also. I watched it grow till it became so vast a tree that its shadow seemed to cover the whole earth, and I blessed and adored the God of heaven that He had instituted so mighty a power for the blessing of the sons of men.

O Jesus, once crucified but now exalted, so let it be, and let us be Thy humble instruments in promoting the extension of Thy blessed reign, and we will ever adore Thee, as we do now, not only as “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews,” but as “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.”

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOHN 19:1-37

Verse 1. *Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.*

This was one of the most terrible punishments to which a man could be sentenced. The Roman scourge was no trifle. It tore off the quivering flesh of the agonized sufferer, for it was constructed on purpose to do so. It was generally made of the sinews of oxen, intertwined with the knuckle bones of sheep, and small slivers of bone. This torture our blessed Savior endured. These are the stripes with which we are healed.

2. *And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe.*

Mockery was blended with cruelty. They might have made Him a crown, yet surely it need not have been one of thorns unless they intended to put Him to the utmost torment that they could conceive. By this crown of thorns our blessed Lord was crowned King of the curse, for the earth was cursed through Adam’s sin, and part of the sentence pronounced by God in the garden of Eden was, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.” So Christ wore the mark of the curse which man’s sin had brought upon the world.

3. *And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.*

This was the homage which the Son of God received from men, harmless and gentle, He came here with no purpose but that of doing good, and this is how mankind treated Him.

4-5. *Pilate therefore went forth again, and said unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate said unto them, Behold the man!*

Was there ever such a sight of majesty in misery before or since? Yet He needed not to endure all that ignominy, He was no vanquished monarch unable to maintain His own rights. He was still “over all, God blessed for ever,” and He could have smitten everyone there to death if He had pleased to do so. But He was the Lamb of God’s passover, so He meekly suffered.

6-7. *When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him. We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*

They no doubt understood that He claimed to be divine and so He did. I have heard some say that He was a good man, but not God. If He was not God, He was certainly not a good man, for no good man, who was only a man, would claim to be God, or lead others to believe that He was divine. If He was not actually divine, He was a rank impostor, but He was divine, and therefore we worship and adore Him equally with the Father and the Spirit.

8-10. *When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*

Pilate talks like some great one, yet how contemptibly little he was, vacillating, cowardly, unable to do what he knew was right. His poor victim who stood before him was infinitely greater in character than he was.

11. *Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*

Christ referred to Judas, and through him to the Jews who had conspired to put Him to death, but what tenderness it was on the part of Jesus, to make an excuse as it were even for Pilate! He was notable for making excuses for the guilty. That was a remarkable excuse that He pleaded for His murderers, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” There was never another such a tender heart as His, He was so gentle and so kind that all their cruelty only moved Him to pity them, and pray for them.

12-14. *And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.*

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he said unto the Jews, Behold your King! [See sermon #1353, Ecce Rex]

What mockery there was in Pilate’s use of this title, and yet how true it was! They asked to have Christ put to death, yet He was their King. Their accusation was transparently false, and Pilate made them see that it was so.

15-17. *But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.*

The inspired writers seem to delight to give us the Hebrew names of these notable places that are linked with Christ’s last agonies, and they are still very precious to Christians, Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha—three names never to be forgotten by those who were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ.

18. *Where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.*

As if to show that they thought Him the worst of the three, and therefore gave Him—shall I call it the place of chief dishonor?

19-20. *And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.*

So that all who gathered around the cross might read it.

21-22. *Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.*

He could be stubborn about some things, which shows that he had strength of mind if he had chosen to use it, yet he was beaten to and fro like a shuttlecock by these wicked men, and seemed to have no power to resist them.

23. *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments,—*

For they had stripped Him. He must be naked because sin makes us naked, and His garments must be a covering for us. They “took his garments,”—

23-24. *And made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled,—*

They knew nothing about that ancient prophecy, yet God ordained that they should act thus, “that the scripture might be fulfilled,”—

24. *Which saith; They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.*

Doubtless, on the dice there fell the blood of Christ, yet they still gambled there. There is, perhaps, no sin which so effectually hardens the heart as that of gambling, it is a sin with which Christians should not have even the remotest connection.

25-30. *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: [See sermons #421, “It Is Finished!” and #2344, Christ’s Dying Word for His Church]

Consummatum est. “The work is done, redemption is accomplished; the salvation of My people is forever secured.”

30-37. *And he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

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