

MOCKED OF THE SOLDIERS

NO. 2824

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 29, 1903.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand:
and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!”
Matthew 27:29.*

IT is a shameful spectacle where cruelty uses its keenest instrument to cut, not into the flesh, but into the very spirit, for scorn, contempt, insult and ridicule, are as painful to the mind and heart as a scourge is to the body—and they cut like the sharpest lance. These Roman soldiers were a rough body of men—fierce, courageous, terrible in battle, uncouth, untaught, uncivilized, little better than barbarians. And when they had this unique King in their power, they made the most of their opportunity to torment Him. Oh, how they laughed to think that He should call Himself a King—this poor, emaciated creature who looked as if He would faint and die in their hands—whose blessed visage was marred more than that of any of the sons of men! It must have seemed to them a sorry jest that He should be a rival to imperial Caesar, so they said, “If He is a King, let us clothe Him with royal purple,” and they flung over His shoulders a soldier’s tunic. “As He is a King, let us plait Him a crown,” and they made it of thorns. Then they bowed the knee in mock homage to the Man whom His own people despised, whom even the mob rejected and whom the chief men of the nation abhorred. It seemed to them that He was such a poor, miserable, dejected Creature that all they could do was to make fun of Him and treat Him as the butt for their utmost ridicule.

These Roman soldiers had in them, as men, a spirit which I sometimes grieve to see in boys at this present day. That same cruel spirit that will torture a bird or a beetle, or hunt a dog or cat simply because it looks miserable and because it is in their power—that was the sort of spirit that was in these soldiers. They had never been taught to avoid cruelty. No, cruelty was the element in which they lived. It was worked into their very being! It was their recreation. Their grandest holiday was to go and sit in those tiers of seats at the Coliseum, or at some provincial amphitheatre and watch lions contending with men, or wild beasts tearing one another in pieces. They were trained and accustomed to cruelty—they seemed to have been suckled upon blood and to have been fed on such food as made them capable of the utmost cruelty—and, therefore, when Christ was in their hands, He was in a sorry case, indeed. They called together the whole band and put a purple robe upon Him and a crown of thorns upon His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed their knees before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they spat upon Him and took the reed from His hand, and struck Him on the head.

Now we will leave those Roman soldiers and the Jews that had a hand in persecuting Him, for he that delivered Him unto them had committed even greater sin. Neither Pilate nor his legionaries were the chief criminals at that time, as we well know. From this incident in our Lord’s life, I think we may learn, first, *lessons for the heart*. And, secondly, *lessons for the conscience*.

I. First, we have here A SET OF LESSONS FOR OUR HEART.

Beloved, we begin with this one. Where I see the great Substitute for sinners put to such shame, scorn and ridicule, my heart says to itself, “*See what sin deserves?*” There is nothing in the world that more richly deserves to be despised, abhorred, condemned, than sin! If we look at it aright, we shall see that it is the most abominable thing, the most shameful thing in the whole universe. Of all the things that ever were, this is the thing which most of all deserves to be loathed

and spurned. It is not a thing of God's creating, remember—it is an abortion—a phantom of the night which plucked a host of angels from their thrones in Heaven, drove our first parents out of Paradise and brought upon us unnumbered miseries.

Think, for a minute, what sin is, and you will see that it deserves ridicule for its folly. What is sin? It is rebellion against the Omnipotent, a revolt against the Almighty. What utter folly that is! Who shall hurl himself against the bosses of Jehovah's buckler and not be dashed in pieces? Who shall rush upon the point of His spear and hope to vanquish Him? Laugh to scorn such folly as that! Under that aspect, sin is the apex of folly, the climax of absurdity—for what power can ever stand up against God and win the day?

But, further, sin deserves to be scorned because it is a wanton attack upon One who is full of goodness, justice and truth. Note that evil thing that assails the Most High and brand it so that the mark of the iron shall abide on it forever! Set it up in the public pillory and let all true hearts and hands hurl scorn upon it for having disobeyed the perfect Law of God, angered the generous Creator and Preserver of men, done despite to Eternal Love and infinite damage to the best interests of the human race! It is a ridiculous thing because it is fruitless and must end in being defeated. It is a shameful thing because of its wanton, malicious, unprovoked attack upon God. If you will look back a little and consider what sin attempted to do, you will see the reason why it should be shamed for its audacity. "You shall be as gods," said he who was the mouthpiece of sin—but are we, by nature, like gods? Are we not more like devils? And he who uttered that lie—even Satan—did he succeed as he expected when he dared to rebel against his Creator? See how his former glory has vanished! How are you fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning, and how is your brightness quenched in everlasting night! Yet sin, speaking through the lips of Satan, talked about being a king and of making all of us kings—but it has only degraded us to the dunghill and to utter beggary! Yes, to worse than that—to death and Hell! What spitting, sin deserves! If it is to be crowned, let it be crowned with thorns! Bow not your knee to it, but pour upon it all the scorn you can! Every true and honest heart in Heaven, among the angels and the glorified spirits, and on earth, among sanctified men and women, must look upon sin as a thing worthy of unspeakable contempt. May God make sin as contemptible in our sight as Christ appeared to be to the Roman soldiers! May we scoff at its temptations. May we scorn its proffered rewards. And may we never bow our hearts to it in any degree whatever, since God has set us free from its accursed thralldom!

That is the first lesson for our hearts to learn from the mockery of our Savior by the soldiers—see what a contemptible thing sin is.

Learn, next, my dear Brothers and Sisters, *how low our glorious Substitute stooped for our sake*. In Him was no sin either of nature or of act. He was pure, entirely without spot before God, Himself, yet, as our Representative, He took our sin upon Himself. "He was made sin for us," says the Scripture most emphatically. And, inasmuch as He was regarded as being the sinner, though in Him was no sin, it naturally followed that He should become the object of contempt. But what a wonder that it should be so! He, who created all things by the word of His power and by whom all things consist—He who counted it not robbery (not a thing to be grasped) to be equal with God—sits in an old chair to be made a mimic king and to be mocked and spat upon! All other miracles put together are not equal to this miracle! This one rises above them all and out-miracles all miracles—that God, Himself, having espoused our cause and assumed our Nature, should deign to stoop to such a depth of scorn as this!

Though myriads of holy angels adored Him, though they would have gladly left their high estate in Heaven to smite His foes and set Him free, He voluntarily subjected Himself to all the ignominy that I have described—and much more which is utterly indescribable—for who knows what things were said and done in that rough guard-room which holy pens could not record, or what foul jests were made, and what obscene remarks were uttered, which were even more shocking to Christ than the filthy spit which ran down His blessed cheeks in that time of shameful mockery? Ah, my Brothers and Sisters, you cannot imagine how low your Lord stooped on your account! When I hear any say that they have been so slandered for His sake that they cannot endure it, I have wished that they knew what He endured on their account. If we stood in the pillory and all mankind hooted at us for a million million years, it would be as nothing compared with the wondrous condescension of Him who is God Over All, blessed forever, stooping as He did for our sake!

That is the second lesson for our hearts to learn.

Then let me say to you very tenderly, wishing that some other voice could speak of it more effectively—see how your Redeemer loved you. You know that when Christ stood by the grave of Lazarus and wept, the Jews said, “Behold how He loved him!” Ah, but look at Him there among those Roman soldiers—despised, rejected, insulted, ridiculed! And then let me say to you, “Behold how He loved us—you and me—and all His people!” In such a case I might quote the words of John, “Behold, what manner of love!” But this love of Jesus is beyond all manner and measure of which we can have any conception. If I were to take all our love to Him and heap it up like a vast mountain. If I were to gather all the members of the one Church of Christ on earth and bid them empty their hearts, and then fetched out of Heaven the myriads of redeemed and perfected spirits before the Throne of God, and they added all their heart’s love. And if I could collect all the love that ever has been and that ever shall be throughout eternity in all the saints—all that would be but as a drop in a bucket compared with the boundless, fathomless love of Christ to us that brought Him down so low as to be the object of the scorn and derision of these wicked men for our sake! So, Beloved, from this sad scene let us learn how greatly Jesus loved us and let each one of us, in return, love Him with all our heart.

I cannot leave this set of lessons for your heart without giving you one more. That is, *see the grand facts behind the scorn*. I do believe—I cannot help believing—that our blessed Master, when He was in the hands of those cruel soldiers and they crowned Him with thorns, bowed before Him in mock reverence and insulted Him in every possible way, all the while looked behind the curtain of the visible circumstances and saw that the heartless pantomime—no, tragedy—only partially hid the Divine reality, for He was a King, even then, and He had a Throne and that crown of thorns was the emblem of the diadem of universal sovereignty that shall, in due season, adorn His blessed brow. That reed was to Him a type of the scepter which He shall yet wield as King of kings and Lord of lords. And when they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” He heard, behind that mocking cry, the triumphant note of His future Glory, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! And He shall reign forever and ever!” For when they mockingly bowed the knee to Him, He saw all nations really bowing before Him and His enemies licking the dust at His feet.

Our Savior knew that these ribald soldiers, unconsciously to themselves, were setting before Him pictures of the great reward of His soul-travail. Let us not be discouraged if we have to endure anything of the same sort as our Lord suffered. He was not discouraged, but remained steadfast through it all. Mockery is the unintentional homage which falsehood pays to truth. Scorn is the unconscious praise which sin gives to holiness. What higher tribute could these soldiers give to Christ than to spit upon Him? If Christ had received honor from such men, there would have been no honor in it to Him. You know how even a heathen moralist, when they said to him, “So-and-So spoke well of you yesterday in the market,” asked, “What have I done amiss that such a wretch as that should speak well of me?” He rightly counted it a disgrace to be praised by a bad man—and because our Lord had done nothing amiss, all that these men could do was to speak ill of Him and treat Him with contumely, for their nature and character were the very opposite of His. Representing, as these soldiers did, the unregenerate, God-hating world, I say that their scorn was the truest reverence that they could offer to Christ while they continued as they were!

And so, at the back of persecution, at the back of heresy, at the back of the hatred of ungodly men to the Cross of Christ, I see His everlasting Kingdom advancing and I believe that “the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be exalted above the hills,” and that “all nations shall flow unto it,” even as Isaiah foretold that Jesus shall sit upon the throne of David, and that of the increase of His Kingdom there shall be no end, for the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor unto Him, “and He shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah!” Glory be to His holy name!

Have all our hearts truly learned these four grand lessons—the shamefulness of sin—the condescension of our Lord—the immeasurable love which made Him so condescending—and the ineffable glory which hides behind the skirts of all this shame and sorrow? If not, let us beseech the Holy Spirit to teach them to us.

II. Now I want to give you, from this same incident, A SET OF LESSONS FOR YOUR CONSCIENCE.

And, first, it is a very painful reflection—let your conscience feel the pain of it—that *Jesus Christ can still be mocked*. He has gone into the heavens and He sits there in Glory, but yet, spiritually, so as to bring great guilt upon him who does it, the glorious Christ of God can still be mocked and He is mocked by those who deride His people. Now, men of the world, if you see faults and failings in us, we do not wish you to screen us. Because we are the servants of God, we do not ask for exemption from honest criticism. We do not desire that our sins should be treated with more leniency than those of other men, but, at the same time, we bid you beware that you do not slander, scandalize and persecute those who

are the true followers of Christ, for, if you do, you are mocking and persecuting Him. I believe that if it is the poorest of His people, the least gifted and the most faulty, yet, if they are evilly spoken of for Christ's sake, our Lord takes it all as done to Himself. You remember how Saul of Tarsus, when he lay smitten on the ground, heard a Voice which said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" "Well, but," he might have said, "I have never persecuted *You*, Lord." No, but he dragged Christian men and women to prison and scourged them, and compelled them to blaspheme—and because he had done this to Christ's people, Christ could truly say to him, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, you have done it unto Me." If you persecutors need to amuse yourselves, you can find much cheaper sport than that of slandering the servants of Christ! Remember that the Lord has said concerning them, "He that touches you, touches the apple of His eye." If you were to touch the apple of a man's eye, you would be provoking him to defend himself, so do not awaken Christ's righteous anger by scoffing at any of His people! I say no more upon that point. If the message is meant for any man here, let him give heed to the warning.

Next, Christ may be mocked by despising His Doctrine. It seems to me a fearful thing that men should ever hold up Christianity to scorn. Yet nowadays there is scarcely any portion of the Truth of God which is not ridiculed and caricatured. It is stripped of its own clothes and dressed up in somebody else's old purple cloak and then it is set in a chair, while men pretend great homage for it, and salute it, saying that they have great reverence for Christ's teaching. But, before long they spit in its face and treat it with the utmost disdain. There are some who deny the Deity of Christ, others who hate the central Doctrine of His atoning Sacrifice, while many rail at Justification by Faith which is the very heart of the Gospel! Is there any Doctrine—I scarcely know one—which has escaped the mockery and scorn of ungodly men? In the present day if a man wants to make himself a name, he does not write upon something which he understands and which is for the public welfare, but he straightway begins to assail some Doctrine of Scripture of which he does not know the meaning! He misrepresents it and sets up some notion of his own in opposition to it, for he is a "modern thought" man, a person of much importance.

It is easy work to scoff at the Bible and to deny the Truth of God. I think that I could, myself, pose as a learned man, in that way, if ever the devil should sufficiently control me to make me feel any ambition of that sort. In fact, there is scarcely a fool in Christendom who cannot make himself a name among modern thinkers if he will but blaspheme loudly enough, for that seems to be the road to fame, nowadays, among the great mass of mankind! They are dubbed "thoughtful" who thus insult the Truth of God as the soldiers, with their spit, insulted the Christ of God!

I shall come closely home to some of you who attend here regularly, when I say that Christ can still be mocked by resolves which never lead to obedience. Let me speak very softly upon this solemn Truth of God. Give me your hand, my Friend. Let me look into your eyes. I would gladly look into your soul if I could, while I put this matter very personally to you. Several times, before leaving this House, you have said, "I will repent of my sin. I will seek the Lord. I will believe in Jesus." You meant these words when you uttered them. Why, then, have you not fulfilled your promises? I do not care what excuse you give, because any reason which you give will be most unreasonable, for it will only amount to this—that there was something better than to do what Christ bids you, something better for you than to be saved by Him, something better than the forgiveness of your sins, something better than regeneration, something better than Christ's eternal love! You would have chosen Christ, but Barabbas came across your path, so you said, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" You would have thought seriously about the salvation of your soul, but you had promised to go to a certain place of amusement, so you put off seeking the Savior till a more convenient season. Possibly you said, "My trade is of such a character that I shall have to give it up if I become a Christian—and I cannot afford to do that." I heard of one who listened to a sermon which impressed him—and he did not often hear sermons—and he wished that he could be a Christian, but he had made various bets for large amounts and he felt that he could not think of other things till they were settled.

There are many such things that keep men from Christ. I do not care what it is that you prefer to the Savior—you have insulted Him if you prefer anything to Him. If it were the whole world and all that it contains, that you had chosen, these things are but trifles when compared with the Sovereignty of Christ—His crown rights to every man's heart, and the immeasurable riches that He is prepared to give to every soul that comes and trusts in Him! Do you prefer a harlot to the Lord Jesus Christ? Then don't tell me that you do not spit in His face! You do what is even worse than that! Do you prefer profits wrongly gained to accepting Jesus as your Savior? Do not tell me, Sir, that you have never bowed the knee before Him in scorn, for you have done far worse than that! Or was it a little paltry pleasure—mere trifling laughter and

folly of an hour—that you preferred to your Lord? Oh, what must He feel when He sees these contemptible things preferred to Him, knowing that eternal damnation is at the back of your foolish choice? Yet men choose moment's folly and Hell, instead of Christ and Heaven! Was ever such an insult as that paid to Christ by Roman soldiers? Go, legionaries, you are not the worst of men! There are some who, being pricked in their conscience, make a promise of repentance and then, for the world's sake, and for their flesh's sake, and for the devil's sake, break that promise—the soldiers did not sin against Christ so grossly as that!

Listen once more. I must again come very closely home to some of you. Was it not a shameful thing that they should call Christ, King, and yet not mean it? And, apparently, give Him a crown, a scepter, a royal robe, the bowing of the knee and the salutation of the lips, but not to mean any of it? It cuts me to the heart to think of what I am going to say, yet I must say it. There are some professors—members of Christian churches—members of *this* Church—who call Christ Master and Lord, yet they do not do the things which He says. They profess to believe the Truth of God, yet it is not like the Truth of God to them, for they never yield to its power and they act as if what they call Truth were fiction and human invention! There are still some, like those of whom the Apostle wrote, and I can say as he did—“of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ”—though in the nominal church! Their God is their belly, they glory in their shame and they mind earthly things. Yet they bow the knee before Christ, they sing, “crown Him, crown Him,” and they eat the bread and drink the wine which set forth His broken body and shed blood—yet they have no part nor lot in Him.

It has always been so in the nominal church, and it will be so, I suppose, till Christ comes to separate the chaff from the wheat. But, oh, how dreadful it is! To insult Christ in the Roman guard-room was bad enough, but to insult Him at the Communion Table is far worse! For a Roman soldier to spit in His face was bad enough, but to come and mingle with His people, call yourself His servant and then to go deliberately to drink with the drunkard, or to be unchaste in your life, or dishonest in your trade, or false in your talk, or foul in your heart is even more abominable! I know no milder word that can express the truth! To call Christ, Master, and yet never to do His bidding—this is mockery and scorn of the worst possible kind, for it wounds Him at the very heart!

I was reading, today, part of a Welsh sermon which struck me much. The preacher said, “Let all who are in this congregation avow their real master. I will first call upon the servants of the devil to acknowledge him. He is a fine master, and a glorious one to serve, and his service is joy and delight. Now all of you who are serving him, say, ‘Amen. Glory be to the devil!’ Say it! But nobody spoke. “Now,” he said, “don’t be ashamed to acknowledge him whom you serve every day of your life. Speak out and say, ‘Glory be to my master, the devil!’ or else hold your tongues forever.” And still nobody spoke, so the minister said, “Then, I hope that when I ask you to glorify Christ, you will speak.” And they did speak, till the chapel seemed to ring again as they cried, “Glory be to Christ!” That was good. But if I were to test you in a similar fashion, I feel tolerably certain that nobody here would acknowledge his master, if his master is the devil! And I am afraid that some of the devil’s servants would join us in our hallelujahs to Christ! That is the mischief of it—the devil himself can use self-denial and he can teach his servants to deny their master—and in that very way to do him the most honor. O dear Friends, be true to Christ and, whatever you do, never mock Him! There are many other things which you can do that will be much more profitable to you than mocking Christ. If God is God, serve Him. If Christ is your Lord and Master, honor Him. But if you do not mean to honor Him, do not call Him Master, for if you do, all your faults and sins will be laid at His door and He will be dishonored through you.

Now I think that I hear somebody say, “I am afraid, Sir, that I have mocked Christ. What am I to do?” Well, my answer is—Do not despair, because that would be mocking Him in another way by doubting His power to save you. “I am inclined to throw it all up.” Do not act so, for that would be to insult your Maker by another sin, namely, open revolt against Him. “What shall I do, then?” Well, go and tell Him your grief and sorrow. He told His disciples to preach the Gospel first at Jerusalem, because that was where those soldiers lived, the very men who had mocked Him. And He prayed for His murderers, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” In a like manner, He presents His mercy to you, first. Come to Him, then, and if you are conscious that you have mocked Him in any one of these ways that I have mentioned, say to yourself, “Then, if He will but forgive me, I will henceforth live all the more to His praise. I cannot wipe out my sin, but He can, and if He will do so, I will love Him much because I shall have had much forgiven. And I will spend and be spent to glorify His holy name.”

My time has almost gone, so this must be my last remark. Whether we have mocked Christ or not, come, dear Brothers and Sisters, *let us now glorify Him*. This very hour let us crown Him with our heart's love and trust. Bring forth that royal crown—the crown of your love, of your trust, of your complete consecration to Him—and put it upon His head now, saying, “My Lord, my God, my King.” Now put the scepter into His hand by yielding absolute obedience to His will. Is there anything He bids you do? Do it! Is there anything He bids you give? Give it! Is there anything He bids you abstain from? Abstain from it! Put not a reed scepter into His hand, but give Him the entire control of your whole being. Let Him be your real Lord, reigning over your spirit, soul and body! What next? Bow before Him and worship Him in the quiet of your inmost heart. You need not bow your bodies, but let your spirits fall down before Him that sits upon the Throne of God, and cry, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

And when you have worshipped Him, then proclaim Him King. As those soldiers said in mockery, “Hail, King of the Jews!” so now do you in real earnestness proclaim Him King of Jews and Gentiles, too! Go home and tell your Friends that Jesus is King! Tell it out among the nations that “the Lord reigns,” as the old version has it, “reigns from the tree.” He has made His Cross to be His Throne, and there He reigns in majesty and in mercy! Tell it to your children, tell it to your servants, tell it to your neighbors, tell it in every place wherever you can be heard—that the Lord, even Jesus, reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords! Say to them, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.”

And then, when you have proclaimed Him, kiss Him yourself. As the rough soldiers spat upon Him, so do you give to Him the kiss of homage and affection, saying, “Lord Jesus, You are mine forever and ever.” Say, with the spouse, “I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.” I suggest to you that each individual here who loves His Lord much, should think of something fresh that He can do for Christ during this week—some special gift that you can bestow upon Him—some special action that you can do which shall be quite different and shall be only for Jesus, and altogether for Jesus, as an act of homage to His name. I often wish that God's people were more inventive, like that woman who wanted greatly to honor Him, so she brought out her alabaster box and broke it, and poured the precious ointment upon His head. Think of something special that you can do for Christ, or give to Him.

A dear Friend, now in Heaven, but who used to worship in this place, had a son who had been a great scapegrace, and was, in fact, living a vicious life. He had been long away from his father, and his father did not know what to do about getting him home, for he had treated him very badly, marred his comfort and spoiled his home. But, as I was preaching one night, this thought came to him, “I will find out, tomorrow morning, where my son is, and I will go to him.” The father knew that the son was very angry with him, and very bitter against him, so he thought of a certain fruit, of which his son was very fond, and he sent him a basketful of it the next morning. And when the son received it, He said, “Then, my father still has some affection for me.” And the next day the father called—and the day after he had him at home again! And that was the means of bringing the son to the Savior! He had worn himself out with vice and he soon died, but his father told me that it was a great joy to his heart to think that he could have a good hope concerning his son. Had the son died away from home. Had the father not sought him out, he would never have forgiven himself!

He did that for Christ's sake. Cannot some of you do a similar deed for the same reason? Is there any skeleton in your closet? Is there any mischief you could set right? Or have you anything you can give to your Lord and Master? Think, each one of you for himself or herself, what you can do and, inasmuch as Christ was so shamefully despised and rejected, seek to honor and glorify Him in the best way that you can and He will accept your homage and your offering for His love's sake. May He help you to do so! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 27:15-54; JOHN 18:28-38.

We are now to read about our Lord before Pontius Pilate.

Matthew 27. Verses 15-30. *Now at that feast the governor was accustomed to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will you that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? For he knew that*

for envy they had delivered Him. When he was set down on the Judgment Seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have you nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Which of the two will you that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate said unto them, What shall I do, then, with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil has He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see you to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and struck Him on the head. Surely, mockery could have gone no further! We marvel at the boldness and ingenuity of their scorn. Oh, that we were half as earnest in seeking to honor Him—as careful to think of everything that might make our homage perfect. But we, alas, too often fail to give Him due honor and glory, even when others are all aflame with zeal to insult Him.

31. *And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.* Perhaps they were afraid that He would die from sheer exhaustion and so, with a cruel mercy, they would keep Him alive for the infliction of further tortures.

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear His Cross.* Any one of us might well have wished to have been Simon, yet we need not envy him. There is a cross for everyone who is a follower of the Crucified—may we have Grace to carry it after Him!

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink.* He wholly abstained from that which might have lessened His pain. He came to suffer and He intended to go through with all that He had undertaken. He would do nothing that would blunt the edge of the sacrificial knife. He forbids not the soothing draught to other sufferers who are in pain, but, as for Himself, He will not partake of it.

35-37. *And they crucified Him, and parted His garment, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet, They parted My garment among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched Him there, and set up over His head His accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.* And so He is, and so He shall be—King of the Jews even on that Cross and never so royal as when He had surrendered everything for love of those whom He came to redeem!

38-43. *Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, You that destroys the temple, and builds it in three days, save Yourself. If You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross. Likewise also the chief priest mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God.* What pain this taunt must have caused to the Savior! Because He is so pure and never yields to temptation, we are very apt to forget that temptation was really temptation, even to Him, and that it grieved His pure and holy Soul thus to be tempted to turn aside from the path of perfect trust in His Father and complete obedience to Him. No doubt the pain of temptation is in inverse ratio to our willingness to yield to it. When we yield to temptation, we feel a pleasure in it, but when we are horrified at it, and start back from it, then we feel the pain of it. Oh, for a mind and heart, so perfectly subject to the will of God, that we should feel such a temptation as this to be the very agony of grief to us, as it was to our Lord!

44. *The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth.* Nobody seemed to look upon Him with any desire to help Him, but even the lowest of the low would contribute their portion of mockery to increase His misery.

43-54. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani? That is to say, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This Man calls for Elijah. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. The rest said, let Him be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost, and, behold, the veil of the temple was ripped in two from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks split; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with Him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. John gives us some details of our Lord before Pilate which Matthew does not mention.*

John 18:28-38. *Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the Hall of Judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring you against this Man? They answered and said unto him, If He were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him up unto you. Then said Pilate unto them, Take you Him, and judge Him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying what death He should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto Him, Are You the King of the Jews? Jesus answered Him, Say you this thing of yourself, or did others tell it you of Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You unto me: what have You done? Jesus answered, My Kingdom is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My Kingdom not from here. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Are You a king then? Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears My voice. Pilate said unto Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and said unto them, I find in Him no fault at all. Thus did all who came into contact with Jesus bear witness that the Lamb of God was indeed “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.”*

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—414, 333.

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