

THE KING IN PILATE'S HALL NO. 2826

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 12, 1903.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“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.”
John 18:37.

OUR Lord was being cross-questioned by an unscrupulous, vacillating, contemptuous Roman official. So, as our blessed Lord and Master did not escape the ordeal of malicious questioning, let no disciple of His imagine that he will escape. “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he is as his master, and the servant as his lord.” Sooner or later the day will come when the profession that you have made shall be questioned and tested. To some of Christ's followers, this time of trial comes very soon after their conversion. Others are assailed at a later period. The cool, calm, calculating doubter suggests a question about this or that, and everything that can be moved is shaken. Just as Pilate said to Christ, “Are you a king, then?” so will men say to you, “Are you a Christian? Are you really believing in Jesus? Have you been born-again? Are you a new creature in Christ Jesus? Are you fully sanctified?” And they will make these inquiries in such a tone of contemptuous ridicule, that you will need all your strength, all your patience, an increase in your faith, and in all your graces, if you are to witness a good confession, as your Master did before Pontius Pilate.

When such a time comes to you, I cannot suggest to you a better model for your answer than that which your Lord gave to the Roman governor. At first, He did not answer Pilate. “Jesus gave him no answer.” And a large portion of the inquisitive questioning to which we have to submit is not worth answering. Nor is it worthwhile for you and me to go up and down the world fishing for questions, or inviting the objections, and quibbling of skeptics, because we think ourselves so exceedingly clever that we are easily able to answer them. Believe me, you will have quite enough to do if you catch on your shield all the fiery darts that come without your invitation! You will have no need to ask to be led into temptation, or to seek permission to rush into it! Our Savior invited no questions from Pilate—He did not even condescend to answer all that Pilate had to say to Him—and the best thing for a Christian to do, in many of his times of trial, is to say, with David, “I was dumb with silence. I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.”

When the Master did reply, He set us an example that we may safely follow. Observe how He replied without any tartness, without even the appearance of anger. He was very courteous towards Pilate. He put what He had to say in a fashion which would commend itself to him. He knew that Pilate's chief jealousy was about His being a king, and He tried to remove it by explaining that His kingdom was not of this world, otherwise His servants would fight for Him, so that He should not be delivered to the Jews. I cannot conceive of replies, to such a man as Pilate, more suitable, more calculated to have done him good, if there had been any soil in Pilate's heart upon which the good seed could have fallen with the hope of growth. I pray that you and I, when we are assailed and questioned, may be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves, giving a reason for the hope that is in us with meekness and fear, answering not with the objective of displaying our own skill or learning, but always with the motive of seeking the good of the questioner, if, perhaps, God may grant unto him repentance, that he may come to the

knowledge of the truth of God. I admire and hold up as an example to you the exceeding sweetness of our Savior's replies to His carping critic.

Note, however, how bold He was, as well as wise and gentle—"You say that I am a king." He does not flinch from admitting the truth, however distasteful it may be to His hearer. If this truth troubles Pilate after our Savior's explanation that His kingdom is not of this world, He cannot deny the fact that He really is a King, for He must speak the truth come what may of it. I fear that sometimes, in our endeavors to be sweet in disposition, we have not been strong in principle. "Charity" is a word that is greatly cried up nowadays, but, often it means that in trying to be courteous, we have also been traitorous! Our speech has been soft and smooth, but it has not been sincere and true. Did you ever catch yourself wishing to trim off the corners of a truth of God—or, at least, seeking if you could not omit something that might prejudice your hearer? If so, let me tell you plainly that he who wishes to alter *any* truth has already begun to lie! Though he may not actually do it, yet the very wish to change the truth of God in any degree is a proof of perversity of heart which needs to be repented of and forgiven! We have already turned aside from the right path when we do not dare to say what God has taught us. Our Savior never acted like that—He was always true, transparent, clear, and faithful. There was never in Him any holding back in the least degree. As He said to Pilate, "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." Oh, that we might learn from our Savior the sacred art of blending Christ-like gentleness with holy courage—and Christ-like courage with gentleness such as His!

Observe, too—for it is worthy of notice—how modestly and unobtrusively our Savior answered Pilate's questioning. It is an unhappy circumstance that some men seem as if they cannot speak boldly without having somewhat of pride mixed with their courage. Full often our very virtues lie quite near to the borders of vice. We aim at what is right, but, alas, we go beyond it, or we fall short of it, or hit the target where our shots do not count. Ah, Lord, what imperfect creatures we are! But our Savior was perfect in every respect. He only answered the questions of Pilate when it was right for Him to answer them, and even then He seemed to take the words wherewith to frame His answer out of Pilate's own mouth—"You say that I am a king." "It is even as you have said." Our gracious Master is very straightforward, yet how modest He is! He seems to hide Himself even behind Pilate's words. He does not hide the truth, yet, in a perfectly sinless way, He somewhat conceals Himself. I wish we could imitate Him in that respect. Even when we are, like Bayard, "without fear, and without reproach," we are very apt, at the same time, to be without any desire for the conflict against evil, or any wish to impose ourselves in the least degree upon the attention of others, even if a protest would be right from us. We never see any of this false shame in our Savior. So, if we have at all given way to it in the past, let us never repeat that sin.

The words of Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, are very properly rendered in the Revised Version, "Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed *the* good confession." It was more than a good confession that our Lord Jesus witnessed before Pontius Pilate, so the definite article is rightly used, and "the good confession," stands out prominently as an example for all His followers. It is concerning that good confession that I am about to speak as the Holy Spirit shall graciously guide me.

I. First, let us ask—WHAT WAS "THE GOOD CONFESSION" THAT JESUS WITNESSED BEFORE PONTIUS PILATE?

I think the good confession of our Lord was, first, *His avowal of His kingship*—"You say that I am a king." Dear friends, do not forget that our Savior was, at that time, a prisoner in bonds, on trial for His life. As far as the eye could see, He appeared to be absolutely in the power of Pilate—a man who was destitute of any kind of conscience, and who cared nothing about what means he employed so long as he could attain his own evil ends. There stands Jesus, a bound prisoner, before one who can order Him to be put to death. And the judge contemptuously says to Him, "Are you a king, then?" And He answers, with great gentleness, but most decidedly and undoubtedly, "I am a king, even as You say." I think I see Pilate's lip curl—I can imagine the supreme contempt with which he looked upon the miserable victim before him, disowned by His own countrymen, who had brought Him there because, in their hate, they wished to have Him put to death—yet He talks about being a king! It may have been a merry jest for

Pilate at the moment, but he did not dare to make it one afterwards. His wife would have stopped him had he sought to find amusement in Jesus of Nazareth! At the time, it must all have seemed very strange to him. It takes a great deal of courage for a man to avow that which seems to be improbable, and, indeed, impossible. He knows it is true, but the other man thinks it is a piece of fanaticism. "Ridiculous nonsense," he says, and he scorns the idea with a sarcastic grin. It is not easy, then, for a humble-minded spirit just as determinedly to acknowledge it. I believe that there is many a man who could stand upon a public platform, and announce his convictions to an infuriated crowd, who would not dare to say the same things to a single individual. It took more courage for Christ to speak to Pilate, alone, as He did, than it has done for many a man to stand and burn at the stake, yet the Savior did it. Calmly and deliberately, He avowed the truth of God, blessed be His holy name! "I am a king," He said, and so He is. In our hearts, we acknowledge His sovereignty over us as individuals, and His supremacy over the entire Church. No, more, His Father has given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as He has given Him. He has said it, "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." "And He shall reign forever and ever," and all loyal hearts cry, "Hallelujah!" It was a good confession for the Nazarene, clothed in the common smock frock of a Galilean peasant, with gory sweat still upon His brow, with the ropes that bound Him still about His wrists, with the howling savagery of His countrymen behind Him, to say to Pilate, "I am a king."

Next, Christ's "good confession" was *His announcement of a spiritual kingdom*. Pilate could not comprehend what He meant when He said, "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." A spiritual kingdom! Pilate would not have given the smallest Roman coin for such a kingdom as that! Our Savior's own countrymen did not understand what He meant by a spiritual kingdom "not of this world." They were looking for a temporal prince, an earthly leader who would deliver them from the Roman yoke, but Jesus asserts that His kingdom, whatever it is, and wherever it is, is a *spiritual* thing! This is the testimony that we are also trying to bear today, and, sometimes we have to bear it before the very temporal power that thinks the church to be an instrument to be used for its own purposes—a sort of mental and moral police force to keep people in order—the officers themselves to be kept in order and dressed, governed, fed and maintained by an Act of Parliament, and not able to lift so much as a little finger should the State forbid them to do so! This is a doctrine which needs some courage to utter it even now, but it is to be spoken, and must be spoken more and more loudly! Christ's kingdom is not of this world! It borrows no power from the secular arm, and would not accept it if it were offered. It is a rule of spirit over spirit, of mind over mind, of the truth of God over the souls of men—and that man is a faithful witness for Christ who can unflinchingly bear this testimony even before the greatest and the proudest of the land! Our Savior did so when He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Another part of Christ's "good confession" was *a declaration of His life purpose*—"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." There is many a man who is pursuing a calling which he would scarcely like to acknowledge. And there are others who think that their calling can be best pursued by stealthy, crafty, Jesuitical plans. But it was not so with the Savior. He boldly declared the purpose for which He had come into the world—why should He conceal it? He who seeks to bear witness to the truth of God should be true enough to declare what the objective of his witness is. And the Savior did so, before Pilate, and wherever He was! All His life He was a witness to the truth—He was the truest man who ever lived! It is beautiful to notice the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ even in small particulars. There is no rhetoric about our Savior's speech, because rhetoric is too often but a lie. He speaks as simply as a child. There is no attempt at any display of learning in our Savior's teaching. Because it is all solid truth and divine revelation, there is no need that He should use the jargon of the schools, or call Himself a Rabbi or doctor. He spoke with authority, and you can see how simply, how plainly, how heartily He did it. There was no particular garb to attract attention to the Savior, no priestly robes with which to dignify a kind of babyish authority. He was a man among men, speaking what He knew in the language of the people which they could understand. There was no pomp, or ceremony, or show about His life, and, especially, there was no sham or pretense. He was what He seemed to be, and He seemed to be just what He was! If you look upon any other man, you can see some

attempt to hide his deficiencies, or to increase his influence by an appearance of greater strength than actually exists. In the Savior, you see Him altogether as He is. He wears His heart upon His sleeve. He speaks straight on, and never turns aside to crooked ways. He never blushes or stammers—why should He? What has He to conceal? His teaching is delivered as from a mountaintop, and men may stand and gaze—and, the longer they gaze, the better will they see what He wishes them to see! He has no curtain behind which there is something concealed—all is as open as the day. As a truthful man, He was a fit witness to bear testimony to the truth of God. And what a breaker of idols, what a smasher of all shams He was! Pharisees, and Sadducees, and Herodians got but short notice from Him. Nothing false could stand before Him. Even a scourge of small cords, when it was held in His hands, sufficed to sweep the buyers and sellers from the temple! And when He used the sledgehammer of denunciation, who could resist Him? His fan was in His hand, and He thoroughly purged the floor. And this was His life purpose—that He might bear witness to the truth of God—and He acknowledged that purpose even before Pontius Pilate.

Our Savior also witnessed “the good confession” by *His acknowledgement that there is such a thing as positive truth*—“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” There is need of just such witness as that today. “Now be very careful upon that point,” says one. “Do you mean to say that there really is such a thing as the *truth*”? By your leave, dear sir, or without it, I will venture to assert that there is! “That reply is a very bigoted one because if there is a doctrine that is the truth, then that which is contrary to it is a lie.” Precisely so, and by your leave, or without your leave, I say again that it is so, and it must be so in the natural order of things. If this doctrine is true, then that which contradicts it cannot be true! If God has spoken thus, that which is opposed to God, and His truth, is not from Him, and cannot stand on the same footing with that which is divinely revealed. It takes a good deal of courage to say that, nowadays. If you go into society, you will get three cheers if you declare that you are an Agnostic—that you do not know anything—you are not sure of anything. Others say that whatever a man believes, or does not believe, it really doesn't matter provided he is perfectly sincere. That is to say, if a man sincerely takes cyanide, it will not kill him! And if he sincerely goes without food, he will not starve. And if he sincerely refuses to breathe, he will do as well as those who do breathe, which is another lie. The statue of Christ was set up among the statues of Plato, Socrates, and other notable men—and some thought it was an honor to Christ, but it was not. They would crown Christ, so they say, among the great ones of earth. Ah, but they cannot crown Him unless they “crown Him Lord of all.” Our blessed Savior is honestly intolerant! He says, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but He that believes not shall be damned.” Because He loves the souls of men, He will not bolster up the fiction of universal charity. And even before the Broad-church or No-church Pilate—He says that He has come to bear witness to the truth. So there is the truth, and that which is contrary to it is *not* truth!

One other point in our Lord's “good confession” was *His separation of characters*, for He went on to say to Pilate—and I fear that most of us would have left out that sentence—“Everyone that is of the truth hears My voice.” Do you hear that declaration, Pilate? You are the Roman procurator—a very great man—and this poor prisoner of yours, whose life is now at your mercy, tells you plainly that everyone that is of the truth hears His voice. Then, Pilate, if you are of the truth, you will have to sit at His feet, and listen to His words, and learn of Him! I can well conceive what Pilate thought as he turned on his heels, and contemptuously asked, “What is truth?” He had heard quite enough of such talk as that—he did not want any more of such close dealing. But therein lies the glory of the Master, that He is not content with merely teaching truth of God, but, in His good confession before Pontius Pilate, He presses it home even upon His judge! And He divides and separates between the precious and the vile. So must you and I do, dear friends, if we are faithful followers of “the faithful Witness.” I dare not preach to this congregation as if you were all Christians, for you are not. I dare not deliver even one discourse under the delusion that all my hearers are saved, for, alas, they are not. This is the fault with multitudes of sermons—that they seem to carry the whole congregation to heaven when possibly the major part of those present may be going down to hell! That will not do. Remember what the Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, “If you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth.” But if there is no win-

nowing fan in our hand to separate the chaff from the wheat, we are not like Christ, nor has Christ sent us on His service. In this “good confession” of His, we see how clearly and solemnly—gently, I admit, but still most decidedly—He made a division and separation of characters, and gave a test by which Pilate could judge himself if he had been willing to do so.

II. The time will not suffice for me to go fully into all the teaching of my text, but I want to ask, in the second place—TO WHAT TRUTH DID OUR LORD WITNESS?

He said to Pilate that He was born—that proves His humanity. He also said that He came into the world, and that, I think, shows His divinity as well as His humanity. He came on purpose to bear witness to the truth, and I believe that the life of Christ witnessed not only to all doctrinal truth, but also to everything that is true, especially to true-heartedness, simplicity, sincerity. His life was a testimony against all guile, craftiness, cunning, concealment—in that sense it was as testimony to the truth.

But with regard to special truths to which He testified, did not His very coming here, and being born, bear witness to *the grand truth that God is love, and that God loves men*? The Infinite takes upon Himself the nature and form of an infant. The Illimitable is encased within a human body. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” We never can have a clearer testimony to the thoughtful care of God to men than we find in the coming of the Son of God as the Son of man, except this—that, being found in fashion as a man, He proved the love of God to sinners by the tears which He wept over the guilty and perishing, and, best of all, by the blood which He shed for many for the remission of sins. As you see Christ dying on the accursed tree, say, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us.” He wills not the death of any, but longs that they should turn unto Him and live. The Savior’s death for the guilty proves that “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” All His life the Savior was bearing witness to this grand truth of God! Oh, that we may, none of us, dare to doubt it after He has backed it up by a life of self-abnegation, and a death of sublime self-sacrifice!

He also bore witness, all His life, to *the spirituality of true religion*. He was always teaching truth like this—“God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” He wore no phylactery, He assumed no airs of an ascetic. Even in His eating and drinking, He was like other men, insomuch that they said of Him that He was “a man gluttonous, and a wine bibber”—a vile charge, without an atom of truth in it! He taught that true religion consisted not in long prayers, but in entering into the closet, and sincerely seeking the Father’s face. It was not fasting thrice in the week, but it was truly praying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” It was not giving alms in public, and sounding a trumpet before him, and in secret devouring widows houses, but it consisted in love to God, and love to man. It was the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart that Jesus preached—and He grandly witnessed against all the idolatrous, and false forms of faith which, even down to this day, prostitute His blessed name!

In that sad hour our Lord Jesus was also a wonderful Witness to *the enmity of men to God*. He in whom there was no roughness or sternness, as there was in John the Baptist, came as the Messenger of love and mercy, for God sent Him not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved! He was the great Householder’s Son, who was, “last of all” sent to receive the fruits of the vineyard, but the husbandmen said, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.” The men of this world were never so base—they never displayed so much of their utter malice against God as when they took His Son, and put Him to a cruel and ignominious death. This was the culmination of human guilt. All the adulteries, murders, unnatural vices, and accursed blasphemies that had ever defiled the race of mankind have not so certainly proved it to be a desperately fallen thing as the murder of the Son of God, the Savior and the Friend of men! This appalling crime of Deicide stands out without a parallel in the history of the universe! There was no guilt in the Lord Jesus for which He deserved to die, yet, with wicked hands, they crucified and slew Him!

Our Savior was also always a Witness to *the great necessity of a new creation*, a change of heart, a regeneration. To Nicodemus He said, “You must be born-again.” And to His disciples, “Except you are converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He also preached the absolute necessity of faith in Himself, and did not mince the matter in the least—“He that

believes on the Son has everlasting life: and He that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." To all this Jesus steadfastly witnessed in life and in death.

And to this truth He also bore witness, *that salvation was to be found only in Himself*. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." "If any man thirsts, let Him come unto Me and drink." His teaching was always concerning Himself—"I am the way, the truth, and the life." "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He never hesitated to bear witness to the truth, so it was but natural that part of His "good confession" before Pilate should be this plain declaration, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."

III. Now I will try briefly to answer a third question—WHAT HAD THIS "GOOD CONFESSION" OF JESUS TO DO WITH PILATE?

I answer, first, that *it gave Pilate a reason for acting justly*. It ought to have helped to stir any little conscience that Pilate still had, and, also, to allay the jealousy which he may have felt because of the Savior's royal claims. Our Lord spoke thus out of kindness to Pilate.

I think, however, that the main reason for our Savior's testimony was that *it gave Pilate an opportunity to learn the truth*. Had his soul been like the good soil—had he really ever been the subject of sovereign grace, he would have said to Jesus, "I will gladly hear what this truth is if You will tell me." He would, at least, have spared time enough to hear from his strange prisoner what this truth was. There must have been an unusual force about our Savior's few short sentences that ought to have convinced even Pontius Pilate of His evident sincerity. Those eyes, so gentle, yet so piercing, must have looked Pilate through and through. The tone of His voice must have been very different from anything to which Pilate had been accustomed in the courts of Nero. Jesus spoke as no other man had ever spoken in Pilate's hall before—and had there been anything hopeful about him, he would have said, "Good Master, tell me what that truth is to which You bear witness."

And I say to you who are not converted, if you desire to be right with God, you will want to know what this truth is for which the Lord Jesus lived and died. And when you do know it, if there is the right principle in your heart, then you will believe it, and, believing it, you will assuredly be saved! There is such life-giving truth in the Savior's teaching that you have but to hear it, and turn it over in your mind, and weigh it with the best judgment that you have, to be convinced that it is most certainly true! So I put it to you—if it is true, will you not believe it? Believing it, will you not yield to it, and let it reign over your whole being, for it is the truth from the mouth of the King? It is the scepter in the hand of King Jesus with which He rules over the hearts of all His loyal subjects!

IV. Now, to finish, I have to ask—WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH OURSELVES?

It has something to do with every one of us, whether we acknowledge Christ or not. First, it suggests to our hearts this question—*Are we of the truth?* For, if we are of the truth, we shall hear Christ's voice! It is the voice of the King eternal, immortal, invisible! He is the King of truth, and He rules over truthful minds. Coming to be the chief Witness to all truth, He really occupies the throne of truth. Now, dear friends, are we of the truth? For, if we are not, we shall not accept Christ. But if we are, we shall be glad to have Him as our King! I ask any man or woman here who has up to now refused Christ, whether he is not conscious of something missing from his life? Are you not sometimes half-inclined to believe in Jesus? Do you not have to do violence to your conscience by what you call, reason; but by what I venture to say is a most unreasonable travesty of all good reasoning? If you would but let that reason of yours go its own way, and follow the track of the truth of God, I believe that, before long, by God's grace, you would be sitting at the Savior's feet and learning of Him!

The next thing that this testimony of Christ has to do with us is this. If, on our behalf, He witnessed "the good confession" for the truth before Pontius Pilate, then it behooves you and me, not only to believe, but *to bear witness to the truth*. Brothers and sisters in Jesus, this looks to me to be but a small thing for us to do. If the Son of God has come into this world on our behalf, and has not been ashamed to call us brethren, and to espouse our cause even at the cost of His life, I say that it looks to me to be but a small thing that He should ask of us that, if with our heart we believe in Him, we should with our

mouth make confession of Him—that, if we believe in Him, we should also be baptized in His name, for it is His will that we should make an open confession before men if we really are His disciples.

There are new fashions in theology, and new gods lately come up, and even new Christs, and all manner of nonsense and novelty. But I am a follower of the old Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever—and I glory in being a fool for Christ's sake if it is a foolish thing to follow the Man of Nazareth, the Christ of Calvary who died as the Substitute for all who believe in Him—that by the shedding of His precious blood, He might reconcile them unto God forever!

I appeal to some who I believe really do love my Lord and Master, but who are, like Saul of old, hiding away out of sight. Are you never going forth to fight for your King? Will you still continue in the ways of the world, and yet profess to be a lover of the Lord? Cowards that you are, come out boldly for Jesus! If you are on Christ's side, acknowledge it! There never was a cause that better deserved to be openly confessed than His! If Christ is God, follow Him! But if Satan is God, serve him. If the world is worth your love, give your love to the world, and say so—do not come sneaking in among Christians as if you belonged to them! But if the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of your love, give it to Him, and say that you have done so! Come to the front, unite with His people, share the scorn that falls upon them, and whenever any man wishes to set Christ in the pillory, say to Him, “Put me there, too, for I am one with Him, and have taken up His cause.” When He comes—and He soon will come in all the glory of His Father, and of His holy angels, he who has denied Him before men, He will deny before the assembled universe! But he who has confessed Him before men, him will He confess in the presence of His Father, and of His holy angels. May that be my lot, and yours, dear friends, without a single exception, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
JOHN 18:28-40.

John 18:28. *Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of Judgment:*

That is to say, Pilate's hall. Pilate, at that time, was probably residing in one of the old and sumptuous palaces of Herod, there holding His court during the time of the Passover.

28. *And it was early.*

They were very eager to prove their enmity to Christ. They had spent the night, and the earliest moments of the dawn in examining their illustrious prisoner, condemning Him, abusing Him, and now they were off to Pilate.

28. *And they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.*

What could defile such wretches as these? Yet they were afraid of ceremonial defilement, though neither afraid nor ashamed to saturate their hands in the blood of Jesus!

29. *Pilate then went out unto them.*

He loathed and detested them, yet, for his own evil purposes, he would yield to their wishes and whims.

29, 30. *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.*

As much as to say, “You may take that for granted. We would not have brought Him if He had not done wrong. You need not look into the matter, we have already heard the evidence, and convicted Him, and so saved you all the trouble of trying Him. We only bring Him here for you to condemn Him.”

31. *Then said Pilate unto them, You take Him, and judge Him according to your law.*

“That is your way of doing such things, but it is not a method into which we shall fall. Our law does not condemn a man before it hears the evidence against him. I am not going to be your tool, to put this man to death without hearing what is laid to His charge, and the proofs of His guilt. If you want that done, you must do it yourselves.”

31. *The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.*

“You Romans have taken from us the power of life and death, and we want Him put to death.” There was a clear confession that nothing short of Christ's death would satisfy them.

32. *That the sayings of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying what death He should die.*

Crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish method of capital punishment, so God overruled the wanton wickedness of the worst of men for the accomplishment of His own eternal purposes, without, however, diminishing their responsibility and guilt in the least degree. It was “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” that Christ was put to death, yet it was “with wicked hands” that they took Him and crucified Him.

33. *Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto Him, Are you the King of the Jews?*

He did not look much like it. There was little enough about His appearance or His apparel to suggest the idea of royalty.

34, 35. *Jesus answered Him, Say you this thing of yourself, or did others tell it you of Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?*

I can imagine him throwing all the scorn and contempt possible into the question. It was characteristic of the Romans, as we learn from the works of their great writers, that they utterly despised and detested the Jews.

35-37. *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 unto the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears My voice.*

We might have expected that He would have said, “I came into the world that I might be a king.” But He explains that, as a Witness to the truth, He was a King.

38. *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.*

He did not want an answer. He merely thought it such an unnecessary piece of trifling to talk about truth. He had so slight an idea of what the word might mean, that when he had said, “What is truth?” “He went out again unto the Jews, and said unto them, I find in Him no fault at all.” That was the truth about *the* truth, from the lips of a man who cared nothing about the truth, yet who was compelled to bear this testimony, “I find in Him no fault at all.”

39. *But we have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the Passover: will you therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?*

Now Pilate may have thought if Christ were their King they would certainly prefer Him to a thief and a robber, so he was putting before himself an opportunity of escaping from judging Christ—and before them a test as to whether there really was in them any liking for the Christ, or any possibility of His becoming their King.

40. *Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.*

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