

THE DREAM OF PILATE'S WIFE

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**A SERMON
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*“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.”
Matthew 27:19.*

I EARNESTLY wished to pursue the story of our Savior's trials previous to His crucifixion, but when I sat down to study the subject I found myself altogether incapable of the exercise. “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.” My emotions grew so strong, and my sense of our Lord's grief became so extremely vivid, that I felt I must waive the subject for a time. I could not watch with Him another hour, and yet I could not leave the hallowed scene. It was, therefore, a relief to meet with the episode of Pilate's wife and her dream. It enables me to continue the thread of my narrative, and yet to relax the extreme tension of the feelings caused by a near view of the Master's grief and shame. My spirit failed before the terrible sight. I thought I saw Him brought back from Herod where the men of war had set Him at naught. I followed Him through the streets again as the cruel priests pushed through the crowd and hastened Him back to Pilate's hall. I thought I heard them in the streets electing Barabbas, the robber, to be set free, instead of Jesus, the Savior, and I detected the first rising of that awful cry, “Crucify, crucify,” which they shrieked out from their bloodthirsty throats, and there He stood who loved me and gave Himself for me, like a lamb in the midst of wolves, with none to pity and none to help Him. The vision overwhelmed me, especially when I knew that the next stage would be that Pilate, who had cleared Him, by declaring, “I find no fault in Him,” would give Him over to the tormentors that He might be scourged, that the mercenary soldiery would crown Him with thorns and mercilessly insult Him, and that He would be brought forth to the people and announced to them with those heart-rending words, “Behold the man!” Was there ever sorrow like His sorrow? Rather than speak about it this day, I feel inclined to act like Job's friends, of whom it is written, that at the sight of him “they lifted up their voices and wept; and sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”

We leave the Master awhile to look at this dream of Pilate's wife, which is only spoken of once in the Scriptures, and then by Matthew. I know not why only that evangelist should have been commissioned to record it, perhaps he alone heard of it, but the one record is sufficient for our faith, and long enough to furnish food for meditation. We receive the story as certified by the Holy Spirit.

Pilate throughout his term of office had grossly misbehaved himself. He had been an unjust and unscrupulous ruler of the Jews. The Galileans and the Samaritans both felt the terror of his arms, for he did not hesitate to massacre them at the slightest sign of revolt. And among the Jews themselves, he had sent men with daggers into the midst of the crowds at the great gatherings, and so had cut off those who were obnoxious to him. Gain was his objective, and pride ruled his spirit. At the time when Jesus of Nazareth was brought before him, a complaint against him was on the way to Tiberius the Emperor, and he feared lest he should be called to account for his oppressions, extortions, and murders. His sins at this moment were beginning to punish him, as Job would word it, “The iniquities of his heels compassed him about.” One terrible portion of the penalty of sin is its power to force a man to commit yet further iniquity. Pilate's transgressions were now howling around him like a pack of wolves, he could not face them, and he had not grace to flee to the one great refuge. But his fears drove him to flee before them, and there was no way apparently open for him but that which led him into yet deeper abominations. He knew that Jesus was without a single fault, and yet since the Jews clamored for His death, he felt that he must yield to their demands, or else they would raise another accusation against him, namely, that he was not loyal

to the sovereignty of Caesar, for he had allowed one to escape who had called Himself a king. If he had behaved justly he would not have been afraid of the chief priests and scribes. Innocence is brave, but guilt is cowardly. Pilate's old sins found him out and made him weak in the presence of the despicable crew, whom otherwise he would have driven from the judgment seat. He had power enough to have silenced them, but he had not sufficient decision of character to end the contention. The power was gone from his mind because he knew that his conduct would not bear investigation, and he dreaded the loss of his office, which he held only for his own ends. See there with pity that scornful but vacillating creature wavering in the presence of men more wicked than himself and more determined in their purpose. The fell determination of the wicked priests caused hesitating policy to tremble in their presence, and Pilate was driven to do what he would gladly have avoided.

The manner and the words of Jesus had impressed Pilate. I say the manner of Jesus, for His matchless meekness must have struck the governor as being a very unusual thing in a prisoner. He had seen in captured Jews the fierce courage of fanaticism, but there was no fanaticism in Christ. He had also seen in many prisoners the meanness which will do or say anything to escape from death, but he saw nothing of that about our Lord. He saw in Him unusual gentleness and humility combined with majestic dignity. He beheld submission blended with innocence. This made Pilate feel how awful goodness is. He was impressed—he could not help being impressed—with this unique sufferer. Besides, our Lord had before him witnessed a good confession—you remember how we considered it the other day—and though Pilate had huffed it off with the pert question, “What is truth?” and had gone back into the judgment hall, yet there was an arrow fixed within him which he could not shake off. It may have been mainly superstition, but he felt an awe of one whom he half suspected to be an extraordinary person. He felt that he himself was placed in a very extraordinary position, being asked to condemn one whom he knew to be perfectly innocent. His duty was clear enough, he could never have had a question about that, but duty was nothing to Pilate in comparison with his own interests. He would spare the Just One if he could do so without endangering himself, but his cowardly fears lashed him on to the shedding of innocent blood.

At the very moment when he was vacillating, when he had proffered to the Jews the choice of Barabbas, or Jesus of Nazareth—at that very moment, I say, when he had taken his seat upon the bench, and was waiting for their choice, there came from the hand of God a warning to him, a warning which would forever make it clear that, if he condemned Jesus, it would be done voluntarily by his own guilty hands. Jesus must die by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and yet it must be by wicked hands that He is crucified and slain, and therefore Pilate must not sin in ignorance. A warning to Pilate came from his own wife concerning her morning's dream, a vision of mystery and terror, warning him not to touch that just person, “For,” she said, “I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him.” There are times in most men's lives when, though they have been wrong, yet they have not quite been set on mischief, but have come to a pause and have deliberated as to their way, and then God in great mercy has sent them a caution, and has set up a danger signal bidding them stop in their mad career before they plunged themselves finally into irretrievable ruin. Somewhere in that direction lies the subject of our present discourse. O that the Spirit of God may make it useful to many.

I. And first, I call your attention to THE COOPERATION OF PROVIDENCE WITH THE WORK OF GOD. I call it the work of God to warn men against sin, and I call your attention to Providence working with it to bring the preventives and cautions of divine mercy home to men's minds.

For, first, observe the providence of God *in sending this dream*. If anything beneath the moon may be thought to be exempt from law, and to be the creature of pure chance, surely it is a dream. True, there were in old times, dreams in which God spoke to men prophetically, but ordinarily they are the carnival of thought, a maze of mental states, a dance of disorder. The dreams which would naturally come to the wife of a Roman governor would not be likely to have much of tenderness or conscience in them, and would not, in all probability, of themselves run in the line of mercy. Dreams ordinarily are the most disorderly of phenomena, and yet it seems that they are ordered of the Lord. I can well understand that every drop of spray which flashes from the wave when it dashes against the cliff has its appointed orbit as truly as the stars of heaven, but the thoughts of men appear to be utterly lawless, especially the thoughts of men when deep sleep falls upon them. One might as well foretell the flight of a bird as the course of a dream. Such wild fantasies seem to be ungoverned and ungovernable. Many things operate naturally to

fashion a dream. Dreams frequently depend upon the condition of the stomach, upon the meat and drink taken by the sleeper before going to rest. They often owe their shape to the state of the body or the agitation of the mind. Dreams may, no doubt, be caused by that which transpires in the chamber of the house, a little movement of the bed caused by passing wheels, or the tramp of a band of men, or the passing of a domestic across the floor, or even the running of a mouse behind the wall, may suggest and shape a dream. Any slight matter affecting the senses at such time may raise within the slumbering mind a mob of strange ideas. Yet whatever may have operated in this lady's case, the hand of providence was in it all, and her mind, though fancy free, wandered nowhere but just according to the will of God to accomplish the divine purpose. She must dream just so and no way else, and that dream must be of such and such an order, and none other. Even dreamland knows no god but God, and even phantoms and shadows come and go at His bidding, neither can the images of a night vision escape from the supreme authority of the Most High. See the providence of God in the fact that the dream of Pilate's wife, however caused, should be of such a form and come at such a time as this. Certain old writers trace her dream to the devil, who thus hoped to prevent the death of our Lord, and so prevent our redemption. I do not agree with the notion, but even if it were so, I admire all the more the providence which overrules even the devices of Satan for the purposes of wisdom. Pilate must be warned, so that his sentence may be his own act and deed, and that warning is given him through his wife's dream, so does Providence work.

Note, next, the providence of God in arranging that *with this dream there should be great mental suffering*. "I have suffered many things in a dream concerning Him!" I cannot tell what vision passed before her mind's eye, but it was one which caused her terrible agony. A modern artist has painted a picture of what he imagined the dream to be, but I shall not attempt to follow that great man in the exercise of fancy. Pilate's wife may have realized in her sleep the dreadful spectacle of the crown of thorns and the scourge, or even of the crucifixion and the death agony. And truly, I know of nothing more calculated to make the heart suffer many things concerning the Lord Jesus than a glance at His death. Around the cross there gathers grief enough to cause many a sleepless night, if the soul has any tenderness left in it. Or her dream may have been of quite another kind. She may have seen in vision the Just One coming in the clouds of heaven. Her mind may have pictured Him upon the great white throne, even the man whom her husband was about to condemn to die. She may have seen her husband brought forth to judgment, himself a prisoner to be tried by the Just One, who had before been accused before him. She may have awaked; startled at the shriek of her husband, as he fell back into the pit that knows no bottom. Whatever it was, she had suffered repeated painful emotions in the dream, and she awoke startled and amazed. The terror of the night was upon her, and it threatened to become a terror to her for all her days, and she therefore hastens to stay her husband's hand. Now, herein is the hand of God, and the simple story goes to prove that the wandering nomads of dreamland are still under His control, and He can cause them to produce distress and anguish, if some grand end is to be served thereby.

Equally remarkable is it that *she should have sent to her husband the message*, "Have nothing to do with this just person." Most dreams we quite forget. A few we mention as remarkable, and only now and then is one impressed upon us so that we remember it for years. Scarcely have any of you had a dream which made you send a message to a magistrate upon the bench. Such an intention would only be resorted to in an urgent case. Though the judge was your own husband you would be very hard-pressed before you would worry him with your dreams while he was occupied with important public business. Mostly a dream may wait till business is over. But so deep was the impression upon this Roman lady's mind that she does not wait until her lord comes home, but sends to him at once. Her advice is urgent—"Have you nothing to do with this Just One." She must warn him now, before he has laid a stroke on Him, much less stained his hands in His blood. Not, "Have a little to do and scourge Him, and let Him go," but "Have you nothing to do with Him. Say not an unkind word, nor do Him any injury! Deliver Him from His adversaries! If He must die, let it be by some other hand than yours! My husband, my husband, my husband, I beseech you; have nothing to do with this just person. Let Him alone, I pray you!" She words her message very emphatically. "Have you nothing to do with this just person: for I have suffered many things in a dream concerning Him. Think of your wife! Think of yourself! Let my sufferings about this Holy One be a warning to you. For my sake let Him alone!" And yet, do you know, her message to my ear sounds rather authoritative for a woman to her husband, and he a judge! There is a tone about it that

is not ordinarily in the address of wives to husbands. "Have you nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." It shows a wonderful providence of God that this lady was moved to send so strong a message to her self-willed husband, to beseech, to entreat, to implore, almost to demand of him, that he let this just man go. O Providence, how mightily can you work! O Lord, the seraphim obey You, but You find an equally willing servitor in a wife who, at Your bidding, stands between her husband and a crime!

Once more, about this providence I want you to notice *the peculiar time in which her warning came*. It was evidently a dream of the morning, "I have suffered many things in a dream this day." The day had not long broken—it was yet early in the morning. The Romans had a superstition that morning dreams are true. I suppose it was after her husband had left her that she thus dreamed. If I may be allowed, not to state a fact, but to make a conjecture, which seems to me most probable, she was a dearly beloved wife, but sickly and therefore needed to rest further into the day than her husband. And when he had left his couch, she had yet another sleep, and being a sensitive person, and all the more likely to dream, she awoke from her morning sleep oppressed with a terror which she could not shake off. Pilate was gone, and she was told that he was in the judgment hall. She asked her attendants why he was there so early, and they replied that there had been an unusual clamor in the courtyard, for the high priests and a mob of Jews had been there, and the governor had gone out to them. They might, perhaps, also tell her that Jesus of Nazareth was brought there a prisoner, and the priests were entreating Pilate to put Him to death, though they had heard the governor say that he found no fault in Him. "Go," she said to her maid, "call to one of the guards, and bid him go at once to my husband, and say what I tell you. Let him speak aloud, that some of the cruel Jews may hear it, and be moved from their cruel purpose. Let him say that I implore my husband to have nothing to do with this just person, for I have suffered many things this very morning in a dream concerning Him." Just at the moment, you see, when Pilate had sat down on the judgment seat, the warning came to him. When there was a little lull, and he was anxious to acquit his prisoner, at that instant of time which was the most hopeful, this weight was thrown into the right side of the scale, thrown in most wisely and mercifully to keep back Pilate from his grievous sin. The warning came at the nick of time, as we say, though, alas, it came in vain! Admire the punctuality of Providence. God never is before His time. He never is too late. It shall be seen concerning all that He does, that on the same day determined by the prophecy, the fulfillment came. My soul stands trembling while she sings the glory of her God, whose providence is high, even like Ezekiel's wheels. But the wheels are full of eyes, and as they turn, all the surroundings are observed and provided for, so that there are no slips, or oversights, or accidents, or delays. Prompt and effectual is the operation of the Lord.

Thus much concerning Providence, and I think you will all agree that my point is proven—that providence is always co-working with the grace of God. A great writer who knows but little about divine things, yet, nevertheless, tells us that he perceives a power in the world which works for righteousness. Exactly so! It is well spoken, for this is the chief of all powers. When you and I go out to warn men of sin, we are not alone, all Providence is at our back. When we preach Christ crucified, we are workers together with God. God is working with us as well as by us. Everything that happens is driving towards the end for which we work, when we seek to convince men of sin and of righteousness. Where the Spirit of God is, all the forces of nature and providence are mustered. The fall of empires, the death of despots, the rising up of nations, the making or the breaking of treaties, terrific wars and blighting famines, are all working out the grand end. Yes, and domestic matters, such as the death of children, the sickness of wives, the loss of work, the poverty of the family, and a thousand other things are working, working, always working, for the improvement of men. And you and I, lending our poor feebleness to cooperate with God, are marching with all the forces of the universe. Have comfort, then, in this, O workers for Jesus, suffering many things for Him, be of good courage, for the stars in their courses fight for the servants of the living God, and the stones of the field are in league with you.

II. Secondly, I gather from this story THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CONSCIENCE TO GOD. How are we to reach Pilate? How are we to warn him? He has rejected the voice of Jesus and the sight of Jesus—could not Peter be fetched to expostulate with him? Alas, Peter has denied his Master. Could not John be brought in? Even he has forsaken the Lord. Where shall a messenger be found? It shall be found in a dream. God can get at men's hearts, however hardened they may be. Never give them up, never

despair of awakening them. If my ministry, your ministry, and the ministry of the blessed Book should all seem to be nothing, God can reach the conscience by a dream. If the sword comes not at them at close quarters, yet what seems but a stray arrow from a bow drawn at a venture shall find the joints in their harness. We ought to believe in God about wicked men, and never say of them, "It is impossible that they should be converted." The Lord can wound leviathan, for His weapons are many, and they are suited to the foe. I do not think a dream would operate upon *my* mind to convince me, but certain minds lie open in that direction, and to them a dream may be a power. God may use even superstition to accomplish His beneficent purposes. Many besides Pilate have been warned by dreams.

Better still, Pilate was accessible through the dream *of his wife*. Henry Melvill has a very wonderful discourse upon this topic, in which he tries to show that probably if Pilate had dreamed this dream himself, it would not have been so operative upon him as when his wife dreamed it. He takes it as a supposition, which nobody can deny, that Pilate had an affectionate and tender wife, who was very dear to him. The one brief narrative which we have of her certainly looks that way, it is evident that she loved her husband dearly, and would therefore prevent his acting unjustly to Jesus. To send a warning by her was to reach Pilate's conscience through his affections. If his beloved wife was distressed it would be sure to weigh heavily with him, for he would not have her troubled. He would gladly shield his tender one from every breath of wind and give her perfect comfort, and when she pleads, it is his delight to yield. It is, therefore, no small trouble to him that she is suffering, suffering so much as to send a message to him, suffering because of one who deserves her good opinion—one whom Pilate himself knows to be without fault. If this lady was indeed the wife of Pilate's youth, tender and dearly beloved, and if she was gradually sickening before his eyes, her pale face would rise before his loving memory, and her words would have boundless power over him when she said, "I have suffered many things in a dream." O Claudia Procula, if that were your name, well did the Lord of mercy entrust His message to your persuasive lips, for from you it would come with tenfold influence. Tradition declares this lady to have been a Christian, and the Greek Church has placed her in their calendar as a saint. For this we have no evidence, all that we know is that she was Pilate's wife, and used her wifely influence to stay him from this crime. How often has a tender, suffering, loving woman exercised great power over a coarse, rough man! The All-wise One knows this, and therefore He often speaks to sinful men by this influential agency. He converts one in a family that she may be His missionary to the rest. Thus He speaks with something better than the tongues of men and of angels, for He uses love itself to be His orator. Affection has more might than eloquence. That is why, my friend, God sent you, for a little while that dear child who prattled to you about the Savior. She is gone to heaven now, but the music of her little hymns rings in your ears even now, and her talk about Jesus and the angels is yet with you. She has been called home, but God sent her to you for a season to charm you to Himself and win you to the right way. Thus He bade you cease from sin and turn to Christ. And that dear mother of yours, who is now before the throne, do you remember what she said to you when she was dying? You have heard me a great many times, but you never heard a sermon from me like that address from her dying couch. You can never quite forget it, or shake yourself free from its power. Beware how you trifle with it. To Pilate, his wife's message was God's ultimatum. He never warned him again, and even Jesus stood silent before him. O my friend, to you it may be that your child, your mother, or your affectionate wife may be God's last messenger, the final effort of the warning angel to bring you to a better mind. A loving relative pleading with tears is often the forlorn hope of mercy. An attack so skillfully planned and wisely conducted may be regarded as the last assault of love upon a stubborn spirit, and after this it will be left to its own devices. The selection of the wife was no doubt made by infinite wisdom and tenderness, that if possible Pilate might be stopped in his career of crime and strengthened to the performance of an act of justice by which he would have avoided the most terrible of crimes.

So, then, we may safely conclude that the Lord has His missionaries where the city missionary cannot enter. He sends the little children to sing and pray where the preacher is never heard. He moves the godly woman to proclaim the gospel by her lip and life where the Bible is not read. He sends a sweet girl to grow up and win a brother or a father where no other voice would be allowed to tell of Jesus and His love. We thank God it is so. It gives hope for the households of this godless city—it gives us hope even

for those for whom the Sabbath bell rings out in vain. They will hear, they must hear these home preachers, these messengers who tug at their hearts.

Yes, and let me add that where God does not employ a dream, nor use a wife, yet He can get at men's conscience by no visible means but *by thoughts which come unbidden and abide upon the soul*. Truths long buried suddenly rise up, and when the man is in the very act of sin he is stopped in the way, as Balaam was when the angel met him. How often it has happened, that conscience has met a guilty man even in the moment when he meant to enjoy the pleasure filled with wrong, even as Elijah met Ahab at the gate of Naboth's vineyard! How the king starts back as he beholds the prophet, he would sooner have seen the very devil than Elijah. Angrily he cries, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Though, indeed, Elijah was his best friend, had he known it. Often does conscience pounce upon a man, when the sweet morsel of sin has just been rolled under his tongue, and he is sitting down to enjoy it. The visitation of conscience turns the stolen honey into bitterness, and the forbidden joy into anguish. Conscience often lies like a lion in a thicket, and when the sinner comes along the broad road it leaps upon him, and for a while he is sorely put to it. The bad man is comparable to leviathan, of which we read that his scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal, so that the sword of him that lays at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the javelin, and yet the Lord has a way of coming at him and sorely wounding him. Let us, therefore, both hope and pray for the very worst of men.

Brothers and sisters, use for the good of men anything which comes in your way. Use not only sober argument and sound doctrine, but even if a dream has touched your heart, do not hesitate to repeat it where it may have effect. Any weapon may be used in this war. But see to it that you seek the souls of men, all of you. You who are wives should be especially stirred up to this sacred work. Remember Pilate's wife, and think of her as affectionately giving the warning to her husband, and go and do likewise. Never keep back from an ungodly husband the word which may convert him from the error of his ways. And you, dear children, you sisters, you of the gentler sort, do not hesitate, in your own quiet way, to be heralds for Jesus wherever your lot is cast. As for us all, let us take care that we use every occasion for repressing sin and creating holiness. Let us warn the ungodly at once, for perhaps the man to whom we are sent has not yet performed the fatal deed. Let us stand in the gap while yet there is space for repentance. Pilate is even now sitting on the judgment seat. Time is precious. Make haste! Make haste, before yet he commits the deed of blood! Send the messenger to him! Stop him before the deed is done, even though he should complain of your interference. Say to him, "Have you nothing to do with this just person: for I have suffered many things because of Him, and I pray you do nothing against Him."

That is our second point. God bless it. Although I cannot preach upon it as I would, the Spirit of God can put power into it.

III. Thirdly, we have now the lamentable task of observing THE FREQUENT FAILURE EVEN OF THE BEST MEANS. I have ventured to say that, humanly speaking, it was the best means of reaching Pilate's conscience for his wife to be led to expostulate with him. He would hear but few, but he would hear her, and yet even her warning was in vain. What was the reason?

First, *self-interest* was involved in the matter, and that is a powerful factor. Pilate was afraid of losing his governorship. The Jews would be angry if he did not obey their cruel bidding. They might complain to Tiberius and he would lose his lucrative position. Alas, such things as these are holding some of *you* captives to sin at this moment. You cannot afford to be true and right, for it would cost too much. You know the will of the Lord, you know what is right, but you renounce Christ by putting Him off, and by abiding in the ways of sin that you may gain the wages thereof. You are afraid that to be a true Christian would involve the loss of a friend's goodwill, or the patronage of an ungodly person, or the smile of an influential worldling, and this you cannot afford. You count the cost, and reckon that it is too high. You resolve to gain the world, even though you lose your soul! What then? You will go to hell rich! A sorry result this! Do you see anything desirable in such an attainment? Oh that you would consider your ways and listen to the voice of wisdom!

The next reason why his wife's appeal was ineffectual was the fact that Pilate was *a coward*. A man with legions at his back, and yet afraid of a Jewish mob—afraid to let one poor prisoner go whom he knew to be innocent, afraid because he knew his conduct would not bear inspection! He was, morally, a coward! Multitudes of people go to hell because they have not the courage to fight their way to heaven.

“The fearful and unbelieving shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” So says the Word of God. They are afraid of encountering a fool's laugh, and so rush upon everlasting contempt. They could not bear to tear themselves away from old companions, and excite remarks and sarcasm among ungodly wits, and so they keep their companions and perish with them. They have not the pluck to say, “No,” and swim against the stream. They are such cowardly creatures that they will sooner be forever lost than face a little scorn.

Yet while there was cowardice in Pilate, there was *presumption* too. He who was afraid of man and afraid to do right, yet dared to incur the guilt of innocent blood. Oh, the cowardice of Pilate to take water and wash his hands, as if he could wash blood off with water, and then to say, “I am innocent of His blood”—which was a lie—“see you to it.” By those last words he brought the blood upon himself, for he consigned his prisoner to their tender mercies, and they could not have laid a hand upon Him unless he had given them leave. Oh, the daring of Pilate thus in the sight of God to commit murder and disclaim it. There is a strange mingling of cowardliness and courage about many men. They are afraid of a man, but not afraid of the eternal God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. This is why men are not saved, even when the best of means are used, because they are presumptuous, and dare defy the Lord.

Besides this, Pilate was *double-minded*. He had a heart and a heart. He had a heart after that which was right, for he sought to release Jesus, but he had another heart after that which was gainful, for he would not run the risk of losing his post by incurring the displeasure of the Jews. We have plenty around us who are double-minded. Such are here this morning, but where were they last night? You will be touched by today's sermon! How will you be affected tomorrow by a lewd speech or a lascivious song? Many men run two ways. They seem earnest about their souls, but they are far more eager after gain or pleasure. Strange perversity of man, that he should tear himself in two. We have heard of tyrants tying men to wild horses and dragging them asunder, but these people do this with themselves. They have too much conscience to neglect the Sabbath, and to forego attendance at the house of prayer, too much conscience to be utterly irreligious, to be honestly infidel, and yet at the same time they have not enough conscience to keep them from being hypocrites. They let “I dare not” wait upon “I would.” They want to do justly, but it would be too costly. They dare not run risks, and yet, meanwhile, they run the awful risk of being driven forever from the presence of God to the place where hope can never come. Oh that my words were shot as from a cannon! Oh that they would hurl a cannon-shot at indecision! Oh that I could speak like God's own thunder, which makes the hinds to calve, and breaks the rocks in pieces. Even so would I warn men against these desperate evils which thwart the efforts of mercy, so that, even when the man's own wife, with tender love, bids him escape from the wrath to come, he still chooses his own destruction.

IV. Lastly, we have a point which is yet more terrible, THE OVERWHELMING CONDEMNATION OF THOSE WHO THUS TRANSGRESS. This Pilate was guilty beyond all excuse. He deliberately and of his own free will condemned the just Son of God to die, being informed that He was the Son of God, and knowing both from his own examination and from his wife that He was a “just person.”

Observe that the message which he received was most distinct. It was suggested by a dream, but there is nothing dreamy about it. It is as plain as words can be put—“Have you nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him.” Pilate condemned the Lord with his eyes open, and that is an awful way of sinning. Oh, my dear friends, am I addressing any here who are purposing to do some very sinful thing, but have lately received a warning from God? I would add one more caution. I pray you by the blessed God, and by the bleeding Savior, and as you love yourself, and as you love her from whom the warning may have come to you, do stop, and hold your hand! Do not do this abominable thing! You know better. The warning is not put to you in some mysterious and obscure way, but it comes point blank to you in unmistakable terms. God has sent conscience to you, and He has enlightened that conscience, so that it speaks very plain English to you. This morning's discourse stops you on the highway of sin, puts its pistol to your ear, and demands that you “Stand and deliver.” Stir an inch, and it will be at your own soul's peril. Do you hear me? Will you regard this heaven-sent expostulation? Oh, that you would stand still awhile and hear what God shall speak while He bids you yield yourself to Christ today. It may be *now or never* with you, as it was with Pilate that day. He had the evil thing which he was about to do fully described to him, and therefore if he ventured

on it, his presumption would be great. His wife had not said, "Have nothing to do with this man," but "with this *just* man," and that word rang in his ears, and again and again repeated itself till he repeated it too. Read the twenty-fourth verse. When He was washing his wicked hands he said, "I am innocent of the blood of this *just* person"—the very name his wife had given to our Lord. The arrows stuck in him! He could not shake them off! Like a wild beast, he had the javelin sticking in his side, and though he rushed into the forest of his sin, it was evidently rankling in him still—"that just person" haunted him. Sometimes God makes a man see sin as sin, and makes him see the blackness of it, and if he then perseveres in it, he becomes doubly guilty, and pulls down upon himself a doom intolerable beyond that of Sodom of old.

Beside that, Pilate was sinning not only after distinct warning, and a warning which set out the blackness of the sin, but he was sinning after his conscience had been touched and moved through his affections. It is a dreadful thing to sin against a mother's prayer. She stands in your way, she stretches out her arms, and with tears she declares that she will block your road to hell. Will you force your way to ruin over her prostrate form? She kneels! She grasps your knees, she begs you not to be lost. Are you so brutal as to trample on her love? Your little child entreats you, will you disregard her tears? Alas, she was yours, but death has removed her, and before she departed she entreated you to follow her to heaven and she sang her little hymn—

"Yes, we'll gather at the river."

Will you fling your babe aside as though you were another Herod that would slay the innocents and all in order that you may curse yourself forever and be your own destroyer? It is hard for me to talk to you like this. If it is coming home to any of you it will be very hard for you to hear it. Indeed, I hope it will be so hard that you will end it by saying, "I will yield to love which assails me by such tender entreaties."

It will not be a piece of mere imagination if I conceive that at the last great day, when Jesus sits upon the judgment seat, and Pilate stands there to be judged for the deeds done in the body, that his wife will be a swift witness against him to condemn him. I can imagine that at the last great day there will be many such scenes as that, wherein those who loved us best will bring the weightiest evidences against us, if we are still in our sins. I know how it affected me as a lad when my mother, after setting before her children the way of salvation, said to us, "If you refuse Christ and perish, I cannot plead in your favor and say that you were ignorant. No, but I must say Amen to your condemnation." I could not bear *that!* Would my mother say, "Amen" to my condemnation? And yet, Pilate's wife what can you do otherwise? When all must speak the truth, what can you say but that your husband was tenderly and earnestly warned by you and yet consigned the Savior to His enemies?

Oh, my ungodly hearers, my soul goes out after you. "Turn you; turn you, why will you die?" Why will you sin against the Savior? God grant you may not reject your own salvation, but may turn to Christ and find eternal redemption in Him. "Whoever believes in Him has everlasting life."

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 3.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—21, 5, 473.**

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