

JESUS BEFORE PILATE – "CONSIDER HIM."

– *JUNE 5. – MATT. 27:11-26. –*

"Jesus came into the world to save sinners." – 1 Tim. 1:15.

AFTER the Lord's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was brought before the high priests, Annas and Caiaphas, for examination, and it was probably at this same house of the high priest that the Jewish Sanhedrin met, and the trial before it took place, as described in Matt. 26:59-66. It was probably about one o'clock in the morning that our Lord was brought in as a prisoner, and the examination and trial are supposed to have lasted until about half past five in the morning; a little later, probably between six and eight o'clock of that same day, he was brought before Pilate, the representative of the Roman Government. The chief priests and leading Jews of the Sanhedrin had been anxious for some time to apprehend our Lord, and he had walked in Galilee and no longer walked in Jewry (the Province of Judea) because the Jews sought to kill him. True, they had reasoned among themselves – "not upon a feast day, because of the people;" but our Lord had eluded them, and returned only at the time of the Feast of the Passover, knowing that it was at this time that his "hour was come, that he should depart out of the world," and that it must be at the time of the Passover, to fulfil the types and prophecies of the law. Finally, exasperated by the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the ass, and his driving the money-changers out of the Temple, they had seized upon the proposition of Judas for his betrayal at night, his capture when the multitudes were at home, his trial at an untimely season at night, his condemnation by the Jewish Court, and, rushing the matter through, the securing of Pilate's endorsement of the death sentence, which was essential.

In the trial before the Sanhedrin, which was the chief or Supreme Court of the Jews, and was composed of seventy of their prominent men, it was necessary that a form, at least, of justice should be

followed; hence witnesses were sought, to prove something against our Lord which would show him worthy of death. But finding no such witnesses, they ultimately secured two who were willing to bear false witness, who falsified by slightly perverting our Lord's statements – the wish to bear witness against him and to secure the favor of the chief priests probably helping them to distorted views of our Lord's words.

It was because the Sanhedrin had no power to put to death without the consent of the Roman governor that they brought Jesus before Pilate, and they brought him bound, as indicating that they had already determined that he was a vicious character and had found him duly guilty, and that the endorsement of their verdict and order of execution were the only proper steps for Pilate to take.

In the trial before the Sanhedrin no charges of treason or sedition were made, because such would have been out of order: the Jews holding their right to **[R2312 : page 160]** freedom from the Roman yoke, treason to Rome would have been loyalty to Judaism; besides, this was the very thing for which they had been waiting for centuries – a deliverer, and a great one; hence, the charge before the Sanhedrin was blasphemy. But before Pilate the charge of blasphemy would have had no weight, himself being probably an unbeliever in Jehovah and the Jewish religion and customs. Hence, the charge before Pilate was treason to Caesar; the high priests and Sanhedrin hypocritically taking the position that they were loyal defenders of the Roman power. But Pilate evidently saw through their subterfuge. His experience with human nature taught him at a glance not only that the prisoner before him was a remarkable man, but also that he was not of the kind to make a dangerous enemy to the empire.

Pilate's question to our Lord was evidently one of curiosity full of irony, "Art *thou* the King of the Jews?" If he expected any wild or blatant assertion of power and dominion, might and greatness, or any appeal to his compassion or pity or fear, he was disappointed. The

Master merely answered in the brief and simple [R2313 : page 160] words, "Thou sayest." He made no response to the various charges and calumnies which the Jewish elders and priests heaped upon him – "not one word." He knew that his hour was come; he knew that the cup of bitterness and ignominy which he was draining to the dregs was permitted of the Father; his will was entirely submitted to the Father's will; he had no desire to clear himself, nor to avoid or resist the death sentence sought. Pilate was amazed that anyone should be so indifferent to the preservation of his own life; but altho astonished that our Lord made no effort to resist his enemies and preserve his life, Pilate clearly saw that the charges were base fabrications, unworthy of consideration; and hence he informed the accusers that, as it was the season when he usually set at liberty a prisoner, they could reckon Jesus as having been justly accused, justly sentenced, and then set at liberty. But the accusers were enraged at the thought of their plans miscarrying, and fearful that even yet their prey might escape them, and cried out and incited the people against such a decree.

The Roman governor, like others of his day and since, was susceptible to fear, and especially if inspired by dreams; and a message from his wife, cautioning him to do nothing against Jesus and telling of her troubled dreams on his account, determined Pilate that he would set Jesus at liberty. Accordingly, he gave his decision that the one who should be released to them would be either Jesus or a very noted robber, named Barabbas. By naming Barabbas as the alternative choice to Jesus he evidently thought that, because Barabbas was so undesirable a person to have at liberty, the Jews would finally conclude that of the two they would prefer to have Jesus at liberty rather than Barabbas. But Pilate was mistaken: the hatred inspired by religious fanaticism is the deepest, wickedest and most conscienceless of all, and Barabbas was promptly accepted, – which left Pilate committed on that point, and left Jesus under the implied sentence.

The governor was still further perplexed. In attempting to get out of a dilemma he had unwittingly gotten himself into a worse fix, and he inquired what would be their will, then, respecting Jesus. Their blood-curdling cry, "Crucify him" astonished Pilate, and he answered, "[No!] for what evil hath he done?" But seeing that the case hung in the balance, the bloodthirsty accusers cried with greater vehemence, "Crucify him, crucify him," creating a tumult, and thus endeavoring to impress upon Pilate the danger of a general insurrection, unless their demands were complied with.

Poor Pilate! He stood as a representative and mouthpiece for the Roman empire, and was required to preserve order at any cost. He yielded to the demands, but indicated his own separateness from the sentence by his words, and by the symbolic act of washing his hands with water, in their presence, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; look to yourselves [that you are likewise free from blood-guiltiness]." Thus laying the responsibility upon them, he evidently still had hope of their change of mind. It was probably with this same thought in mind, or probably because the law required that everyone worthy of crucifixion should first be scourged, that our dear Redeemer was scourged before being delivered to be crucified.

Promptly the defiant cry, "His blood be upon us and upon our children," rang out through the courts of Pilate's tribunal, and reverberated in the courts of heaven, and was recorded as a prophecy of divine judgment against them. Alas! poor Jews; with what judgment you judged, you have been judged. And altho the true followers of the Nazarene have never injured you, his nominal friends have often brought vengeance upon you at the hands of Pilate's successors. You cried, "We have no king but Caesar," and were taken at your word by the Almighty. Oh, poor Jew, there is no way to escape your self-pronounced curse of his *blood*, except by accepting his blood, freely offered to you as to all mankind as the blood of sacrifice, the blood of atonement which sanctifieth (maketh holy to God) all to whom it is applied by faith. It is the "blood [seal] of the New Covenant."

The narrative of our dear Redeemer's shame, endured so patiently on our behalf, is most touching, and perhaps the relation of it and the reading of it have brought more hearts to repentance than almost anything else. Nor does it lose its power with those who have already accepted our Lord and the redemption which his blood effected: it mellows our hearts every time we consider him who endured such great contradiction of sinners against himself, when we remember that it was unmerited by him, and that it was a part of his sacrifice on our behalf. The Apostle points one of his most forcible lessons with this subject, urging that all of the Lord's followers should consider the meekness, patience and sufferings of Christ, endured most unjustly, lest we should be weary or faint in our minds, when enduring comparatively light afflictions, while seeking to walk in his footsteps. (Heb. 12:3.) Again, the Apostle refers to this, in connection with the other sufferings of Christ, saying that he who was rich for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich; that he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; and that as he laid down his life on our behalf, a willing sacrifice, "we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren."
