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## **AS A DECEIVER, YET TRUE.**

– JOHN 18:28-40. – MAY 21. –

**Golden Text:** – "Everyone that is of the Truth heareth his voice."

OUR LESSON relates to the trial of Jesus in the judgment hall of Pilate's palace. He stood before the representative of the greatest empire in the world, greatly disadvantaged yet remarkably calm and self-possessed. It was still early in the morning, probably eight o'clock or earlier. There had been no intermission of the strain upon Jesus' nerves from the time that he ate the Passover with his disciples, then washed their feet, then instituted the Memorial Supper as a symbol of his own death, the breaking of the bread of life to his followers. Then he bade Judas do whatever he intended to do, knowing full well the results. Then he talked to his disciples en route to Gethsemane about the vine and the branches, and prayed for them as in [R3554 : page 140] John 17, and, reaching Gethsemane, was in an agony of prayer on his own account, anxious to be shown that his work had all been thoroughly and satisfactorily done to the Father's approval.

From the moment that he got that approval through the angel who ministered unto him, all was peace and calm. His arrest, the scattering of his disciples, the hearing before the High-priest's court, the raillery, the smiting, the pulling of the hair of his face, the spitting upon him, his being blindfolded and asked to prophesy who had struck him, all this ignominy he endured patiently, and then, it being contrary to Jewish law to condemn a man in the night, his further trial was postponed until the members of the Sanhedrin could be called at daybreak to formally condemn him. Meantime his dear followers had all scattered like sheep, and the beloved Peter had denied him even with cursing before the cock crew. After passing through all these experiences, and probably without having been furnished with refreshments, it is remarkable that our Lord –

weakened through his ministries and the giving out of his vitality in the healing of others – should have been so calm and strong as he stood before Pilate.

His enemies, the members of the Sanhedrin, and the High-priests, who had before determined that he should be put to death, with murder in their hearts had still a form of godliness, and would not enter the judgment hall because, according to their tradition, this would have constituted a defilement of their holiness. Alas, how deceitful the human heart can be! How much of murder and meanness can be covered with a garment of light, with a claim of religious purity, professing to be seeking to know and to do God's will. This which is so conspicuously illustrated in this lesson is observable in our day as well in many of the affairs of life. Hypocrisy seems to be a very general failing, and sometimes the falsity is hidden from the heart of the deceiver as it probably was in this case. We remember Peter's words subsequently respecting these very men: "I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." The fact that great crimes may be committed in ignorance, and even with the thought of doing God service, should make all who are children of the light, all who are lovers of the truth and righteousness, to be very careful indeed to search their own hearts and motives earnestly lest they also should be of this class – self-deceived.

### **THAT THEY MIGHT EAT THE PASSOVER**

This expression has caused some confusion of thought. Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover Supper the evening before. Why, then, it is asked, should these fear to be contaminated lest they should thus be prevented from eating the Passover Supper, if it were in the past? We reply that their solicitation was in respect to the Passover Feast which would last the entire week, beginning that very day. We must bear in mind when using this word Passover that it is applicable both to the Supper and to the Feast week which followed it, and that the Jews thought more of the Feast week, while we as Christians

center our interests specially in the Passover Supper, or rather in the Memorial Supper instituted that evening to take the place of the Passover Supper for the Lord's followers throughout this Gospel age.

Our Lord frequently reproved the Jews along this very line of making clean the outside of the cup while inwardly it was filthy – of presenting a clean outward appearance as individuals and as a nation while at heart far from pure. On one occasion he reminded them that they would fast with great solemnity and outward show of restraint of appetite, whereas in their hearts they had that lack of love, that selfishness which would permit them to appropriate anything and to figuratively devour widows' houses. The Lord said nothing against outward ceremonies of cleanliness, purity and holiness, but declared that these would never take the place of the heart purity which in God's sight is all important.

When Pilate discerned that they would not enter the judgment hall he remembered their customs, and went to an outer court and had his official chair placed there. Much to their surprise he asked them to name their charges against the prisoner.

Evidently from his previous custom they had expected that Pilate would receive any culprit that they would bring to him, and be satisfied that if they had condemned one of their own nation he must be indeed a bad man and worthy of condemnation and execution at the hands of the Romans. Their surprise is indicated in their reply: "If he were not an evil-doer we would not have delivered him up to thee" – Do you suppose, Pilate, that we would be willing to place in your hands as the representative of Roman authority any of our citizens of good repute? **[R3554 : page 141]**

### **TAKE YE HIM AND JUDGE HIM**

Pilate's thrusting back the responsibility upon the Sanhedrin was very proper. The context shows us that he discerned that it was because of malice and envy that they were thus dealing with Jesus –

that he was not an ordinary criminal, one whose liberty would in any wise be calculated to disturb the peace of the Roman empire.

The reply of the disappointed Jewish rulers was to the effect that they would have been willing, indeed, to attend to the whole matter, only that authority to put any man to death had been taken from them. The Jewish Talmud contains this statement: "Forty years before the destruction of the Temple the judgment of capital crimes was taken away from Israel." Supposing this to be a correct statement, it follows that in divine providence the power of the Jews to punish an offender with death had been taken away that very year in which our Lord was arraigned. This is the more remarkable when we remember that the Jews never crucified any one, and that crucifixion was the legal and official method of putting to death under Roman law, and that prophecy long before had declared, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," and that our Lord himself prophesied his crucifixion, saying, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." This he said signifying what death he should die. (John 12:32,33.) Only by that taking of the authority away from the Jews that very year was the matter put in such a form that Jesus was not stoned to death, but was crucified.

The real charge against Jesus according to the Jewish trial was that he was a blasphemer, that he had declared himself to be the Son of God. The Jews never claimed to be sons of God; the highest station known amongst them was that occupied by Abraham, namely, a friend of God, and that occupied by Moses, namely, a servant of God, the prophets also being servants. Not until Christ came as the Head of the new house of sons were any recognized as sons. To this agree the words of the Apostle, "Moses verily was faithful as a servant over his house, but Christ as a son over his house, whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence of our faith and rejoicing firm unto the end." This charge of blasphemy under which our Lord was convicted before the Sanhedrin was punishable with stoning to death, but the power of putting to death being out of the hands of the Jews and in

the hands of the Romans altered the whole matter, and our Lord was crucified, was made a curse for us according to the forstatement of prophecy.

## **THE KING OF THE JEWS**

Luke gives us other particulars respecting the trial (23:2), informing us that the Jews brought their charges under three counts – all of them signifying treason against the Roman government. (1) Sediton. (2) Forbidding to give tribute to Caesar. (3) That he claimed himself to be an anointed king. Doubtless witnesses were produced to substantiate these charges.

No man could occupy the position which Pilate held without possessing some degree of mental acumen and thought. And though but a heathen and a sinful man, Pilate quickly discerned the true status of the case before him, that it was a case of religious persecution, that the accusers were not interested in upholding the Roman government, and that the accused was not a menace to that government in any particular. After hearing the testimony Pilate entered again into the judgment hall to personally speak with the prisoner and to consider what he should do in the matter. Here all four of the evangelists agree that his first words to Jesus were, "Art thou the King of the Jews?"

This was a question which our Lord could not properly evade. He was the King of the Jews; he had left the heavenly glory to assume this very position; his coming had been heralded for centuries before and had constituted the basis of the divine promises and prophecies. He could not deny the fact now before Pilate; to have done so would have been to counteract and overthrow his own teachings and the very faith which he wished to establish according to the divine plan. At the same time it was due to Pilate and to us all that he should plainly show by his answer that he was not seeking to wrest the government from Pilate and the Romans at this time. The answer was along this line – "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell

it thee of me?" or perhaps we might paraphrase the answer thus: "Are you asking this question from your own standpoint as a Roman, or are you asking from the standpoint of the hopes of the Jews as religionists?"

Pilate's retort was, "You are aware that I am not a Jew and do not enter sympathetically into the hopes of your nation. It is your own nation and the chief religious rulers of the same, over whom you might be esteemed to be a prince or king – it is these very men who have [R3555 : page 141] delivered you to me, who have put you in my power, who want me to put you to death. What have you done to them? In what way have you so displeased them and angered them and aroused their fierce jealousy?"

Our Lord was calm and moderate, yet just to the point: "My Kingdom is not of this world," not a kingdom of the present order or arrangement. This was as much as was necessary to be told under the circumstances, as much as Pilate could have understood – more probably would have confused him. How brief and how wise was this answer! Our Lord proceeded to call Pilate's attention to the fact that his followers were not fighting for him, not seeking to establish his sway, his Kingdom authority by force; that if his Kingdom were thus to be established he would never have permitted himself to thus have been left at the mercy of his enemies; that his Kingdom was not from hence, was not yet due to come into power. In one of our Lord's parables he pointed out this very same lesson, saying, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations." He marks his Kingdom as beginning at his second advent.

Pilate evidently caught the thought, as is implied in his answer, "Art thou not a King, then?" – Do I understand you to mean that you are to be a King, but have not yet become a King, that your reign is in the distant future? Our Lord replied, Yes, you were right in your

original assumption that I am a King. I was born a King, I came into the world for this very purpose of being a King, all my testimony is in line with this great truth; every one who is honest, everyone who is of the truth heareth my voice and is thus drawn to be my disciple or follower and to appreciate me as King. Others, however, are in the majority and do not recognize me now, and will not until the time shall come when I shall set up my Kingdom. Thus we paraphrase the record.

### **"WHAT IS TRUTH?"**

Our Lord's reference to truth, sincerity, honesty, seemed to touch a tender spot in Pilate's conscience. Few worldly people respect insincerity. Many would not **[R3555 : page 142]** wish to lie or deceive egregiously or injuriously, but nevertheless deception is considered a part of the life and character and practice of every successful person in business and in society. So, catching at our Lord's last statement, Pilate, as he turned on his heel to go back to the Jews, said, Yes, but who will tell us how closely that word truth or sincerity should be or could be applied in life's affairs?

It is well for the Lord's people to have clearly in mind that as the Master designated himself the Way, the Truth, the Life, so all who are truly his disciples must be of the Truth, must be sincere. It would appear that the Lord is during this Gospel age especially calling this class, the truth-hungry, the sincere, the honest-hearted, and that others are not apt to be much influenced by any of the hopes and promises now extended; but that even if such persons should now get a clue of the Truth they do not hold it long, not being at heart children of the Truth, children of the Light. How important, then, that we should be honest-hearted to begin with, sincere in all our words and thoughts and conduct; and while this honesty of word and deed should guide all of our relationships with the world, we should be doubly careful to have them measure our relationship to the Lord and



to his people and to his Word! Only the sincere will ever be truly overcomers.

Poor Pilate, as he thought of his own disregard for sincerity in many of the prominent affairs of his life, and as he looked at the leaders and rulers of the Jewish nation, which claimed to be the most holy people in the world, feared that question of What is truth? What is it to be sincere? How true and how sincere should we be? These were questions beyond his depth, beyond his power to properly weigh, and apparently equally beyond the power of appreciation of the chiefest of the Jews. Jesus himself apparently was the only representative and exponent of the Truth – he was preaching a doctrine which evidently was too high above the heads of his own nation. We may see, however, that in the Lord's plan this preaching of the Truth is the means whereby the Lord would gather together a people for himself, his jewels during this Gospel age.

No wonder the Scriptures tell us that those whom the Lord is thus choosing along the lines of truth and sincerity are peculiar people, different from the majority, and no wonder either that they tell us that in all they will be but a little flock. Let us, dear readers, make every effort that by the grace of God we may be amongst these very elect ones. Let us prize the Truth above riches or honor of men – yea, above life itself; so shall we be true disciples, followers of him who is the truth, and who prayed for us saying, "Sanctify them through thy Truth, Thy Word is Truth."

### **"I FIND NO FAULT IN HIM."**

In these words we have Pilate's verdict – not guilty. According to Roman law this was the proper ending of the case. But the Jews, realizing now that after all their efforts their prey was about to escape from them, were angered and threatened Pilate, not too openly so as to taunt him, but in a very effective manner. Not long before they had accused him to the emperor, and now in covert language they threatened a further accusation, hinting that this time their charges



would probably be very powerful in the estimation of the emperor. They intimated that their charge would be that Pilate was fostering sedition, that he was no friend of the emperor, Caesar, that they themselves were more loyal than he; that when they found a seditious person of their own nation raising a disturbance they freely brought him to Pilate, merely asking for his execution, and that the emperor's representative was guilty of treason in refusing to execute one who claimed that he was the King of the Jews and was gathering to his standard many of the people all through the length and breadth of Palestine.

Pilate at once discerned that such a charge brought by such influential persons would be a serious matter in the eyes of the emperor; but, hearing of Galilee, he inquired if Jesus were by birth a Galilean, and receiving an affirmative answer he found a loophole and said, Then he belongs to Herod's jurisdiction and I transfer the whole matter to Herod's court; let him deal with him. – Luke 23:5-12.

We remember how the Lord was maltreated by Herod and his soldiers, crowned with thorns, invested with a purple robe and returned to Pilate. It was in the meantime, probably, that Pilate's wife told him of her dream respecting Jesus, and no doubt the governor was doubly perplexed when the prisoner was returned to his court in the gorgeous robe which made more prominent his real claims, and yet made even more ridiculous the pretensions of the Jewish priests and rulers that he was a dangerous person, a menace to the government.

It occurred to Pilate that one way to appease the Jews – to let them feel that they had not been utterly defeated – would be to allow the supposition that he was justly condemned and then to let him be the prisoner usually respited at this season every year. He proposed this, but the rabble cried out for Barabbas, who was really a seditious person and a murderer, and probably the real ideal of many of those

who were hounding Jesus at the instigation of the priests. It was then that Pilate asked, "What, then, shall I do with Jesus?" and, instigated by the priests and Pharisees, the answer came, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

### **"VOX POPULI, VOX DEI."**

Alas, poor fallen human nature! How little it is to be relied upon! How untruthful is the proverb, "*Vox populi, vox Dei*" – The voice of the people is the voice of God. If we could suppose the world filled with perfect men and women, in the image and likeness of God and actuated by the spirit of holiness, then, indeed, we could suppose that the voice of the multitude would be the voice of God. But the very reverse is not infrequently the case; the voice of the people is often the voice of the demons who are deluding them, as the Apostle intimates, saying, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not."

In accord with this thought, that the judgment of the world is not to be depended upon under present conditions, is our Lord's suggestion to all of us, "Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, [blind, still servants of sin in fellowship instead of opposition to the principles of selfishness now prevailing] the world would love its own. But now ye are not of the world, for I have chosen you out of the world, that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruitage should be perpetual." To us, then, the voice of Jesus is the voice of God, and only his sheep hear his voice and follow him. We are glad, however, to remember the assurances of the divine promise that ultimately all the families of the earth shall be blessed and brought to a knowledge of the Truth, released from the bondage of sin and Satan, who then will be **[R3555 : page 143]** placed under restraint. Meantime those who stand for the right must be content to be of the minority, but their faith will be strengthened by the assurance that he that is for us is more than all that be against us. By

and by, when the clouds of darkness of this present time shall have rolled away and the new Kingdom shall be in power, the Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth, and the righteous shall be in the majority, and whosoever will not obey the laws of that empire shall be destroyed from amongst the people. – Acts 3:23.

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