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## "AS DECEIVERS AND YET TRUE."

– LUKE 23:13-25. – *DECEMBER 2*. –

**Golden Text:** – "Then said Pilate, I find no fault in this man."

– Luke 23:14.

OUR Lord's words, "The darkness hateth the light," were verified not only in his own case but also amongst those who have been his footstep followers throughout this Gospel age. In the lesson before us we see an illustration of this in the incidents connected with our Lord's examination before Pilate and Herod, in his being "set at naught" and variously maltreated, and we can apply the same general principles to his true followers. Another of our Lord's sayings was illustrated in his experiences at this time, namely, "If the light that is in thee become darkness, how great is that darkness." The Jewish people had a certain amount of light, as the Apostle declares, "Much advantage everyway." (Rom. 3:2.) Yet the most rabid of our Lord's foes were the chief priests and rulers, and the Jewish mob whom they incited and authorized, and in a sense legalized by their learning, pretended piety and official position as those who "sat in Moses' seat." How great was their darkness, how perverted their sense of justice, how absent all sense of love! – how fully they demonstrated the wisdom of the divine decision that they were not fit to represent God and his Kingdom amongst men, and should, therefore, be cast off, that a spiritual Israel might be selected as Messiah's associates, his Bride. And is it not the same to-day? Has it not been a similar class all the way down through the age and now that is found opposing God and his Anointed, represented in his members in the flesh? It is even so: while the whole world under the blinding influence of the Adversary is opposed to the light, to the Truth, to the children of the light and to the promulgation of the Truth, nevertheless it is nominal Christendom and her Doctors of Divinity whose opposition is chiefly aroused, whose

tongues are the loudest in crying, "Crucify! crucify!" against all the true members of the body of Christ, those who walk in his footsteps. We are glad of the Apostle Peter's assurance, as respects all such, that in general they have not had a sufficiency of light to make their course of conduct a guilty one to the last degree. The apostles said of the traducers of Jesus, his real crucifiers, "I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." (Acts 3:17.) We may be sure that much of the opposition to the body of Christ all down through the age the Lord will be able to similarly pass by as done in blindness, in ignorance. We must be in the condition of heart to love our enemies, to do good to those who despitefully use us, and to pray for such; and we have [R3895 : page 364] good hope that when the blessed Kingdom of the Lord shall be established, and clear knowledge of the Lord fill the whole earth, many of these now blinded and bitter enemies will have the eyes of their understanding opened and be amongst those who will bow the knee and with the tongue confess to the glory of God.

## **JESUS BEFORE PILATE**

Our Lord was brought before Pilate early in the morning of the day of his crucifixion, about eight o'clock. The Jewish Sanhedrin had met still earlier, and had approved of the findings of the High Priest in the examination during the night watches – that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, of treason against God and his country. This was held to be proven by his admission before the High Priest that he was the Son of God, the Messiah. They were ashamed of him, and desired no such King, no such Savior, no such Messiah. They went to Pilate's judgment hall early, before the news of our Lord's arrest would reach the people of the city in general, and thus too great a commotion be made and perhaps some of his friends be aroused to his defense.

It required but a few moments for Pilate to make an examination of the prisoner at the bar. The charge against our Lord before Pilate was a totally different one from that on which he had been condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrin. It was of three counts: (1) Seditious, raising a tumult, stirring up the people to a rebellion; (2) that he taught the people that they should not give tribute to Caesar; (3) that he himself claimed to be the king who should receive the tributes. The charges were so evidently untrue that Pilate speedily discerned the animus of the Jewish rulers who formulated them. He saw that it was the religious power of the rulers that was in danger, and not the civil power of the Roman government. The multitude standing outside the gates shouted the accusations riotously, incited so to do by their religious teachers. Jesus made no reply, so that even Pilate marveled at his quietness, self-possession, non-resistance and lack of vindictiveness and refusal to defend himself, even though he was manifestly a person quite able to plead his own cause. Pilate even asked him if he were not aware of the fact that he had power either to set him at liberty or to inflict the punishment desired by the people. Our Lord's answer was serene, that Pilate could have no power at all except as it was permitted him by the heavenly Father. Ah, this was the secret of our Lord's composure! He had given his life, his all; he had surrendered to the Father his every interest; he had confidence in the Father's love and wisdom, and was willing, therefore, to drink of the cup which the Father had poured, rejoicing to do the will of him that sent him and to finish that work. So with the Lord's followers throughout this age – in proportion as they, like him, have been enabled to realize the fulness of their consecration and at heart have been filled with his spirit and loving submission to the Father's will – in that same proportion they have been able to be calm under most severe and trying ordeals, so that the world even has marveled at their composure and self-control, the peace of God passing all understanding ruling in their hearts.

Concluding his brief interview with Jesus, Pilate approached the wide-open doorway of his court-room, outside which the people were crowding, and publicly and openly declared, "I find no fault in this man." The rulers, disappointed, fearing that by some mischance they would after all lose their prey, were angry, and aroused the populace to expressions of dissatisfaction with the verdict. Pilate, however, had given the sentence and was not disposed to change it – yet he hesitated about setting Jesus at liberty in the face of such an angry demonstration on the part of the general public as well as of the influential rulers. Incidentally hearing something said about Galilee, he inquired if Jesus were a Galilean, and this being confirmed he said, "Since he is a Galilean I will send him to Herod, who at present is in the city." Then our Lord, publicly accompanied by a squad of Roman soldiers, was sent to Herod, who had a curiosity to see him; he had heard many things about him, and he had wondered whether or not he might be John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, raised from the dead. But when Herod began to question Jesus he answered him never a word. There is a time to speak and a time to hold silence, and our Lord was the master of the situation. Undoubtedly his silence was more forceful than anything he could have said. Herod was evidently provoked by this silence, but dare not belittle himself by showing this. He therefore contented himself by allowing some of his men of war to array Jesus in a gorgeous robe, and to do him mock reverence. He regarded Jesus as a pretender, and no doubt thought it a stroke of wit to parody his claims of royalty. His verdict was, Not guilty – innocent. As Pilate had turned the prisoner over to Herod, declaring that he himself found no cause of death in him, Herod returned the compliment by remitting the prisoner again to Pilate. When, therefore, Pilate found the matter again in his hands he called together the chief priests and the rulers of the people, as stated in the opening verse of our lesson, and said, "Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people: And behold I have examined him before you and have found no fault in this man as touching those things

whereof ye accuse him. No, nor Herod, for I sent you to him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is found in him. I will therefore chastise him and release him."

## **AN APOLOGY FOR PILATE**

Many are disposed to censure Pilate's severity: they call him a wicked man, unwilling to stand by his own convictions, and suggest that even the proposition to chastise Jesus was a manifestation of this weakness – that if there was no fault in Jesus, justice would not only have forbidden his execution but would also have forbidden his scourging with whips.

We believe that an injustice is done the man. He was a heathen, had no faith in the Jewish expectancy of a Messiah, [R3895 : page 365] no respect for the Jews themselves, but thought of them as a rebellious people whom he was placed there to keep in order – in subjection to the Roman empire. His training in life had been to consider that there might be many gods invisible, but that Caesar, the Roman Emperor, was the tangible representative of the gods, whose honor, authority and respect should be maintained at any hazard. He knew that he was placed as the representative of Rome at Jerusalem not to do justice but to keep order – not to favor and forward the divine plans, but to represent and maintain the authority of the Roman empire. What mattered it to Rome if a thousand innocent victims suffered every year so long as Roman prestige was maintained and Roman tribute was collected? If injustice amongst the Jews had been likely to stir them up to disloyalty to Rome, then the injustice would have been righted, so that the authority of Rome might remain upon a good basis; but if both the rulers and the people united against anybody or anything, and made it a test of [R3896 : page 365] their loyalty to Rome, the Emperor and senate would surely expect that Pilate, as their representative, would favor the voice of the people and maintain order and quiet. Apparently

therefore it was either a respect which Pilate felt for our Lord's personality or the influence of his wife's dream of the preceding night that led him to strive with the Jewish rulers for the release of Jesus. Many another man in his position would have used the opportunity to curry favor with those under his control, and would have executed Jesus simply to please them – just as we see that Herod did on another occasion, respecting which we read, "And he killed James, the brother of John, with a sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." – Acts 12:2,3.

The scourging incident should be viewed from this standpoint: Pilate wished to placate the mob spirit which he perceived at his court gate: if Jesus were scourged, and thus demeaned, the people would probably be better satisfied and more likely to let the incident drop than if the Lord were turned free without chastisement. We esteem then that it was with a good motive rather than a bad one that Pilate condemned Jesus to be lashed on the back.

### **BARABBAS CHOSEN – BY POPULAR VOTE**

At this season of the year it was the custom for the Roman Governor to release a prisoner as an act of magnanimity and an adjunct to the general joy of the occasion. Pilate reminded them of this, and suggested that after scourging Jesus he would be the prisoner whom he would release, but the multitude cried out against this with united voice, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas." We cannot doubt that the priests and rulers had more or less to do with this – that they were still inciting the people against Jesus. And when we think of the Jews we are appalled at the condition of heart which it reveals. Barabbas was a seditionist in fact and had been imprisoned for murder – and this was the choice of the people as against Jesus! Truly they showed the murderous condition of their hearts: although

outwardly a moral people, respecting the Law, inwardly they were filled with the spirit of the Adversary – they hated the Light and the great Light-Bearer. Similarly, all down through the age, those who have been chosen to office – while they have not always been seditionists and murderers – have rarely, if ever, been saints. And so today, although nearly nineteen centuries have passed, and the most civilized parts of the world are called Christendom, we may be sure that if our Lord were to offer himself as King to these he would be rejected, and, if not a murderer elected instead, the choice would certainly fall upon one who had considerable of the murderous spirit – the spirit of the world, the spirit of the Adversary, which frequently manifests itself, as the Apostle declares, in malice, hatred, envy, strife – works of the flesh and of the devil. The disciple is not above his Lord; but in proportion as he has a heart-likeness to his Lord, in that same proportion he will be tolerably sure not to be pushed into any place of very great honor and dignity in the present time. We by no means inveigh against those who occupy official and honorable positions. We believe that good, noble characters have filled such positions by popular choice, popular vote, but we consider such occurrences so rare as to prove the rule to the contrary. Let it be remembered, however, that we make a wide distinction between a good citizen, a good ruler, a noble man and a saint, a follower in the footsteps of Jesus. Let us determine that by the grace of God our stand will be with the Master; let us expect that it will be unpopular, cost us shame and contempt and disadvantage, and that this will be our share in his cross – and let us remember that only those who bear the cross will wear the crown. "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side; Some great cause, God's new Messiah offering each the bloom or blight, Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right; And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light."

## **PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM**

Edersheim remarks that it was "While the people were deciding to choose Barabbas instead of Jesus, and Pilate was sitting on his judgment seat, a messenger came to him from his wife, warning him not to yield and deliver up Jesus to be crucified, for she had suffered many things in a dream because of him. We can understand it all, if, on the previous evening, after the Roman guard had been granted, Pilate had spoken of it to his wife. Tradition has given her the name Procula. What if Procula had not only been a proselyte, like the wife of a previous Roman governor (Saturninus), but had known about Jesus and spoken of him to Pilate on that evening? This would best explain his reluctance to condemn Jesus, as well as her dream of him."

### **"WHY, WHAT EVIL HATH HE DONE?"**

Pilate a second time essayed to influence the people, but again they began shouting, "Crucify him, Crucify him," and the third time he appealed to them saying, "Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him. I will therefore chastise him and let him go," but **[R3896 : page 366]** the mob was "instant with loud voices requiring that he might be crucified, and the voices of them and the chief priests prevailed."

Stalker comments upon this incident: "This scene has often been alleged as the self-condemnation of democracy. *Vox populi, vox Dei*, its flatterers have said – but look yonder! When the multitude has to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, it chooses Barabbas! If this be so, the scene is equally decisive against aristocracy. Did the priests, scribes, and nobles behave better than the mob? It was by their advice that the mob chose."

Elsewhere their arguments are set forth: they clearly intimated to Pilate that the incident would be reported at Rome, and would have a peculiar light that would reflect against his



vigilance as the representative of Roman authority – that a pretender to the dominion of Israel had appeared, and that they themselves, loyal to Rome, had arrested him and brought him to the Governor, who was so slack of his duty that instead of crucifying him he had set him free. Poor Pilate was in a very hard place for one of his character, position and education. He gave way finally under pressure, whereas many a man in his place would not have thought of resisting the popular will in such a matter. He finally gave sentence that the will of the people should be done. And is not this as high a level as is ever attained by earthly law and justice? What human law can stand against the will of the people? Is it not the same with us today? The people make the laws and the people execute them, and Pilate merely hearkened to the voice of Jesus' own countrymen. Here, too, the Scriptures lay the blame, saying, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Here the Apostle also lays the blame, not upon Pilate, but upon the Jews and their rulers.

### **PILATE WASHED HIS HANDS**

As an indication of his dissent, and as clearing himself in the sight of all from the responsibility, Pilate called for water to be brought, and in the sight of the multitude poured it over his hands. Thus washing his hands he said, both in symbol and in words, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man, see ye to it." (Deut. 21:6-9.) How blinded were the Jews that they could not even appreciate justice to the same extent as this heathen ruler, who had nothing at stake personally nor religiously – whose every interest might be said to have been better served by a concurrence in the popular vote. This hardness of heart is represented by the willingness with which the priests and rulers and multitude accepted the responsibility, saying, "His blood be upon us and upon our children." The full responsibility of what followed was left with the Jews.

## "HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED"

Carrying out the thought that the responsibility lay with the Jews, God through the Prophet had already declared that the time would come when the poor blinded eyes would be opened and the Jews would look upon him whom they had pierced and mourn for him. (Zech. 12:10.) Thank God that such a time is coming, and that the Lord promises that he will pour upon them the spirit of prayer and supplication, and will take away their sin. As a people they have had severe experiences for now many centuries, and all who have the Spirit of Christ rejoice to know of their coming reprieve; and not only so, but to know, further, that the blessing which will thus begin with the "Jew first" shall extend through him under the divine guidance of spiritual Israel in glory, the Christ, to the blessing of all the families of the earth during Christ's Millennial reign.

## "AS DECEIVERS AND YET TRUE"

These words of the Apostle merely confirm the thought emphasized by the Master himself, that all true followers of Jesus will have more or less of his experiences. He was the true one – the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life – and yet he was crucified as a deceiver, he was misunderstood by the sin-blinded world, yea, by the most enlightened people of that time. The disciple is not to expect to be above his Lord, but rather to expect to glory in the privilege of being his companion. Let us learn, therefore, to rejoice even in **[R3897 : page 366]** the midst of misrepresentation, falsification, buffetings, scourgings, legal and illegal, farcical – let us count it all joy to be permitted thus to have companionship with our beloved Savior; let us learn the lesson of patient endurance in well doing, that in due time, not having fainted, we may reap the glorious reward of joint-heirship with him in his Kingdom.

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