

JESUS TRIED BY PILATE

– *NOVEMBER 22.* – *MATTHEW 27:11-26.* –

"Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ?" – Verse 22.

PILATE was the Roman Governor of Judea, the representative of Caesar's government. We are not inclined to blame him seriously for the death of Jesus. He acted as he was expected to act. He was in Judea, not to settle Jewish theories or religious disputes, but to keep the people of Judea quiet, orderly, subject to the government of Rome. It was policy, so far as compatible with the peace and quiet of the country, that he should rule justly; but justice was to be sacrificed at any time in the interests of the Roman Empire. Tradition has it that Pilate had heard previously of Jesus, and had even met Him by appointment privately, making inquiry respecting His teachings.

Our last lesson showed us Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin as early in the morning as possible, before the people would be generally astir, before therefore there could be any general co-operation on the part of Jesus' friends, by the people, respecting His arrest, etc. As quickly as possible the high priest and representatives of the Sanhedrin hurried Jesus to the Praetorium, asking Pilate to condemn Him. Pilate inquired as to what charge they had against Jesus. They evasively answered that of course He was a wicked man, worthy of punishment; else they would not be there at all accusing Him.

Pilate reminded them that under the Roman usage they had great liberty in dealing with all disputes of a religious kind, that he was not posted in Judaism, and that therefore they should deal with the case themselves. The priests responded that they knew this; but that they had no power to inflict the death penalty. Thus they

revealed the depth of their wickedness – that they had been plotting deliberately to have Pilate inflict the death penalty upon an innocent person. Then they began to accuse Jesus, claiming that He was perverting the nation – turning it away from loyalty and obedience to the Roman government – that He was telling the people that they should not pay taxes to Caesar, and that He was claiming Himself to be the Jewish King Messiah.

These were serious charges before the Roman Governor, which he was bound to consider; and we have noticed that they were totally different charges from those brought against Jesus by the Sanhedrin trial. Although the charges were false, Jesus made no defense. He knew that the time had come for Him to die. He would not attempt to turn aside that which He knew to be a part of the Divine Program for Him.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Pilate looked upon Jesus, no doubt thinking that one so gentle in appearance would not be at all likely to raise an insurrection that would be injurious to the interests of the Roman Empire. Another account tells us that Pilate perceived that the chief priests and scribes were moved with envy in making their charges. Pilate perceived that something in Jesus' teachings appealed to the people more than did the teachings of these religious rulers, and that he was being asked to perform a mean and unjust act for persons who sought to shirk their own responsibility.

However, Pilate must not appear to be sympathetic with the Nazarene. He must not appear to treat lightly the charges made respecting another king than Caesar. He therefore demanded of Jesus, "Do You not hear the things witnessed against You? Why do You not answer, and plead guilty or not guilty?" Jesus said nothing.

Pilate then went out to the Scribes and Pharisees, who had refrained from entering the Praetorium because the day was the beginning of the Passover. After conferring with the chief priests and hearing from them, apparently, Pilate asked the question, "Art Thou the King of the Jews? Do You acknowledge that?" Jesus responded by asking, "Is the question because of anything that you see and know of My teachings, or is your question merely based upon the assertion of My enemies?" Pilate replied that the chief men of Jesus' own nation had delivered Him, and now he would like to know what He had done that was the cause of this opposition.

Jesus answered that His Kingdom was not of this world – this present Age or order of things. He was, therefore, not in conflict with Caesar's kingdom. This would account to Pilate for the fact that neither Jesus nor His friends made any manifestation of rebellion against the civil government, as would have been the case if His had been an earthly government. His Kingdom, He declared, was of the future. Pilate replied, "You do, then, claim to be a King, and that some time and somewhere You will exercise dominion?" Jesus answered that He was a King and that to this end He had been born, to this end He came into the world. He must bear witness to the Truth; and all who were of the Truth, and only such, would be able to appreciate His testimony.

"Ah," said Pilate, "that is a question with everybody: What is Truth? Nobody seems to know." Then he went forth to the Jews and said, "I find no crime in Him. He is in no way a malefactor against Caesar or his laws. He has done nothing that could lead me to interfere justly with His liberty or His rights."

The high priests and the Doctors of the Law were alarmed. Was it possible that just at the moment when they had hoped to crucify Jesus, He would escape from them! Then they vehemently charged that Jesus was stirring up the people, preaching

everywhere, and that His preaching had begun away off in Galilee. When Pilate heard the word Galilee, he asked, "Is He a Galilaean?" Being told that He was, Pilate said, "Then I can easily transfer this whole troublesome matter to [R5571 : page 333] Herod, King of Galilee," the latter at the time also having his palace in Jerusalem.

Jesus was sent to Herod, who had a curiosity respecting Him. He had heard many things of Jesus, and would have liked to see Him do some miracle. Herod asked our Lord questions, but there was no response. The chief priests and Scribes violently accused Jesus to the king. Herod and his soldiers mocked Him, and sent Him back to Pilate with a gorgeous robe on, a mocked King. This act of deference on the part of Pilate, and the return of the courtesies by Herod, bridged over an enmity which had existed between the two for some time.

NEITHER PILATE NOR HEROD CONDEMNED

Addressing the accusers of Jesus again, Pilate said, "Ye brought unto me this man as one that perverteth the people. Behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him: no, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him (and he sent Him back unto us) and behold, nothing worthy of death has been done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." Evidently the chastising, or whipping, of Jesus was done to save His life – with the thought that the Jews would be appeased in having Jesus suffer to this extent.

At this time of the year on several occasions Pilate had released prisoners in honor of the Passover. The multitude at this time cheered Pilate, and inquired whether or not he would release some prisoner. Thinking this a favorable opportunity to dispose of Jesus and get Him out of the hands of the chief priests and leaders of the people, Pilate said to the people: "Shall I release this One to you who is in prison claiming to be the King of the Jews?" The

crowd looked to their religious leaders and were incited to urge the governor to release Barabbas, the highway robber. Pilate said to the throng, "What, then, shall I do with Jesus, called the Messiah?" And the multitude, influenced by their clergy, cried out: "Let Jesus be crucified!" Pilate asked: "Why, what has this man done? I find no cause of death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." Jesus was therefore delivered over to the multitude, only too willing to mock Him, as well as to scourge Him. Pilate said to the waiting Jews, "I will bring Him out shortly, scourged, and you will know that I find no crime in Him."

PILATE'S ENDEAVORS TO FREE JESUS

Jesus, therefore, came out wearing the crown of thorns and purple gown. Pilate said unto them: "Ecce homo!" – Behold the Man! See the One whom you are trying to have me put to death. Behold that He is one of the noblest specimens of your race or of humanity. See Him in His sorrow and humility. Behold the beautiful dignity of His character. Whatever you have against Him, you will feel placated now that you see His humility. But they cried out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate answered: You may crucify Him if you choose, but I find no fault in Him – I find no crime in Him. Then the Jews came to the real point of the matter, the real reason of their opposition, namely, that Jesus had declared Himself to be the Son of God and that they considered that blasphemy. When Pilate heard that he was all the more afraid and returned the question to Jesus: Whence art thou? But he got no answer. Then saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." Then Pilate thought again to release Jesus, and yet it might stir up tumult in the city, which his office obligated him to keep in peace and quiet. But the Jews cried out: If thou release this man thou art not

Caesar's friend; everyone that maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. This was putting Pilate in an awkward position. To release Jesus would seemingly make him the supporter of Caesar's opponent – the more strange, because Jesus was accused by His own countrymen and really had nobody to defend Him except Pilate himself.

To add to Pilate's perplexity he had at this time received a message from his wife, urging him to have nothing to do with opposition to Jesus, and informing him that she had had a special dream respecting the matter. Again Pilate had recourse to the people, as in contradistinction to their rulers. Presenting the noble personage of Jesus before them he exclaimed, "Behold your King!" But this seemed only to incense the multitude, who cried the more vehemently, "Away with Him! Crucify Him! We have no king but Caesar."

In desperation Pilate had water poured upon his hands and washed them in the sight of the people, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man! See ye to it." The people cried, "His blood be upon us and upon our children!"

And has it not been so! For more than eighteen centuries the Jews have suffered – aliens from God! without prophet! without priest! without sin-offerings! without Atonement Days! (Hosea 3:4,5.) Ah! but the time nears when, their iniquity being pardoned, the Lord will pour upon Israel the spirit of prayer and supplication; the eyes of their understanding will be opened and they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and they shall all the more praise Him! – Zechariah 12:10.

Complying with the demands of the people in all things not contrary to the interests of the Roman Empire, as was his bounden duty, Pilate surrendered to the demand and delivered Jesus to death and released to them Barabbas, the robber.

THE SAME SPIRIT PREVAILS

Let us not think that human nature has changed during the past eighteen centuries. Rather let us believe that, the circumstances being the same today, Jesus or His disciples might be executed in any land, provided the civil magistrates desired their death and deemed it expedient in the interests of peace, and especially provided their religious rulers and teachers demanded such a sacrifice of the innocents, considering it necessary to their own hold upon the credulities of the people.

Let us not be surprised if similar experiences should come to some of God's saintly people in the near future. The pages of history show that so-called interests of religion, voiced by religious rulers, have been powerful with civil rulers to the subversion of justice and the death of the innocent throughout the Age. The course of God's people at all times should be that marked out by the Master – full resignation to the will of God – full realization of God's supervision of all the interests of His Cause – and full trust that the results will work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

"Though all the world my choice deride,
Yet Jesus shall my portion be;
For I am pleased with none beside;
The fairest of the fair is He.

"Thy sufferings I embrace with Thee,
Thy poverty and shameful cross;
The pleasures of the world I flee,
And deem its treasures only dross."

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