

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE ACCUSATIONS

AFTER THE JEWS had gained their first victory over the governor, for as such they might account it, in having succeeded by their imposing attitude in wresting from him the reply, **“Take ye him and judge him according to your law,”** they proceed with increasing courage and bring forward accusations against their prisoner, by which they hope completely to influence the Roman and induce him to favor their murderous project. They are acquainted with his weak side - his pride of office, his ambition, and in particular, his dependence on the favor of his imperial master; and toward this point they direct their assault.

They abstain from repeating before a heathen tribunal, accusations against Jesus which they could successfully bring forward against Him in their Jewish Sanhedrin. Instead of an ecclesiastical, they make before Pilate a political charge. They accuse the Lord of a threefold crime, which, because it is imputed to Him in a certain sense by His opponents and the enemies of His kingdom, even in the present day is worthy of particular investigation.

“We found this fellow perverting the nation.”

This is the first of the three charges brought against Him. They intend by it to say, “This Man seeks to lessen the respect due to the constituted authorities.” But to bring forward against Jesus a charge like this, some shadow of truth was requisite, and this they found in the position which the Lord had taken with reference to the priests and scribes.

For as regards the priests, our Lord certainly did not instruct His disciples to place their trust in them as their real mediators with God, or to seek in their sacrifices the cause of their justification in His sight. If by this, He detracted from the authority of the sons of Aaron, He did nothing more than reduce this authority to the correct measure intended by God. But where had He denied to the priesthood of Israel the authority of a divine institution and refused it the reverence and submission which belonged to it as such?

As long as Jesus had not fulfilled the entire requirements of His high-priestly calling, and as long as the great atoning sacrifice had not been offered on the cross, He gave all honor to the Levitical priesthood, for the sake of their divine appointment.

Not only did He visit the temple as the house of God and celebrate the festivals of Israel as sanctified by Him, but he obediently submitted also to all the Levitical statutes enjoined by Moses, from the circumcision and presentation in the Temple, to the eating of the paschal lamb.

Not only so, but He did not fail to enjoin upon others the punctual fulfillment of their ecclesiastical duties; so that He did not absolve the leper whom He had healed from presenting himself to the priests and offering the sacrifices appointed by Moses in such a case.

The Lord acted toward the elders of the people, whether they were Pharisees or Sadducees, as He did toward the priests.

It is true that as the Master of all, He reproved their errors and sins, as appears from Mark 7:13, and refused in any manner to justify their human invented ordinances and traditions by which the Word of God was only weakened and rendered void. He nevertheless unhesitatingly recognized their divine appointment, as you will remember is evident from Matthew 23:2, 3, where he says, **“The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. All therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.”**

Could this be called weakening the respect due to the constituted authorities, or was it not rather the contrary?

He turned the people aside only from those authorities which did not deserve the name, not being divinely instituted and appointed. But this does not exclude the fact that He most expressly, though in the spirit of Christian liberty, today claims the submission of believers to the official ordinances of the Church, which He has Himself instituted and sanctified.

The pastoral office, with its various spheres of operation, is established by Him. He says to those who preach His Word, **“He that despiseth you, despiseth me.”** He points them out to us as stewards of the divine mysteries and says to the members of the churches by the mouth of His apostle:

- **“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor.”**
- **“Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls.”**

It is thus the Lord supports the authorities of the Church which rest on divine institution and only properly rejects with all earnestness and emphasis, those unjustifiable assumptions which are contrary to the Word of God.

The second accusation which is brought against the Lord Jesus by the Jews, is that of
“forbidding to give tribute to Cesar.”

Truly, a more unjust accusation than this they could not have invented against Him. It is devoid of the slightest foundation; and we are compelled to believe that it occurred to them only because they were still smarting under the disgrace of the defeat they had experienced at His hands when they endeavored to draw from him a disloyal expression.

Luke mentions this affair in the twentieth chapter of his Gospel.

The chief priests and scribes sought, even at that time, how they might lay hands upon Him; but their evil conscience made them afraid of the people, in whose esteem they had already begun to sink considerably. That which they did not venture to execute by force, they sought to attain by craftiness and under the assumed appearance of what was just and right.

For this purpose they induced some worthless individuals to attempt to take hold of His words, so that they might have an ostensible ground for delivering Him up to the civil power. The bribed emissaries approach the Saviour in the garb of reverential submission and ask, with the innocent mien of those who seek instruction, **“Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or no?”**

The net was cunningly spread, but in such a manner that they were caught in it themselves.

The Lord immediately saw through the snare and tore away the hypocritical mask from them by the simple question, **“Why tempt ye me?”** He then asked them to show him a penny, which being done, He takes the coin, holds it up to them and asks, **“Whose image and superscription hath it?”** They answer, **“Caesar’s.”** And He said unto them, **“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.”**

The narrative informs us that they could not take hold of His words before the people, and they marveled at His answer and held their peace.

This single expression of our Lord’s perfectly suffices to show us what was His political principle, if I may so call it.

A heathen emperor then reigned over Judea, an enemy to God and His cause. But still he ruled, and wielded the scepter. The coin which bore his image testified of this. The Lord commanded that it should be returned to him to whom it belonged. What else did he intimate by so doing, than that which was subsequently enjoined upon us by His apostle in His name, in Romans 13:1-3, **“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou, then, not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.”**

Christ is so far from favoring revolt, that He threatens with judgment all resistance to the existing authorities, whatever they may be, as though it were a rebellion against the majesty of God Himself.

He enjoins us in His Word, to be **“subject to our masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.”**

If a tyrant rule over us, there is no question as to what is our duty, according to our *magna charta*, the Holy Scriptures. In the autocrat and the despot we have to recognize a chastening rod raised against us by the hand of God, and quietly endure it while calling to mind our sins.

The third and last accusation brought against Jesus is that He had said of Himself that He was Christ, a king.

They wish Pilate to understand this in a political sense. But how far the Lord was from causing or fostering such an idea of the object of His coming into the world, we well know. The Jews attempted by force to make Him act the part of a king; and would have borne Him on their hands and loaded Him with homage and crowns of honor. But as often as He perceived any movement of the kind, He escaped from the multitude and hid Himself.

When His own disciples expressed similar sentiments respecting the kingdom He came to establish, He never failed to reprove them severely, to rectify their mistakes, and to impress upon them the fact that His kingdom came not with outward observation but was within them.

The Jews also were well aware how far it had always been from His intention to found a kingdom according to their views; and this was the very thing which irritated them above everything else and kindled their animosity against Him. Nevertheless their effrontery extends so far that they now impute to Him as His desire and aim, what they had fruitlessly labored to induce Him to attempt.

But as certainly as Christ did not come to establish an earthly kingdom; so surely will His dominion eventually swallow up all the kingdoms of the world and become itself an earthly empire.

The potentates of this world will deposit their crowns and scepters in homage at Jesus' feet, in order to receive them back consecrated and as a fief from the hand of the King of kings. The people, enlightened and returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, will submit with delight and affection to a government in which the gentle guidance of their Prince of Peace is alone perceptible.

The legislation will have, as its basis, the word of the living God, and the economy of the state will rest upon the foundation of the gospel. The offerings which the common weal may require, will be tendered by the impulse of voluntary affection, and the **“swords will be turned into plowshares and the spears into pruning hooks.”**

Daniel looked forward to this jubilee-period of the kingdom of Christ when he exclaimed, **“The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”**

In the same manner, Zechariah refers to this subjugation of all worldly empire to Christ, when he significantly predicts that **“In that day, shall there be upon the bells of the horses, holiness unto the Lord, and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.”**

The song of praise for this period of triumph and fulfillment lies already in the archives of divine revelation, “**The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ!**” and our Lord comforts us with the anticipation of this period while teaching us daily to pray in blissful hope, “**Thy kingdom come!**”

We have now been convinced that nothing could be more groundless than were the accusations brought against our Lord before Pilate. Every investigation which took place terminated only in His greater glorification. We rejoice at this result; for you know how much we are personally interested in His coming forth justified from every tribunal. “**Just and right is he.**” No guile was ever found in His mouth, and He was the personification of every moral virtue, and in this respect, He has left us an example, that we should follow His steps.

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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