

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

CHRIST BEFORE HEROD

PILATE'S CLEAR AND DECIDED TESTIMONY that he found no fault in Jesus, did not fail of its effect on His accusers. They stand aghast, and perceive the danger which threatens the result of their whole proceedings. Had Pilate manfully maintained throughout the tone of judicial decision with which he commenced, it would doubtless have burst the fetters imposed on the better feelings of a great part of the assembled multitude, and Christ have been set at liberty and even saluted with new hosannas; while the tumult thus occasioned might have been attended with serious consequences to the chief priests and rulers.

They were therefore compelled to oppose such a change in the state of things by every means in their power. They consequently again raise their voices with fresh complaints. Their accusations, though uttered more noisily than before, bear evident marks of their failing courage.

Instead of denouncing the Lord, as before, as a rebel and a traitor, they bring their accusation down to the unimportant assertion. that **“he stirred up the people teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.”**

How easy would it have been for Pilate, by a rapid and prudent use of this favorable moment, to have triumphantly rescued his prisoner and with Him, himself and his own conscience! In order entirely to confuse and disarm his more than half subdued foes, he only needed, in a few energetic words, to have pointed out the baseness of their conduct. But fear had taken possession of the poor man.

In the uproar, which only showed the weakness of the adverse party, he imagines he hears some new storm rolling over his head and how does he rejoice when the mention of Galilee seems to him to open a new way of escape. He hastily inquires **“whether the man were a Galilean?”** and on being answered in the affirmative, he exclaims with delight, **“He belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction!”**

He immediately gives orders for Jesus to be conducted bound to the latter, who happened fortunately to be at that time in Jerusalem; and he feels as if a mountain were removed from his breast on seeing the troublesome captive withdraw under the escort of the chief priest, soldiers, and the crowd that followed.

We already know something of Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee. He is the same wretched libertine who caused John the Baptist to be beheaded in prison. For this crime his conscience severely smote him; and when he heard of Jesus and His doings, he could not be persuaded but that the wonder-worker was John whom he had murdered but who had risen from the dead. A Sadducee according to his mental bias, more a heathen than an Israelite, and entirely devoted to licentiousness, he was, nevertheless, as is often the case of such characters, not disinclined to base acts of violence and capable of the most refined cruelties. Luke states respecting him that he had done much evil.

To this degraded libertine therefore, in whom every better feeling had been gradually extinguished our Lord is brought, in order that He may not be spared from anything that is ignominious and repulsive, and that there might be no judicial tribunal before which He did not stand.

The envenomed hosts of priests and Pharisees with wild uproar arrive with their prey before the residence of the Galilean king, who, on hearing what was the cause of the appearing of the unwonted crowd, orders the heads of the people with their delinquent to be brought before him. Jesus silently and gravely approaches His sovereign. The latter, as the narrative informs us, **“when he saw Jesus, was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him, and he hoped to have seen some miracles done by him.”**

It may seem strange that Herod had never before seen the face of Jesus, although He so often abode in Galilee. But the Lord had never honored Tiberias where Herod resided, with a visit, although He had frequently been near it; and for Herod to take a single step in order to make the acquaintance of the Nazarene who was so much spoken of, naturally never crossed the mind of one so destitute of all religious interest and at the same time, so proud and overbearing as his Galilean majesty. It afforded him no little pleasure so conveniently and without risk, to see his long-cherished wish fulfilled.

“At all events,” thought he within himself, “it will afford an interesting pastime, an amusing spectacle. And if He will let Himself be induced to unveil somewhat of the future to us or perform a miracle, what a delightful hour might be spent!”

The king promised himself a recreation from the presence of Jesus such as is expected from that of a juggler or a charlatan.

In this respect, he represents those frivolous people who, according to the apostolic expression, **“have not the Spirit,”** and to whom even the most sublime things are only a comedy.

Persons of this description venture to intrude even into the sanctuary and are apparently desirous of seeing Christ, at least as set forth in sermons, books, figures, or history, but only because of the aesthetic feeling thereby excited. Suffice it to say, that to such characters even the church becomes a theater, the sermon a pastime, the gospel a romance, and the history of conversions a novel.

O how dangerous is the position of those in whom all seriousness degenerates into empty jocularly, and everything that ought deeply to affect them, into jest and amusement! They trifle with eternal verities.

Herod regards our Lord on His approach with an inquisitive look, and after eyeing Him from head to foot presumes to put a number of foolish questions at Him. Our Lord deigns him no answer but observes complete silence. The king continues to question Him but the Saviour is mute. Herod even suggests that He ought to perform some miracle. Jesus cannot comply with his wish and gives him to know this by His continued silence more impressively than could have been done by words. The chief priests and scribes, indignant at His passive behavior, again begin their blasphemies and accuse Him vehemently. He regards them as unworthy of a reply and continues to observe silence.

The Lord having refused to do the will of Herod and his satellites, the miserable men infer from His behavior that He is unable to do anything and begin to despise Him, and even to mock Him. Painful are the mortifications that Jesus has here to endure. Even the hurrying Him about hither and thither, - Pilate's sending him to Herod, to show the latter a piece of civility - Herod's returning the compliment by sending Him back to the Roman governor, that the latter may have the honor of pronouncing the final sentence upon Him - what degradation is inflicted on the Lord of glory in all this! But this is only the beginning of disgrace and humiliation. How much has He to endure in the presence of Herod and his courtiers who treat him as a juggler and a conjurer!

He is urged to amuse the company by a display of His art. His ear is offended by impertinent questions; and on His making no reply to them all, the measure of insult and mockery overflows.

And tell me how the Most Holy One, who inhabits eternity, could quietly have borne to see such degradation of the Son of His good pleasure without casting forth the lightnings of his wrath upon the perpetrators of such indignities, if the Lord Jesus had endured this scandalous treatment only for His own Person, and not at the same time as standing in an extraordinary position, and exercising a mysterious mediation?

But you know that He stood there in our stead and as the second Adam, laden with our guilt.

- **“The Lord laid upon him the iniquities of us all.”**
- **“The chastisement of our peace was upon him.”**

Thank God that such was the case; for I should never have been able to make room for the conviction that my sins would not be imputed to me, had I not at the same time, been told what had become of the sins thus taken from me, since I know nothing more surely than this, that my blood-red sins cannot be arbitrarily pardoned and overlooked or even pass unnoticed as trifles of no account. Were this the case, how would it be possible for me to believe any longer in a just and holy God? But the gospel now comes in and tells me most clearly the history of my misdeeds, how they were transferred to Him who appeared in my place; and in His intervention, I now sensibly grasp the legal ground of my absolution.

The Lord stands before Herod, as he did before Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, not merely to be judged by men, but by God at the same time; and it is my sin for which He atones and my debt which He liquidates.

No wonder, therefore, that He resigns himself to the poisoned arrows which here pierce His heart in its most vulnerable part - that without gainsaying He listens to the most wicked imputations, and with lamb-like patience lets Himself be branded both as a blasphemer and a fanatic, a rebel and a conspirator - that He even bears with equanimity the circumstance that Herod's expectations respecting Him are gradually changed into contempt for His person - that the Lord of Glory suffers Himself to be degraded so low as to become the butt of the miserable jokes of a contemptible and adulterous court.

What He endures is dreadful to think of; and yet it lay in His power with a wave of His hand, to dash the reckless company to the ground. But He does not move a finger and remains silent, for He knows that here is God's altar and the fire and the wood; and that He was the Lamb for the burnt-offering.

But however deep the humiliation in which we behold the Son of God, it is nevertheless interwoven throughout with traits which are glorifying to Him and tend to establish our faith.

Even in the childish joy which Pilate evinces at the prospect of transferring the process against Jesus to another, his deep conviction of the innocence and unblamableness of the accused is more clearly reflected than in all his oral assertions. His soul exults at the accidental information given him that Jesus belongs to the Galilean tetrarchate, which teaches us how fortunate the Roman esteemed his being thus able to escape from sharing in the guilt of condemning the Righteous One. Of Herod it was said that he was **"exceeding glad when he saw Jesus."**

This uncommon joy of the Galilean prince, that at last an opportunity was afforded him of seeing Jesus face to face, is not less important in an apologetic point of view and tends no less to the Lord's glorification than the joy of Pilate in being happily rid of Him.

The Saviour must have excited a great sensation in the country and not have displayed His marvelous powers in remote corners but in places of public resort, that Herod thus burned with desire to make His personal acquaintance. And how uncommon and unique must the Lord's acts have been, that a man so totally dead to every better feeling, as that adulterer in a royal crown, should have such a desire!

Herod hoped besides that he would have seen some miracle performed by the Saviour. This expectation is again a proof that Jesus had really sealed His divine mission by miraculous acts, and that the wonders He performed were universally acknowledged to be such.

Herod does not intend first to try whether Jesus can work miracles but takes His power and ability to do so for granted. But what a depth of inward corruption is betrayed in the fact that this man, in spite of his conviction of the Saviour's ability to perform divine acts, not only refuses Him belief and homage but even degrades Him to the state of an object of his scorn!

The tetrarch asks the Lord a variety of questions surpassing the bounds of human knowledge. He had therefore heard of the wisdom with which the Lord knew how to reply to questions of this kind and to solve every difficulty. Hence he involuntarily does honor to Christ's prophetic office. And even in the circumstance that Herod did not venture to go further in his ridicule than clothing Jesus in a white toga, when the latter observed a profound silence to his questions - he manifests a secret reverence for Him, and thus proves anew that Christ must have actually spoken in an ambiguous manner of His kingdom and of a dominion which He came to establish.

Finally, that the deep-rooted disagreement which had so long prevailed between Pilate and Herod, was suddenly terminated and changed into a friendly feeling by the civility shown to the latter in transferring over to him the accused Rabbi, serves again as a proof how highly these men in power thought of the delinquent brought before them.

The transfer of a common criminal, or even of a notorious fanatic and swindler, would probably have been attended by no such effect. But that Jesus of Nazareth was selected to mediate the renewed approximation of the two potentates works favorably and puts an end to all former ill-will and mistrust. Who does not perceive that this circumstance, however revolting in itself, again tends to glorify Christ in a high degree?

Something similar to that which occurred between Pilate and Herod happens not seldom, even in the present day. Parties who most violently oppose each other in other fields of research become reconciled and even confederates and friends, if only for a while, as soon as they join in the contest against Christ and His adorers. But what else do they evince thereby than that Christ stands in their way as an imposing power? An inconsiderable personage, whose claims on their submission they knew not to be well-founded, would never exercise such an influence over them; and finally, an individual whom they regarded as merely mythological, they would certainly put aside, as unworthy of their attention.

Whatever may be planned or executed against Jesus, He comes forth more than justified from it all. Hatred must glorify Him as well as love. Persecution crowns Him as well as devotedness to His cause. But if mutual opposition to Him is able to transmute bitter enemies into friends, what bonds ought the mutual homage of the glorified Redeemer to cement!

May the Lord awaken in the hearts of His children sentiments of real brotherly affection toward each other!

~ end of chapter 31 ~

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