

THE PRESENT TRUTH

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It Was for Us Pt. 3

Before Herod: Herod had never met Jesus, but he had long desired to see Him, and to witness His marvelous power. As the Saviour was brought before him, the rabble surged and pressed about, some crying one thing, and some another. Herod commanded silence, for he wished to question the prisoner. He looked with curiosity and pity upon the pale face of Christ. He saw there the marks of deep wisdom and purity. He was satisfied, as Pilate had been, that malice and envy alone had caused the Jews to accuse the Saviour. Herod urged Christ to perform one of His wonderful miracles before him. He promised to release Him if He would do so. By his direction, crippled and deformed persons were brought in, and he commanded Jesus to heal them. But the Saviour stood before Herod as one who neither saw nor heard. The Son of God had taken upon Himself man's nature. He must do as man must do in similar circumstances. Therefore He would not work a miracle to gratify curiosity, or to save Himself from the pain and humiliation that man must endure when placed in a similar position. His accusers were terrified when Herod demanded of Christ a miracle. Of all things they dreaded most an exhibition of His divine power. Such a manifestation would be a death blow to their plans, and would perhaps cost them their lives. So they set up the cry that Jesus worked miracles through the power given Him by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.

Several years before this, Herod had listened to the teaching of John the Baptist. He had been deeply impressed, but he had not forsaken his life of intemperance and sin. So his heart grew harder, and at last in a drunken revel he had commanded that John should be slain to please the wicked Herodias. Now he had become still more hardened. He could not bear the silence of Jesus. His face grew dark with passion, and he angrily threatened the Saviour, who still remained unmoved and silent. Christ had come into the world to heal the broken-hearted. Could He have spoken any word to heal the bruises of sin-sick souls, He would not have kept silent. But He had no words for those who would but trample the truth under their unholy feet. The Saviour might have spoken to Herod words that would have pierced the ears of the hardened king. He might have stricken him with fear and trembling by laying before him the full iniquity of his life, and the horror of his approaching doom. But Christ's silence was the severest rebuke that He could have given.

That ear which had ever been open to the cry of human woe, had no place for the command of Herod. That heart, ever touched by the plea of even the worst sinners, was closed to the haughty king who felt no need of a Saviour. In anger, Herod turned to the multitude, and denounced Jesus as an imposter. But the accusers of the Saviour knew that He was no imposter. They had seen too many of His mighty works to believe this charge. Then the king began to shamefully abuse and ridicule the Son of God. "And Herod with his men of war set Him at naught, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe." Luke 23:11.

As the wicked king saw Jesus accepting all this indignity in silence, he was moved with a sudden fear that this was no common man before him. He was perplexed with the thought that this prisoner might be a heavenly being come down to the earth. Herod dared not ratify the condemnation of Jesus. He wished to relieve himself of the terrible responsibility, and so sent the Saviour back to Pilate.

Condemned by Pilate: When the Jews returned from Herod, bringing the Saviour again to Pilate, he was very much displeased, and asked what they would have him do. He reminded them that he had examined Jesus, and had found no fault in Him. He told them that they had brought complaints against Him, but that they had not been able to prove a single charge. As stated in the preceding chapter, they had taken Him to Herod, who was a Jew, like themselves, and he had found in Him nothing worthy of death. But to pacify the accusers, Pilate said: "I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him." Luke 23:16. Here Pilate showed his weakness. He had acknowledged that Christ was innocent; then why should he punish Him? It was a compromise with wrong. The Jews never forgot this through all the trial. They had intimidated the Roman governor, and now pressed their advantage until they secured the condemnation of Jesus.

The multitude clamored more loudly for the life of the prisoner. While Pilate was hesitating as to what he should do, there was brought to him a letter from his wife, which read: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." Matthew 27:19. Pilate turned pale at this message; but the mob became more urgent as they saw his indecision. Pilate saw that something must be done. It was customary at the feast of the Passover to set at liberty one prisoner, whom the people might choose. The Roman soldiers had recently captured a noted robber, named Barabbas. He was a degraded ruffian and a murderer. So Pilate turned to the crowd, and said with great earnestness: "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" Matthew 27:17. They replied, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas." Luke 23:18.

Pilate was dumb with surprise and disappointment. By yielding his own judgment and appealing to the people, he had lost his dignity and the control of the crowd. After that, he was only the tool of the mob. They swayed him at their will. He then asked: "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" With one accord they cried, "Let Him be crucified." And the governor said, "Why, what evil hath He done?" "But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified." Matthew 27:22, 23. Pilate's cheek paled as he heard the terrible cry, "Let Him be crucified." He had not thought it would come to that. He had repeatedly pronounced Jesus innocent, and yet the people were determined that He should suffer this most terrible and dreaded death. Again he asked the question: "Why, what evil hath He done?" And again was set up the awful cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Pilate made one last effort to touch their sympathies. Jesus was taken, faint with weariness and covered with wounds, and scourged in the sight of His accusers. "And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote Him with their hands." John 19:2, 3. They spit upon Him, and some wicked hand snatched the reed that had been placed in His hand, and struck the crown upon His brow, forcing the thorns into His temples, and sending the blood trickling down His face and beard.

Satan led the cruel soldiery in their abuse of the Saviour. It was his purpose to provoke Him to retaliation, if possible, or to drive Him to perform a miracle to release Himself, and thus break up the plan of salvation. One stain upon His human life, one failure of His humanity to bear the terrible test, and the Lamb of God would have been an imperfect offering, and the redemption of man a failure. But He who could command the heavenly host, and in an instant call to His aid legions of holy angels, one of whom could have immediately overpowered that cruel mob --He who could have stricken down His tormentors by the flashing forth of His divine majesty--submitted with dignified composure to the coarsest insult and outrage. As the acts of His torturers degraded them below humanity, into the likeness of Satan, so did the meekness and patience of Jesus exalt Him above humanity, and prove His kinship to God. Pilate was deeply moved by the uncomplaining patience of the Saviour. He sent for Barabbas to be brought into the court; then he presented the two prisoners side by side. Pointing to the Saviour, he said in a voice of solemn entreaty, "Behold the man." "I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him." John 19:5, 4.

There stood the Son of God, wearing the robe of mockery and the crown of thorns. Stripped to the waist, His back showed the long, cruel stripes from which the blood flowed freely. His face was stained with blood, and bore the marks of exhaustion and pain; but never had it appeared more beautiful. Every feature expressed gentleness and resignation, and the tenderest pity for His cruel foes. In striking contrast was the prisoner at His side. Every line of the countenance of Barabbas showed him to be the hardened ruffian that he was. Among the beholders there were some who sympathized with Jesus. Even the priests and rulers were convicted that He was what He claimed to be. But they would not yield. They had moved the mob to a mad fury, and again priests, rulers, and people raised the cry: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" At last, losing all patience with their unreasonable, vengeful cruelty, Pilate said to them: "Take ye Him, and crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him." John 19:6. Pilate tried hard to release the Saviour; but the Jews cried out: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." John 19:12. This was touching Pilate in a weak place. He was already under suspicion by the Roman government, and he knew that a report of this kind would be his ruin.

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." Matthew 27:24. In vain Pilate tried to free himself from the guilt of condemning Jesus. Had he acted promptly and firmly at the first, carrying out his convictions of right, his will would not have been overborne by the mob; they would not have presumed to dictate to him. His wavering and indecision proved his ruin. He saw that he could not release Jesus, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. Yielding to the demands of the mob, he again scourged Jesus, and delivered Him to be crucified. But in spite of his precautions, the very thing he dreaded afterward came upon him. His honors were stripped from him, he was cast down from his high office, and, stung by remorse and wounded pride, not long after the crucifixion he ended his own life.

So all who compromise with sin will gain only sorrow and ruin. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. When Pilate declared himself innocent of the blood of Christ, Caiaphas answered defiantly, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Matthew 27:25. And the awful words were echoed by the priests, and re-echoed by the people. It was a terrible sentence to pass upon themselves. It was an awful heritage to hand down to their posterity. Literally was this fulfilled upon themselves in the fearful scenes of the destruction of Jerusalem, about forty years later. Literally has it been fulfilled in the scattered, despised, and oppressed condition of their descendants since that day.

Doubly literal will be the fulfillment when the final accounting shall come. The scene will then be changed, and "this same Jesus" will come, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God." Acts 1:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:8. Then they will pray to the rocks and mountains: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come." Revelation 6:16, 17. {The Story of Jesus 130- 138}