

## THE GREATEST TRIAL ON RECORD

NO. 495

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 22, 1863,  
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,  
 against the Lord and against His Anointed.”  
 Psalm 2:2.*

AFTER our Lord had been betrayed by the false-hearted Judas, He was bound by the officers who had come to take Him. No doubt the cords were drawn as tight, and twisted as mercilessly as possible. If we believe the traditions of the fathers, these cords cut through the flesh even to the very bones, so that all the way from the garden to the house of Annas, His blood left a crimson trail. Our Redeemer was hurried along the road which crosses the brook Kedron. A second time He was made, like unto David, who passed over that brook, weeping as he went.

And perhaps it was on this occasion that he drank of that foul brook by the way. The brook Kedron, you know, was that into which all the filth of the sacrifices of the temple was cast. And Christ, as though He were a foul and filthy thing, must be led to the black stream. He was led into Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate, the gate through which the lambs of the Passover, and the sheep for sacrifice were always driven. Little did they understand, that in so doing, they were again following out to the very letter the significant types which God had ordained in the law of Moses.

They led, I say, this Lamb of God through the Sheep Gate, and they hastened Him on to the house of Annas, the ex-high priest, who, either from his relationship to Caiaphas, from his natural ability, or his prominence in opposing the Savior, stood high in the opinion of the rulers. Here they made a temporary call, to gratify the bloodthirsty Annas with the sight of his victim. And then, hastening on, they brought Him to the house of Caiaphas, some little distance off, where, though it was but a little past the dead of night, many members of the Sanhedrim were assembled.

In a very short time, no doubt informed by some speedy messenger, all the rest of the elders came together and sat down with great delight to the malicious work at hand. Let us follow our Lord Jesus Christ, not, like Peter, afar off, but, like John. Let us go in with Jesus into the high priest's house. And when we have tarried awhile there, and have seen our Savior despitely used, let us traverse the streets with Him, till we come to the hall of Pilate. And then to the palace of Herod, and then afterwards to the place called “the pavement,” where Christ is subjected to an ignominious competition with Barabbas, the murderer. And where we hear the howling of the people, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Brethren, as the Lord gave commandment concerning even the ashes and offal of the sacrifices, we ought to think no matter trivial which stands in connection with our great Burnt Offering. My admonition is, “Gather up the fragments which remain, that nothing be lost.” As goldsmiths sweep their shops to save even the filings of the gold, so every word of Jesus should be treasured up as very precious.

But, indeed, the narrative to which I invite you is not unimportant. Things which were purposed of old, prophesied by Seers, witnessed by Apostles, written by Evangelists and published by the ambassadors of God, are not matters of secondary interest. They deserve our solemn and devout attention. Let all our hearts be awed as we follow the King of kings in His pathway of shame and suffering.

**I.** Come we, then, to the hall of Caiaphas. After the mob had dragged our Lord from the house of Annas, they reached the palace of Caiaphas, and there a *brief interval* occurred before the high priest came forth to question the Prisoner. How were those sad minutes spent? Was the poor Victim allowed a little pause to collect His thoughts, that He might face His accusers calmly? Far from it—Luke shall tell the pitiful story—“And the men that held Jesus mocked Him and smote Him. And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face, and asked Him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote You? And many other things blasphemously spoke they against Him.”

The officers were pausing until the chairman of the court should please to have an interview with the Prisoner, and instead of suffering the Accused to take a little rest before a trial so important, upon which His life and Character de-

pended, they spend all the time in venting their bitter malice upon Him. Observe how they insult His claim to the Messiahship! In effect, they mock Him thus—“You claim to be a Prophet like unto Moses. You know things to come. If you are sent of God, prove it by discovering your foes. We will put You on trial and test You, O Man of Nazareth.”

They bind His eyes and then, smiting Him one after another, they bid Him exercise His prophetic gift for their amusement, and prophesy who it was that smote Him. Oh, shameful question! How gracious was the silence, for an answer might have withered them forever. The day *shall* come when all that smite Christ shall find that He *has* seen them, though they thought His eyes were blinded. The day shall come, Blasphemer, Worldling, careless Man, when everything that you have done against Christ’s cause, and Christ’s people, shall be published before the eyes of men and angels—and Christ shall *answer* your question—and shall tell you who it is that smote Him.

I speak to some this morning who have forgotten that Christ sees them. And they have ill-treated His people. They have spoken ill of His holy cause, saying, “How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?” I tell you, the Judge of men shall, before long, point you out and make you, to your shame and confusion of face, confess that you smote the Savior when you smote His Church.

This preliminary mockery being over, *Caiaphas, the high priest came in*. He began, at once, to interrogate the Lord prior to the public trial, doubtless with the view of catching Him in His speech. The high priest asked Him, first, of his *disciples*. We do not know what questions he asked. Perhaps they were something like these—“What do You mean, to allow a rabble to follow You wherever You go? Who are You, that You should have twelve persons always attending You, and calling You Master? Do You intend to make these the leaders of a band of men? Are these to be Your lieutenants, to raise a host on Your behalf?

“Or do You pretend to be a Prophet, and are these the sons of the Prophets who follow You, as Elisha did Elijah? Moreover, *where* are they? Where are Your gallant followers? If You are a good man, why are they not here to bear witness to You? Where are they gone? Are they not ashamed of their folly, now that Your promises of honor all end in shame?” The high priest, “asked Him of His disciples.” Our Lord Jesus, on this point, said not a syllable. Why this silence? Because it is not for our Advocate to accuse His disciples. He might have answered, “Well do you ask, ‘Where are they?’ The cowards forsook Me. When one proved a traitor, the rest took to their heels.

“You ask, ‘Where are My disciples?’ *There is one yonder*, sitting by the fire, warming his hands, the same who just now denied Me with an oath.” But no, He would not utter a word of accusation. He whose lips are mighty to intercede *for* His people, will never speak *against* them. Let Satan slander, but Christ pleads. The accuser of the Brothers and Sisters is the prince of this world—the Prince of peace is ever our Advocate before the Eternal Throne.

The high priest next shifted his ground and asked him concerning *His doctrine*—what it was that He taught—whether what He taught was not in contradiction to the original teachings of their great lawgiver Moses—and whether He had not railed at the Pharisees, reviled the Scribes, and exposed the rulers. The Master gave a noble answer. Truth is never shamefaced—He boldly points to His public life as His best answer. “I spoke openly to the world. I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the Temple, where the Jews always resort. And in secret have I said nothing. Why ask me? Ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.”

No sophistries—no attempt at evasion—the best armor for the truth is her own naked breast. He had preached in the market places, on the mountain’s brow, and in the Temple courts. Nothing had been done in a corner. Happy is the man who can make so noble a defense. Where is the weakness in such a harness? Where can the arrow pierce the man arrayed in so complete a panoply? Little did that arch-knave Caiaphas gain by his crafty questioning. For the rest of the questioning, our Lord Jesus said not a word in self-defense. He knew that it availed not for a lamb to plead with wolves. He was well aware that whatever He said would be misconstrued and made a fresh source of accusation.

And He willed, moreover, to fulfill the prophecy, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.” But what power He exerted in thus remaining silent! Perhaps nothing displays more fully the Omnipotence of Christ than this power of self-control. Control the Deity? What power less than Divine can attempt the task? Behold, my Brothers and Sisters, the Son of God does more than rule the winds and commend the waves, He restrains *Himself*. And when a word, a whisper would have refuted His foes and swept them to their eternal destruction, He “opened not His mouth.” He who opened His mouth for His enemies, will not utter a word for Himself. If ever silence were more than golden, it is this deep silence under infinite provocation.

During this preliminary examination, our Lord suffered an outrage which needs a passing notice. When He had said, “Ask them that hear Me,” some over-officious person in the crowd struck Him in the face. The margin in John 18:22 very properly corrects our version and renders the passage, “with a rod.” Now, considering that our blessed Lord suffered so much, this one little particular might seem unimportant, only it happens to be the subject of prophecy in the book of Micah 5:1, “They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.”

This smiting while under trial is peculiarly atrocious. To strike a man while he is pleading in his own defense, would surely be a violation of the laws even of barbarians. It brought Paul’s blood into his face and made him lose his balance when the high priest ordered them to smite him on the mouth. I think I hear his words of burning indignation—“God shall smite you, you whited wall! For do you sit to judge me after the Law, and command me to be smitten contrary to the Law?”

How soon the servant loses his temper! How far more glorious the meekness of the Master. What a contrast do these gentle words afford us—“If I have spoken evil, bear witness to the evil. But if well, why do you smite Me?” This was such a concentrated infamy, to strike a man while pleading for his life, that it well deserved the notice both of Evangelist and Prophet.

But now *the court are all sitting*. The members of the great Sanhedrim are all in their various places, and Christ is brought forth for the public trial before the highest ecclesiastical court. It is, mark you, a foregone conclusion that by hook or crook they will find Him guilty. They scour the neighborhood for witnesses. There were fellows to be found in Jerusalem, like those who in the olden times frequented the Old Bailey—“straw witnesses”—who were ready to be bought on either side. And, provided they were well paid, would swear to anything. But for all this, though the witnesses were ready to perjure themselves, they could not agree one with another.

Being heard separately, their tales did not tally. At last two came with some degree of similarity in their witness. They were both liars, but for once the two liars had struck the same note. They declared that He said, “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands,” Mark 14:58. Now here was, first, misquotation. He never said, “I will destroy the temple.” His words were, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” See how they add to His words, and twist them to their own ends? Then again, they not only misquoted the words, but they misrepresented the sense, willfully, because He spoke concerning the temple of His body, and not the literal temple in which they worshipped.

And this they must have known. He said, “Destroy this temple”—and the accompanying action might have showed them that He meant His own body, which was raised by His glorious resurrection after destruction upon the Cross. Let us add, that even when thus misrepresented, the witness was not sufficient as the foundation for a capital charge. Surely there could be nothing worthy of death in a man’s saying, “Destroy this temple and I will build it in three days.” A person might make use of those words a thousand times over—he might be very foolish, but he would not be guilty of death for such an offense.

But where men have made up their minds to hate Christ, they will hate Him without a cause. Oh, you that are adversaries of Christ—and there are some such here today—I know you try to invent some excuse for your opposition to His holy religion! You forge a hundred falsehoods! But you know that your witness is not true, and the trial in your conscience, through which you pass the Savior, is but a mock one. Oh that you were wise, and would understand Him to be what He is, and submit yourselves to Him now. Finding that their witness, even when tortured to the highest degree, was not strong enough, *the high priest*, to get matter of accusation, *commanded Him* by the Most High God to answer whether He was the Christ, “the Son of the Blessed.”

Being thus entreated, our Master would not set us an example of cowardice—He spoke to purpose—He said, “*I am*,” Mark 14:62, and then, to show how fully He knew this to be true, He added, “you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of Heaven.” I cannot understand what Unitarians do with this incident. Christ was put to death on a charge of blasphemy, for having declared Himself to be the Son of God. Was not that the time when any sensible person would have denied the accusation? If He had not really claimed to be the Son of God, would He not *now* have spoken?

Would He not now, once and for all, have delivered our minds from the mistake under which we are laboring, if, indeed, it is a mistake, that He is the Son of God? But no, He seals it with His blood. He bears open testimony before the

herd of His accusers. “I am.” I *am* the Son of God, and I *am* the sent One of the Most High. Now, now the thing is done! They want no further evidence. The judge, forgetting the impartiality which becomes his station, pretends to be wonderfully struck with horror. He rends his garments, turns round to ask his co-assessors whether they need any further witness. And they, all too ready, hold up their hands in token of unanimity and our precious Master is at once condemned to die.

Ah, Brothers and Sisters—and no sooner condemned, than the high priest, stepping down from his divan—spits in His face! And then the Sanhedrim follow and smite Him on His cheeks. And then they turn Him down to the rabble that had gathered in the court, and they buffet Him from one to the other, and spit upon His blessed cheeks, and smite Him. And then they play the old game again, which they had learned so well before the trial came on. They blindfold Him for a second time, place Him in a chair, and as they smite Him with their fists, they cry. “Prophet! Prophet! Prophet! Who is it that smote You? Prophecy unto us!”

And thus the Savior passed a second time through that most brutal and ignominious treatment. If we had tears, if we had sympathies, if we had hearts—we should prepare to shed those tears, to awake those sympathies, and break those hearts *now*. O Lord of Life and Glory! How shamefully were You treated by those who pretended to be the curators of holy Truth, the conservators of integrity, and the teachers of the Law!

Having thus sketched the trial as briefly as I could, let me just say that throughout the whole of this trial before the ecclesiastical tribunal, it is manifest that they did all they could to pour contempt upon His two claims—to Deity and to Messiahship. Now, Friends, this morning—this morning, as truly as on that eventful occasion—you and I must decide on which of two sides we are on. Either this day we must cheerfully acknowledge His Godhead and accept Him also as the Messiah, the Savior promised of old to us. Or else we must take our post with those who are the adversaries of God and of His Christ.

Will you ask yourself the question, on which side will you now stand? I pray you, do not think that Christ’s Deity needs any further proof than that which this one court gives. My dear Friends, there is no religion under Heaven, no false religion, which would have dared to hazard such a statement—for that yonder Man who was spit upon, and buffeted, was none other than incarnate God. No false religion would venture to draw upon the credulity of its followers to that extent. What? That Man there who speaks not a word, who is mocked, despised, rejected, made nothing of—what?—He is “very God of very God?” You do not find Mohammed, nor any false Prophet asking any person to believe a doctrine so extraordinary!

They know too well that there is a limit, even to human faith. And they have not ventured upon such a marvelous assertion as this, that yonder despised Man is none other than the Upholder of all things. No false religion would have taught a truth so humbling to him who is its founder and lord. Besides, it is not in the power of any man-made religion to have conceived such a thought! That Deity should willingly submit to be spit upon to redeem those whose mouths vented the spittle! In what book do you read such a wonder as this? We have pictures drawn from imagination—we have been enchanted along romantic pages—and we have marvelled at the creative flights of human genius. But where did you ever read such a thought as this?

“God was made flesh and dwelt among us”? He was despised, scourged, mocked, treated as though He were the off-scouring of all things? He was brutally treated, worse than a dog, and all out of pure love to His enemies? Why, the thought is such a great one, so God-like, the compassion in it is so Divine, that it *must* be true! None but God could have thought of such a thing as this stoop from the highest Throne in Heaven to the Cross of deepest shame and woe. And do you think that if the doctrine of the Cross were not true, such effects would follow from it?

Would those South Sea Islands, once red with the blood of cannibalism, be now the abode of sacred song and peace? Would this island, once itself the place of naked savages, be what it is, through the influence of the benign Gospel of God, if that Gospel were a lie? Ah, hallowed mistake, indeed, to produce such peaceful, such blessed, such lasting, such Divine results! Ah, He *is* God. The thing is *not* false.

And that He is Messiah, who shall doubt? If God *should* send a Prophet, what better Prophet could you desire? What Character would you seek to have exhibited more completely human and Divine? What sort of a Savior would you wish for? What could better satisfy the cravings of conscience? Who could commend Himself more fully to the affections of the

heart? He must be, we feel at once, as we see Him, One alone by Himself, with no competitor—He *must* be the Messiah of God.

Come, now, Sirs, on which side will you set yourselves? Will you smite Him? I put the question—“Who is it that will smite Him this day? Who is it that will spit upon Him this day?” “I will not,” says one, “but I do not accept nor believe in Him.” In *that* you smite Him, Fool! “I do not hate Him,” says another, “but I am not saved by Him.” In refusing His love, you smite Him. Whoever among you will not trust Him with your soul—in *that* you smite Him, smite Him in the most tender part—since you impugn His love and power to save.

Oh, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.” That suffering Man stands in the place of everyone that will believe on Him. Trust Him! Trust Him!—you have then accepted Him as your God, as your Messiah. Refuse to trust Him!—you have smitten Him. And you may think it little to do this today—but when He rides upon the clouds of Heaven you will see your sin in its true light, and you will shudder to think that ever you could have refused *Him* who now reigns, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” God help you to accept Him, as your God and Christ, today!

**II.** But our time flies too rapidly and we must hasten with it and accompany our Savior to another place.

The Romans had taken away from the Jews the power to put a person to death. The Jews sometimes did it still, but they did it, as in the case of Stephen, by popular tumult. Now, in our Savior’s case, they could not do this because there was still a strong feeling in favor of Christ among the people. A feeling so strong, that had they not been bribed by the rulers, they would never have said, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” You will remember that the priests and rulers did not arrest Him on the feast day, “lest,” they said, “there be a tumult among the people.”

Besides, the Jewish way of putting a person to death, was by stoning—therefore, unless there was a sufficient number of persons who hated Him, a person would never get put to death at all. That is why the method of putting to death by stoning was chosen, because if a person was generally thought to be innocent, very few persons would stone him. And although he would be somewhat maimed, his life might possibly be spared. They thought, therefore, the Savior might escape as He did at other times, when they took up stones to stone Him.

Moreover, they desired to put Him to the death of the accursed. They would identify Him with slaves, and criminals, and hang him like the Canaanite kings of old. Therefore they took him away to Pilate. The distance was about a mile. He was bound in the same cruel manner, and was doubtless cut by the cords, He had already suffered most dreadfully. Remember the bloody sweat of last Sunday week. Then remember that He has already twice been beaten. And He is now hurried along, without any rest or refreshment, just as the morning is breaking, along the streets to the palace where Pilate lived.

Perhaps the tower of Antonia, close to the Temple itself—we are not quite sure. He is bound and they hurry Him along the road. And here the Roman writers supply a great number of particulars of anguish out of their very fertile imaginations. After they had brought Him there, a difficulty occurred. These holy people, these very righteous elders, could not come into the company of Pilate, because Pilate, being a Gentile, would defile them! Now there was a broad space outside the palace, like a raised platform, called “the pavement,” where Pilate was likely to sit on those high days, that he might not touch these blessed Jews.

So he came out on the pavement, and they, themselves, went not into the hall, but remained before “the pavement.” Always notice that sinners who can swallow camels will strain at gnats! Crowds of men who will do great sins are very much afraid of committing some little things which they think will affect their religion. Notice, that many a man who is a big thief during the week, will ease his conscience by rigid Sabbatarianism when the day comes round. In fact, most hypocrites run for shelter to some close observance of days, ceremonies and observations—when they have slighted the weightier matters of the Law.

Well, Pilate receives Jesus bound. The charge brought against Him was not, of course, blasphemy. Pilate would have laughed at that, and declined all interference. They accused Him of stirring up sedition, pretending to be a king, and teaching that it was not right to pay tribute to Caesar. This last charge was a clear and manifest lie. *He* refuse to pay tribute? Did not He send to the fish’s mouth to get the money? *He* say that Caesar must not have his due? Did He not tell the Herodians—“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s?” *He* stir up a sedition?—the Man that had “not where to

where to lay His head?" *He* pretend to snatch the diadem from Caesar?—He, the Man who hid Himself, when the people would have taken Him by force and made Him a king? Nothing can be more atrociously false.

Pilate examines him and discovers at once, both from His silence and from His answer, that He is a most extraordinary Person. He perceives that the kingdom which Jesus claims is something supernatural. He cannot understand it. He asks Him what He came into the world for—the reply puzzles and amazes him, "To bear witness to the truth," says Jesus. Now, that was a thing no Roman understood—for a hundred years before Pilate came, Jugurtha said of the city of Rome, "a city for sale"—bribery, corruption, falsehood, treachery, villainy. These were the gods of Rome, and *truth* had fled the seven hills. The very meaning of the word was scarcely known.

So Pilate turned on his heel and said, "What is truth?" As much as to say, "I am the procurator of this part of the country. All I care for is money." "What's truth?" I do not think he asked the question, "What *is* truth?" as some preach from it, as if he seriously desired to know what it really was, for surely he would have paused for the Divine reply and not have gone away from Christ the moment afterwards. He said, "Pshaw! What's truth?" Yet there was something so awful about the Prisoner, that his wife's dream, and her message—"See that you have nothing to do with this just Person," all worked upon the superstitious fears of this very weak-minded ruler.

So he went back and told the Jews a second time, "I find no fault in Him." And when they said, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning at Galilee to this place," Pilate caught at that word "Galilee." "Now," he thought, "I will be rid of this Man. The people shall have their way, and yet I will not be guilty." "Galilee?" said he. "Why, Herod is ruler there. You had better take Him to Herod at once." He thus gained two or three points—he made Herod his friend—he hoped to exonerate himself of his crime—and yet please the mob.

Away they go to Herod. Oh, I think I see that blessed Lamb of God again hounded through the streets! Did you ever read such a tale? No martyr, even in Bloody Mary's time, was ever harried thus as the Savior was. We must not think that His agonies were all confined to the Cross. They were endured in those streets—in those innumerable blows, and kicks, and strikes with the fist, that He had to bear. They took Him before Herod and Herod, having heard of His miracles, thought to see some wonderful thing, some piece of jugglery, done in his presence. And when Christ refused to speak and would not plead before, "that fox," at all, Herod treated Him with a sneer. "They made nothing of Him."

Can you picture the scene? Herod, his captains, his lieutenants—and on down to the mean soldiers—treat the Savior with a broad grin! "A pretty king," they seem to say. "More like a miserable beggar! Look at His cheeks, all bruised where they have been smiting Him—is that the color of royalty's complexion?" "Look," they say, "He is emaciated, He is covered with blood, as though He had been sweating drops of blood all night. Is *that* the imperial purple?" And so they "made nothing of Him," and despised His kingship.

And Herod said, "Bring out that costly white robe. If He is a king, let us dress Him so," and so the white robe is put on Him—not a purple one—that, Pilate put on afterwards. He has two robes put on Him—the one put on by the Jews, the other by the Gentiles, seeming to be a fit comment on that passage in Solomon's song, where the spouse says, "My beloved is white and ruddy"—white with the gorgeous robe which marked Him King of the Jews, and then red with the purple robe which Pilate afterwards cast upon His shoulders, which proved him King of nations, too.

And so Herod and his men of war, after treating Jesus as shamefully as they could, looking at Him as some madman more fit for Bedlam than elsewhere, sent Him back again to Pilate. Oh, can you not follow Him? You need no great imagination—as you see them dragging Him back again! It is another journey along those streets. Another scene of shameful tumult, bitter scorn and cruel smiting. Why, He dies a hundred deaths, my Brothers and Sisters, it is not *one*—it is death on death the Savior bears, as He is dragged from tribunal to tribunal.

Look, they bring Him to Pilate a second time! Pilate again is anxious to save Him. He says, "I have found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof you accuse Him—no, and neither Herod—I will therefore release Him!" "No, no," they say. And they clamor greatly. He proposes a cruel alternative, which yet He meant for tender mercy. "I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go." He gave Him over to his lictors to be scourged. The Roman scourge was, as I have explained before, a most dreadful instrument.

It was made of the sinews of oxen and little sharp pieces of bone, which, you know, cause the most frightful lacerations, if by accident you even run your hand over them. Little sharp pieces, splinters of bone, were intertwined here and

there among the sinews. Every time the lash came down, some of these pieces of bone went right into the flesh and tore off heavy large pieces, and not only the blood but the very flesh would be rent away.

The Savior was tied to the column and thus beaten. He had been beaten before—but this of the Roman lictor was probably the most severe of His flagellations. After Pilate had beaten Him, he gave Him up to the soldiers for a short time, that they might complete the mockery, and so be able to witness that Pilate had no idea of the royalty of Jesus, and no complicity in any supposed treason. The soldiers put a crown of thorns on His head and bowed before Him and spat on Him. They put a reed in His hands. They drove the crown of thorns into His temples. They covered Him with a purple robe.

And then Pilate brought Him out, saying, “Behold the Man!” I believe he did it out of pity. He thought, “Now I have wounded Him and cut Him to pieces. I will not kill Him. This sight will move their hearts.” Oh, that *Ecce Homo* ought to have melted their hearts, if Satan had not made them harder than flints, and sterner than steel. But no, they cry, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” So Pilate listens to them again, and they change their tune. “He has spoken blasphemy.” This was a wrong charge to bring—for Pilate, having his superstition again aroused—is even more afraid to put him to death.

And he comes out again, and says, “I find no fault in Him.” What a strong contest between good and evil in that man’s heart! But they cried out again, “If you let this man go you are not Caesar’s friend.” They hit the mark this time, and he yields to their clamor. He brings forth a basin of water, and he washes his hands before them all, and he says, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” A poor way of escaping! That water could not wash the blood from his hands, though *their* cry did bring the blood on *their heads*—“His blood be on us, and on our children.”

When that is done, Pilate takes the last desperate step of sitting down on the pavement in royal State. He condemns Jesus and bids them take Him away. But before He is taken to execution, the dogs of war shall snap at Him again. The Jews, no doubt, having bribed the soldiers to excessive zeal of scorn, they a second time—(oh, mark this! Perhaps you thought this happened only once. This is the *fifth* time He has thus been treated)—the soldiers took Him back again, and once more they mocked Him, once more they spat upon Him, and treated Him shamefully.

So, you see, the first time was when He first went to the house of Caiaphas. Then after He was condemned there. Then Herod and His men of war. Then Pilate after the scourging. And then the soldiers, after the ultimate condemnation. Do you see, now, how manifestly, “He was despised and rejected of men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief”? “We hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

I do not know when I ever more heartily wished to be eloquent than I do now. I am talking to my own lips, and saying, “Oh, that these lips had language worthy of the occasion!” I do but faintly sketch the scene. I cannot lay on the glowing colors. Oh, that I could set forth Your grief, You Man of Sorrows! God the Holy Spirit impress it on your memories, and on your souls, and help you pitifully to consider the griefs of your blessed Lord!

I will now leave this point, when I have made this practical application of it. Remember, dear Friends, that this day, as truly as on that early morning, a division must be made among us. Either you must this day accept Christ as your King, or else His blood will be on you. I bring my Master out before your eyes and say to you, “Behold your King.” Are you willing to yield obedience to Him? He claims, first, your implicit faith in His merit—will you yield to that? He claims, next, that you will take Him to be Lord of your heart and that, as He shall be Lord within, so He shall be Lord without. Which shall it be? Will you choose Him *now*? Does the Holy Spirit in your soul—for without Him you never will—does the Holy Spirit say, “Bow the knee and take Him as your king?”

Thank God, then. But if not, His blood is on you, to condemn you. *You* crucified Him. Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod, the Jews and Romans, all meet in you. *You* scourged Him. *You* said, “Let Him be crucified.” Do not say it was not so. In effect you join their clamors when you refuse Him. When you go your way to your farm and to your merchandise, and despise His love and His blood—*you* do spiritually what *they* did literally—you despise the King of kings. Come to the fountain of His blood and wash and be clean, by His Grace.

III. But we must close with a third remark. Christ really underwent yet a third trial. He was not only tried before the ecclesiastical and civil tribunals, but He was really tried before the great democratic tribunal, that is, the assembly of the people in the street.

You will say, “How?” Well, the trial was somewhat singular, but yet it was really a trial. Barabbas—a thief, a felon, a murderer, a traitor—had been captured. He was probably one of a band of murderers who were accustomed to come up to Jerusalem at the time of the feast, carrying daggers under their cloaks to stab persons in the crowd and rob them, and then he would be gone again. Besides that, he had tried to stir up sedition, setting himself up possibly as a leader of the bandits.

Christ was put into competition with this villain. The two were presented before the popular eye, and to the shame of manhood, to the disgrace of Adam’s race, let it be remembered that the perfect, loving, tender, sympathizing, disinterested Savior was met with the word, “Crucify Him!” And Barabbas, the thief, was preferred. “Well,” says one, “that was atrocious.” The same thing is put before *you this morning*—the very same thing! And every unregenerate man will make the same choice that the Jews did—only men renewed by Divine Grace will act upon the contrary principle.

I say, Friend, this day, I put before you Christ Jesus, or your sins. The reason why many come not to Christ is because they cannot give up their lusts, their pleasures, their profits. Sin is Barabbas—sin is a thief—it will rob your soul of its life. It will rob God of His glory. Sin is a murderer—it stabbed our father, Adam—it slew our purity. Sin is a traitor—it rebels against the King of Heaven and earth. If you prefer sin to Christ, Christ has stood at your tribunal and you have given your verdict that sin is better than Christ.

Who is that man? He comes here every Sunday. And yet he is a drunkard? Where *is* he? You prefer that reeling demon Bacchus to Christ. Who is that man? He comes here. Yes. And where are his midnight haunts? The harlot and the prostitute can tell! You have preferred your own foul, filthy lust to Christ. I know some here that have had their consciences openly pricked, and yet there is no change in them. You prefer Sunday trading to Christ. You prefer cheating to Christ. You prefer the theater to Christ. You prefer the harlot to Christ—you prefer Satan, himself, to Christ—for Satan it is that is the father and author of these things.

“No,” says one, “I don’t, I don’t!” Then I do again put this question, and I put it very pointedly to you—“If you do not prefer your sins to Christ, how is it that you are not a Christian?” I believe this is the main stumbling stone, that, “Men love darkness rather than light, *because* their deeds are evil.” We come not to Christ because of the viciousness of our nature, and depravity of our heart. And this *is* the depravity of your heart, that you prefer darkness to light, prefer bitter for sweet, and choose evil as your good. Well, I think I hear one saying, “Oh, I *would* be on Jesus Christ’s side, but I did not look at it in that light. I thought the question was, ‘Would *He* be on *my* side?’ I am such a poor guilty sinner that I would stand anywhere, if Jesus’ blood would wash me.”

Sinner! Sinner! If you talk like that, then I will meet you right joyously. Never was a man one with Christ till Christ was one with Him. If you feel that you can now stand with Christ, and say, “Yes, despised and rejected, He is, nevertheless, my God, my Savior, my King. Will he accept me?” Why, Soul, He *has* accepted you! He has renewed you, or else you would not talk so. You speak like a saved man. You may not have the comfort of salvation, but surely there is a work of Divine Grace in your heart! God’s Divine election has fallen upon you and Christ’s precious redemption has been made for you, or else you would not talk so.

You cannot be even *willing* to come to Christ, and yet Christ reject you. God forbid we should suppose the possibility of any sinner crying after the Savior, and the Savior saying, “No, I will not have you.” Blessed be His name, “Him that comes to Me,” He says, “I will in no wise cast out.” “Well,” one says, “then I would have Him today. How can I do it?” There is nothing asked of you but this—Trust Him! Trust Him! Believe that God put Him in the place of men—believe that what He suffered was accepted by God, instead of their punishment. Believe that this great equivalent for punishment can save *you*.

Trust Him. Throw yourself on *Him*—as a man commits himself to the waters, so do you—sink or swim! You will never sink, you will never sink—for, “he that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life and shall never come into condemnation.”

May these faint words upon so thrilling a subject bless your souls! And unto God be glory, forever and ever. Amen and Amen.

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