

Chapter 84

The Innocent condemned

Matthew 27 vv 15-26

Mark 13 v 6-15

Luke 23 vv 17-19

John 18 vv 39 and 40

For the second time this Friday morning Jesus is brought into the judgment hall of Pilate. Do not imagine that Pilate was happy to see Jesus for the second time. He hears that Herod too has found no fault in Jesus. That makes the case even harder for him. He knows that he should let Jesus go free but he dare not! He dare not!

The Jewish high priests are standing outside awaiting with increasing impatience the governor's sentence. It is taking too long, much too long, in the view of these elders. What they had feared is now happening.

Gradually the citizens of Jerusalem come out of doors, but with them also come many who are celebrating Passover. More and more people are getting about.

They decide however to persevere. Now that they have the hated Nazarite in their power they do not intend to agree to His being set free. Then all their trouble will have been in vain. That must be avoided.

Pilate steps outside. All listen with bated breath.

"Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent ye to

him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him."

The faces of the members of the Sanhedrin become dark. Their eyes glint ominously. Their lips are pursed in determination.

Pilate has not yet finished speaking though. He wants to keep the Jews as friends, and so he suggests: "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him."

Wrong, Pilate! That is very unjust. Why are you going to have Him chastised or beaten? You should do Him no harm at all, for you yourself have declared that He is innocent. But in order to do the Jews a favour you are going to have the innocent Jesus chastised. You are going to have Him scourged. Is that just? ...

Oh, children, Pilate wants to get himself out of a difficulty. He starts to bribe. He hopes that the Jews will then be satisfied, but he is mistaken.

At the sound of this proposal the elders of the Jews shake their heads decidedly. No, they will not be content with merely scourging Jesus. They demand that He be put to death. He must and shall be got out of the way.

At this rate Pilate is getting nowhere. Now he no longer knows what to do. It goes

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against the grain with the proud Roman to yield to the demands of the Jewish elders, and on the other hand he fears their vengeance.

Suddenly some of the people call out that Pilate has got to release a prisoner. Release a prisoner, but why? ...

Yes, boys and girls, in those days that was a regular custom. At the Passover feast Pilate always released one Jewish prisoner. The Jewish people could themselves choose who it should be.

That is why some of the Jews call out that Pilate must now also release a prisoner. That had not so far taken place this year.

When Pilate hears that his face clears. Now perhaps he has a fine opportunity to give Jesus His freedom. He has noticed for some time that it is the elders who want to put Jesus to death. Well then, he will let the people choose. Perhaps the hatred for Jesus is not so great among the people.

"Whom will ye," says he, "that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?"

Barabbas? ... Who is that? ... We have not yet heard of him. Do you know who he is? ... The inhabitants of Jerusalem know him indeed. Barabbas is an evildoer. He had stirred up the people against the Romans. He was indeed a rebel, and for that reason was taken prisoner. Furthermore he had murdered somebody. So he is both a rebel and a murderer. He is a dangerous man. Now he languishes in the prison and waits for death, for there can be no pardon for him. He will be crucified.

Pilate chooses this dangerous murderer on purpose. This well-known criminal, whom nobody pities, he sets against the innocent Jesus. He calculates that the Jewish people will choose Jesus. Of course! They can do nothing else. Then he will at last be released from all difficulty.

What Pilate did here, he should not have done. He should not compare the innocent Jesus and the guilt-ridden Barabbas. The Lord Jesus is thus equated with Barabbas, or counted as being alike. Pilate, the judge dealt very unjustly here. In tense anxiety he waits to hear what answer the Jews will give to his suggestion. He notices that the Jews are hesitating.

Suddenly he is called aside for a moment. A servant has come with a message for him from his wife.

Do you know what message his wife has sent him? ... Listen then. I will just read it to you from Matthew's gospel:

"Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

Oh, what a strange message. What does she mean really? ... Who is "that just man"? ... By "Him" she means "Jesus of Nazareth". How does she know that Jesus is a "just man" ... she was a heathen and yet she calls Jesus a just man, though He is unknown to her. She has dreamed about Jesus. That did not happen by chance, but God ordered it so. Now she is awake, but she has not forgotten her dream. On the contrary, the dream has made a great impression on her. She is afraid that her husband will do the wrong thing and so she sends to warn Pilate.

Even from the mouth of this heathen woman comes the witness that Jesus is righteous,

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that Jesus is innocent.

We may be quite certain that Pilate is shocked by this message. Oh, he will do all that he can to save Jesus. Then he hurries outside again, to the waiting multitude.

"Now, whom must I release?" he asks again, "Jesus or Barabbas?"

For a moment there is silence. Then the people answer as with one voice: "Release unto us Barabbas."

Pilate shrinks back, disconcerted, he looks for a moment at the crowd. That answer he had not expected. How does that come about then? ... Why do the people choose Barabbas? ... Is their hatred so deep that they choose a murderer in preference to an innocent? ...

Evidently the chief priests, in Pilate's short absence, had made their way among the people and had advised them to choose Barabbas, so that that evildoer might be released. The influence of those ungodly elders upon the multitude was so great, that the people listened to them.

So it comes about that they answer as with one voice: "Release unto us Barabbas!"

Isn't it dreadful? ... Truly, not only the elders, but also the people have rejected Jesus, the Messiah, their King. The people too are to blame.

Pilate's cunning plan has failed however.

"What will ye then that I shall do unto Jesus?", he asks undecided and confused.

You should not ask that, Pilate. You are the judge. you must decide. You must release Him at once, for He is innocent.

Can you see that Pilate is getting into more and more difficulty? ...

"What must I do with Jesus?" Thus

resounds the question of the proud governor to the hate-blinded people.

He does not need to wait long for the answer, for the great multitude shouts and screams: "Let Him be crucified."

Among the Jews criminals were stoned, but this method of execution was not used by the Romans; they crucified them. That was a terrible, painful, dishonourable, God-cursed death. And Jesus had to die that ignominious death, that He might save His people from the curse of sin.

"Crucify Him!"

What a fearful demand. He, the wonder working Prophet: He, who had always helped and healed the sick and the afflicted, must be crucified. What shameful ingratitude from the Jewish people.

Pilate does not want to do that though. He cannot yet bring himself to allow an innocent man to be put to death. He cannot yet condemn Him.

"I will chastise Him, and let Him go", he cries to the people. He hopes that they will then be contented.

And what answer does he get? ... "Crucify Him! ... Crucify Him! cries the multitude excitedly.

Pilate begins to despair.

"Why, what evil hath He done?" he asks desperately. Yet he receives no answer to this question.

"Let Him be crucified! Let Him be crucified." shouts the raging maddened crowd. They can no longer see reason.

Matthew 27 vv 26-31

Hark 13 vv 16-20

John 19 v 1-6

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Pilate is at his wit's end. He commands the men of war to scourge Jesus. That is no justice, Pilate! That is very unjust!

At once those cruel heathen soldiers hasten towards the Lord Jesus and take him inside. There they remove His clothes and scourge Him unmercifully.

Now you should know that the scourging of the Romans was extremely cruel. To them a scourge was a stick upon which were bound several leather thongs. At the end of these thongs were attached pieces of lead, and sometimes even sharp pins. With such an instrument they smote an evildoer upon the bared back.

Well then, with such a scourge the Lord Jesus was now beaten. So it is not long before the Saviour's back is cut to shreds.

God's people had merited those stripes, children. They deserved to be scourged in punishment for sin. They were the guilty. But now the Lord Jesus, their Saviour, receives those stripes instead of His elect. Isaiah had said already: "With His stripes we are healed." Here those words are fulfilled. He is lashed that they may for ever be free. In love He takes upon Him those painful, agonising blows. So heavy is the punishment of sin. So dearly did the Saviour have to pay to redeem His people.

Here too is literally fulfilled what the Psalmist had already foretold in Psalm 129 v 3: "The plowers plowed upon my back."

Afterwards these cruel heathens cast a purple robe around the shoulders of the suffering Saviour. Purple was worn by kings, but here the soldiers do not do it to honour Jesus, oh no, they

are mocking and ridiculing the heavenly King! They do it to humiliate him.

A king wears a crown, doesn't he? ... a golden crown!

Well then, the Lord Jesus, who has said that He is the King of Israel, must also wear a crown. The Romans however do not take for the Lord Jesus a golden crown, but they hastily plait a crown of thorns and press it upon the head of the Son of God.

A king holds in his hand a golden sceptre. Well then, Jesus too shall have a sceptre, but He is given a reed. That is His sceptre.

Look, there is the Messiah! And what next? ... Then those rough heathens fall upon their knees and with mockery in their voices they cry: "Hail, King of the Jews!" With a scornful laugh they worship Him, not in truth, but full of contempt.

What mockery and scorn Jesus had to endure.

And, the Lord is silent. He permits it! He does not attempt to defend Himself! Oh, He, the almighty God could punish those mockers with one word. One word from His divine mouth and all would fall down dead. But that He does not do!

Silently, as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, He undergoes that painful suffering.

Some of the soldiers strike Jesus in the face. Others spit upon Him, yet another snatches the reed roughly from the Saviour's hand and strikes it upon the crown of thorns, so that the sharp points go deeper into Jesus' head.

Then Pilate, the unrighteous judge, puts a stop to it. He takes the Son of God outside and

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shows Him thus to the Jewish people.

"Behold the Man!" he says compassionately. He hopes that the Jews will have pity upon the Lord Jesus. He hopes that the people will say: "That is enough. Jesus need suffer no more, let Him go now." That is what he hopes.

"I find no fault in Him," he declares yet again, and yet he has allowed the Lord to be ill-treated and mocked in such a cruel and inhuman way.

When the Jews see Jesus standing there they scream: "Crucify Him! ... Crucify Him!" They have no pity. They demand His crucifixion!

"Take ye Him and crucify Him" cries Pilate, "for I find no fault in Him." The answer resounds: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Certainly, Jesus had to suffer and die to bear God's wrath over sin, but what a heavy load of guilt the Jewish people here take upon themselves.

They reject the long promised Messiah wilfully and voluntarily. They reject their heavenly King. Their shouting echoes all around!

John 19 vv 7-12

After this outburst the uproar subsides a little. There is a moment's quiet. The chief priests make use of it.

"We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God," they shout.

Pilate is shocked to hear that. He casts a shy glance at Jesus. God's Son? ... Could that be true? ... Could this strange, silent Man be a Son of the gods?



"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

You must remember that Pilate was a heathen, and among the heathen they believed that the gods sometimes came upon earth. For such a god's

son they had an idolatrous fear and respect.

That is why we read in the Bible that Pilate was the more afraid. No fear of the Jews is meant here, but a superstitious fear of Jesus. Could He really be a son of the gods? He must investigate this.

He takes Jesus inside once more and asks curiously: "Whence art thou?" ... He means: "Art Thou really of heavenly origin?"

Yet Jesus is silent! He gives the unjust Roman judge no answer.

Then Pilate becomes angry.

"Speakest thou not unto me?" says he, offended, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

Then comes the solemn answer from the Lord's mouth: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." The Lord means: "God is permitting all this, otherwise you would have no power at all." and the Lord concludes, "Therefore he that delivered me to thee hath the greater sin."

For sure, Pilate too is guilty, for he did not pronounce justice, but Pilate was a heathen who knew no better. The Jews however were no heathens, they indeed did know better. That is why the sin of the Jews was greater.

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Pilate hears that answer. What a strange, unusual Man this Jesus is. In the utmost amazement and astonishment he stares at Him, and there is a superstitious awe in his eyes. His decision is made. He is not going to condemn Jesus. He has no thought of doing so.

Again he hurries outside and speaks to the Jews, seeking to release Him.

The Jewish officers then begin to threaten. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a King speaketh against Caesar."

When Pilate hears these threatening words, he grows pale. Oh, if this comes to Caesar's ears then he is lost. Then Caesar will investigate everything and his wrong actions and underhand dealings will come to light. That would cost him his life, for the Roman Caesar is cruel and severe. No, now he can no longer release Jesus, for then he himself would be lost.

And so? ...

Matthew 27 vv 24 and 25

John 19 vv 13-16

Look, there he sits down upon the judgment seat, which stands on the broad Pavement in front of the judgment hall.

Jesus still stands clothed in the purple robe, His bleeding head still adorned with the roughly plaited crown of thorns.

"Behold your King!" says Pilate to the Jews, but now his voice has a tone of mockery.

A wild scream is heard.

"Away with Him! Away with Him!" demand the Jewish elders.

"Away with Him! Away with Him!" demand the people too.

"Shall I crucify your King?" asks Pilate.

"We have no king but Caesar." they shout wildly.

Once more the heavenly King is rejected by the Jewish people. They prefer the Roman Caesar to the King of Israel.

Pilate shrugs his shoulders. He feels that he can do nothing more. Everything has failed. All his attempts to release Jesus founder upon the Jewish chief priests' hatred of Jesus.

He calls for water, washes his hands for all to see, and says: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person."

What next? ... Oh, I scarcely dare to tell it, then the maddened crowd replies: "His blood be on us and on our children."

Fools! They know not what they are saying. They do not realise the consequences of those gruesome words. Shamelessly they call down the blood of Christ in its power of punishment and vengeance upon themselves and upon their children.

Dreadful! Horrible! ... How do they dare?

That blood DID come upon them! Forty years later Jerusalem is besieged by mighty Roman armies. Thousands of Jews are crucified by the embittered Romans, without the city. The hills around Jerusalem were then full of crosses so full that there was no room left to erect any more crosses.

And in the centuries which followed, the Jews were oppressed and persecuted. They were hunted like wild beasts. Everywhere they were hated and despised. Nowhere were they safe. Nowhere could they find rest. Millions have been

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murdered in the course of the ages. That blood follows the Jews even to the present day. They have been made to know, that they spoke those terrible words without thought.

And yet, boys and girls, **it would be wonderful if: "His blood came on you" but not in its condemning power, but in its saving and cleansing power.** I hope that that blood will cleanse your souls from sin. I hope that that blood will make you free from the stain of sin.

The Jews however did not mean it in this way!

At these words, shrieked with such hatred, Pilate gives up. He sees that a tumult will result if he hesitates any longer. He gives command that the innocent Jesus shall be crucified.

It was of necessity that Jesus should be crucified when innocent, for it is just for that reason that He is the Saviour of his people, by that means He has paid for the sins of His elect.

The Jews have got their own way. The cell doors of Barabbas are opened at Pilate's command, and he is set free. And while that evildoer, that rebel, that murderer walks free through Jerusalem's streets, the soldiers get everything ready to take Jesus away as an evildoer to the hill of crucifixion Golgotha!

See there the substitute for all God's people, children. Guilty sinners, rebels against God, shall forever be free, because the innocent Jesus is punished and put to death in their stead.

How wonderful it would be, if you too might be redeemed by the blood of Christ. The HOPE of salvation still remains. The voice of God still calls to you. Bow your knees often and beg the Lord for a renewal of heart. That is essential! That is indispensable! If you lack that, then you lack everything!