

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

CHRIST A KING

LET US NOW RETURN to the Mighty Captive. He suffers Himself to be judged in order that He may subsequently interfere, both legally and effectually on our behalf, who had become amenable to divine justice. In every step of His path of suffering, He proves Himself to be the Man who “**restored what he took not away.**” But He would not have been such a Mediator if, even in His form of humiliation, He had not been at the same time “**higher than the heavens.**” Thus His superhuman glory breaks forth victoriously on every occasion through the obscurity of His lowliness like the sun through the veil of clouds. Nor can He so entirely restrain it as to prevent at least a few glimmerings of it from constantly shining forth.

We find in Pilate a degree of humanity and of susceptibility for something better. He is not the cold, shallow, worn out man of the world, to which many would degrade him. God, indeed, will judge him, but not with the lukewarm, who disgust Him, and whom, like the Laodiceans, He will spue out of his mouth.

The governor, after listening to the accusations of the priests and rulers, returns thoughtfully into his palace, and commands Jesus to be again brought before him. The sacred sufferer appears in silence in the chamber of His judge. It is evident that the Roman cannot avoid feeling a degree of veneration for the wonderful Man; and who is there can do otherwise? Even the rudest scoffers feel in their consciences, the sting of their attacks upon the Lord Jesus, and endeavor by means of ridicule, to drown the reproving voice within them for their enmity to Him.

Pilate begins his examination by asking, “**Art thou the king of the Jews?**” This he seems to have uttered in a mollified tone, in the full expectation of His saying in reply, “God forbid that I should seek after such high things!” Much would he have given to have heard such a declaration from His lips, partly, that he might have a legal ground for officially rejecting the accusation of the malignant Jews, and partly in order, in an easy manner, to get rid of the Nazarene, of whose innocence he is fully persuaded.

Jesus, however, does not give the desired answer in the negative; but, on the contrary He affirms it, after rectifying the false views of His kingdom with which the governor was imbued. He begins His reply to Pilate’s question by asking in return, “**Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?**”

These words were calculated to remind the judge of his duty, not to enter further upon things merely of a suspicious nature, which like the charge brought forward by the Jews, bore the stamp of falsehood upon its front. "Of thyself," the Saviour intended to say, "thou dost not surely speak thus, since, being in possession of intelligence respecting My conduct, thou art doubtless sufficiently convinced of the absurdity of the Jewish accusation. But how does it consist with the dignity of thy office, that thou condescendest to treat such a groundless charge in such a serious manner?"

There is also a profounder meaning in our Lord's words, which may be expressed as follows: "Is it of importance to thee - and such it ought to be - to inquire, whether, and in what sense I am a king; or was the impulse to thy question given thee by the language of others?"

Had Pilate been able to answer the first in the affirmative, that hour would have been to him a time of eternal salvation. But his answer was not of a kind to induce the Saviour to initiate him more deeply into the mysteries of His kingdom.

Our Lord's question is still put in a certain sense to all. It is of the highest importance whether as inquirers we approach the kingdom of truth by impulse from without or from a feeling of inward necessity. Those who approach the Lord and His Word from an inward impulse, and for the sake of their soul's welfare, will behold "**the King in his Beauty**," and find unsealed the mystery of godliness.

The governor has not wholly misunderstood the Lord's words, even in their profounder meaning, and clearly perceives that Jesus seeks to make an impression upon him, and to incite him to be serious with regard to the question concerning His kingdom. But scarcely does he perceive our Lord's intention than he adroitly evades it, and says, "**Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?**"

We see how purposely he tries to liberate himself from Him, as though he feared lest the awe - inspiring influence which the deportment of Jesus exercised over him might become stronger, and in the end overpowering.

"**Am I a Jew?**" he asks, and thereby means to say, "Canst Thou expect me to have any regard to the question whether Thou art really the promised Messiah or not? What have we citizens of Rome to do with the hopes of the Jews?"

Observe here how Pilate is the inventor of the oft-repeated artifice of infidels - that of regarding both the Old and New Testament only as Oriental literature. They are anxious to excuse their estrangement from Christianity on the ground which Pilate takes, of not being a Jew. It is a current saying with such people, "Every nation has its own sphere of religious ideas; and hence what responds to the peculiarity of one nation, is not, on that account, for all." The prophets - nay, even the Lord Himself and His apostles, are treated just like the sages of Grecian antiquity, or the Saphis of Persia, and the Brahmins of India. There, as here, men investigate under the pretense of retaining what is good.

But the idea of belonging to any particular religion, like that of Palestine, as if it were the universal religion, they reject. What blindness! Is the sun of no use to the north, because it rises in the east?

Our Lord easily perceives how little inclined the governor is to lend his ear to deeper explanations, and therefore, He confines Himself to the placing the charge made by the Jews in its proper light. **“My kingdom,”** says He, **“is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.”**

Do not leave unobserved how carefully He selects His words, while thus defending Himself, lest He should infringe upon the truth even by a mere omission. He does not deny that He came to establish a kingdom and expressly calls it His kingdom; He only repels the groundless suspicion of His having intended to overturn the existing authorities and to establish a new political state.

Had this been His intention, says He, **“then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.”** He does not, however, say that His kingdom makes no claim eventually to the government of the whole world, or He would have denied more than was consistent with truth. He only asserts that His kingdom was not of this world, and clearly intimates, by laying the emphasis on the word **“this,”** that another aeon than the present would certainly see His delegates seated on thrones, and His Word and gospel the magna charta of all nations.

It is particularly to be observed that in the sentence, **“Now is my kingdom not from hence,”** the word **“now”** evidently refers to a period in which His kingdom should occupy a very different position than it did at that time.

Pilate listens with astonishment and with a degree of uneasiness to our Lord’s speech and then affected by a reverential impression respecting the Person of the accused, he says, **“Art thou a king then?”**

One might have thought he would have said, “I clearly see that thou art not a king.” But it would appear that the idea became increasingly strong in him that this Jesus was really a king, although in a different sense from what the Jews declared He pretended to be.

But the case is similar with regard to many in the present day. These people are conscious of a superior nature in Jesus, but they continue in their unbelief, and are never clear in their own minds about the person of Christ. In the bottom of their soul the question of Pilate again is heard, **“Art thou a king then?”** And when, notwithstanding, they try to defend the bulwark of their unbelief, nothing is left them but by constraint to belie the voice of truth within them, which thousands, alas! do, because a recognition of Christ as a king would cost them the delight they experience in the service of the world and sin.

What answer does the Lord Jesus make to Pilate’s question?

“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

He is, therefore, a king. He boldly asserts it Himself. Not for a moment did the shame and suffering He was enduring succeed in obscuring in Him the consciousness of His superhuman dignity and majesty. May you who are our brethren in the Lord, in the midst of the weakness of the flesh, and the various afflictions through which you have to pass, never wholly lose the divine consciousness of your adoption. Christ is a king; you are, therefore, not in error who wear His uniform and have trusted your life and destiny to His hands. You are perfectly justified, not only in speaking of Christ’s kingdom, but also in bidding adieu to the last doubt of its final victory and eventual sway over the world, although His kingdom is not of this world, or, as He majestically expresses Himself, like one looking down from the heights of heaven upon the earth, **“Now is my kingdom not from hence”** - that is, hath no earthly origin.

Christ is a king.

“To this end,” says He, **“was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth.”**

Two objects are mentioned here; the first has reference to His royalty, by which He asserts that He was no adventurer but was born a king, such as the wise men from the east correctly honored when they hailed Him as the new-born king of the Jews. The second has reference to His bearing witness.

In the words, **“I was born,”** He indicates His incarnation. But, lest Pilate, or anyone else, should erroneously suppose that Jesus included His whole origin in these words, He adds, **“I came into the world;”** thereby intimating His heavenly descent, and His existence before He appeared in the flesh - yea, before the world was. We ought highly to esteem such testimonies of His eternal and divine nature from His own lips.

Their value is increased in an age like the present which is so full of skepticism, and which so boldly dares to stamp the Lord Christ as a mere man. Had this really been the case, nothing would be left us but to close our churches and bury all our hopes, because the latter rest wholly on the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore cleave firmly to this doctrine, seeing that it is clearly and fully asserted in the sacred Scriptures, especially at a time when, to use the language of the apostle Peter, there are many **“false teachers who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”**

It is pleasing to observe how the Lord, out of consideration for the governor, imperceptibly leads him from His kingly office to the circumstance of His bearing witness, and to the truth as its object. He hopes by so doing to touch the string which would be the first to reverberate at the sound of the gospel.

The perverted Roman was also an inquirer after truth for this question belonged to the Grecian subjects of study which the Romans had also taken up, and a seeking after truth belongs to human nature. Someone well observes here, that “Jesus lays hold of Pilate by the only topic by which He could make an impression on him.” Thus carefully does the Lord proceed in the exercise of His pastoral office, while taking into account the particular inward state of every individual whom He strives to save.

Christ, however, did not come into the world to join Himself to the seekers after truth as their confederate, but rather to lead them on to the aim they were in search of, and thus bring them to the Sabbath of repose. He did not come, as some think, to bring down truth from heaven to earth, but as He Himself says, “**to bear witness of the truth.**”

Truth already existed, interwoven in the history of Israel, and clothed in the inspired language of Moses and the Prophets. Christ only bore witness to it, and confirmed it in the most comprehensive manner, accomplishing prophecy in Himself, and presenting in His own person, the realization of the law’s fulfillment.

In His whole conduct He exhibits to the world the divine origin of the law, and in the events of His life, that of prophecy. He bore witness of the truth, inasmuch as in His own person, while casting down all that is false, He was able to display it in all its splendor in the face of heaven, earth, and hell.

But how was it that the Lord, who never abruptly passed from one idea to another, connected His witnessing for the truth with His kingdom and dominion? Did He mean to say that His kingdom was only a sphere of tuition, and He in so far only a king, as He was able to reign over the minds of men by His teaching? By no means. He does not bear such witness as a king, but as a prophet; and points out the way in which He will establish His kingdom, which He intimates in the words, “**He that is of the truth heareth my voice.**”

Yes, those who hear His voice are the citizens of His kingdom.

The expression, “**every one that is of the truth,**” betokens an inward preparation for conversion, which no one experiences without the operation of grace.

No one is by nature of the truth; but all men are liars, since they love darkness rather than light, because the light reproveth them for their sins and disturbs their repose; and because they press error to their bosoms and shut themselves up against the entrance of truth which menaces their sensual pleasures with danger and urges them to a life of self-denial. But as soon as the Spirit gains room, the love of delusion gives way to the ardent desire to be freed from it.

By, the operation of the Spirit of God we become joined to those who are of the truth. Then, if the divine Teacher utters His voice, how does our inmost soul echo to the sound of His light and life-giving words. If He then says, “**Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden,**” how gladly do we accept the gracious invitation! If He then unveils His glory and beauty, how do our longing souls rush into His arms rejoicing!

Therefore, let us not cease to call upon the King of Truth to help us, and not leave us till He has attuned the chords of our soul in such a manner that His word may find a full and abiding echo in us. Let us entreat, above all things, the hearing ear, the understanding, believing, child-like, and simple heart, and plead His gracious promise to guide the meek in judgment, and to teach the humble His way.

~ end of chapter 28 ~

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