EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE XXIII. 13–25.

13 And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,

14 Said unto them, 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:

15 No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.

16 I will therefore chastise him, and release him.

17 (For of necessity he must re­lease one unto them at the feast.)

18 And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:

19 (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)

20 Pilate therefore, willing to re­lease Jesus, spake again to them.

21 But they cried, saying, Cruci­fy him, crucify him.

22 And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let *him* go.

23 And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.

24 And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.

25 And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

WE should observe, for one thing, in this passage, *what striking testimony was borne to our Lord Jesus Christ’s perfect innocence by His judges.*

We are told that Pilate said to the Jews, “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.” The Roman and the Galilean governors were both of one mind. Both agreed in pronouncing our Lord not guilty of the things laid to His charge.

There was a peculiar fitness in this public declaration of Christ’s innocence. Our Lord, we must remember, was about to be offered up as a sacrifice for our sins; it was meet and right that those who examined Him should formally pronounce Him a guiltless and blameless person: it was meet and right that the Lamb of God should be found by those who slew Him “a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Pet. i. 19.) The over-ruling hand of God so ordered the events of His trial, that even when His enemies were judges they could find no fault and prove nothing against Him.

The circumstance before us may seem of trifling mo­ment to a careless Bible reader; it ought however to commend itself to the heart of every well-instructed Christian. We ought to be daily thankful that our great Substitute was in all respects perfect, and that our Surety was a complete and faultless Surety.—What child of man can count the number of his sins? We leave undone things we should do and do things we ought not to do, every day we live. But this must be our comfort,—that Christ the Righteous has undertaken to stand in our place, to pay the debt we all owe, and to fulfil the law we have all broken. He did fulfil that law com­pletely: He satisfied all its demands: He accomplished all its requirements. He was the second Adam, who had “clean hands and a pure heart,” and could there­fore enter with boldness into God’s holy hill. (Psalm xxiv. 4.) He is the righteousness of all sinners who believe in Him. (Rom. x. 4.) In Him all believers are counted perfect fulfillers of the law. The eyes of a holy God beholds them in Christ, clothed with Christ’s perfect righteousness. For Christ’s sake God can now say of the believer, “I find in him no fault at all.”

Let us learn, for another thing, in this passage, *how thoroughly the Jews took on themselves the whole responsi­bility of our Lord Jesus Christ’s death.* We are told that when Pilate was “willing to release Jesus,” the Jews “cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him!” Again, we are told that “they were instant with loud voices, re­quiring that he might be crucified.”

This fact in the history of our Lord’s passion deserves particular notice; it shows the strict accuracy of the words of the apostles in after times, when speaking of Christ’s death. They speak of it as the act of the Jewish nation, and not of the Romans. “Ye killed the Prince of life,” says Peter to the Jews at Jerusalem: “Ye slew and hanged him on a tree.” (Acts iii. 15; iv. 30.) “The Jews have both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets,” says Paul to the Thessalonians. (1 Thess. ii. 15.) So long as the world stands the fact before us is a memorial of man’s natural hatred against God. When the Son of God came down to earth and dwelt among His own chosen people, they despised Him, rejected Him, and slew Him.

The fearful responsibility which the Jews took on themselves in the matter of our Lord’s death was not forgotten by God: the righteous blood which they shed has been crying against them as a people for eighteen hundred years. Scattered all over the earth, wanderers among the nations, without a land, without a government, without a home, the Jews show to this day that their own words have been terribly fulfilled: the blood of their slain Messiah “is upon them and upon their children.” They are a standing warning to the world that it is a fearful thing to reject the Lord Christ, and that the nation which speaks stoutly against God, must not be surprised if God deals with it according to its words. Marvellous indeed is the thought that there is mercy in store for Israel, notwithstanding all its sins and unbelief! The nation which pierced and slew Him, shall yet look to Him by faith and be restored to favour. (Zech. xii. 10.)

We should observe, lastly, in this passage, *the remark­able circumstances connected with the release of Barabbas.* We are told that Pilate “released him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom the Jews had desired; but delivered Jesus to their will.” Two persons were before him, and he must needs release one of the two. The one was a sinner against God and man,—a malefactor stained with many crimes; the other was the holy, harmless, and undefiled Son of God, in whom there was no fault at all. And yet Pilate condemns the in­nocent prisoner and acquits the guilty! He orders Barabbas to be set free, and delivers Jesus to be crucified.

The circumstance before us is very instructive: it shows the bitter malice of the Jews against our Lord. To use the words of St. Peter, “They denied the holy one and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted to them.” (Acts iii. 14.) It shows the deep humiliation to which our Lord submitted, in order to procure our re­demption. He allowed Himself to be reckoned lighter in the balance than a murderer, and to be counted more guilty than the chief of sinners!

But there is a deeper meaning yet beneath the circum­stance before us, which we must not fail to observe. The whole transaction is a lively emblem of that wondrous exchange that takes place between Christ and the sinner, when a sinner is justified in the sight of God. Christ has been made “sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor. v. 21.) Christ the innocent has been reckoned guilty before God, that we the guilty might be reckoned innocent, and be set free from condemnation.

If we are true Christians, let us daily lean our souls on the comfortable thought that Christ has really been our Substitute, and has been punished in our stead; let us freely confess, that, like Barabbas, we deserve death, judgment, and hell: but let us cling firmly to the glori­ous truth that a sinless Saviour has suffered in our stead, and that believing in Him the guilty may go free.

NOTES. LUKE XXIII. 13–25.

13.—[*He* *had called together.*]This expression seems to denote a general gathering of the leading persons among the Jews, in order that the declaration of our Lord’s innocence might be as public and unmistakeable as possible. It made it im­possible for the Jews afterwards to deny that the Roman governor found our Lord “not guilty.”

14.—[*Have* *found no fault.*]Burgon remarks here, that we ought to notice, “how many and what various persons bear testimony to the innocence of the Holy One: Pilate, Herod, Pilate’s wife, Judas Iscariot, the thief on the cross, and the centurion” who superintended the crucifixion. We cannot doubt that this was specially over-ruled and ordered by the providence of God.

15*.—*[*Nothing worthy of death is done unto him.*]There seems no doubt that these words would have been better rendered, “nothing worthy of death has been done by him.” This is the opinion of Scholefield, Major, and Alford. (Compare Acts xxv. 11, 25; xxvi. 31.)

16*.—*[*Chastise.*]This means “chastise by scourging.” Dod­dridge paraphrases the verse: “When I have chastised Him by scourging, which will be an admonition to Him for the future not to use those wild and enthusiastical expressions which have given so much umbrage and suspicion, I will let Him go.” Pilate appears to have hoped that by this com­paratively slight punishment of one whom he regarded as a harmless fanatic, he should satisfy the Jews.

17.—[*Of* *necessity he must release one.*]Major remarks, “By whom or at what time this practice originated, is not deter­mined. The most probable opinion is that it was introduced by the Romans, and perhaps by Pilate, at the beginning of his government, in order to gratify the Jewish people.”

18*.—*[*Barabbas.*]Iam quite unable to receive the opinion held by some, that the scapegoat in the Jewish law was a type of Barabbas. I believe that the scapegoat was a type of Christ rising again, and not of Christ crucified. Barabbas was a type of the sinner deserving judgment, and yet set free.

20*.—*[*Willing to release Jesus.*]Pilate’s desire to acquit our Lord and set Him free, coupled with his great desire to please the Jews and get the praise of man, is a striking picture of the slavery to which a great man without prin­ciple may be reduced.

21*.—*[*Crucify him.*]Crucifixion was not only the most painful, but the most ignominious and disgraceful death, to which a person could be sentenced. Bishop Pearson remarks, “By the ignominy of this punishment we are taught how far our Saviour descended for us, that while we were slaves, and in bondage unto sin, He might redeem us by a servile death.”

22*.—*[*The third time.*]Pilate’s thrice repeated declaration of our Lord’s innocence is deserving of notice. Bishop Pearson remarks, “It was thought necessary to include the name of Pilate in the creed, as of one who gave a most powerful external testimony to the certainty of our Saviour’s death, and the innocency of His life. He did not only profess, to the condemnation of the Jews, that he found nothing worthy of death in Christ; but left the same written to the Gentiles of the Roman Empire. Two ways he is related to have given most ample testimony to the truth: first by an ex­press written to Tiberius, and by him presented to the senate; and secondly, by records written in tables of all things of moment which were acted in his government.” For this last statement Pearson gives the authority of Ter­tullian, Eusebius, and Justin Martyr.

23*.—*[*They were instant.*]This is the same Greek word that is translated “pressed upon him” in Luke v. 1, and “lay upon us” in Acts xxvii. 20.

24*.—*[*That it should be as they required.*]These words would have been rendered more literally “that their request should be.”

25*.—*[*To their will.*]This means “the will of the Jews.” Let it be noted here, and throughout St. Luke’s account of our Lord’s passion, how much less he said of the things done by the Roman soldiers, than either Matthew, Mark, or John. The reason is simple. St. Luke wrote specially for the use of the Gentile Christians: he desired to keep before their minds prominently, that though our Lord was crucified under Pontius Pilate, the persons most to blame for His death were not Gentiles, but Jews.