**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-086**. **THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate. 2. And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King. 3. And Pilate asked Him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And He answered him and said, Thou sayest it. 4. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. 5. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. 6. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. 7. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. 8. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. 9. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing. 10. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. 11. And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. 12. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."*

*Luke 23:1-12*

Luke's canvas is all but filled by the persecutors, and gives only glimpses of the silent Sufferer. But the silence of Jesus is eloquent, and the prominence of the accusers and judges heightens the impression of His passive endurance. We have in this passage the Jewish rulers with their murderous hate; Pilate contemptuously indifferent, but perplexed and wishing to shirk responsibility; and Herod with his frivolous curiosity. They present three types of unworthy relations to Jesus Christ.

**I. We see first the haters of Jesus.**

So fierce is their hatred that they swallow the bitter pill of going to Pilate for the execution of their sentence. John tells us that they began by trying to get Pilate to decree the crucifixion without knowing Jesuscrime; but that was too flagrant injustice, and too blind confidence in them, for Pilate to grant. So they have to manufacture a capital charge on the spot, and they are equal to the occasion. By the help of two lies, and one truth so twisted as to be a lie, they get up an indictment, which they think will be grave enough to compel the procurator to do as they wish.

Their accusation, if it had been ever so true, would have been ludicrous on their lips; and we may be sure that, if it had been true, they would have been Jesuspartisans, not His denouncers. The Gracchi complaining of seditionare nothing to the Sanhedrim accusing a Jew of rebellion against Rome. Every man in that crowd was a rebel at heart, and would have liked nothing better than to see the standard of revolt lifted in a strong hand. Pilate was not so simple as to be taken in by such an accusation from such accusers, and it fails. They return to the charge, and the more urgentcharacter of the second attempt is found in its statement of the widespread extent of Christ's teaching, but chiefly in the cunning introduction of Galilee, notoriously a disaffected and troublesome district.

What a hideous and tragic picture we have here of the ferocity of the hatred, which turned the very fountains of justice and guardians of a nation into lying plotters against innocence, and sent these Jewish rulers cringing before Pilate, pretending loyalty and acknowledging his authority! They were ready for any falsehood and any humiliation, if only they could get Jesus crucified. And what had excited their hatred? Chiefly His teachings, which brushed aside the rubbish both of ceremonial observance and of Rabbinical casuistry, and placed religion in love to God and consequent love to man; then His attitude of opposition to them as an order; and finally His claim, which they never deigned to examine, to be the Son of God. That, they said, was blasphemy, as it was, unless it were true,--an alternative which they did not look at. So blinded may men be by prejudice, and so mastered by causeless hatred of Him who loves them all!

These Jewish rulers were men like ourselves. Instead of shuddering at their crime, as if it were something far outside of anything possible for us, we do better if we learn from it the terrible depths of hostility to Jesus, the tragic blindness to His character and love, and the degradation of submission to usurpers, which must accompany denial of His right to rule over us. They hated Me without a cause, said Christ; but He pointed to that hatred as sure to be continued towards Him and His servants as long as the worldcontinues the world.

**II. We have Pilate, indifferent and perplexed.**

Luke's very brief account should be supplemented by John's, which shows us how important the conversation, so much abbreviated by Luke, was. Of course Pilate knew the priests and rulers too well to believe for a moment that the reason they gave for bringing Jesus to him was the real one, and his taking Jesus apart to speak with Him shows a wish to get at the bottom of the case. So far he was doing his duty, but then come the faults. These may easily be exaggerated, and we should remember that Pilate was the most ignorant, and therefore the least guilty, of all the persons mentioned in this passage. He had probably never heard the name of Jesus till that day, and saw nothing but an ordinary Jewish peasant, whom his countrymen, like the incomprehensible and troublesome people they were, wished, for some fantastic reason, to get killed.

But that dialogue with his Prisoner should have sunk deeper into his mind and heart. He was in long and close enough contact with Jesus to have seen glimpses of the light, which, if followed, would have led to clear recognition. His first sin was indifference, not unmingled with scorn, and it blinded him. Christ's lofty and wonderful explanation of the nature of His kingdom and His mission to bear witness to the truth fell on entirely preoccupied ears, which were quick enough to catch the faintest whispers of treason, but dull towards truth. When Jesus tried to reach his conscience by telling him that every lover of truth would listen to His voice, he only answered by the question, to which he waited not for an answer, What is truth?

That was not the question of a theoretical sceptic, but simply of a man who prided himself on being practical, and left all talk about such abstractions to dreamers. The limitations of the Roman intellect and its characteristic over-estimate of deeds and contempt for pure thought, as well as the spirit of the governor, who would let men think what they chose, as long as they did not rebel, spoke in the question. Pilate is an instance of a man blinded to all lofty truth and to the beauty and solemn significance of Christ's words, by his absorption in outward life. He thinks of Jesus as a harmless fanatic. Little did he know that the truth, which he thought moonshine, would shatter the Empire, which he thought the one solid reality. So called practical men commit the same mistake in every generation. All flesh is as grass;... the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Further, Pilate sinned in prostituting his office by not setting free the prisoner when he was convinced of His innocence. I find no fault in this man, should have been followed by immediate release. Every moment afterwards, in which He was kept captive, was the condemnation of the unjust judge. He was clearly anxious to keep his troublesome subjects in good humour, and thought that the judicial murder of one Jew was a small price to pay for popularity. Still he would have been glad to have escaped from what his official training had taught him to recoil from, and what some faint impression, made by his patient prisoner, gave him a strange dread of. So he grasps at the mention of Galilee, and tries to gain two good ends at once by handing Jesus over to Herod.

The relations between Antipas and him were necessarily delicate, like those between the English officials and the rajahs of native states in India; and there had been some friction, perhaps about the Galileans, whose bloodhe had mingled with their sacrifices. If there had been difficulties in connection with such a question of jurisdiction, the despatch of Jesus to Herod would be a graceful way of making the amende honorable, and would also shift an unpleasant decision on to Herod's shoulders. Pilate would not be displeased to get rid of embarrassment, and to let Herod be the tool of the priestshate.

How awful the thought is of the contrast between Pilate's conceptions of what he was doing and the reality! How blind to Christ's beauty it is possible to be, when engrossed with selfish aims and outward things! How near a soul may be to the light, and yet turn away from it and plunge into darkness! How patient that silent prisoner, who lets Himself be bandied about from one tyrant to another, not because they had power, but because He loved the world, and would bear the sins of every one of us! How terrible the change when these unjust judges and He will change places, and Pilate and Herod stand at His judgment-seat!

**III. We have the wretched, frivolous Herod.**

This is the murderer of John Baptist--that fox, a debauchee, a coward, and as cruel as sensuous. He had all the vices of his worthless race, and none of the energy of its founder. He is by far the most contemptible of the figures in this passage. Note his notion of, and his feeling to, Jesus. He thought of our Lord as of a magician or juggler, who might do some wonders to amuse the vacuous ennui of his sated nature. Time was when he had felt some twinge of conscience in listening to the Baptist, and had almost been lifted to nobleness by that strong arm. Time was, too, when he had trembled at hearing of Jesus, and taken Him for his victim risen from a bloody grave. But all that is past now. The sure way to stifle conscience is to neglect it. Do that long and resolutely enough, and it will cease to utter unheeded warnings. There will be a silence which may look like peace, but is really death. Herod's gladness was more awful and really sad than Herod's fear. Better to tremble at God's word than to treat it as an occasion for mirth. He who hates a prophet because he knows him to be a prophet and himself to be a sinner, is not so hopeless as he who only expects to get sport out of the messenger of God.

Then note the Lord's silence. Herod plies Jesus with a battery of questions, and gets no answer. If there had been a grain of earnestness in them all, Christ would have spoken. He never is silent to a true seeker after truth. But it is fitting that frivolous curiosity should be unanswered, and there is small likelihood of truth being found at the goal when there is nothing more noble than that temper at the starting-point. Christ's silence is the penalty of previous neglect of Christ's and His forerunner's words. Jesus guides His conduct by His own precept, Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; and He knows, as we never can, who come into that terrible list of men to whom it would only add condemnation to speak of even His love. The eager hatred of the priests followed Jesus to Herod's palace, but no judicial action is recorded as taking place there. Their fierce earnestness of hate seems out of place in the frivolous atmosphere. The mockery, in which Herod is not too dignified to join his soldiers, is more in keeping. But how ghastly it sounds to us, knowing whom they ignorantly mocked! Cruelty, inane laughter, hideous pleasure in an innocent man's pain, disregard of law and justice--all these they were guilty of; and Herod, at any rate, knew enough of Jesus to give a yet darker colouring to his share in the coarse jest.

But how the loud laugh would have fallen silent if some flash had told who Jesus was! Is there any of our mirth, perhaps at some of His servants, or at some phase of His gospel, which would in like manner stick in our throats if His judgment throne blazed above us? Ridicule is a dangerous weapon. It does more harm to those who use it than to those against whom it is directed. Herod thought it an exquisite jest to dress up his prisoner as a king; but Herod has found out, by this time, whether he or the Nazarene was the sham monarch, and who is the real one. Christ was as silent under mockery as to His questioner. He bears all, and He takes account of all. He bears it because He is the world's Sacrifice and Saviour. He takes account of it, and will one day recompense it, because He is the world's King, and will be its Judge. Where shall we stand then--among the silenced mockers, or among the happy trusters in His Passion and subjects of His dominion?