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

**LUKE-088**. **JESUS AND PILATE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"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 he 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. 26. And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus."*

*Luke 23:13-26*

Luke here marks out three stages of the struggle between Pilate and the Jews. Thrice did he try to release Jesus; thrice did they yell their hatred and their demand for His blood. Then came the shameful surrender by Pilate, in which, from motives of policy, he prostituted Roman justice. Knowingly he sacrificed one poor Jew to please his turbulent subjects; unknowingly he slew the Christ of God.

**I. The first weak attempt to be just.**

Pilate invested it with a certain formality by convoking a representative gathering of all classes, chief priests and the rulers and the people. The nation was summoned to decide solemnly whether they would or would not put their Messiah to death, and a Roman governor was their summoner. Surely the irony of fate (or, rather, of Providence) could go no further than that. Pilate's résumé of the proceedings up to the moment of his speaking is not without a touch of sarcasm, in the contrast between yeand Iand Herod. It is almost as if he had said, Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that you should have a quicker scent for rebellion than I or Herod!He was evidently suspicious of the motives which induced the rulersto take the new role of eager defenders of Roman authority, and ready to suspect something below such an extraordinary transformation. Jews delivering up a Jew because he was an insurgent against Caesar,--there must be something under that! He lays stress on their having heard his examination of the accused, as showing that he had gone into the matter thoroughly, that the charges had broken down to their knowledge. He represents his sending Jesus to Herod as done from the high motive of securing the completest possible investigation, instead of its being a despicable attempt to shirk responsibility and to pay an empty compliment to an enemy. He reiterates his conviction of Jesusinnocence, and then, after all this flourish about his own carefulness to bring judicial impartiality to bear on the case, he makes the lame and impotent conclusion of offering to chastise Him.

What for? The only course for a judge convinced of a prisoner's innocence is to set him free. But this was a bribe to the accusers, offered in hope that the smaller punishment would content them. Pilate knew that he was perpetrating flagrant injustice in such a suggestion, and he tried to hide it by using a gentle word. Chastisesounds almost beneficent, but it would not make the scourging less cruel, nor its infliction less lawless. Compromises are always ticklish to engineer, but a compromise between justice and injustice is least likely of all to answer. This one signally failed. The fierce accusers of Jesus were quick to see the sign of weakness, both in the proposal itself and in their being asked if it would be acceptable to them. Not so should a Roman governor have spoken. If pressure had made the iron wall yield so far, a little more and it would fall flat, and let them at their victim.

Pilate was weak, vacillating, did not know what he wished. He wished to do right, but he wished more to conciliate, for he knew that he was detested, and feared to be accused to Rome. The other side knew what they wanted, and were resolute. Encouraged by the hesitation of Pilate, they cried out all together. One hears the strident yells from a thousand throats shrieking out the self-revealing and self-destroying choice of Barabbas. He was a popular hero for the very reason that he was a rebel. He had done what his admirers had accused Jesus of doing, and for which they pretended that they had submitted Him to Pilate's judgment. The choice of Barabbas convicts the charges against Jesus of falsehood and unreality. The choice of Barabbas reveals the national ideal. They did not want a Messiah like Jesus, and had no eyes for the beauty of His character, nor ears for the words of grace poured into His lips. They had no horror of a murderer, and great admiration for a rebel. Barabbas was the man after their own heart. A nation that can reject Jesus and choose Barabbas is only fit for destruction. A nation judges itself by its choice of heroes. The national ideal is potent to shape the national character. We to-day are sinking into an abyss because of our admiration for the military type of hero; and there is not such an immense difference between the mob that rejected Jesus and applauded Barabbas and the mobs that shout round a successful soldier, and scoff at the law of Christ if applied to politics.

**II. The second, weaker attempt.**

Pilate repeated his proposal of release, but it was all but lost in the roar of hatred. Note the contrast between Pilate spoke(v. 20) and they shouted. It suggests his feeble effort swept away by the rush of ferocity. And they have gathered boldness from his hesitation, and are now prescribing the mode of Christ's punishment. Now first the terrible word Crucifyis heard. Both Matthew and Mark tell us that the priests and rulers had stirred upthe people to choose Barabbas, but apparently the mob, once roused, needed no further stimulant.

Crowds are always cruel, and they are as fickle as cruel. The very throats now hoarse with fiercely roaring Crucify Himhad been strained by shouting Hosannaless than a week since. The branches strewed in His path had not had time to wither. The voice of the people is the voice of God,--sometimes. But sometimes it sounds very like the voice of the enemy of God, and one would have more confidence in it if it did not so often and so quickly speak, not only in divers, but in diverse, manners. To make it the arbiter of men's merit, still more to trim one's course so as to catch the breeze of the popular breath, is folly, or worse. Men admire what they resemble, or try to resemble, and Barabbas has more of his sort than has Jesus.

**III. The final yielding.**

It is to Pilate's credit that he kept up his efforts so long. Luke wishes to impress us with his persistency, as well as with the fixed determination of the Jews, by his note of the third time. Thrice was the choice offered to them, and thrice did they put away the possibility of averting their doom. But Pilate's persistency had a weak place, for he was afraid of his subjects, and, while willing to save Jesus, was not willing to imperil himself in doing it. Self-interest takes the strength out of resolution to do right, like a crumbling stone in a sea wall, which lets in the wave that ruins the whole structure.

Pilate had come to the end of his shifts to escape pronouncing sentence. The rulers had refused to judge Jesus according to their law. Herod had sent Him back with thanks, but unsentenced. The Jews would not have Him, but Barabbas, released, nor would they accept scourging in lieu of crucifying. So he has to decide at last whether to be just and fear not, or basely to give way, and draw down on his head momentary applause at the price of everlasting horror. Luke notices in all three stages the loud cries of the Jews, and in this last one he gives special emphasis to them. Their voices prevailed. What a condemnation for a judge! He gave sentence that what they asked for should be done. Baseness in a judge could go no farther. The repetition of the characterisation of Barabbas brings up once more the hideousness of the people's choice, and the tragic words to their willsets in a ghastly light the flagrant injustice of the judge, and yet greater crime of the Jews. To deliver Jesus to their will was base; to entertain such a willtowards Jesus was more than base,--it was the ruin of them, and of all Israel. Our whole lives here and hereafter turn on what is our willto Him.