

Exhortation 6: Christ Before Pilate

Charles Herle (1598-1659)

Scripture

I. The Text Opened

A. Luke 23:1

1. “And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate,” (Luke 23:1).
2. One of the greatest ironies of Christ’s arrest and subsequent death was the fact that it was the Jewish religious leaders who prided themselves in their knowledge of the Old Testament law that had him arrested.
 - a) It was the chief priests and pharisees that made the business deal with Judas to betray him and appointed the band of soldiers that captured him.
 - b) And it was this same group that beat him, mocked him, and spat on him – very uncharacteristic behavior for “holy” priests and synagogue leaders.
 - c) Their next move was to turn him over to the governor because, as they themselves explain, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death,” (John 18:31).
 - (1) *So, they led him bound from the high priest’s hall to the governor’s palace to proceed with his accusations, and so to his sentence of death.*
 - (2) *This decision came about not because of their love and loyalty to justice, however, but because they lacked the power to legally sentence him.*
 - (3) *At the same time, their warning to the government officials was threateningly clear, “If you let this man go, you are not Caesar’s friend,” (John 19:12).*
 - d) Within the next few hours, a total of four accusations were brought against Christ, all of which demanded the death penalty: sedition, seduction, usurpation, and blasphemy.
 - (1) 1) *Sedition (insurrection or rebellion). Christ was accused of “stirring up the people” with his teaching, (Luke 23:5).*
 - (2) 2) *Seduction, (to cause to err from the paths of truth, duty, or religion). “He perverts the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar,” (Luke 23:2).*
 - (3) 3) *Usurpation, (the wrongful seizure of something by force, to take something not rightfully yours to take). “He says that he himself is Christ, a King; and he that makes himself a king speaks against Caesar,” (John 19:12).*
 - (4) 4) *Blasphemy, (because he claimed to be God). “We need no further witness, you have heard the blasphemy,” (Mark 14:63-64).*

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: Christ’s teachings stirred up the people, but it was to nothing more than the life of holiness and love required to be his disciple, (Mark 10:21).

1. He was certainly not inciting them to rebel or overthrow the Roman government of that day.
2. In fact, he was so far removed from seduction or perverting the nation in regard to truth or duty to their government that all they need to do, to know they had no better champion, was to observe his life (Mark 12:17).

- a) How resolutely by his teaching did he vindicate and refine the Old Testament Law, and how absolutely by his life did he fulfill it perfectly?
- b) These were the two ends of his coming, teaching, living, and dying – to restore and fulfill the law, (Matt. 5:17).
3. And as for usurpation, so far is he from the least ambition or desire of usurping at this point in time (John 7:6), that when he knows the people want to make him king, he disappears from their midst and retreats to the mountain alone (John 6:15).
- a) Though he is the sovereign God of the universe, he came first to serve, and deal with sin.
- b) Indeed, one day he would indeed reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, after his resurrection, but not until God's timing and plan were complete.
4. Concerning his claim to be God and their accusation of blasphemy, he was never guilty of any kind of blasphemy in any way, at any time.
- a) He is God, (John 10:30), and it is impossible for him to deceive or lie.
- b) The reason his accusers could not see it, and accused him of such, after all his works and miracles, is because God blinded their eyes to the truth in order to use them to fulfill his grand plan of redemption, (John 12:40, Isa. 44:18), and they preferred their interpretation of their own kingdom instead of God's Kingdom. God's will, plan, and goals for creation and for his people cannot and will not ever be thwarted.
- (1) Even these malevolent, evil, wicked, enraged accusers of Christ were carrying out God's plan to the letter.*
- c) So let us believers take courage and comfort in the truth that no matter how hopelessly wicked the world around us seems, this too is part of God's work to bring Christ to the throne and all his enemies under his feet, (Rom. 14:9-11, Heb. 10:12-13, Phil. 2:6-11).
- (1) He is the blessed Savior, who are both Judge and Advocate of that great court of heaven, became for rebels an accused, an arraigned prisoner here on earth.*
- (2) What does it mean, that the Lord, once challenged his accusers, "which of you can rebuke me of sin?"*
- (a) And yet he is here silent to all their accusations before Pilate?*
- (3) When that old accuser of the brethren shall lay to any Christian's charge things that they well know they are guilty of, (Rev. 12:10), their silence will not be as Christ's, because he was the innocent Lamb of God.*
- (a) Rather, they must plead one thing, and one thing only, and that is that the blood of Christ has cleansed them from all those sins, (1 John 1:7, Rom. 8).*
- (4) The Lord, as silent as he was, could "have smitten the earth with the rod of your mouth, and with the breath of your lips have [could have] slain the wicked," (Isa. 11:4).*
- (a) But for the wicked in hell, all the breath of their lips will not be able to cool their own tongue.*
- (b) Christians cannot simply request a pardon, for unless he blots out that litany of accusations against them they would be left to call for the rocks and mountains to fall on them and cover them, (Col. 2:14).*

B. Christ Accused for Blasphemy

1. "And the whole multitude of them arose and led him unto Pilate," (Luke 23:1).
- a) God takes blasphemy very seriously.

b) So seriously, in fact, that when he was laying the foundation for how his own people should think about him and behave toward him, God warned them, “He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death,” (Lev. 24:16).

(1) *This explains why those Jewish religious leaders who prided themselves on knowing Old Testament Law went into a rage, tearing their clothes, when Christ confirmed to them that he was the Son of God.*

(2) *There was now no alternative to his sentence of death: “I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God.”*

(a) *Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*

(3) *Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy,” (Matt. 26:63-65).*

c) What they failed to consider, however, was that God himself spoke these very words from heaven when John the Baptist baptized Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” (Matt. 3:17).

(1) *And they completely missed what the Apostle John so beautifully portrays regarding the relationship between God and his Son in the first chapter of his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”*

(a) *The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God,” (John 1:1, 14, 29, 34).*

(b) *Christ himself verifies that “I and my Father are one,” (John 10:30).*

2. Blasphemy is any form of irreverence or untruth about God, which means if Christ had denied his divinity before these mocking priests and pharisees, that indeed would have been blasphemy!

a) So, though malice may call what Christ said blasphemy, it is, in fact, the epitome of truth itself.

b) And yet, to all their accusations of blasphemy, “he answered not a word.”

(1) *Was this some obstinate weariness of life and subsequent desire to die?*

(2) *Or was it some confused inability to acquit himself from their accusations?*

(a) *No, of course not.*

(3) *He had already fully submitted himself into the severest hands of both his Father’s wrath and his enemy’s malice.*

(4) *He had already affirmed, “not my will but thine be done” to his Father, and, “it is I whom you seek,” to his enemies.*

III. The Text Applied

A. As God, Christ could have spoken to them in fire and thunder as he did at Sinai (Exod. 19).

1. He could have laid them at his feet with mere words, as he had already done in the Garden.

a) Why, then, do we find him here with nothing to say as if he could not hear or could not speak? (Psa. 38:14)?

- b) We must surely say that the cause of his silence was our own guiltiness, ours in whose place he now stood.
2. We were guilty of all their accusations.
- a) Regarding sedition (rebellion against authority), in Adam we rebelled against God and his command to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that grew in the Garden (Gen. 3).
- b) Regarding seduction, in Eve we were seduced by the devil, that old serpent, and in turn, we seduced Adam.
- c) Regarding usurpation, (taking what is not rightfully ours to have), we traitorously invaded and usurped that divine prerogative of knowing good and evil.
- d) And regarding blasphemy, in doing so we attempted to make ourselves what Christ is here unjustly accused of, being equal with God. As the serpent tempted Eve, "You shall be as gods knowing good and evil," (Gen. 3:5).
3. When Adam fell, God made a derisive pronouncement, "Behold the man is become like one of us."
- a) And here, standing before his accusers, we are rightly able to say in a just devotion of almighty God, "Behold God is become like one of us."
- (1) He chose to humble himself by taking on the cloak of humanity and becoming like us so that he could die a selfless death, bearing our sins in his body on the tree, (Phil. 2:6-7), paying for our guilt with his own blood.*
- b) When that adulterous woman was brought before Christ to be judged, he wrote with his finger on the ground and so sent away all her accusers with shame.
- (1) So, when we shall be then brought before him to be judged, he will write our pardon with the finger of his mercy on the ground of our merits, and so shall all our accusers be driven out of his presence.*
- c) Who shall be able to lay anything to the charge of his chosen, Lord, when it is he that justifies, (Rom. 8:33)?
- (1) We rightly fear the Lord, seeing we are rightly accused, (Luke 23:40), but Christ had done nothing amiss.*
- (2) And yet he willingly bore the Christian's burden.*
- (3) Therefore, when you sit in the seat of judgment, in heaven Christ is our advocate and will plead for us.*
- (4) What shall we then fear though the wickedness of our enemies encompasses, if the faith of our hearts can lay hold on him above?*
- (5) He will not nor cannot forget to be gracious.*
- (6) He is still the same when decked with majesty and honor as when clothed with reproach and shame, (Psa. 35:26).*
- d) He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), and we come before him, before that Shepherd and Bishop of souls (1 Peter 2:25) and we ask that he plead before his offended Father on our behalf.
- (1) It was the Father to whom we stood guilty and indebted.*
- (2) Then, now, and evermore he is an incessant intercessor for us.*
- (3) Every wound, every drop of blood that was pledged on our behalf was of much more value than that of Abel's (Heb 12:24).*
- (4) How can we imagine that mercy is above sacrifice?*
- (5) And yet, in this his work, there is both mercy and sacrifice; a sacrifice that cannot fail of mercy.*