

Exhortation 10 – Christ Rejected

Charles Herlse (1598-1659)

Luke 23:18

I. The Text Opened

A. Christ is Rejected and Barabbas is Released

1. “And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas,” (Luke 23:18).
 - a) Imagine being a jury of one who must determine, between a known murderer and a benevolent restorer of life, who you will set free and who you will sentence to death.
 - b) And suppose at the time of the trial the courtroom is full of spectators with an interest in the outcome.
 - c) Picture how bizarre it would be if when you chose to sentence the murderer and let the healer go free, the entire courtroom in unison rose from their seats and began to shout, “Release the murderer and hang the healer!”
 - (1) *But this is exactly what happens when Pilate asks the crowd in front of the governor’s palace a similar question.*
 - (2) *While sitting on the judge’s seat, Pilate’s wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him,” (Matt. 27:19).*
 - d) While looking for a way out of this most serious predicament, Pilate thinks if he puts an absurd choice between a known murderer and an innocent before the crowd that they will make the obvious choice, and he’ll be able to remove himself from the decision.
 - (1) *And yet the answer that comes back from the riotous crowd when he asks, “Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’” is “No, not him! Give us Barabbas and crucify Jesus!” (John 18:39-40).*

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: Human nature is spiteful and malicious.

1. How far does human nature have to become to find itself so far below the bounds of love and justice and even pity to make such a choice?
 - a) How much unreasonable perverseness is required to allow the murderer, Barabbas, to live while sentencing Christ, who only went about doing good, to death?
2. The distance between heaven and earth are not so wide as we find here where the crowd prefers the author of sedition to the Prince of peace and a murderous rebel to a merciful Savior.
 - a) And yet, Adam preferred that seductive, mutinous murderer the devil to God himself.
 - b) God tells them, “eat and you shall die,” (Gen. 3). But the serpent counters, “you shall not die but you will be like gods.”
 - c) Adam and Eve reject God’s truth and choose instead to trust the serpent’s beguiling lies.

(1) Thousands of years later there is another choice for man to make, and the answer rings out loud and clear, "Release Barabbas to us and crucify Jesus!" (Luke 23:18, 21).

- d) There is no other name under heaven by which they could be saved, and yet it appeared there was no one on earth they hated more than the Son of God, (Phil. 2:9-10).
 - e) The blessed Savior, by his death freed two notorious malefactors from theirs – this seditious murderer Barabbas and that thief on the cross.
 - f) The one he freed from the death of his body, the other from the death of his soul, both in order to assure men that it is none other than his death that can free men from that death which is of both body and soul.
3. Let men never think that he will redeem a soul from death without first setting it free from sin's bondage – those powers of sin and darkness.
- a) One relates to damnation and the other to dominion, and yet the two are inseparable; where he redeems from one, he also redeems from the other.
4. How often have men preferred the temptations of Satan and neglected his commands, thereby rejecting him.
- a) How often has he offered men in his word, his sacraments, and nudges of his Spirit, and they have not released him to work in their life?
 - b) Has his careless neglect of those free offers resounded with Pilate words, "what have I to do with thee, Jesus thou Son of God?"
 - c) And yet how often would he have gathered them under his wings, as a hen her chickens (Matt. 23:37)?
 - d) How often does he still offer himself to their heart, crying, "Why will ye die? Come unto me; return, return!"

B. "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," (Luke 23:22).

- 1. How often are men backed into a position of choice between taking our stand alone with Christ or succumbing to the jeering crowd making a mockery of our God?
 - a) At this mock trial of Christ before the people, with Pilate occupying the judge's seat, he finds himself in a similar predicament.
 - b) He must either condemn this Jew whom he believes to be innocent or identify himself as an enemy of Caesar.
 - c) That is precisely the choice put to him by the religious leaders who initially brought Jesus to Pilate, "He that makes himself a king as this man does is an enemy to Caesar, and if you let him go, you are not Caesar's friend," (John 19:12).
 - d) Pilate is afraid of either choice and would happily spare both Jesus and Barabbas, but that choice is not an option.

(1) And so, he chooses to spare himself rather than Jesus.

(2) The religious leaders brought Christ to trial out of envy, (Matt. 27:18), and Pilate delivers him over to the executioners out of fear. Pronouncing Christ's innocence and publicly washing his hands of his blood guiltiness only serves to secure his own eternal condemnation, for innocence either absolves the prisoner or condemns the judge.

(3) To say, "Take him and crucify him," and yet, "I find no fault in the man," (John 19:6; Luke 23:14), turns the point of Pilate's sword into his own heart and makes the bench the bar.

2. With his wife's dream and the Savior's confession on the one side, (Matt. 27:19), and the people's willful violence and the threat of being identified as Caesar's enemy on the other, Pilate's soul is bound for destruction.

- a) How soon does he discover that his own conscience is a worse enemy than Caesar?
- b) Guilt at once kindles in the heart both shame and horror, (Matt. 27:24), and it is so fierce a fire that the basin of water before him cannot put it out.
- c) For what can a little water in a bowl or even Jordan's floods do toward washing those stained hands that had the power to release innocence and yet chose not to (John 19:10)?
- d) Pilate tries to shut his eyes so he cannot see his own heart, to make himself believe that he can wash away all the guilt of such an unjust sentence.
- e) The hypocrite in the end deceives not so much the world as himself, and at last God leaves him to think that he can deceive him too.
- f) But neither water on the hands of Pilate nor the feet of Judas, though administered by the hands of our Savior himself, can wash the guilt from a heart that is foul.

(1) The hand without the heart is nothing more than an altar without a sacrifice, or a sacrifice without fire, (1 Kings 18).

- g) For nothing can wash away the guilt of this blood but the merit of the same, (Heb. 9:22), without which all Pilate's washing was in vain, regardless of how boldly he declares, "I am free from the blood of this just man, see you to it," (Matt. 27:24).

(1) Solomon rightly says that God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions, (Eccl. 7:29), not the least of which is how to hide the stains and shift the guilt of our sins.

(2) Even Adam, when called to account for his actions by God, shuffles the responsibility from himself to Eve, and then ultimately to God, "the woman that you gave me, gave me of the tree and I did eat," (Gen. 3:12).

- h) Pilate would gladly be free from the blood of the innocent Christ, so not only does he wash his hands, but he says of himself, "I am free."

(1) But a basin of water from the local spring can do nothing to free men from the stain of sin.

(2) The only effectual cleansing for a heart racked by sin is the washing of water by the word, (Eph. 5:26).

(3) Men must personally partake of the Water of Life if they desire to be thoroughly clean and truly free.

III. The Text Applied

A. Christ's seat of judgment.

1. It was not enough for him to come down from his throne of majesty in heaven to his footstool of misery on earth, (Isa. 66:1).

a) But will he come down from his seat of judgment to the bar of condemnation also?

b) He said that he did not come into the world the first time to judge the world, but to save it, (John 12:47).

c) Pilate's authority and the people's fury was all part of God's design to effect salvation, but it was his people's sin that brought him to condemnation.

2. As God decreed, one man must die for the people, or all must perish.

- a) The Lord must either be condemned by man, or all mankind by him.
- b) Pilate had no power that was not given him from above, (John 19:11), and it was his power alone that gave him up to the power of Pilate and his will that delivered him up to the will of the people.
- c) He gave himself up; all Pilate could do was give the sentence.
- (1) *When men were first in Adam, left to their own power and will, how soon did that will betray them, that power delivered them up into the power and will of their enemies?*
- (2) *But now his people are him, and Christ in them, their desire is for his power to be shown and his will to be done in their redemption and sanctification.*
- d) May we consider that the Lord, keep our heart pure.
- (1) *Let us never attempt to “absolve” our sins nor participate in any outward formalities of hand-washing devotion to say, “I am free.”*
- (2) *Pilate confessed his innocence but remained in the gall of bitterness covered with the blood of iniquity (Matt. 27:24).*
- (3) *The stony ground may hear the word with joy (Luke 8:13); there may be enlightening, a kind of partaking of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4-6), a tasting of the heavenly gift, of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come that may yet fall short of true repentance.*
- (4) *Let us never with Pilate think that we are free from sin unless our heart has been truly cleansed by the only water that can wash us clean, that of the Spirit and the Word.*
- e) Today we are not charged with the decision to crucify Christ or let him go free, but we are called upon to love him fully, take up his cross and follow him ... or be left to chase after some lesser god of our own making.
- (1) *In the face of that decision, whom do you choose?*