

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
19:1-16

1. So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *him*. 2. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, 3. and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands. 4. Pilate then went out again and said to them, Behold I bring him out to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. 5. Then Jesus came forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And *Pilate* said to them, Behold the man! 6. Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out saying, Crucify *him*, crucify *him*. Pilate said to them, You take him and crucify *him*, for I find no fault in him. 7. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. 8. Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9. and went again into the judgment hall, and said to Jesus, Whence are You? But Jesus gave him no answer. 10. Then Pilate said to him, Are you not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release you? 11. Jesus answered, You could have no power *at all* against me, except it were given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin. 12. From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, you are not Cæsar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Cæsar. 13. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, Behold your King! 15. But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar. 16. Then he delivered him to them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led *him* away.

1.--[*So then Pilate...scourged Him.*] The cruel injury inflicted on our Lord's body, in this verse, was probably far more severe than an English reader might suppose. It was a punishment which among the Romans generally preceded crucifixion, and was sometimes so painful and violent that the sufferer died under it. It was often a scourging with rods, and not always with cords, as painters and sculptors represent. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his "Antiquities" particularly mentions that malefactors were scourged and tormented in every way before they were put to death. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible says that under the Roman mode of scourging, "the culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame, and beaten with rods."

As to Pilate's reason for inflicting this punishment on our Lord, there seems little doubt. He secretly hoped that this tremendous scourging, in the Roman fashion, would satisfy the Jews; and that after seeing Jesus

beaten, bleeding, and torn with rods, they would be content to let Him go free. As usual, he was double-minded, cruel and deceitful. He tried to please the Jews by ill treating our Lord as much as possible, and at the same time he hoped to please his own conscience a little by not putting Him to death. He told the Jews, indeed, according to Luke's account, what he wanted: "I will chastise Him and release Him" (Luke 23:16). How entirely this weak design failed we shall see by-and-by.

Chrysostom says: "Pilate scourged Jesus, desiring to exhaust and soothe the fury of the Jews. Being anxious to stay the evil at this point, he scourged Him and permitted to be done what was done, and the robe and crown to be put on Him, in order to relax their anger." Augustine and Cyril say much the same.

The importance of this particular portion of our Lord's sufferings is strongly shown by the fact that Isaiah specially says, "by His stripes we are healed;" and that St. Peter specially quotes that text in his first epistle. (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24.) Our Lord Himself particularly foretold that He would be scourged (Luke 18:33).

It may seem needless to say that Pilate did not scourge Jesus with his own hands. Any plain reader will at once conclude that the scourging was inflicted by his soldiers or attendants. Yet the venerable Bede thinks that Pilate himself scourged Jesus. And it is worth remembering that a modern skeptical writer has actually argued that the book of Leviticus must be uninspired, because in that book the priest is commanded to lift, and move, and offer up the bodies of slain sacrifices, which alone he could not do! Surely he might have recollected that a man is said to do things when he does them by the hands of servants and attendants! It was thus, no doubt, that Pilate scourged Jesus. The word "took" probably means "commanded Him to be seized."

Hengstenberg thinks that the remarkable incident of Pilate's washing his hands (Matt. 27:24) and declaring his innocence of Christ's blood comes in between this verse and the preceding chapter. I would rather place it after the 15th verse of this 19th chapter.

The place where this horrible indignity was inflicted on our Lord's holy person (according to St. Matthew 27:27) was the prætorium, or common hall, which was probably a kind of guardroom where the Roman soldiers used to spend their time and keep themselves in readiness to do anything the Governor wished. What kind of a place the guardroom of a body of rough Roman soldiers can have been we can hardly conceive, even if we visit the worst regimental guardrooms of modern days.

Some think that our Lord was scourged twice--once at the beginning of Pilate's examination and once after His final condemnation. This, however, seems to me very doubtful. The idea probably arises from not carefully observing that the proceedings before Pilate, after the scourging recorded here, are peculiar to St. John's Gospel, and omitted by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Besser remarks: "Before the message 'Christ our righteousness' was revived

and the Lutheran 'Christ for us' was again the refreshment of weary souls, men could not draw much refreshment from Christ's scourging. Before the Reformation, whole hosts of self-bewailing penitents came forth from Italy and spread over Germany. They were called 'Flagellants;' and naked to the waist they roamed through towns and villages singing penitential hymns like Dies Iræ, and flogging one another."

2.--[*And...crown of thorns...on His head.*] About the object of the soldiers in this act, there can be no doubt. It was done in mockery and ridicule of our blessed Lord, and to pour contempt on the idea of His being a King. These rude men would show how they defied such a King. We can well believe that rough heathen soldiers, like Roman legionaries, were expert and trained by practice in the best way of torturing a prisoner.

Thorns, according to Tristram, are so common in Palestine that the soldiers would have no difficulty in finding materials for weaving this crown. Hasselquist, quoted in Smith's Dictionary, says: "The plant called 'nebk' (*zizyphus spina Christi*) was very suitable for the purpose as it has many sharp thorns, and its flexible, pliant, and round branches might easily be plaited in the form of a crown; and what, in my opinion, seems the greatest proof, is that the leaves most resemble those of ivy, as they are of a very deep green. Perhaps the enemies of Christ would choose a plant like that with which Emperors and Generals used to be crowned, that there might be calumny even in the punishment." How painful and irritating such a crown of thorns would be, sticking into the forehead or head of one whose hands were bound, we can easily imagine.

Here, as in every step of Christ's passion, we see His complete and perfect substitution for sinners. He, the innocent sin-bearer, wore the crown of thorns so that we, the guilty, might wear a crown of glory. Vast is the contrast which there will be between the crown of glory that Christ will wear at His second advent and the crown of thorns that He wore at His first coming.

Lightfoot remarks that "it was a most unquestionable token that Christ's kingdom was not of this world when He was crowned only with thorns and briars, which are the curse of the earth." It was, moreover, a striking symbol of the consequences of the fall being laid on the head of our divine Substitute. In Leviticus it is written that Aaron shall lay his hands "upon the *head* of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat" (Lev. 16.21).

History says that in the Crusades, when Godfrey of Bouillon, the Christian General, was made King of Jerusalem, he refused to be crowned with a golden crown, saying that "it did not become him to wear a crown of gold in the city where his Savior had worn a crown of thorns."

Rollock observes: "You shall find these soldiers even worse inclined than Pilate was. This falls out: if the master command them to do one evil deed, often the servants will do two."

When John Huss, the martyr, was brought forth to be burned, they put a

paper over his head on which were pictured three devils, and the title "heresiarch." When he saw it he said, "My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake, did wear a crown of thorns. Why should not I, therefore, for His sake, wear this ignominious crown?"

[*And...a purple robe.*] This again was done as a mark of contempt and derision. A mock royal robe was thrown over our Lord's shoulders in order to show how ridiculous and contemptible was the idea of His kingdom. The color purpose was doubtless meant to be a derisive imitation of the well-known imperial purple, the color worn by Emperors and Kings. Some have thought that this robe was only an old soldier's cape, such as a guard house would easily furnish. Some, with more show of probability, have thought that this robe must be the gorgeous robe that Herod put on our Lord (mentioned by St. Luke) when he sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23.11), a circumstance which John has not recorded. In any case, we need not doubt that the robe was some shabby, cast-off garment. It is worth remembering that this brilliant color, scarlet or purple, would make our blessed Lord a most conspicuous object to every eye when He was led through the streets from Herod, or brought forth from Pilate's house to the assembled multitude of Jews. Once more we should call to mind the symbolical nature of this transaction also. Our Lord was clothed with a robe of shame and contempt, so that we might be clothed with a spotless garment of righteousness and stand in white robes before the throne of God.

3.--[*And said, Hail, King of the Jews!*] This again was evidently done to pour contempt upon our Lord. The words of the soldiers were spoken in contemptuous imitation of the words addressed to a Roman Emperor on his assuming Imperial power: "Hail, Emperor! *ave Imperator!*" It was as much as saying, "Thou a King indeed! Thou and thy kingdom are alike base and contemptible."

Hengstenberg observes: "It was the kingdom of the Jews itself that the soldiers laughed at. They regarded Jesus as the representative of the Messianic hope of the Jews. They would turn to ridicule these royal hopes, which were known far in the heathen world, more especially as they aspired to the dominion of the whole earth."

Let us not fail to remark at this point that ridicule, scorn, and contempt were one prominent portion of our blessed Master's sufferings. Anyone who knows human nature must know that few things are more difficult to bear than ridicule, especially when we know that it is undeserved and when it is for religion's sake. Those who have to endure such ridicule may take comfort in the thought that Christ can sympathize with them; for it is a cup which He Himself drank to the very dregs. Here again He was our Substitute. He bore contempt that we might receive praise and glory at the last day.

Henry remarks: "If at any time we are ridiculed for well-doing, let us not be ashamed, but glorify God; for thus we are partakers of Christ's sufferings."

[*And they struck...hands.*] The words so rendered would be equally translated "they gave Him blows with a rod or stick." The same Greek word

in the singular is so translated in the marginal reading of John 18:22. When we compare Matt. 27:27,30, where it says the soldiers took a reed and struck Him with it on the head, it seems highly probable that this was the action here recorded. According to Matthew, the soldiers put the reed in our Lord's hand as a mock scepter; and when, as Lampe observes, "He refused to retain it in His right hand, because He came to suffer indignities but not to perform them," they snatched it out of His hand and brutally struck Him with it on the head. This appears to me a reasonable and satisfactory supposition, and makes it most likely that the blow here was not "with the hand."

If the blows were inflicted on the head, whether with hand or reed, we can readily conceive what acute bodily pain they might occasion to a head crowned with thorns. The thorns would be driven into the skin till the blood ran down the face and forehead and neck of our Lord. Truly "He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5).

4.--[*Pilate then went out, etc.*] This verse opens a new scene of the painful story of the passion. The scourging being over and the mockery of the soldiers having gone on as long as Pilate thought it worthwhile, the Roman Governor went forth outside the palace where he lived to the Jews, who were waiting to hear the result of his private interview with our Lord. We must remember that under the influence of hypocritical scrupulosity, they would not go inside the Gentile Governor's house lest indeed they should be "defiled," and were therefore waiting in the court outside. Now Pilate comes out of his palace and speaks to them. The words of the verse seem to show that Pilate came out first and that our Lord was led out behind him. "Behold I am bringing Him outside again, that you may know that I can find no fault or cause of condemnation in Him, and no ground for your charge that He is a stirrer-up of sedition and a rebel King. He is only a weak, harmless fanatic who lays claim to no kingdom of this world, and I bring Him forth to you as a poor, contemptible person worthy of scorn, but not one that I can pronounce worthy of death. I have examined Him myself, and I inform you that I can see no harm in Him."

It seems to me quite plain that Pilate's private interview with our Lord had completely satisfied the Governor that He was a harmless, innocent person, and made him feel a strong desire to dismiss Him unhurt; and he secretly hoped that the Jews would be satisfied when they saw the prisoner whom they had accused brought out beaten and bruised, and treated with scorn and contempt, and that they would not press the charge any further. How thoroughly this cowardly double-dealing man was disappointed, and what violence he had to do to his own conscience, we shall soon see.

It is very noteworthy that the expression "I find no fault in Him" is used three times by Pilate, in the same Greek words, in St. John's account of the passion. (John 18:38, 19:4-6.) It was meet and right that he who had the chief hand in slaying the Lamb of God, the Sacrifice for our sins, should three times publicly declare that he found no spot or blemish in Him. He was proclaimed a Lamb without spot or fault, after a searching examination by him who slew Him.

5.--[*Then Jesus came forth...robe.*] The language of this sentence appears

to me to show that Pilate went outside the palace first and announced that he was going to bring out the prisoner, and that then our Lord followed him. The word "forth" both in this and the preceding verse means literally "outside" or "without." It is the same that is used in the texts "His brethren stood without" (Matt. 12:46) and "Without are dogs" (Rev. 22:15).

That our blessed Lord, the eternal Word, should have meekly submitted to be led out after this fashion--as a gazing-stock and an object of scorn, with an old purple robe on His shoulders and a crown of thorns on His head, His back bleeding from scourging and His head from thorns, to feast the eyes of a taunting, howling, blood-thirsty crowd--is indeed a wondrous thought! Truly, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). Since the world began, the sun never shone on a more surprising spectacle both for angels and men.

[*And Pilate...Behold the Man.*] This famous sentence, so well known as "Ecce Homo" in Latin, admits of two views being taken of it. Pilate may have spoken it in *contempt*: "Behold the Man you accuse of setting Himself up as a King! See what a weak, helpless, contemptible creature He is." Or else Pilate may have spoken it in *pity*: "Behold the poor feeble Man whom you want me to sentence to death. Surely your demands may be satisfied by what I have done to Him. Is He not punished enough?" Perhaps both views are correct. In any case, there can be little doubt that the latent feeling of Pilate was the hope that the Jews, on seeing our Lord's miserable condition, would be content and would allow Him to be let go. In this hope, again, we shall find he was completely deceived.

Pilate probably threw a strong emphasis on the expression "Man," indicative of contempt. This may have led to the Jews saying so strongly, in the seventh verse, that the prisoner "made Himself the *Son of God*," and claimed to be Divine and not a mere "man" as Pilate had said. He probably also meant the Jews to mark that he said "Behold the man," not "your King", but a mere common man.

6.--[*When the chief priests...crucify Him.*] We see in this verse the complete failure of Pilate's secret scheme for avoiding the condemnation of our Lord. The pitiful sight of the bleeding and despised prisoner had not the effect of softening down the feelings of His cruel enemies. They would not be content with anything but His death, and the moment He appeared they raised the fierce cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

Let it be noted that the chief priests were the foremost in raising the cry for crucifixion. It is a painful fact that in every age none have been such hard, cruel, unfeeling, and bloody-minded persecutors of God's saints as the ministers of religion. The conduct of Bishop Bonner, in the reign of bloody Mary, toward some of our martyred Reformers is a melancholy proof of this.

The officers here mentioned were the attendants, servants, and immediate followers of the priests, who would naturally take up any cry raised by their masters.

The word rendered "cried out" means a loud shout or clamorous cry, and is

peculiar to John's account of this part of the passion. It is the same word that is used of our Lord at the grave of Lazarus: "He cried, Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). It is the same that is used of the multitude at Jerusalem, when they would no longer listen to Paul speaking to them on the stairs: "They cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air" (Acts 22:23).

The cry "Crucify" was equivalent to a demand that our Lord might be put to death after the Roman manner.

Cyril remarks: "When the multitude would perhaps have blushed with shame at the sight of what had been done, remembering Christ's miracles, the priests are the first to cry out, and so inflame and stir up the mob."

He who would know to what an extraordinary degree of blood-thirstiness a mob may be stirred up to, when once excited, should study the history of the Reign of Terror at Paris during the first French revolution.

[*Pilate said...take Him...no fault in Him.*] This, as Cyril justly argues, is the language of one vexed and irritated, and made impatient by the pertinacity with which the priests stuck to their point. "Do your bloody work yourselves, if you must needs have it done. Take your prisoner away and do not trouble me with the case. I find no fault in Him, and I dislike being made your tool in this matter." It seems impossible to put any other construction on Pilate's words. He could not have meant gravely and seriously that he would allow the Jews to put the prisoner to death and thus admit the precedent of letting them inflict capital punishment. Temper, vexation, and irony seem to lie at the bottom of his words; and the chief priests seem to have taken his words in this sense. We cannot doubt that they would gladly have taken away our Lord and crucified Him at once if they had thought Pilate really meant they should do so.

For the third time we should notice Pilate's emphatic declaration, "I find no fault in Him." Three times he vainly tried to evade condemning our Lord, or to make the Jews desist from their bloody design: once by asking the Jews to choose between Christ and Barabbas; once by sending Him to Herod; once by scourging Him and exhibiting Him in a contemptible light before the people. Three times he failed utterly.

Burkitt remarks: "Hypocrites within the pale of the visible Church may be guilty of such monstrous acts of wickedness, as even the consciences of heathens without the Church may boggle at and protest against."

7.--[*The Jews answered him, etc.*] In this verse we find the priests taking up a new ground of accusation against our Lord. They saw that their political accusation had failed. Pilate would not condemn Him as a King, and refused to see any fault in Him on that score. They, therefore, charge our Lord with blasphemy and committing an offense against their law. As to Pilate's ironical words, "Take ye Him and crucify Him," they made no remark on them, as though they knew they were not meant to be taken seriously. The whole sense must be filled up in some such way as this: "It is no use telling us to crucify this prisoner ourselves, because you well know that it is not lawful for us to put any man to death. But seeing that you will

not condemn Him as a political offender, we now charge Him with an offense against our religion, which, as our Governor, you are bound to defend and protect. We call upon you to condemn Him to death for claiming to be the Son of God, which, according to our law, is blasphemy, and a capital crime." This is a lengthy paraphrase, undoubtedly, but one that is necessary if we would fill up the sense of the verse and understand what the Jews meant.

The "law" referred to by the Jews is probably Lev. 24:16. But it is curious that "stoning" is the punishment there mentioned, and not a word is said of crucifixion. This they do not tell Pilate. There is, perhaps, more fullness in the expression "a law" than appears at first. It may mean, "We Jews have a law given us by man from God, which is our rule of faith in religion. It is a law, we know, not binding on Gentiles, but it is a law that we feel bound to obey. One of the articles of that law is that 'He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be stoned.' We ask that this article may be enforced in the case of this man. He has blasphemed by calling Himself the Son of God, and He ought to be put to death. We, therefore, demand His life." There certainly seems an emphasis in the Greek on the word "we," as if it meant "we Jews," in contradistinction to Gentiles.

The expression "He ought" is literally "he owes it," he is a debtor, he is under an obligation or penalty of death, according to the terms of our code of law.

The expression "made Himself" must mean appointed, constituted, or declared Himself the Son of God. Compare Mark 3:14, John 6:15-8:53, Acts 2:36, Heb. 3:2, and Rev. 1:6.

The expression "Son of God" meant far more to a Jewish mind than it does to us. We see in John 5:18 that the Jews considered that when our Lord said that God was His Father, He made Himself "equal with God." See also John 10:33. One thing, at any rate, is very clear: whatever Socinians may say, our Lord distinctly laid claim to divinity, and the Jews distinctly understood Him to mean that He was God as well as man.

Cyril well remarks that if the Jews had dealt justly, they would have told the Gentile ruler that the person before him had not only claimed to be the Son of God, but had also done many miracles in proof of His divinity.

Rollock observes: "Look what blinds them! The Word of God, which should make them see, blinds them so that they use it to their ruin. The best things in the world, yea, the Word of God itself, serve to wicked men for nothing else but their induration. The more they read, the blinder they are. And why? Because they abuse the word and make it not a guide to direct their affections and actions."

8.--[When Pilate heard...more afraid.] In this verse we see Pilate in a different frame of mind. This new charge of blasphemy against our Lord threw a new light over his feelings. He began to be really frightened and uncomfortable. The thought that the meek and gentle Prisoner before him might after all be some superior Being, and not a mere common man, filled

his weak and ignorant conscience with alarm. What if he had before him some God in human form? What if it should turn out that he was actually inflicting bodily injuries on one of the Gods? As a Roman he had doubtless heard and read many stories, drawn from the heathen mythology of Greece and Rome, about Gods coming down to earth and appearing in human form. Perhaps the prisoner before him was one! The idea raised new fears in his mind. Already he had been made very uncomfortable about Him. Our Lord's calm, dignified, and majestic demeanor had doubtless made an impression. His evident innocence of all guilt, and the extraordinary malice of His enemies, whose characters Pilate most likely knew well, had produced an effect. His own wife's dream had its influence. Even before the last charge of the Jews, the Roman judge had been awe-struck, and secretly convinced of our Lord's innocence, and anxious to have Him set free, and actually "afraid" of his prisoner. But when he heard of His being the "Son of God," he was made more afraid.

Burton remarks: "Like Gamaliel in the Acts, Pilate was seized with a salutary apprehension, lest haply he be found even to fight against God."

The "saying" referred to must mean the expression "Son of God."

The word "more" deserves attention. It shows clearly that from the first Pilate had been afraid and uneasy in conscience. He had never liked the case being brought before him at all. To have such an extraordinary preacher, and a worker of such miracles as our Lord, brought to his bar frightened him. But now when he heard that He laid claim to divinity, he was "*more* afraid." We must never forget that Pilate, as Roman Governor of Judea (charged with the management of a most turbulent and troublesome province), was doubtless informed by spies, as well as the officers of his army, of everything that went on in Judea. Can we doubt for a moment that he must have heard many accounts of our Lord's ministry, and specially of His miracles and astonishing power over the sick and the dead? Can we doubt that he heard of the raising of Lazarus at Bethany, within a walk of Jerusalem? Remembering all this, we may well suppose that he regarded the whole case brought before him by the Jews with much anxiety from the very first, and we can well understand that when he heard that Jesus was "the Son of God," he was more than ever alarmed. Unprincipled rulers have an uneasy position.

Bishop Hall thinks that the cause of Pilate's fear was only the increased rage and excitement of the people. He was afraid of a riot and tumult!

9.--[*And went again into the judgment hall.*] This means that on hearing this fresh charge of blasphemy, Pilate retired again from the outside of the palace into the inner part, where he had before conversed with our Lord, once more leaving the Jews outside. This new charge was so serious that he did not care to enter into it publicly, and preferred examining our Lord about it privately.

[*And said...Whence are You?*] This question, I think, can admit of only one meaning. It meant: "Who are You? What are You? Are You from heaven? Are You one of the gods come down to earth, of whom I have heard the priests talk? What is Your real nature and history? If You are some superior

being, more than a common man, tell me plainly, that I may know how to deal with Your case. Tell me privately, while these Jews are not present, that I may know what line to take up with Your enemies." We may well believe that Pilate caught at the secret hope that Jesus might tell him something about Himself which would enable him to make a firm stand and deliver Jesus from the Jews. In this hope, again, the Roman Governor was destined to be disappointed.

[*But Jesus gave him no answer.*] Our Lord's silence, when this appeal was made to Him by Pilate, is very striking. Up till now He had spoken freely and replied to questions; now He refused to speak any more. The reason for our Lord's silence must be sought in the state of Pilate's soul--he deserved no answer and therefore got none. He had forfeited his title to any further revelation about his Prisoner. He had been told plainly the nature of our Lord's kingdom and the purpose of our Lord's coming into the world, and been obliged to confess publicly his innocence. And yet, with all this light and knowledge, he had treated our Lord with flagrant injustice, scourged Him, allowed Him to be treated with the vilest indignities by his soldiers, and held Him up to scorn, knowing in his own mind all the time that He was a guiltless person. Pilate had, in short, sinned away his opportunities, forsaken his own mercies, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of his own conscience. Hence our Lord would have nothing more to do with him, and would tell him nothing more. "He gave him no answer."

Here, as in many other cases, we learn that God will not force conviction on men, and will not compel obstinate unbelievers to believe, and will not always strive with men's consciences. Most men, like Pilate, have a day of grace and an open door put before them. If they refuse to enter in and choose their own sinful way, the door is often shut and never opened again. There is such a thing as a "day of visitation" when Christ speaks to men. If they will not hear His voice and open the door of their hearts, they are often let alone, given over to a reprobate mind, and left to reap the fruit of their own sins. It was so with Pharaoh, Saul, and Ahab; and Pilate's case was like theirs. He had his opportunity and did not choose to use it, but preferred to please the Jews at the expense of his conscience, and to do what he knew was wrong. We see the consequence. Our Lord will tell him nothing more.

In saying all this, I think we must not forget that Pilate's wicked refusal to listen to his own conscience, and our Lord's consequent refusal to speak to him any more, were all ruled by the eternal counsels of God to the carrying out of His purpose of redemption. In handling such a point, we must speak with reverence. But it is plain that if our Lord had revealed to Pilate who He was, and forced Pilate to see it, the crucifixion might perhaps never have taken place, and the great sacrifice for a world's sins might never have been offered up on the cross. Our Lord's silence was just and well merited. But it was also part of God's counsels about man's salvation.

Let us note that there is "a time to be silent" as well as "a time to speak." This is a matter in the social intercourse of daily life, about which we all need to pray for wisdom. To be always saying to everybody

everything we know, is not the line of a wise follower of Christ.

Let us note that if we do not make a good use of light and opportunities, and if we resist Christ speaking to our conscience, a time may come when, like Pilate, we may speak to Christ and ask things of Him, and He may give us no answer. It is written in a certain place: "They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way." "Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer." (Prov. 1:24-32.)

Chrysostom observes: "Christ answered nothing, because He knew that Pilate asked all the questions idly."

Besser remarks: "A petition to Christ for enlightenment, even when offered up in a man's last moments from a deathbed, never fails of being answered if offered in sincerity and from the heart, and obtains for the suppliant as much grace as is needful for salvation. But to a Pilate, Jesus is silent."

10.--[*Then Pilate said, etc.*] In this verse we see the imperious, fierce, haughty, arrogant temper of the Roman Governor breaking out. Accustomed to seeing prisoners cringing before him and willing to do anything to obtain his favor, he could not understand our Lord's silence. He addresses him in a tone of anger and surprise combined: "Why do You not answer my question? Do You know what You are doing in offending me? Do You not know that You are at my mercy, and that I have power to crucify You or release You according as I think right?" I can see no other reasonable construction that can be put on Pilate's words. The idea that he was only persuading our Lord and gently reminding Him of his own power seems utterly unreasonable and inconsistent with the following verse.

This high-minded claim to absolute power is one that ungodly great men are fond of making. It is written of Nebuchadnezzar: "Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down" (Dan. 5:19). Yet even when such men boast of power, they are often, like Pilate, mere slaves and afraid of resisting popular opinion. Pilate talked of "power to release," but he knew in his own mind that he was afraid, and so was unable to exercise it.

It is only fair to remember that the Greek word rendered "power" might be rendered "authority" or "commission;" and in this sense Pilate might only mean, "I have commission from the Roman Government to sentence prisoners to death or let them go free. Would it not be for Your interest to speak to me?"

11.--[*Jesus answered, etc.*] Our Lord's reply to Pilate in this verse is remarkably calm and dignified, though not without some difficulties because of its elliptical construction. It may be paraphrased thus: "You speak of power. You do not know that both you and the Jews are only tools in the hand of a higher Being, and that you could have no power whatever against Me if it were not given you by God. This, however, you do not understand and are, therefore, less guilty than the Jews. The Jews who delivered Me into your hand do know that all power is from God. Thus their knowledge

makes them more guilty than you. Both you and they are committing a great sin, but their sin is a sin against knowledge, and yours is comparatively a sin of ignorance. You are both unconsciously mere instruments in the hand of God, and you could do nothing against Me if God did not permit and overrule it." The logical connection of the former and latter parts of the verse is by no means clear. The precise object of "therefore" and the reason why God's overruling providence made the Jews more guilty than the Gentiles are things that it is not easy to explain. But I must think that the latent idea of our Lord was to remind Pilate how ignorantly he was acting, and how little he knew what he was about, compared to the Jews.

That the possession of superior knowledge increases the sinfulness of a sinner's sin, seems taught by implication in this verse. It was more sinful in the Jews, with all their knowledge of the law and the prophets, to deliver up Christ to be crucified than it was in Pilate, an ignorant heathen, to condemn Him and put Him to death.

The word "he" is differently interpreted. Some think that it must refer to Caiaphas, as the high priest and chief actor in the whole affair of our Lord's murder. Some even think it refers to Judas Iscariot. The more probable idea is that it refers to the whole Jewish people, personified by "he" and represented by their high priest.

One thing, at any rate, is very certain. This was the last word that Jesus spoke during His trial. Henceforth He was "like a lamb before his shearers--silent."

Hengstenberg remarks that in apportioning the comparative guilt of Pilate and of the Jews, our Lord shows Himself even at this crisis the true Judge of mankind.

Lampe remarks: "The sin of the Jews was heavier than that of Pilate. Pilate was a Gentile, ignorant alike of the Messiah and His distinguishing marks; the Jews had read the prophecies about Him. Pilate could only have heard something about our Lord's great miracles by rumor and report; they were all done under the very eyes of the Jews. Pilate injured Jesus unwillingly and from cowardice; they injured Him from hatred and envy. Finally, Pilate was only the instrument; the Jews were the impelling cause. Thus our Lord pronounces His opinion concerning His judges, an opinion according to which He will one day judge them."

The expression "therefore," or literally "on account of this," is rather a difficult one. Markland says it means "*Because* he has not this power from above, which you have, the Jew has the greater sin." Pearce takes much the same view.

Rollock observes, speaking of the inquisition in Spain: "The Papists, when they have caught a Christian who confesses Jesus Christ, after trying him, put him in the hands of the Emperor or King of Spain. Then they wash their hands, as clean of His blood; and who took his life but the King of Spain? But the wrath of God persecutes them, and the blood of the innocent lies on them because they *delivered* them into their hands to be tormented."

Hutcheson observes that "the greatest height of impiety is found within the visible Church," where there is most knowledge.

When all has been said, we must admit that there is probably something in the verse more deep than we have line to fathom. The two propositions of the verse are both quite intelligible; but the connecting link "therefore" is a hard knot, which has not yet been fairly untied.

Augustine paraphrases this sentence thus: "He sins worse who of ill will delivers up the innocent to the power to be put to death, than does the power itself, if for the fear of another greater power it puts to death the innocent. The Jews delivered Me unto the power, as having ill will against Me; but you are about to exercise your power against Me as being afraid for yourself. Not that a man has a right to put to death an innocent person from fear, but to put to death out of hatred is much more evil than to put to death out of fear." Cyril says much the same.

One thing, at any rate, is very clear. There are degrees in sin. All are not equally sinful. The servant who knew his master's will and did it not was more guilty than he who knew it not.

12.--[*From then on...release Him.*] This is a remarkable sentence. It evidently means that from this point of the case Pilate sought more diligently than ever to have our Lord acquitted and set free. Before he wished it; now he really took pains to effect it. Whether this was occasioned by our Lord's manner and demeanor in speaking the words of the preceding verse, or by some meaning which He attached to the words, we cannot tell. But so it was.

How and in what manner Pilate sought to release Jesus we are not told by John. But it is evident that he left our Lord in the hall (where he had been asking Him "Whence are You?") and went out alone to the Jews to tell them he could make nothing of their charge of blasphemy, and wished to let the prisoner go. This must have taken place *outside* the doors, because the Jews scrupulously refused to go *inside*. Moreover, the Jews could not have known of this fresh desire to release Jesus if Pilate had not come forth and communicated it to them. In this verse, therefore, be it remembered, we have Pilate and the Jews alone outside the palace and our Lord left inside. Pilate proposes to release Him, and the Jews protest against it. Then we shall find Pilate goes in again and brings Jesus out for the last time.

[*But the Jews cried out...speaks against Cæsar.*] In these words we see the Jews stopping Pilate short, in his weak efforts to get our Lord released, by an argument which they well knew would weigh heavily on a Roman mind. They tell him plainly that they will accuse him to Cæsar, the Roman Emperor, as a governor unfriendly to the Imperial interests. "You are no friend to Cæsar if you let off this prisoner. Everyone who sets himself up as a king, be his kingdom what it may, is usurping part of Cæsar's authority, and is a rebel. If you pass over this man's claim to be a king and set Him at liberty, we shall complain of you to Cæsar." This was a settling and clinching argument. Pilate knew well that his own government of Judea would not bear any investigation. He also knew well the cold,

suspicious, cruel character of Tiberius Cæsar, the Emperor of Rome, which is specially mentioned by Tacitus and Suetonius, the Roman historians, and he might well dread the result of any appeal to him from the Jews. From this moment, all his hopes of getting rid of this anxious case and letting our Lord go away unharmed were dashed to the ground. He would rather connive at a murder to please the Jews than allow himself to be charged with neglect of Imperial interests and unfriendliness to Cæsar.

It is hard to say which was the more wretched and contemptible sight at this point of the history--Pilate trampling on his own conscience to avoid the possible displeasure of an earthly monarch, or the Jews pretending to care for Cæsar's interests and warning Pilate not to do anything unfriendly to him! It was a melancholy exhibition of cowardice on the one side and duplicity on the other; and the whole result was a foul murder!

13.--[*When Pilate heard that saying, etc.*] The "saying" here refers to the Jews' saying about Cæsar in the preceding verse. When Pilate heard the dreaded name of Cæsar brought up, and found himself threatened with a possible complaint to Rome as a neglecter of Imperial interests, he saw plainly that nothing more could be done and that he must give way to the demands of the Jews and sacrifice an innocent prisoner. He therefore returned to the palace, brought forth Jesus again, and for the first time took his seat on the throne of judgment outside the palace in the courtyard, or paved area adjacent to it. The case was now over. Pilate's weak efforts to deliver an innocent prisoner from unjust accusation were useless. He dared no longer oppose the bloody demands of the Jews. There remained nothing to be done but to take his seat publicly on the throne of judgment and pronounce the sentence.

The word "forth" here, as in the fourth and fifth verses, means literally "outside." Pearce remarks that "this is the fifth time that Pilate came forth and tried to prevail with the Jews that Jesus might not be crucified."

On the "judgment seat," Parkhurst remarks: "In the Roman provinces, justice was administered in the open air, the presiding judge sitting on a tribunal on a raised ground covered with marble."

The "pavement" means the marble, or Mosaic leveled space on which the judge's chair was placed. Parkhurst says that Roman Governors used sometimes to carry with them the materials to form such a pavement.

The word Gabbatha, according to Hammond, is more Syriac than Hebrew: "According to the custom of the New Testament, which calls Syriac, at that time the vulgar language of the Jews, Hebrew." Parkhurst says that the word means literally a raised place, and remarks that John does not mean in this verse that Gabbatha means pavement, but that the same place which in Greek was called "pavement" was called in Hebrew "the raised place."

14.--[*And it was...passover.*] This remarkable expression cannot mean that "this was the hour for preparing the passover meal," for it was not. It means, "this was the day before the great sabbath of the passover week, a day well known among the Jews as the preparation, or day of preparing for

the passover sabbath, which was peculiarly a high day." St. Mark expressly says this in his account of the passion (Mark 15:42). That all the Jewish feasts had their "eves," or preparation days, is quite clear from Rabbinical writers.

We should observe how accurately and precisely John marks the day of the crucifixion.

[*And about the sixth hour.*] This expression raises a grave difficulty, and one which in every age has perplexed the minds of Bible readers. The difficulty lies in the fact that Mark in his Gospel expressly says "it was the third hour, and they crucified Him" (Mark 15:25), while John in this place says our Lord was only condemned at the sixth hour! Yet both Evangelists wrote by inspiration, and both were incapable of making a mistake. How then are we to reconcile and harmonize these two conflicting statements. The solutions of the difficulty suggested are many and various.

(a) Some say, as the rationalistic writers, that one of the two Evangelists made a blunder, and that one of the accounts therefore is false. This is a solution that will satisfy no reverent-minded Christian. If Bible writers could make blunders like this, there is no such thing as inspiration, and there is an end of all confidence in Scripture as an infallible guide.

(b) Some say, as Theophylact, Beza, Nonnus (in his poetical paraphrase), Tittman, Leigh, Usher (vol. vii. 176), Kuinoel, Bengel, Pearce, Alford, Scott, and Bloomfield, that the discrepancy has probably been caused by an error of the manuscript writers, and that the true reading in St. John should be "third" and not "sixth hour." This, however, is a very shortcut road out of the difficulty, and the immense proportion of old manuscripts are flatly against it.

(c) Some say, as Augustine does in one place, and Bullinger, "that at the third hour the Lord was crucified by the tongues of the Jews, and at the sixth by the hands of the soldiers." This however, to say the least, is a weak and childish explanation. Moreover, it is open to the grave objection that it would make out our Lord to have been only three hours on the cross, and all that time in the dark and not seen consequently by anyone! At this rate the inscription over His head on the cross would certainly not have been ready by many! "There was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour."

(d) Some say that Mark reckoned time on the Jewish plan, by which the hours began to count from the morning, and their seven o'clock answered to our one; while John reckoned time on our English plan, which is the same as the Roman one, and John's sixth hour meant literally about six in the morning. According to this theory Jesus was condemned, in John's account of the passion, at six o'clock in the morning, and crucified, in Mark's account, at nine o'clock.

This explanation is very commonly adopted and is supported by Wordsworth, Lee, and Burgon. But it is open to very serious objections. I see no proof whatever that John reckons time on the Roman and English plan and not

on the Jewish plan. The passage in the story of the Samaritan woman, which is commonly quoted as a proof, is no proof at all, and on reflection will cut directly the other way. If the "sixth hour," when Jesus sat on the well (see John 4:6) meant really our English six o'clock in the evening, it makes it impossible to understand how the conversation with the woman, her return to her native village, the telling of the men to come and see Jesus, the coming of the men, the return of the disciples with meat, could all be brought into the short space of one evening! The thing would have been impossible. Moreover, it is an additional objection that if Jesus was condemned at six o'clock in the morning, there are left three long hours between the condemnation and the crucifixion unaccounted for and unexplained. I am obliged to say that in my judgment this way of explaining the difficulty completely fails.

(e) Some think, as Calvin, Bucer, Gualter, Brentius, Musculus, Gerhard, Lampe, Hammond, Poole, Jansenius, Burkitt, Hengstenberg, and Ellicott, that John's sixth hour means any time after our nine o'clock in the morning; any time, in fact, within the space begun by the Jewish third hour. They say that the Jews divided the twelve hours of their day into four great portions: from six to nine, from nine to twelve, from twelve to three, and from three to six. They also say that any part of the time after our six in the morning would be called the third hour, and any time after our nine in the morning would be called the sixth hour. And they conclude that both the condemnation and the crucifixion took place soon after nine o'clock-- Mark calling it the third hour because it was near our nine o'clock, and John calling it the sixth hour because it was some time between our nine and twelve.

Grotius says, in Parkhurst, that the third, sixth, and ninth hours, which were most esteemed for prayer and other services, were marked by the sounding of a trumpet, and that after the trumpet sounding at the third hour, the sixth hour was considered to be at hand. Glass and Lampe support this opinion; and Lampe shows from Maimonides, a famous Jewish writer, that the Jews really divided the day into four quarters. Hengstenberg also remarks that the fourth and fifth hours are never mentioned in the New Testament.

This theory undoubtedly brings the two Evangelists near to one another, if it does not quite reconcile them.

(f) Some think, as Augustine in a second place suggests, and Harmer (quoted in Parkhurst) following him, that the "sixth hour here does not refer to the time of day, but to the preparation of the passover;" and that the meaning is, "It was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour after that preparation began." But as that preparation often began very early indeed in the morning, or about our three o'clock, six hours counted from that time would bring us down to Mark's third hour, or our nine o'clock. Lightfoot supports this view, which is certainly very ingenious and would clear away all difficulty. But it may fairly be objected that plain readers would hardly attach such a meaning as Harmer suggests to "the sixth hour."

The difficulty is one of those that will probably never be solved. God has

been pleased to leave it in Scripture for the trial of our faith and patience, and we must wait for its solution. Questions of time and date, like this, are often the most puzzling, from our inability to place ourselves in the position of the writer, and from the widely different manner in which measures and points of time are expressed in the language of different nations and in different ages. This very difficulty before us, perhaps, presented no difficulty whatever to the Apostolic Fathers, such as Polycarp and Clement. Perhaps they possessed some simple clue to its solution of which we know nothing. It is our wisdom to be patient and to believe that it admits of explanation, though we have not eyes to see it.

If I must venture an opinion, I think there is more to be said for the fifth of the six solutions I have given than for any other. But I allow that it is incomplete. In any case, we must in fairness remember that St. John does not say, distinctly and expressly, "it was the sixth hour," but "*about* the sixth hour." This shows that some latitude may be allowed in interpretation, and that the acknowledged discrepancy between John and Mark must not be too far pressed, or made of too much importance. One thing, at all events, appears to me quite inadmissible. We cannot allow ourselves to suppose that Jesus was not crucified till twelve o'clock in the day, when the miraculous darkness began, and that He only hung on the cross three hours.

[*And he said...Behold your King!*] These words must have been spoken in bitter irony, anger, and contempt. "Behold the Man whom you accuse of setting Himself up as a King and being an enemy to Cæsar! Behold this bleeding, weak, humble, meek, helpless prisoner, this wretched, harmless Person you pretend to be afraid of and want me to crucify! You wish your own King to be put to death? This, I am to understand, is what you desire. Look at Him, and say!"

15.--[*But they cried...crucify Him!*] As on former occasions, Pilate's public appeal had not the slightest effect on the Jews. Once more they raised their fierce, relentless, obstinate cry and demanded the Prisoner's death by crucifixion. Nothing but His blood would satisfy them. The horrible excesses of the Parisian mob, during the infamous Reign of Terror in the first French revolution, give us some faint idea of the savage spirit that can run through a crowd, by a kind of infection, when their hatred is stirred up against an individual.

The Greek word rendered "away with him" is literally "take him away," and often means "take him away to execution or destruction."

Henry remarks that this public rejection of Christ fulfilled two prophecies of Isaiah: "Him whom the nation abhors" (Isa. 49:7) and "We hid as it were our faces from Him" (Isa. 53:3).

[*Pilate said...crucify your King?*] For the last time Pilate put the question to the Jews and gave them a last chance of relenting. In bitter irony he asked, "Shall I then really crucify your own King? Shall I, a Roman, order a King of the Jews to be put to an ignominious death? Is this your wish and desire?"

[*The chief priests...no king but Cæsar.*] These memorable words inflicted indelible disgrace on the leaders of the Jews, and stamped the Jews forever as a fallen, blinded, God-forsaking, God-forsaken, and apostate nation. They, who at one time used to say "The Lord God is our King," renounced the faith of their forefathers and publicly declared that Cæsar was their king, and not God. They stultified themselves and gave the lie to their own boasted declaration of independence of foreign powers. Had they not said themselves, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man"? (John 8:33.) Had they not tried to entrap our Lord into saying something in favor of Cæsar, that they might damage His reputation? "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?" (Matt. 20:17.) And now, indeed, they shout out, "We have no king but Cæsar!" Above all they madly proclaimed to the world, though they knew it not, that "the sceptre had departed from Judah" and that Messiah must have come. (Gen. 49:10.) Truly the sceptre had departed when chief priests could say "We have no king but Cæsar."

Cyril remarks that "while other nations all over the world cling tenaciously to their own religion and honor those whom they call gods and will not forsake them, Israel revolted from God and cast off His authority and claimed Cæsar as their king. Justly therefore they were delivered over into Cæsar's hands and endured the heaviest calamities."

Henry remarks: "They would have no king but Cæsar, and never have they had any other to this day 'but have been many days without a king and without a prince' (Hos. 3:4), that is, without any of their own; and the kings of the nations have ruled over them. Since they will have no king but Cæsar, so shall their doom be; they themselves have decided it."

Lampe compares the conduct of the priests in this place to that of the trees in Jotham's parable, who said to the bramble, "Come and reign over us" (Jud. 9:14). The very men who ought to have taught the people to hope for the Messiah here publicly renounce the Messiah's kingdom, and declare themselves contented with Cæsar!

I cannot but think that Pilate's public washing of his hands before the people, and saying "I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matt. 27:24), must come in at this part of St. John's narrative.

16.--[*Then he delivered, etc.*]

This verse describes the conclusion of the most unjust trial of our blessed Lord, when "in His humiliation, His judgment was taken away" (Acts 8:33). All was now over. The last appeal had been made to the Jews, and for the last time they had rejected it. What happened is described by Luke but passed over by John. "Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required" (Luke 23:24). He then formally delivered over our Lord into the hands of the chief priests, and formally gave them permission to put Him to death by crucifixion. These hardened and wicked men at once "took Jesus and led Him away." Of course, we must not suppose that the chief priests *themselves* laid hands on our Lord, and with their own hands led Him away. No doubt the Roman soldiers of Pilate were the executioners, and a centurion had charge of all the bloody transaction of the execution. But

inasmuch as the soldiers only carried out the wishes of the priests, the priests were the responsible persons and prime agents in this judicial murder. Luke says, "He delivered Jesus to their *will*" (Luke 23.25).

Let us remember, when we read that word "delivered," that it is expressly written, He was "delivered for our offenses," and that God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom. 4:25, 8:30). Christ was delivered to death that we might be delivered from death and set free. Here is substitution.

Let us remember, as we read the word "led," that Isaiah expressly foretold that Messiah should be brought, or led, as a Lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7, Acts 8:32).

Alford thinks it possible that at this point the scourging of our Lord was repeated. But I see no satisfactory proof of this. Considering what a Roman scourging was, it is not probable that anybody could have endured it twice in one day.

Let us note that according to the narrative of John there seems no delay between the condemnation of our Lord and His crucifixion. He went at once from Gabbatha to Golgotha, and from the judgment to execution. At this rate, the theory supported by Burgon and others--that there was a delay of three hours, between six o'clock and nine, after condemnation--is completely overthrown. If we looked at Matthew and Mark alone, we might fancy that Pilate saw nothing more of our Lord after He had been scourged and mocked by the soldiers. But it appears plain to me, if we carefully compare John's account with that of Matthew and Mark, that they have not recorded our Lord's last appearance before Pilate, which John relates. Nor can I feel surprised at this, when I remember that throughout John's Gospel he supplies what the other evangelists have omitted. In particular, he supplies our Lord's examination before Annas and His private conversation with Pilate, when the Jews would not enter Pilate's palace, and entirely omits the examination before Caiaphas. So likewise, I think he supplies the last scene in our Lord's trial, which Matthew and Mark entirely omit, for some wise reason. Holding this theory, which to me seems the most natural account of the order of things, I cannot see any room for an interval of time between the final condemnation and the crucifixion.

Henry remarks with much shrewdness: "Judgment was not sooner pronounced than with all possible expedition the prosecutors, having gained their point, resolved to lose no time, lest Pilate should change his mind and order a reprieve, and also lest there should be an uproar among the people."

How St. John became acquainted with all the details of our Lord's trial and the private conversations between Him and Pilate, is a question which none can answer satisfactorily who do not hold the doctrine of plenary inspiration. That John was in and about the palace of the high priest and not far from our Lord all the time, from the seizure in Gethsemane up to His death, we may well believe; but that he could have overheard the private conversations between Jesus and Pilate seems simply impossible. How then could he know anything about them and write them down? There is but

one answer. He wrote them by inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Why the common people, who always "heard Jesus gladly," permitted our Lord's crucifixion so easily and made no resistance, is at first sight rather hard to understand. The Galileans, who would have made Jesus King at one time, were of course at Jerusalem in great numbers on account of the passover feast. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when an immense multitude cried "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King who comes!" had happened only a few days before. The priests themselves were afraid of an uproar among the "people." Yet there is not a symptom of any opposition to the judicial murder that was arranged and carried into execution. How as this?

In reply, we must probably take into account the following considerations. (1) There was a superstitious reverence for the priests among all Jews. The mere fact that the high priests accused Jesus would have immense weight. (2) The fear of the Roman garrison kept the people back. (3) The followers and friends of Jesus were almost entirely the poor and lower orders. (4) All multitudes are fickle and capricious.