

THE ROBE OF REPROACH

Jn. 19:5 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe.

Godlessness, in various forms, was the order of the day in ancient Jerusalem. There was no shortage of religion ... The Romans, of course, worshipped many gods, - of whom the Israelite God was counted as yet another. He was no threat to them for, - as far as they were concerned, - it didn't matter *who* you worshipped, or *how* you worshipped. We are all worshipping the same!

The Jews, on the other hand, believed in only one God. However, their beliefs had become so contaminated that their concept of God/Jehovah had become so deeply flawed. They maintained certain important aspects of their history, such as the Passover, and they continued annually to remember how Jehovah had delivered them from Egypt. However, as time progressed, they had fashioned their religion to legitimise their lifestyle, and consequently Judaism had become staid, barren, and empty of the true worship of God. The reason behind this lay in those who occupied the pulpits, - the Sanhedrin, and many of the rabbis in the local synagogues. They had become so trained in their academic studies that the personal relationship between them and the Lord had become lost ... and, as a consequence, the people had been led away from God. The Jewish religion was being directed by religious men who had no knowledge of God. Jer. 5:31 *The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so. ... These were religious and spiritual delinquents!*

And that was how it came about that the greatest enemy of the Lord Jesus was not the Romans, but the Jewish religion. The Romans would have been content to accommodate Jesus and His message, - that was *their* policy ... but, it was *his own* [*the Jews, who*] received him not (Jn. 1:11).

As we come to consider the Good Friday message, we shall concentrate our attention on the picture John draws for us in Jn. 19:5, *Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. ... What do you see here?*

THE UNFAIRNESS OF THE TRIAL

We shall not spend much time on this because we have already considered some aspects of this in our ongoing studies of the Gospel of Mark ... and we know how unfair those proceedings were. They began in the Garden of Gethsemane with the kiss of a traitor. They were followed by the desertion of all the disciples. The Saviour was then taken into the illegally-convened court of Caiaphas the High Priest, and He was subjected to the most harrowing

abuse as He was then passed on to the Sanhedrin, ... the hatred they had for Him could not be contained. He was brought to Pilate, a Roman governor, - a foreigner. Pilate had to listen to the groaning and moanings of these people as they harangued the Name of Jesus and, as far as he was concerned, he did not really care about Jesus. ... And then there was Herod ... and a greater rascal you would have had difficulty finding! He had not a clue about the deep religious issues, and he was not overly concerned either ... he was only looking for opportunities to make himself more appealing to the leaders and people in Jerusalem, for his own ends.

You could not imagine a more one-sided and prejudiced crowd than this. These were the enemies of Christ ... and they had Him cruelly 'in their sights', - **the unfairness of the trial**. We also see ...

THE UNACCEPTABLENESS OF THE VERDICT

It was straightforward and simple for each of those people to understand, v.4 Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, *Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.* ... The official position of the local representative of the vast Roman Empire was that Jesus has no case to answer! The most powerful man in the land, - representing the Caesar, - declared the accusations against the Saviour as having no foundation!

Is it not absolutely amazing that even a godless and pagan-worshipping sinner like Pilate could not find any fault with Jesus! Why could he find no fault in Jesus? ... Because there *is* no fault in Jesus! Jesus is perfect. Religion had blinded the eyes of His countrymen ... for even an idol-worshipping Gentile could see what was blatantly staring them all in the face!

But they would not accept Pilate's judgment. They dressed the Saviour up! *The soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe (v.2).* ... The pain as those thorns *jagged* into His skin ... but, those cruel men did not care! They had no sympathy for Jesus. In their eyes, even though He was not *legally* guilty in a court of law, ... it was nothing to them! If some considered Him guilty, ... it was neither 'here nor there' ... He was guilty, and that is it! ... Our Saviour, guilty ... regardless of no crimes being brought against Him! Slapping Him on the face, thumping Him on His arms and side ... they mocked Him, *Hail, King of the Jews!* (v.3).

It was made clear to them He was innocent, but they would not accept such a decision. ... **The unfairness of the trial, the unacceptableness of the verdict** ...

THE UNSEEMLINESS OF THE SAVIOUR

How awful a sight He must have been! He had washed the night before, in preparation for the Passover meal ... but He had not washed since. He had not washed that morning, - how do I know? I know because they piled upon Him all the filthiness they could. They would not have afforded to Him such decency or such kindness. Only God stopped them from going further than they did. If God had left them to their wicked devices Jesus would have been slaughtered there and then! ... They could not have prevented their hatred! ... But we also must remind ourselves those religious Jews and that political Pilate were not in charge of what was happening ... We read, *Is. 53:10 it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.* Had it not been the Lord's will, Jesus would not have been there. On previous occasions, they had tried to arrest Him, but they couldn't. This was God's time *now!*

Indeed, it is a wonderful truth that every child of God needs to take a hold of ... *I Cor. 10:13 God is faithful, who will not suffer [allow] you to be tempted [tried and tested] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation [the trial and the testing] also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

In just a few short hours, - at nine o'clock, the third hour of the day, - the Saviour would be hanging on a cross, held there by nails, - *despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows (Is. 53:3), and forsaken by His Father (Mt. 27:46).* There was absolutely nothing about Him that attracted a single ounce of sympathy from those who condemned Him. I would imagine that even if you were standing watching someone being executed, - no matter how evil they were and no matter how dastardly their crimes, and no matter how they deserved it, - ... I would imagine you could not fail to feel sorrow in your heart ... for a good mother or a good father who brought that wicked person into the world ... and yes, I could not help even to have sorrow in my heart for the perpetrator, even though he deserved death.

But there was nothing about Jesus that warranted execution ... nothing even that could have remotely legitimately been contrived. He was *made sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (II Cor. 5:21).*

Moses, Samuel, David and none of the Old Testament saints had been *made sin*, - they all sinned through their own actions ... but only the sinless One, our Saviour, was *made sin* for us. He never committed a single act against God, and yet *Is. 53:5 he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him ... 6 the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Pilate considered himself to be in control, but he wasn't. He thought he had the power of life and death over Jesus, but he hadn't. Yes, Jesus stood alone that day ... *in His Father's will.*

His captors abused Him. They had no right to whip Him. By Pilate's own admission, Christ was innocent, - why then did they punish Him? They were out of control because of their hatred towards Him.

I wonder if it was actually Pilate himself who beat Christ, trying to please the Jews, who were threatening to report him for *not* wanting to condemn Jesus ... because that is what it seems to say, *v.1 Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.* Pilate, the man who could not find fault in Jesus, was the man who beat Him in front of this religious rabble to pacify them. ... The reason I believe Pilate himself probably beat/scourged Jesus is because of the Greek word which is used by Matthew and Mark (*φραγελλῶω*, Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15), which is a direct translation from the Latin *flagellum*. ... That means the man who said "I find no fault in Him" (Lk. 23:4; Jn. 19:4) was the same man who nevertheless inflicted painful wounds upon our Saviour ... with the full knowledge Jesus did not deserve them.

He turned Christ over to his soldiers, - rough, uncouth, and hard men, who loved making the plight of their victims even worse. They fashioned a crown out of the jagged thorns, and found an old cloth they threw around Him. Jesus was good enough only for a laugh, and a figure of amusement! In a similar way, those who do the same thing today, - poke fun at Him and make jokes about Him, - are heaping up coals upon their own destruction.

Pilate and his soldiers were supposed to be upholding the law and the rule of decency but, instead, they had lost all justice and humanity. It does not take a brave man to mock someone in bonds. It does not take an elite soldier to do what these cowards did to Jesus! They treated Him as a plaything, 'dirt'. He was beaten, dejected and powerless. ... **The unseemliness of the Saviour.**

As we look back to that day described here ... and if we were to finish the story at this particular juncture ... we would have no salvation. We would have no hope for eternity. Despised and rejected, a Man of shame and sorrows ... a solitary figure before His accusers ... What made Him do it?!

There was only one reason why Jesus suffered as He did ... and it can be summed up in one word, - *grace*. This was God's free and sovereign grace which brought the Saviour to this point in His earthly life. Matthew Henry wrote, "See here the wonderful condescension of our Lord Jesus in His sufferings for us." Grace is a gift, it cannot be purchased or achieved through our own efforts for grace is all of God. Because of God's grace, Jesus came down from the majestic heights of Glory to face the scorn of men. The patience with which He stood there and received upon Himself their ridicule ... It was because of grace He suffered the pain which was more than any could imagine. He did not do it out of duty, but He did it out of love, - holy, divine and electing love. ... All of God's grace.

The humiliation He bore was more than the mockery they cast at Him, ... the affliction He endured outweighed anything the cross could inflict ... The dreadful agony He was about to suffer as He stood before Pilate and then on to the cross was the eternal pain of all my sins and yours. We could never count what we owe Him! He despised the shame as He stood there dressed in the mocking purple robe and crown of thorns. I say it with all respect, ... He looked every bit the fool they were trying to make Him out to be. He was the object of their contempt, ridiculed and railed more than the two men who deservedly would hang on either side of Him ... but even in His shame we see our Saviour. We see His glory as we look at Him there. We see it by the eye of faith, because this same Jesus, the Son of God, would accomplish fully the plan of salvation His Father sent Him to complete, "I stand amazed in the presence Of Jesus the Nazarene, And wonder how He could love me, A sinner, condemned, unclean."

When we see Him standing there as He did on that day, - He had you and me on His heart. He suffered *our* shame. He took the cruelty they meted out to Him, for it was His Father's will that through His suffering and disgrace, you and I would be saved. In this manner, the writer to the Hebrews, in his epistle wrote how the Saviour went outside the camp, bearing our reproach (Heb. 13:13).

No matter how it looked as Jesus stood in front of His enemies, ours is not a Gospel of defeat and hopelessness. That is how it might have seemed, and it is also how it might seem to an unsaved person ... but I draw this picture simply because it is the picture God presents to us in His Word. It is how He presents His Son on that evening in which it seemed there was no hope. But you and I know how the story ends ... It does *not* end with Jesus Christ as the Victim, for we know the story concludes with Jesus Christ as the Victor!

He died on the cross knowing He had already won the victory for in His Father's eternal plan, it had been completed to the satisfaction of the Godhead. In that wonderful first chapter of Ephesians we read, v.6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ... 9 according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself. And there on the cross, - through all the shame and misery, - shines forth the glory of our salvation worked out to absolute perfection in Him! ... "Mercy there was great, and grace was free; Pardon there was multiplied to me; There my burdened soul found liberty at Calvary."

Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. Nothing hindered His Father's plan, ... to see of the travail of his soul, and ... be satisfied (Is. 53:11).

Oh, what a Saviour that He died for me!
From condemnation He hath made me free. ...
All my iniquities on Him were laid,
All my indebtedness by Him was paid.

It points to another fast approaching day when we shall see His glory. There will be nothing to hide the view ...

When clothed in His brightness, transported I rise
To meet Him in clouds of the sky,
His perfect salvation, His wonderful love
I'll shout with the millions on high.

Pilate will have gone, the corrupt Jewish leaders, and every obstacle to His glory will have been removed forever. That is what we are looking forward to ... And so, in conclusion, we say along with the prophet Isaiah, 5:19 Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it! 33:17 Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.