
The Innocence Of Jesus

*"Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in Him'"
(John 18:38).*

The chief priests accused Jesus of being a rival king to the emperor of Rome. They cried, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2). They knew that Pilate would not allow himself to become a referee in their Jewish squabbles. Therefore, driven by their determination to solicit a "guilty" verdict and a sentence of crucifixion, they voiced the only accusation that would compel a serious response from Pilate. They wanted him to believe that he would not be Caesar's friend if he did not support their judgment. Recognizing the implications of their charge, Pilate reluctantly took Jesus into the palace so that he could make a personal inquiry into their accusation.

His question "Are You the King of the Jews?" (Luke 23:3) brought him face to face with the greatest truths of all time: the spiritual nature of Jesus' kingdom, the true kingship of Jesus, and the all-important truth of why Jesus came into this world. No man on earth has ever had the privilege of a private interrogation such as Pilate had, yet he ignored its solemnity. He dismissed it with the sneering question "What is truth?" (John 18:38a).

Nevertheless, Jesus' conduct, His straightforward and valid answers, and His calm and assured presence convinced Pilate that He was authentic and was not guilty of the crime of which He was accused. Pilate was able to see through the concocted schemes of the Jews. Therefore, Pilate's immediate, perceptive, and accurate judgment was that Jesus was innocent.

John wrote, "And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in Him'" (John 18:38).

This concise but pointed judgment of Pilate evidently prompted a flood of bitter, frantic charges against Jesus from the chief priests. Mark wrote, "The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly" (Mark 15:3). Characterized by desperation, they argued loudly, barking out as many vicious accusations as they could within a few opportune seconds. They had brought Jesus to this point, and they were not going to allow Pilate to acquit Him. Now that their most powerful charge against Him had failed, they simultaneously began assaulting Pilate with a multitude of false charges that might, when strung together, sound convincing, or at least alarming. Numerous worthless arguments were yelled into the face of Pilate as if from one big cannon blast. The noise of the arguments bombarded his ears, reminding him of the possibility of a riot if he did not participate in their scheme to crucify Jesus.

Caught in this storm, pummeled by the Jews from one side and convicted by the integrity of his position as governor on the other side, Pilate turned to Jesus for help. "Do You not answer?" he said to Him. "See how many charges they bring against You!" (Mark 15:4). With a dignity that the world has admired for two thousand years, Jesus declined to answer him or them, but stood silent before the tumult. He was saying by His sacred silence, "These empty and vain charges of ungodly men are not worthy of an answer. I will not grant any

validity to them by giving a response. I will stand before you and ask you with My silent presence to be the authentic governor that you are supposed to be." Even Pilate was astounded by what he saw. Mark wrote, "So Pilate was amazed" (Mark 15:5).

What does this silent testimony say to us?

It tells us what we already know to be true. Jesus was the perfect Man, and He is the Son of God. He was the Word who had become flesh. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Psalm 97:2b). Knowing who He is, we should not be surprised that Jesus refused to enter into their empty debate. These Jewish dignitaries had no legitimate complaints; they had only prejudice and envy. Jesus did not argue with sin; He condemned it by His response of silence.

His silence registers a protest against the way sinful men sometimes deal with innocence. The statement "I find no guilt in Him" should have halted the trial. Pilate's judgment should have ended the plot to crucify Jesus. However, wickedness will not be defeated by innocence; it seeks to trample and subdue it. In order to crucify Jesus, His enemies would have to crush purity with their wicked fingers. This setting shows us more clearly than any other circumstance in history how wicked men treat pure and undefiled innocence.

His silence declares anew the commitment of Jesus to be our Savior. Jesus knew what He would face at this trial. As the One who made mankind, He knew people's hearts and was well aware of the mistreatment awaiting Him. He had told the apostles ahead of time that He would have to go "to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matthew 16:21). He had set His face to go to Jerusalem, knowing what would occur there (Luke 9:51). Back in the garden, in earnest prayer before His Father, Jesus had submitted Himself as a "lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers" (Isaiah 53:7b). He would put Himself into the hands of godless men and let them do with Him whatever they wished. Standing before Pilate, our Lord calmly and faithfully

began to drink the cup that the Father had given Him to drink.

Nothing can be more thought-provoking than the innocence of Jesus. All one needs to do is find one mistake, one flaw, one blemish in the character of Jesus, and he has proven that Jesus is not the Son of God. The converse is also true: If one finds Jesus to be faultless (as Pilate did), then he has proven Him, without question, to be the Son of God. As Jesus passed through the most unjust trial the world has ever known, He did so with divine dignity and human perfection. Through His character, He said anew to the world that He was God in the flesh and that He came to save. John wrote, "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). We read in Hebrews 5:9, "And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." Peter challenged us to follow Jesus' perfect example: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; . . . and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:21-24a).

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"Pilate had told the Jews what he thought of the case in that memorable verdict: 'I find in [H]im no fault at all!' He could not understand His bearing, but he felt and confessed His innocence; he could not comprehend His kingdom, but he read and revered His character. But the recognition of that faultless spirit was a challenge both to conscience and to manhood, and his confession is still one of the most momentous in all history. The most hostile advocates, the most searching scrutiny, could show up no blemish. Both the Hebrew court and the Roman judge had failed to find in Him the least hint of the blight of sin."¹

¹Marcus Loane, *Life Through the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1966), 99.