

Behold the Man and Behold your King - Pilate John 19:5 and 14

[The New King James version of the Scriptures has been used unless otherwise stated.]

Truth for today has been broadcasting Christian ministry for nearly 20 years. But today is the first time we have broadcast on Transworld Radio. So, can I give you a very warm welcome to our programme and may God bless His word to all of our hearts.

I first want to read two verses from John's Gospel chapter 19:

"Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!" (v. 5)

"Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (v. 14)

When we read these verses in the Bible, we often think of them in isolation or only in their immediate context. But the Holy Spirit unfolds a pattern of revelation which extends throughout the chapter, the book, both Old and New Testaments - and indeed, throughout the whole Bible. This pattern gives us an excellent insight into the ministry of God's grace. With this in mind, I want to connect the declarations of Pilate made before the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus with the two declarations of John the Baptist at the outset of the Lord's public ministry.

The very first chapter of John's Gospel describes the deity of Jesus Christ:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (vv. 1-5)

After describing the deity of Jesus Christ in the opening verses of the first chapter of his Gospel, the Apostle John records John the Baptist's introduction to Jesus with the words,

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (v. 29)

In these words John the Baptist immediately identifies Jesus as the Saviour of the world. To any bystander, Jesus was another Jewish man responding to John the Baptist's message. This message was a call to repentance and to baptism, and to live a righteous life while awaiting the coming Messiah. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist himself was astonished that Jesus asked to be baptised. He protested that he himself needed to be baptised by Jesus. But, here at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus willingly identifies Himself with the needs of His people. Although He was the Creator, He humbles himself in the presence of His creatures. However, apart from John the Baptist, we know of no-one else who responded to Jesus Christ that day, and Jesus silently moved on. A few verses later, as John the Baptist sees Jesus walking, he simply declares,

“Behold, the Lamb of God.” (v. 36)

Two of the disciples of John the Baptist listened and followed Jesus. When Jesus asked them what they wanted, they asked Him where he was staying. Jesus replied, “Come and see.” The two disciples spent the day with the Saviour. John records the profound effect this meeting had upon Andrew, who was one of these disciples:

"One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus." (vv. 40-42)

At this point Jesus had done no miracles. John the Baptist had simply identified who Jesus was, and Andrew and his friend had spent a few hours with Jesus. Yet, they were utterly convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. John writes earlier in the chapter:

"He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (vv. 10-13.

We see the fulfilment of these words in the circumstances surrounding John the Baptist's two declarations of Jesus as the Lamb of God. In the first instance, as far as we know, no-one responded to John the Baptist's witness to who Jesus was. This is the first example of what John wrote in verse 11,

“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

But on the second occasion two disciples of John the Baptist responded to His words. This corresponds to the words we read: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." These two responses of rejection and reception of the Lord Jesus Christ continued throughout His earthly ministry and, indeed, right down to the present day. But there is something else about John's declaration, which is very important. On both occasions John calls Jesus “the Lamb of God.” In the Jewish mind the expression “the lamb of God” would remind them of the Passover Lamb sacrificed just before God delivered the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. (see Exodus 12)

Moses was given precise instructions from God about the Passover lamb. Each house had to take a lamb. The year-old lamb was to be without blemish, in other words, not diseased or injured. It was kept before its sacrifice to ensure it was perfect. On the Passover day the lamb was killed. Its blood was placed on the doorposts and lintel of the house. Afterwards, the lamb was roasted and eaten. God declared that, on the Passover night, “when I see the blood, I will pass over you.” (Exodus 12:13) The sacrifice of the lamb saved the house from God's judgement on the Egyptians.

The sacrificed lamb is a vivid illustration of God's provision of a saviour who stands in our place, a substitute. Abraham referred to this in Genesis 22:8 when he said, “God will provide Himself a lamb.” (v. 8)

After all the centuries of sacrifice, which the writer of Hebrews tells us could never take away sin (see Hebrews 10:11) John the Baptist announces that the Lamb of God was present in the world.

For the next three years, Jesus demonstrated Himself to be the Son of God who came as the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world. The apostle John writes later in his first letter,
"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Saviour of the world." (1 John 4:14)

Peter also writes,

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Let's now consider Pilate's declarations at the end of Christ's three-year ministry. In chapter 18 of his Gospel John describes the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. John tells how Jesus is brought before the High Priest and questioned. He then describes Peter's denial of Jesus. And then how Jesus is taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. The outcome of these meetings was that Pilate was convinced of the innocence of Jesus and declared this in verse 38,

"I find no fault in Him at all."

Although he did not know it, Pilate was publicly declaring the perfection of Jesus, the Lamb of God. However, Pilate did not have the moral courage to uphold justice. Instead, he used the custom at the Passover of releasing a prisoner chosen by the people. It seems Pilate thought the crowd would want Jesus to be released. But the chief priests influenced the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released.

In John chapters 18 and 19 we have a vivid insight into corrupt religious and political systems which mock justice and allow unrighteousness to reign. These systems have continued in different forms throughout history and are as apparent today as ever. Pilate had the power to do good and wanted to release Jesus but to keep the peace he allowed the crucifixion of Jesus. The next cruel act of Pilate was to deliver Jesus to the soldiers. Jesus suffered the brutality of battle-hardened men who took pleasure in inflicting pain and humiliation on those who could not defend themselves. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had shown His power to make the soldiers afraid and fall down. Matthew tells us He could have commanded the intervention of twelve legions of angels. But Jesus submitted to all that men could inflict upon Him. As Isaiah records,

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)

It is in verse 4 of John 19 that we come to the moment when Pilate brings Jesus before the waiting crowd and addresses them with the words,

"Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

It is difficult to know if Pilate thought that the crowd would be filled with pity and change their minds upon seeing Jesus beaten and wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. He announces Jesus with the words, "Behold the Man!" It is one of the most poignant moments in history. The priests, the people, and Pilate, the governor, had no understanding of what was being fulfilled on that day.

We looked earlier at the words John wrote in the first chapter of his Gospel:

"He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."

Over the three short years of Jesus Christ's ministry, He had demonstrated the miracle of His incarnation. The miracle began with his birth in Bethlehem. It was the day when Immanuel, which means, "God with us" was born. That was the moment when God entered His own creation. He didn't arrive as Adam did, as a mature man, but as a tiny baby, the same baby that Simeon was to hold in his arms declaring, "My eyes have seen Your salvation." (Luke 2:30) Luke records the first words of Jesus, "I must be about My Father's business." (Luke 2:49) Luke also records His last words from the cross, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Luke tells us that, as a twelve-year-old boy, Jesus was found in the temple at Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph found him sitting with the teachers. He was listening to them and asking them questions and confounding them with His understanding and answers. From there, we follow Jesus to His baptism. As we have seen, John the Baptist had declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God, and as Jesus came out of the waters of baptism God the Father declares, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) So begins the ministry of the Lord Jesus. This ministry revealed who He was as God. It demonstrated His power, for example in Mark chapters 4-5 over disaster, the devil, disease and death. It displayed His power to give sight, hearing, speech, and to remove deformities and lameness. It showed His ability to heal broken hearts, to forgive and to set people free from evil and to transform the lives of everyone who came to Him in simple faith. Jesus healed people's bodies, minds and spirits. Not only all this, He walked on water, stilled the storm and fed the hungry to show that He was God. But at the same time, it was a ministry fulfilled in His gracious lowliness as Jesus of Nazareth.

He was also the Person who experienced hatred as a child by King Herod, became a refugee, settled in poverty-stricken Nazareth and worked as a carpenter. During His ministry, He had to ask to be shown a penny: He had no home or possessions but the clothes he wore. Jesus, though all-powerful, knew weariness on journeys, anger at unrighteousness, tears of compassion, continual rejection, and, as we have seen today, cruelty and humiliation and, finally, crucifixion. The life of Christ, the Son of God, was lived in love, obedience and devotion to God the Father. The apostle John tells us, "God is love." To manifest that love, Jesus Christ entered into the world He had made. He came to where we were, as the Lamb of God. He came as a man to become, in the words of Paul, the "One Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5) It was in lowly grace that Jesus stood as Pilate addressed the crowd with the words, "Behold the man."

Pilate had no conception of the Person who stood before him and no understanding of the truth of the words he himself spoke. Pilate was representative of a world power which allowed injustice to prosper, and washed its hands of any responsibility. Before the crowd stood the Man Christ Jesus. The crowd were representative of the nation. The people had rejected the Messiah, who had come to live amongst them and demonstrate the heart of God. It was this crowd which responded in unison to Pilate's declaration with the awful words, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

David prophetically expresses the Messiah's experience in Psalm 69 verse 20,

"Reproach has broken my heart,
And I am full of heaviness;
I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none;
And for comforters, but I found none."

Pilate expressed his shock at the crowd's response: "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." But the Jews were determined in their rejection of their own Messiah, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Pilate became increasingly afraid of the forces at work which he did not understand, and he was compelled to speak again with Jesus. But Jesus, at first, does not answer him: "Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."" (John 19:9-11)

Pilate was angry Jesus did not answer him. Jesus responded to Pilate as the Son of Man, subject to the Father's will. Pilate was a Gentile governor and the circumstances in which he found himself were the fulfilment of God's purposes through Israel although Pilate was still personally responsible for acting justly and protecting the innocent. But the Chief Priests were more responsible as recipients of the Word of God and the revelation of the promised Messiah whom they had rejected. They had delivered Jesus to Pilate, and they organised the crowd to demand the death of Jesus by crucifixion. Although God was sovereign in all these circumstances, men were still responsible for the actions they chose to take. The words of Jesus caused Pilate to continue his efforts to release Him. But the Jews argued that Jesus was challenging Caesar himself. From then on Pilate sought to release Jesus, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."(v. 12)

It is very sad to see the proud and envious representatives of the nation of Israel use an argument in support of their Gentile rulers to ensure the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The combination of religion and politics has rarely served the world well. Here it comes into play in all the spiritual wickedness that led to Calvary. This leads to Pilate's second declaration in regard to Jesus:

"Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour.
And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (v.14)

John highlights the time of this declaration as the Preparation Day of the Passover. This is the clear connection between John the Baptist's twice-uttered description of Jesus as, "The Lamb of God" at the beginning of the Lord's ministry and Pilate's two declarations about Jesus, "Behold the Man" and "Behold your King."

When Jesus was an infant, the wise men, who were Gentiles, referred to Jesus as the one born "King of the Jews." It is very striking that Pilate, also a Gentile, presents Jesus to the crowd as their king before Jesus was led away to die at Calvary. In John chapter 1 Nathanael declared Jesus to be the Son of God and King of Israel at the beginning of his ministry. Here Pilate announces Jesus as the king of Israel at the end of that ministry. Jesus stood before the crowd in all His moral, that is, His intrinsic glory and dignity as the Son of Man. He also stood crowned with thorns and wearing a purple robe in mockery of Him as the King of Israel. The One who came to heal broken hearts experienced a broken heart, it was not broken in self-pity, but in love for a world which had rejected Him. The cruelty and violence of people energised by Satanic influence could not diminish the glory of His Person as God and Man nor could it extinguish His love. He had always acted towards His people with lovingkindness, compassion and grace. The crowd shouted out their united response,

""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 Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a

Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the centre." (vv. 15-17)

Pilate, the Gentile governor, had presented Jesus to His people and they had rejected Him. But, in spite of his enormous failings in administering justice, Pilate did one more important thing, Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was:

"JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." (v. 19)

Pilate's title was a reminder of the governor's two declarations,

Jesus of Nazareth - "Behold the man."
The King of the Jews - "Behold your king."

On that awful day the world's compassion, and its authority to govern righteously, bestowed by God for the well-being of the peoples of the world, was indelibly shamed and disgraced. But it was also the day when God's love was poured out in all its fullness at Golgotha. The first response to such love was that of one of the dying thieves. Luke records his words: they corresponded to the titles of Jesus above the cross. When he said, "This man has done nothing amiss," he was declaring "Behold the man." When he then asked the Lord Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom, he was declaring "Behold your king." Whilst Jesus was dying for the whole world, He was leading one lost sheep to Himself. "Today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) Since then millions have looked to Calvary and come to know Jesus as "the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

May He give us the grace to become more like "The Man Christ Jesus" and to own Him in our lives as our Lord, "the King of kings and Lord of lords."

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