

The Challenge to and Exposure of the Jewish Rulers

by T. Austin-Sparks

Jesus' trial and crucifixion is a parable that illustrates the judgment of this world and postulates the ruin of all that is built upon corruption, falsehood, and pretension.

Scripture: John 18:28

Topics: "Christ's Authority", "The Nature of True Lordship"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the spiritual significance of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, asserting that this pivotal 'hour' reveals Christ's true nature and authority. He challenges the Jewish rulers and exposes their moral corruption, demonstrating that despite their apparent power, they are judged by Christ, who embodies true lordship. Pilate, representing worldly authority, is also shown to be morally compromised, as Jesus reveals the inadequacies of human judgment. Ultimately, the sermon illustrates that God's sovereignty prevails, and through His death, Jesus establishes His kingdom, which transcends worldly systems of power. The trial serves as a profound parable of the judgment of both religious and secular authorities, highlighting the triumph of truth over falsehood.

Transcript

These chapters, read as narrative, might be thought to be historical in the sense of giving an account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, but there is that which is much more and much deeper than that. Indeed, the true meaning and value is not the historical but the spiritual. Jesus has, at length, come to that for which supremely He came from Heaven. This is the "My hour" of which He has so often spoken. He had said so many things as to why He came into the world. Now they are all concentrated into this "Hour."

Let us be quite clear on one thing. All that ever Jesus has proved to be, through the long period of nearly twenty centuries; over an ever-growing area of the world; to an ever-increasing multitude of people of every nation, tongue, class, and circumstance: all that, He was in that hour. He was no less then than He is now. He has not become a bigger or greater or more wonderful Christ than He was then. To realize this is to have an altogether transforming view of His so-called trial, judgment, and death. The elements of His subsequent history in the experience of peoples were all present then. The final and inclusive reality is His lordship. But nothing could ever look more unlike lordship than that which a superficial reading of these chapters conveys.

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Let us look again, after having cleared and adjusted our minds as to the essential constituents of government and lordship. Over a very far-reaching area of the world, as it was then, the Jewish hierarchy, centered in High-Priest and a Council of Rulers, held sway. The far-flung Jewish system referred and deferred unquestioningly to their judgment and authority. To dispute that authority or to question its integrity was to bring down the very judgment of Heaven upon the offenders their excommunication and execution.

Very well. Jesus knew all this, and then did two things. He challenged and refuted it, and then made havoc of it.

In that very hour, when, from all physical and natural standpoints, He was at a complete disadvantage and in "weakness," He utterly demoralized them right at the top level.

They had repeatedly to change their methods to make up a case. They darted from one point and argument to another when they sensed the weakness of their position. They resorted to subterfuges, half-truths, and false witness. They, who stood for ceremonial cleanness, were made by Him to show their inward corruption by stooping to moral infamy (18:28). If there was one thing which in their heart of hearts they hated, repudiated and would never have entertained, it was Caesar's authority. But here they are being utterly false to themselves and to their people, and are saying the most humiliating thing conceivable: "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15).

The case against them is much greater and stronger than this, but the point is that they - on all grounds - are in His judgment hall, and He is the Judge, not the other way round. This surely shows that Christ's kingdom and kingship is spiritual and moral, in righteousness and truth, not official, political, temporal, of this world; and it is a thing of terror, a devastating thing to all that is not of it. Even if you think - as they did - that you have done Him to death, got Him out of the way, you have - as they did - to meet Him and reckon with Him on these terms, and for them it has meant centuries of unspeakable misery!

The Judgment and Condemnation of Pilate

But that is not all. What of Pilate?

If the Jewish High Priest and the Sanhedrin were the center of religion over a wide area of the world, Pilate was the local representative of a still wider and more powerful world system. The long and indomitable arm of Rome and Caesar reached over the world and held it in an imperious sway. This, in a very real sense, was the world - the kingdom of this world. It could crush at a word and silence with a gesture.

The Jewish hierarchy, thinking to secure its ends through that austere and relentless power, blindly forced Jesus into the judgment hall of Pilate. With every kind of indignity and humiliation heaped upon Him He stands with no defense and no appeal.

But look - listen! What is happening?

He is quietly and steadily tearing down the moral structure of that whole edifice, and exposing the utter rottenness of its moral foundations. Pilate is nonplussed, disconcerted, cornered like a trapped creature. He is writhing, looking in every direction for some way out. Subterfuges, tricks, expedients, policy, pretension, playacting!

Jesus is the Judge and Pilate is in His court.

He forever and for history discredits Pilate as a rightful executor of equitable laws by proving him guilty of accepting reports without getting evidence (18:34,35); He makes him hide behind the transparent veil of cynicism (38); compels a verdict of innocence; draws out his inconsistency; drives him to subterfuge; makes him repeat his verdict twice (38,39; 19:4,6); uncovers a secret fear (8: note - "the more"); puts him in the place of a puppet (11); discloses more moral weakness (12,13); proves him to be a mere worldly time server (12,15,16); draws forth an acknowledgment even if in irony of universal sovereignty (19,20).

The Vindication of the Son of Man

So Jesus has established His claims. He came to bring the kingdom of God - but, thank God, not of the rotten kind in this World. He claimed to be the Truth, and He has torn the mask from the Devil's system of falsehood. He claimed to be the Light, and He has exposed the haunts and works of darkness. He came to die not at man's choice and will, but by laying down His life of His own accord. He came to overcome the world and its Prince and He has done it! And so we might go on.

The one inclusive and glorious issue is that, while men thought themselves to be in the saddle, driving on to their own ends, God in sovereignty was in charge fulfilling His own predeterminate and foreknown counsel. The real government was with the supposed "victim."

"We beheld his glory" - the glory of the transcendence of moral excellence - "glory as of an only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth."

The so-called "trial" of Jesus is a parable. It forever illustrates and demonstrates the judgment of this world - religious and secular - and postulates the ruin of all that is built upon corruption, falsehood, pretension, and mere formality.

Here is the -

"One death-grapple in the darkness,

Twixt old systems and the Word.

Truth for ever on the scaffold,

Wrong for ever on the throne.

Yet that scaffold sways the future,

And amidst the dim unknown,

Standeth God, keeping watch above His own."

By His cross He conquers!

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