The Silence of Jesus
Scripture: Matthew 27
Code: BQ052113

And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against You?" And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed. (27:12-14)

The second element in this account that demonstrates the perfection and innocence of Christ was His own attitude. To Pilate's consternation, Jesus **made no answer** to the intensified accusations of the chief priests and elders.

The Jewish leaders had already rendered their predetermined verdict of guilty, and the governor his verdict of not guilty, declaring, "I find no guilt in Him" (John 18:38). He knew that the original charges against Jesus not only were religious rather than political but were spurious and made out of envy. He also knew that the charges they had just made regarding insurrection, not paying taxes, and claiming to be a king were manufactured solely for his benefit, in order to give a political basis for judgment against Him.

Pilate knew the truth, and the Jews were opposing the truth. The Jews had unjustly convicted Him, and Pilate had justly exonerated Him. Jesus therefore refused to say anything else because there was nothing more to say.

Hoping that Jesus would come to His own defense and help expose the duplicitous Jewish leaders, **Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against You?"** But again Jesus **did not answer him with regard to even a single charge**. Understandably, **the governor was quite amazed**. Pilate had confronted hundreds of accused men, most of whom loudly protested their innocence and were willing to say or do anything to save themselves. Many of them doubtlessly made countercharges against their accusers or else passionately pled for mercy. A person who said nothing in his own defense was unheard of and astounding. But Jesus' innocence was so obvious that it demanded no defense on His part.

"Where is the revolutionary who opposes Rome, the tax-dodging protester, and the rival to Caesar's throne?" Pilate must have mused. The Man who stood before him was calm, serene, undefensive, and completely at peace. As Isaiah had predicted some seven centuries earlier, although "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter,

and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

Pilate not only was amazed but in a quandary. He was convinced of Jesus' innocence and was repulsed by the chicanery of the chief priests and elders. Yet he did not dare offend them, because his own position with Rome was now precarious due to the contemptuous miscalculations he had previously made regarding Jewish religious convictions.

He had governed Judea for some four or five years, but his rule had been marked by several serious misjudgments that threatened his office and even his life. First, he had deliberately offended the Jews by having his soldiers carry ensigns into Jerusalem that carried the likeness of Caesar. Because the Jews considered such images to be idolatrous, previous governors had carefully avoided displaying the emblems in public, especially in the holy city of Jerusalem. When a delegation of Jews persistently asked Pilate to remove the ensigns, he herded them into an amphitheater and threatened to have his soldiers cut off their heads if they did not desist. When the group bared their necks and threw themselves to the ground, defiantly asserting their willingness to die, Pilate withdrew both his threat and the ensigns. He had been sent to Palestine to keep the peace, not foment a revolution, which a massacre of those men would surely have precipitated.

A short while later, Pilate forcefully took money from the Temple treasury to erect an aqueduct. When the Jews again openly rioted, Pilate sent soldiers disguised as civilians among them to brutally slaughter many of the unsuspecting and unarmed protesters. Luke's reference to "the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (13:1) may relate to an additional cruel facet of that massacre.

Pilate's third public offense against the Jews was almost his undoing. He had special shields made for his guard at Fort Antonia and, no doubt intending to gain favor with the emperor, ordered likenesses of Tiberius engraved on the shields. This time the Jewish leaders appealed directly to Caesar, and Pilate's scheme backfired. Tiberius was more concerned about the genuine prospect of rebellion than the insincere flattery of Pilate, and he demanded that the shields be removed immediately.

Pilate was now justifiably afraid that another riot by the Jews would cost him his procuratorship. His brutal and senseless ambush of some Samaritan worshipers a few years later brought exactly that result. When the Samaritans appealed to the governor's immediate superior, the legate of Syria, that official ordered Pilate to Rome to explain his actions. His political career was ended, and tradition holds that he eventually committed suicide in Gaul, to which he had been banished.

We learn from Luke that when Pilate heard the Jewish leaders say Jesus was stirring up the people, "starting from Galilee, even as far as this place," he asked if Jesus were a Galilean. When told that Jesus was indeed from that region, he felt certain he had found a solution to his dilemma. He

immediately sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee but was visiting in Jerusalem at the time (Luke 23:5–7). With His appearance before Herod, the second phase of Jesus' political trial began.

For his own perverse reasons, "Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him" (Luke 23:8). Because Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist, Jesus had never visited the tetrarch's capital city of Tiberias in Galilee, and the ruler had never seen Him. Herod desired to meet Jesus purely out of curiosity, hoping to see this famous miracle-worker perform for his private benefit.

Although Herod "questioned Him at some length," Jesus "answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently" (Luke 23:9–10). Luke does not mention what Herod asked Jesus about, but based on what is known of that ruler, his questions were utterly superficial. Jesus therefore had even less to say to him than to Pilate. He owed the tetrarch no explanation of His teaching or His activities, about which Herod was probably well informed or easily could have been.

Whatever else Herod may have known or believed about Jesus, he knew He was no political threat to himself or to Caesar. By this time Jesus had already been beaten by the Sanhedrin, and His face was bruised, bleeding, and covered with spittle. The accused, silent prisoner appeared anything but regal or dangerous.

But resentful of Jesus' silence and probably hoping to mollify the howling, infuriated Jews, "Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate" (Luke 23:11). The word rendered "gorgeous" literally means bright and resplendent, suggesting the royal apparel that had often been worn by Jewish kings at their coronations.

Although Herod did not declare Jesus not guilty, as Pilate had done, he acknowledged no charge against Him, and once again Christ's innocence was manifested. The tetrarch mocked and mistreated Christ, but he could find no fault in Him.

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