

DO NOT MISCALCULATE CHRIST

18 ²⁸Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor's palace. By now it was early morning; so [the Jews] themselves did not enter into the palace, in order to avoid defiling themselves so that they might eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and asked, What charge are you bringing against this man? ³⁰They replied, If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you. ³¹Then Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and judge him by your law. The Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death. ³²[This happened] so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating what kind of death he was going to die might be fulfilled ³³Pilate went back into the palace, summoned Jesus, and asked him, Are you the King of the Jews? ³⁴Jesus asked, Do you say this of your own accord, or did others speak to you about me? ³⁵Pilate replied, Am I a Jew? Your own people and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done? ³⁶Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight in order to prevent me from being handed over to the Jews. But, the fact is, my kingdom is not from here. ³⁷Then Pilate said to him, So then, you are a king. Jesus answered, You are right in saying that I am a king. For this reason have I been born, and for this reason have I come into the world, [namely,] so that I may testify to the truth. Every one who belongs to the truth recognizes my voice. ³⁸Pilate said to him, What is truth? After he had spoken [with Jesus] he again went out to the Jews and said to them, I do not find him guilty of any crime. ³⁹But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Would you have me release to you the King of the Jews? ⁴⁰They shouted back, Not this man; [release] Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a robber. (Jn. 18:28-40)

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. ²The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They dressed him in a purple robe ³and came up to him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands. ⁴Then Pilate went out again and said to [the Jews], Look, I am bringing him out to you so that you may know that I do not find him guilty of any crime. ⁵So when Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, [Pilate] said to them, Here is the man! ⁶When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they shouted, Crucify [him]! crucify [him]! Pilate replied, Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I do not find him to be guilty of any crime. ⁷The Jews answered him, We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God. ⁸When Pilate heard this, he became even more afraid. ⁹He went back into the palace and said to Jesus, Where do you come from? But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Therefore Pilate asked him, Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not realize that I have the authority to release you, and the authority to crucify you? ¹¹Jesus replied, You would have no authority over me, unless it had been given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin. ¹²At this point Pilate sought to release him. But the Jews cried out, If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; for anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. ¹³When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at the place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew [it was called], Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the [day of] Preparation for the Passover, about the

sixth hour [of the day]. [Pilate] said to the Jews, Here is your King! ¹⁵But they shouted, Away with [him]! Away with [him]! Crucify him! Pilate asked them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. (Jn. 19:1-16)

Introduction

The American humorist, O. Henry, once wrote a short story entitled, “The Ransom of Red Chief.” It was the story about two inept hoodlums, Sam and Bill, who kidnapped a ten-year-old boy and the misadventures they had with their young captive called “Red Chief.”

The two came to the small Alabama town of Summit, kidnapped the ten-year-old son of a prominent resident, and decided to demand \$2000 for his return. The two hoodlums managed to get the boy into a buggy and carry him off to a cave a few miles outside of Summit, where the little fellow proceeded to terrorize the two outlaws and have the time of his life. The lad kept them up until 2 a.m. playing Indian scout. Then, at daybreak, Sam was awakened by a series of awful screams coming from his partner, Bill; “Red Chief” was sitting on top of Bill, trying to scalp him.

Throughout the course of the day, ten-year-old “Red Chief” dropped a red hot boiled potato down Bill’s back and then smashed it with his foot; smacked Bill behind the ear with a rock the size of an egg, which he had launched from his slingshot; and then made poor Bill play the role of his horse whom he rode roughshod all afternoon—all this while Sam was out delivering the ransom note.

Once again leaving poor Bill in the “custody” of “Red Chief,” late that night Sam sneaked back to the spot where the ransom for the boy’s return was to be picked up. But what he found there was not the \$2000 ransom payment; instead, he found a note, which read as follows:

Gentlemen:

I received your letter today by post, in regard to the ransom you ask for the return of my son. I think you are a little high in your demands, and I hereby make you a counterproposition, which I am inclined to believe you will accept. You bring Johnny home and pay me two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, and I agree to take him off your hands. You had better come at night, for the neighbors believe he is lost, and I couldn’t be responsible for what they would do to anybody they saw bringing him back.

Very respectfully,

Ebenezer Dorset

Sam and Bill decided to accept Mr. Dorset's offer. Without further delay they showed up at the Dorset house under the cover of darkness, handed over to Mr. Dorset the \$250 and the ten-year-old terror known as "Red Chief."

In this humorous short story we find that these two inept hoodlums seriously miscalculated the person with whom they were dealing. In the passage of Scripture presently before us, we find that the Roman governor, Pilate, made the same mistake of seriously miscalculating Christ. We must appreciate Christ's true identity or else, like Pilate, we will seriously miscalculate the Person with whom we are confronted.

I. Do Not Miscalculate Christ, By Viewing Him as a Harmless Idealist

Pilate could not ignore the charge brought against Jesus by the Jewish leaders, as presented in Luke 23:1-2, *"Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."* So he now addresses the question to Jesus, *"Are you the King of the Jews?"* (Jn. 18:33.)

The Greek text seems to indicate Pilate's scorn, contempt, and disbelief: **"You** are the King of the Jews?!" Pilate views it as incredible that this man standing before him could possibly be the King of the Jews and a threat to Rome. Bear in mind Jesus' call to discipleship and the way in which He identifies Himself: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matt. 11:29.)

Pilate no doubt expected a negative reply to his question and thus a swift end to this whole episode. But Jesus answered him, *"Do you say this of your own accord, or did others speak to you about me?"* (vs. 34.) To Pilate's surprise, Jesus does not respond like a frightened little animal: timidly denying the charge, cringing in fear before the prospect of the horrible death by crucifixion, which Pilate was able to administer.

Far from being intimidated in the presence of the imperial governor, Jesus assumes the role of the interrogator. Note that the question He asks Pilate—Have you personally come to the conclusion that I am the King of the Jews or is this just something that others have said about Me?—comes close to the question He once asked His own disciples: *"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say the Son of Man is? ... ¹⁵But what about you? he asked. Who do you say I am?"* (Matt. 16:13,15.) In effect, Jesus is asking Pilate, 'Where do **you** stand with regard to Me? Do you really perceive that I really am the King of Israel? Or do you find that to be incredible?'

With scornful indignation, this proud Roman governor responds, *"I am not a Jew, am I?"* (vs. 35.) Pilate seems to have perceived the import of Jesus' question, "Have you given serious consideration to who I am?" This Roman governor

responds with a complete denial of Jesus' kingship and a disdain to even be associated with Jesus or His people in any way Pilate seeks to assert his dominance over Jesus, in effect replying to Him, "**You** have been delivered to **me**; you are my prisoner!" He seeks to identify Jesus as a mere man standing before the tribunal of imperial Rome; he inquires of Jesus, "What have you done? Into what sort of trouble have you gotten yourself?"

With solemn dignity the Lord Jesus disdains to even honor Pilate's question with a reply (vs. 36.) On the contrary, Jesus affirms that He, indeed, does possess a kingdom: three times He speaks about "*my kingdom.*" He declares that this kingdom is not an earthly kingdom; that is to say, it does not have its origins in this world. Note carefully that Jesus does not say that His kingdom has no relationship to this world, or that it has no bearing upon this present world. Jesus is merely saying that His kingdom does not originate from this world: it is the divine kingdom of God that comes into this world and that shall finally supplant the kingdoms of this world. Note Revelation 11:15, a passage that records the testimony of the angels concerning the day of Christ's return in glory at the end of the age: "*the seventh angel sounded [his trumpet]; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.*"

Pilate responds to Jesus' words with a bemused exclamation, "*So then, you are a king*" (vs. 37.) This practical Roman, conversant with power politics and military might, is bemused with Jesus and merely views Him as a harmless idealist. But Jesus refuses to disgrace His divine majesty by directly answering Pilate's contemptuous remarks (vs. 37b.) He merely testifies that the reason He has come into the world is to bear witness to the truth. He asserts that everyone who has an affinity with the truth—everyone who is "tuned in to" the truth—will recognize the ring of truth in His words and in His life. Expressing the cynicism and relativism of his day, Pilate scornfully replies, "*What is truth?*" (vs. 38.) At this point Pilate has dismissed Jesus as a harmless, irrelevant idealist.

Do not make the same mistake: do not miscalculate Christ by viewing Him as merely a harmless idealist, as do so many people. Consider the testimony of a newspaper reporter, Lee Strobel, who describes his view of Christ before his conversion: "I was convinced that if I looked at the historical evidence concerning Christ, I would probably be able to find out He was a nice guy and a wonderful, charismatic person, but certainly not God" (*POWER*, 6/23/91, p. 6.) In contrast to that common misconception of Christ, consider the testimony of the Apostle John:

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
(Jn. 20:30-31)

II. Do Not Miscalculate Christ, By Viewing Him as an Object of Contempt or Pity

Having recognized that Jesus has violated no Roman law, and seeking to placate the Jewish leaders, Pilate determines to scourge Jesus and release Him (Jn. 19:1.) According to the New Testament commentator, Leon Morris, scourging was “a brutal affair ... It could make pulp of a man’s back.” (*The New International Commentary, The Gospel of John*, p. 790.)

Thus Jesus was turned over to the Roman soldiers who treated Him with vicious cruelty and contempt (vs. 2.) They wove a crown of thorns and brutally pressed it down on Jesus’ brow. This “crown” was possibly a caricature of the “radiate crown;” a crown in which spikes radiated outward, symbolizing the glory and divinity of the one who wore it. A crown reserved for the officials of imperial Rome. (Morris, pp. 790-791.) They stripped Jesus of His garments and mockingly dressed Him in a purple robe, (another symbol of royalty.) They kept coming up to Him, bowing down before Him, and in a ridiculing manner, exclaiming, “*Hail! King of the Jews!*” (mimicking the way they would have approached Caesar.) All the while they continued to strike Him in the face; demonstrating their utter contempt for this One who had meekly subjected Himself to their abuse.

Pilate now presents Jesus to the Jews in this miserable state of mocking and degradation, exclaiming, “*Here is the man!*” (vs. 5.) Pilate held Jesus up as an object of contempt: How could this helpless victim of violence and derision be viewed as a king? He presented Jesus as an object of pity; perhaps he sought to solicit compassion from the Jewish mob as they looked upon this helpless, battered individual who was one of them.

But far from evoking pity, the sight of Jesus in this pathetic state of humiliation evokes from the crowd the cry of “*Crucify him!*” (vs. 6.) Thus Pilate, the soldiers, and the Jewish nation treat Jesus as an object of contempt.

Do not make the same mistake: Do not miscalculate Christ by viewing Him as an object of pity or contempt. Do not treat Christ as an object of contempt by taking His name in vain, merely invoking His name as an expression of exasperation or anger, while you totally disregard and dismiss His divine identity. Do not treat Christ as an object of pity by entertaining the thought that it’s a shame such a good man met with such an awful death, or entertaining the thought that it’s a shame more people do not live like this remarkable teacher! Remember the testimony of the Apostle John:

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (Jn. 20:30-31)

III. Do Not Miscalculate Christ, By Viewing Him as a Mysterious Person to be Avoided

When Pilate seeks to release Jesus, the Jews protest: *“We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God”* (vs. 7.)

When Pilate heard this—*“He claimed to be the Son of God”*—*“he became even more afraid”* (vs. 8.) Pilate was obviously troubled by the fact that the Jews were insisting on his executing an innocent man. Pilate had become increasingly perplexed by Jesus’ silence, when a negative reply to Pilate’s question, “Are you the King of the Jews?” would have insured His release. Pilate would become all the more disturbed by the report sent to him by his wife: *“While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message, ‘Do not have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him’”* (Matt. 27:19.) Now, added to all this, Pilate learns that Jesus indeed claims to be the Son of God.

So it is that Pilate rushed back into the palace and demanded of Jesus, *“Where do you come from?”* (vs. 9.) Earlier, he had ascertained that Jesus was a Galilean, and therefore he had sent Jesus to King Herod,

But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.” ⁶*Hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean.* ⁷*When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.* (Lk. 23:5-7)

So it is evident that, when he now inquires of Jesus, “From where do you come?” Pilate is not inquiring about Jesus’ earthly origins. No doubt the words Jesus had spoken earlier were now ringing in Pilate’s ears and speaking to his heart:

Then Pilate said to him, “So then, you are a king.” Jesus answered, “You are right in saying that I am a king. For this reason have I been born, and for this reason have I come into the world, [namely,] so that I may testify to the truth. Every one who belongs to the truth recognizes my voice.” (Jn. 18:37)

Jesus now responds to Pilate with an awesome silence (vs. 9b.) Pilate finds it incredible that Jesus refuses to speak to him (vs. 10.) How is it possible that this battered prisoner can hold the imperial governor in contempt? Does He not realize the authority the governor possesses?

Jesus only breaks His silence to correct the governor’s misunderstanding (vs. 11.) Jesus reminds Pilate that his authority is a delegated authority: it does not originate from Pilate, or from Rome, or from the people; it comes *“from above”*—from God. Pilate is convicted by the truth of Jesus’ words, and not wanting to be

held accountable for the death of this innocent, mysterious, frightening individual, he earnestly seeks to release Jesus (vs. 12.)

Pilate never actually passes legal sentence against Jesus; rather, he delivers Jesus over to the Jews. He symbolically washes his hands and proclaims himself innocent of this whole matter, thereby seeking to distance himself from this innocent and mysterious Person:

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" (Matt. 27:24)

Do not make the same mistake: do not miscalculate Christ by viewing Him as a mysterious Person to be avoided. Do not be like the people of the Gerasenes in their response to Jesus following His act of driving the demons out of the possessed men and consigning them to a herd of pigs that were driven down the hillside and drowned in the sea:

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. (Lk. 8:34-37)

Let us hear and heed the testimony of the Apostle John:

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (Jn. 20:30-31)