

What I Have Written I Have Written

By
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“Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.” (John 19:22)

The events that compose the blackest chapter in human history took place on the Friday Jesus was crucified in the dark hours before dawn. Judas had planted the kiss of betrayal. The Sanhedrin had put Jesus on trial, but could not agree on his faults. By his own confession to be the Son of God, the trial ended in a guilty verdict. All that was left was the approval of the Romans and so to Pilate he was sent.

Pilate was accustomed to judging men. The moment Pilate looked in his face he knew that Jesus was no ordinary man. He took Jesus aside and questioned Him. His verdict was the opposite of the Jewish leaders. He simply said, “I find no fault in him.” He tried strategy to earn Jesus’ release by offering the detestable and wicked Barabbas, but the Jews did not bite. They preferred debauchery over holiness. Pilate tried drama with the washing of his hands but he could not wash away his guilt. He preferred convenience over justice.

With the predawn trial over and the cross raised up, there above his head they nailed the sign: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Perhaps this was a vain effort on the part of Pilate to try and gain a little self respect, but it was too little too late. Jesus was dying on the cross that Pilate ordered and at the hands of the soldiers that Pilate commanded. His reply to the request to change the message on the sign expresses an eternal truth as old as man: “What I have written I have written.”

- I. Men write on tables of wood and stone because they don't want to be forgotten. Men long to be immortal. The march of history reveals this motive in human nature. From the earliest forms of writing on walls and structures of ancient civilizations, we see kings and generals telling tales for the sake of future generations as if the recording of the story gives them life beyond the grave.
- II. Men write to create their versions of events for the sake of history, but they cannot undo the past. Pilate told the Jews that he would not change what he had written. He could have taken that sign down and written something else, but in reality, he could never undo what he had done that day. He had his chance, and it was now forever gone. No matter what he wrote and no matter how truthful it was, he could never lift himself from the black pits of moral disgrace. He could never erase from God's eternal record the deeds of his cowardice. How many since Pilate have wept at sundown and longed for yesterday to return. How many have knocked at the iron door of the past, beating their hands black and blue in a vain effort to retrace their steps now long gone.
- III. Men write in hopes of warning those that follow. Pilate declares what he thinks is the truth and in so doing sends a message to all later generations who have read this passage in John that Jesus is the Christ. He lacked the courage to challenge the wicked political system, but give him credit for one point of reference: he told the truth by declaring Jesus king of the Jews.

IV. Men write in hopes that their writing will come back to them in eternity. Pilate will again stand before Jesus, but their roles will be reversed. The disposition we make of Jesus here in this life will determine the disposition he will make of us for eternity. We will all face what we have written and what we have said.

No man lives to himself. We are what we are partly because of what our forefathers were. The heritage that they have passed on to us is either blessing or cursing us. Culture, inventions, and discoveries of past generations are the properties of our own day and the things by which we live. Pilate's statement suggests many things that are interwoven in the pattern of life on earth.

It suggests the age old desire to leave something behind. It is the universal cry of the lonely human heart as it passes from this earth to the beyond.

It suggests the impossibility of unbarring the doors of the past and walking again down the paths of yesterday.

It suggests that the things we leave behind affect the lives of generations unborn.

It suggests further that what we write on times swift moving pages will come back to be reckoned with at God's Day of Judgment.

From those distant days when primitive man chiseled his hieroglyphics on the walls of his cave home, there has been that inborn desire to leave a record behind that those who come after may see the footprints on the sands of time. Unearthed ruins dating back to the dawn of human history reveal some of those records in drawings and paintings. Digging down beneath the ruins of a small Greek town some years ago revealed that six cities by as many generations of men had been built on the same spot.

The sixth city was Homer's Troy, another example of the record left by generations of long ago. The pyramids are possibly the most outstanding example of men from the past attempting to communicate with men of the future. The Pharaohs gave vent to that desire by expending fabulous wealth and sacrificing thousands of lives just to satisfy their vain attempt to leave a mark for posterity.

Go into the great libraries of our country. Behold the volumes by Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Chaucer, Tennyson, Browning, Shelly, and Keates. They speak to us now, great works of literature. Go to the field of science. You will see the imprint of Newton, Watts, Pasteur, Fulton, and Edison. Wherever we move in life today, we find here and there the touch of these men in our modern lives. Go to the field of religion. It, too, has its part in passing down its hallmarks. On the walls of the catacombs can be seen the signs scratched there by the early Christians during the days of martyrdom. What would religious life and thought be today if there had been no records left by St. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Wesley, Clark, Bunyan and thousands of others?

I wish there were some wonderful place
In the Land of Beginning Again
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door
And never put on again.

He came to my desk with quivering lips
The lesson was done.
Dear teacher, he said, I want a new leaf
I've spoiled this one.
And for the old leaf stained and blotted
I gave him a new one all unspotted
And into his sad eyes smiled
Do better now my child.

I came to the throne with a quivering soul
The old year was done

Dear Father, I said, Have you a new leaf
I have spoiled this one.
For the old leaf stained and blotted
He gave me a new one all unspotted
And into my sad heart smiled
Do better now my child.