

The Case against Christ

By
Rev. H. P. Robinson

“Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done?” (Mark 15:14)

[Editor’s note: Preached at Holmes Theological Seminary in 1958.]

The trial of Jesus was in progress. It was a tense moment. It is so often the case in a courtroom when a man is on trial for his life. The people had brought their prisoner to Pilate with an accusation and a demand that he be put to death. Pilate, knowing that for envy they had delivered him, was trying to pin down this rabble mob to a clear reason for such a strong sentence. He wanted to find some crime that would relieve his guilt and make him feel justified in sentencing the prisoner to death on a Roman cross.

There seemed to be a faint hint of moral decency still burning in Pilate’s black heart as he vainly tried to release Jesus for lack of evidence. He wanted to satisfy the mob, yet the dying spark of his manhood told him in his heart that this prisoner was innocent. He knew the mob too well. He knew that he could only appease them with the death penalty, but first he tried every possible manner of interrogation to find a case against Christ.

Pilate is like so many who across the years have looked for an excuse to turn Jesus down. Many have tried to find some ground on which to stand and say, “No” to the Savior. Others have attempted to justify their wicked beliefs and behaviors. Still others have looked for someone to blame, some excuse for not going through to salvation. Men are still looking for a case against Christ, a reason for not standing on Christian principles. They want to appear right while doing wrong.

Did they have a case?

Accusation number one: Jesus stirred up the people. Yes, he stirred up the people, but God knows they needed stirring up. For 400 years they had been asleep. For 400 years no man had dared to question their authority. For 400 years they had reclined in their complacency. For 400 years the priesthood had sat in their smug exclusiveness.

They had seen suffering humanity, but had passed by on the other side, leaving them to die. Religious bigotry, racial pride, and self-righteousness had formed a crust about the priesthood that had hardened them to the needs of humanity. The tradition of the elders had replaced the truth of Holy Scripture. The temple was a den of thieves, and the worship of God was an endless procession of meaningless ritual that was as cold and dead as the heart of the elders.

This is what Jesus had questioned. This is why the people were stirred up. He had dared to call them hypocrites. He had dared to tell them that they were whitewashed sepulchers, full of dead men's bones. He had been so bold as to drive the thieves from the temple. He had championed the cause of the common people, the down-and-outers, the misfits, the sinners. There comes a time when people need to be stirred up. The apostles stirred people up and turned the world upside down. If your heart isn't stirred up once in awhile, you may backslide. The early preachers often either had a revival or a riot and sometimes both.

Martin Luther stirred up the people, and salvation by faith was restored to the church. John Wesley stirred up the people, and a holiness revival followed. D.L. Moody stirred up the people, and the Sunday school was born. William Seymour stirred up the people, and the Pentecostal fire fell on Azusa Street. G.B. Cashwell, J.H. King, and other pioneer leaders stirred up the people, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church began its

march across the years to reach men and women for Jesus Christ with the full Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The old time holiness preachers came over the horizon with a song book and a Bible. They attacked sin and stirred up the people. There were extremists, but the world needed an extreme word. It took that to stir up the people. They were criticized, persecuted, and hated, but they stirred up the people to repentance. So did Christ. So should we. Yes, the evidence is irrefutable – Jesus stirred up the people.

Accusation number two: Jesus was different. He broke with custom. He didn't wear a priestly robe. He didn't conform to the traditions of the day. How refreshing it is to find somebody who is not bound by fads and fashions. How hard we struggle to keep up with the times, to conform to custom, to be like everyone else. Jesus didn't. He was different. They couldn't put him in his place. They couldn't find a place for him. He just didn't fit. He wouldn't act like they wanted him to, and he wouldn't preach like they wanted him to. If he had only joined their ranks and followed their rules, he would have been accepted and honored, but he was unconventional, a nonconformist.

Jesus would stop in the middle of a sermon and pick up a crying child and bless it. He would turn aside on the way to the temple and call a hated Publican out of a tree in order to go to his home for a meal. He would leave the old road from Galilee to Jerusalem so that he could stop in Samaria and talk with a despised outcast of society. He would violate the law of Moses by stooping down and laying his hand upon the rotting brow of a loathsome leper and heal him. He would allow his disciples to pluck grains of wheat and eat them on the Sabbath day because they were hungry. On another Sabbath

day he would tell a lame man to take up his bed and walk, which infuriated the keepers of the law. Yes, the evidence is irrefutable - Jesus was different.

Accusation number three: Jesus scandalized their society. He was recognized as a teacher, a rabbi, yet he kept company with sinners. When he went to a publican's home, that publican was no longer a sinner. He spent time talking with the outcast woman at the well in Samaria, but when she left she was drinking from the fountain of living water. When he broke the Sabbath, he pointed out that the Sabbath was made for man and not the other way around. He came to seek and to save the lost. Yes, the evidence is irrefutable – Jesus scandalized their society.

Accusation number four: Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. “Blasphemy,” they cried. This makes the case for capital punishment. To prove his claim, he healed the lame man who was lowered through the roof of the house. They didn't accept it, but he forgave the man his sins anyway. Indeed, he did claim to be the Son of God. And he verified his claim:

By forgiving people of their sins

By healing the sick

By raising the dead

By turning water to wine

By mastering the natural elements when he stilled the storm

By casting out devils

By praying for his enemies

By saving a thief while he hung dying on a cross

By rising on the third day

By ascending into Heaven

By sending the Holy Ghost

By hearing our prayers and never forsaking us or leaving us alone.

He claimed to be the Son of God and in a thousand ways, he verified his claim. Out of the far gone past, the witnesses stand up to testify of his Sonship.

John the Baptist said that Jesus was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

Simon Peter said that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The centurion at the cross exclaimed, "Surely this was the Son of God."

The angels sang it until the Judean night skies rang with anthems proclaiming "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Simeon spoke out in the sunset hours of his life and said, "Now let thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes hath seen the Lord's Christ."

The Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove at his baptism by John and placed his stamp of approval on Jesus.

While from the courts of eternal light the thundering voice of Jehovah God reverberated around the world, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Millions of Christian martyrs have testified to his Sonship and died for their testimonies as the blazing faggots leaped high around them in a consuming fire.

Yes, the evidence is irrefutable – Jesus not only claimed he was the Son of God, he is the Son of God, indeed.

The evidence is solid. Jesus stirred up the people – yes! Jesus was different – yes! Jesus scandalized their society – yes! Jesus is the Son of God – yes! If these are the charges, then he is guilty as charged. And from the foundation of the world, the death sentence is proclaimed. The mob thought they had won the day. Pilate thought he had convicted yet another criminal, but instead, the very plan of God was being carried out right before their eyes.

The made their case, got what they wanted, but only because it was what God wanted, too.

Their motivations were evil; God's were pure.

Their hearts were hard and stubborn; God's was soft and compassionate.

They were full of hate; God was full of love.

The case against Christ is that he was born to die, the very son of God, the lamb who takes away the sin of the world – my sin, your sin, the sin of whosoever will come to the Lamb, to the Savior, to the King.