

## REV. DR. TALMAGE

The Eminent New York Divine's Sunday Sermon.

Subject: "Conscience."

Text: "He took water and washed his hands to the multitude, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye it not?"—Matthew xxvii, 24.

At about 7 o'clock in the evening, the marble stairs of a palace and across the floors of richest mosaic and under ceilings dyed with all the splendors of color and between snowbanks of white and glistening sculpture, passes a poor, pale, sick young man of thirty-three, already condemned to death, the way to be condemned again.

Jesus of Nazareth is His name.

Coming out to meet Him on this tessellated pavement is an unscrupulous, compromising, timeserving, cowardly man, with a few traces of sympathy and fair dealing left in his composition—Governor Pontius Pilate. Did ever such opposite meet? Luxury and pain, selfishness and generosity, arrogance and humility, sin and holiness, midnight and noon.

The bloated lipped governor takes the cushioned seat, but the prisoner stands. His wrists manacled. In a semicircle around the prisoner are the sandhards, with flashing eyes and brandished fists, prosecuting this case in the name of religion, for the better part of which have been religious prosecutions, and which have taken hold of a good man he makes up by intemperance for brevity of occupation. If you have never seen an ecclesiastical court trying a man, then you have no idea of the foaming infernalism of these old religious sandhards.

Governor Pilate cross questions the prisoner and hails him away. He is innocent and wants to let Him go. His action is also increased by some one who comes to the governor and whispers in his ear. The governor puts his hand behind his ear so as to catch the words almost inaudible. It is a message from Claudia Procula, his wife, who has had a dream about the innocence of this prisoner and about the danger of executing him. He wakes up from this morning dream in time to send his message to her husband, then on the judicial bench, and with the protest of his wife, and the entire failure of the sandhards to make out their case, Governor Pilate resolved to discharge the prisoner from custody.

But the intimation of such a thing brings up the governor an equinoctial storm of indignation, which will report him to the emperor of Rome, they will have him recalled, they will send him up home, and he will be hung for treason, for the emperor at Rome has already a suspicion in regard to Pilate, and that suspicion does not cease until Pilate is banished and commits suicide.

So Governor Pontius Pilate compromises the matter, giving Jesus Christ to be whipped instead of assassinated. Alas, for this governor, Pontius Pilate! That night after the court had adjourned, and the sandhards had gone home, and noting was heard outside the room but the step of the sentinel, I see Pontius Pilate arise from his tattered and sleepless couch and go to the laver and begin to wash his hands, crying, "O Lord, our crimson spot! Tell it not to me and to God, and to the night, my crime? Is there no alkali to move these dreadful stains? Is there no chemistry to dissolve this carnage? Must I to the day of my death carry the blood of this innocent man on my heart and hand? Out, thou crimson spot!" The worst thing is that he is an evil conscience, and the best thing a man can have is what Paul calls a good conscience.

But is there no such thing as moral purification? If a man is a sinner once, must he always be a sinner, and an unforgiven sinner? We have all had conscience after us. Or do you tell me that all the words of your life have been just right, and all the thoughts of your life just right, and all the actions of your life just right, and all the sins of your life just right, and all the audience are saying within themselves, "Is there no such thing as moral purification?" There is no laver in which the soul may wash and be clean? Yes, yes, tell it in song, tell it in sermon, tell it in prayer, tell it to the world, you are a Pontius Pilate, and do not know it. You commit the very same sin that Pilate committed. You have crucified the Lord of Glory. But if nine-tenths of this audience are made up of thoughtful and intelligent people, then there is no such thing as moral purification. Tell it in song, tell it in sermon, tell it in prayer, tell it to the hemispheres. That is what David cried out for when he said, "Wash me thoroughly from my sin, and cleanse me from mine iniquities." In another place, when the temple was built, then the laver was an immense affair called the brazen sea, and oh, how deep were the floods there gathered! And there were ten lavers besides—five at the right and five at the left—and each laver had 300 gallons of water. And the outside of these lavers was carved and chased with palm trees, delicately cut, you could almost see the leaves tremble, so thin were the walls. That magnificent laver of the old dispensation is a feeble type of the more glorious laver of our dispensation—our sun.

"It is a sight worth seeing to watch a herd come down a rocky hillside to water on a hot midsummer day. There is a clatter of hoofs and jingle of bells as they rush down the declivity, the leaders not stopping until they cool their hot flanks half-way across the stream, the young colts prancing and kicking up their heels, the mothers following sedately. Then the jingle-jangle of the bells cease, and the thundering hoofs are noiseless for a space as the herd stand quiet drinking their fill.

"The Western ranchman puts a bell around his horse's neck, as the people of the East place bells about the necks of their cattle, to aid in their detection when at large. The intelligent animal sometimes plays a trick on his master. He gets behind some thick growing clump of cedar or mesquite and stands absolutely motionless so that his bell will not make the slightest sound. The man in search of him listens intently for the bell. He is sure that he knows the sound of that horse's bell from a dozen others. He hears nothing and goes much further than he had anticipated wondering how that precious horse could have strayed so far hobbled as he is. All the while that precious horse is in comfortable hiding in a cool, shady place, no doubt enjoying the joke, or the thought of the long journey or task he has escaped.

"Many horses becoming accustomed to the hobbles, can get over the ground rapidly and without inconvenience. They raise the hobbled legs high in air and jump about like a kangaroo. When entirely grass fed, horses are frequently staked out to graze, especially if their riders desire to get possession of them at a stated hour. Occasionally the animals get wound up in the long rope and are choked to death.

"When cowboys go on a round-up or long journey, a number of horses are made to carry packs or are driven along with the outfit that they may be at hand when wanted. The discarded mounts are turned loose wherever they may happen to be, and are looked up afterward at the owner's leisure, a task not difficult, as owing to the practice of branding, information regarding the whereabouts of any animal can readily be gained. The practiced eye of the ranchman or cowboy can note like a flash the brand of any horse or cow he happens to pass.

"The Texas pony is a stranger to the corrycumb and knows not the luxury of a good dressing or rubbing down, yet his coat is glossy and his appearance not unkempt. This is probably because he changes his quarters so often. He would be astonished at the idea of any one being solicitous as to whether he was too warm to drink or too tired to eat. When he comes to water he enjoys a draught, and when he has none he goes without with a cheerful philosophy. If he chances to take in a few thorns with his mess of mesquite beans, or prickly pears, it does not affect either his mind or his digestion; in fact, I have never heard the digestion of a Texas pony questioned."

"I have been for a long while, Oh, if I had only spared the innocent and the imbecile and the crippled." Rousseau declared in old age, but it is to be conjectured his words still gave him sleepless nights. Charles II, King of Spain could not sleep unless he had in the room a confessor and two friars. Cattina had such bitter memories he was startled at the least sound. Cardinal Beaufort, having slain the Duke of Gloucester, often in the night would say, "Away, away, why do you look at me?" King III, Charles I, having slain his two nephews, would sometimes in night shout from his couch and clutch a sword, fighting apparitions. Dr. Webster, having slain Parkman in Boston, and while waiting for his doom, complained to the jailer that the prisoners on the other side of the wall at night long kept charging him with wrongs. Dr. Webster, though there were no prisoners on the other side of the wall, it was the voice of his own conscience.

Thomas Oliver was one of John Wesley's preachers. The early part of his life had been full of recklessness, and he had made debts wherever he could borrow. He was converted to God, and then he went forth to pay his debts. He had a small amount of property to his name, and everybody set out to pay his debts, and everybody knew he was in earnest, and to consummate the last payment he had to sell his horse and saddle and bridle. That was conscience. That is converted conscience. That is religion.

Frank Tiebout, a converted rascal, had a half a pint of liquor on hand at the time of his conversion, and he sold his legs and barrels and demijohns in a wagon and took them down in front of the old church where he had been converted and had everything emptied into the street. That is religion. Why the thousands of dollars sent every year to the United States Treasury at Washington as "conscience money"? Why it simple honesty is not paid to the State, and are attorneys and others even who sometimes retain that which does not belong to them, and these men are converted, or under powerful pressure of conscience, and make restitution. If all the monies out of which the State and the United States treasuries have been defrauded should come back to their rightful exchequers, there would be enough to pay all the State debts and all the United States debt by day after tomorrow.

Conversion amounts to nothing unless the heart is converted, and the pockethole is converted, and the cash drawer is converted, and the ledger is converted, and the fireproof safe is converted, and the pigeonhole containing the correspondence is converted, an his improvements. In a word, he has converted his soul that sings in the parlor, and the dog that licks the platter after the meal, an the cat that comes bounding from the kitchen to greet him. A man half converted, a quarter converted, or a thousandth part converted is not converted at all. What will be the great boon in the day of judgment? Conscience, Consistency, Misimprovement, Opportunities, Consistency, Living before the eyes, sins. Conscience brings up the past. Alas, for this governor, Pontius Pilate! That night after the court had adjourned, and the sandhards had gone home, and noting was heard outside the room but the step of the sentinel, I see Pontius Pilate arise from his tattered and sleepless couch and go to the laver and begin to wash his hands, crying, "O Lord, our crimson spot! Tell it not to me and to God, and to the night, my crime? Is there no alkali to move these dreadful stains? Is there no chemistry to dissolve this carnage? Must I to the day of my death carry the blood of this innocent man on my heart and hand? Out, thou crimson spot!" The worst thing is that he is an evil conscience, and the best thing a man can have is what Paul calls a good conscience.

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"When the laver holding rivers of saliva, having for its pedestal the Rock of Ages, carves with the fingers of the hand of Judah's tribe, and having palm branches for victory and wings suggestive of the soul's flight toward God in prayer and the soul's flight heavenward when we die. Come ye auditory, and wash away all your sins, however aggravated, and all your sorrows, however for all sin and unconsciousness, the fountain, the worst. You need not come you need not go to life that you could imagine you saw the laver in the ancient tabernacle or in the ancient temple? The laver in the ancient tabernacle was made out of the women's mantle looking glasses. It was a great basin, and when the temple was built, then the laver was an immense affair called the brazen sea, and oh, how deep were the floods there gathered!

"And there were ten lavers besides—five at the right and five at the left—and each laver had 300 gallons of water. And the outside of these lavers was carved and chased with palm trees, delicately cut, you could almost see the leaves tremble, so thin were the walls. That magnificent laver of the old dispensation is a feeble type of the more glorious laver of our dispensation—our sun.

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