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*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

Then the whole company of [the Jewish leaders] arose and brought [Jesus] before Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this Man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king." And Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "You have said so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this Man."...

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this Man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining Him before you, behold, I did not find this Man guilty of any of your charges against Him. Neither did Herod, for he sent Him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish and release Him."...

Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this Man was innocent!" And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all His acquaintances and the women who had followed Him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.<sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

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In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

I wonder how well these two men slept that night?

One the judge and one the executioner.

Both of them came to the same conclusion: Jesus was an innocent man.

Pilate actually came to that decision 3 times before sentencing Jesus to crucifixion.

He knew that it was **out of envy that** the chief priests **had delivered Him up**.<sup>Matthew 27:18 & Mark 15:10</sup>

And yet, it is evident that Pilate didn't realize how innocent Jesus was.

Not just innocent of these accusations, but truly innocent of any and all sin.

To him, Jesus might have seemed like any other man, any other Jew.

If not guilty of these accusations, then probably guilty of others.

So to Pilate, perhaps it made sense that even after declaring of Jesus,

**"nothing deserving death has been done by Him,"**

he thought that it was okay for him to say: **"I will therefore punish and release Him."**

Or was Pilate trying to manipulate the situation by trying to pacify the Jewish leaders

by only beating this innocent Man, in hopes that he could avoid sentencing Jesus to death.

But was this perversion of justice any less sinful?

Even when he tried to evade judgment by putting forth Barabbas,

a convicted and condemned robber, murderer, and insurrectionist,

the Jewish leaders and crowd cried for Barabbas' release and Jesus' crucifixion.

Two injustices in one decision, the innocent Man in place of the guilty one.

Pilate finally gave in to the demands of the crowd, but if you read carefully,  
you will notice that he never declared Jesus guilty.  
St. Luke (and the others) simply tell us: **So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.**  
**... he delivered Jesus over to their will.** Luke23:24&25

I wonder how Pilate slept that night?

Pilate, Herod — even Pilate's wife — all knew Jesus was innocent.

Sure, the crowd didn't riot through Jerusalem, and the High Priests were off his back... for now.

Sure, he now had something in common with Herod upon which to build a friendship.

But how did his lethal decision sit with him throughout the day?

When the Jews asked for the legs be broken so that the bodies could be removed before twilight?

When Joseph of Arimathea came to ask for the body so quickly?

How did that conversation go with his wife as they prepared for bed that evening?

Can you feel the guilt... for injustices that you have knowingly committed,  
whether that be as a parent or sibling or employer or teacher or some other position?

When you have decided in favor of your own comfort, rather than seeking the truth.

When you have decided based on your favorites, rather than the facts before you.

Maybe you even feel guilt for verdicts that you were convinced were correct

but later found out that you misjudged,

or that, though you were correct, the fallout was devastating.

Then perhaps you can sympathize with Pilate and the many others in authority  
who are constantly put in such positions.

But while sympathizing with them, this does not take away your guilt or make you innocent.

Nor does contrasting yourself to them, saying, "I would never knowingly do such a thing."

Instead, a true examination of your own heart is needed.

If you can sympathize with them because you feel that guilt too,

then what you need to hear and receive is the outcome of Pilate's decision.

Pilate certainly was not just.

The false accusers and the convicted/condemned criminal went free,

while the innocent and falsely accused was condemned to death.

But this great injustice is the world's greatest good.

It is your greatest good.

Let's hear of it through the witness of the centurion.

The centurion was also put in a bad spot; he was simply carrying out his orders.

Jesus had been condemned and it was his job to execute.

Now, don't misunderstand: this doesn't mean that he was guiltless.

He was doing his job... with relish.

**The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine and saying,**

**"If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"** Luke23:36-37

The Roman soldiers weren't just mocking Jesus, but the Jewish nation and their "king."

He was by no means guiltless.

But in God's mercy, he also got to hear the divine conversation from the cross.

He heard Jesus pray for him, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" <sup>Luke 23:34</sup>

He got to hear his Savior promise paradise to the condemned criminal next to Him.

He got to see and hear the Son of God tenderly care for His mother even in His agony.

He heard the cry of anguish, "**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**" <sup>27:46</sup>

He got to experience the 3 hours of darkness that just happened to coincide with Jesus' execution.

and to hear Jesus' final cries: "**It is finished.**" <sup>John 19:30</sup>

and "**Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!**" <sup>Luke 23:46</sup>

St. Luke doesn't mention the earthquake that happened at Jesus' death, but St. Matthew does. <sup>27:51</sup>

After all this, what does the centurion affirm: "**Certainly this Man was innocent!**"

Was he speaking like Pilate, declaring Jesus only to be innocent of the false accusations?

Or might he have been thinking a little more deeply?

After all, many people have suffered and died being innocent of false accusations,

but never have their deaths been surrounded by such acts of God.

I wonder how he slept that night.

I bet these events stuck with him as he laid down in his bed,

wondering what had he done, what had he taken part in?

wondering if, as he had said, "Truly this was the Son of God!",

then what was God's verdict to be on him?

If God would do all this at the death of His innocent son,

what could and would God do at the death of this guilty centurion?

what could and would He do at your death?

But the centurion didn't have to wonder... and neither do you.

Jesus had already prayed for him that his sins not be counted against him.

And Jesus had already accomplished his redemption.

Yes, Jesus was innocent, but He had purposefully died for the guilty.

That innocent, holy, precious blood of Jesus

that had splattered on the centurion while he nailed Jesus to the cross,

that had sprinkled on him as his spear pierced Jesus' side,

that he had to wash off his hands and that covered his clothes,

is the same pure-white garment of innocent blood

that covers you as a baptized child of God;

that has washed all your guilt and injustice away,

that sprinkles you with a clean conscience,

and let's you sleep easy at night, at peace with God – for your redemption: "**It is finished.**"

and He declares you to be as innocent as His Son, Jesus.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*