

## SERMON XXVII.

Of the signal Providence, which directed and ordered the  
Title affixed to the cross of CHRIST.

LUKE xxiii. 38.

*And a Superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew; This is the King of the Jews.*

**B**EFORE I pass on to the Manner of Christ's death, I shall consider the title affixed to the cross; in which very much of the wisdom of Providence was discovered. It was the manner of the Romans, that the equity of their proceedings might the more clearly appear to the people, when they crucified any man, to publish the cause of his death, in a table written in capital letters, and placed over the head of the crucified. And that there might be at least, a shew and face of justice in Christ's death, he also shall have his title or superscription.

The worst and most unrighteous actions labour to cover and shroud themselves under pretension of equity. Sin is so shameful a thing, that it cares not to own its name. Christ shall have a table written for him also. This writing one evangelist calls the *Accusation*, *αἰτία*, Matth. xxvii. 37. Another calls it the *Title*, *τίτλος*, John xix. 19. Another the *Inscription* or *Superscription*, *ἐπιγραφή* so the text. And another the *Superscription of his Accusation*, *ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας*, Mark xv. 26. In short, it was a fair legible writing, intended to express the fact or crime, for which the person died.

This was their usual manner, though sometimes we find it was published by the voice of the common cryer. As in the case of \* Attalus the martyr, who was led about the amphitheatre, one proclaiming before him, *This is Attalus the Christian*. But it was customary and usual to express the crime in a written table, as the text expresses it. Wherein these three things offer themselves to your consideration.

*First*, The character or description of Christ, contained in that writing. And he is described by his kingly dignity: † *This is the King of the Jews*. The very office, which but a little before, they had reproached and derided, bowing the knee to him in mockery, saying, *Hail King of the Jews*: the Providence of God so orders it, that therein he shall be vindicated and honoured. *This*

\* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. 5. c. 1.

† The full title was, *This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews*. Par.

is the *King of the Jews*: Or, as the other evangelists complete it, *This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews*.

*Secondly*, The person that drew his character or title. It was Pilate; he that but now condemned him: he that was his *judge*, shall be his *herald*, to proclaim his glory. For the title is honourable. Surely, this was not from himself, for he was Christ's enemy; but rather than Christ should want a tongue to clear him, the tongue of an enemy shall do it.

*Thirdly*, The time when this honour was done him: It was when he was at the lowest ebb of his glory; when shame and reproach were heaped on him by all hands. When all the disciples had forsaken him, and were fled. Not one left to proclaim his innocency, or speak a word in his vindication. Then doth the providence of God as strangely, as powerfully, over-rule the heart and pen of Pilate\*, to draw this title for him, and affix it to his cross. Surely we must look higher than Pilate in this thing, and see how Providence serves itself by the hands of Christ's adversaries. Pilate writes in honour of Christ, and stiffly defends it too. Hence our observation is,

Doct. 1. *That the dignity of Christ was openly proclaimed, and defended by an enemy; and that, in the time of his greatest reproaches and sufferings.*

To open this mystery of providence to you, that you may not stand idly gazing upon Christ's title, as many then did; we must, *First*, Consider the nature and quality of this title. *Secondly*, What hand the Providence of God had in this matter. *Thirdly*, And then draw forth the proper uses and improvements of it.

*First*, To open the nature and quality of Christ's title or inscription; let it be thoroughly considered, and we shall find,

*First*, That it was an *extraordinary* title, varying from all examples of that kind; and directly crossing the main design and end of their own custom. For, as I hinted before, the end of it was to clear the equity of their proceedings, and shew the people how justly they suffered those punishments inflicted on them for such crimes. But lo, here is a title expressing no crime at all, and so vindicating Christ's innocency †. This some of them perceived, and moved Pilate to change it, not, *This is*, but, *This is he* that said, *I am the King of the Jews*. In that, as they conceived,

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\* Perhaps the title was written according to custom, but our thoughts must rise higher, even to the purpose of God, who would, by the writing of Pilate, have Christ publicly proclaimed King of the church. *Par.*

† This was very remarkable, that a title was affixed which imported no ignominy. *Calvin.*

lay his crime. O how strange and wonderful a thing was this ! But what shall we say ! it was a day of wonders and extraordinary things. As there was never such a person crucified before, so there was never such a title affixed to the cross before.

*Secondly*, As it was an extraordinary, so it was a public title, both written and published with the greatest advantage of spreading itself far and near, among all people, that could be, “ for it was written in three languages \*, and to those most known in the world at that time.” The Greek tongue was then known in most parts of the world. The Hebrew was the Jews native language. And the Latin the language of the Romans. So that it being written both in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, it was easy to be understood both by Jews and Gentiles.

And indeed, unto this the providence of God had a special eye, to make it notorious and evident to all the world ; for even so all things designed for public view, and knowledge were written. Josephus tells us of certain pillars, on which was engraven in letters of Greek, and Latin, “ It is a wickedness for strangers to enter into the holy place †.” So the soldiers of Gordian, the third emperor, when he was slain upon the borders of Persia, raised a monument for him, and engraved his memorial upon it, in Greek, Latin, Persic, Judaic, and Egyptiac letters, that all people might read the same. And as it was written in three learned languages, so it was exposed to view in a public place ; and at that time, when multitudes of strangers, as well as Jews, were at Jerusalem ; it was at the time of the passover ; so that all things concurred to spread and divulge the innocency of Christ, vindicated in this title.

*Thirdly*, As it was a public, so it was an honourable title. Such was the nature of it, saith † Bucer ; that in the midst of death, Christ began to triumph by it. And by reason thereof, the cross began to change its own nature, and instead of a rack, or engine of torture, it became a throne of majesty. Yea, it might be called now, as the church itself is, *The pillar and ground of truth* ; for it held out much of the gospel, much of the glory of Christ ; as that pillar doth, to which a royal proclamation is affixed.

*Fourthly*, It was a *vindicating* title : it cleared up the honour, dignity, and innocency of Christ, against all the false imputations, calumnies, and blasphemies, which were cast upon him before, by the wicked tongues, both of Jews and Gentiles.

They had called him a deceiver, an usurper, a blasphemer ; they rent their clothes, in token of their detestation of his blasphemy ;

\* *Tribus linguis toto orbe tunc vulgatissimis, scribi voluit ; ut ab omnibus legi, et intelligi potuit.* Pareus.

† *In locum sanctum ingredi alienigenis nefas est.*

‡ *Bucer in loc.*

because he made himself the Son of God, and King of Israel. But now in this, they acknowledged him to be both Lord and Saviour. Not a mock king, as they had made him before. So that herein the honour of Christ was fully vindicated.

*Fifthly*, Moreover it was a *predicting* and *presaging* title\*. Evidently foreshewing the propagation of Christ's kingdom, and the spreading of his name and glory among all kindreds, nations, tongues, and languages. As Christ hath right to enter into all the kingdoms of the earth, by his gospel, and set up his throne in every nation: so it was presaged by this title that he should do so. And that both Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins should be called to the knowledge of him. Nor is it a wonder, that this should be predicted by wicked Pilate, when Caiaphas himself, a man every way as wicked as he, had prophesied to the same purpose, John xi. 51, 52. For being High-Priest that year, he prophesied, That *Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad*. Yea, many have prophesied in Christ's name, who, for all that, shall never be owned by him, Matth. vii. 22.

*Sixthly*, And lastly, It was an immutable title. The Jews endeavoured, but could not persuade Pilate to alter it. To all their importunities he returns this resolute answer, "What I have written, I have written;" as if he should say, Urge me no more, I have written his title, I cannot, I will not, alter a letter, a point thereof. "Surely the constancy of Pilate at this time can be attributed to nothing but divine special Providence †." Most wonderful! that he, who before was as unconstant as a reed shaken by the wind, is now as fixed as a pillar of brass.

And yet more wonderful, that he should write down that very particular in the title of Christ, *This is the King of the Jews*, which was the very thing that so scared him but a little before, and was the very consideration that moved him to give sentence. What was now become of the fear of Cæsar? that Pilate dares to be Christ's herald, and publicly to proclaim him, *The King of the Jews*. This was the title.

*Secondly*, We shall next enquire what hand the Divine Providence had in this business.

And indeed, the providence of God in this hour, acted gloriously, and wonderfully, these five ways.

*First*, In over-ruling the heart and hand of Pilate in the draught and stile of it, and that contrary to his own inclination. I doubt

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\* He would have it written in three languages, that this might be a presage of the future calling, not only of all the Hebrews, but also of all the Gentiles to the kingdom of Christ. *Par.*

† *Hæc Pilati constantia divinæ providentiæ tribuenda est.* Calvin.

not but Pilate himself was ignorant of, and far enough from designing that which the wisdom of providence aimed at in this matter \*. He was a wicked man, and had no love to Christ. He had given sentence of death against him ; yet this is he that proclaimed him to be *Jesus, King of the Jews*. It so over-ruled his pen, that he could not write what was in his own heart and intention, but the quite contrary ; even a fair and public testimony of the kingly office of the Son of God, *This is the King of the Jews*.

*Secondly*, Herein the wisdom of Providence was gloriously displayed, in applying a present, proper, public remedy to the reproaches and blasphemies which Christ had then newly received in his name and honour. The superstitious Jews wound him, and Heathen Pilate prepares a plaister to heal him : they reproach, he vindicates ; they throw the dirt, he washes it off. Oh the profound and inscrutable wisdom of Providence !

*Thirdly*, Moreover, Providence eminently appeared at this time in keeping so timorous a person, a man of so base a spirit, that would not stick at any thing to please the people, from receding, or giving ground in the least to their importunities. Is Pilate become a man of such resolution and constancy ? whence is this ? but from the God of the spirits of all flesh, who now flowed in so powerfully upon his spirit, that he could not chuse but write ; and when he had written, had no more power to alter what he had written, than he had to refuse to write it.

*Fourthly*, Herein also much of the wisdom of Providence appeared, in casting the ignominy of the death of Christ upon those very men who ought to bear it. Pilate was moved by divine instinct, at once to clear Christ, and accuse them. For it is as if he had said, you have moved me to crucify your king, I have crucified him, and now let the ignominy of his death rest upon your heads, who have extorted this from me. He is righteous, the crime is not his but yours.

*Fifthly*, And lastly, The providence of God wonderfully discovered itself (as before was noted) in fixing this title to the cross of Christ, when there was so great a confluence of all sorts of people to take notice of it. So that it could never have been more advantageously published, than it was at this time. So that we may say, How wonderful are the works of God ! “ His ways are in the sea, his paths in the great deeps ; his footsteps are not known : ” His providence hath a prospect beyond the understandings of all creatures.

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\* The Divine Providence which over-ruled the pen of Pilate, had far higher views. *Calvin.*

*Inference 1.* Hence it follows, *That the providence of our God can, and often doth over-rule the counsels and actions of the worst of men to his own glory.*

It can serve itself by them that oppose it, and bring about the glory and honour of Christ, by those very men, and means, which are designed to lay it in the dust. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee," Psal. lxxvi. 10. The Jews thought when they crowned Christ with thorns, bowed the knee, and mocked him, led him to Golgotha and crucified him; that now they had utterly despoiled him of all his kingly dignities; and yet even there he is proclaimed a king. Thus the dispersion of the Jews, upon the death of Stephen, spread the gospel far and near, "For they went every where preaching the word," Acts viii. 4. Thus Paul's bonds for the gospel fell out to the furtherance of the gospel, Phil. i. 12. O the depth of Divine Wisdom! to propagate and establish the interest of Jesus Christ, by those very means that seem to import its destruction: that extracts a medicine out of poison! How great a support should this be to the faith of God's people! When all things seem to run cross to their hopes and happiness! "Let Israel therefore hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption," Psal. cxxx. 7. i. e. He is never at a loss for means to promote and serve his own ends.

*Inf. 2.* Hence likewise it follows, *That the greatest services performed to Christ accidentally and undesignedly, shall never be accepted nor rewarded of God.* Pilate did Christ an eminent piece of service. He did that for Christ that not one of his own disciples at that time durst do; and yet this service was not accepted of God, because he did it not designedly for his glory, but from the mere over-rulings of providence.

If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to what a man hath, saith the apostle, 2 Cor. viii. 12. The eye of God is first and mainly upon the will; if that be sincere and right for God, small things will be accepted; and if not, the greatest shall be abhorred. So 1 Cor. ix. 17. If I do this thing (i. e. preach the gospel) willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation is committed to me, *q. d.* If I upon pure principles of faith and love, from my heart, designing the glory of God, and delighting to promote it by my ministry, do cheerfully and willingly apply myself to the preaching of the gospel, I shall have acceptance and reward with God; but if my work be a burden to me, and the service of God esteemed as a bondage, why then providence may use me for the dispensing of the gospel to others, but I myself shall lose both reward and comfort. As it doth not excuse my sin, that God can bring glory to himself out of it; so

neither doth it justify an action that God hath praise and honour accidentally by it. Paul knew that even the strife and envy in which some preached Christ, should turn to his salvation; and yet he was not at all beholden to them for promoting his salvation that way. So Pilate here promotes the honour of Jesus Christ to whom he had no love, and whose glory he did not at all design in this thing; and therefore hath neither acceptance nor reward with God.

O therefore, whatever you do for Christ, do it heartily, designedly, for his glory: of a ready and willing mind; with pure and sincere aims at his glory; for this is that the Lord more respects, than the greatest services by accident.

*Inf. 3.* Would not Pilate recede from what he had written on Christ's behalf? *How shameful a thing is it for Christians to retract what they have said or done on Christ's behalf?* When Pilate had asserted him to be king of the Jews, he maintained his assertion, and all the importunity of Christ's enemies shall not move him an hairs breadth from it. "What I have written, I have written," *q. d.* I have said it, and I will not revoke it. Did Pilate say, "What I have written, I have written:" and shall not we say, What we have believed, we have believed: and what we have professed, we have professed? What we have engaged to Christ, we have engaged. We will stand to what we have done for him: we will never recant our former ownings of and appearances for Christ.

As God's election, so your profession must be irrevocable. O let him that is holy be holy still. That counsel given by a reverend divine in this case, is both safe and good. "Be sure, (saith he) you stand on good ground, and then resolve to stand your ground against all the world. Follow God, and fear not men. Art thou godly! repent not whatsoever thy religion cost thee. Let sinners repent, but let not saints repent. Let saints repent of their faults, but not of their faith: of their iniquities, but not of their righteousness. Repent not of your righteousness, lest you afterward repent of your repentance.—Repent not of your zeal, or your forwardness, or activity in the holy ways of the Lord.—Wish not yourselves a step farther back, or a cubit lower in your stature, in the grace of God. Wish not any thing undone, concerning which God will say, Well done."

In Galen's time it was a proverbial expression, when any one would shew the impossibility of a thing; you may as soon turn a Christian from Christ as do it.

A true heart-choice of Christ is without reserves, and what is without reserves, will be without repentance. There is a stiffness and stoutness of spirit which is our sin. But this is our glory, in

the matters of God, saith Luther, I assume this title, *Cedo nulli*, "I yield to none:" If ye be hot and cold, off and on; profess, and retract your profession. He that condemned Christ with his lips, will condemn you by his example. Resolute Pilate shall be your judge.

*Inf.* 4. Did Pilate affix such an honourable, vindicating title to the cross? *Then the cross of Christ is a dignified cross.* Then the cross and sufferings of Christ are attended with glory and honour. Remember when your hearts begin to startle at the sufferings and reproaches of Christ, there is an honourable title upon the cross of Christ. And as it was upon his, so it will be upon your cross also, if ye suffer for Christ. Moses saw it, which made him esteem the very reproaches of Christ, above all the treasures of Egypt, Heb. xi. 26. How did the martyrs glory in their sufferings for Christ! calling their chains of iron, chains of gold; and their manacles, bracelets.

I remember it is storied of \* Ludovicus Marsacus, a knight of France, that when he, with divers other Christians of an inferior rank and degree in the world, were condemned to die for religion, and the goaler had bound them with chains, but did not bind him, being a more honourable person than the rest: he was offended greatly by that omission, and said, "Why do not you honour me with a chain for Christ also, and create me a knight of that illustrious order?"

"To you (saith the apostle) it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake," Phil. i. 29. There is a two-fold honour attending the cross of Christ; one in the very sufferings themselves; another, as the reward and fruit of them. To be called out to suffer for Christ, is a great honour. Yea, an honour peculiar to the saints. The damned suffer from Christ, the wicked suffer for their sins. The angels glorify Christ by their active but not by their passive obedience. This is reserved as a special honour for saints.

And as there is a great deal of honour in being called forth to suffer on Christ's account; so Christ will confer special honour upon his suffering saints, in the day of their reward, Mat. x. 32. "He that confesses me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." O Sirs, one of these days the Lord will break out of heaven, with a shout, accompanied with myriads of angels, and ten thousands of his saints, those glittering courtiers of heaven. The heavens and earth shall flame and melt before him; and it shall be very tempestuous round about him;

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\* *Cur me non quoque torque donas, et illustris illius ordinis militem non creas?* Thuan. Hist.



the graves shall open, the sea and earth shall yield up their dead. You shall see him ascending the awful throne of judgment, and all flesh gathered before his face; even multitudes, multitudes that no man can number. And then to be brought forth by Christ before that great assembly of angels and saints: and there to have an honourable mention and remembrance made of your labours, and sufferings, your pains, patience and self-denial, of all your sufferings, and losses for Christ; and to hear from his mouth, *Well done, good and faithful servant*: O what honour is this! Yet this shall be done to the man that now chuses sufferings for Christ, rather than sin; *That esteems his reproaches greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.*

I tell you, It is an honour the angels have not. I make no doubt, but they would be glad, (had they bodies of flesh as we have), to lay their necks on the block for Christ. But this is the saints peculiar privilege. The apostles *went away from the council rejoicing, that they were honoured to be dishonoured for Christ*: Or, as we translate it \*, “counted worthy to suffer shame for him,” Acts v. 41. Surely, if there be any *stigmata laudis*, “marks of honour,” they are such as we receive for Christ’s sake. If there be any shame that hath glory in it, it is the reproach of Christ, and the shame you suffer for his name.

*Inf. 5.* Did Pilate so stiffly assert and defend the honour of Christ? *What doubt can then be made of the success of Christ’s interest, and the prosperity of his cause: when the very enemies thereof are made to serve it?*

Rather than Christ shall want honour, Pilate, the man that condemned him, shall do him honour. And as it fared with his person, just so with his interest also. How often have the people of God received mercies from the hands of their enemies? Rev. xii. 16. “The earth helped the woman,” i. e. wicked men did the church service. So that this may singularly relieve us against all our despondencies and fears of the miscarriage of the interest of Christ.

That people can never be ruined, who thrive by their losses; conquer by being conquered; multiply by being diminished: Whose worst enemies are made to do that for them, which friends cannot or dare not do. See you a Heathen Pilate proclaiming the honour and innocency of Christ; God will not want instruments to honour Christ by. If others cannot, his very enemies shall.

*Inf. 6.* Did Pilate vindicate Christ in drawing up such a title to be affixed to his cross? then hence it follows, *That God will, sooner or later, clear up the innocency and integrity of his people, who*

\* Οτι υπερ τε ονοματος αυτου καταξιωθησαν ατιμασθησαι.

*commit their cause to him.* Christ's name was clouded with many reproaches; wounded through and through, by the blasphemous tongues of his malicious enemies. He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously, 1 Pet. ii. 23. and see how soon God vindicates him. That is sweet and seasonable counsel for us, when our names are clouded with unjust censures, Psal. xxxvii. 5, 6. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day." Joseph was accused of incontinency; David of treason; Daniel of disobedience; Elijah of troubling Israel; Jeremiah of revolting; Amos of preaching against the king; the Apostles of sedition, rebellion, and alteration of laws; Christ himself of gluttony, sorcery, blasphemy, sedition; but how did all these honourable names wade out of their reproaches, as the sun out of a cloud! God cleared up their honour for them even in this world. "Slanders (saith one) are but as soap, which though it soils and daubs for the present, yet it helps to make the garment more clean and shining." "When hair is shaven, it comes the thicker, and with a new increase; so when the razor of censure hath (saith \* one) made your heads bare, and brought on the baldness of reproach, be not discouraged, God hath a time to bring forth your righteousness as the light, by an apparent conviction, to dazzle and discourage your adversaries."

The world was well changed, when Constantine kissed the hollow of Paphnutius' eye, which was ere while put out for Christ. Scorn and reproach is but a little cloud, that is soon blown over. But suppose ye should not be vindicated in this world, but die under a cloud upon your names; be sure God will clear it up, and that to purpose in that great day. Then shall the righteous, (even in this respect) shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Then every detracting mouth shall be stopped, and no more cruel arrows of reproach shot at the white of your reputation.

Be patient therefore, my brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. "The Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all; and to convince all that are ungodly, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed. And of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him," Jude 14, 15. Then shall they retract their censures, and alter their opinions of the saints. If Christ will be our compurgator, we need not fear who are our accusers. If your names, for his sake, be cast out as evil, and spurned in the dirt;

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\* Manton on James, p. 227.

Christ will deliver it you again in that day whiter than the snow in Salmon.

*Inf.* 7. Did Pilate give this title to cast the reproach of his death upon the Jews, and clear himself of it? *How natural is it to men to transfer the fault of their own actions from themselves to others?* For when he writes, *This is the King of the Jews*, he wholly charges them with the crime of crucifying their king\*: and it is as if he had said, Hereafter let the blame and fault of this action lie wholly upon your heads, who have brought the guilt of his blood upon yourselves and children.

I am clear, you have extorted it from me. O where shall we find a spirit so ingenuous, to take home to itself the shame of its own actions, and charge itself freely with its own guilt\*? Indeed it is the property of renewed, gracious hearts to remember, confess, and freely bewail their own evils, to the glory of God: and that is a gracious heart indeed, which in this case judgeth, that the glory, which by confession, goeth to the name of his God, is not so much glory lost to his own name, but it is the power of grace moulding our proud natures into another thing, that must bring them to his.



## SERMON XXVIII.

Of the manner of CHRIST'S Death, in respect to the Solitariness thereof.

ZECH. xiii. 7.

*Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.*

**I**N the former sermons, we have opened the nature and kind of death Christ died; even the cursed death of the cross. Wherein, nevertheless his innocency was vindicated, by that honourable title providentially affixed to his cross. Method now requires that we take into consideration the manner in which he endured the cross, and that was *solitarily, meekly, and instructively*.

\* Because you desired that I should crucify your king, I have crucified him; the ignominy shall henceforth be yours, who extorted this from me. *Calv. on Matth. xxvii. 27.*

† For saints, when their hearts are renewed, are not ashamed, by repentance, to acknowledge their ignominious faults and ignominy, to the glory of God: nothing is lost to us, which redounds to his honour. *Brightman on Cant.*