

Defilement in the Passion History

Rev. A. Schot - John 18:28

Sing: 69: 1 - 3, 7

Read: John 18: 12 - 40

Sing: 140: 1 - 4

Sing: 439: 1, 3

Sing: 421: 5, 6

Congregation, you can find our text in the portion of God's Word that was read to you, John 18:28: *"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover."* We write above our text words: *Defilement in the Passion History*.

With the help the Lord, we will consider:

1. Whom this defilement concerns;
2. Who fears this defilement;
3. What this defilement does.

So, defilement in the passion history:

1. Whom this defilement concerns. We read in the first part of the text: *"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment."* The defilement concerns Jesus.
2. Who fears this defilement. That are the Jews, the Sanhedrin: *"And it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled."* They did not enter the hall of judgement. They feared the defilement.
3. What this defilement does. *"But that they might eat the Passover."* They did not enter the judgment hall, because that would hinder them from eating the Passover.

1. Whom this defilement concerns

Congregation, we are living in the time of the passion weeks. In John 18, we read how the Lord Jesus gave Himself over to be arrested. We also read how

Peter, with his sword, tried to cut off the approaching sword of God’s justice. Peter wanted to prevent Christ’s arrest. But the Lord forbid him. He told Peter to put his sword away. The Lord Jesus surrendered voluntarily.

Now He has been arrested. We read in our text that He is being led to the judgment hall. A lot has happened in the meantime. Early in the morning, an initial inquiry took place under the leadership of Annas, the former high priest. It caused quite a tumult. During that inquiry, the Lord Jesus was even struck in His face. Then after the initial inquiry, the real inquiry took place under the leadership of Caiaphas, the son in law of Annas.

They came to a verdict: a profound and far-reaching verdict. They said: *“Ye have heard the blasphemy. What need we any further witnesses?”* The unanimous verdict is: ‘He is guilty of death.’ But the Sanhedrin may not execute that sentence. They need the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, for that. That is why Jesus, in the early morning, is dragged along to the judgment hall. They pull Him before the earthly judge. The earthly judge must confirm the ecclesiastical verdict. We can see in this something of the fact that the sceptre has just about departed from Judah. The Sanhedrin has hardly any authority.

That the Sanhedrin itself brings Jesus to the judgment hall also tells us a lot. They do not leave that to the accusers or anyone else. Apparently, they do not trust that things then would go well. Therefore, they bring Jesus to the judgment hall themselves. On the way, several citizens join them because the news spreads like wildfire through Jerusalem.

Congregation, what is very important – and I hope you will remember this – is that the way Jesus has to go proceeds right through the judgment hall. The passion history does not bypass the judgment hall, but proceeds right through it. They do not bring Jesus to the Pontius Pilate’s palace, but they bring Him to the place where Pilate exercises judgment. One commentary observes: ‘Praitorion, that is the dwelling place of Pilate the governor, which was also the judicial hall.’ We will see that this judgment hall is very important. A judicial act will take place there. The Lord Jesus was not killed by assassins. He was not killed in secret, but a public judgment took place. A public verdict was pronounced by the earthly

judge. This is very important. We also find this in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Lord Jesus had to be condemned by a temporal judge in order to free His people from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed.

Hence they led Jesus into the judgment hall. The word ‘led’ does not mean that Jesus resisted. It does not mean that He did not want to be led into the judgment hall. Voluntarily He gives Himself to them over. Isaiah prophesied: *“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.”* He bows under the judgment of the civil judge. He awaits the verdict of Pontius Pilate. No advocate is there to assist Him. No one cares for Him.

May I ask you in this time of the passion weeks, ‘Have you ever been in the judgment hall?’ Of course, I do not mean a civil court, but I mean the court where divine judgment is made. We all have to face that divine judgment. God’s justice is placed before God’s children in this life. Have you ever been led into the judgment hall? You have to enter the judgment hall to be acquitted.

Congregation, we resist being led into the judgment hall. Adam resisted. Eve resisted. David resisted. Man does not want to be led into the judgment hall. That is because we are guilty. We know that we will be condemned in the judgment hall. Even David says:

In judgment do not cause

Thy servant to be tried

Before Thy holy laws

No man is justified.

(Ps 389:1)

We are unjust people, guilty people: an irrevocable condemnation awaits us in the judgment hall. And yet the passion time teaches us that we must learn to know the judgment hall. The Lord leads His people into it. Step by step. Their guilt is revealed in the judgement hall: there they are shown their iniquities. In the judgment hall, all my righteousnesses become like a filthy garment, worthy of being cast away. In the judgment hall, nothing remains of man other than a guilty

sinner who must say: ‘Thy wrath and judgment just.’ The Lord leads His children into the judgment hall. And the more the Lord shows His justice to them, the more they understand that they deserve death.

But something else happens here, which is also important. John draws our attention to it. The way into the judgment hall makes Jesus unclean. Why? Why do the Jews not want to enter into the judgment hall? They so earnestly want Jesus to be condemned, don’t they? Why do they not accuse Jesus inside the judgment hall? Well, they are afraid of becoming defiled. Defiled? With what? Is there a contagious disease? No, they are scared of being defiled with leaven. When that defiles them, they become unclean. That was a stringent regulation which the Lord gave them in the ceremonial laws. From a week before Passover until a week after Passover, the Jews were not allowed to have leaven in their houses. Leaven is a piece of sourdough. This sourdough was used so that the bread would rise before baking. When you do not put leaven or yeast in the dough, the bread remains flat. Then you get matzos, a kind of flat airless crackers.

Why did the Jews have to remove leaven from their homes? There were two reasons for this. In the first place, they had to remember what the Lord did when He led them out of Egypt: as we can read in Exodus 12:39 and Deuteronomy 16:3. There we read of a connection between not using leaven and the haste of leaving. Judgment was imminent. The angel of destruction was coming. There was no time to let the dough rise. They had to leave hurriedly. They had to eat unleavened bread. Every year they had to remember that dreadful judgment of the angel of destruction who came to kill. They were not allowed to forget that. They had to continually remember from what destitution and death the Lord had delivered them.

We also see in the Bible that leaven becomes a symbol of sin. As leaven pervades all the dough, so sin pervades all our existence, and through all of humanity. The Lord did not deliver His people from Egypt so that they would sin, but He delivered His people so that they would serve Him; so that they would obey Him. That is the lesson of the leaven. Leaven is sin. You cannot eat of the paschal lamb and at the same time live in sin and cling to sin. The Lord does not deliver so that you can sin, but the Lord delivers so that we will serve Him in

obedience. Therefore, you can understand that this stipulation of removing leaven from your home was a stringent regulation. The Jews do not dare to enter the judgment hall, because Pontius Pilate does not follow the Jewish laws. Gentiles, of course, did not consider these laws. There could well be leaven in that judgment hall. Every crumb was a crumb too many. In no wise were the Jews prepared to take the risk. They took these laws very seriously. They would not take a single step into that judgment hall! Just imagine that they would get defiled! Just imagine that they would become unclean and would not be able to celebrate the Passover!

And, boys and girls, what do they do with the Lord Jesus? They have no problem pushing Jesus into the judgment hall. He is forced into the judgment hall. They don't care about Him. In their eyes, He is already unclean anyway. After all, He is a sinner. How touching! Do you see that God's honour does not concern them at all? The Lord Jesus was also a Jew! And if they had been truly concerned about God's honour, they would also have kept Jesus from entering this place. But they don't care about it at all. They view the Lord Jesus as an unclean person. They only act with self-interest.

And then the wonder... While they remain at a distance from the judgment hall, while they do not want to defile themselves in the house of Pilate, the Lord Jesus does enter it. Not only because they push Him inside, but He enters voluntarily. He does not fear this judge: He is the spotless One, He is the holy One. He came under the law. He kept all the laws. He also kept the ceremonial laws. He is perfectly clean. He kept Himself pure. And now ... they make Him defiled. If Jesus were not already defiled by leaven, He will certainly be defiled because He was led into the place where criminals were sent. He is numbered with the transgressors.

The Lord Jesus, as it were, allows Himself to become defiled. Notwithstanding how great the sorrow in His heart is, He allows Himself to become polluted because He loves the laws of His Father. He goes inside as the Surety and Mediator – we shall see this further in our third thought. Our first thought was: Whom this defilement concerns: the Lord Jesus Christ. How touching! We shall go to our second thought.

2. Who fears this defilement.

It says: *“And it was early.”* It is hectic in Jerusalem, and they do not want an uproar, they want to celebrate the Passover. *“And they themselves went not into the judgment hall.”* Hence, they remain standing outside. They wait, note well, until Pilate himself comes out.

Pilate greatly accommodates the Jews. Of course, he cannot just hand Jesus over to them. Before he can confirm their verdict, he must initiate an investigation. First, some dialogue must take place. Therefore, he needs to speak personally to the Jews. They do not come inside. The judge himself goes outside to speak with them. *“And they themselves went not into the judgment hall.”* They do not want to take any risk, otherwise they will not be able to partake of the Passover. They draw a large safety-circle around themselves. They do not want to go into the judgement hall, because then they will be defiled. They make the safety-circle much more extensive than what is necessary because we do not read in the ceremonial laws that they were not permitted to enter the house of a Gentile. The commentators also allude to that. They say: ‘That was just their general perception, because in actual fact one could not read in the law that it was forbidden to enter a gentile’s house.’ But they did not take a single risk. We could say: ‘They wanted to be even holier than what God had prescribed; they wanted to be purer than what the law stipulated.’ They did not step into the area. They remained outside the Roman building. What God-fearing people, you might think. Yes, it appears so, but sadly, it is different. They are not so strict at all; they are not so God-fearing at all: verse thirty reveals that. There it becomes apparent that they do not even want Pilate to initiate an investigation and they sneer at him: *“If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee.”* In other words: ‘Keep it short: that investigation is completely unnecessary.’

Are they pure people? Congregation, they deliver the innocent One to the judge. They want to put Christ, Who is spotless, to death. Their hands drip with blood. Their hands are not pure, because with those hands, only a few hours before this, they had seized the Lord Jesus. Their feet are not pure. Their feet are

quick to shed blood. They are totally defiled, but they consider themselves pure. These people only purify the outside. The Lord Jesus also said that as He walked among them. They clean the outside of the cup, but ignore the filth that is within. Whited sepulchres they are. Outwardly it all appears beautiful, but inwardly they are full of dead men’s bones.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, says that we must purge out the old leaven. What do these people do? They discard the old leaven literally. That is good, because that is what the Lord prescribed. But what is the profound significance of that leaven? Concerning that, Paul tells the Corinthians that the old leaven pictures the leaven of malice, the leaven of wickedness. Hence, the real leaven that they need to be very afraid of is sin. That is as a very contagious virus. Sin permeates everything. That vile, contagious sin, they need to be very afraid of that. Just as David, in Psalm 51, was afraid of it. But, congregation, they are not afraid of it. Their feet are swift to shed blood; they think that they are without leaven: but they are not without leaven. In contrast, they are one lump of leaven. There ultimately lies the cause of the separation from God. That is sin. But they do not seek to remedy that.

Congregation, that needs to be our most significant problem. Because where does the most deep-seated reason that we cannot have a church service lie? At least, not in the manner we are accustomed to? What is the reason, boys and girls, that you have to listen at home today? The minister also thinks that it is terrible that there is hardly anyone in church today. But why is that? It is because of sin. Sin causes division. David also had to experience that. There was a time that he had to flee from Absalom. Then he could not go to church. His heart longed for the house of the Lord. But it was not possible. Why not? That was because of defilement. There was blood on his hands.

The Lord sought that out in David’s life. There in the solitude – banished from God’s house – he experienced that. I hope that we will also experience that at home, boys and girls, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, and those who are alone. I also hope that we will experience that in church. Because that is where the cause lies, ultimately that is the deepest reason why the church doors could only admit a few people today. All other reasons are

secondary. We need to come to the fountain, to the leaven of sin. If we do not reach there, the passion preaching will just go over us, and then we stay, so to speak, outside the judgement hall. We rather keep ourselves undefiled and soothe ourselves with the thought that we do have any external contamination. We think that we are healthy. But congregation, we are all defiled. From the crown of our head to the sole of our foot, we are all contaminated with the leaven of sin.

It would have been better if the Jews had entered the judgement hall. They were already unclean; they did not have to make themselves unclean: they were unclean already!

If they had entered the judgement hall, then they would have heard their guilt. Whoever desires to kill an innocent one is guilty himself. But they did not want to hear that. They wanted to celebrate the Passover. We will come back to that in our third thought. But they did not acknowledge how deeply corrupt they were. Congregation, we need to bow under God’s justice. That is the place that we need to come to in these very turbulent Sundays. The message again and again is: We must bow under God’s justice. Ask the Lord if He will lead you into the judgement hall. Ask if He will reveal your sin and guilt to you. ‘God will have His justice satisfied; and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves, or by another.’

Do you know what our text teaches us? That Jesus is worthless for people outside the judgement hall. He has no value for pious people. Jesus has no value for clean, undefiled people. But He is precious for people who must enter the judgement hall and who fear that the verdict will be: ‘Guilty of death.’ And that would be entirely just. But... these Jews do not want to hear that. They will not accept that. They push Jesus into the judgement hall. They themselves remain outside. They have clean hands and feet, but they are wholly corrupt. And we are also wholly corrupt, congregation. May the Lord grant that this will be the revealing lesson of this sermon.

If they had entered the judgement hall, they would have heard of Jesus’ innocence. Because Pilate said it repeatedly: *“I find no fault in this man.”* If they

had entered the judgment hall they would have heard of Jesus’ innocence. God’s justice declared Him free, but still He was condemned. Isaiah says: *“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”* He went into the judgement hall for those who are His, and He came out as One condemned.

We proceed to our third thought: ‘What this defilement does.’ But before we say something about that we will sing, Psalter 439: 1 and 3

*O Israel's God, how good Thou art
To all the true and pure of heart!
Though paths of saints are fraught with evil,
Thou showest favor to Thy people.
While faith sank low, I hardly knew
That Thou art Israel's Keeper true;
When in my grief I nurtured doubt,
I well-nigh slipped from ways devout.*

*Whom have I, Lord, but Thee on high?
None else on earth can satisfy
But Thou, O God, my soul's deep yearning;
For Thee my troubled heart is burning.
Though flesh should faint and heart should break,
Thou art my rock that naught can shake;
In life, in death, Thou art my stay,
My strength, my portion, Lord, for aye.*

Defilement in the Passion History: whom this defilement concerns: that is the Lord Jesus; who fears this defilement: the pious Jews. We will proceed to our third thought.

3. What this defilement does

We divide our third thought into two. In the first place: what this defilement does to the Jews. This defilement makes them unclean. If they entered the judgement hall, they would not be able to eat the Passover. In the second place, we will consider: what this defilement does to Jesus. It makes Him to be the Substitute.

Hence, in the first place the Jews. *“But that they might eat the passover.”* If the Jews entered the judgement hall, they would not be able to eat the Passover. Exegetically, it is not so simple. The question is: ‘Did they still need to eat the Passover?’ Boys and girls, you know that the Lord Jesus has already eaten the Passover with His disciples. Did the Lord Jesus eat it a day early? Had He brought it forward a day because of His coming passion? Or had the Jews delayed the Passover by a day so that they could first execute this evil plan? What does ‘eating the Passover’ mean? Is it to eat the Paschal lamb?

There are commentators who say: ‘We can also consider the Passover in the context of the week of unleavened bread.’ The Passover, as it were, was eaten for the entire week. The feast of unleavened bread followed the Passover. That feast lasted for seven days. During that feast -- therefore not just on the first day -- leaven was not permitted to be present. Hence, if they became defiled it would also preclude them from participating in the rest of the feast. They did not want that to happen. They did not want to become defiled. They were mortally afraid of becoming defiled with leaven, but... they crucified Jesus.

What a contradiction. They did not understand anything of the proclamation of the New Testament Passover. Because what does the New Testament Passover mean? Well, if that Passover were only for the pure, only for the holy, then it would be a lost cause for each and every one of us. Not one of us is holy, and no one is undefiled. We are all sinners. If it were true that we first had to be free from the leaven of sin before we could partake of the Passover Lamb, it would be a lost case. These people did not understand anything about the New Testament. They did not know that the New Testament Passover is just for the unclean: that it is precisely for the unholy. Therefore, they did not need to be afraid of entering the judgement hall. They were already unclean, and they needed cleansing in the judgement hall. The Lord Jesus went into the judgement

hall to cleanse the unclean. But they did not need that Remedy because they did not acknowledge themselves to be unclean.

Our self-righteousness is the biggest enemy of the substitutionary righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever desires to cling firmly to that unrighteousness and desires to cling firmly to their self-righteousness, will experience that the step into the judgment hall is not taken. Then we stay outside the judgement hall. Congregation, we must learn to experience our unrighteousness. And these Jews did not want to do that. They did not want to see who they indeed were. They did not realise that their hearts were utterly full of leaven. The leaven had thoroughly permeated them, but they were not aware of it. And then, Christ is worthless. Then the Paschal Lamb has no value; then we do not need any purification. Then we only consider what is external, and we do not realise that we are corrupt.

What has the uncleanliness of Jesus produced? Congregation, there is a people on the earth – and examine your own heart accordingly – that learn to know themselves as entirely unclean. David learned to know himself as an unclean one: he feared God’s justice. *“And enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.”* He knew: if I have to enter the judgement hall, then all is lost. If I have to enter the judgement hall, I will hear my death sentence: then there is no hope anymore. But the Lord still brought David in the judgement hall. And the Lord still does that in the lives of all His children. The Lord teaches His children to bow under His justice. And in the way of further instruction, they learn to lose their life in that justice. The Lord Jesus said of that: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.”* Pious, religious, people detour around the judgement hall, but by doing that they miss the gate to heaven. Jesus’ path to heaven went through the judgement hall. For God’s children, the path to heaven also goes through the judgment hall. There is no salvation outside of justice.

But how do God’s children bring themselves so far? Well, initially they still think that they are too good for that. When the discovery of sin is still dim in their life, they think that it will still come right. Then they begin to reform their life. *“Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay Thee all.”* Then they think that with

the washing of their hands they can deliver themselves from the defilement of sin. They also wash their feet. But the Lord says: *“For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me.”* It will not help at all. More and more, they learn to know themselves as lost. Such people do not have anything more to lose in the judgement hall. It can no longer disappoint them, because they condemn themselves. The Lord makes them agree with the Judge when He says: ‘He is guilty of death.’ Then they say to the Judge: ‘Thou art righteous.’

Do you know what is then such a wonder? We read in Lord’s Day 23 of our Heidelberg Catechism that God’s child then receives a surprising turn in the judgement hall. Because what does such a lost one then hear in the judgement hall? There he hears that Jesus is sinless. Pontius Pilate, the judge says – and therein speaks the Judge of heaven and earth: *“I find no fault in this Man.”* Jesus came into the judgement hall to be exonerated. He went into the judgement hall to hear and leave the witness that He is innocent. In that judgement hall, we also hear that we are guilty of death. It is a privilege when we may agree with that. That is a stage in the life of grace which God’s children commonly resist for a long time. They do not want to go into the judgement hall either, because they know that it will not go well with them either. But do you know what is such a wonder? When you may go into the judgement hall because you no longer have anything to lose, because you are one who is guilty of death, entirely leprous. But then there is One Who comes between the Judge and you. ‘So that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.’ When they underwrite the verdict, an Advocate appears from behind justice. We read of that in Job 33: 23: *“If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.”* Then the Surety says: ‘Father, I am innocent, I am pure, I am holy. I also went into the judgement hall for this black sinner to

cleanse and purify him so that he can exist before Thee.’ Such a Mediator befits us, congregation. One Who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and Who still went into the judgement hall for sinners. Only then can the Judge acquit. In Him there is forgiveness and reconciliation upon the grounds of justice. ‘What believest thou concerning the forgiveness of sins? That God, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.’

How poor self-righteous people are with all their outward purity. They do everything they can to retain it. But soon it will become apparent that it all comes too short. But how rich convicted sinners are with their inward cleansing. They too did everything they could to stay out of the judgement hall, but more and more they lost the strife. If only they had entered the judgement hall earlier, for they come out of it so different from how they entered:

*Jehovah Tsidkenu! My treasure and boast,
Jehovah Tsidkenu! I never can be lost;
In Thee I shall conquer by flood and by field—
My cable, my anchor, my breastplate and shield!*

That is the gospel which may still be proclaimed in these passion weeks. The trouble is that we want to retain our own outward purity. We do not want to enter the judgment hall, although we are lost already. We need to become a lost child of Adam. Not just a little guilty, but mortally guilty. Happy you are when you may bow under that, when the Lord brings you there. In your own perception you end in death... but, oh wonder, in practice it ends in the Passover. “*For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast,*” the apostle says. A true feast. Not a feast with the old leaven of malice and wickedness. These poor sinners can no longer feast with the old leaven. But they feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Indeed, eating the Paschal Lamb cannot be accompanied with leaven. But the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses from all leaven.

Jesus went right through the judgement hall. He became defiled. Why? To open the door to the Father's house: so that those who are cleansed by Him will not be declined entrance at that door. What a wonder that will be. With Asaph, they have vainly washed their hands in innocence. But nevertheless, they will not hear: 'You are unclean: you are not coming in.' It would be righteous, if that were the message. But Jesus will stand at the door to welcome His people in, so that they will feast in the Father's house eternally. Feast eternally in sincerity and truth. Because He has merited it. Then the defilement will be gone forever: "*And they began to be joyful.*"

Amen.

Concluding Psalter 421:5, 6

*O God, our shield, with face benign
Look on Thy servant, wholly Thine,
And keep him, Lord, Thou great Defender!
One day, passed in Thy house of praise,
Is better than a thousand days
Spent in the realm of earthly splendor.
Though only at Thy door I wait,
No tents of sin give joy so great.*

*O God Jehovah, good and kind,
On Zion's mount in clouds enshrined,
Thou art our sun and shield forever.
To upright souls that seek Thy face
Thou givest glory, truth, and grace;
E'en in death's vale Thou failest never.
O Lord of hosts, how blest is he
Who puts his steadfast trust in Thee!
Whom have I, Lord, but Thee on high?*