

I hid not my face from shame and spitting. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 27 October 2010.

As you know, we have been looking recently at some of the things which our Lord Jesus didn't do when in the Garden of Gethsemane and at the cross. The title for this week's talk is 'He didn't hide His face from shame and spitting', a title found almost word-for-word in the Bible.

Over 700 years before our Lord's suffering, Isaiah the prophet wrote, 'I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting'. We know that Isaiah was not writing about himself, and it is obvious from the detailed fulfilment of his words that, with inspiration given by the Holy Spirit, he was speaking of the Lord Jesus.

For, as Isaiah foretold, the Saviour didn't draw back from the mission He had come to fulfil, but He voluntarily endured, not only being scourged (when He 'gave His back to the smiters' – to those who beat Him mercilessly), but being ridiculed and spat on.

In Bible days, there were many ways in which men could express contempt for others. They possessed, as it were, a whole arsenal of scorn and derision. For example, one way to shame an enemy was to strip him of his clothes, either some or all.¹ Another way to humiliate somebody was to wag one's head at him. Again, another way to express disdain for somebody was to damage his beard, which was cherished by men of those days as a symbol of their manly dignity.²

And the Bible makes it clear that, during His so-called 'Passion', our Lord endured each of these. For at the cross men stripped Him of His garments ... men laughed Him to scorn and shook their heads at Him³ ... and we have just read of what men did to His beard, when the Saviour suffered not only the deep disgrace but the excruciating pain of having the hair of His cheeks violently wrenched out.

But from what I have been able to discover one of the very greatest insults which could be levelled at somebody was to spit directly in his or her face.

The Old Testament itself mentions this extreme gesture of contempt on several occasions. For example,⁴ when Miriam (the sister of Moses) was struck with leprosy after she had spoken against Moses, and when (following the good man's prayer for her) God healed her, the Lord required that she should be excluded from the camp of Israel for seven days. He explained to Moses this seven-day period of public shame in the words, 'If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?'⁵ Clearly, spitting in somebody's face was regarded as a very serious matter.

Again, in the book which bears his name, Job bemoans the fact that, although once when he had entered any gathering the old men rose to their feet and even the princes and the nobles stopped talking,⁶ now there were young men of dubious background who – as he said – 'do not hesitate to spit in my face'.⁷

Oh yes, to spit in someone's face was considered to be one of the highest forms of insult and indignity.⁸

With this mind, let me read you three brief extracts from the Gospel of Mark. First, from chapter 10, where, a few months before His crucifixion, Jesus forewarned His disciples, 'we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed ... and they will ... scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him'.⁹ Did you notice that the reference to His being spat on sits between references to His being scourged and being killed? This gives us some idea of how seriously our Lord viewed it ... and how keenly He would feel it.

Turning from Mark 10 to Mark 14, we read of the occasion when, in what proved to be the farce of a trial, our Lord appeared before Caiaphas the high priest and the supreme Jewish council (the Sanhedrin). Mark tells us that when Caiaphas 'asked Him ... "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?", Jesus said, "I am ...". Then the high priest ... said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him as deserving death. Then', we read, 'some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him'.¹⁰ This all took place at night.

Mark tells us in the opening of chapter 15 that 'as soon as it was morning ... the whole council ... bound Jesus and ... delivered Him to Pilate'.¹¹ We then read that, following His civil trial – another blatant travesty of justice – the Roman Governor 'delivered Him to be crucified. And the soldiers led Him away into the court called the praetorium ... and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on Him ... and they struck His head with a reed, and spat upon Him'.¹²

Oh yes, make no mistake, my Lord felt keenly the stinging insult of the spittle – both of the Jewish council and of the Gentile soldiers. Think of how He once made it clear to Simon the Pharisee, who, for his own reasons, had invited Him (the Saviour) into his home for a meal, that He noticed – and felt – Simon's lack of common courtesy

when he had neglected to give Him a kiss of greeting.¹³ How much more then, do you suppose, did He feel the contempt expressed by the filthy spittle of both the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Gentile soldiers?

But we should note that, according to our text, the Lord Jesus said, '*I hid not my face from shame and spitting*'. That is, He bore the shame and the spitting willingly. He did it voluntarily.

It is eight weeks since I last spoke at Coffee Morning. On that occasion we looked together at our Lord's shining garments on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration, and we noticed briefly His face – which we are told then 'shone like the sun'.¹⁴ And why, we may well ask, did He now willingly expose that same face to such indignity and disgrace? Let the New Testament itself give us the answer. It was, it says, 'for the joy that was set before Him' that He 'endured the cross, despising the shame'.¹⁵

And what joy, we may wonder, could possibly compensate for such humiliation? Well, it certainly included the joy of having a saved people to dwell with Him for ever. I note that the last but one book in the New Testament more or less closes by assuring us that one day He will present all those who trust in Him 'faultless (free from blame or stain) before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy'. One German preacher and hymn writer of the eighteenth century captured the thought beautifully: 'Where no shade nor stain can enter, nor the gold be dim, in His holiness unsullied, I shall walk with Him ... He and I, in that bright glory, one deep joy shall share—mine, to be forever with Him; His, that I am there'.¹⁶

I cannot begin to explain it, but the Lord Jesus considered the joy of finding us when we were as lost sheep,¹⁷ and the joy of one day taking us to be with Him to share His glory, as adequate compensation for all the shame and the spitting from which He chose not to hide His face. Such is His love for us.

Footnotes

¹ This is, of course, what Hanun, king of Ammon, did to humiliate David's servants in 2 Sam. 10. 4-5.

² As was also done to David's servants in 2 Samuel 10.

³ Psa. 22. 7-8; Mark 15. 29.

⁴ See also Deut. 25. 9.

⁵ Num. 12. 14.

⁶ Job 29. 7-10.

⁷ Job 30. 1-10.

⁸ To spit *in another's presence* was regarded as an insult – much more to spit *on someone* – and most of all to spit *directly in his or her face*.

⁹ Mark 10. 33-34. In the context, the words 'spit on Him' refer particularly to the action of 'the Gentiles', v. 33; that is, they refer to Mark 15. 19 rather than Mark 14. 65.

¹⁰ Mark 14. 61-65.

¹¹ Mark 15. 1.

¹² Mark 15. 15-19.

¹³ Luke 7. 45.

¹⁴ Matt. 17. 2.

¹⁵ Heb. 12. 2.

¹⁶ From the hymn, 'Midst the darkness, storm, and sorrow', by Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769).

¹⁷ Luke 15. 3-7.