

Insulting the Infinite

Text: Mark 14:65
Broadcast April 8

If I were asked to paint a picture of the total depravity of man, I would not choose as my subject some slum area where men once made in the image of God have become hopeless human derelicts adrift on the sea of life. Nor would I enter some brothel where men behave like animals. Nor would I go to the camps of Belsen and Buchenwald where human bodies became guinea pigs for unspeakable atrocities, suffered unbelievable horrors, only to become fuel in the crematory ovens.

Instead, I would go to Jerusalem and paint a scene in the highest court of an ancient and honored people. In the center of the portrait I would place Jesus the Son of God, standing with calm dignity, His hands folded as if in repose.

On either side of Him I would place two temple police, soldiers assigned to do the bidding of the high priest.

About Him would be the members of the dignified tribunal, the Sanhedrin.

But at that point all dignity and decorum would cease. For I would paint each of the police raining vicious blows upon the face of Jesus, slapping Him with their open hands, and snatching out His beard.

In the eyes of each member of the Sanhedrin I would paint the light of murderous hatred. Their faces would be contorted with fanatical rage as though each of them had been transformed into a demon out of the pit. One would be spitting in Jesus' face, another would be holding a cloth about

His eyes while others beat His face with their fists, all the while dancing with fiendish glee as they jeered, "Now prophesy. Tell who it was that struck you."

And why this revolting scene? Because under oath Jesus had just admitted that He was the Christ, the Son of God. From our vantage point in history one would think that they would have fallen before Him to confess, "My Lord, and my God." Instead they made sport of the Son of God. They beat the Son of the Blessed. Finite beings themselves, they insulted the Infinite.

Revolting it is beyond words to describe. But would you have done any better?

"And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants [officers] did strike him with the palm of their hands." (Mark 14:65) They insulted the Infinite.

As we meditate upon this matter let us note, first, the crime; second, the criminals; third, the conclusion.

THE CRIME

That this entire procedure was criminal needs little proving. Indeed the entire trial of Jesus, according to Jewish law, was a crime from beginning to end. It was held before daylight. The ones who caused Jesus' arrest also sat in judgment upon Him. They sought evidence not to prove His guilt or innocence, but to put Him to death.

The witnesses were false, whose testimony conflicted each other. The so-called evidence was a misrepresentation of facts. Under oath Jesus was forced to give testimony upon which He was condemned. The verdict of conviction was unanimous, whereas under Jewish law such was equal to acquittal.

The elders [Caiaphas] voted first, whereas Jewish law required that the younger judges vote first to escape the pressure of their elders. Jesus was sentenced to death on the same day that he was pronounced guilty. The prisoner was brutally abused, when the court was bound to protect Him. Under Jewish law no condemned man was to be beaten before his execution.

But the greatest crime was neither legal nor physical. It was spiritual. The brutal treatment of Jesus was but the aftermath of the charge of blasphemy heaped upon Him when under oath He admitted that He was the Son of God.

Since his efforts to obtain other evidence against Jesus failed, Caiaphas, the high priest, placed Him under oath. "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." (Matt. 26:63) Heretofore silent, Jesus now replied, "Thou hast said [you have admitted it]: nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (v. 64)

Here was Jesus' direct testimony given under oath. But what did Caiaphas do with it? He made no investigation to prove or disprove it. Had he done so there were those who could have spoken concerning His virgin birth, His sinless character, His teachings as no other man ever spoke, His transfiguration, His miracles wrought in both man and nature.

Indeed, Caiaphas himself was aware of Jesus' greatest miracle, the raising

of Lazarus from the dead, less than three months before and less than two miles from where he now stood. (cf. John 11:47ff) This very event had crystallized Caiaphas' purpose to destroy Jesus. Had he cared to do so, Lazarus himself could easily have been called to testify.

But Caiaphas did none of these things. Instead he tore his clothes in an expression of horror, calling on the entire court to join him in the verdict of death for blasphemy. The verdict had been sealed from the beginning. The trial was nothing more than window dressing. Thus the death of Jesus was not a legal execution. It was judicial murder. Such would have been a crime in any case. But in the case of Jesus the crime was capitalized. For it was the murder of the Son of God.

THE CRIMINALS

Were the only criminals in this instance those gathered in the court of the Sanhedrin? By no means. The crime itself was timeless, and the criminals are found in every age. For what was done to Jesus that day is that which sinful men do to Him in every generation.

Long before Jesus stood before Caiaphas God had foreseen the event. The prophetic books of the Old Testament bristle with this insult to the Infinite. Seven hundred years before Christ Isaiah wrote, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (50:6)

In Isaiah 52:14 we read, ". . . his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." A footnote in the Scofield Bible says, "The literal rendering is terrible: 'So marred from the form of man was His aspect that His appearance was not that of a son of man' — i.e. not human — the effect of the brutalities described in Matthew

26:67, 68; 27:27-30." No wonder that Pilate showed His beaten, bloody face to the mob, and cried, "Behold the man!"

But the fact that God foresaw the event does not lessen the criminality of those who fulfilled it. It was not simply a sin of the mouth and hands but of the heart. And the Bible says that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

Nor can the guilt be confined to the dark, brutal days of yesterday. For that which was done to Jesus long ago continues to this very hour. You yourself may be in that number.

Does such a thought shock you? You are so cultured that you would not even spit on the street, let alone in the face of deity. You would never actually blindfold Jesus as though to shut out His intelligence. So gentle are you that you would never be guilty of violence to any man, and, of all people, the Lord Himself. But would you?

We noted earlier that these vicious acts grew out of their rejection of Jesus' claims to deity. It is beside the point to insist that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. For our scripture says otherwise. He even did so while under oath. So to deny it is to accuse Jesus not only of lying but of perjury. But the issue goes even beyond that.

To deny the virgin birth is to join with those who flung into Jesus' face the spittle of the charge that He was born of fornication.

To question the originality of His teachings is to blindfold His eyes with the cloth of plagiarism, challenging Him to prove the worth of His words.

To discount His miracles is to pummel His face with the fist of hocus-pocus.

To disregard His references to demon possession as simply accommodating His language to the ignorance and superstition of the day is to lay

across His back the cruel rods of hypocrisy.

To insist that His death was not vicarious, the just for the unjust, is to place His name that is above every name in the rogue's gallery of justly executed criminals.

To picture His resurrection as unreal and unbodily is to label Him a fraud, a demonic fraud perpetrated by His very word upon all men in all ages to come.

Such a person would be locked up in jail for life or executed as one unfit to live. And when you lay one shadow of doubt across His life, you label the Bible as just another piece of ancient literature, even less, as a book unworthy to be trusted because it claims for itself to be the divinely inspired word of God.

To deny the deity of Christ is to impugn the very character of God. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

If Jesus was not the unique Son of God, then this statement is not true. It says, "God so loved . . ." To question this verse is to limit and impair God's capability of manifesting His love to men. If Jesus were just a good man, even a perfect one, and not the Son of God, what did God give to save the world? What did such love cost Him? Nothing, or scarcely anything. That is, if the sophisticated denials of some moderns are true.

Furthermore, to deny the unique deity of Jesus Christ is to accuse God, whose very nature is truth, of double talk or double dealing. I read in the Old Testament that God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5) whose glory He will not give to another. (Isa. 42:8)

Yet I also read in the New Testament that He has taken all of His titles and glory and showered them upon Jesus. He has warned me not to

give my faith, love, and worship to another. Yet He has so acted as to cause me to bestow them upon One who is just a man — that is, if your denial of His deity is true. Thus that which is presented to the world as its only hope turns out to be a divinely perpetrated hoax which leaves me without God and without hope in the world.

I am not willing to subscribe to that. Are you? Yet that is just where you must arrive once you start down the road of denial with regard to Jesus' claim under oath to be the Son of God. By comparison with this, spitting in the face of Jesus, beating Him with fists and rods, mocking Him, and in derision slapping His face are mild insults indeed. It is a worse sin to attack the character of God than to abuse the body in which He was incarnated.

Insulting the Infinite! How terrible, how devilish, how beastly, how low! But there is an alternative.

THE CONCLUSION

Are deceit, doubt, derision, rejection, and condemnation the only way? Or is there another? There is. For not all who were in Jerusalem that day joined with those who insulted the Infinite.

There were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both members of the Sanhedrin. They were not a part of this disgraceful scene. (Luke 23:50ff.; John 19:38ff) They could not prevent it, but they would not be a part of it. Instead they came in Jesus' death hour to give His insulted body a decent burial.

Then there were the Eleven. They were frightened and fled. They trusted and they loved. They reassembled and were reassured. And they went forth to tell a lost world the greatest story ever told.

Again, there were the women — timid, weak, afraid. But they were

courageous in their faith. In tender mercy they ministered to Him in death from whom in life they had obtained mercy. They were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. And from their blessed lips first fell the glorious news of the resurrection.

Simple folks they were. Simple in their faith, simple in their love, simple in their ministry — but effective.

The great and the base heaped their insults upon Jesus. But not all the great nor all the low. Not all the Sanhedrin spit upon Him. For two ministered in love. Not all the soldiers slapped Him. For one said that He was surely the Son of God. (Matt. 27:54) Not all of the Twelve betrayed Him. For eleven followed by faith when they could not walk by sight. They were the few compared to the many. They were the lowly compared to the great. They were the weak compared to the strong. But that few, these lowly, these weak have by God's grace and power transformed the world and changed the course of history.

Would you be found in that number? With whom do you walk? The insulters of the Infinite? Or the heralds of the King? The victory of the former was momentary. That of the latter shall be eternal. The questions of the doubters may challenge you. The curses of blasphemers may dismay you. The raucous cries of infidelity may frighten you. The sinister whispers of the unbelievers may allure you. But one experience of faith can silence them all.

The story is told of a man whose purpose it was to undermine a boy's faith in his father who was a surgeon. Said he, "Son, do you know that your father takes people into a big building, straps them to a table in a little room, makes them unconscious, and then cuts on them?" The lad thought a moment, and then replied, "Mister, I don't know about that. But I know my Father."