

“Jesus Spit On”

Text: Mt. 26:59-68 INI Midweek Lent 2 Wayzata 2/24/10

Has anyone ever spit on you? It is a filthy thing to do. It can start a riot. One of the more maddening things one person can do to another. It seems that even in ancient times it was a detestable thing to do to another person. It shows utter contempt. In some ancient cultures an accuser could do that to the accused to show contempt for them. Imagine what newspapers today would say if the Supreme Court Justices did that to the accused and slapped his face after rendering a verdict of guilty and the death penalty. There would be such a scandal.

The ACLU would lobby for their removal from the court. Umpteen congressional committees would convene, mostly to get headlines for congressmen or senators, wanting the media exposure. But we look at those men in their black robes so dignified and think it could never happen. People who are appointed to that responsible a position don't engage in those kinds of things. That's why it's hard for Jewish people to believe what Matthew and the other Gospel writers say of Jesus trial. Listen to the way Matthew records it (TEXT).

The Sanhedrin tried him. They were the Jewish Supreme Court. Those elected to it had to have served as judges in their own communities. Then they had to serve in one of two of the smaller or lower Councils that met at the gate of the temple or at the temple mount. They were required to be morally and physically blameless, learned in the Torah, in sciences and in languages. They had to be married heads of household who also have children.

There were 70 of them. That number coincided with the 70 elders that Moses appointed during the Exodus. The Sanhedrin itself emerged only after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. They were Sadducees and Pharisees, scribes, Chief priests and elders of the people. They were a very august group whose reputation, collectively and individually, were impressive. That they would do the things recorded of them in the Gospels assaults our civilized tastes.

Jesus trial was outside Jewish law. The Sanhedrim met only between the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice. They met each day except for holidays and the Sabbath. The president could be the High Priest but he had to be elected to it by the rest of the council. It was his duty to preside over the sessions, to represent the religious interests of the Jews to the Romans, sum up the votes of the elders, and determine what the traditions were.

There was a vice president who led and controlled the discussion. And there was a sage or referee who put into proper shape the subject to be discussed. A quorum of this group was 23. They were not supposed to meet in secret. When they accused a man of a crime guilty of capital punishment they were not to pass judgment until the next regular time they met. It was to give them cool heads to deal with these important judicial decisions. One other thing, no one accused before them could be forced or tricked into testifying against himself.

As you can see, this trial of Jesus was a travesty of justice. Not just by our standards but also by the standards of His day. Justice was being denied to the one whose very being is just. Jesus as Son of God, God himself, is fair and impartial. He makes judgments on the merits of the case not on the personality of accused or accuser. And yet each of us who appear before him pleads the case of our own lives. Out of pure justice we receive the verdict, “Guilty”.

That is the reason He submitted to this unjust trial and the cruelty that followed. The whole human race was judge. Humans' judging God! What a farce! But it happens. How can a good God let such a thing happen? We especially question when it happens to me. It is wrong to say the bad things that happened at Jesus' trial are a judgment on God's goodness.

If God really cares about me why do all these bad things happen to me? It assumes that bad things come from God and that is not true. That he knows they are happening is true. But that He causes them to happen is not. Things like disease, death, destruction are here because Satan and sin are our lot in life. Sometimes when these evil and bad things happen to us it is the only time we turn to our God. It is only when we turn all this over to Him that we can really find relief. Human judgment of God is that either He really doesn't exist or He doesn't care. Follow Jesus to the cross see how He cares.

Jesus never opens His mouth to speak even in the face of all this mockery of justice and cruelty. He does not scream and yell demanding His rights before the law. He does not try to tear apart the discrepancies of the false witnesses. He does not tell His tormentors of their crime against justice let alone against Him.

He does not even tell them who it was that hit Him even though He knows perfectly well who it is. In this He fulfills what the Prophet Isaiah said about Him in the suffering servant song in chapter 53. "He opened not his mouth."

The only time He ever speaks is when He is directly addressed by the High Priest. Tell us, tell them he did. Even gave those who were judging Him a warning that they would next see Him when He returned in power and great glory to judge the whole world. You would think this statement would send a shiver of chill down their backs. To fall into the hands of the living God is a terrible thing the Bible says. But they do not believe that Jesus is who He claims to be. The claim to be Messiah was not worthy of death nor was it blasphemy. But if He claimed to be God or even God's Son, that was.

The frenzy of the moment caught these men who were the pillars of their society unawares and they committed atrocity after atrocity on Jesus who by now is no longer an accused but a victim. It can happen to people easily that their emotions are in turmoil, reason no longer seems to have any rule, and they do things they would not ordinarily do. Mobs are that way and that's what these orderly, scholarly, honorable men turn into, a rabble of the worst sort, without thought to the person victimized. Jesus did nothing to bring it on. Nor did He deliberately incite them to more and more atrocities.

He told his disciples not to retaliate against anyone who humiliated them because of their faith. Jesus is silent. In His silence He is praying for His tormentors. If He felt differently He certainly could have gotten His revenge on them, or in the least caused them to stop mistreating Him. On other occasions He walked through crowds who were unable to recognize Him. He could have escaped very easily.

That was not what He was there for. He was there to be utterly humiliated, beaten, spit on, cruelly taunted and mocked so that every ounce of evil the world could dredge up against its God might be happened on Him. He was absorbing all our animosities, hatreds, intolerance and viciousness. Every sin that we either have committed or thought of committing He absorbed in his body.

It should give us pause to think. Too often we speak before we think, act before we contemplate. We regret it afterwards but sometimes by then damage has already been done, to others and ourselves. Jesus was put through all that happened to Him so we might not do it to others. The power of the cross over sin pays for it. He gives us power to crucify our own flesh. Jesus gives us love to control us. Each time we think of what he went through for us increases our love for our savior who went through it for us. Amen