

## "DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MEN"

– MATTHEW 26:57-68. –

"HE is despised and rejected of men," wrote the Prophet Isaiah (53:3), as in the Golden Text of this lesson. How strange it all appears to those who have come to know the Lord and to appreciate man from the standpoint of the divine Word. Nevertheless, as we take up the narrative and follow the circumstances as though we were there present we perceive that it was difficult for the chief actors surrounding our Lord to realize the true situation. And turning from these to ourselves in the present time we may apply a lesson and realize that we, too, are in touch with great and important subjects in the present harvest-time; that we, too, probably are so close to great events as to be unable to appreciate their true import; that we, too, should go very carefully and should continually watch and pray lest we also fall into temptation. The thought of our own precarious condition will doubtless give us sympathy with those whose reprehensible conduct is noted in this lesson.

Our last lesson left Jesus and the disciples at the garden gate. There Peter, who had one of the two swords previously mentioned, started to use it in defence of his Master, at the first blow smiting off the ear of Malchus, one of the servants of the High Priest's court. As Jesus said when instructing them to bring their swords, and being informed there were two swords already in the company, "It is enough," so this mere demonstration of the willingness of the disciples to defend him was quite sufficient, and the order at once came to "Put up thy sword." The opportunity was thus furnished for Jesus to heal the ear and so display his gracious magnanimity toward his enemies. The disciples apparently learned most thoroughly the lesson that he that taketh to the sword shall perish by the sword, and hence

never afterward do we hear of their using force or violence in the service of the Lord. How well it would have been had all the followers of the Lord learned and applied to themselves this same lesson. The neglect of it has stained the pages of history to the dishonor of the Lord's teaching and been injurious to his real cause, while favorable to nominal [R3888 : page 350] Christianity – Churchianity, Christendom and its large crop of tares. All of the Lord's people should take to heart this message and remember the Lord's word, "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called the children of God." (Matt. 5:9.) We are never to use the sword, earthly power, in seeking to promote the cause of the Master. He has power enough, and when the time comes for its exercise he will take to himself this great power, and the sword of justice will be unsheathed and cause a terrible time of trouble. But that will be the due time, and the Lord will then so take charge of the affairs of earth that the lessons from that experience will prove profitable and not injurious. The only sword which the Lord's people now may use is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and it is to cleave its way by its own sharpness and penetrating power rather than force of language and invective, or any manifestation of anger on the part of those who use it. On the contrary, they are directed to speak the truth in love, that thus the truth may do its own work in its own way.

### **"ALL FORSOOK HIM AND FLED"**

At first glance it would appear that the disciples were very cowardly when they all forsook the Master at the time of his arrest. But then we must remember that this was our Lord's own suggestion. He said to the officers, "If I am the one you seek, let these go their way." They discerned that they could be of no use to the Lord after he was in the hands of the high priests, who represented the civil court, the law of the land, and whom they knew to be prejudiced against Jesus. They may have even taken

Jesus' words to imply a command that they should go their way. Furthermore they were perplexed: they had been expecting such different results from their adherence to Jesus. When they looked for his exaltation he talked about his crucifixion, was sad and distressed, and now was arrested. Everything was perplexing, disheartening, and they probably went to their homes thoroughly discouraged, except Peter and John, who followed him afar off. Arriving at the High Priest's palace and court-room, Jesus was first led before the aged priest Annas and cross-questioned a little, and then sent to the court of his son-in-law, the official priest, Caiaphas. His presentation before Annas was probably merely a matter of courtesy, as apparently it was Caiaphas who had caused his arrest and was waiting with certain elders of the Jews to examine him preparatory to his trial, with a view to ascertaining just what charges they would bring against him. (But in the morning it was evidently not thought worth while to have a formal trial according to the Law. Hence the unlawful night hearing was really the trial. The determination to get Pilate to try and execute Jesus was the thought, though to Pilate they subsequently implied that they had condemned Jesus lawfully.)

### **SEEKING FALSE WITNESSES**

We have little reason to doubt that the High Priest and elders had considerable knowledge of Jesus, his teachings and his mighty works. We are informed that one of his last miracles in the vicinity of Jerusalem, the awakening of Lazarus from death, had so stirred the Scribes and Pharisees that they determined that Jesus must be put to death, because they feared that a few more such miracles would thoroughly arouse the people on his behalf and thus break their control over them. They now had their victim in their grasp, arrested without the knowledge of the people and without arousing any disturbance. And they still had the murderous intention respecting him. It was merely a question how they might execute it – not how they might serve the ends

of justice, but how they might appear to conform to the requirements of justice and the Law, of which they were representatives, and yet accomplish the villainy, the murder, that was in their hearts. Hence we read that they sought false witnesses: they did not wish true witnesses, who would tell what they knew about the Master, but false witnesses, who would misrepresent him, his teachings, etc., either ignorantly through misunderstanding him or designedly with a view to gaining favor with the officers of the court. But they found none. It is certainly to the credit of those connected with the court, aside from its chief officers, that they neither seriously misunderstood our Lord's teachings nor were willing to misrepresent them. Finally, the best they could do was to find two witnesses who declared that they had heard Jesus say that if the Temple were destroyed he would be able to raise it up in three days. Nothing about this was false evidence – it was what the majority of those who heard probably understood our Lord to mean. It was subsequently, under the enlightenment of the holy Spirit, that the apostles understood that he "spoke of the temple of his body"; hence these two witnesses are not to be blamed as false witnesses, though doubtless in their ignorance they supposed that the testimony they bore was against Jesus and discreditable to him, as showing a spirit of boastfulness and a disregard for the greatness and grandeur of the Temple. The High Priest, however, realized that he had utterly failed of getting any testimony against the Lord. But he did not wish this to so appear to all the people present, and hence he affected to regard this testimony as very damaging, and indignantly questioned Jesus whether or not he heard that testimony, and if he had nothing whatever to say in rebuttal – was he unable to refute the witness, the testimony? Jesus answered nothing. Had the witnesses repeated his words exactly there was nothing in them upon which any law would condemn him.

## "ART THOU THE CHRIST?"

Finally, unable to get Jesus to discuss the Temple question, and thus possibly say something that could be considered incriminating, the High Priest bethought him that a leading question put in a most solemn form might succeed in getting Jesus to make some admission that would be incriminating. The question was, "Tell us whether thou be the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God?" Caiaphas probably knew that Jesus had not boasted of his Messiahship, that rather he had gone quietly about his work, doing good and instructing the people, and allowing his works to testify that "never man spake like this man," and that he was working the works of him that sent him and was therefore the Messiah. It was a question, therefore, whether or not Jesus would incriminate himself by admitting his Messiahship. Had he denied it what recourse for a charge against him would have remained? But Jesus did not deny this question. To have remained silent even would have been to deny himself, denying the truth, denying the High Priest [R3888 : page 351] of the nation the knowledge and the corresponding responsibility of the hour. It was every way due to the head of the nation he should know that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Our Lord therefore answered, "Thou hast said," that is, I assent to what you have said, or, I am the Messiah, the Son of God, and I will volunteer further to assure you that by and by, hereafter, ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the glories of heaven.

In this statement, as in nearly all of our Lord's utterances, much was said in few words. It was not his intention nor would it have been proper to have explained the future of the divine plan at that time under those circumstances to those people. "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence him, and he will show *them* his covenant." Hence our Lord did not say, as he might have said, "You are about to condemn me; I will be

crucified this day between two thieves; I will rise again on the third day; I will ascend to the Father in forty days thereafter; I will then send my holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the work will be begun of a spiritual kingdom which will find the very elect throughout the whole earth. When these are found I will come again at my second advent in power and great glory, not to be tried by you, but to be your judge and to be the King and Ruler of the whole world, and to grant the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom to every creature, with full opportunity of coming to full knowledge and full blessing." We see that what our Lord stated implied that he knew all this, but it was not the proper time for its declaration.

What lessons are there for us in connection with these facts? One is that when we seek information on any subject we should be thoroughly honest, thoroughly just, and not seek opportunity to misrepresent another, no matter what useful ends we might suppose would be served by such a course. To all who are the Lord's people in any sense of the word justice must stand out prominently. It is the very foundation of God's throne, we read, and surely must be the foundation of all character amongst those who are the Lord's and who hope ever to come off conquerors in this present time. Only the honest, only the just, seem to be influenced by the message of the Lord's Word at the present time, and those who lose their candor, their honesty, their sincerity, seem very certain to lose the Truth also. Let us all beware, therefore, of any slackness along this line of justice – toward God, toward ourselves, toward our friends, toward our enemies. We can not, we must not, be less than just to any, though we may be and should be more than just to all – yea, loving, generous.

## FEIGNING RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

Hearing Jesus' admission that he was Messiah, the High Priest realized that this was the strongest, indeed the only complaint he could make against the Lord of anything that [R3889 : page 351] had the appearance of evil. Nor was there evil in this, for it was the truth; but feigning great piety, great respect for God, great reverence for the promise of God respecting Messiah – feigning to be thunderstruck with such a claim by Jesus, Caiaphas arose, his face full of pretended indignation and wrath against such a claim, which he affected to think so dishonored God as to be blasphemy, he rent or tore his robe as an expression of his pretended righteous indignation. He cried out to the people, "This is blasphemy – what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? What would be the proper punishment for such an awful crime as this? How shall we deter others from similarly coming forward and claiming to be Messiah, the Son of God, healing the sick, giving examples of his power in awakening the dead and casting out the devils from the people?" The elders, there assembled for the very purpose of murdering Jesus, answered, voted, "He is worthy of death." Jesus must wait, and they meanwhile reviled him – if not the elders and officers, yet with their knowledge and without their hindrance – and smote the Lord and spat upon him and derided him, and, calling him a Prophet, asked him to prove his ability as a Messiah and prophet by naming his tormentors. "But as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" to defend himself, nor did he use the power invested in him, nor call for the twelve legions of angels who he previously declared would have been ready to respond for his release. On the contrary, he realized that he was but carrying out his covenant of sacrifice and submitted himself accordingly, desiring that this or whatever was the Father's will might be done in him.

What is the lesson in this for us? We have covenanted to learn of him, to follow his example. How do we receive the buffetings,

the trials, the "contradictions of sinners"? Are we similarly patient, long suffering? Do we endure these, realizing that nothing could happen to us except by our Father's knowledge – nothing that he is not both able and willing to overrule for our good? It will not do for us to say that if we deserved the evil treatment we could take it patiently, for we are to remember the truth of what one of the thieves confessed, "This man hath done nothing amiss." We cannot say that we have been perfect in all of our dealings with those who may spitefully use us and persecute us, even though our intentions have been the best, and even though we have in some degree rendered good for the evil we receive. Let us remember the Apostle's words on this line, "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye might follow in his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously." – 1 Pet. 2:20,23.

Let us not only see to it that we are as nearly as possible faultless and undeserving of reproaches and buffetings, but when these experiences come to us let us remember to take them patiently, uncomplainingly, and thus to more and more develop and exhibit the character-likeness of our Lord. Those who thus do, have the Lord's guarantee that every such experience shall prove a blessing in the end. Those who, on the contrary, undertake to "battle for their rights," show that they either do not understand the nature of the covenant they have made to take up the cross, or else that they are unwilling to comply with the terms of that covenant.

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