

Passion Week devotional lecture by the Rev. Richard Oldham, 1851

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The St Mary's Heritage Project

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Lecture I - Monday - Jesus buffeted and spat upon.

SOURCE:

Passion Week - being five lectures on the Passion of our Blessed Lord, with special reference to the fulfilment of prophesy, delivered in St. Mary's Church, Glasgow, during Passion Week, 1851, by the Rev. R. S. Oldham, M.A., Incumbent.

Lecture I	Monday	<i>Jesus buffeted and spat upon.</i>
Lecture II	Tuesday	<i>Jesus scourged.</i>
Lecture III	Wednesday	<i>The nails.</i>
Lecture IV	Thursday	<i>The gall and the vinegar.</i>
Lecture V	Saturday	<i>The spear.</i>

[RGE 2009]

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Lecture I - Monday - Jesus buffeted and spat upon.

ISAIAH l. 6 "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."

ST. MARK xiv. 65. "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 did strike Him with the palms of their hands."

We have now entered, brethren, on that awful week, in which we are to contemplate day by day the successive stages of our Saviour's Passion.

His life, which, from first to last, was so far one of suffering that the title "A Man of Sorrows" describes Him generally, was to close in an accumulated load of suffering, such as none other ever bore.

When all was over, and He had risen from the dead, it might be said, that in His earthly sojourn He had known all grief, except only the grief of remorse and of a guilty conscience. The grief which sin in other ways brings with it, He *had* felt, though they were the sins of others, and not His own, which were the cause. He had been borne down by the crushing sense of its loathsome foulness; it had brought Him, as it does all men, into contact with the evil one; and in His last hours He had felt even the estrangement which it produces from God. All griefs of the affections, too, had been His. He had wept, in sympathy at least, at the death of a loved friend; He had shed tears of compassion over the prospective ruin of the holy city; and all the wounds which ingratitude, unjust persecution, desertion, treachery, can give the spirit, had been inflicted upon His. Lastly, the bodily pains, the acutest and the most terrible, He had not tasted merely, but endured the worst. And though in all He had triumphed, He had suffered in all. Grief He had (in the emphatic language of prophecy) been "made acquainted with;" - it had become His intimate companion.

Such (I say) might have been the account of His life any of His disciples or He Himself might have given, after His Resurrection. And it was in this week that all this suffering was brought to its height. It was the Week of Sorrows out of a Life of Sorrows. Who shall count the drops in that cup which in this week was given Him to drink?

And therefore it must necessarily always be in hushed and awe-struck tones that we speak of this week's events. We shall be apt, in seeking to abstain from argument or discussion, merely to take our reflections as they arise.

Yet, on the other hand, the practical result of the present solemn Commemoration is in danger of being injured, and its profit may be lessened, if there be no system in our Meditations.

It would seem, then, a wise plan, and one, by following which, while we preserve the devotional character of those meditations, we may also receive instruction - if, in devoutly contemplating each of the awful scenes now presented to us, we take especial

notice of some one particular, common to them all, and so serving to link together our reflections on all of them.

Such is the course, brethren, on which I invite you to enter this morning. I propose on each morning of this week (Good Friday excepted) to lecture on some one of other of the circumstances of our Lord's Passion, and always with reference to their having been made the subject of Prophecy.

It may be said, that we are led to this mode of considering them by the example of our Blessed Lord Himself. Nothing can be more striking than the way in which, by all He did and said, He has guided us to read *these* records of the New Testament, above all others, by the light of the Old. It has been observed, that He seems throughout especially to have had the Psalms in his mind; but not the Psalms only. The whole of the Old Testament, - the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, - formed the constant subject of His thoughts, as it is also the key to all His actions. We shall probably be surprised, as we go on, to find how all the details of the Passion may be read; nay, how the narrative of the Evangelists may even be completed and filled up, from the pages of the Prophets.

We begin, then this morning, with that particular related by St. Mark, in the passage which forms part of our text - our Lord's being *buffeted and spat upon*. This comes rightly first, for it was the first step in His final Suffering. He had been led the night before by that band, which, through the betrayal of Judas, had succeeded in seizing Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, first of all to the private house of Annas, probably only that He might be securely bound there; and thence on to the palace of the High Priest, Caiaphas.

Here, at the earliest dawn, He was tried before the assembled Sanhedrim. There was at least the form of a trial. It was not more than this, for we know that the Chief Priests, and Scribes, and Elders, who composed that Council, had before determined on His death. However, witnesses were called, and much pains even were taken to procure some testimony that should have the appearance of truth. But this attempt failed. "*Though many false witnesses came,*" no consistent story could be framed, or sufficient accusation be set up. "Such is the Divine innocency," says an old writer, "that falsehood itself cannot invent any thing which is capable of tarnishing it." To the impatient question of the High Priest, "*What is it that these witness against Thee?*" Jesus answers nothing; and it is only Caiaphas, himself setting aside all *those* accusations, comes to the real charge against Him, and adjures Him by the living God to declare whether or no He were the Christ, the Son of God, that Jesus speaks, saying plainly, I am! And this seals His doom. O strange and melancholy sight! O blinded nation of the Jews! The Messiah, the Desire of Israel, the expected Deliverer, the great Prophet, the true High Priest, the King of the royal line of David, stands before the great Council of the nation, in presence of the Scribes and Elders, and makes Himself known, avows Himself to be such, and for this He is to be condemned to die.

Well might the symbolical action of Caiaphas have a terrible significance against himself and against his people! He rent his clothes, in token of the guilt of Jesus. He might well rend them, but with a far different meaning. Yea, let him and all Israel rend their garments, in token of mourning and of lamentation, for now is the sceptre

departed from Judah, the veil of the Temple shall soon be rent too, the Levitical priesthood is at that moment rent in twain for ever.

And now it is that the actual sufferings of Jesus begin. Pronounced guilty of death, because He could not deny Himself to be the Lord of Life, He is removed from before the Council. He is then yet more tightly bound, and stands ready to be delivered up as a condemned criminal to the Roman power. But before He is given over to the authorities for execution, He is loaded with ignominy and brutally abused. It was still very early in the day, and before they lead him to Pilate, they will make Him their sport. The conduct of the High Priest towards Him had encouraged the guards and attendants to treat Him with every contempt. They gather round Him therefore. One mocks Him, jeers at Him; another strikes Him; a third spits on Him. Some rudely push and jostle Him, helpless as He was; and others, blindfolding Him, smite Him on the face, and they bid Him say which of them has done it.

Brethren, we are fain to turn away from such a scene. It seems as if this time, not the power, but all the spite of Hell were let loose against the Saviour. And, indeed, what shall cover us with such shame as to see Him thus suffering shame at the hands of men? He who stood there and was thus treated, was the Son of God. "That face, which" (in the words of Bishop Taylor) "the angels stare upon with wonder, like infants at a bright sunbeam, and in the beholding of which much of the celestial glory doth consist," that face it was which was thus jeeringly covered, and struck, and spat upon. And they who did all this were His sinful creatures!

O, the adorable mystery of Divine love, which condescends, not only to suffer *for* man, but at the hands of man! And *this* suffering, moreover, was (so to speak) extra and additional. It formed no part of the proceedings necessary to His death. It was mere wanton cruelty that inflicted it.

Let us pause, then, here, to note the bright example of patience and meekness which this scene affords. Jesus truly was one who practised what He taught. He had said before to His disciples, "*Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart;*" and again, more particularly, "*Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;*" and now He was *proving* what He had said of Himself, and doing this very thing. Though He did not literally *offer* His cheeks to be smitten - for indeed there was no need - yet He obeyed to the utmost this His own injunction. "*He was bound, who came to loose the bands of death; He was condemned, whose sentence must acquit the world; He was spat upon, who was fairer than the sons of men; He was derided, who was clothed with glory and majesty¹;*" and so also He could, by a word, or by His will only, have withered the hand that was stretched out to strike Him; and by not doing so, He did, in fact, turn His face to His cruel persecutors. He had before made withered hands whole, but He will not now do the reverse, even under such provocation.

See here the first lesson for the Christian martyr. The great and deadly conflict between the Son of God and the prince of darkness had now begun, and the first success is gained by patient suffering. So have the victories of the martyrs' noble army also

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Bishop Hall.

been achieved. And still must the Church suffer from the world, if she would overcome it. Her members singly must do the same. Let us pray that the example of Jesus before Caiaphas, so as we have seen Him to-day, may work meekness in all His followers! What is that reproach, that dishonour, that contumely, that shame, which shall equal what He so meekly bore?

And now, my brethren, let me read to you the account of this transaction, indited by the Holy Ghost some centuries before. Carry in your thoughts all the several particulars which we have had occasion to notice, and then listen to the following predictions of them gathered from the Prophets and the Psalms:

“The rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed².” “They cast their heads together with one consent; and were confederate against Him³.” “They took this counsel together, saying, God hath forsaken Him; persecute Him, and take Him, for there is none to deliver Him⁴.” (Then His silence.) “As for Me, I was like a deaf man, and heard not; and as one that is dumb who doth not open his mouth. I became even as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs⁵.” “For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against Me: they have spoken against Me with a lying tongue. They compassed Me about also with words of hatred⁶.” “False witnesses are risen up against Me, and such as breathe out cruelty⁷.” “They laid to My charge things that I knew not.⁸” (And yet His at length answering Caiaphas, and declaring Himself, notwithstanding His humiliation, to be the Son of God..) “While I was musing, the fire kindled, and at last I spake with my tongue⁹.” “Have I no power to deliver? Behold at My rebuke I dry up the sea¹⁰.” (And then come in the words of the text:) “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,” (which are continued thus by Jeremiah:) “He giveth His cheek to him that smiteth Him; He is filled full with reproach¹¹.”

Would you not certainly have thought that all this had been written *after* our Lord’s Passion, instead of centuries before? Do not all these passages so exactly express what really happened, as to seem a description rather than a prophesy?

² Ps. ii. 2

³ Ps. lxxxiii. 5.

⁴ Ps. lxxi. 11.

⁵ Ps. xxxviii. 13.

⁶ Ps. cix. 2, 3.

⁷ Ps. xxvii. 12.

⁸ Ps. xxxv. 11.

⁹ Ps. xxxix. 3.

¹⁰ Isa. l. 2.

¹¹ Lam. iii. 30.

The thought, however, may arise in some minds, that some, at least, of these passages, although they do so accurately describe even the details of our Lord's Passion, were yet not originally written with any reference to it. In answer to this let it only be said, that no careful student of Scripture can possibly believe that such exact adaptations are merely accidental. Even in those cases where it is not the whole chapter that relates to the Messiah, but where a single verse is separated from its context, the reference (it cannot be doubted) is an intended one. This is shown in the strongest light, when it is plain that the second or prophetic sense is also more strictly the literal one, than the first or historical sense.

We may take our text as an instance. As applied to Christ the expressions used are strictly and literally true. But as spoken of Isaiah, to convey the meaning that he was a faithful servant of God, notwithstanding the contempt and opposition he met with, they are mostly highly figurative, and can be taken only as a poetical and metaphorical way of speaking. It was not that he had actually been smitten on the cheek, or that actually he had not hid his face from spitting; but these metaphors imply that neither ridicule nor persecution deterred him from performing the mission with which he was entrusted. While, on the contrary, as has been already said, the passage becomes simply descriptive, and may be taken in its most literal signification, when applied to our Lord.

One little circumstance, indeed, which is mentioned in it, we do not find noticed in the Gospels as having been fulfilled - the plucking off the hair. The Evangelists do not record this among the other indignities offered to the Saviour. But observe, we are not on that account to conclude that He did not suffer it. Rather are we to consider this as one of the passages which fill up and complete the Gospel narrative. We know distinctly that we are not told all that those who took part in the cruel mocking of Jesus *said* to Him; for, after mentioning the taunt which the other Evangelists also mention - Prophecy, who is it that smote Thee? St. Luke adds, "AND MANY OTHER THINGS *blasphemously spake they against Him.*" As, therefore, we are not told all that they *said*, so, doubtless, neither is all recorded that they *did* to Him. Nor, when we find a particular not noticed by the writers of the New Testament, yet prophesied of in the Old, shall we have much hesitation in believing, that it did have a place in the actual occurrences at the time. And thus may we not only learn, as we surely ought to do, to see Christ as much in one part of Holy Scripture as in another; - for indeed it is of Him that all Holy Scripture speaks, and must speak; - but we shall read each part better by reading it in connexion with the whole; and for to-day let Isaiah have filled up for St. Mark the picture of our Saviour's first bitter suffering in the hall of Caiaphas.