

Twice in Matt 27 we met the word 'mocked', vv. 29, 31 – have sport/jest at someone else's expense. In his gospel, Luke records how, at the close of Jesus' so-called trial before Caiaphas, the men of the council and their attendants had earlier 'mocked Him', 22. 63. For their part, they ridiculed the popular view that Jesus was a prophet – covering His face and demanding, 'Prophesy, who struck you'. Now at the close of His trial before Pilate, the soldiers of the governor and others of the Roman cohort stationed at the barracks (the whole band, 'all the band', maniple, up to 200<sup>2</sup>) crowd around to mock His supposed kingly claims. **So You are a King?**

First, **they placed around Him a scarlet cloak** (described as reddish purple by other gospels) - in all likelihood some discarded military cloak - in obvious mimicry (mock imitation) of the short purple cloak worn by the Caesars, v. 28. Note that the soldiers changed His clothing three times - first they stripped Him and put the cloak on (around) Him, v. 28, and then they took the cloak off Him and put His own garments back on Him, v. 31 – later they removed His garments again and gambled for each piece when He was crucified, v. 35 – the Holy Spirit leaves it to our imagination what renewed pain these heartless actions meant for Him as each change of clothing opened afresh the half-dried wounds of His scourging, v. 26; the scourge was a murderous, barbarous weapon of torture, made of leather strips/thongs imbedded acorn-shaped lumps of lead, short, sharp pointed bones ... He was bound, bent, beaten ... and His back torn all directions, mass bleeding flesh.

Then **they plaited, twisted a crown of thorns** – no doubt carefully plucked and woven by hands well protected by tough military gauntlets. **So You are a King?** This crown they pressed down on His head – to play the part of the laurel wreath which, according to Suetonius the Roman historian, was worn by the then Emperor Tiberius, v. 29.<sup>3</sup> Well expressed by hymn, 'Sinners in derision crowned Him, mocking thus the Saviour's claim'. But this rude coronet with its hard, sharp thorns meant not only mockery but inexpressible pain for Jesus – the more so when they repeatedly struck His head with the reed/staff, v. 30. Men gave Him - 'For His head, the crown to wear; for His back, the cross to bear, for His hands, the nails to tear'. It has been said that drops of His own blood supplied the rubies for the crown He wore that day.

**A reed/staff**, did we say? I doubt that this reed was particularly slight and flimsy. Reeds were often used to make staves for walking, and I take it that this was a thick and sturdy reed – in all likelihood, the walking cane – the staff – of someone present. I note that the word translated 'reed' occurs in the Greek Old Testament in 2 Kings 18<sup>4</sup> – where 'the king of Assyria (Sennacherib) sent (three of chief generals), the Tartan, the Rabsaris and the Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And when they were come up, the Rabshakeh (commander-in-chief of army) announced, Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust? Behold, you trust upon the staff of this crushed reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust on him', vv. 17-21. Interesting that same picture is painted of Egypt in Ezek. 29. 6-7, 'they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel', and, addressed to Egypt, 'when they leaned on you, you broke'. The reed was an eminently suitable picture of Egypt because the Nile, the river of Egypt, has always been rich in sturdy reeds. **So You are a King?**

And this solid cane was thrust into Jesus' right hand to do duty as a sceptre - the emblem of royal authority, v. 29 – and then used to pound down the thorns – as they struck Him on the head again and again.<sup>5</sup>

**They bowed the knees before Him in mock obeisance**, v. 29. **So You are a King?** Mark says, 'kneeling, they worshipped Him (or 'paid Him homage'; 10,000 talent servant fell down before the king, Matt. 18. 26; cf. Rev. 3. 9)', Mark 15. 19. Certainly by the time of Tiberius, the Caesar's were openly acknowledged and revered as gods - were both given and accepted divine honours. Suggest that 'worshipped' is therefore a fair translation; it was the soldier's bogus, counterfeit worship.

**They mocked Him, saying 'Hail (rejoice), King of the Jews'**, v. 29.<sup>6</sup> Mark says again they 'began to salute/greet Him, Hail, king of the Jews', Mark 15. 18. **So You are a King?** This was their sneering imitation of the official salute 'Avé, Imperator' (Hail, Emperor) addressed to Caesar. On their lips, 'King of the Jews' was itself a title of derision – they had nothing but contempt for the Jews - as a small but very troublesome subject race (causing trouble out of all proportion to size) - and by their well-chosen words they managed to mock both Jesus and His nation at the same time.

**'Spitting at Him**, they took the reed and struck Him on the head', v. 30. In biblical days, men expressed contempt and disdain many ways. Boast whole arsenal of ridicule : e.g. make naked or part naked (classic case = Hanun, son of Nahash of Ammon, 2 Sam. 10 – 'show kindness Hanun, son of Nahash, as his father to me' (again, as chapter 9, David showed kindness to a son for his father's sake; there Mephibosheth and Jonathan) – send condolences – sent to comfort. But advisors suggested come to spy out city – cut off garments half way – 'men were greatly ashamed'), clap hands at; wag heads at.

But seem spit in face worst – Deut. 25. 9 (one of two brothers dies, not necessarily elder, no son, man refuse take widow as wife to raise seed in brother's name – 'not like to take', firstborn continue name of dead, not blot name, elders, chance change mind, stand firm), and case of *Miriam* (spoke against wife and 'Has Lord only spoken through Moses, not also

us', meekest, God heard. Smile, 'Come out, you 3, to tabernacle of congregation (tent of meeting)', they 'came out' and Lord 'came down', pillar of cloud, stood door, call Miriam and Aaron, if prophet among you, make Self known vision, and speak dream, not so with Moses, faithful, speak face to face, why then not afraid speak against my servant Moses? Lord and cloud departed, suddenly leprous, as snow. Aaron plead 'not as one dead', Moses, good man, cried Lord, 'heal her, I pray', shut out camp, for seven days people not journey, Monopoly?), 'would she not be *ashamed* 7 days if father spit in face', Num. 12. 14.

Once *Job* enter room, princes stop talk, hands on mouth, elders stood up, now young men to whose fathers wouldn't have entrusted dogs, 'I am their song, their byword, they spare not (not hesitate) to spit in my face', Job 30. 10. Ultimate of humiliation and disgrace. **So You are a King? The soldiers filthy spittle took the place of the kiss of homage and allegiance which the Emperor was accustomed to receive.** 'He hid not His face from shame and spitting', Isa. 50. 6b.

**And throughout the whole disgusting spectacle, He - the object of their scorn and sport - maintained His dignified silence.** As Isaiah put it, twice, in 53. 7, 'He opened not His mouth'. 'He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth : He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth'.

And yet, make no mistake, He felt it keenly. Clearly been stung by insult of Luke 7, in house of Simon the Pharisee : 'I entered your house, gave no water for feet, kiss for cheek, oil for head'. Felt lack of common courtesy. How much more? According to all three synoptic gospels, as He had approached Jerusalem, He had specifically forewarned His disciples in His third and most detailed prediction, that He would be delivered 'to the gentiles to be *mocked*, to be scourged and to be crucified', Matt. 20. 19//Mark 10. 34//Luke 18. 32. Make no mistake, their mockery stung Him sharply. And how, we venture to ask, did God the Father feel about this treatment of His Son? The Lord prayed, 'Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my *dishonour*', Psa. 69. 19. Note that word dishonour. Jesus said that the Father 'has given all judgement to the Son, *that all may honour* the Son, even as they honour the Father', John 5. 23. God's agenda! How then, do you think, would He feel to see His beloved Son so dishonoured and abused? And yet, amazingly, God didn't intervene! - no fire fell from heaven to consume the soldiers that morning - nor did the ground under the Praetorium open to swallow them up. God did nothing! Absolutely nothing!

Ah, but one day - one day, God will throw into reverse the fine detail of this cruel mockery – will reverse every detail of this parody of His Son's majesty. We sometimes sing, 'Every mark of dark dishonour, told in answering glory now'. Well, if not altogether now - certainly one day. And we have read of that day, in Revelation 19, when heaven will open for a magnificent pageant - the coming of the awesome warrior king.

Then He will appear, **clothed, not in some discarded scarlet cloak, but with His garment dipped in blood** – possibly 'sprinkled' with blood, v. 13 – I suggest not His own but that of enemies. Yes, before the confrontation with His foes recorded in vv. 19-21 – but book of imagery – to alert His foes – the Beast, false prophet and gathered armies all - if I understand it correctly - to the immanent and certain judgement about to fall on them. And fall it will! Isa. 63.1-6 speaks of the day – 'Who is this that comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah (capital of Edom)? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?' 'I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' 'Why are you red in your apparel, and your garments like him that treads in the winevat?' 'I have trodden the winevat alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in my anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart'. Does 'day of vengeance' ring bells? Cntr Luke 4 cut short and Isa. 61. 2, 'Spirit of Lord on, anoint preach gospel poor, proclaim acceptable (favourable) year of Lord and ...'. That day has now dawned.

Then He will appear, **crowned not with thorns but with many crowns (diadems) on His head**, v. 12. Not now the woven crown of Matthew 27 but with many diadems of regal dignity. The diadem was a narrow band worn around the head by the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans as the distinctive badge of royalty. It was common for a sovereign to wear more than one diadem as an indication of his authority over more than one country. For example, when Ptolemy VI (Philometer), King of Egypt, entered Antioch in 169 BC, he wore two diadems to signify that he was now lord of both Egypt and Asia, 1 Macc.11. 13. Here in Revelation - the great red dragon is portrayed as wearing seven diadems, 12. 3, and the Beast out of sea as wearing ten, 13. 1 – but He, the King of Kings has 'many' diadems! – His cannot be counted.

Then He will appear, **not with a reed** - rudely thrust into His right hand by men - **but wielding a rod of iron** (firm, inflexible and unbending – not break if lean on) with which to rule the nations, 19. 15 - a point made already in 12. 5 – man-child caught up to God and His throne - who to rule all nations rod of iron. *Not a reed but a rod!* The expression 'rod of iron' links us back of course to Psalm 2. 9 - 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron'. Indeed much of this section of Revelation is coloured by Psalm 2.

Then He will appear, **not to be greeted by a handful of men** (even if all 200) who hold Him up to ridicule as they **kneel before Him in mock obeisance**. But in God's time, at (or 'in') the name of Jesus 'every knee will bow', Phil. 2. 10. In that day, there will be no 7,000 refusing to bow, as once the 7,000 of God's gallant resistance movement refused to bow the knee to Ba'al, 1 Kings 19. 18.

And then it will not be **a handful of men who 'snigger' as they salute Him, 'King of the Jews'** but 'every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord', Phil 2. 10. In that day, no-one will be heard to claim that Caesar is lord! Domitian (days John wrote) = demand evidence of loyalty to state. The warrior King has a name written on His garment and thigh - on the place where a sword would normally hang – declaring to all He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And then no band of puny men will **spit in His face**. In that day, the very kings and judges of the earth will be exhorted, in the language of Psalm 2, 'to kiss the Son' - not Caesar as a token of allegiance - but 'the Son (God's Son, that is), lest He be angry' and they perish from the way, Psa. 2. 12.

No longer then can it be said that **He opens not His mouth**. For out of His mouth proceeds a sharp sword that with it He may smite (strike down) the nations, 19. 15. (Nazareth = Wondered gracious words 'proceeded (same Greek) out of mouth', Luke 4. 22.) Though the 'armies' of heaven ride out of heaven with Him at their head, v. 14, they wear no armour and bear no weapons. They are neither dressed nor equipped for conflict. Only the King carries a weapon. His name is on His thigh but His sword is in His mouth.

And, with what Isaiah calls 'the breath of His lips', Isa. 11. 4, He will visit withering destruction on the wicked. For the word proceeding out of His mouth carries a destructive power far more terrible than any invented or harnessed by men - as the united gentile nations will find to their cost, v. 21. Once, as the Lamb of God, He was dumb before the shearers, Acts 8. 32; now, as the Lion of Judah, He – the Lord - 'shall roar out of Zion' (utter voice from Jerusalem) and destroy the assembled gentile armies, Joel 3. 16 – 'Proclaim among the gentiles, let men of war draw near', summon, gather to valley of Jehoshaphat.<sup>7</sup>

Once God watched and listened as men laughed at and derided His Son. But, in the day of reversal, as Psalm 2 assures us, He that sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision, Psa. 2. 4.

But, as we close, we ask, *why* did He, the sovereign Lord, willingly bear such shame? In one sense, of course, He did it for God, 'For Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face', Psa. 69. 7. In another sense, for me, 'who for joy before endured cross, despising shame', Heb. 12. 2. Joy of having me for, with and like Himself. Does His shame - suffered all for me - not move me to wonder and adoration.<sup>8</sup>

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**End-notes :**

<sup>1</sup> Hymn – ‘Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious’, by Thomas Kelly.

<sup>2</sup> See C.K. Barrett and the Word Commentary on John 18. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See too TDNT, vol. VII, pages 619 etc.

<sup>4</sup> See NIDOTTE, 3, 942.

<sup>5</sup> The imperfect tense.

<sup>6</sup> Compare, ‘Where is he who is born king of the Jews?’, Matt. 2. 2.

<sup>7</sup> ‘He shall roar like a lion’, Hosea 11.10. Cf. Jer. 25. 30; Amos 1. 2.

<sup>8</sup> But surely, it must do more. No doubt most have been told or read of the effect which German artist Sternberg's painting of the crucifixion (hung in gallery at Dusseldorf) had on young Count Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf's life was changed, when, gazing at the picture, he heard the Master say to him, ‘All this I did for you. What have you done for me?’ Found Moravian mission. We also ought ask, What then can I do for the Lord Jesus - something which will involve me in some cost - some sacrifice - some self-denial – do for the One who willingly faced the scorn and mockery of men for me.