

An Awful Contrast

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon's sermon explores the profound implications of the contempt shown to Christ and calls believers to recognize their own sins and glorify Him in their lives.

Scripture: Matthew 26:67, John 19:1

Topics: "Humiliation of Christ", "Judgment and Grace"

Description

C.H. Spurgeon delivers a powerful sermon titled 'An Awful Contrast,' reflecting on the profound humiliation of Christ as he faced contempt from the high priest Caiaphas and the religious leaders who spat in his face. Spurgeon emphasizes the depth of human depravity revealed in this act, contrasting it with the divine love and patience of Christ, who endured such shame for humanity's sake. He warns that even those in positions of religious authority can become enemies of Christ, and he calls for self-examination among believers to recognize how they may also dishonor Him. The sermon culminates in a reminder of the future judgment when Christ, once despised, will return as the sovereign Judge, urging listeners to seek His grace and prepare for that day.

Transcript

GUIDED BY OUR TEXT in Matthew's Gospel, let us first go in thought to the palace of Caiaphas the high priest, and there let us, in deepest sorrow, realize the meaning of these terrible words: "Then did they spit in his face." There is more of deep and awful thunder in them than in the bolt that bursts overhead, there is more of vivid terror in them than in the sharpest lightning flash: "Then did they spit in his face." Observe that these men, the priests, and scribes, and orders, and their servitors, did this shameful deed after they had heard our Lord say, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

"It was in contempt of this claim, in derision of this honor which he foretold for himself, that "then did they spit in his face," as if they could bear it no longer, that he, who stood to be judged of them, should claim to be their Judge; that he, whom they had brought at dead of night from the garden of Gethsemane as their captive, should talk of coming in the clouds of heaven: "Then did they spit in his face." Nor may I fail to add that they thus assaulted our Lord after the high priest had rent his clothes.

My brethren, do not forget that the high priest was supposed to be the representative of everything that was good and venerable among the Jews. The high priest was the earthly head of their religion; he it was who, alone of mortal men, might enter within the mysterious veil; yet he it was who condemned the Lord of

glory, as he rent his clothes, and said, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy." It makes me tremble as I think of how eminent we may be in the service of God, and yet how awfully we may be enemies of the Christ of God.

Let none of us think that, though we even clamber up to the highest places in the church, we are therefore saved. We may be high priests, and wear the Urim and the Thummim, and put on the breastplate with all its wondrous mystic stones, and bind around us the curious girdle of the ephod, and yet, for all that, we may be ringleaders in expressing contempt of God and of his Christ. It was when Caiaphas, the high priest, had pronounced the word of condemnation against Christ, that "then did they spit in his face."

God grant that we may never take upon ourselves any office in the Church of God, and then, girt about with the authority and influence which such an office might lend to us, be the first to pour derision and contempt upon the Christ of God! Yet I do not hesitate to say that when men look to the earthly priesthood instead of looking to Christ, the great High Priest, when men are taught to trust in the mass instead of trusting in Christ's one sacrifice for sin upon the cross, it is then that the very priests do lead the way in spitting in his face.

Antichrist never more surely dwells anywhere than in the place where Christ is thus dishonored, and none do him such dire disgrace as those who ought to bow at his feet, and lift him high among the sons of men, yet who reject him, and refuse his rightful claims. "Then did they spit in his face," after he had proclaimed his Godhead as King and Judge of all, and after the man who ought to have been his principal earthly servant had turned arch-traitor, and led the way in contempt of him by accusing him of blaspheming.

"Then did they spit in his face." There are two or three thoughts that come to my mind when I think that these wicked men did actually spit in Christ's face,--in that face which is the light of heaven, the joy of angels, the bliss of saints, and the very brightness of the Father's glory. This spitting shows us, first, how far sin will go. If we want proof of the depravity of the heart of man, I will not point you to the stews of Sodom and Gomorrah, nor will I take you to the places where blood is shed in streams by wretches like to Herod and men of that sort.

No, the clearest proof that man is utterly fallen, and that the natural heart is enmity against God, is seen in the fact that they did spit in Christ's face, did falsely accuse him, and condemn him, and lead him out as a malefactor, and hang him up as a felon that he might die upon the cross. Why, what evil had he done? What was there in his whole life that should give them occasion to spit in his face? Even at that moment, did his face flash with indignation against them? Did he look with contempt upon them?

Not he; for he was all gentleness and tenderness even towards these his enemies, and their hearts must have been hard and brutal indeed that "then did they spit in his face." He had healed their sick, he had fed their hungry, he had been among them a very fountain of blessing up and down Judaea and Samaria; and yet, "then did they spit in his face." I say again, relate not to me the crimes of ancient nations, nor the horrible evils committed by uncivilized men, nor the more elaborate iniquities of our great cities; tell me not of the abominations of Greece or Rome;--this--this, in the sight of the angels of God, and in the eyes of the God of the angels, is the masterpiece of all iniquity: "Then did they spit in his face."

To enter into the King's own palace, and draw near to his only-begotten Son, and to spit in his face,--this is the crime of crimes which reveals the infamous wickedness of men. Humanity stands condemned of the blackest iniquity now that it has gone as far as to spit in Christ's face. My meditation also turns towards the Well-beloved into whose face they spat; and my thought concerning him is this, how deep was the

humiliation he had to endure! When he was made sin for us, though he himself knew no sin; when our Lord Jesus Christ took upon himself the iniquities of his people, and was burdened with the tremendous weight of their guilt, it became incumbent upon the justice of God to treat him as if he were actually a sinner.

He was no sinner, and he could be none; he was perfect man and perfect God, yet he stood in the place of sinners, and the Lord caused to meet upon him the iniquity of all his people. Therefore, in the time of humiliation, he must not be treated as the Son of God, neither must he be held in honor as a righteous man; he must first be given up to shame and to contempt, and then to suffering and to death; and, consequently, he was not spared this last and most brutal of insults: "Then did they spit in his face."

O my Lord, to what terrible degradation art thou brought! Into what depths art thou dragged through my sin, and the sin of all the multitudes whose iniquities were made to meet upon thee! O my brothers, let us hate sin; O my sisters, let us loathe sin, not only because it pierced those blessed hands and feet of our dear Redeemer, but because it dared even to spit in his face! No one can ever know all the shame the Lord of glory suffered when they did spit in his face. These words glide over my tongue all too smoothly; perhaps even I do not feel them as they ought to be felt, though I would do so if I could.

But could I feel as I ought to feel in sympathy with the terrible shame of Christ, and then could I interpret those feelings by any language known to mortal man, surely you would bow your heads and blush, and you would feel rising within your spirits a burning indignation against the sin that dared to put the Christ of God to such shame as this. I want to kiss his feet when I think that they did spit in his face. Then, once more, my thoughts run to him again in this way, I think of the tender omnipotence of his love.

How could he bear this spitting when, with one glance of his eye, had he been but angry, the flame might have slain them, and withered them all up? Yet he stood still even when they did spit in his face; and they were not the only ones who thus insulted him, for, afterwards, when he was taken by the soldiers into Pilate's hall, they also spat upon him in cruel contempt and scorn.

"See how the patient Jesus stands,

Insulted in his lowest case!

Sinners have bound the Almighty hands,

And spit in their Creator's face."

How could he bear it? Friends, he could not have borne it if he had not been omnipotent. That very omnipotence, which would have enabled him to destroy them, was omnipotence of love as well as omnipotence of force. It was this that made him--if I may so say,--"restrain himself," for there is no omnipotence like that which doth restrain omnipotence. Yet so it was that he could endure this spitting from men; but can you think of this marvellous condescension without feeling your hearts all on fire with love to him, so that you long to do some special act of homage to him, by which you may show that you would fain recompense him for this shame if you could?

I will not say more about that point, for the shameful fact stands indelibly recorded in the Scripture: "Then did they spit in his face;" but I want to bring the truth home, brethren, and to show you how we may have done to Christ what these wicked men did. "Oh!" says one, "I was not there; I did not spit in his face." Listen; perhaps you have spat in his face, perhaps even you have spat in his face. You remember that

touching hymn that we sometimes sing,--

"My Jesus! say what wretch has dared

Thy sacred hands to bind?

And who has dared to buffet so

Thy face so meek and kind?

"My Jesus I whose the hands that wove

That cruel thorny crown?

Who made that hard and heavy cross

That weighs thy shoulders down?

"My Jesus! who with spittle vile

Profaned thy sacred brow?

Or whose unpitying scourge has made

Thy precious blood to flow?

"'Tis I have thus ungrateful been,

Yet, Jesus, pity take!

Oh, spare and pardon me, my Lord,

For thy sweet mercy's sake!"

There are still some who spit in Christ's face by denying his Godhead. They say, "He is a mere man; a good man, it is true, but only a man;" though how they dare say that, I cannot make out, for he would be no good man who claimed to be God if he was not God. Jesus of Nazareth was the basest of impostors who ever lived if he permitted his disciples to worship him, and if he left behind him a life which compels us to worship him, if he was not really and truly God; therefore, of all those who declare that he is not God,--and there is a very great company of them even amongst the nominally religious people of the present day,--we must sorrowfully, but truthfully say, "Then did they spit in his face."

They also do the same who rail at his gospel. There are many, in those days, who seem as if they cannot be happy unless they are tearing the gospel to pieces. Especially is that divine mystery of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ the mark for the arrows of the wise men, I mean those who are wise according to the wisdom of this world. We delight to know that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the room and place and stead of his people.

"He bore that we might never bear

His Father's righteous ire."

Yet I have read some horrible things which have been written against that blessed doctrine, and as I read them I could only say to myself, "Then did they spit in his face." If there is anything that is beyond all else the glory of Christ, it is his atoning sacrifice; and if ever you thrust your finger into the very apple of his eye, and touch his honor in the tenderest possible point, it is when you have aught to say against his offering of himself a sacrifice unto God, without blemish and without spot, that he might put away the iniquities of his people.

Wherefore judge yourselves in this matter, and if ye have ever denied Christ's Deity, or if ye have ever assailed his atoning sacrifice, it might truly have been said of you, "Then did they spit in his face." Further, this evil is also done when men prefer their own righteousness to the righteousness of Christ. There are some who say, "We do not need pardon, we do not want to be justified by faith in Christ, we are good enough already," or, "We are working out our own salvation; we mean to save ourselves."

O sirs, if you can save yourselves, why did Jesus bleed upon the cross? It was a superfluity indeed that the Son of God should die in human form if there be a possibility of salvation by your own merits; and if you prefer your merits to his, it must be said of you also, "Then did they spit in his face." Your righteousnesses are only filthy rags; and if you prefer these to the fair white linen which is the righteousness of saints, if you think to wash yourselves in your tears, and so you despise that precious blood apart from which there is no purging of our sin, still to you does our text apply, "then did they spit in his face," when they preferred their own righteousness to Christ's.

I have often spoken to you about the parable of the prodigal son; but, possibly, your case is more like that of the elder brother in the parable; you have your portion of goods, it is all your own, and you are keeping it. You are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. You are self-righteous, you think that you can do very well without God and without Christ, and you half suspect that God can hardly do without you. You are doing so very well in the observance of rites and ceremonies, and the performance of charity and devotions that, if you go into the far country, you will cut a very respectable figure; you will be one of those excellent citizens of that country who will, in due time, send some poor prodigal into your fields to feed your swine.

I am inclined to believe that your case is even more sad and hopeless than that of the prodigal himself. You, too, have gone far away from God, you are living without him. He is not in all your thoughts, you could almost wish that there were no God, for then there would be no dark cloud hovering in the distance to spoil your summer's day, no fear of storms to come to mar the joy of the hour. Just as truly as of the avowed infidel who openly rejects Christ, it must be said of you, "Then did they spit in his face."

The same thing is, oh! so sadly true when anyone forsakes the profession of being a follower of Christ's. There are some, alas! who, for a time, have appeared to stand well in the Church of God,--I will not judge them,--but there have been some who, after making a profession of religion, have deliberately gone back to the world. After seeming for a while to be very zealous, they have become worldly, gay, and perhaps even lascivious and vile. They break the Sabbath, they neglect the Word of God, they forsake the mercy-seat; and their last end is worse than their first.

When a man forsakes Christ for a harlot, when he gives up heaven for gold, when he resigns the joys he professed to have had in Christ in order that he may find mirth in the company of the ungodly, it is another instance of the truth of these words, "Then did they spit in his face." To prefer any of these things to Christ, is infamous; and the mere act of spitting from the mouth seems little compared with this sin of spitting with

the very heart and soul, and pouring contempt upon Christ by choosing some sin in preference to him.

Yet, alas! how many are thus still spitting in Christ's face. Perhaps some now present are doing it. If, dear friends, our conscience in any measure accuses us of this sin, let us at once confess it; let us humble ourselves before the Lord; and with the very mouth that spat upon him, let us kiss the Son lest he be angry, and we perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. And when we have confessed the sin, let us believe that he is able and willing to forgive us.

I know that it requires a great act of faith, when sin is consciously felt, to believe in the splendor of divine mercy; but, dear friends, do believe it. Do the Lord Jesus the great honor of saying to him, "Gracious Lord, wash me in thy precious blood; though I did spit in thy face, wash me in that cleansing fountain, and I shall be whiter than snow;" and according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you. You shall have the forgiveness even of this great sin if you confess it, and believe that Christ is both able and willing to forgive it.

And when you have done that, then let your whole life be spent in trying to magnify and glorify him whom you and others have defamed and dishonored. Oh, I think that, if I had ever denied Christ's Deity, I should want to stand in this pulpit night and day to revoke what I had said, and to declare him to be the Son of God with power! I think that, if I had ever set up anything in opposition to him, I should want day and night to be setting him up above everything else, as indeed, I long to do.

Come, Christian brethren and sisters, let us do something unusual in Christ's honor; let us find out something or invent something fresh, either in the company of others or all by ourselves, by which we may further glorify his blessed name. Yet once more, if ever anybody should despise us for Christ's sake, let us not count it hard, but let us be willing to bear scorn and contempt for him. Let us say to ourselves, "'Then did they spit in his face.' What, then, if they also spit in mine?"

If they do, I will 'hail reproach, and welcome shame,' since it comes upon me for his dear sake." See, that wretch is about to spit in Christ's face! Put your cheek forward, that you may catch that spittle upon your face, that it fall not upon him again, for as he was put to such terrible shame, every one who has been redeemed with his precious blood ought to count it an honor to be a partaker of the shame, if by any means we may screen him from being further despised and rejected of men.

There, dear friends, I have not preached, I have just talked very, very feebly, and not at all as I wished and hoped I might be able to do, about this wonderful text: "Then did they spit in his face." Now try to follow me, just for a few minutes, while I let you see that same face in a very different light. Our second text is in the 20th chapter of the Revelation, at the 11th verse:--"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the ear and heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them."

This passage needs no words of mine to explain it. Notice how the apostle begins: "I saw." Oh, I wish I had the power to make you also see this great sight! Sometimes, vividly to realize a truth even once, is far better than to have merely heard it stated ten thousand times. I remember the story of a soldier who was employed in connection with one of the surveys of Palestine. He was with some others of the company in the valley of Jehoshaphat, and without thinking seriously of his words, he said to his comrades, "Some people say that, when Christ shall come a second time to judge the world, the judgment will take place in the valley of Jehoshaphat, in this very place where we now are."

Then he added, "When the great white throne shall be set, I wonder whereabouts I shall be." It is said that he carelessly exclaimed, "I shall sit here upon this big stone," and he sat down; but in an instant he was struck with horror, and he fainted, because in the act of sitting down he had begun to realize somewhat of the grandeur and the terror of that tremendous scene. I wish I knew how to do or say anything by which I could make you realize this scene that John saw in vision.

The Lord Jesus Christ went up to heaven from the top of Olivet in his own proper body, and he shall so come in like manner as he was taken up into heaven; but he shall come, not the lowly Man of sorrows, but as Judge of all seated upon a great white throne; and John says, "I saw it." As we sang, a few minutes ago,--

"The Lord shall come! but not the same

As once in lowliness he came;

A silent lamb before his foes,

A weary man, and full of woes.

"The Lord shall come! a dreadful form,

With rainbow wreath and robes of storm;

On cherub wings, and wings of wind,

Appointed Judge of all mankind."

I wish, dear friends, that even in your dreams you might see this sight, for, though I have no trust in dreams by themselves, yet any realization of this great truth will be better than the mere hearing of it. "I saw," said John, "a great white throne." He saw a throne, for Christ now reigns, he is King of kings, and Lord of lords; and when he comes again, he will come in the power of universal sovereignty as the appointed Judge of all mankind. He will come upon a throne; That throne is said to be white.

What other throne can be so described? The thrones of mere mortals are often stained with injustice, or bespattered with the blood of cruel wars; but Christ's throne is white, for he doeth justice and righteousness, and his name is truth. It will also be a great white throne,--a throne so great that all the thrones of former kings and princes shall be as nothing in comparison with it. The thrones of Assyria, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, shall all seem only like tiny drops of dew to be exhaled in a moment; but this great white throne shall be the recognized seat of the King of kings, the Sovereignty over all sovereignties: "I saw a great white throne."

John not only saw the great white throne, but also "HIM that sat upon it." What a wondrous sight was that! John saw him, whose eyes are "as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." John saw him whose divine majesty shall shine resplendent even through the nail-prints which he shall still wear when seated on the great white throne. What a sight it was to John, who had leaned his head upon Christ's bosom, to behold that same Master, whom he had seen die upon the cross, now sitting upon the throne of universal judgment: "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it."

Now notice what happened: "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away." As soon as ever this great white throne appeared, heaven and earth began to roll away like a wave receding from the shore.

What must HE be before whose face heaven and earth shall retreat as in dismay? Observe, first, Christ's power. He does not drive away the heaven and the earth; he does not even speak to them; the sight of his face is all that is needed, and the old heaven, and the old sinstained earth, shall begin to flee away, "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up;" and all that by the mere showing of Christ's face.

He does not have to lift his arm, he has not to seize a javelin, and to hurl it at the condemned earth; at the sight of his face, heaven and earth shall flee away. Behold the terror of Christ's majesty. And what will you do in that day,--you who did spit in his face, you who did despise him? What will you do in that day? Suppose the great judgment day had already come, suppose that the great white throne was just over yonder, and that when this service was over, you must appear with all the risen dead before your Judge.

One would have to say, "I have refused him; how shall I dare to look in his face?" Another would cry, "He drew me once, I felt the tugging of his love, the drawings of his spirit but I resisted, and would not yield. How can I meet him now? How can I look him in the face?" Another will have to say, "I had to strive hard to escape from the grasp of his hand of mercy; I stifled conscience, and I went back into the world." You will all have to look into that face, and that face will look at all of you.

One will have to say, "I gave up Christ for the world." "I gave him up for the theater," another must say. "I gave him up for the dancing saloon," another will say. "I gave him up for the love of women," another will say. "I gave him up that I might carry on my business as I could not carry it on if I was a true Christian; I gave up Christ for what I could get." You will have to say all this, and that very soon. As surely as you see me upon this platform now, you shall see the King upon the great white throne then, that King who was once despised and rejected of men.

O sirs, I would that ye would think of all this! It is not one hundredth part so much my concern as it is yours; I am not afraid to see Christ's face, for he hath looked on me in love, and blotted out all my sin, and I love him, and long to be with him for ever and ever. But if you have never had that look of love, if you have never been reconciled to him, I ask you; by the love you bear yourselves, to begin to think about this matter. Begin to prepare to meet this King of men, this Lord of love, who, as surely as he is the Lord of love, will be the King of wrath, for there is no anger like the anger of love.

There is no indignation like "the wrath of the Lamb," of which we read a few minutes ago. Divine love, when it has become righteous indignation, burns like coals of juniper, and is quenchless as hell. Wherefore,--

"Ye sinners, seek his grace,

Whose wrath ye cannot bear;

Fly to the shelter of his cross,

And find salvation there;"

and ere heaven and earth begin to flee away from the face of him who sits upon the throne, and ere ye yourselves begin to cry to the rocks to cover you and the mountains to hide you from that face,--seek ye his face with humble penitence and faith, that you may be prepared to meet him with joy in that last tremendous day.

If what I have been saying be all a dream, dismiss it, and go your ways to your sins; but if these things be the very truth of God,--and verily they are,--do act as sane men should, think them over, and prepare to meet your Judge. God help you to do so, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/an-awful-contrast/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net