

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

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CHAPTER THREE

"AND THEY BLINDFOLDED HIM"

(Luke 22:64; Mark XIV. 65; Matthew 26:68)

"By Thy sweat bloody and clotted! Thy soul in agony,
Thy head crowned with thorns, bruised with staves.
Thine eyes a fountain of tears,
Thine ears full of insults,
Thy mouth moistened with vinegar and gall,
Thy face stained with spitting,
Thy neck bowed down with the burden of the Cross,
Thy back ploughed with the wheals and wounds of the scourge,
Thy pierced hands and feet,
Thy strong cry, Eli, Eli,
Thy heart pierced with the spear,
The water and blood thence flowing,
Thy body broken, Thy blood poured out --
Lord forgive the iniquity of Thy servant
And cover all his sin."

-- LANCELOT ANDREWES

Historically speaking, the passion of CHRIST is entirely in the past. He died for sin once and dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. But mystically the passion of CHRIST is ever present. Mystically it takes place in the core of humanity over and over again. We crucify Him afresh. **JESUS CHRIST is constantly being betrayed, forsaken, denied, blindfolded, spat upon, scourged, mocked, and then crucified.**

Every incident in the story of His suffering is typical. In a mystical sense we were all there when "**He died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**" "**I am crucified with Christ.**" Horatius Bonar speaks truly for each one of us:

"'Twas I that shed the sacred blood,
I nailed Him to the tree;
I crucified the CHRIST of GOD,
I joined the mockery.

Of all the shouting multitude
I feel that I am one;
And in that din of voices rude
I recognize my own.

Around the Cross the throng I see,
Mocking the Sufferer's groan;
Yet still my voice it seems to be
As if I mocked alone."

"And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?" (Luke 22:63-64), "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands" (Matthew 26:67).

The great painters have put on canvas every detail of the story of the Passion week save this. Yet the scene is so typical and so terribly tragic that one wonders why no artist's brush has made the attempt to portray its deep and lasting significance. It is in the courtyard of the palace of Caiaphas, very early before the morning dawn. Full moonlight floods the scene and the blaze of an open fire that has been kindled throws fitful lights and shadows across the court.

The blindfolded CHRIST seated in the midst of a group filled with blind hatred.

The servants of the Sanhedrin, the hirelings of the high priest; and all of them probably were Jews of CHRIST's own race.

Some knew Him and had heard His words. They had witnessed His miracles. In the garden they shrank from His glance. Now they blindfold Him and mock Him. What darkness brooded over hearts that could do this or endure seeing it done! What insensibility to love and truth; what blindness to the beauty of holiness; what reprobate minds and seared consciences!

And this they did to JESUS of Nazareth who in Jerusalem had opened the eyes of one born blind. They blindfolded Him. Was Malchus among them? Did Caiaphas take part?

Did Peter see anything of it before he went out and wept bitterly? Afterwards he wrote of that terrible night when he stood and warmed himself -- but his soul shivered -- by the fire: --

"Christ suffered ... 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 that judgeth righteously ... by whose stripes ye were healed."

Yes, Peter must have seen it, at least from afar; the shame and agony of it smote his heart. The last look of JESUS before He was blindfolded was on Peter, who also had denied Him before these very servants.

However brief the record, we can read between the lines the cowardice, the cruelty, and the unreasonableness of their hatred toward the Saviour.

Why did it occur to them to blindfold JESUS? Was it not because His eyes were filled with such a holy wonder at their unbelief, eyes full of compassion for their ignorance and yet flashing with a light that smote their consciences like a flame of fire. They could not bear to look Him in the face and so, as Mark says, when "**some began to spit on him,**" others "**covered his face and began to buffet him.**"

Their cowardice was only matched by their hatred. They smote Him. They mocked Him. "**And many other things spake they against him reviling him.**"

And their hatred was unreasonable.

They demanded evidence where no evidence was needed.

They thought to degrade prophecy to the level of mind-reading and by blows inflicted on the helpless and blindfolded prisoner have CHRIST point out the individual guilt of their corporate blasphemy. "**Who is he that struck thee? Prophecy.**" It was not an individual that smote Him, it was the race; it was humanity. "**He was smitten of God and afflicted and we hid as it were our faces from Him**" -- or, when we could not hide our faces we covered His face and blindfolded Him.

All the age-long cowardice of infidelity and unbelief is typified in this incident. Some men have always been afraid, and therefore unwilling, to look CHRIST in the face. Men try to escape JESUS in history by declaring that the story is a myth; or they refuse to look Him full in the face. How many popular histories and school text-books blindfold JESUS by an apologetic paragraph utterly inadequate to the subject.

Unbelief blindfolds the Bible by closing its covers, preventing its message from reaching childhood or abandoning it on the shelf, a "classic which every one talks about but no one reads."

Men blindfold CHRIST in the pulpit or in the press, and then mock His prophetic office and Messianic glory. When infidelity and agnosticism have blindfolded the Saviour then they strike Him in the face. Voltaire, Nietzsche, Renan, Bebel, Paine, Ingersoll, and others, like them in mind and heart although not in notoriety, all agreed to first blindfold JESUS before they denied His deity; to hide His face before they smote His glory.

Theguir, the birthplace of Renan, is an old monastic town with an earnestly religious population. It stands on a hill overlooking the river Jaudy. On the quay, visible at once to every traveller, is a white Calvary in stone with life-sized figures and the words in three languages at the foot of the central cross: "**Truly this was the Son of GOD.**" The Calvary, we are told, was erected as a protest against the honour conferred on Renan when his statue was erected in the cathedral square of his birthplace.

It is painful to read the Gospel record of this blindfolded CHRIST, but more of how men have blindfolded Him again and again for nineteen centuries and then mocked Him.

What could be sadder than the words of Nietzsche and more blasphemous: "The Gospel died on the cross," said he, "that which thenceforward was called Gospel was the reverse of that Gospel which CHRIST had lived. It was evil tidings, a dysangel." Although Nietzsche is at times very indulgent toward CHRIST and rarely hurls his invectives against "this founder of a little Jewish sect," he hates the very name of Christianity and of Paul as exponent of its Gospel.

The hatred of unbelief is as evident to-day as it was in the judgment hall of Caiaphas. Men cannot leave the CHRIST alone. His face rivets attention. His eyes are a flame of fire. He draws or repels men; and He did then, so now.

"In this the Face that thrills with awe
Seraphs who veil their face above?
Is this the Face without a flaw,
The Face that is the Face of Love?
Yea, this defaced, lifeless clod
Hath all creation's love sufficed,
Hath satisfied the love of GOD,
This Face, the Face of JESUS CHRIST."

The Old Testament saints longed to see GOD's glory in the face of His anointed. This was Moses' prayer and David's hope and Isaiah's longing. "**How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?**" (Psalm 13:1), "**Make thy face to shine upon thy servant.**" (Psalm 31:16), "**Turn not away the face of thine anointed**" (Psalm 82:10), "**Hide not thy face from me lest I become like them that go down into the pit**" (Psalm 67:7).

When Isaiah saw His glory and spoke of His suffering he foretold the tragedy of this awful day. "**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**" (Isaiah 50:6), "**a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised**" (Isaiah 53:3), "**But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear**" (Isaiah 59:2), "**They blindfolded Him**"; thus the word perhaps is fulfilled that was spoken by Isaiah, "**Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORDS servant?**" (Isaiah 52:19).

When we meditate on such words we begin to realize what it meant for JESUS to be blindfolded and so to experience on Himself and in Himself all the unreasonableness and blindness of willful unbelief, toward GOD and His messengers. The incredulity of unbelief is not of yesterday. All down the centuries men have demanded proof from those who witnessed for GOD such as they demand for nothing else under Heaven. Have faith in CHRIST: -- Where are His miracles, what signs does He work? Why should we believe His Word? When have His prophecies been fulfilled? "**Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?**" (Isaiah 53:1).

We turn our faces away from CHRIST or blindfold Him; and remain unconvinced and unconvicted. The servants of the high priest saw nothing. But Peter was smitten in his conscience by one glance. He could repent because he did not blindfold JESUS. And so it has

always been. As Jeremy Taylor wrote in his sermon on the Faith and Patience of the Saints: --

"He died not by a single or a sudden death, but he was the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; for He was massacred in Abel, saith Paul;

He was tossed upon the waves of the sea in the person of Noah;

it was He that went out of His country, when Abraham was called from Charran, and wandered from his native soil;

He was offered up in Isaac,
persecuted in Jacob,
betrayed in Joseph,
blinded in Samson,
affronted in Moses,
sawed in Isaiah,
cast into the dungeon with Jeremiah;
for all these were types of CHRIST suffering.

And then His Passion continued after His resurrection. For it is He that suffers in all His members: It is He that endures '**the contradiction of sinners**';

it is He that is '**the Lord of life and is crucified again and put to open shame**' in all the sufferings of His servants and sins of rebels and defiances of apostates and renegades and violence of tyrants and injustice of usurpers and persecutions of His church.

It is He that is stoned in Stephen,
flayed in the person of Bartholomew;
He was roasted upon Lawrence's gridiron,
exposed to lions in Ignatius,
burnt in Polycarp,
frozen in the lake where stood the forty martyrs of Cappadocia.
The sacrament of CHRIST's death, said Hilary, is not to be accomplished but by sufferings all the sorrows of humanity."

We need not be surprised, therefore, if men blindfold our Saviour, buffet Him or put Him to open shame in our day. Mohammed's mission, whatever else it may have been or done, was a blindfolding of JESUS, an eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness by the moon of Mecca.

Every new religion and philosophy that draws men away from the Gospel can only succeed by blindfolding the CHRIST. Those who look into His face will follow no other leader. "**But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them**" (II Corinthians iv:3-4).

Those who walk in the dark with blinded minds have often themselves put out the light by first blindfolding the CHRIST of GOD. Whatever the phrase "**god of this world**" may mean, it surely

includes that power of the Evil One which prevents men from seeing the glory of our Saviour.

That spirit of the times which includes such floating opinions, worldly maxims, clever speculations, impure impulses and aims at any time current as create an atmosphere of doubt and unbelief in which all faith is strangled. Blindness precedes unbelief and is the cause of it. The blindness is effected by covering up the Gospel, by mystifying GOD's clear word, and by closing our eyes against the truth.

"For judgment," said JESUS, **"I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind"** (John 9:39).

Look again at the pitiful picture of the blindfolded CHRIST in the midst of the group of ruffians of the Sanhedrin. Gaze on that face, illumined by the early morning sun and by imprisoned divinity -- bleeding, buffeted, blindfolded. **"look upon the face of thine anointed"** (Psalm 84:9) said the Psalmist -- and here we see that face as the true image of a suffering Saviour.

"Behold the Man!" Bound, exhausted, bruised, insulted, and yet silent with the silence of suffering love. **"Prophecy, who is it that struck thee?"** We must surely find the answer in our own consciences.

"Clear, Lord, the brooding night within,
And cleanse these hearts for Thine abode:
Unlock the spell of sin,
Crumble its giant load."

But JESUS suffered for us not only to redeem us from sin and its curse, He also **". . . suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps"** (I Peter 2:21). In every incident of the passion the great Cross-bearer of the universe cries in our ears, "Follow Me. Live boldly, dangerously, completely, without fastidiousness. Accept the mud and the slime, the heat and the misery, the odious rebuff and the stinging rebuke. Be silent before your accusers. Endure and dare for My sake and the Gospel. Do not refuse the drink with Me the cup of failure which is often more bitter than the cup of death -- the agony of mockery which precedes the agony of the Cross."

When we remember the judgment hall and the blindfolded CHRIST who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, we shall not grow weary nor faint at rebuke or contumely. **"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"** (Matthew 5:12).

It is the last and greatest beatitude. The beatitude of those who follow CHRIST all the way to the end. From Gethsemane to Gabbatha and Golgotha.

"There is no gain but by a loss,
You cannot save but by a Cross --
The corn of wheat to multiply
Must fall into the ground and die.
Wherever you ripe fields behold,

Waving to GOD their sheaves of gold,
Be sure some corn of wheat had died --
Some soul has there been crucified;
Some one has wrestled, wept and prayed,
And fought hell's legions undismayed."

~ end of chapter 3 ~
