

Sunday, March 29, 2015

“Thou hast seen all their vengeance *and* all their imaginations against me. Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, *and* all their imaginations against me; The lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day. Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their musick. Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.” (Lamentations 3:60-66)

Jeremiah had preached for around 40 years, warning of the impending destruction and captivity of the children of Judah. The whole time, he had endured persecutions of all sorts, and now his prophecies have come to fruition. The Babylonians have come in and they have taken Judah captive. It is at this time and under these circumstances that Jeremiah utters this imprecatory prayer. He is still facing persecutions from the enemies of God, both within from his own people, and without from the Babylonians. There are many sufferings that the people of God are called to suffer, and our brother Jon talked about this a few weeks ago. It is a necessary and blessed part of taking up our cross and following our God:

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Philippians 1:29)

Today I would like to focus on a particular brand of persecution, called in Hebrews 11:36 “cruel mockings.” Jeremiah refers to it in the passage above: “Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their musick.” “Sitting down” is when they are planning things out. They imagine devices. They hold meetings. They consult with one another. They plot. They plan. “Rising up” refers to the execution of their plan.

Earlier in the same chapter, he uses similar language:

“I was a derision to all my people; *and* their song all the day.” (Lamentations 3:14)

Apparently they had literally written lyrics to sing, accompanied by musical instruments, to mock Jeremiah. He was the object of their derision. Likewise all of Judah was the object of the derision of the Babylonians. God’s people always have been, are now, and always will be, mocked and ridiculed by the enemies of God. And the use of song to do it is no unique thing. Job endured it:

“*They were* children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword.” (Job 30:8-9)

That word “byword” that Job uses denotes a couple things, which Joseph Caryl has a good description of:

“First, frequency of speech about him, or that he was much in their discourse; a thing or person much and often spoken of is a byword. As if he had said, ‘nothing was so commonly talked of as my calamity, and my self. I am the common theme.’ Secondly, as it notes frequency of speaking, so contemptuous speaking, or speaking of another in scorn, both meet here. ‘I am their byword’: they often talk of me, and they talk of me despitefully, scornfully. Their words are reproaches, and their speakings of me despisings.”

Our Savior endured this, too, which we learn about in the Messianic Psalm 69:

**“They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards.”
(Psalm 69:12)**

The Apostle Paul said similar things in 1 Corinthians 4:

“For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We *are* fools for Christ's sake...” (1 Corinthians 4:9-10)

The Greek word for “spectacle” is the word from which we get our English word “theater.” A similar word is translated as “gazingstock” in Hebrews 10:33, “ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions.”

And of course, we’ve seen this first hand at Westboro Baptist Church. Songs, plays, musicals, standup comedy, talk shows, etc. The idea is that we are their entertainment. Kind of like Samson:

“And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines *were* there; and *there were* upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.” (Judges 16:25-27)

Wicked men will frequently mock the people of God when something happens to them that they perceive to be a defeat. You see it in the examples above of Jeremiah, Job, Christ and Samson. And you see it on almost a daily basis with this little church. Prosecutions, laws

being passed to restrict our preaching (e.g., picketing laws, flag desecration laws), laws being passed to promote sodomy (e.g., fag marriage), lawsuits, cyberattacks, mobs overrunning us, our pastor dying, etc. I say that they perceive these types of things to be defeats. We don't see it that way:

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

I'm telling you that being mocked and scoffed is part of the persecutions that we have the privilege of enduring. It may seem like a minor thing, but it is not a minor thing. All of the saints of God, and Christ Himself, have suffered cruel mockings. With respect to the people of God, it is a wonderful blessing, and will surely end with the following: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Revelation 21:4). With respect to the enemies of God, it is a terrible curse, and will surely end with them having “their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8).

Let us look at some of the characteristics of these mockers/scorners, so you will understand the true nature of what you're dealing with when you have one on your hands.

They delight in scorning (Proverbs 1:22). It's what keeps them going. It's what gets them out of bed in the morning. They “walk after their own ungodly lusts”, and they are “sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 18-19). In other words, they are the very definition of a “worker of iniquity,” whose occupation and delight is sin. Of course, such people are hated by God (Psalm 5:5). Where the blessed man's “delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he mediate day and night” (Psalm 1:2), the scorner delights in scorning and that is what consumes his thoughts. Gill says:

“[They] throw out their flouts and jeers at those that are the most religious, for the just, upright man, is commonly by such laughed to scorn, and those that depart from evil make themselves a prey; and particularly at the ministers of the word, for a man that has scarcely so much common sense as to preserve him from the character of an idiot, thinks himself a wit of the age, if he can at any rate break a jest upon a Gospel minister.”

They are the objects of God's scorn and contempt and derision. God mocks them. “Surely He scorneth the scorners” (Proverbs 3:34). This proverb, incidentally, is quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 5:5 and is translated thus: “God resisteth the proud.”

They have brought ruin upon themselves, and it's only a matter of time before they face the dreadful consequences: “If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.” (Proverbs 9:12).

“Judgments are prepared for scorners.” (Proverbs 19:29).

They cannot find wisdom, and that is because they have no fear of God before their eyes: “A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.” (Proverbs 14:6). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 9:10).

They are full of pride and wrath. “Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.” (Proverbs 21:24).

They are fools. “Fools make a mock at sin.” (Proverbs 14:9). That is, they make light of the enormity of their (and others’) sins, as if it’s something to joke about, and they scoff at anyone who would instruct them. “For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 7:6).

They refuse to be corrected. “A scorner heareth not rebuke.” (Proverbs 13:1). “A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.” (Proverbs 15:12). Hence, we are warned to not reprove these people: “He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.” (Proverbs 9:7-8). The only use in correcting a scorner is that it may help a simple man: “When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise.” (Proverbs 21:11).

“The scorner is an abomination to men.” (Proverbs 24:9). That is, generally speaking, nobody wants anything to do with a scorner. Gill says *“one that scorns all around him, in whatsoever company he comes, and that ridicules every person, and every thing that is said in conversation, is usually hated and abhorred by all sorts of men.”* Nobody likes a smart ass! “Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out.” (Proverbs 22:10).

They are dangerous. “Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath.” (Proverbs 29:8). On a spiritual level, they are instruments of Satan, and we must not be ignorant of his devices. He would seek to cause us to be ashamed of our God, His doctrines, His standards, His Word. It is a direct and calculated attack on our faith in God. We are in great spiritual danger when dealing with scorners, so don’t underestimate the danger.

So much for their characteristics. But what is it, precisely, that they are mocking? And why? We have a wide spectrum of mocking in the Scripture. On one end of the spectrum, we have the relatively mild name-calling like “what will this babblers say?” (Acts 17:18). On the other end of the spectrum, we have the mocking of God Himself as He hung dying on the cross. These, however, are just different degrees of the same thing. They mock our faith, they mock the sovereignty of God, they mock the very idea of a Judgment Day. And the reason is, because if we suggest that there is a sovereign God who will bring every work into judgment,

then we have encroached on their ability to freely pursue their lusts. They don't want anyone suggesting that they are sinning and will have to answer for those sins. So you can be guaranteed that when you cross paths with a mocker, you are crossing paths with a person who is coddling some dark sin. Thomas Adams says, *"All this their scorn of religion is but to maintain their lusts: did not the gospel cross their sins, they would not cross the gospel. 'To be carnally minded is death,' Romans 8:6 – this troubles them."* And why does it trouble them? Because the law is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness (Romans 2:15). They mock Him for the same reason that they hate Him: "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." (John 7:7).

It would be instructive to look at a few more examples of this in the Scripture, to help flesh this out a little bit.

"And he [Elisha] went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." (2 Kings 2:23-24)

What were these kids mocking Elisha about? Being bald? Not primarily. The important part is the "go up" part. Elijah had just been taken up to heaven by a whirlwind:

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." (2 Kings 2:11)

You know that this miracle was the talk of the city, and the wicked parents of those 42 children were at home blaspheming and mocking God, jeering at that mighty work. Can you hear these people at home? "Hey kids, did you guys hear about that moron Elisha? That bald bastard. He's claiming that Elijah went up to heaven. There's no heaven and hell anyway, and if there was, I'd rather go to hell than spend any time with those wing nuts. I wish Elisha would go on up too, and then we could say good riddance to the both of them. I'm tired of seeing them around anyway." We look upon that miraculous assumption into heaven, and we see that as an emblem of this:

"Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

The wicked men of the world look on it with contempt, because if it's true, then that means that there's a heaven, and a sovereign God sitting on the Judgment throne.

The next example is Rabshakeh, the Assyrian:

“Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make *an agreement* with me *by* a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern; Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. *Beware* lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where *are* the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who *are they* among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.” (Isaiah 36:13-21)

How many times through the years have we heard mocking words like this, that our God will not be able to help us? This type of mocking is designed to dethrone God and cause His people to be ashamed, and lose their faith. I spent a lot of time in Isaiah 36 and 37 during our trial that ended up before the Supreme Court. I heard people sounding like Rabshakeh, and I took great comfort from those passages.

It is very similar to the mocking by Sanballat and Tobiah in Nehemiah:

“But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem... But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.” (Nehemiah 2:19-20, 4:1-3).

I would submit to you that no human has ever gone through such cruel mocking as Jesus Christ did during the events surrounding His crucifixion. In fact, many commentators suggest that the mocking and reviling that He endured was the worst part of that affliction.

He was mocked first after being examined before the high priest, Caiaphas:

**“Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote *him* with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?”
(Matthew 26:67-78)**

Then again when he went before Herod:

“And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.” (Luke 23:11-12)

Note that nothing brings sinners together like opposition to goodness. A month or so ago, a headline appeared that said “Atheists and Believers Respond to Westboro Baptist Church with Unity, Positivism, and Resolve.” Thomas Adams says: *“Though there be several lusts in several men, and these quarrel and fight one against another, yet they all conspire against goodness...In the tradition of Christ, the lust of the rulers was envy, Herod’s was curiosity, Pilate’s popularity, Judas’s money; yet were they all confederate against Jesus.”*

Then Christ was mocked again after appearing before Pilate:

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of *soldiers*. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*.” (Matthew 27:27-31)

And then finally when He was on the cross:

“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will

have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.” (Matthew 27:39-44)

The last passage I'd like to go over is from 2 Peter:

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.” (2 Peter 3:1-4)

We have a prophecy here. There will be scoffers in the last days. When Peter says “knowing this first”, he essentially is saying “before you go any further and learn any more things, make sure you have a firm understanding of this.” It should come as no surprise to anyone that we are surrounded by scoffers – we have a prophecy! There have always been scoffers, but there has never been such a proliferation of scoffers. And the subject of their scoffing is the return of Christ and the Judgment Day. Their scoffing goes something like this: “We are really smart people. We have identified a whole bunch of laws of nature, and universal constants, and stuff like that. And these laws have been in place since the beginning. There was no miraculous destruction of mankind with a worldwide flood, and there isn't going to be another miracle where the earth is burned up with fire. Your prophets have been telling us for thousands of years that God is going to come in wrath, and He still hasn't come, and He won't come. You guys are just trying to scare people with all your talk about hell, and God's hatred and wrath. And if God exists, He'd love everyone, so He wouldn't be coming back in vengeance anyway.” And don't think that this type of mocking only happens among self-professed atheists. Standing outside of Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California, one of the old men from the church came out loudly mocking us by saying, “The end is near! The end is near!” This world is full of mockers, and I will suggest to you that the “God loves everyone” lie that has saturated the world falls under this category of mocking the return of Christ, because if He loves everyone, then He isn't going to return in wrath. And if He's not going to return in wrath, then He's not going to return at all. This Satanic mocking strikes at the heart of what brings us the greatest joy, that is, the return of our Savior. If there is no return of Christ, then there is no resurrection. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Being on the receiving end of the mockers of this world should be a cause for great rejoicing for at least the following reasons:

1. Through this, we are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.

“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (1 Peter 4:13)

2. We have a high priest who not only went through such sufferings, but sympathizes with us in them, helps us during them, and delivers us from them.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

3. It is strong evidence that our calling and election is sure (2 Peter 1:10). Mocking in and of itself is not evidence, but the reason behind the mocking is evidence. We are mocked because we faithfully preach a sovereign God. Thomas Adams:

“Yea, therefore is it the more likely to be the truth, because the wits of the world dispute against it. Where shall you find Tertullus, but retained against Paul? If a stranger come, all the dogs of the town will be barking at him. There is nothing causeth so much noise and wrangling, as the opposition of goodness.”

4. As noted above, it is evidence that the return of Christ is near.
5. The servant is not greater than his lord.

“The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.” (John 15:20)

I would like to conclude with a couple of warnings. First of all, there are appropriate times to mock people. Elijah did it:

“And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.” (1 Kings 18:27)

Paul did it:

“Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.” (1 Corinthians 4:8)

We do it very appropriately when we do things like mock the impotence of their favorite idol, the American flag, to show them how foolish they are. However, we should be careful to not mock people out of maliciousness, and we should not respond in like manner:

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow 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 that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:21-25)

Secondly, and along these same lines, we should understand that sometimes, we deserve to be mocked. There have been times where we, myself included, have become arrogant and have done or said things that deserve a response of mocking. That does not let the mocker off the hook by any means. But this, like any other persecution, should be a cause for self-examination. We can learn this from the case of Shimei:

“And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name *was* Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men *were* on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou *art taken* in thy mischief, because thou *art* a bloody man... And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now *may this* Benjamite *do it*? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him. It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day.” (2 Samuel 16:5-8, 11-12)

**“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.”
(1 Peter 2:20)**

I love you. Amen.