

Looking unto Jesus

3. "He is despised and rejected of men"

Stephen Whitehouse

THE LORD JESUS was a man of sorrows who intimately knew what grief was all about. Isaiah declared, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Rotherham places a different emphasis on this verse: "Despised was he, and forsaken of men, Man of pains, and familiar with sickness". To the leaders of Israel he was repellent; to the people he was unacknowledged.

The Son of God came as Saviour and Deliverer "to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Lk. 4:18). We might think that he would be greeted with open arms and a raucous reception, for he came to "save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21), and was on a God-given mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). But this is the great and terrible irony: a man who came to save was actually put to death!

Why was the Lord Jesus so hated? Why so despised? Why so scorned? Why so derided? There are many reasons and here are a few. Jesus:

- **came to fulfil the Law and the prophets.** "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets", he said; "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mt. 5:17). Both the leaders and the people reviled and hated him for such (perceived) arrogance. Yet Jesus knew what was in their hearts, and so cleverly asked them, "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?" (Jno. 7:19). Their response was so telling, and illustrates the depths of their evil hearts: "The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil" (v. 20).

- **exposed the leaders for their vanity and their pretentious ways.** The Lord Jesus knew they were only outwardly righteous and adored praise and adulation. He condemned them for it, and warns us not to parade our piety by performing charitable deeds merely to be seen by others. When a follower of Christ does a charitable deed, it is to be done in secret. Similarly, if the love for prominence is the only motive in prayer, then, Jesus says, the prominence gained is the only reward.

- **uncovered, revealed and condemned sin.** The Master was uncompromising about sin, and

openly denounced it: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (Jno. 8:34). He reminded the Jewish listeners that whoever practises sin is a slave to sin. Such uncompromising language is evidence alone why Jesus was not wanted and soon became despised. He was a constant and pressing thorn in their sides, and they were deeply grieved and sorely hated him for it.

- **insisted upon the spiritual development of the inner man.** This principle was made evident in Old Testament times, for we read, "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The Lord Jesus pointed out that, whilst the Pharisees were careful to maintain an outward show of religion and morality, their hearts were filled with self-indulgence (Mt. 23:25-28). They hated him for his insight.

- **taught the importance of the denial of self.** Our Master plainly stated what is involved in discipleship: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt. 16:24). This has its highest type and pattern in Jesus, who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). The Jews could not accept this because of their proud hearts. They thought he was just a young preacher from Galilee, merely "the carpenter's son" (Mt. 13:55). How wrong they were!

- **demanded repentance.** Jesus called people to repent and believe in the gospel (Mk. 1:15). In order to be eligible for the Kingdom of God, they had to recognise that they were sinners and in dire need of forgiveness, and believe the Good News. He went on to say, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3). Even the words of the Son of God himself could not convince them of this unpalatable truth!

Israel could not stomach the teachings of Jesus, nor his miracles. They simply had to rid themselves of him, and quickly—evidence of how wicked the heart of man is. Never has this solemn and sad truth been so painfully obvious as when the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst God's people. And though Jesus shone the light of God's truth brilliantly upon them, they preferred to live in the darkness of their rituals, so they cried, "Crucify him, crucify him".