

“The Temptation to Scorn”
Sermon Draft: 7th June 2020
Texts: Genesis 34:1-12; 1 Samuel 2:27-35 & Matt. 5:21-24

If sermon content came with a warning label, this is how the label on this sermon would read: “Take care, brethren, that your outrage over the transgressions of divine law—both crimes and offenses—do not lead you to commit the sin of scorn.” Holding others in contempt is spiritually dangerous. Holding persecution, the hatred of others evidenced towards you as a believer, the derision and mockery, in contempt is both commendable and right. Jesus despised the shame of the cross. We may do the same towards our mistreatment **for the servant is not greater than his master**. The Matt. 5 passage, from where I sit plays into this warning in a very pointed manner: it begins with anger **without cause**, then proceeds to name-calling, **Raca (block head, or empty head)**, and then proceeds to **You fool in a progression towards scorn** that is marked by increasing degrees of severity of punishment (judgment—council—fires of hell) and the first judgment, **angry without cause** is on a par with **murder! Angry without cause** covers a lot of ground like prejudice, racial bias and bigotry. Anger over rape and murder is not **anger without cause** but it is dangerous ground. Scorn debilitates, clouds our thinking. Christians should not wear scorn as if it were their badge of honor—Jesus never did so. So, the warning is take heed of the sin of scorn. The second thing I want to communicate is that it is our challenge and privilege to discover where the place of Christ is in the challenging circumstances we find ourselves in.

Two dueling scenario’s rivaled each other *in my head* as I consider the rape of Dinah (one biblical scenario) and that lurid, horrific scene is very hard to get out one’s head. The second scene (in the news cycle) is the video of the killing/murder? of George Floyd who, it turns out, was a Christian brother¹. George’s killing/murder has been usurped as a pretext for violence, theft and murder! It has been co-opted as an example of police brutality, this is more politically advantageous! We are outraged by the killing presented with “racist” charges as a filter. We are, I fear, more incensed at racism and police brutality *than we are at murder. Now that is truly alarming . . . we are up in arms over race and God is offended by murder, the murder of one of his children, George.* Where is Christ to be exalted in this?

What does the resurrection of Jesus mean when applied to the rape of Dinah, or to George Floyd’s street murder, our brother in the faith?

As the week progressed, as property damage soared and as other peoples lives were violently disrupted, as rioting and looting occurred and rage incinerated cars, bars and businesses, I began to be more deeply troubled by what didn’t happen in the course of George’s murder. First and foremost, the other officers failed to do their duty to protect the life of George. They know better than to standby and allow someone to be murdered. There was a “fail” on the part of three other first responders—the other officers involved. But, as I looked about the footage, observing the second responders;

¹It is *daunting* to consider the spectrum of Christians *who have recently died* as represented by Ravi Zacharias and George Floyd! As Christians we should be grieving both Ravi and George. George Floyd’s six year old daughter says, “I miss Dad, he changed the world.” Both men have great legacies—they have gone on to their reward (and we should rejoice for their souls, *fulfilled, perfected, home with Jesus at last and yet, both too soon*. Ravi labored in the arena of Christian truth and George labored in the realm of non-violence and peace whether in the challenging Third Ward of Houston, Texas or, most lately, in Minneapolis.

we had, as everyone knows, a fail on that level too. *People were ready to video the incident, but they were not willing to intervene.* Is that too much to expect? Why didn't an intervention happen?

I pause to present a brief picture of the “church militant.” Here is a vivid picture of “the church militant,” or of heavenly aggression against Satan and the kingdom of this world. It is the light breaking into this present darkness viewed practically—with all its political ramifications laid bare, Peacemaking is not passivity—Burke’s “good men should do nothing.” Heaven does violence to the earth to redeem, restore and reorder it. That, bluntly stated is the future and that is our *present* mandate and mission. God is concerned with our salvation and we are consumed with what others may think of us! We want those who hate us to like us? This is war.

There is for Christians an even higher level of allegiance, power and authority which is ours as citizens of heaven, another country—and less excuse for standing by. Our loyalty belongs to the kingdom of God. We possess a transcendent authority, a higher one—above nationality, trans-racial and ethnicity! We are one in our allegiance to our king and serve as ambassadors to his good will. We are, in his name peacemakers, and ***all that we stand for*** declares that evil, all the works of the devil, cannot stand: not murder, not duplicity, not murder, not slavery (whether economic and social or sexual), not violence, or hatred, tyranny, injustice or servility to sin and Satan—none of the works of the kingdom of darkness or of hell ***shall prevail against the church.*** Who can resist the Lord who reigns and rules over all situations. Christ may have been there, and we may not have chosen to engage when things went down. We can say, “In the name of the Lord Jesus, we take authority over this situation and command you to cease and desist. ***You shall not commit murder.*** And we arrest you and remand you to the civil authorities present here.”

They are here to prevent the taking of life, or the threatening the safety of others.” It is whose we are, if we believe in Christ, that determines our actions: we cannot be bullied into inaction, or marginalized, or silenced. We cannot be terrorized because our king is ruler over all whether or not others believe in him—no one can lock down Jesus, or those who serve him. ***We are the only ones who can disqualify ourselves!*** No one tells him to stand down, or get out of the way. Either that’s the way it is or his lordship is a phantasm, it is unreal and futile. If sincere Christians used their heavenly authority, George would not be dead². ***We are here to call out violence, evil and injustice.*** If Christians used their authority, abortion and sex trafficking both would end. They cannot withstand the church when with self-sacrificing courage and fervor, we oppose them. Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men should do nothing.” Burke only had it partially right. ***It’s godly men, rather than good men***—meaning Christian men (and Christian women) who dismantle the structures of evil, abolish slavery and demolish injustice and shatter the chains that fast-bind all mankind. Christians stop attempted murders, robberies and muggings. They interrupt violent acts, abuse, kidnappings and rape—crimes of all sorts—*with the crime-stopping power of Almighty God.*

² The mayor of Atlanta spoke for many when she declared, “***We are better than this as a people. We are better than this as a country.***” And Bernie Sanders says, “The rich have been looting this country for decades,” what he doesn’t say is that he favors replacing the rich with the government—that legitimates the looting. To admit that is to face the manifest greed and envy of the left.

I know, the situation was tense, officers were involved, one in particular was killing another human being, and no one took action to disrupt the murder. Why was no one willing to step in and command the officer to “cease and desist?” “Officer, get off the man’s neck! You are killing him! Stop it now.” More boldly, someone could have exercised the rights entailed in citizen’s arrest:

“Under the authority of the constitution of this republic, I arrest and charge you, officer, for attempted murder. And I remand you to the custody of your fellow officers here. Officers, take this man into custody.”

A non-Christian citizen’s arrest even—in this form is legal and binding. But if you do not know your rights, or your authority which is non-partisan and transcends all racial boundaries, status and social privilege(!) or how to enact/enforce a citizen’s arrest, then you are ill-equipped to meet such a situation as an American citizen. That bold action sounds dangerous. And it could be. You might even end up being arrested yourself BUT you would have done something to possibly insure that George was still alive! Truth wasn’t even given a chance. No one did anything but film and decry the murder. How sad, how sick . . . how disappointing. Where was the church? MIA?

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Keeping in mind, the rape of Dinah and the George Floyd scene I just depicted, I want to ask us if there is anyone here remembers the young man, Brock Turner? He was attending Stanford University on a swimmer’s scholarship when he decided to rape a woman at frat party. Three counts of felony sexual assault. The woman’s name was Chanel Miller (her book on the incident, Know My Name, came out Sept. 4, 2019):

In 2015, Miller was attacked while unconscious after drinking too much at a fraternity party at Stanford University. Two young men on bicycles rescued her. Her attacker tried to run away but they chased him and held him down until the police arrived. Brock Turner, her attacker, was a student at Stanford and a swimming champion.

<https://www.npr.org/2019/09/04/757626939/victim-of-brock-turner-sexual-assault-reveals-her-identity>

Chanel’s *victim impact statement* remains one of the most compelling pieces of heartbreaking prose ever written! “Two young men (Swedish exchange students: Arndt and Johnson) on bicycles rescued her.” “Her attacker tried to run away but they chased him and held him down until the police arrived.” What these young men did, Chanel says, “as if motivated by intuition,” was, in effect a citizen’s arrest even though they were not U S citizens. Where was Christ in this incident? He was in those two rescuers, saving Chanel, who deemed it the decent and right things to do. It was.

The parallels between Chanel’s attempted, but interrupted rape and Dinah’s actual rape do not end with rape. Dinah’s rape is very disturbing (like Chanel’s assault narrative). Where was Christ in that? The extreme interpretations have ranged enormously: from “blaming the victim, or drunkenness,” to excoriating the prince, Shechem, the perpetrator. We do simply do not have the level of witness in Dinah’s case that was supplied in Chanel’s situation through court proceedings. We do not know where Dinah’s rape occurred. Was it in Shechem’s tent, or the fields where Dinah

went to see the woman of the land? Did she fight and resist her attacker? We do not know. Was there no one around to intervene? We do not know. What we do know is that she was sexually assaulted—violated. We also know (v. 26) that in the butchery which followed, her rape being the pretext for violence and murder and “retaliatory rape(!)”: They, Jacob’s wicked sons, took **All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.** (v. 29) on the pretext of avenging her honor, they massacred and torched a whole city! And that pales in comparison to the aftermath of George’s killing, those protesting the injustice of his death have torched a whole nation! Sounds just like theft, pillage and looting to me—just such ensued in the wake of George’s murder! A disproportionate and bloody business—hardly just, in fact evil. So many innocent lives wasted, who will answer for their blood?

Jacob’s sons had a long way to go before their conscience
would catch up to their passions and sin.

What is described in scripture, though distant in time, is simply horrific, too vile . . . absolutely evil, in almost every way imaginable. There is no justice in what Simon and Levi perpetrated on the pretext of avenging Dinah’s honor. It was dishonoring to God—it was murder. Circumcision was hijacked to serve as a trap and a snare! It went from a sign of the covenant to a platform for murder! And it forces us to consider that all societies are “honor” based. That there actually is a universal standard out there which compels us to weigh crimes and consequences. And when we do, what we come up with is that the despicable, imbalanced, and furious vengeance taken by Simon and Levi far outweighs the originating crime. And not to be lost in the horrific mix is Shechem’s sincere, even goodhearted attempt to redress his misguided and sinful behavior towards Dinah. Was he actually repentant? Does the prohibition to intermarry legitimate the massacre of all the men? Again, where is Christ in all of this?³

But, all the while, these things (and more) are seethingly present to my mind, I have been growing increasingly aware of a spiritual danger that spiritual outcry, moral outrage, consciously tends to put me in. As best as I can put it, *the sin of scorn* is present danger. I must guard against it, against scorn, **open contempt** of others, becoming my default position—even the perpetrators of evil deeds! Yet that is exactly what Christ would have us do with our response of social and moral outrage—he is mediating our response to George’s death, and our response to Chanel’s attempted rape *while she was inebriated*.

First of all, we mustn’t hold others to a standard that we are unwilling to keep. While it is wrong to refuse to intervene, even at risk of consequences and personal harm, in attempted murder, it is wrong to expect others to intervene Christianly if we do not know they are Christians! Plainly, Simeon and Levi were not “Christian.” They were morally

³ *That, frankly, is not an easy question to answer.* It is not a soft, slow ball pitch to the batter! The Rabin, who have dealt with the Dinah for centuries prior to Christ, offer a redemptive note. They suggest that as a result of this encounter, not necessarily a one time incident of rape(!) that a child was conceived, a girl named Anaseth, who is destined to be the wife of Joseph by a marriage contracted in Egypt. This may explain the inclusion of the episode genealogically and culturally. Meaning that Joseph didn’t marry outside the prohibition of God (not to **intermarry with foreign women**). We do recall biblically that both Isaac and Jacob were forbidden to marry Canaanite women—so that second piece fits well! Theologically, Jewishly speaking, this is a nice touch but this future wife of Joseph piece cannot be substantiated biblically despite the Targum and/or oral tradition sources.

regressive, uncouth, decadent and depraved, and just as lustful as the Canaanites they were slaughtering—a quick preview of what lies ahead morally establishes this negative assessment:

- In Chapter 34, all of Jacob's sons are guilty of deceit and violence, starting with Simeon and Levi; this plays out in the Joseph saga later painfully.
- and then in Chapter 35 Jacob's son Reuben sleeps with Jacob's concubine; this is adulterous as well as incestuous!
- and then in Chapter 37 all of Jacob's sons sell their brother Joseph into slavery—nearly destroying their father with grief due to their jealousy and hatred;
- and then in Chapter 38 Jacob's son Judah sleeps with his son's widow. Albeit, it unknowingly (she presenting herself to be a temple prostitute) which is fornication at the very least.

Source: Forerunner Commentary (Gen.34:2)

In addition to Jesus' admonition to avoid scorn (Matt.5), we have record of David's offense before God in 2 Samuel 12:8-9:

8 I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your [a]care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.

Yes, he committed adultery, but *he also held God's law in contempt* and that reaped divine displeasure! Next then, let's step back and let's review 1 Samuel 2:27-29:

27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh's house? 28 Did I not choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I not give to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel? 29 Why do you kick at [as in "scorn," or "hold in contempt"] My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the [lit. the first] choicest of every offering of My people Israel?'

Now, the anonymous man of God who spoke with Eli apparently evidences no scorn, or contempt in his confrontation of Eli. He simply lays out the facts, and the consequence for Eli's contempt. It could plausibly be read as friendly advice. Nothing here suggest that Nathan held David in contempt, or in confronting the king, scorned him!

30 Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. 31 Behold, the

days are coming when I will break your [a]strength and the [b]strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. 32 You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that [c]I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. 33 Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar [d]so that your eyes will fail from weeping and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die [e]in the prime of life. 34 This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die.⁴

35 And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest [probably Zadok], who shall do according to what is in my heart and my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever [meaning King David most immediately—but the application to Christ is astonishing!].

There is both a curse and a prophecy in this rebuke, or word of the Lord to Eli! Eli and his sons have forgotten both their office and their authority. It happens. (The police officers, I think, failed in this way in the George Floyd incident, too. May the Lord deal with them and instruct others by their example.) Life is so consequential, we had best remember that—no arrest is just routine, no day is ordinary.

To the point, this is a divine judgment and rebuke on **scornful human behavior!** God, as a matter of record, can, and has punished both scorners and scoffers—David and Eli were both, in Old English, scoff-laws! We should take care not to be counted amongst them. **Be angry and sin not** comes to mind. It can be applied thus: do not allow even self-righteous indignation (over public sin and transgressions) to boil over into scorn and tempt you to have contempt in your heart for others. Keep a guard over your spirit! Do not hold police officers in contempt on account of a few bad apples. Do not hold protestors in contempt for their angry and unfortunate behavior. *Do not even hold the agitators in contempt—but do arrest them and hold them accountable for their mischief. Nicely.*

The more central complaint of God against Eli and his sons is tellingly: **Why do you kick at** [as in “scorn,” or “hold in contempt”] **My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the [lit. the first] choicest of every offering of My people Israel?** Eli, who was literally very obese, scorns the sacrifice and offerings of God through **honoring his sons** whom he has permissively allowed to take the first portion of every offering, and not being satisfied with the portion appointed for them! This appears to be “sacrilegious gluttony”—it is regardless selfish, greedy and glutenous. **God “righteously” resents being held in open contempt**. God alone is entitled to that.

For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me

⁴ Footnotes:

a. 1 Samuel 2:31 Or arm

b. 1 Samuel 2:31 Or arm

c. 1 Samuel 2:32 Lit He does

d. 1 Samuel 2:33 Lit to waste away your eyes and to grieve your soul

e. 1 Samuel 2:33 Lit as men

will be lightly esteemed. This is for God to do even though we bring that on ourselves.

This part is difficult to write. I wonder if anyone else has experienced religious discrimination? I was discriminated against, repeatedly on a single day. And the ones who did this to me were Anglicans. They held me in contempt, and one even in derision. I was mocked for being a Non-conformist, or a Free Churchman. I was in England at the time and it was in the same decade when those of my persuasion were finally allowed to vote!

So I wasn't alone in this discrimination, not by a long shot, and yet it still hurt. It is painful to recall *and it doesn't simply go away*. Every time I hear Anglican, I have to fight my way through a maze of difficult, distressing emotions. Yes, I learned that conscience comes at a price and, yes, I can identify with other victims of other form of abuse—both solid gains. I, as a child abandoned by my father, have that refining process to cope with, too. It is encouraging to my heart to hear Jesus warn people about **causing little ones to stumble** because I was stumbled in my younger years. But I do not enjoy processing those feelings of shame, rejection and scorn. And I know many sincere, caring Anglicans who would be horrified at my experience and sympathetic to my pain but I was still treated shabbily. They “hated” me **without cause** and that wound tends to go septic—creating a vulnerability in me which could lead me astray, as in holding others in contempt especially, unfair as it may be, Anglicans. And that is a battle I would prefer not to have to fight, *but to maintain a good conscience I do*. **Can anything good come from Nazareth?** ringing in my ears, I am going to share from a piece on the sin of scorn written by an Anglican.

Greg Goebel, an Anglican priest, wrote in “Pastor’s Journal: Scorn Has No Place for Christ’s Follower’s (May 3, 2018) “As a general rule, those who follow Christ should not scorn anyone because our Lord was scorned.” “I have sensed scorn in my own heart. I’ve scorned others before. When I was growing up the word “liberal” was a terrible pejorative. . . Scorn was heaped on secularists, public schools, rock musicians, celebrities and most Democrats.” [It may be fair to observe that some Democrats has responded in kind . . . calling Republicans “deplorable’s,” ignoramuses, racists and bigots—the derisive labels roll on and on.] “I wore this scorn like a badge of honor. It marked me as a true believer who really understood. It helped me feel that I wasn’t part of that sad, *contemptible* group of others.”

“This was all in the context of a Christian church community. These were people who loved on me, and were genuinely caring people who served the poor and the outcast. And yet, such was, and is, the culture of conservative Christianity that scorn is an acceptable sin.”

Is this fair? Is this on a par with what the **man of God brought Eli**—a balanced, objective and unpleasant divine indictment? Something best expressed with humility and sorrow *rather than proud, distancing disdain?* **How might the Lord be confronting us with the sin of scorn?**

Derek Chauvin, and his fellow officers, held George Floyd in contempt. Brock Turner held Chanel Miller in contempt. Shechem held Dinah in contempt. King David held Uriah, Bathsheba and God in contempt. The rioters hold their fellow Americans in contempt in their violence, destruction and looting (unlawful taking). Wild viciousness

and murder has been loosed on our streets wherever scornful agitators set up shop to curse, and scream and throw projectiles hoping to harm and hurt others. The mainstream media hold both the presidency and this president in contempt and he returns the scorn. It is time and past time to let the scorn die—let it die first in me! Why? Because it is sin.

Ask: Is it possible that things are as disagreeable as they are for no greater cause than the fact that we are so disagreeable? Unkind, hateful, proud and contemptuous? Who me?! Are you talking to me? Are you suggesting that I be *respectful* to someone who is behaving disrespectfully to things that matter to me? *Well, maybe.* Is this Anglican priest giving me a reproof? Does his Anglicanism even matter because if it does, I have not improved on those who abused me first? *I want to distance myself from a conservative Christianity that reeks of scoffing, scorn and sin—**scorn is not an acceptable sin.** In fact it never was acceptable to Christ!*

World English Bible

An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.

New American Standard Bible

He kisses the lips Who gives a right answer.

(Thank you, Greg Goebel, I receive your reproof. ***This is Christ*** at work in the mix of it all!)

Scorn is a manifestation of *pride of the flesh*—meaning especially my pride. Its presence may well suggest that I am finding my identity in something, or someone other than the Lord Jesus. Can anyone else relate to that? It may be my political position, my social attitude and values—even my racial identity. (Even as hidden and poorly understood as racial identity may be—most people, regardless of race, are lacking in self-awareness on this level.)The biblical antidote for pride is humility.

Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up. (James 4:10)
We actually have no need, or good reason to exalt ourselves! What if scorn is the first step in the process of dehumanization, we hold them in contempt so that we can rob, steal, assault, abuse and harm them with malicious intent and with impunity. What if scorn is the first step in the lethal progression which moves from I fear you, to I hate you, I want to hurt and harm you . . . I will act as *if* you are nothing to me (I don't care) and I intend to loot, burn, and beat you. . . . or, rape, torture and murder you. Scorn knows no compassion and shows no pity. For God who is **the Father of mercy and God of all comfort**, this violence is profoundly wicked.

Greg continued with: “No one likes to be scorned. No one listens to a scorner. ***No one really respects a scorner.***” So far as I am concerned you could add slanderer, gossip, false witnesses, scoffers and hypocrites to scorners legitimately, only to discover that most of our news sources have dried up. That is one root of the media credibility challenge—the open contempt and disdain is palpable everywhere, infecting the very air. The presumption of innocence, apparently, doesn't enhance viewership or sell ads—so we simply follow the dollar like beasts with rings in the nose? No. Is there anything else we can do? Yes, we could repent. Repent of scorn as an acceptable sin; it is maladaptive. It is not Christian.

And then we can deploy ourselves as soldiers in the strife of good with evil—we could “Christianize” every situation because that is what Christians do. We could use our authority in the right way. ***Where is Christ in all this?*** He is present, calling us out now, summoning us to follow him more truly—in every situation—even more deeply. We could attach scorn to the cross and leave it there to die.

Right, ambassador?

Amen.