

HE ANSWERED NOTHING

Noah Webster defined *satire* as *A discourse or poem in which wickedness or folly is exposed with severity*. He distinguished satire from sarcasm in that, unlike sarcasm, satire does not express contempt or scorn. Webster defined *sarcasm* this way:

keen reproachful expression; a satirical remark or expression, uttered with some degree of scorn or contempt; a taunt; a gibe. Of this we have an example in the remark of the Jews respecting Christ, on the cross, “He saved others, himself he cannot save.”

Webster defined *lampoon* as “A personal satire in writing; abuse; censure written to reproach and vex rather than to reform.” Concerning these words, Webster was faithful to make careful distinctions. Over twenty years ago, Doug Wilson published his book, *A Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking*. John Frame, for one, found Wilson’s treatment inadequate. He wrote:

Now I am accusing Doug here of a sin of omission, that he doesn’t say enough to help us make safe use of his serrated edge. In reviewing books, I normally don’t make much of omission. After all, nobody can say everything, and when people occasionally try to say everything they end up saying nothing. But by Doug’s own admission, harsh rebuke is a dangerous instrument—something you should not use without wisdom and experience. So I must fault him for writing a book praising this instrument, urging its greater use, defending its practitioners, claiming for it a central role in biblical witness, and only then telling his readers (in much more muted tones) to use caution. And the cautions he proposes are too general to be of much use to anybody. It’s like spending 120 pages lauding the fun and usefulness of assault rifles and then adding “of course these things can kill people, so be careful.”

Wilson, in his reply, conceded, saying, “John is exactly right that it was not showcased the way it ought to have been.” The concern of Frame, and of others, is that some people use the so-called serrated edge, not to reform sinners, but to retaliate against them, and simply to amuse each other. Perhaps the writings of Wilson, and his followers, should be classified, not as satire, but as lampoon, according to Webster’s definitions. Jesus did, on occasion, strongly rebuke the ruling class of Israel, and He did, on occasion, use satire, and even sarcasm. Yet, He was careful not to repay evil with evil, but to repay evil with good. He was careful to be obedient to God in all things, even in dying for men that did not deserve it.

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses asked God His name, and God replied:

I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. (Exodus 3:14, 15)

God’s name is I AM. This means that He exists in Himself, has life in Himself. (John 5:26) He has always existed, and He always shall. He is the creator of all things, and He provides all things. He depends upon

nothing and all things depend upon Him. So, Saint Paul told the philosophers of Athens, “he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things,” and “in him we live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:25, 28)

After God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai, and there made a covenant with them. He said to them:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:4–6)

God delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt so that they might worship and serve Him only. So, He would make a covenant with them in which, if they obeyed His commands, then He would be their God, and they would be His people. The people replied, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:8) The people agreed to God’s terms. They vowed to obey God’s law, so He gave them His law, the Ten Commandments. The third commandment is, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7) The Israelites had agreed to take God as their God, and to take to themselves His name, to be called by His name. God forbid them take His name in vain, which is to say, as something worthless, or meaningless. King David wrote in the Book of Psalms of such as broke this commandment. He wrote, “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. (Psalm 139:19, 20) In King David’s time there were in Israel men of violence, men who shed innocent blood. They broke the Sixth Commandment, and, by so doing, broke the Third Commandment. They swore by the name of God, but by their actions they foreswore Him. So, God would forswear them.

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, the people of God rebelled against Him. They were hypocrites. They observed His ceremonial law, but disregarded His moral law. Isaiah the prophet said:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1:11–15)

It was not only the common people that were corrupt; the leaders of the people, too, were corrupt. The prophet said, “Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.” (Isaiah 1:23) So, God called His people hypocrites. He said, “Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is an hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly.” (Isaiah 9:17; compare Isaiah 10:6) The people claimed God as their God, but by their actions they disowned Him. God said of them, “Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” (Isaiah 29:13) By their hypocrisy they broke the Third Commandment. By their hypocrisy, they

blasphemed. God said, “My name continually every day is blasphemed.” (Isaiah 52:5) Because of the rebellion and hypocrisy of the people, God would bring judgment upon them. Isaiah said to Hezekiah, King of Judah:

Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. (Isaiah 39:6, 7)

God would cause the army of Babylon to conquer the kingdom of Judah, and carry the people away into exile. Isaiah prophesied:

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. 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. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? (Isaiah 50:4–9)

Isaiah here speaks somewhat of himself, as a servant of God who said to the people what God told him, and who suffered for it. Though all Israel were against him, yet he did not retaliate, but rather entrusted himself to the Lord. According to tradition, Mannassah, King of Judah, finally killed the prophet by sawing him in two. (compare Hebrews 11:37) Although Isaiah here speaks of himself, yet he was but a type of Christ, and to Christ does this prophecy ultimately refer.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God which God promised David to succeed him on the throne of Israel. From the time of Jesus’s birth, His enemies sought to kill him. King Herod the Great was the first, ordering the massacre of all infant males in the town of Bethlehem, and its vicinity, in hope that one of them was the Christ. From the beginning of Jesus’s earthly ministry, there were those who wished Him dead, and none more than the religious leaders of Israel. For some time, the leaders of Israel conspired to kill Him. When Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem to make His Triumphal Entry, the people who joined Him cried out, “Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” (Mark 11:9, 10) Jesus entered the city, not on a warhorse, and not with violence, and Judas Maccabeus had done one-hundred and sixty-four years before; He entered the city on a donkey, and peacefully. Three days later, the chief priests and scribes plotted to kill Jesus. (Mark 14:1, 2) Saint Mark recorded, “After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.” (Mark 14:1, 2) So, the Jews arrested Jesus, and brought Him to trial before the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of Israel. In the trial, such as it was, the chief priests and the council members sought witnesses against Jesus, but there were only those who bore false witness, in violation of the Ninth Commandment. During the proceedings, Jesus did not protest His innocence, but remained silent. Finally, the high priest asked Jesus, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61) The high priest asked Jesus if He is the Son of God, the King of Israel, which was promised to King David. Jesus answered, “I am:

and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:62) Jesus answered in the affirmative the question the high priest put to Him. Moreover, Jesus stated that He would fulfill Daniel’s vision of the Christ. Daniel said:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13, 14)

Daniel saw in his vision a man ascending to heaven, and there God gave him dominion over all the earth forever. Jesus told the council of the Jews that He is that man. The high priest tore his clothes in protest, and said, “What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye?” (Mark 14:63) So, the council condemned Jesus to death. Then some of the council members spat on Him, and covered his eyes, and struck Him, and told Him to prophesy who had struck Him. Even the servants struck Him. In all this, Jesus did not retaliate. He did not revile His enemies, as they reviled Him, or strike them, as they struck Him.

The Jews had no right under the laws of Rome to execute a man, so they turned Him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea for execution. Pilate asked Jesus if He is the king of the Jews, and Jesus answered that He is. When the chief priests accused Jesus before Pilate, Jesus said nothing in His defense. Pilate believed that Jesus had committed no crime, and he knew that the chief priests desired to kill Jesus because of envy. It was Pilate’s custom at the feast of the Jews to release a Jewish prisoner, and he offered to release Jesus. The chief priests refused, and demanded that the governor release Barabbas, a man who led an insurrection, and in it committed murder. So, in order to pacify the people, Jesus ordered Jesus to be scourged, and then crucified.

Saint Mark wrote:

And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him. (Mark 15:16–20)

The Roman soldiers made a great mockery of Jesus, They put on His body a purple robe, signifying royalty, and on His head they placed a crown of thorns. They mockingly hailed Him as king of the Jews. They struck Him on the head with a reed, which they had before put in his hand as a mock scepter. They spit on Him, and on their knees they pretended to worship Him. Finally, the soldiers removed the purple robe, and led Him out to crucify Him. First the Jews, and then the Gentiles, persecuted Jesus, so that all had a hand in His suffering.

Jesus was by this time so weak from the abuse, that He could not carry his cross, so the soldiers ordered one Cyrus of Cyrene to carry it for Him. The soldiers brought Jesus to the place of crucifixion, and there they did crucify Him. At the top of the cross they placed the accusation against Him: The King of the Jews.

Jesus was crucified as a criminal, between two other criminals, and so was Scripture fulfilled. Isaiah had prophesied of God’s Suffering Servant:

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:11, 12)

Jesus is the world's only perfectly innocent man; He committed no sin. Yet, wicked men executed Him as a criminal because they were envious of His great influence over people. The enemies of Jesus tormented Him, and finally killed Him. Yet, the Son of God came into the world for this purpose, to suffer and die for unrighteous men. His sacrificial death would atone for the sins of men. Because of His great humility and sacrifice, God would give Him victory by making Him ruler over all men including His enemies.

As Jesus hung on the cross, people that passed by blasphemed Him, which is to say, they slandered Him. They shook their heads at Him, and said to Him, "Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross." (Mark 15:29, 30) Of course, Jesus had never said that He would destroy the temple of the Jews, but rather said that the Jews would destroy the temple of His body, and that He would three days later raise it up. They told Him to come down from the cross and save Himself, but Jesus was determined to obey God by dying to save others. The chief priests and scribes scoffed at Him, saying, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." (Mark 15:31, 32) Of course, they would not believe even after Jesus rose from the dead. Even the two criminals who were crucified with Him insulted Him.

Three hours after the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, darkness covered the land, and, three hours later, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) These words King David before spoke when he felt that God did not deliver him from his enemies. Christ applied the Scripture to Himself, for His enemies railed against Him, and crucified Him and God did not intervene. Of course, God would intervene. He would raise Jesus from the dead and make Him ruler of all. Finally, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and gave up His spirit, and died. The roman soldier who watched Him believed, and confessed, "Truly this man was the Son of God." (Mark 15:39)

Saint Paul gave perspective on Jesus's obedience. He wrote to the Philippians:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11)

Jesus is the Son of God, and in glory equal with His Father. The Son of God, graciously and humbly, laid aside His rights and privileges as God, and became incarnate, so that he might live and die as a man, and might die and live for men. Because of His humble obedience and loving sacrifice, God raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him as ruler of the world. Saint Paul taught that the frame of mind that the Son of God had is the same frame of mind that His followers must have. The Christian must, when necessary, lay aside his rights and privileges in order humbly to serve the best interest of others.

Jesus is the perfect example of humble obedience. He is also the perfect example of gracious suffering. Saint Peter wrote:

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: (1 Peter 2:22, 23)

Jesus was perfect. He never sinned, even in the things He said. Although He was reviled, He never reviled in return. When He was persecuted, He did not threaten His persecutors. He did not seek His own revenge, but rather entrusted Himself to God who is the righteous judge, and executioner.

Let us not take the name of the Lord in vain, but rather glorify it. Let us thank God for Jesus's gracious sacrifice for our sins. Let us follow Jesus's example of humbly entrusting ourselves to God.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.