

“SPITTING IMAGE”

READINGS: Exodus 33 verses 12-23 and Matthew 22 verses 15-22

INTRODUCTION

Love it or loathe it, it will very soon be back on our television screens. I am of course referring to the return of “Spitting Image”. The puppet show which took the mick out of the great and the good. Nothing was sacred and no-one was exempt. Trailers have already shown that two obvious candidates for ridicule this time round are Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. It will be interesting to see who else is put on the firing line, although I am not sure that I am going to be one of its most avid viewers.

The term “spitting image” was used long before the puppets were on the scene. I used to hear my parents talking about someone being “the spit” of someone else. Rhys is often being told how much like me he is, although I can’t quite see it myself. On one occasion we were on one of our Saturday “Daddy Days” at Roath Park. He must have been about 9 or 10 and an elderly lady stopped us and was talking to Rhys and Elise. The lady looked at him and then at me and said to Rhys, “well it is obvious who you belong to.” Rhys looked at me and smiled, then after she had walked away, asked me if I knew her. I told him that I had no idea who she was, to which Rhys continued “how did she know I was your son?” Sometimes family likenesses are more obvious to everyone. Sometimes it takes a stranger to see the similarity.

PART 1 – THE IMAGE BEARER

We all have been, according to Genesis, created in the likeness of God, in his image. Sometimes the similarities, for want of a better word, are more evident and obvious than others. For a change, this morning I want to compare the Old Testament with the New. In our Exodus reading, Moses tells God that he (Moses) wants to see God face to face. Up until this point Moses had spoken only to burning bushes, clouds, pillars of fire and now he wants a closer relationship, something which, I am sure, we can all relate to. Despite all those previous conversations, Moses wants more. He wanted literally to see God and asks God if he can see his glory.

Moses is seeking some certainty in relation to the promises which God has made to them. OK, so God has delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. He is meeting their physical needs by providing food in the form of manna and quails, there is fresh water to drink, but other than that, they are wandering around in a desert trusting in a promise – one that has not yet been met, they are trusting in the grace of God not to allow them to starve or die of thirst, but for some of them, their minds are back in Egypt. They are travelling on towards a land described as “flowing with milk and honey”, But for now the reality is sand and rocks and plenty of it.

Perhaps you can understand why Moses wants a little more clarity, more certainty. For Moses, on the one hand he seems to be trying to please a demanding God, and on the other hand please a cantankerous and frightened people. So, in essence, he is asking God for a little more assurance. He is not playing down the importance of those other conversations which have taken place in the past, but now, he wants to meet God face to face, to have a face to face conversation. If this could happen, maybe Moses was going to feel a bit easier in himself, of the task laid upon him. **“Now, show me your glory”** he asks (**Exodus 33 verse 18**).

So God offers Moses something. Not everything he really asked for. **“I will cause all my goodness pass in front of you, and will I proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.’ I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion to whom I will have compassion. But,”** he said, **“you cannot see my face; for no one may see me and live.”** (**verses 19 and 20**). God then directs Moses to a place in the rock face where **verses 21-23** tell us that God would cover Moses with His hand and after His glory has passed, God will take His

hand away and Moses will see God's back. So, in response to seeing God face to face, Moses sees God's hand and His back.

Whilst it might seem that Moses has been sold short here, the one fact we cannot overlook is that God was with Moses. God heard Moses' request and responded. In seeing God's back, Moses was assured that God was ahead of the people, leading them as promised. That was one assurance that Moses needed and it something which we need assurance of as we continue our journey's through life, and especially in these uncertain and difficult times. We need the assurance that God is there. We need the assurance that God hears the cries of our hearts. We need the assurance that God will act – not perhaps as we would like, but as is best, in His way.

In the case of Rhys, I am, apparently, the image bearer. I may not have given in to meeting every whim and fancy – not that he really had many – but as the "Image Bearer" I was there for him and Elise. I listened to their tears and their fears as well as their joys and celebrations. I tried to do what was best for them and I know that they saw it that way by becoming the adults they have become. The One in whose image we are created, our Divine "Image Bearer" guides us, hears our prayers, knows what's best for us, and longs for us to become the people we were created to become. He longs for us to experience His had of protection, to "see His back" by following His guidance – to have the assurance that He has been there, is there and will continue to be there for us. In that, we will see and experience His glory.

PART 2 – BEARING THE IMAGE

Moving on from Moses longing for the assurance which God gave to him, God wants to know are we listening and following and bearing His image to the world. This is revealed in the conversation Jesus has in **Matthew 22**.

The Jewish religious leaders looking for a way to rid themselves of Jesus. They know that they are powerless in themselves, except have Him arrested and flogged. But that might just back fire on them. They had to get Him to say something against the Romans so they can take over and do something to keep Jesus quiet. But there is a problem. A lot of the ordinary folks saw Jesus as a prophet and just handing Him over to the Romans could make things very difficult for themselves. So they come up with, in their eyes, a fool-proof plan that, if it worked, however Jesus responded would upset one side or the other. This is their plan. There are two main groups arguing against each other. One was the non-religious Herodians, supporters of Herod Antipas who wanted closer and better ties with Rome. They supported Roman taxation, and believed it was right for everyone to pay taxes to Rome, not based on income, but something like a poll tax, something everyone had to pay, and not always handled honestly. The others comprised the religious Pharisee group, who objected strongly against paying anything to Rome, claiming it was heresy, against God, to do so. They based their claim on the fact that the tax had to be paid in Roman coins which had an image of Caesar on them. The Pharisees refused to pay anything but the Temple Tax, which was paid in Jewish shekels. It's hard to see how two such opposing forces could work together, but under the common cause of getting rid of Jesus, they did. A bit like the working out of the question for the Brexit poll. a question was worked out. They thought that no matter how Jesus answered, He would condemn Himself. The question was: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Either of the two possible answers would condemn Jesus.

They start out by flattering Jesus, and Jesus, quite justifiably calls them hypocrites. He knows what their real motives are. Matthew tells us that it was "evil". So instead of answering their "yes" or "no" question, Jesus does the Jewish thing – answers their question with a question. He asks for one of the coins. It seems, Jesus did not make it a habit to carry Roman coins around with Him. "Show me the coin used for paying the tax," Jesus says. He points to the picture and inscription on the coin. "Whose portrait is this?" Jesus asks, "And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Then he said to them, 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'" Ingenious! So ingenious that the followers of the Pharisees and the Herodians "were amazed. So they left him and went away." The phrase "render unto Caesar" is often used in modern language and I am sure that not many people realise that it comes from the Bible. But, only part of the original saying

is used and hides its true meaning. Jesus says, give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but in the same breath, goes on to say: "and give to God what is God's."

Whose image do we bear? If we bear God's image, does this not also mean "give yourself back to God?" Again, the reminder from **Genesis 1 verse 27** where we are told: "**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female.**" Quite literally, we have all been created in the image of God, and we are to give back to God what is rightfully God's! Have we done this? Are we doing this?

When humanity rebelled against the Creator, what was one of the main reasons? We see in **Genesis 3** that Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, but of course in doing this they did not become more like God, instead, the image was blurred. The goodness of God became mixed in us with the badness or the evil of Satan. They became unholy, naked, alone, fearful, lost. God said to Adam, "**since from it [the ground] you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.**" (**Genesis 3 verse 19**). But I don't want that to be the last word for me, and thankfully, neither does God! By His grace, because of His great love for us, God has come back in human form to reclaim that which is rightfully His. God has come to us in Jesus Christ, and in God's mercy all of us who receive Jesus Christ, all of us who believe in His name God grants the right to, once again, "**become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision but born of God.**" (**John 1 verse 13**). And for all of us who have been born of God—through the Cross of Christ, God stamps His inscription on us - the likeness and image of God, for He made us. and as Christian believers, Christ has purchased us with His blood. So let me ask, are we willing to allow God to have what is already rightfully His - our lives and our allegiance?

This does not mean that we do not pay taxes to the governing authority. Christians are to be good citizens, good witnesses for Christ. Because our ultimate and everlasting citizenship is not of this world. Should we render unto Caesar what is Caesar's? Yes, that's just a coin. What we are to render unto God is our whole selves! Are we doing this? Or do we still live as "almost Christians", who have half an interest set in the kingdom of darkness, and another half in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus told us that we cannot have it both ways. Because the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God are like oil and water - they don't mix. People should be able to see Christ's image and Christ's inscription on us. We are to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, not part of the dust! Our challenge as we grow closer to God, like Moses, is also to know that we are God's coins, we are to bear the image of God. There is no competition between God and "Caesar". Our full allegiance must be to Christ and Christ alone.

PSALM 96 verses 1 – 7

¹ Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

² Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

⁴ For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵ For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

EXODUS 33 verses 12 – 23

¹² Moses said to the LORD, ‘You have been telling me, “Lead these people,” but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, “I know you by name and you have found favour with me.”’ ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.’

¹⁴ The LORD replied, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, ‘If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?’

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’

¹⁸ Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’

¹⁹ And the LORD said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’

²¹ Then the LORD said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.’

MATTHEW 22 verses 15 - 22

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the poll-tax to Caesar or not?’

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’

²¹ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’

²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.