

**At the Foot of the Cross:  
George Herbert's  
"The Sacrifice"**



**March 27, 2019**

***The Temple* (1633)**

**"The Sacrifice"**

**Stanzas 25-31:**

**See How Spite Cankers Things**

Entire poem available at: [www.tinyurl.com/herbert2019](http://www.tinyurl.com/herbert2019)

## Stanzas 25-31:

### See How Spite Cankers Things

- 25           Hark how they cry aloud still, *Crucify:*  
*It is not fit he live a day*, they cry,  
Who cannot live less than eternally:  
                  Was ever grief like mine?
- 26           *Pilate* a stranger holdeth off; but they,  
Mine own dear people, cry, *Away, away*,  
With noises confused frightening the day:  
                  Was ever grief like mine?
- 27           Yet still they shout, and cry, and stop their ears,  
Putting my life among their sins and fears,  
And therefore wish *my blood on them and theirs:*  
                  Was ever grief like mine?
- 28           See how spite cankers things. These words aright  
Used, and wished, are the whole worlds light:  
But honey is their gall, brightness their night:  
                  Was ever grief like mine?

**29** They choose a murderer, and all agree  
In him to do themselves a courtesy:  
For it was their own case who killed me:  
Was ever grief like mine?

**30** And a seditious murderer he was:  
But I the Prince of peace; peace that doth pass  
All understanding, more than heav'n doth glasse:  
Was ever grief like mine?

**31** Why, Caesar is their only King, not I:  
He clave the stony rock, when they were dry;  
But surely not their hearts, as I well try:  
Was ever grief like mine?

- 25 Hark how they cry aloud still, *Crucify:*  
*It is not fit he live a day*, they cry,  
Who cannot live less than eternally:  
Was ever grief like mine?
- 26 *Pilate* a stranger holdeth off; but they,  
Mine own dear people, cry, *Away, away,*  
With noises confused frightening the day:  
Was ever grief like mine?
- 27 Yet still they shout, and cry, and stop their ears,  
Putting my life among their sins and fears,  
And therefore wish *my blood on them and theirs:*  
Was ever grief like mine?
- 28 See how spite cankers things. These words aright  
Used, and wished, are the whole worlds light:  
But honey is their gall, brightness their night:  
Was ever grief like mine?

This has not interrupted their mob-mentality chant, “Crucify!  
 Don’t let the sun rise for Him again!” Even though this Son  
 is more surely rising eternally than even the sun they see:  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine? 25

Pilate is a late arrival, and he asks for a cooling off period, 26  
 But My own invited guests shout, “Away with Him!”  
 With gnashing teeth Babeling, terrifying the day:  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine?

Yet still they stomp, yell, and clap their hands over their ears, 27  
 Dragging My Life into the clutches of their sins and fears,  
 Which leads them to call for My blood  
     to be on their entire clan’s hands:  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine?

See how spite infects, corrupts, and bursts good things. 28  
 Their words about My blood are true:  
     the healing light for the one-whole-clan of the world:  
 But spite makes sweet things bitter  
     and day is doomed to be night:  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine?

29           They choose a murderer, and all agree  
              In him to do themselves a courtesy:  
              For it was their own case who killed me:  
                      Was ever grief like mine?

30           And a seditious murderer he was:  
              But I the Prince of peace; peace that doth pass  
              All understanding, more than heav'n doth glasse:  
                      Was ever grief like mine?

31           Why, Caesar is their only King, not I:  
              He clave the stony rock, when they were dry;  
              But surely not their hearts, as I well try:  
                      Was ever grief like mine?

The murderer Barabbas is selected by all 29  
 For the Governor's pardon as his festival gift:  
 Yet what leads to My death is the crowd's mission  
     (and not because of this one-time bargaining):  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine?

And Barabbas indeed murdered in the name of insurrection: 30  
 But I AM the Prince of Peace, peace beyond all telling,  
 Seen only dimly this side of eternity:  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine?

Their allegiance is to Caesar, the Roman King— 31  
     not Me, their True King:  
 As if Caesar struck the rock and made water flow  
     to quench their dying thirst;  
 But their hearts remain unbroken,  
     walling off my attempts to break in with love:  
     Is there anybody out there with a grief like mine?

## Questions for Conversation

1 Which line from Herbert's "The Sacrifice" stanzas tonight grabs your attention and invites you to reflect on it?  
Why that line? Does it somehow connect with your life?

2 Have you ever had a canker sore, cold sore, severely chapped lips, or some other mouth sore / injury? How did it change things like eating?

3 Why do you think Herbert uses "cankers" as a verb to talk about the affect "spite" (malice, bitterness) has on our understanding of Jesus?

4 What is the truth about saying "his blood will be on us"? In other words, what would "spite" make us miss out on understanding?

### Acknowledgements

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