

The Crucifixion of Jesus

- Mark 15:16-32
- Last week we ended with the scourging of Jesus, which left him so beaten and disfigured that he did not even look like a human anymore, just as Isaiah prophesied. Today we walk with Jesus on the Via Dolorosa, the way of suffering, from the palace to the place of the skull. It is a familiar passage but an important one. Let's look at it today under these main points: Soldiers shame him, Simon helps him, Scorners mock him.
- **Soldiers shame him (verses 16-20)**
- It would be easy for us to work up an intense hatred for the Roman soldiers who take the Savior who has been scourged beyond human recognition and add to his suffering with this brutal game they play. They call together the whole battalion, 600 men, and they essentially torture Jesus for their own entertainment. Jesus is clothed in purple by the soldiers, the color of royalty, and a crown of thorns is pressed down onto his head to add to his pain and to their delight in mocking him. We all know how much even a scratch on our heads can bleed. Rivulets of blood must have run down Jesus' head, covering his face and neck and dripping onto his body. They salute him, crying out, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and Matthew tells us they put a reed, a word that can mean the shaft of an arrow in his hand, as a scepter. Then they took it from him and one by one they hit Jesus on the head with the stick, driving the thorns deeper into his scalp and producing more and more blood. Did these men have any idea that they were doing this to the King of kings and the Lord of lords? They descend into an even lower level than beasts as they kneel down before the bloodied and beaten Savior, one by one, and then spit into his face, into the face of the precious Lamb of God. The Roman soldiers were the most disciplined men in the world, but they reveal that a man or woman whose heart is undisciplined can stoop to any and every unspeakable act. It reminded me of an account I read years ago of the trial of Adolph Eichmann, one of the masterminds of the German concentration camps and the horrors that were poured out on the Jews. A Jewish man on the witness stand in the 1961 trial of Eichmann broke down and wept as he recalled the torture and the ritualistic murders of his friends and family members, but he said that though he wept for what he had seen he wept even more for what he could see now, that this evil can be found in the heart of anyone who gives himself to it.
- We see clearly, in the torture and mockery that Jesus suffered, the darkness of man's mind and heart, the depths of depravity, the hellish cruelty that each of us is capable of outside of the grace of God and the cleansing work of Christ's blood in our lives.
- John records that Jesus was then led back to Pilate, wearing the purple robe and the crown of thorns, the Roman governor was surely shocked and horrified to see what Jesus had been reduced to by the scourger's brutal whip and the soldiers' torture. He points to Jesus and says, "Behold the man!" D.A. Carson writes, "Pilate is speaking with dripping irony: here is the man you find so dangerous and threatening?" Carson goes on, "(John) records the event with still deeper irony: here indeed is the Man, the Word made flesh. All the witnesses were too blind at the time, but this Man was displaying his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, in the very disgrace, pain, weakness and brutalization that Pilate (saw but did not understand)."

- When the Roman soldiers were done, they stripped Jesus of the purple cloak, again causing intense pain and increased bleeding from wounds all over his body, and they put his own clothes back on him and led him to be crucified.
- Cicero, a Roman statesman, called death by crucifixion the “most cruel and horrifying punishment.” Quintilian acknowledged that it was an act of terror, meant to incite fear: “Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear.” It was a punishment reserved for non-Romans, and used only for slaves, violent criminals, and prisoners of war, and women in those categories could be crucified as well. To add to the shame, men were normally crucified naked, though possibly to satisfy Jewish sensitivities, a loincloth may have been prescribed for Jesus. No major arteries were severed in a crucifixion, so the victim could survive for several days. Death came through shock or asphyxia or heart failure, or a combination of all three. To breathe, the victim had to push himself up with his nailed feet, scraping his back that was already a bloody pulp against the roughhewn beam of the cross. It was a hideous way for anyone to die. But...God’s perfect Son, the Messiah, dying on a Roman cross? It was so unthinkable that Paul would write 25 years later, “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” (1 Cor. 1:23). Later writers of course would try to change the narrative. Simon took his place, one wrote. Jesus felt no pain on the cross, wrote another. Mark does not do that, but admits to the horror of the cross, to put on display what the cross meant and what it accomplished. Martin Hengel wrote, “In the death of Jesus of Nazareth, God identified himself with the extreme of human wretchedness, which Jesus endured as a representative of us all, in order to bring us to the freedom of the children of God.” Oh, saints, we mustn’t waste that freedom by living trivial lives. And we must always remember whose we are, what has been given to us in Christ, and the grace of God in our lives that is without measure! Paul wrote, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) That leads us to...
- **Simon helps him (verse 21)**
- Plutarch wrote, “every criminal condemned to death bears his cross on his back.” Jesus was too weak to carry the patibulum, the cross beam, so the Roman soldiers “compelled a passerby” to carry it for him. Simon of Cyrene, which was on the north coast of Africa. Simon was likely a man of color. But what is most interesting is that Mark names Simon’s two sons who were with him, Alexander and Rufus. Unusual for Mark to include three names in one sentence, and why would he name this man’s sons anyway? It appears that he names them because he knows his readers would recognize them. That they know them, or at least one of them. Many believe that Rufus would have been known to the Roman readers of Mark’s gospel, and that he was the man Paul wrote about in Romans 16:13, “Greet Rufus, chosen of the Lord.”
- What did Simon do for Jesus? He took up his cross and followed Jesus, the very thing that Jesus has told his disciples to do. James Edwards writes, “It is worth considering...whether Simon’s faithfulness in carrying the cross of Jesus resulted in his sons’ participation in the faith and in the church.” I would submit to you that it is the most important thing a son or daughter can see their father and their mother do! Do

they see you work hard to provide food and clothing, to keep a clean house and give them opportunities to learn and grow and have fun and get rest and be healthy? Excellent! But even more excellent is that they see their dad and their mom taking up their cross daily and following the Lord. There is no price that could be put on that blessing for any child. That leads us to...

- **Scorners mock him (verses 22-32)**
- They led Jesus out of the city and to Golgotha, which Mark tells his Roman readers was called “the place of the skull.” There they offered Jesus an ancient narcotic, “wine mixed with myrrh,” but he refused. It would have numbed him a little, but Jesus does not give himself to dulled senses. He welcomes the Father’s will with a fully conscious state.
- Mark writes simply, “There they crucified him.” Mark does not sensationalize the horror of the cross. It was enough to simply state it.
- They divided his clothing by casting lots. The wine mixed with myrrh and the divided clothing were prophecies which the Roman soldiers unwittingly fulfilled. “They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” (Psalm 69:21) “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothes they cast lots.” (Psalm 22:18)
- They crucify Jesus in between two robbers, recalling the question James and John had asked Jesus, if they could be positioned on his right and his left in the kingdom. By the way, notice verse 28 is missing? It is not included in this manuscript, but in some manuscripts, it says, “And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘He was numbered with the transgressors.’” (a reference to Isaiah 53:12)
- Mark opens up a little more, breaking away from his normal reserve to report on the scorners who passed by the cross. They are not given names, just described as deriding Jesus, wagging their heads, and mocking him. Again, a fulfillment of prophesy: “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” (Psalm 22:7-8)
- They mock him as a prophet. “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross.
- They mock him as a priest. “He saved others; he cannot save himself.”
- They mock him as a king. “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe.”
- The mockery of Jesus did not end at the cross but continues today all around the world. A church just a mile from here has different color doors on their front lawn that represent Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism and other world religions, along with their symbols, and the message written on them is, “God’s doors are open to all.” It makes a mockery of the cross where the Son of God died who said, **“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved...” (John 10:9) “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:1-3)**
- Those who blasphemed Jesus as he hung on the cross and those who reject Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God and the only hope for mankind will be found in the number that

John also wrote about in his last book: “Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” (Revelation 6:15-17)

- They mocked the prophet, the priest, the king, the Christ. Notice that all three of these taunts assume that to save oneself is the highest aim, and that to vindicate himself as a Messiah, Jesus only needs to come down from the cross and save himself. **But Jesus did not leave glory and come to earth to teach us how to help ourselves or how to fulfill ourselves.** We cannot save ourselves, and all of the world’s religions deceive men and women into thinking that they can. But Jesus came to “give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) He came to do the will of the Father, not his own will. The irony is that those who mock him and tell him they would believe in him as a Savior if he would only come down from the cross would have nothing to believe in had he done that. Jesus died on the cross. Just as he said he would. We will look at that next week, Lord willing.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another