

MARK — Misunderstood Power

Pastor Perry Burkholder



Jesus is led to a cross, shamed, and mocked. The Roman way was to strip one of their identity by doing all of this, displaying their victims naked and nameless in front of their friends and families.

Mark 15:21-32

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!” In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 15:16–32.

The Soldiers Mocking Jesus

Hail, King of the Jews!

Following a sham trial, the Roman soldiers put together a sham coronation. And they reveled in dominating their power over him. In their mind, they’re thinking, “This guy can never be a king.”

But God’s power is displayed through weakness and suffering and pain.

Strangely enough, this idea of power, strength, and glory is what is held up as paramount in our culture, and as Christians, we can be too easily tempted to sing this same song and look down upon weakness, frailty, and vulnerability.

When we’re in trouble and discouraged, we’re tempted to think, “There is no way God is with me. If God was really with me, it wouldn’t hard, difficult, painful, etc.; If God were

with me, I wouldn't suffer.”

Do you not hear those voices? When you're trying to be a good human, you know what it's like when everything is against you to love someone else well, especially when you don't like them at that moment.

Often in those moments, we find ourselves entertaining a spirit of mockery.

But here is the case with this, as stated by Timothy Keller.

Mockery shows when anything weak or suffering comes into our life and our temptation is to harden our hearts and rebel rather than obey. When blow after blow comes in your life and there is disappointment, even the best of us can start to mock the idea of the love of God...

What are you doing when this is happening? You are mocking. Your heart is hardening and starting to despise. But mockery always requires superiority and the only way you can become hardened in your heart and angry and cynical because bad things are happening is because ultimately you know better than He does. Because of course, you can see the end from the beginning and God's not getting it right — Tim Keller.

But Jesus' perspective is diametrically opposed to this. We see a hint of God's purpose that Jesus has in mind in Isaiah;

He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Is 53:3–4.

And it is ultimately to this end that Jesus is drinking this cup of wrath and mockery:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 4:15–16.

“Come Down & Save Yourself”

Show your power by saving you. Our culture doesn’t understand that Jesus never came to save himself but to save others. And the culture talks past Jesus in this way.

Self-salvation is at the root of climbing up the ladder at the expense of others; promoting your own welfare over others. You need to show how much you’re better through whatever means you can: TikTok, social media, creating your own brand.

The world shapes us to think that our whole life has to be about putting ourselves out there and show how well we are “saving ourselves” by “being real” and being successful and the like.



But instead, Jesus is calm and non-anxious as he is brutally beaten and mocked.

The world didn't understand then or now. Jesus lost his own life so he could save others.

There was an early hymn that Paul records that shows us how the early church retroactively understood Jesus' sacrifice and behavior on the cross:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his
own advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Php 2:5–11.

Jesus walked in the fear of the Lord, walking in perfect unity with God and confidence in his identity and was able to take the hits to his character and identity. He is what we describe in the business as a “differentiated person.”

A differentiated person has the ability to think clearly and carefully, to set priorities and make decisions. It means you know how to hold on to you are and who you are not regardless of your circumstances. — Peter Scazzero

You stay the same person no matter what circumstances and other people are saying.



How well are you able to affirm your values and goals apart from the pressures around you? Apart from the discomfort it causes you? Because tolerating discomfort is foundational to maturing and growth.

Welcome to the person of Jesus. He demonstrated this in this text.

You Will Be Misunderstood

If you acknowledge who you are and stand firm in your Christian identity, you must be a differentiated person.

But you can't do it. No one can.

We're too busy saving ourselves and avoiding discomfort by making our faith known. We're often too busy managing perceptions.

Most people think that Christians are good enough to earn God's favor, but really none of us deserve God's favor.



We need to be confident enough to tell people how selfish, broken, and hurtful we are, and how in need of grace we are. We need to dispel these myths that Christians are good enough. We need to tell them that someone else is saving us, not ourselves.

Do not accept praise from other people and take credit for Christ's work. If someone praises you for good character, point them to Christ. "

"The character you praise me for is actually a result of Jesus working in my life."

"Thanks for the compliment! I'm this way because God has been changing me more into this person. I wasn't always this way."

Or other related phrases, that communicate the idea that you're not taking credit for Jesus' character growth in your life.

Show Us Power

Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”

The religious elite are standing before the man that orchestrated his public shaming and execution.

But now they're putting God on notice: “Well, now that you're in this position of weakness, if you're really God, then come down on our terms in the way we want you to,” and ignore 3 years of miraculous evidence in front of thousands upon thousands of witnesses.

He has already demonstrated his power over demons, sickness, nature, death, and sins, and demonstrated his authority to forgive sins through all of those aforementioned acts.

And all of the disciples except 1 who were a part of crafting this story went to their death believing that Jesus was the Son of God.

And our skeptical friends sit in the same seat as these religious leaders who refuse to look at the evidence. If you look underneath, you can see the arrogance, power, pride, and strength.

As a church, we want to be the kind of people who can look at this skepticism in the faith and welcome the people and walk through the skepticism with them.

“Come walk with us, and you can challenge us if we can challenge you.”



The beauty of this gospel is that God shows his glory and power through his suffering and weakness, and as his followers, we demonstrate God's power through our shame and weakness.

As we look at this passage, we can pray, "Jesus, making me like you. Help me to be differentiated like Jesus." And give Jesus the credit for when he does in your life.