

The Death that Redeems (Part 1)

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 15:16-32/ August 18, 2024

Introduction:

Years ago, “The Passion of the Christ” was released and received quite a bit of attention. The movie focused primarily on depicting the brutality Jesus experienced leading up to and being on the cross. Regardless of your views on the movie, one thing is for sure, it didn’t hold back in graphically portraying what Jesus may have experienced. Yet, when you read the gospels, it is telling where the focus of the narrative actually falls, especially for Mark. Mark doesn’t detail the scourging, which might have made for a more captivating story. In our passage today, he will briefly detail the the crown of thorns and mention Jesus crucified only in passing. Instead of focusing on describing the pain Jesus experienced, which may have tugged more on our heart strings, he emphasizes what was said to Him and about Him. Last week, we observed how Mark’s lack of details highlighted the great exchange taking place on the cross, as Jesus was delivered up according to God’s plan to suffer and die in our place. We noted the true amazement behind this was Christ’s willing surrender to be subjected to death and God’s wrath toward sin to purchase our redemption. Over the next two weeks, we are going to closely examine this death that redeems and consider precisely what Christ subjected Himself to for us. I want to draw out three points and one practical application this morning.

Starting in verses 16-20, where we see how,

Christ Subjected Himself to Humiliation and Cruelty for Us

As we see the description of what took place before Jesus was led to be crucified, consider what the details focus on. Look at verses 16-18, “And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’” Mark begins with a vividly painted scene of soldiers leading Jesus inside the governor’s palace and calling together “the whole battalion.” The term for battalion is a technical military term for a cohort. The size of these cohorts varied and could number up to six hundred Roman soldiers. Picture the scene with hundreds of soldiers circled around Jesus inside of the palace walls. Verses 17-18, then, focus in on their actions. James Edwards draws out the significance of the details Mark shares, saying, “Purple, the most expensive and prestigious of ancient dyes, symbolized royalty. The crown, normally made of gold leaf, signified royalty or military valor... The salute, “ ‘Hail, King of the Jews,’ ” is a parody of Caesar’s salute, “Ave Caesar, victor, imperator” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 466). The main purpose of the crown for the soldiers wasn’t the pain it caused but the insult and mockery of Jesus’ supposed kingship. The fact that the whole battalion came together for this spectacle may be intended to heighten that mockery, as this supposed king was now exposed to humiliation by subjects whose line of work revealed the perceived power of Rome. Look at verses 19-20, “And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.” The cruelty of their actions alludes back to Jesus’ final passion prediction again. Yet, notice how not only do we see Jesus mocked, spit on, and beaten, but we see them “kneeling down in homage to Him.” Mark employs a Greek term that signifies worship increasing the irony. The one to whom all knees will eventually bow was cruelly treated and sarcastically worshipped. Before the scene fades to black, we see Jesus stripped of the royal robe, put back in His clothes and led out to be crucified. Church, consider how the King of kings was humiliated. He was robed and crowned for spectacle and sport. He was taunted and worshipped in jest. Consider the cruelty He received at the hands of lawless men. His brow was pierced by the crown of thorns as the reed pushed it further into the skin after each blow, while hundreds of vile soldiers spit on Him. Yet, don’t stop there. Consider the reason why this was taking place. It was because of our sin, to redeem us from the curse of it.

Thorns existed because of the curse of sin, as God says to Adam in Genesis 3:17-18, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you;... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.” The crown of thorns symbolizes our sin placed on Jesus. And the emphasized mockery of His kingship reminds us it was our King who subjected Himself to humiliation and cruelty like this for us. Oh Family, don’t just consider the actions themselves, consider the one who subjected Himself to those acts to redeem rebels like you and me. Next, in verses 21-25, we see how,

Christ Subjected Himself to Weakness and Shame for Us

Again, pay attention to where the emphasis of Mark falls in these verses. Hint, it isn’t on the act of crucifixion. Look at verse 21, “And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.” The opening of this scene is quite fascinating. Mark doesn’t mention Jesus being able to carry the cross like John does but focuses on describing the man compelled to carry it for Him. We first discover he was merely someone passing by while coming in from the country. Just imagine walking down the road and seeing a company of soldiers ushering a group of men carrying crosses outside of the city. You stop for a moment to see who was being crucified but are suddenly thrust into carrying a cross for one of those men. You pick up the cross and start walking, looking at Jesus, weakened by everything, walking beside you. Mark doesn’t leave this man anonymous but shares his place of origin and the names of his two sons. These details are typically included because they would have been known by the readers and probably had become part of Christian community. Rufus is believed to be the same man Paul greeted at the end of his letter to the Romans. This may mean Simon observed something in the crucifixion of Jesus that eventually led to the whole family trusting in the gospel. The weakness of Christ brought a man as close as he could possibly come to witness what was taking place. Notice what happens next in verses 22-25, “And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him.” We discover the place where Jesus was crucified to anchor this moment to a historic place outside the city and along a public highway. We then observe two details connected to things happening around Jesus. First, He is offered a drink considered to be a pain dulling drug. Note how Jesus refuses this, presumably leaning fully leaning into the agony of crucifixion. Second, some around the cross have stripped Jesus of His garments and are choosing which ones to take by casting lots. Verse 24 is a clear echo of Psalm 22:18, which says from verse 14, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” In Psalm 22, David speaks of his suffering and feeling forsaken by the Lord. David recounts his afflictions and shame throughout the psalm, but Mark reveals he was ultimately depicting the afflictions and shame the righteous Son of God would eventually fulfill. As this scene fades, Mark casually mentions Jesus being crucified at the third hour. Church, consider how the Son of Man subjected Himself to weakness when you see Him unable to carry His cross. Though He was offered a drug to dull the pain, He fully bore the whole experience. Consider the shame He experienced as His clothes were divided amongst the bystanders, fulfilled the affliction and shame of Psalm 22. Yet, don’t stop there. Consider the reason why this was taking place. His weakness and shame was for us. Psalm 22 is further echoed throughout these final moments of Christ’s life but it ends with this beautiful promise of the whole earth turning to the Lord and all the families of the nation’s worshipping him. Christ’s weakness and shame leads to our strength and glory.

As John Calvin says well, “The Evangelists portray the Son of God as stripped of His clothes that we may know the wealth gained for us by this nakedness, for it shall dress us in God’s sight. God willed His Son to be stripped that we should appear freely, with the angels, in the garments of his righteousness and fullness of all good things” (Calvin, Harmony, 194). Family, don’t just consider the actions around Jesus, consider what they mean for rebels like you and me. Lastly, in verses 26-32, we see how,

Christ Subjected Himself to Ridicule and Scorn for Us

As Mark turns our gaze to Jesus on the cross, he still doesn’t set our attention on the physical tortures of crucifixion but keeps them locked on something else. Look at verses 26-27, “And the inscription of the charge against him read, ‘The King of the Jews.’ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.” Simple details bring back powerful memories. Once again, Mark reminds us of the mockery being centered around Jesus’ kingship, and then he details two robbers, possibly insurrectionists, on crosses next to Jesus. Notice how he describes them “one on his right and one on his left.” Do you remember the request of James and John following the final passion prediction? In Mark 10:37, they say, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” They desired to be on Jesus’ right and left in His glory. But their request failed to see the whole picture, for this was the moment of Christ’s glory. This is why Jesus told them they didn’t know what they were asking. Continue in verses 29-32, “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!’ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.” Your version may include a quotation from Isaiah 53:12 as verse 28, which isn’t found in the earliest manuscripts. Look at the details Mark gives. In the moment of Christ’s glory He is ridiculed and scorned, first by people who passed by, then by the chief priests and scribes, and finally by the criminals next to Him. This all echoes Psalm 22:6-8, which says, “But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. 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!’” Note the difference between the echo in Mark’s gospel and the psalm itself. In psalm 22, the mockery is of God’s promised deliverance, but here it is in Jesus’ own power to save Himself. Twice Mark records them saying, “you come down from the cross” and “save yourself” Their ridicule and scorn is centered on Jesus’ power and authority, essentially saying, “You say you have the power to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days and you are the Christ. Prove your power and authority by coming down and we will believe you.” Anything thing to note is how the term for derided is the same term for blasphemy (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 473). This may be a subtle nod towards their blasphemy of God the Son. Church, consider the ridicule the Son of God endured while He hung on the cross. His power and authority is mocked and denied by everyone around him. Consider the scorn He faced as they blasphemed Him and tempted Him to come down from the cross. Yet, don’t stop there. Consider the reason why this was taking place. His power is actually displayed in staying on the cross. He could have saved Himself but, by not doing so, He provided salvation for all the families of the earth. His restrained power and authority is what provided our redemption. Family, don’t just cringe over the ridicule and scorn our Lord received, consider what it meant for rebels like you and me. In all of this lies gospel beauties for us to see and believe. Now, I want to close by considering a practical application for us.

1) Christ’s Experience Models Our Response to God’s Grace

The apostle Peter later points back to this mockery of Jesus to encourage us with how to respond in our own suffering. Look at 1 Peter 2:20-25 with me, “For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” Let me draw out a few things. First, Peter isn’t talking about any suffering that comes from our own sin. Our suffering could be a result of our sin, and we need to repent of that sin rather than wallowing in our suffering. Second, Peter says suffering for doing good is a grace of God and something to which we have been called. Family, when you do good and suffer for it, God’s grace is ultimately what is leading you into and through that suffering. Don’t be fooled into thinking suffering is ever a result of Satan out-powering God. Our God sovereignly reigns in mysterious ways over all that takes place. Third, in our suffering, we have a beautiful opportunity to look to Christ’s example and respond like He did. When you are reviled, do you revile in return? When you suffer, do you threaten others? Or do you entrust yourself to the one who judges justly? Our suffering provides us with an opportunity to point people to the salvation of our God and the Shepherd of our souls. We follow a good shepherd who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. Instead of dwelling on the reviling, ridicule, or scorn we receive by the world around us and responding in sin, entrust your life to God, die to sin, and live to righteousness. Let your family, your friends, and the world around you see your good deeds so they might see and believe. Watching Jesus Christ suffer while entrusting Himself to God likely led to the salvation of Simon and his family. Will you seek to have your suffering and firm faith lead to the same kind of results for those you love?

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, consider what Christ subjected Himself to for you and let that lead you to respond to God’s grace like He did. If you haven’t placed your trust in Christ, look on these moments in His life and realize He subjected Himself to all of this for you. He stayed on the cross to provide redemption and the forgiveness of sin for all who place their trust in Him. Your sin can be forgiven today. Your redemption can be secured today. Turn to Him and pray for His mercy and grace. If you are trusting in Christ, realize the suffering you face could be the grace of God to provide you with an opportunity to follow in the steps of your Lord and Savior. Focus on His mercy and grace to allow that suffer to lead others to the Shepherd of your soul. Don’t revile or slander in return but entrust yourself to the one who judges justly. We invite you to respond as the Lord leads. You can come and kneel before Him, sit and reflect, or stand and sing. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you that you will find worshipped on the front rows or the back of the stairs in the back with lanyards on. Would you pray with me as we seek God’s grace together?