

## 90 Mark 15:16-20

### Mocking the King

#### Text

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 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.

#### Introduction

One of the signs of our time is identify theft. It is bad enough when someone gets a hold of your card, but it can be even more frustrating if we are not able to right anything because the bank or insurance company, etc does not believe that you are who you say you are.

There are few things more tragic than for a man to be executed for a crime he didn't commit. There are few things more tragic than for your house to be broken into in the middle of the night, you catch and shoot the burglar, only to find out it was your son just coming in late.

Jesus is being executed for crimes he did not commit. He is being ridiculed and mocked as an impostor king, when in fact he is the king. He is beaten and tortured and belittled as a wanna be when he is the real deal.

#### Assembling for Sin

*And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion.*

Observe that they led Jesus. He is pulled here and there in submission to the will of the Father. He was take to the house of the high priest. He was then given to the guards who received him with blows. He was bound and led to Pilate. He was sent to Herod, he was sent back to Pilate. And now he is led into the palace. He has given himself to the flow of events, determining not to stop or resist any of it. His will is resolved and there is a strange calm as he is tossed to and fro by the tempest of the people.

The soldiers lead Jesus into the palace. It is probably a courtyard inside the walls of the palace. They called together the whole battalion. All the soldiers present are going to have some fun with Jesus. They gather everyone for this sport. The more the merrier. Notice the depravity of men. These men intend to torture Jesus for the short time that they have him. They are not content to simply let the sentence carried out against Jesus to be executed, they have to add their own torments. Moreover, it is not as though they were furious with Jesus and felt that this should

be considered as part of his just condemnation. No, they do it for mere sport, for mere entertainment. How wicked does a person have to be to torture another human for entertainment? How is it that we so easily unite and gather together for the most wretched of acts, but it is exceedingly difficult to gather for acts of righteousness. "Come let us go and do evil" is the siren call of our culture; and many people follow the call. But try to do good, try to rally behind a righteous purpose and see how far you get. You may get a response at the first, but if this "doing good" is too prolonged, or if it repeats too frequently, the interest dies off quickly. Thomas Boston in his book *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* says the following:

If a person is driven at any time, to think of the great concerns of the soul, it is not harder work to hold an unruly hungry beast, than to hedge in the carnal mind, that it get not away to the vanities of the world again. When God is speaking to men by His word, or they are speaking to Him in prayer, does not the mind often leave them before the Lord, like so many 'idols that have eyes, but see not, and ears, but hear not.' . . . the worldly man's mind is in little hazard of wondering, when he is contriving his business, casting up his accounts, or counting his money.

The disciples quickly run away from Jesus if it means identifying with him; but the soldiers quickly gather to him if it means they can mock.

## Approving the Ridicule

*17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.*

There is some discussion about the purple cloak in academic and critical circles. Purple fabric was very expensive. There is a reason that it was a royal color. It seems unlikely that these soldiers would have an actual royal robe to use. I think that the better explanation is that this was some kind of impoverished replication of the royal garment. The whole context is one of mockery. The other elements of this ridicule were whatever could be fashioned together. For a crown they went out and found some thorn branches that they could weave together. For a scepter they found some kind of reed or cane to use. Matthew describes the robe as a scarlet cloak. It seems, therefore, that this was just a discolored soldier's cloak.

Looking for something that could pass for a crown for their games, a couple of soldiers likely went to gather some thorn branches that they could twist together. The popular understanding is that these are the stems of an acanthus plant. But we cannot really be sure for since, as Hendrickson notes, "few countries the size of Palestine have so many varieties of prickly plants." "Far more significant" he continues "is the fact that thorns and thistles are mentioned in Genesis in connection to Adam's fall. Here in Mark 15:17b and its parallels Jesus is pictured as bearing the curse that lies upon nature, in order to deliver nature and us from it."<sup>1</sup>

That is a wonderful observation. When we think of the cross of Christ, we typically only think of our own redemption. To be sure, that is a major focus of it, but we need to remember that all of creation was cursed on account of Adam's sin. Thus it is in the cross of Christ that all will be made right. The sins of God's elect will be forgiven and we will have a right relationship with

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1. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Baker Academic, 1975) p 644.

God. We are created to be whole people as a physical and spiritual being, so our redemption will not be complete until our resurrection. The curse on this earth and everything that that entails is also made right in the atonement of Christ.

*18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.*

This is really the focus of this section. It is all about ridicule and mock homage. They salute him and cry, "χαί.ρε, βα.σι.λεῦ τῶν ἰ.ου.δαί.ων" "Hail, King of the Jews!" It was a reworking of the usual cry, "ave Caesar" for the emperor. It seems that we focus more on the physical suffering of Christ. I myself have given an extended treatment of the flogging. But Mark's focus is more on the mocking than on the physical suffering. Why is that?

There was much more honor in that time. Our culture is almost completely void of it. A person's name meant everything to them. Shame was a big deal. That is why the Our culture is almost completely shameless. We like to put shameless on display. The more we see it the more normal it seems. The more we see it the less it shocks us. So when we look at the suffering of Jesus, our only way to relate to that is to notice the physical pain. I don't want to minimize that aspect, because what he had to endure was unimaginable. Still, I don't think the physical aspect was the worst of it.

We entertain ourselves into imbecility and we glory in the shameful so that it is no big deal for us to use the Lord's name in vain. I am not talking about curse words. Whenever we use God's name in an empty manner we are guilty of using it in vain. Thus when we bear the name of Christ in claiming to be Christians, and we behave shamefully, we drag his name through the mud. We have just used it in an empty way. We have become of those who heap ridicule upon Jesus. Though he is the one true king, we live as though he were an impostor and we mock him by our lives. We attend church and sing songs as mere lip service.

"Hail Jesus king of the Jews," we shout but we walk away with zero intent to follow our King's commands. Horatius Bonar captured this in a poem saying:

"And of that shouting multitude  
I feel that I am one;  
And in that din of voices rude  
I recognize my own.  
Around the Lord the throng I see  
That mock the Sufferer's groan;  
Yet still my voice it seems to be.  
As if I mocked alone." (Horatius Bonar 1808-89)

## Agony in the Head

*20 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 time for crucifixion has now come. The soldiers have had their fun and it is time to get back to work. They tear the robe from his back and put his clothes back on him. They now lead him to be crucified. The hour of wrath is at hand. Proverbs 19:29 says, "Condemnation is ready for scoffers,

and beating for the backs of fools." In a twist of irony, it is Jesus, the one scoffed at who is ready

for condemnation, whose back has received a beating. I want to make two points in this section: First, that Jesus is the head of the church and we are its body; if he suffers we will suffer. Second, his suffering is of a different sort.

First, the theme of suffering is not a small theme. We should expect it. Consider

**John 15:18-20** If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

**Matthew 24:9** Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

**Luke 6:22** Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

**1 John 3:13** Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

We should expect to suffer. I remember talking to a brother once who said, "You know, even if Christianity were not true, I would still do it again. This is a good life." I nodded with a degree of uncomfortableness because in the back of my mind ran **1 Corinthians 15:19** which says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." I eventually said that I didn't agree because of that passage, but I had a hard time seeing how that passage was true. My friend seemed to be right, this was a good life. There was a disconnect in what that passage said and what reality seemed to be. I was not really suffering or leading a pitiable life. I didn't expressly say as much, but I reasoned in my head that it must just be a general rule that in most countries there would be persecution, but not here, not now.

It really didn't dawn on me until just recently that the reason for the disconnect reveals that it was an inconsistency in my own life. Scripture wasn't the problem, my life was. I preach to you what I must preach, not what I have mastered. I still need to work this out in my life. All of you still need to work this out in your life.

Second, Jesus' suffering is of a different kind than ours. Jesus' suffering is substitutionary. His was an undeserved suffering. He suffered, not for his sins, but for ours. Moreover, at this point in our text, the worst is yet to come. Verse 20 says that they led him away to be crucified. That is where the real payment happens. His suffering leads to wrath. His persecution leads to an outpouring of the wrath of God.

Our suffering is not substitutionary, but is both vicarious and deserved. It is deserved in that any suffering we endure here on earth is suffering that we are deserving of anyway. Although we deserve to suffer, our suffering should be vicarious. I may not have the best term here, but what I mean to say is that our suffering should come because we exhibit Christ-likeness. We should suffer because we are righteous.

Jesus suffers undeservedly, while we have easily merited our suffering. His suffering was substitutionary, ours is vicarious. His led to wrath, ours leads to glory. He wore a cloak as they mocked his kingship in order that we may be clothed in his righteousness. He held a mock scepter that the soldiers subsequently beat him with in order that we might rule with him. He wore a crown of thorns that we may receive the crown of glory. Praise be to God for his mercy and love!