

The King on the Cross

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- [0 : 0 0] Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of Mark, chapter 15. If you're visiting with us this morning, it's our habit to go through normally.
- We go through a book of the Bible passage by passage, and so we've been in the book of Mark for quite a while. We only have two weeks left after this week. We're in Mark 15, starting at verse 16.
- Here now in God's Word. And the soldiers led Jesus away inside the palace, that is, the governor's headquarters.
- And they called together the whole battalion, and they clothed him, Jesus, 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. 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.
- [1 : 2 3] And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexandra and Rufus, to carry his cross. 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 along them, casting lots for them to decide what each should take.
- And it was the third hour when they crucified him. 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.
- 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 and 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.
- [2 : 3 4] Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. Amen. This is God's word. Now, this is a story that most of us know well, especially if you were raised in the church.
- And we've heard it since we were children. And there's so much that we could say about this scene and what's going on here. Because if you think about it, our whole faith rests on that idea that Jesus Christ went to the cross, that he died, and then that he was resurrected.
- But this morning, I want to focus on just one element of the crucifixion scene this morning, which is the mockery of it all. The mockery of it all.
- And I want to do that because I think that's where Mark actually focuses most of his attention. Did you notice how he did that when we were reading? When I think about the cross, usually what I think about is the pain and the suffering.

I think about the nails. And how could you not? But Mark says, you notice Mark says hardly anything about the actual act of crucifixion. He only uses four words to describe it.

[3 : 38] Down there in verse 24, he just writes, And they crucified him. That's all he says about the crucifixion itself. And maybe the reason that he said so little about the crucifixion is because nobody in the first century needed to be told what the crucifixion entailed.

It was so gruesome that no one needed to be reminded about what it meant. But whatever the reason, where Mark lingers in this passage is not on the nails.

It's on the way that Jesus was mocked by the crowds around him. And if we want to understand Mark's gospel well, I think we've got to ask the question, why? Why did Mark want Christian readers to know so much, so much about the humiliation of Jesus in his final hours?

And I want to offer one answer this morning to that question, which is the shame of the cross actually points to the cross's glory. The shame of the cross points to its glory.

And what I mean by that is the very words and actions in this passage that are meant to humiliate Jesus, ironically, reveal his greatness.

[4 : 49] And so we're going to camp out on that idea for a few minutes. And then I want to offer two takeaways for what that means for us today about how we live our lives as Christians. Now, as you get into this passage, there's a clear theme of all the mockery.

And the clear theme is the idea that Jesus could be a king. And we know that because of how often the word king is used here. You know, Pilate, at the beginning of Mark 15, which we read last week, Pilate uses the word king three times.

And then three times in this passage, you see that word king used. And every single time it's used, it's used by someone or a group of people who are trying to humiliate Jesus.

Because, obviously, right, how could a king ever end up in a situation like this? And that humiliation begins with the Roman soldiers. So, you know, sometimes when you read these things, it's always helpful to think about what Mark could have said.

You know, Mark could have said, you know, those soldiers got together and they mocked Jesus. They got together and they humiliated Jesus. And he could have just left it to our imagination, just like he left the cross to our imagination.

[6 : 00] But he doesn't do that. And I think that's significant. Mark slows the story down at the very points where people are mocking Jesus. And he tells us exactly how they humiliated him.

Which is, you know, with the Roman soldiers, what happens is it says they gathered 600 soldiers. And if you think about what the soldiers are doing here, the soldiers do everything that a good soldier should do for a king.

They place a robe on Jesus. And not just any robe. Mark makes the point of saying it's a purple robe because purple dye was the most expensive type of fabric in the ancient world.

So it was only fit for a king. So they put this purple robe on Jesus to point out his royalty. They put a crown on him, as one does for a king. They salute him and they praise his name.

And then they bow down in homage to him. All things that a good soldier should do for a king. Except all of it here is meant to humiliate and to torture.

[7 : 02] And what's the message? The message of the Roman soldiers is to the world, they're saying, look what kind of king this Jesus really is. Look what kind of king this Jesus really is.

They're putting Jesus to shame. And yet this is where Mark holds our gaze. He slows down the narrative so that we can watch what the Roman soldiers are doing.

And the effect, ironically, is that Mark is also saying to the world, look at what kind of king this Jesus really is. It's the same event, but Mark draws a totally different conclusion.

And it's because for Mark and for all the writers of the New Testament, the humiliation of the cross does not disprove Jesus' kingship. It actually shows what kind of a king Jesus is.

He is a king who comes in order to lay down his life for the sake of his people. And if all you saw about Jesus was the cross, it would be hard to find anything redeeming in that.

[8 : 04] If you didn't know anything about Jesus but what you saw on that one day. But if you read the gospel of Mark, you realize Mark has been laying the groundwork for that idea. That Jesus' humiliation is actually his glory.

He's been laying that groundwork for the whole gospel. Remember, after all, Jesus told his disciples, he said weeks or years earlier, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And so the cross is just a fulfillment of everything that Jesus had already said about who he was. And so from Mark's perspective and from a Christian's perspective, the king, the king on the cross is the king that Jesus came to be.

He came in order to suffer. He came in order to be humiliated. He came in order to be mocked. Not in spite of his kingship, but as a king.

Because he was a king, he came to do all these things. And this would have been so counterintuitive in an ancient world where every king is judged by his greatness. How much money do you have?

[9 : 07] How strong is your arm? How powerful are you? There's something in the human psyche that loves power. I was listening to a pollster yesterday talk about the presidential election.

And they weren't making a political point. They were just making a human nature point, which is he said, watch out. Because if one of the candidates begins to gain steam, then there's something in the human nature that always wants to be with the winner.

And so when one candidate picks up steam, you have all these people who begin to be drawn towards that person, not because of their politics, but because they want to vote for who the winner will be. They want to be with a winner.

And that's in the human nature. But that's not Jesus on the cross. Jesus appears so weak. And he is so counterintuitive about everything that we imagine that a king should be.

And I think if I could put my finger on why it was so hard for the people in this day to see Jesus as king, it's because they mistook weakness for mere weakness.

[10 : 11] And I think you see that really illustrated well in verse 31 when the scribes and the chief priests say something really mocking about Jesus.

You see down in verse 31, Jesus is hanging on the cross at this point. And above him, there's a sign that reads, king of the Jews. That's in the background. And then they look at Jesus and they say to one another, he saved others.

He cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe. He saved others, but he cannot save himself. Now, again, those words are meant to hurt.

Those words are meant to mock. Here is the king who supposedly has the power to save people. He can't even save himself. But again, Mark records that.

And I think part of the reason is because what they don't realize is how true what they are saying is, but in a way that they don't understand because isn't what they're saying exactly true if you believe the gospel?

[11 : 13] That he came in order to save others, and in order to save others, he would not save himself. In fact, he knew that in order to save others, he could not save himself.

And you could say that's weakness, that he had to die to save others, but it's not mere weakness. It's weakness with a purpose. It's weakness to achieve something greater than any other human being could ever dream of achieving.

He goes to the cross looking weak, but it's actually because he's glorious. And it points to his glory. And so do you see why Mark would talk so much about the Mark and words here?

It's because all of the humiliation of Jesus at the cross is actually pointing to his glory. The very words that are meant to hurt him so often are actually true and shows what kind of a king that he is.

Now, next week we're going to look at the death of Jesus, so we're going to look at the cross for one more week. But before we go to next week, I want to mention two conclusions, two takeaways that we can already have from this passage and what we learned about Jesus' humiliation at the cross.

[12 : 19] And the first takeaway is this. True faith sees the shame of the cross and boasts in it. True faith sees the shame of the cross and boasts in it.

Now, if you were raised in the church, that is a, I would say, it's a dangerously familiar saying. In Galatians, Paul says in Galatians 6.14, he says, Far be it from me to boast except in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I say that it's dangerously familiar because it's the kind of thing that you hear so often you forget what it might actually mean. And let me offer one way to think about it. Boasting in the cross means making the cross.

Even the shame of it. The cornerstone of your life story. And I think I can illustrate this with a really trivial example, but one that I think points to a deeper truth.

And when I was in sixth grade, my sixth grade English teacher made us do a little creative writing assignment. It was 20 minutes. You know, no other kid in that classroom remembered that assignment.

[13 : 25] But I remember it like it was yesterday because I wrote it. I submitted it. And my teacher was really pleased with what I had written. She was so pleased that she asked me to stand up and read it to the class.

And most importantly, she looked at me in the eyes and she said, Hunter, you are a gifted writer. Now, that was a really small moment in my life.

And for whatever reason, no other teacher made that compliment in all the years after that. But what she said stuck with me. And for reasons that I can't explain, it worked its way into the way that I saw myself.

So that even when I was in college, I would write something and I would look at it and I would say, this essay is trash. But then I would remember what she had told me.

And I would say, no, Miss Hudson, your sixth grade English teacher told you you were a gifted writer. And for whatever reason, that gave me confidence and I began to believe it.

[14 : 23] And, you know, I don't tell that story to tell you that I knew I was going to be great when I was in sixth grade. But I think that's pointing to something that we all know, which is that there are words that people speak to us.

And there are events in our life that may be really insignificant. But for whatever reason, they become the foundation of the way that we see ourselves. So that when someone asks you, who are you?

That's a part of it. And we begin to internalize these things. When you read someone like Paul talk about the cross, you see that that is exactly what has happened to Paul.

The cross for Paul is not just a fact of history. It is something that has actually become his story. Something that's worked its way into Paul's life so that, you know, you go to Paul and you ask him, Paul, who are you?

He cannot tell you who he is without telling you about the cross. And it's why Paul will say things like, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

[15 : 31] Paul talks about the cross like it is so real to him that he was actually there and like it actually affected his life the moment it happened. And because it did. But there's no parallel like this.

There's nothing else in the world that's like this where our lives are transformed by something that happened 2,000 years ago. But true faith believes in the cross in such a way that it actually becomes a part of your story.

And not just a part of our stories, but the heart of it. So that if someone asks you, who are you? You have to say, I cannot really tell you who I am without telling you about the cross and what it means.

And that's really odd to say if you think about what's actually happening in the cross. This is a humiliating execution. And yet a Christian is someone who says, this humiliating execution is the defining part of who I am.

But we say that because at the cross we see that we have a king. And not just any king, but a king who stoops down. A king who stoops down to give his life for us.

[16 : 35] And to boast in the cross is to say, if I could have any other king, I would choose no other king. But the king that I see going to the cross for me.

All the humiliation there. All the things that were meant to embarrass Jesus. All those things to me are glorious. Because it shows that Jesus went to the cross for me. Now that's what it means to boast in the cross.

But boasting in the cross also, if you're a Christian you know this. It takes a lifetime to figure out what that actually means. A lifetime to live in the light of that so that it actually becomes a part of your story.

You know, it's one thing to confess Jesus from the front of the crowd. It's one thing to say I believe in Jesus. It's another thing to have that story so woven inside of your soul. That it begins to change how you act in every part of your life.

In every day of your life. In those unexpected ways. And you know, one thing that we want to be as a church. Is a church that continues to remind ourselves about the cross. Because we believe that the cross has power.

[17 : 44] And it can actually transform us. So that's the first takeaway from this passage. The shame of the cross actually points to his glory. And the first takeaway is true faith takes the shame of the cross and boasts in it.

But here's the second takeaway, briefly. True faith creates cross-shaped lies. True faith creates cross-shaped lies.

If you think about it. Before Jesus went to the cross. He gave his disciples several pictures of what it meant to follow.

But the most vivid illustration that he gave them. The most vivid metaphor was of a cross. And he said, if anyone would come after me. Let him deny himself. And take up his cross.

And follow me. And you've got to remember when his disciples were told that. They didn't know about the cross. They knew that Jesus was going to die. But they didn't know it was going to end on the cross. And so for them, it's just this really ugly metaphor to describe what discipleship is like.

[18 : 48] And then you have to imagine the day where they put those pieces together. And they realize, here is Jesus. He has gone to the cross. And he told me months ago, years ago, that I have to take up my cross and follow him.

And suddenly that metaphor takes on flesh and blood. And the metaphor, what is the metaphor trying to get? It's not to say that you have to figure out a way to die for Jesus.

Even though that may be asked of you one day. And we know that's not what the metaphor is about. Because Luke tells us that Jesus said, take up your cross daily. So it's not so much about the way that you die.

It's about the way that you live. And the only way that we can get at knowing what it means is to actually look at the cross and say, what does, what is Jesus in this passage?

How does his cross show me how my life should be different in the way that I live it? And you just have to look at Jesus. What's going on here? Here you have a king. And he is the king.

[19 : 49] He's the son of God. And if you think about it, no one ever had more of a right to stand on his own rights than Jesus. No one ever had more of a right to be respected, to be honored.

And yet, at the cross, what does Jesus do? He doesn't stand on his rights. He stoops. And he allows himself to be misunderstood, mocked, mistreated, all for the purpose of serving others and of being faithful to his God.

And somewhere in there, in that, is what it means for us to take up our cross. It's not about standing on our own lives. It's about not standing on our own lives.

It's about being willing to be misunderstood, thoughtless of, for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of serving other people. And I think the beauty of this call, the beauty of the call to carry our cross is not, so often it's not in our ability to figure out one great thing that we can do.

One great act of service. It's in all the little things, all the little ways that Jesus calls us to carry our cross. You know, just to give one example, we had a, I remember when I served at a bigger church, they had a youth group of 100 people.

[21 : 08] And they had a woman who, I don't even think I spoke to her the first month that I was there. I was an intern. And she just would come in unannounced.

She would serve biscuits to all the students. And then when she had made all the biscuits, she would leave. And I was having a conversation with her one day. And I said, how long have you been coming down here and making biscuits?

And she thought to herself, and she said, oh, I guess about 20 years. And she had never once been recognized for doing that. She just came down and she did it because she loved Jesus and she loved those kids.

And in my opinion, she should have been honored for that. And we did honor her. But that's not why she did it. She didn't do it for the glory. She did it because she knew that Christ called her to serve others.

And the way that she did that was in a way that no one else noticed. And she never got credit for it. But she did it because she knew that she was called to serve. And so often, let me say this, Martin Luther, he's got a famous quote.

[22 : 08] He said, the cross is the test of everything. The cross is the test of everything. And what he meant by that was, if something is truly Christian, if a church is truly Christian, if a Christian is truly a Christian, you will see the cross there.

You won't just see glory. You won't just see someone that's high and lifted up. You'll see someone who is carrying the cross. And the way that we look at the cross, and we see the way that Jesus serves at the cross, and the challenge for us is to apply that individually to our lives and say, what does cross-shaped fatherhood look like?

What does cross-shape, what does it mean to be a cross-shaped manager? Someone who, in our day-in and day-out lives, we are serving others even when we don't give credit for it.

We're loving others even when we don't give credit for it. And we're speaking about the gospel even when it brings us shame in the short term. What does it look like to be a cross-shaped church?

A church that maybe, you know, when we think about what next service project we want to do, our first question is not, what will get our name out there in the community, but it is where is help needed the most, even if we never get credit for what we've done.

[23 : 31] Cross-shaped church, cross-shaped life. Let me just close with this. When I look at the cross, I see something beautiful because I believe in the gospel.

The cross is not inherently beautiful, but because I know what Jesus is doing there, that's beautiful to me, and I hope it is for you. And when I see other people carry their cross, it's beautiful to me.

And yet, isn't it true that we can see all of that beauty, and yet it's so hard for us to carry our own crosses? You know, when it comes down to it to say, I'm going to forgive that person.

That's where it gets hard to carry our cross. And let me just say, part of the glory of the cross is not that it is just a great example to us.

but it offers the hope for transformation. That what Jesus did there on the cross was not just to show us a great way to live and a great way to die, but he laid the groundwork for all Christians to be transformed in the image of his son.

[24 : 34] And that's our great hope this morning, is that as Jesus calls us towards a life that we can never live for ourselves, he also offers us the power to live in that life. That's our kingdom.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you for the gospel. We praise you that you've given us a king that we may never have thought to ask for, but it was the king that we always needed. And it's the king that we bow down to this morning.

Help us to live in the life of his kingdom. In your son's name we pray. Amen. Amen.