

Condemned and mocked

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[0 : 00] Jenny, thank you. The Alexaminos graffiti you may have seen before. It's a piece of graffiti! discovered in Rome a while back scratched on a wall. It dates from the second century.

! A rough drawing scratched into the plaster of a wall. You can see it here, a copy of it. It's a crude drawing of a cross and then stretched on it a man with the head of a donkey.

And to the left you see there stands another man and he's got one arm raised in worship and scratched alongside that not very clearly there are words of mocking and sneer in Greek.

Alexaminos, that's the man, worships God. He worships God! It's a cruel little piece of graffiti, something you might see and scratched in a school toilet with someone's name. This crucified donkey stripped and hung out. Is this really your God, Alexaminos? Do you really worship that? Fast forward to the present day and a guy called Robert Crampton writes about how he loves Christmas. He loves Christmas but not Easter. I do love a Christmas carol, the tunes but also the words.

They're so much more optimistic than the doom-laden death cult lyrics served up in many hymns the rest of the year. When is the penny going to drop with Christianity? That death and martyrdom and suffering and pain and loss and blood are not concepts with which any brand would want to be identified.

[1 : 45] If this is the core of your message, no wonder you've got a problem. And from one angle if you kind of step back and think about it you can understand what he is saying.

You can understand what the mockers are saying. Because at the heart of Christianity, as we know, is a shamed, abused, deserted man who is stripped and nailed up and bleeding.

And to the naked eye were you to have been there, there's no glory, there's no divine power, there's no positive spiritual vibes to make your life better in a man being killed.

Is someone here in Orchard Park, is a teenager, is an adult who's heard nothing of Christ before, are they really going to choose to spend their 21st century lives worshipping him as their God? Really?

I introduce like that, we've just read from Mark 15. It's just a few hours before Jesus's crucifixion. The striking thing in Mark's Gospel is that Mark the Gospel writer doesn't pass over the stuff that happens.

[2 : 59] Actually he lays these events out for us in ever more slow and precise detail. On purpose, he wants to take us there. He wants to place us there.

So that with open eyes we kind of might be forced to see exactly what took place in those hours.

The accusations, the spit, his cry. You think, why? Why show us all this?

And the answer is that in these brutal events, we are meant to see not just horror, we are also meant to see the beauty and the glory of Jesus Christ.

That is, in the details of his sham trial that we've just read of, and his cruel beating, and his vicious crucifixion, we are meant to, and we do, see the good news of the Gospel displayed to us.

In all its glory. And so time spent considering the crucifixion should move us, like Alex Aminos. It should move us to worship Jesus Christ afresh and unashamed.

[4 : 19] Let's look at these verses together. It's worth remembering, actually, up front, that none of what takes place here in these verses takes Jesus by surprise. Back in chapter 10, verses 32 to 34, up on the screen, we read, look at this, they were on their way up to Jerusalem, that's the disciples and Jesus, with Jesus leading the way, and his disciples were astonished.

While those who followed were afraid, and again he took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. We are going up to Jerusalem, he said, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.

Three days later he will rise. Jesus isn't talking about someone out there, he's talking about himself. He knew. He knew the details. Because this is God's plan for him.

And yet so bravely he stepped towards his death. In chapter 14, having been arrested, Jesus was delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law, as Jesus had predicted.

[5 : 31] They condemned him to death, as Jesus had said they would. And by the end of chapter 14, all the disciples had fled and deserted and disowned him and left him utterly alone.

So now our verses this week, this next little bit of the story. Chapter 15. Firstly, in verses 1 to 15, see Jesus, the King of the Jews, condemned by a guilty world.

Condemned by a guilty world. Because in this scene, the one who is judged and condemned is the only innocent party. He's the only innocent one.

And all others around him are stained with his blood and tainted with guilt. Look, with me. Verse 1. Very early in the morning now, the chief priests with the elders and teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin made their plans.

That's all the Jewish leaders. There's none who waver or question. They act with their eyes open as one united guilty group.

[6 : 41] Planning. They're planning because in the Roman province of Judea, the Jewish leaders have no right to execute someone. Only the Roman magistrate has the right of the sword.

And therefore, planning together, they bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. We want you to kill him for us. And Jesus had said, by the way, they will hand him over to the Gentiles, the non-Jews.

And so it is. Pontius Pilate is the Roman governor of Judea, and he represents Caesar, the imperial authority of Rome.

And Pilate here does have the power of life and death over Jesus. What will he do? Verse 2. Are you the king of the Jews? As Pilate.

You have said so, Jesus replied. Chief priests are on the sidelines, and they accuse Jesus of many things. And so again, Pilate asked him, aren't you going to answer?

[7 : 43] See how many things they're accusing you of. But Jesus still made no reply. And Pilate was amazed. And Pilate isn't accusing Jesus like the chief priests.

In the middle of all the noise and slurs and accusations, the Son of God stands still and silent and innocent, like a lamb to the slaughter.

And Pilate's amazed. There's something about Jesus in this moment, something unique, something compelling maybe. What to do?

Now, verse 6, it was the custom at the Passover festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison, by the way, with the rebels who'd committed murder.

in the uprising. And the crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. And so do you see, in a flash, shrewd Pilate knows exactly what to do.

[8 : 47] To the crowd, verse 9, do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? Asked Pilate. Pilate doesn't want to see Jesus killed. In fact, he sees through this whole evil charade, verse 10.

Knowing it was out of self-interest, envy, that the chief priest had handed Jesus over to him. Very striking noticing the motives in this passage.

There is a motive to do away with Jesus. Envy. Maybe, like many people today, in their heart of hearts, who actually can't stomach Jesus being the centre of attention and Lord of all.

He's got what I want and I won't have it. He's the centre of attention and I want to be the centre of attention in my life. Let me get rid of him. And Pilate hopes the crowd will decide for him and ask for Jesus' freedom and all will be well.

But now, look, verse 11, the chief priest stirred up the crowd to get Pilate to release Barabbas instead. So do you see there's a crowd here? There's a faceless, nameless mass of people.

[10 : 07] A few days beforehand, the crowd had been amazed at Jesus' teaching. He'd spoken in the temple courts. They'd listened to him with delight. We like what he says. He's so challenging and radical. But now, the chief priests get in amongst them.

We don't know what they say. But abruptly, the crowd just turns like that. Which I think is meant to be a bit scary, this crowd turn.

Because it is how humans often act, isn't it? We're so easily stirred up and manipulated. We're very easily influenced by influencers around us.

By the powerful people, the clever people, the people who are better than us, who say something and you're tempted to follow them. We're very easily influenced by the majority of people.

Even a dead dog can go with the flow. We look left and right. We're tempted to copy each other.

We're tempted to stick in the crowd and we're scared to step out of line in case we're singled out.

[11:23] And so, with the chief priest doing their work in the crowd, Pilate asked them, what shall I do then with the one you call the king of the Jews? And they shout, crucify him, crucify him.

And you're meant to see them, I think, in that moment. Kind of like a Twitter mob. All certain and demanding and righteous and we know what's best.

They're united and they're straining and they're baying for blood. And Pilate says, why? What crime has he committed? Because Jesus is totally innocent of all crimes.

But they shouted all the louder together as one, crucify him. There is guilt here. Like these people, they've been manipulated, they're stirred up, they're egged on by one another.

But, well, not two months after this moment, Peter, who had deserted Jesus, speaks to this same crowd in Acts chapter 3.

[12:27] Listen, you disowned Jesus before Pilate, though Pilate had decided to let him go. You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you.

You killed the author of life, he says to them. So in these verses, the envious guilt of the leaders and the united guilt of the crowd.

and then there's Pilate. You think, what's he going to do now? He still has the power to decide, Pontius Pilate. He knows Jesus has committed no crime.

He sees the envy of the chief priests. He has the power to stand firm and yet finally he caves in.

Look, verse 15, wanting to satisfy the crowd, which is such a political thing to do, isn't it?

Politicians wanting to please the crowd so they can play and stay in power. Such a weaselly thing to do. So cowardly, so human, wanting to satisfy the crowd.

[13:39] Pilate released Barabbas to them and had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. Do you see what's going on here? Jesus, the son of God and innocent king of the Jews, turned upon and condemned by a guilty world, by everyone here, Jew and Gentile, chief priest leaders, every member of the crowd, Pilate, they all play their part.

In this darkest moment in human history, no one looks up to God and asks what would please him. Rather, a united humanity clubbing together, tainted with guilt, driving Jesus to his death.

So what's this got to do with us? I'm not trying to set us up here, but you could read this and go, what nasty, evil people to do that to him. You could read this and say, hey, if I'm going to put myself in the story, I'm a disciple.

I'm like Peter and the others. Under pressure, I do, I might stay quiet about following Jesus. I might even run away, but that's who I am in the story.

I'd not be part of this baying crowd. Maybe that's right. But at the very least, the action here should make us really feel quite uneasy, don't you think?

[15:17] Queasy, even. Because as a human race, in our hearts, we do have an inbuilt bent against God and against his son.

As a society, we refuse to love him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Get away from us, we say.

In our culture, in our schools, in our neighbourhoods, we feel able to airbrush Jesus out of life and hold him at arm's length and look polite and nice as we do that.

but basically we want him away, go away. Here in the first century, the Lord Jesus is there in front of them. He's flesh and blood.

And as for them then, so today, it doesn't take much for a refusal to love him to blossom into a desire to do away with him.

[16:23] If I can put it like this, the one moment we as a human race had opportunity to lay our hands on him, we took our chance.

Deliberately, collectively, enviously, stirred up and not wanting to step out of line, crucify him, crucify him.

I was listening to a song a while back by an American rapper because I like some American rap, not much of it. And the song is called Were You There? Despite his kindness, we seek to do our maker violence, the fallenness of humanity at its finest.

So now he stands before the crowd doomed to die, an angry mob who's yelling out crucify. The way they treat the Lord of glory is debased and it's foul.

But you miss the point if you don't see your face in the crowd. Well, if you think that's true, your face in the crowd, or maybe amongst the disciples having deserted him and fled and left him to his fate.

[17 : 38] Here in Mark's gospel, Jesus, the king of the Jews, he's innocent, you see, yet condemned by a guilty world. And now secondly, much more briefly, Jesus, the king of the Jews, scorned and ill-treated.

Just in verses 16 to 20 at the end there. In this little moment, having been handed over to Pilate, chapter 15, verse 1, now in verse 15, Pilate had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. Jesus had said, do you remember, back in Mark, chapter 10, they will hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.

Jesus knew and he stepped towards this unflinchingly with his face set. In verse 15, firstly, in the text here, do you see, Pilate had Jesus flogged, most likely bound to a post or a pillar.

They took a multi-lashed leather whip weighted with pieces of bone and metal designed to flay and tear into his back. They flogged him. And then he's passed to the soldiers.

[18 : 56] And verses 16 to 20 are terrible, but they're here for us. Now the Lord Jesus Christ here is utterly passive. Everything is done to him.

Do you see? The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace, the praetorium, and called together the whole company of soldiers. That's a tenth of a legion. That's 600 men surrounding him and he alone and already flogged and bleeding.

They put a purple robe on him and twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. A kind of savage mockery by rough men. And they began to call out to him, Hail, King of the Jews.

And mixed in now come blows and shaming. Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat at him. And falling on their knees they paid homage to him, this so-called king.

Until having scorned, spat on, and struck him, their sport is finally done. and when they had mocked him they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him and then they led him out to crucify him.

[20 : 10] And that's Mark chapter 15 verses 1 to 20. Jesus, the king of the Jews, the son of God, condemned by a guilty world and scorned and ill-treated.

And with the world against him he's battered and bloody and now dragged off to be crucified. In part this week, just looking at these verses again which I've read so many times in the past, I've found these events kind of freshly revolting actually.

what is done to Jesus as they gang up on him, it's revolting that, it's just revolting. And I, well I've kind of forced myself, I should wonder where I would have stood if I was there.

Genuinely, I think, not baying for his blood. I don't think I would. But you know, there is a fair amount of chief priests like envy in me. I hate it when other people are at the centre of attention.

I hate it when the photo that's taken doesn't show me in my best light. There's a lot of envy in me not liking it when other people are at the centre of the world. There's a lot of pilot-like crowd-pleasing in me.

[21 : 37] I feel happy to want to please you because I think you're my brothers and sisters and we're Christians together, but in the normal world, I so want to please other people. There's a fair amount of disciple-like cowardice in me too.

And given the genuine battle in me sometimes, as I guess there is in you, over whether I'll love him and obey him or I'll just shove him and his teaching to one side, I think I would probably do well to think that I wouldn't be too different to them back then.

And nor would you, don't you think? It is revolting what they do to him and what they are like. And yet at the same time, in the midst of these revolting events, we do see glory, don't we?

Do we not? We see the glory of Jesus Christ. In our growth group on Tuesday, we talked about the obedient bravery of Jesus.

In the garden of Gethsemane, knowing everything that would take place, he prayed to his father, take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

[22 : 54] And then he rose and then he walked out into this. The son of God allows himself to be handed over.

And when he's accused, he makes no reply. crucify. And he stands still while the crowd shouts crucify. Like, Jesus is able to cast out demons and calm storms with a word, and yet he remains silent.

And he restrains himself. And then he lets them flog him and spit on him and mock him. I don't know how to put this.

there's a self-control in Jesus. More than that, an obedient self-sacrificing in him. This should be stunning to us that the son of God would stand and allow this to happen to him.

It's remarkable bravery. And all the more so, all the more so, when we remember for whom he undergoes this all.

[24 : 07] Just up on the screen here, let me see if I can pull it up. Just here, I just put one verse on the screen, which was written by Peter, deserting, disowning Peter, some years later.

We're looking back, considering everything that took place in Jerusalem, Peter writes, 1 Peter 3 verse 18, Christ also suffered once for the righteous, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. And finally, that is the glory of it. It's what Robert Crampton misses, it's what mocking graffiti artists don't get, and it really, really is the heart of the gospel, that everything Jesus does and endures, everything we've read about, so revolting, everything he endures in obedience to his father's will, is for the unrighteous.

He is the righteous one, so clearly here, innocent of all blame and all sin, he's the rightful, obedient king of the Jews and king of the world, he does not deserve what he receives.

And yet in God's mysterious plan, Jesus' silence and his suffering and every piercing word and every tear in his back and hole in his scalp and every moment of his suffering is for people like you and me.

[25 : 38] It's for the unrighteous. He endures this for those who have their hearts bent against God, for selfish and envious human beings, for faces in the crowd, for deserting disciples.

In this real historical moment, 2,000 years ago, Jesus is taking on himself the burden of the sins of a guilty world, the sins of his people, the sins of his many.

And he suffers and dies at the hands of men, paying the penalty for sins and drinking the cup of God's wrath, so that you and I and every unrighteous person, as we turn to Jesus Christ in sorrow and faith, may be received by him, may be forgiven for good and have our guilt removed, so that even people like us can be brought to God and restored to him forever.

And that's the beauty, that's the glory of the horrible and obedient sufferings of Jesus. Christ suffered once for sins.

He suffered as the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. And so if time spent considering the crucifixion like this, if it shows us just a touch more the depths of our unrighteousness and guilt and the horrors that he went through for us, then that is a good thing.

[27 : 14] It's good. If it moves us to be like Alexamenos, because Alexamenos worships God. He sees the Son of God who's died for him, who's restored him to his God forever.

He doesn't care what people think about him. He raises his hand and he worships the crucified Son of God, the one who was scorned and ill-treated for people like him and for people like you and me.

And let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together. Almighty God and Father, we see here on this day of days the terrible guilt of humanity as we they clubbed together against him.

The envy, the desiring to satisfy others, the being stirred up and standing with the crowd. We see your Son in all his brave innocent obedience.

we hear that he was giving his life as a sacrifice, pouring out his blood for the sake of people like us.

[28 : 49] We hear the gospel message that through his death forgiveness and life may flow to us. Make us those, we pray, who stand together unashamed of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

and who in all humility and all confidence place our trust in him for forgiveness and life eternal. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.