

# God Does His Best When We Do Our Worst

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] weeks back we followed Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and he said to his disciples watch and pray that you may not enter temptation you remember they passed on that invitation so that when Jesus was arrested they didn't just fall away they ran away and then Peter follows at a distance last week into the courtyard and there he is in a new situation and a new temptation faces him he's lost his focus he's concerned for his safety and comfort and so he denies Jesus I just want to say we are in a new situation we face new temptations and the way forward for us is not you know to pull the right levers and gears it's to gather as brothers and sisters to pray to God our heavenly father so I invite you to come tomorrow night 7 30 here downstairs so let's now turn to the bible to mark chapter 15 that David read to us verses 1 to 20 on page 852 if you'd like to follow along there's a bible in front of you in the seat and as you do that you can all after the service ask our organist why he wants to blow up trumpets it's just a test of who was listening during the anthem well we have stood together this morning and confessed that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate and this is a very familiar passage and it is both depressingly ugly and stunningly beautiful and it brings together all that's been going on in mark in one overwhelming few hours of the trial before Pilate just before Jesus is crucified the key phrase is king of the Jews king of the Jews it comes four times in our passage six times in this chapter and every time it's used it's a phrase of mockery and ridicule because the passage lays bare who we are and who Jesus is and we cannot escape the ugliness of Jesus being degraded and denounced and dehumanized and do you notice that mark wants to include all of us in this it's not just the Jewish council it's not just the Gentile ruler it's the crowd it's the soldiers all are involved and from the soldiers the innocent son of God suffers and from us all he suffers injustice and humiliation as God lays on Jesus our own sin and it also lays bare the true nature of Jesus kingship it is through injustice it is through this suffering it's through this humiliation that Jesus becomes our true king he suffers both from us and for us the innocent for the guilty which is why we're here today this is this is the gospel this is what we believe so just let me ask two questions we'll focus on those two questions what does the passage say about us what does the passage say about Jesus as we move through it firstly what does the passage say about us and I need to say I don't think you're going to like this you're not going to like hearing it any more than I like preaching it the truth in this text is the truth in much of the Bible is deeply offensive to our massive sense of self-dignity there's no flattery of us here and there's a U.S. preacher who says it this way he says we are much worse than we could imagine

but Christ is much more wonderful than we could possibly hope and I think that nicely captures the spirit of this passage because the truth is that underneath our niceness and our politeness and our inclusiveness and our tolerance left to ourselves if we have the choice we creatures will kill our creator that our natural response to Jesus the son of God is not to welcome him and to crown him but to do away with him and to crucify him so chapter 15 starts in the first light of day in verse 1 the council gathers again this is the high Jewish council in the night if you remember they had found Jesus guilty as blasphemy they had beaten him they had bashed him they'd spat on him and then they'd handed him over to the guards to continue that performance the only problem for them is that they don't have the right to execute Jesus they're under Roman rule so they have to massage their message so it'll become more political and they come up with the perfect idea

Jesus is claiming to be a new king to challenge Caesar if you've been with us along the way since chapter 3 it's those with the formal religious power who have worked to eradicate Jesus this impulse is what stands behind all fanatical religion and all formalist religion that allows form above Jesus Christ it must reject Jesus as king and son of God and formal religion and religion which is fanatical in the end will oppose the message of Jesus Christ and those who believe it the impulse behind the council's actions is the same impulse that influences so many formal churches today it

lies behind the rise of fundamentalist Islam it's the rejection of Jesus Christ as king and so in verse 1 the council ties Jesus up with rope and officially delivers him over to Pontius Pilate and despite the best efforts of spin doctors over the last 100 years or so

Pontius Pilate goes down in history as the man who would do nothing despite the evidence before him and despite the fact that he knows Jesus is innocent there are a number of verses that speak about this and despite the fact that he has all the authority he needs he turns out to be a spineless pragmatist and he rejects Jesus too if you've been to Israel you can visit his palace it's on the coast in Caesarea Maritima and once a year he used to come up to Jerusalem to the palace there for the Passover and he hated Jerusalem historical records demonstrate he only had contempt for the Jews under his rule he was tactless he was disrespectful and he'd already managed to turn a number of Jewish delegations that had come to him into violent protests where people had to be killed according to him by the way that he treated them it all blown up in his face and he's keen not to have a repeat performance here and so in verse 2 if you look down he says to Jesus are you the king of the Jews you've got to know about this that is dripping with sarcasm

Rome is clearly got the iron grip here and the only king is Caesar and this peasant stands before him bruised bloody covered in spit and Pilate says really?

[ 8 : 00 ] you're a king? who could you possibly be a king of? oh the king of the Jews and Jesus answers him in verse 2 in that little phrase you said so literally it's just you say it's neither a clear yes or no what Jesus is saying is the words are yours but that's not the whole story and those of us who read last week's passage just a few verses before know that Jesus when he was confronted by the whole council spoke in unambiguous terms about the fact that he is not just king of Israel he is the king and lord and sovereign he is God's chosen king of all humanity every nation every race every language Jesus Christ is lord of all that's what he was saying he's coming to judge the dead Buddhists Hindus Muslims west coast new age spirit guides Jesus Christ is lord of all he is their lord to call him lord only of one tiny sliver of humanity is far from the truth and although Pilate can't see the whole truth if you look at verse 10 it's quite clear these charges are ridiculous he can see straight through the high priests and he sees their envy at work there comes a time in everyone's life where you have to decide about Jesus and it usually comes at a very inconvenient time it did for Pilate where you've got to act on what you know and do the right thing but instead of doing the right thing

Pilate looks for the easy way out he just wants he wants to avoid taking responsibility and so in verse 6 he comes up with the special holiday prisoner release scheme it's worked in the past crowd likes it to take one of the prisoners and free them but he underestimates just how much the priests hate Jesus and he underestimates how easily the crowd is manipulated so we meet Barabbas Barabbas is waiting in prison to be crucified we don't know much about him but that he was a leader of a gang who led a futile attempt to overthrow Roman rule that's maybe why he's popular with the crowd here is a guy who talked big but only and succeeded in killing a couple of people before he's captured sentenced and about to be crucified it's quite possible the two who are crucified beside Jesus belong to his crew so in verse 8 the crowd is introduced one last time in Mark's gospel and they request Pilate to do the gladiator thing you know hand up hand down thumb up thumb down whatever it is and even though he knows Jesus is innocent

Pilate stupidly asks the crowd in verse 9 do you want me to release this king of yours but the crowd never wants Jesus and never really we never really want Jesus a crowd will always choose someone more like themselves than Jesus he says alright what do you want me to do with this self-styled king of yours and they call out with the help of the clergy crucify him he says you can't be serious what has he ever done to you and they yell even more loudly crucify him which is an astonishing thing to hear from a Jewish crowd it's completely perverse they want Pilate they want to take the life taker the murderer in prison give him life they want to take the life giver and for him to die that's what you get with the people's choice left to ourselves our natural choice is always to reject God's son and so Pilate the ruler is ruled by those whom he rules doesn't take him long to calculate that to side with Jesus now would be very unpopular and so he does exactly nothing he just caves he's quite happy to sacrifice this innocent prisoner for a few minutes of popularity with the crowd

Pilate is the person the man or the woman who knows what is right to do but refuses to act refuses to decide looks for the easy path the expedient way at the moment of choice will not take responsibility but here is the thing if you don't decide that is a decision and the decision in the end

will be taken from our hands Pilate decides to not side with Jesus and therefore he has to join everyone in doing away with the sinless son of God verse 15 so Pilate wishing to satisfy the crowd released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus he delivered him to be crucified he never noticed how very restrained reserved Mark's narrative is he doesn't give us all the gruesome details of scourging but I'll tell you the commentators do they can't help themselves one of the commentators

I read this week has done a PhD in the torture methods before crucifixion that's not the focus Mark never exploits the savagery and the brutality of what's happening to Jesus because the focus is not really on the physical suffering it's on the humiliating the mocking the derision the shame the rejection and that's why verses 16 to 20 are there after being flogged Jesus is handed over to the elite Roman guard verses 16 to 20 this is a highly disciplined proud and able men they've been sent to Israel to uphold law and order they get Jesus alone in the barracks they are a whole battalion 600 of them gather and what they do is they stage a grotesque mock enthronement for this king of the Jews it's a vicious display of cruelty and humiliation and if you read it carefully there are racist overtones there's sexual abuse overtones with all the arrogance of the elite they very cleverly satirise his enthronement royal robe crown of thorns they bow and worship this one who's now been beaten three times flogged who barely stands but still stands in quiet dignity hail they say king of the Jews and they whack him on the head with a cane and they spit in his face until they are fully amused in verse 20 we read when they had mocked him they stripped him of the purple cloak put on his clothes and led him out to crucify him now what does this what does this say about us well [15:28] I've been reading this week that Google have had their trucks in Vancouver taking photographs for street view to put aside their maps and some of the photos that Google take are quite awkward and even embarrassing and my favourite photo is taken it's about five miles from here of people taking down 23 trees on their property when the council had given permission for two I'm sure they're very nice people and good citizens but when they were charged it was hard to escape the photographic evidence well this passage is like a spiritual heart view of each of us what is it that troubles our human race and the answer is that we belong to a race that is determined to reject Jesus as our king I mean if you listen to the news this week even in our

Canadian political life senators and mayors and chiefs of staff and MPs have been acting badly public killing on the streets of London honour killings India say nothing of the slaughter and the rising death toll in Syria what this is saying and what the Bible says is that behind all the corruption and injustice and rapacity that we see in our news behind our own selfishness and addictions and blindness and pride is our fundamental human unity in opposition and rejection to Jesus as Lord in his new legislation on terrorism I read this week President Obama says that they are targeting those who have this evil in their hearts we've read Mark haven't we we know that Jesus says it's out of our hearts that murder and envy and adultery and corruption come do you remember the first words that Jesus preached when he came on the scene in Mark chapter 1 he says the kingdom of God the kingship of God has come repent and believe this good news because he is king our response is to repent that is to turn away from our rejection towards Jesus to believe the good tidings that he is the king to rejoice in his rule to gladly give our lives to him but I say again it's not a message the world wants to hear is it our world's very happy for us to talk about this within these nice cosy walls and remain out of sight but when you begin to live the truth of Jesus' kingship and proclaim the truth that he is crucified and that's our only hope it won't be welcome because of what it reveals about us secondly then and even very briefly what does it say about Jesus what does this passage teach us about Jesus this is exactly how Jesus comes into his kingship it's in this degradation it's in the very humiliation as he bears our injustice and the shame which belongs to us this is what he came to do the son of God entered the world to suffer and to die and God lays on him all our sin and all our rejection you see and he is suffering degradation and depravity all the depravity of humanity here not just from us but for us you know at any moment he could have called on millions and millions of angels who would have who would have blazed down and stopped what is happening he could have saved himself he could have healed himself he could have gone back into the presence of God but if he had done that none of us could be saved none of us could be healed and none of us could come into his presence this is the very heart of the

Christian gospel that the innocent son of God suffers on behalf of us the guilty he suffers at our hands but for us the life giver gives his life this is how the kingdom of God came into the world and since the start of the gospel Mark has given us a picture of Jesus matchless sovereignty profoundly

human and just beautifully divine very moving all the time you know in the early chapters he takes a man who is deformed and excluded by leprosy and he touches him and he restores him and he brings him back into family he heals a man who is utterly paralyzed and he says I have authority to forgive sins he calls his disciples to follow him to give up their lives to take up their crosses for him he stills the storm he casts out the demons he takes a woman who is beyond human help and speaks her name and he raises a little girl to life this is the kingship of Jesus every enemy of humanity every enemy we experience

Jesus confronted and every enemy bows before him I've been fascinated in the service today all the hymns speak about our foes Jesus confronted and ruled over them he teaches the way of the kingdom he warns about the reality of hell and judgment he tells us that our hearts naturally are opposed to God he speaks of serving and taking up our cross and he speaks about the fact that he will be rejected and I quote delivered over to the chief priests and scribes they will condemn me to death and they will deliver me over to the Gentiles that's exactly what's happened in our passage and they will mock me and spit on me and flog me and kill me and after three days I will rise three times in our passage this word delivered over is used and the reason it's there is very important because what is happening here for Jesus is not just a random unlucky injustice it's not a terrible and preventable waste of this good life just seven weeks after this on the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter stands and says men of Jerusalem hear these words

Jesus of Nazareth a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst as you yourselves know this Jesus was delivered up according to what was he delivered up according to the machinations of the council was he delivered up because of the spinelessness of Pilate was he delivered up because of the crowd or the cruelty of the elite guard no what Peter says is he was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God the way Jesus delivers us from sin and from death is for him to be delivered over to sin and death it's in his weakness and in his shame and in his suffering that we find life and health and glory and he suffers though he is truly innocent as the guilty so that we who are truly guilty might be made innocent and there's a wonderful preacher in England called Dick

[ 23 : 24 ] Lucas and he says of this passage this is humanity doing their worst and God doing his marvellous and wonderful best I think that's great it's not flattering I warned you but I think it is liberating and it's liberating so long as we keep both truths together both what it says about us as well as what it says about Jesus you see if we hold to what it says about us and we let go of what it says about Jesus what we'll do is we'll work very hard and very actively to come up with solutions we may even do some good and we'll be busy busy busy but there'll be no real hope and if we just hold on to the Jesus side and forget our natural tendency to reject him even after we've become Christians what will happen is that our fellowship will be superficial we will not be a fellowship of sinners our fellowship will be false and we'll find ourselves lonely in it and our expectations of one another will be completely unrealistic and unkind and I think the kingship of Jesus will remain remote and slightly unreal so we've got to hold these two together he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him nothing in his appearance that we should desire him he was despised and rejected a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised and we held him in low esteem surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows away yet we considered him punished by

God stricken by him and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed we all like sheep have gone astray each of us turn to our own way the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all