



Speaker:
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The Crucified King

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 53 of 53

6/20/2021 (SUN) | Bible: **Mark 15:16-28**

And the soldiers led him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head and began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews." And they smote him on the head with a reed and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.

And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

And they compelled one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

And they brought him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, "The place of a skull."

And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh, but he received it not.

And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

And with him they crucified two thieves, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS.

Today, we come to the climax of Mark's gospel. We come to the point where the Son of God is to be hanged on a tree to die.

We've seen Jesus get arrested and suffer a mockery of a trial. His conviction, and the death sentence it carried, wasn't made through evidence. A hateful and envious Jewish religious elite has determined to see this man dead at any cost. And the Roman authority thought only of what the best move was politically.

What we read Jesus suffering at the hands of the soldiers isn't a measured dispensing of a court sentence but an act of mass bullying and violence. These soldiers had witnessed and carried out such extreme violence in their military careers they'd effectively become sociopathic. All what they're doing to Jesus is for fun.

Showing cruelty to another human being is one thing, but the soldiers in charge of Jesus have gone to find all their friends so they can join in too. There are dozens, maybe scores, of soldiers.

Jesus is flogged. Again, there are no regulations about the degree of beating or flogging to be inflicted. The soldiers could do whatever they felt like.

I'm inclined to support the idea of a return of corporal punishment in the UK. It's not without its problems, but on balance I think it'd be good for society. But the infliction of punishment would have to be strictly regulated, and there'd need to be medical people on standby to give help as necessary. But when the Romans carried out a flogging, it wasn't unusual for victims to die from it before even leaving for their final journey to the place of execution.

On top of the physical cruelty, these soldiers wanted to add mockery. We see them model Jesus in a grotesque form of a king:

- They put a robe on him. It was possibly one belonging to one of the soldiers.
- Instead of a royal sceptre, he's handed a reed to hold.
- The mock-up continues by placing on his head, not a laurel crown like their emperor wore but one they've strung together from a thorn bush.
- And we hear the loud cries as they offer up their mock worship and adoration. Instead of *Hail, Caesar*, they shout *Hail, the King of the Jews*.

This is a gross picture—and it's meant to be. But we who belong to God make our observations with heavenly vision. We can see the bigger picture. They may have arranged this ridiculous scene, but **we** see something glorious. **We see a real king:**

- We understand he is worthy above all others to wear the garments of the King.
- We understand he holds a sceptre of righteousness, the property of the King of Kings.
- And we understand his destiny is to be seated once again at the right hand of his father wearing a crown as King of Nations.

So we have this great contrast. Human eyes see a pathetic figure, a person of no consequence who is just hours away from his death. **WE SEE THE SON OF MAN.** *We see the King.* We see the saviour of the world! And we have this awareness that **everything leading up to this point, and everything that will come after it, is all the working out of God's wise purposes.**

Do you remember in Revelation, where we see a similar contrast? There was a picture of scroll—a book, if you like. It had a seal on it. People wanted to know what was in the book. But tragically, no one was found worthy to open the seal.

But there was someone after all! It was none other than Jesus Christ. And there he is called both the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. The lamb is a defenceless creature, whereas the lion is top of the food chain. It's showing us again the nature of this supreme King as

being both ruler of all but one who was willing to make himself vulnerable and be slaughtered for his subjects.

On our virtual tour of Jerusalem I showed you a couple of weeks ago, I pointed out a Roman fortress at the corner of the great temple. Tradition holds this is where Jesus was maltreated before being led away to Calvary.

On this basis, Christians have made an educated guess as to the route Jesus would have taken on that final walk. They named the route *Via Dolorosa*, “the way of sadness”, and each year Christian pilgrims walk the route in remembrance of Jesus.

Further research though has shown Jesus wasn’t in the Antonia Fortress but rather in Herod’s palace. It’s not very important, of course. But maybe they should have a rethink about that route.

The reason the Romans made prisoners do this walk of shame to the execution was to intimidate the population. Depending on the type of crucifixion, prisoners would be forced to carry through the streets a crossbar which they’d eventually be hanged on. We’re not to think Jesus was hauling a huge cross through the streets. But it still proved so difficult for him they roped in a member of the public to help him out. It’s likely Jesus has lost enough blood through his flogging to make him weak.

We see him now arrive at his destination, in verse 22. We call it *Golgotha*. The Aramaic word is *gulgotha*, meaning “skull”. We also know the place as *Calvary*. This comes from a Latin word meaning “scalp” or “bald head”.

We can’t say for sure what the name refers to. Some have looked for a feature in the rocks which looks like a human skull. But since the image of a human skull is used to symbolise death, it could simply be “the place of death”.

Years ago, a biblical researcher announced he’d found what he believed was the location of Golgotha. It’s in a rock feature which looked a little bit like a face or skull. But as we’ve said, he could have been looking for the wrong thing. And let’s be honest: you could stare at the clouds for half-an-hour and see a skull shape. So if you ever go to Israel, and the coach takes you to see the famous Golgotha skull in the rocks, remember it could be nothing.

(If any of you have seen these things, I hope I’m not ruining your memories of Jerusalem!)

If you’re interested, the best candidate for the location of the site of Jesus’s crucifixion is the spot where now stands the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Crucifixion wasn’t invented by the Romans. It’d been around for a long time. The Romans stole the idea and expanded on it. During the siege of Jerusalem, they crucified many prisoners of war outside the city walls, and their cruel imaginations allowed them to crucify people in many different ways. So we’re not to think by investigation we can discover how Jesus was crucified.

We **do** know it was reserved for people who were not Roman citizens. The point of it was cruelty. People hanged on crosses could take *days* to die. During that time, they’d suffer the

heat of the day, the cold of the night and dehydration. They could die of blood loss, heart failure or asphyxiation, among others.

We also know victims were crucified naked. The idea this could've been the case with Jesus has for obvious reasons disturbed Christians. Some have suggested the Romans would've covered him up with a loincloth for the sake of the sensibilities of the Jews. I'll leave you to decide whether you think that's a reasonable conclusion.

Just out of interest, I thought I'd mention an archaeological find made in Jerusalem. The remains of a crucified prisoner were found. Looking at the evidence, they were able to build up a picture of how this man was crucified. There was the central stake. He was tied to the crossbar and hauled up into position. The most interesting part I thought was how the legs were positioned. The man's legs were bent and his feet placed on either side of the main trunk. And it looks like nails were used to go through the heels, one on each side.

It's generally agreed now that the nails that went into Jesus's hands went in through his wrists, and the other nails went through his ankles.

We see in verse 23 he was offered a concoction of wine and myrrh. There are two views on this. One tradition says pious women were in the habit of offering this to victims of crucifixion for pain relief. There's a precedent in the Scriptures for this. We find a piece of advice suggesting we give strong alcoholic drink to people who are on their deathbed as an analgesic. Today, we tend to see morphine used instead.

But there's another, quite different view. We read in the writings of Pliny that wine mixed with myrrh was a delicacy. So it could be it was the Roman soldiers offering this to Jesus, not for pain relief but as another element in their mockery of him. *The king deserves the best wine!*

I've spent half of our time looking at some of the details of this incident. But the theme I want to pick up on today is **Jesus as a crucified king**. "King of Kings" is a title of reverence, like "Majesty", and it's used to describe other people in the Scriptures, not just Jesus. But when we say Jesus is majestic, it's understood we mean the *most* majestic. Likewise, when we describe him as King of Kings, we mean he's the *ultimate* king, the one to whom all the kings and presidents of this world are duty-bound to bow.

I decided to bring together a few examples of prophecies about the coming King. I want to look at what Jesus claimed to be, and how he reacted when the designation of King was aimed at him. And I want to also look at some of the things people said about him, whether in sincerity or in mockery.

The prophecies

Let's have a look at a prophecy from the prophet Micah:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Micah 5:2

Not only does this announce the King of Israel is coming, but it also predicts the exact place where he'd be born: little old Bethlehem. Not a grand city but a fairly insignificant town. Here, he's titled "ruler in Israel". Keep in mind *Messiah* means the "Anointed King". We'll see a variety of titles—all describing the same office.

Zechariah makes this announcement:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Zechariah 9:9

Your King is coming. He is the just one, and he has salvation to dispense. Here, Jesus is the King of Zion, the King of Jerusalem. You'll no doubt recognise this prophecy because we looked at its fulfilment a few weeks ago. Zechariah declares, contrary to anything we'd expect, that Zion's King would come to Jerusalem in a way very inappropriate for a king. He arrives on a donkey! It's another example of the contrast I've been speaking about. He's a king all right, but not like any king of this world.

The third example I'd like to use is found in the Psalms:

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. The sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.

Psalms 45:6

As I said earlier, the Royal sceptre belonged to the king alone. Used as imagery, it describes the rule of Jesus Christ. The "rightness" of his sceptre describes the perfections of this rule. We note also it addresses Jesus as the eternal God of heaven.

Jesus's claims

the Royal status of Jesus was veiled when he was mocked by the Romans. It was veiled when he made his grand entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. And it was in a sense veiled by Jesus himself. It simply wasn't part of his mission to go around declaring he was the King of Israel. If nothing else, this discretion avoided both stirring the people into a nationalist frenzy and being arrested prematurely.

It's not just about what Jesus said but what he *didn't* say. If we believe him to be a person of integrity, we know he'd reject any titles attributed to him if they were incorrect. If someone called him "The King", he'd be duty-bound to correct them. Here's one such example, when his followers do exactly that:

And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen saying, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, "Master, rebuke thy disciples". And he answered and said unto them, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

Luke 19:37–40

The Pharisees are requesting he correct them when they call him King, but Jesus indicates he *must* be called King; and if his followers didn't acknowledge it, the inanimate creation itself would rise up in miraculous speech to declare what must be declared.

In John's gospel, we read the following:

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence."

John 18:36

His kingdom. Here, he implies his regal status. *He has a kingdom.* And a kingdom has two elements: the subjects, and the king who rules them. The subjects are those he chooses to rule over in a very particular way. Yes, as sovereign of all, he rules all the peoples of this world. But he rules in a very special way *when he enters into a covenant* with a group of people.

We spoke recently about God making covenants with Abraham and then Moses. He was at one time the King of the Hebrews and afterwards the Jews. But the disintegration of God's covenant with the Jews was the means by which salvation was opened up to all the peoples of this world. Had it not been the case, the only religion to reach the shores of Britain would be a dead Judaism.

Jesus's kingdom is not of this world. His people don't live in one area, least of all the modern state of Israel. His kingdom is worldwide, yet the majority of people in this world don't belong to it. God has always sought out his elect people from the multitude of the human race, and he will continue to do this till the end.

The number of people in God's kingdom grows every day, without fail. So you remember this if you witness what you think is a decline in Christianity. Let me make this clear: **there is no such thing as a decline in the church of God.** The *rate* at which people enter God's kingdom may slow down to a trickle, but it grows, nonetheless. God is saving people every day, all over the world.

What others said

Let's remind ourselves of this incident from when Jesus was just a toddler:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him."

Matthew 2:1-2

If you met these wise men, Magi, today, you'd think they were a strange bunch. We're not told much about them at all, but the wise men of those days would have all kinds of interests. I expect they were students of everything from astrology to alchemy, mathematics to magic, physics to philosophy.

I can't tell you where they stood in the eyes of God. But God chose them to receive a revelation. He disclosed to them a very special king was about to arrive on this planet. He would be identified by a sign somewhere in outer space or maybe something in our own atmosphere.

It sounds like they had access to the Hebrew Scriptures, and they confidently use this title "King of the Jews". You see how Jesus was even worshipped, albeit for a very brief time, when he was a child.

This next reference is from the time when Jesus was in his active ministry:

Nathanael answered and saith unto him, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."

John 1:49

Nathaniel has this sudden realisation that the miraculous knowledge Jesus has showed him to be the true Messiah, the King of Israel who'd been the subject of prophecies for centuries.

Last week, we witnessed the sham trial of Jesus. I said it was impossible to determine what was going on in the mind of Pilate. But have you not seen by now how the confessions of Jesus as King come from both sincere and insincere sources? Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd as their King, and regardless of his motives what was said was said. **Behold, your King.**

We've already mentioned that the soldiers, both in word and deed, were declaring Jesus as King. And it's an example of how even in their rebellion we find men confessing the truth about Jesus Christ!

And let's not forget this sign that went up above Jesus Christ's head. The full title was probably *This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. We may not know why it was written, but we do know it was done ultimately by divine providence.

When we think about the Romans and Jews mocking Jesus while he hung on the cross, we see it's evidence of what Jesus claimed to be. What they said would make no sense unless Jesus had indeed claimed to be the King of Israel, even if it was rarely declared explicitly by him.

So it's come to this. The ministry of Jesus has come to a head. There he was, hanging.

It was no accident of circumstance he was surrounded by criminals also being crucified. There's a reference there to an Old Testament prophecy which said the Messiah would be counted like one of the criminals. *He was numbered with the transgressors.*

Had he accepted that narcotic drink, the pain would be lessened. His senses would be dulled so that he could've suffered less psychologically too.

But he was determined to be fully conscious through it all. For the punishment to count, it had to be felt. Had his suffering being lessened in any way, the justice of God would not have been carried out. And brethren, **had God's wrath not been fully appeased through the suffering of his Son, you and I would have to go into that Lake of Fire after all.**

He needed to experience the suffering in all its fullness. And I'm inclined to say, being conscious, he was able to be fully aware of the identities of every person he was dying for.

Of all the contrasts we've mentioned, this one of the King of Kings suffering a humiliating death has to be the greatest. The ultimate King and the ultimate servant. Truly unique.

And in the next week or two we're going to see the necessary events which take place after the atonement is completed. A resurrection from the dead, and an ascension into heaven:

...who—being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person and upholding all things by the word of his power—when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:3

There he sits right now. He's reclaimed his rightful place as King of all Kings. But those few decades of condescension were essential for the salvation of mankind. In the Great Substitution, he showed himself fully willing to suffer to an unimaginable extent to save his people eternally.

He now rules on high to save and to act as the heavenly mediator for those he *does* save. All who come to him in faith, repenting of their sins, receive forgiveness and eternal life. And no man or woman, angel or demon, can pluck that person out of God's hand.

Perhaps today's reading will remind you of an incident a while back. James and John had requested they be allowed to sit on the left hand and the right hand of Jesus in his glory. Today, we see a shocking image that will perhaps have had a shocking effect on the disciples too. You want a glimpse of what it means to be on the left and the right side of Jesus? *Then visualise Calvary.*

Believer, following Jesus—walking by his side—is not a Sunday school picnic. The true disciple will experience suffering. It's not that they'll necessarily be crucified or killed in any way for Jesus sake. But they're expected to have such a level of commitment that they'd not deny Jesus in order to escape a terrible fate like that.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

We've been, in a sense, *crucified* along with Christ. We have, in a sense, died with him. And we have, in a sense, risen from the dead and ascended on high with him.

And it's our pleasant duty to spend our Christian lives leaning on Christ and obeying him. We are to daily crucify, or mortify, our sinful passions. We're to treat sin as our greatest enemy, one who has to be sought out and killed without mercy. The joyful Christian life is found not through a close but lazy relationship to God. True joy is to be found in both reliance on God *and* great effort to live in a way which honours him.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Romans 8:13

Amen.