

Introduction

The Apostle Paul was uncompromising about how to do the work of evangelism. He reminded the Corinthians of his approach when he had been with them, that he had appeared anything but bold and there was nothing impressive about him. Rather, he had been determined to simply focus on Jesus. He wrote, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." That is where our journey in Matthew's gospel has brought us this morning. The crucifixion of Christ Jesus is the climax of history. Here is the event of which the substance of the message of the gospel consists, which Paul preached and which we are called to proclaim to the nations. The way that Matthew presents the crucifixion can be divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the hostility humans directed against Jesus, and the second part focuses Christ's own experience and the immediate results of his death. This morning we are in verses 27-44 and focus on the human cruelty to Jesus.

[Read Text and Pray]

The main idea that emerges from this text is that while Jesus is at his lowest, sinful humanity is at its worst. The cross is the lowest point of humility for Jesus. He humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. It is a glorious humility. Yet the cross of Christ displays the depth of how wretched human beings can be. The cross shows us Jesus at his lowest and people at their absolute worst—overflowing with contemptible pride and loathsome arrogance and nefarious wickedness. In these verses Matthew's attention focuses on the mockery dished out by human beings on their creator, who has now come to them in the flesh. I count 9 ways in which the people and events involved in Jesus' crucifixion insult him. And yet there is a beautiful profundity to the mockery. When all is said and done, the scorn is turned upside down. That is why I refer to the message of this text as "the irony of the mockery." We will have to move fast this morning to be able to consider each of 9 categories of mockery.

I. The Mockery of Jesus's Royalty (27-31)

A. The Roman soldiers subjected Jesus to the horrific assault of scourging. It would have brutally lacerated and mutilated his body so as to shred his skin and expose his inner organs. And now the soldiers turn to make sport of him by mocking the charge against him. He is being crucified because he claimed to be royal—the Messiah, the Christ of the Jews. A monarch's royalty is expressed in their robe, their crown, and their scepter. So the soldiers took to mocking Jesus as an entertainment show before an entire battalion of the Roman army. Some 600 soldiers would have gotten their laughs from deriding a brutally beaten man and making fun of him. Their pride and arrogance were fed and their delight was taken in scorning a man now nearly beaten to death. How callous can the human heart be!

They placed on him pitiful excuses for a robe and a crown and a scepter. Ironically, however, their mockery gives occasion for us to recognize the true royalty of Jesus. First, there was the robe. Matthew says it was scarlet in color. Mark and John tell that the robe was purple. A likely explanation is that the robe was meant as a purple robe which would be the color of royalty, but the best they could do was actually scarlet. Unwittingly the soldiers portray that Jesus was clothed with human iniquity in order to suffer for human sins. Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins are like SCARLET, they shall be as white as wool."

Second, there was the crown. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on Jesus's head. This was an unsightly excuse for a crown, but more importantly the long, sharp thorns would have punctured Jesus's scalp causing blood to flow down his head and face. Thorns take us back to the fall and the curse of thorns. At the Fall creation was subjected to futility. But the work of Christ on the cross was to bear the sin that brought the curse and bring relief to the yearning of creation to be set free from its bondage and corruption.

Third, the soldiers placed a reed in Jesus's right hand as a mock scepter. The scepter is the royal symbol of a king's authority, but a reed is a pitiful reflection of power. The irony is that Jesus is the only one with sufficient power to overcome the obstacles that stand between God and his determination to redeem human beings from their sin. The vision in Revelation 5 draws attention to the scroll in the hand of him who was seated on the throne. And no one in heaven or on earth was found who was worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals—that is no one except "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David." This lion is the lamb who endured humiliating hostility, and he is worthy to receive power. In Revelation 19 we see an image of the returning Christ, and he brings with him not a flimsy reed but a scepter of iron.

Having thusly arrayed Jesus, the soldiers commenced to mockingly bow down before him. Scornfully, they fain homage to him while spitting on him and hitting him with his own reed. They take the symbol of power and beat him with it, but the fact is they cannot remove his power. Unbeknownst to them they are helping fulfil the predetermined plan of God.

And oh the irony of this scene! Revelation 19 depicts Jesus's return with a robe and not just one but many crowns and a rod of iron to rule with irresistible power. Visualize what I read:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are MANY CROWNS, and he has a name written upon him that no one knows but himself. He is CLOTHED IN A ROBE DIPPED IN BLOOD, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and he will RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON." Oh the irony of the mockery of his royalty!

And not only that, but get this. According to the apostle Paul, these soldiers will kneel again. Yet it will not be in jest. There will be no spitting and no laughter, no hitting and no mockery. They will not be entertained. They will be constrained. For every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, including Lord of them. And that includes me and you too. Oh that we would bow today willingly so that bowing in that day would be glad and rejoicing and not convulsing as will be the case with all who have not believed the gospel of God!

II. The Mockery of a Cross-Bearer (32)

As they went out they found a man to carry the cross of Jesus. I categorize this aspect of the cross an example of mockery because it points out how brutally Jesus had been beaten. He was in such a weakened state that he was simply physically incapable of carrying the two hundred pounds or so all the way to Golgotha. It is just the HEIGHT of mockery that creatures would physically beat their creator within an inch of his life. But the irony of his beating is that by his stripes we are healed. And even in his weakness is he strong.

III. The Mockery of the Wine (33-34)

When Jesus arrived at Golgotha he was offered wine. But it was not plain wine; it was mixed with gall. The purpose of this mixture at this time was two-fold. The gall had a stupefying effect resulting in a more cooperative victim when it came to hammering the nails. It would also reduce the pain of the crucifixion. Therefore, when Jesus tasted the gall, he would not drink.

This would seem to be another underhanded work of the devil whispering, "Minimize your pain." No. Jesus came to earth for the very purpose of embracing suffering not running from it, not reducing it, but enduring it to the full extent.

The irony of the mockery of the wine is that Jesus himself will pour out the wine of the full wrath of God. Revelation 19:15 says, "he will tread the winepress of the wrath of God the Almighty." Revelation 14:10 says that those marked as belonging to the beast will "drink the wine of God's wrath poured full strength into the cup of his anger." Psalm 75:8 declares, "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs."

Hell is a terrible place and an eternal condition of suffering and torment. There is weeping and gnashing of teeth. There is agony and anguish of inestimable proportions. You will either experience that anguish yourself or escape. And the only escape is that which is provided by Christ because in undiminished fashion he suffered that anguish on the cross. To escape you must repent of sin and trust in Jesus.

IV. The Mockery of the Crucifixion (35a)

Crucifixion is, as you probably know, one of the cruelest forms of inducing death known to humanity. The various facets of it reduce its victims into a ghastly depth of pain, agony, and humiliation. Crosses were often on a roadside so that the shame of it all would be exacerbated. And the Old Testament taught that those who were hung on a tree were cursed by God.

The wonderful irony is that Jesus WAS cursed by God, not because of his sin, but because of ours. Writes Paul to the Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."

Again what was done out of the arrogance and pride of man exhibiting our outrageously nefarious hearts merely worked right in to God's plan to bring redemption to those under the death sentence of God's law. Hallelujah what a Savior!

V. The Mockery of Divided Garments (35b)

When they crucified the Lord, right there under his gaze, they divided his garments among them. It is mockery because in crucifixion all dignity was taken away. Jesus was stripped bare before all to be humiliated as low as could be. But the beautiful irony is that in his robe-less crucifixion, he was suffering shamefully to purchase robes of righteousness of his people. He suffered that we might not. He was humiliated that his people might be glorified. He was stripped so that we might be clothed—so that we who trust in Christ might be found in him not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

VI. The Mockery of Being Watched (36)

Verse 36 says they sat down and kept watch over Christ there. It was the duty of the soldiers to remain with the one who was crucified to make certain that friends or family did not come and

remove him from the cross or that they did not seek to bring a swifter end to his death in order to alleviate the suffering. So there they were, watching to make sure Jesus did not come down from the cross and to be certain that he suffered to the full extent.

More beautiful irony emerges yet again. For there was a far higher purpose for Jesus to remain on the cross than to fulfill the designs of earthly government. He was there to satisfy divine wrath and justice, and everything was under his control. Jesus had previously said, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." Had Jesus wanted or designed to come down, the watchers could not have kept him there. But the crucifixion of Jesus and all its mockery was by divine design and plan. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

VII. The Mockery of the Placard (37)

It was meant as a joke—this sign placed above the head of Jesus. "This is Jesus—King of the Jews." Pure mockery! How can this guy be messiah? How can he be a conquering king? Clearly he is a defeated foe not a leader to be followed. What a shame that this is the best excuse the Jews have for a king!

But again, how ironic! The suffering servant is the conquering king. He was fighting the mightiest foe ever faced—not an army of men and horses and chariots, not weapons of the flesh, spears and swords, which can do no more than harm the body. He was dueling with the enemy of sin and death. On the battleground stood a giant loudly mocking the armies of the Lord. But here stands one soldier to represent the entire kingdom of God and everything is invested in his work. You know, David had already been anointed king when he faced Goliath the Philistine giant. And after defeating him, he went on to be crowned king. And here is Jesus hanging on the cross and now dealing a death blow to death itself. That placard will be ultimately replaced with a name written on his robe and on his thigh. According to Revelation 19, the king with a blood-spattered robe, many crowns, and a scepter of iron will bear the title "King of kings and Lord of lords." And he will reign forever!

VIII. The Mockery of Hanging with Two Robbers (38)

Two robbers were crucified with Jesus, one on either side with Jesus in the middle. The word here for robber is not your ordinary thief. The sentence of crucifixion was reserved for serious criminals. In fact the word for robber speaks of a brutal kind of thief, the kind that was known to torment, abuse, and murder their victims. These were really bad guys. Here between them was the spotless lamb of God. Here was the man who wouldn't break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick. He was gentle and lowly and just about eradicated sickness and disease from Judea in his days. He healed. He fed. He blessed. And he loved. But here he is between two brigands, two vicious bandits. He was presented as just another wicked man, a mean and selfish blight disturbing the peace and bringing harm. Yes, that is Jesus all right—NOT!

No indeed, he was not a disturber of the peace. Jesus came and died to make peace between God and man. Here again, what wonderful irony! Isaiah says, "He was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sins of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). He was numbered with the transgressors so he could pay for the sin of transgressors. He became a sin and guilt bearer to the greatest degree, for though he bore no sins of his own, he bore the sins of many transgressors and paid their penalty all at once. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

IX. The Mockery of Verbal Derision (39-44)

Finally, we come to a slew of verbal insults that were hurled at Jesus one after the other. I have grouped them together into one category of verbal derision. Passers by were haughtily wagging their heads as though they were so good. The chief priests, scribes, and elders were also there with their insults. And the robbers joined in the mockery as well.

All these verbal insults boil down to this. "If you are so great, if you could really save others, if you are really the Son of God, then come down; save yourself; or let God deliver you." These mockers sound just like the devil when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Two of those temptations began with "If you are the Son of God . . ." Come on prove it! Prove it! Prove that you are the Son of God! But that's just what he was doing, wasn't it. By remaining on the cross he was demonstrating himself to be the Son of God. "He saved others; he cannot save himself." No. He won't save himself so that he can save others. What did Jesus say to his disciples? "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour" (John 12:27). The truth of course is that all that he had done and exhibited of his power and position as he walked through Judea, demonstrated that he is indeed the Son of God. Remaining on the cross is what he came to accomplish.

He was there to do a work no one else could do. The irony is that if he had come down, if he had played into the taunts of the onlookers, the very purpose for his coming would have gone unfulfilled. The world would be without hope and without a gospel to preach or to believe or by which to be saved.

Conclusion

Several exhortations arise out of this display of human hatred. One is the exhortation to abhor sin. You see the spirit of sin here, and it is disgusting, vile, filthy, and repulsive. Whenever you hear of a group of kids gathering together to put down another kid by mocking and scorn, you may feel a twinge of rage because these kids are being so hateful and so mean and cruel to one another. And they do it as if they themselves are better. Such an image gives us a glimpse into the madness surrounding Christ as he hung on the cross—such envy, such jealousy, such animosity fueled by nothing other than his righteousness and their evil pride! We must abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. God's holiness and our sins are the reason Christ went to the cross. The crucifixion scene should compel us who believe to hate sin. We should despise the extent to which this scene unmasks our own propensity to ghastly intentions and self-exaltation by deriding others. We should despise the fact that the faultless one who meekly and compassionately calls us to himself is the one who is hated and mistreated. We should hate that our sin is the ultimate explanation for this horrific event.

The second exhortation is expressed in a single word, Repent. This is the first word of the good news preached both by John the Baptist and by Jesus. Turn. Turn your hearts to sorrow for the wickedness of your sin and turn against sin in your life. Put it to death. See in every sin the spirit of mockery that cries out in arrogance against Christ. Kill your pride and kill its scorning. True repentance is inseparable from faith. Repenting of your sin, turn to Jesus and believe in him. Trust in him. Receive from God the forgiveness provided by Christ's blood.

A final exhortation is look to Jesus. How did he respond when he was reviled? When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. As a sheep before his shearers is silent so Jesus opened not his mouth. Listen, scorners are gonna scorn. Mockers are going to mock. Mockery is devilish. A people, a culture, a society that abandons God mocks righteousness. They vilify all other mockery, but the

mockery of those who stand for good. It is rather a last straw to attempt to dislodge God's people from faithfulness. It operates to dishearten us and provoke us to sin. Do not be taken off course by the hostility of the world. Jesus completed the work fully. You and I can take from Jesus encouragement to do the same. Psalm 119:51 says, "The arrogant utterly deride me, yet I do not turn aside from your law."

Prayer

Benediction

May you consider Christ who endured such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. May your hatred of sin so increase that you will go to whatever lengths necessary to resist it and put the desires of the flesh to death.