



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“The Scorn of the Savior” Mark 15:16–32

I want you to take your Bibles this morning, yet again, and be turning to the Gospel of Mark. We are in Mark chapter 15, and this morning, we want to look together at a lot of verses, verses 16 through 32. This is sort of a struggle each week to find a place to cut off our studies together. There’s so much depth, so much richness in these gospel accounts, and we’re taking a larger chunk this morning to study because I don’t want to chop up the crucifixion of our Lord in too many bite-sized pieces. We need to get the full picture in one shot as much as we can. So, we’re going to look at verses 16 through 32. The title of the message: “The Scorn of the Savior.” Please stand to your feet in honor of the reading of God’s Word, picking up in verse 16. Mark writes under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

And the soldiers led him [that is Jesus] away inside the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him 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.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander 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 among 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 with 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.” Those who were crucified with him [Mark says] also reviled him.

This is the authoritative Word of God. Please be seated. Let’s ask the Lord’s blessing as we study this passage together.

Our Father, we are familiar, very familiar, with the account of our Lord’s crucifixion, but we pray this morning that we might have fresh insight, Lord, by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray this would not merely be an exercise in intellectualism, but Father, that You would move our hearts in love and honor and devotion to Christ our Savior because He is worthy of all of our praise and worship. We pray these things in His holy name. Amen.

Those of you who have been with us for the last couple of years as we’ve marched through Mark’s Gospel together have realized that we have come really to that section in Mark’s Gospel that deals with the seriousness of the gospel itself, the reality of the cross, the reality of the crucifixion of the Messiah. And we have seen the same thing over and over again as we come each week to study Mark’s Gospel. We have seen Jesus mocked. We have seen Jesus abused. He is mocked and He is abused by Jews. He is mocked and abused by gentiles. He is mocked and abused by the religious establishment. He is mocked and abused by the Roman authorities. The one who is mocked and abused in our hearts is the one that should have been honored and worshiped. Two trials Jesus went through: one before the religious leaders and one before the civil magistrates. The trial before the Sanhedrin we saw where Jesus was questioned by Annas. He was brought before the high priest, Caiaphas. He was officially charged at 5:00 a.m. on Good Friday. False charges, false accusations against Jesus. They couldn’t come up with anything, so the best they could do was to say, “Well, He claims to be the Messiah,” which indeed He did claim to be. But they twisted all of that and then took Him to the Romans, to the civil authorities and took Him before Pilate, took Him before Herod, took Him back to Pilate again. And said that He made Himself out to be not just the King of the Jews but a king that would threaten Rome itself, a king that would overthrow Caesar, which was not at all what Jesus intended to do at His first coming.

His first coming was one of humiliation, and that’s why He said in John 18:36, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”* At His second coming, He will overthrow all human authorities, won’t He? *“Every knee will bow...and every tongue will confess”* that He is Lord. Every civil magistrate will bow, but in His first coming at the establishment of His kingdom, it was a *“kingdom...not of this world”* because He had to die as a sinner. This, of course, shocked and confused His disciples, all of whom were surprised by everything that Jesus would endure. They were fearful, leading to Peter’s denial of his Lord, and yet Jesus wasn’t shocked at all, was He? We read Peter’s words. Peter says in 1 Peter 2, *“He was reviled, [but] he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”* And *“He...bore our sins in his body on the tree.”* He entrusted Himself to the Father because He was with the Father before the foundation of the world in the covenant of redemption that planned all of this. In fact, back in Mark chapter 10, you have the most detailed prediction that Jesus made of His suffering, verse 33. Jesus says, *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise again.”*

Jesus was familiar with Isaiah 53 and the suffering servant, and He wasn’t just familiar with it, but He knew that He came to fulfill that. All of the Bible is about Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation, it is all about Him. And if you read your Bible and you don’t see Jesus, go back and read it again. It’s all about Him. The Bible is a “Him” [hymn] book. It sings about the glories of Christ. Jesus knew that, and so in this prediction in Mark chapter 10, He speaks about being handed over. He speaks about being mocked. He speaks about being spit upon. He speaks about being flogged—all fulfilling Isaiah 50, all fulfilling Isaiah chapter 53. *“I gave my back to those who strike me.”* And

ironically, Jesus’ abusers unwittingly—and here’s what you need to see this morning—they unwittingly, by their words and by their deeds, affirm the reliability and the consistency of the Old Testament Scriptures. They even in all of their wickedness helped fulfill the Bible’s prophecies about Christ, revealing that in all of their mocking, in all of their scorning, the true identity of Jesus. This is amazing that to a *T* Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies, and God used wicked people to do that. Psalm 109:25: “*I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads.*” That was words of David, but it’s a prophecy about Christ.

Now, as we see in this passage, our Savior being scorned and being crucified, and as we look at the mistreatment of Him by the Roman authorities, we see here captured three actions in verses 16 through 32, three actions which—listen to this—prophetically demonstrate Jesus’ true identity as a saving King. We see that in His visual abasement or humility. Secondly, in His vertical association with sinners; and third, in the vile antagonism against Him. All three of these actions motivated by evil help bring about the good of our salvation, and that’s why we can worship God in the midst of such a painful passage. So, first, I want you to note with me what I want to call the visual abasement, the visual abasement, and we see this in verses 16 through 20. Christ’s visual abasement is seen in several actions taken by the soldiers, first of all beginning with the calling, verse 16. “*And the soldiers led [Jesus] away inside the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion.*” The soldiers led Him inside of the palace. This is probably a reference to the praetorian guard, the governor’s headquarters. This is where Pilate was stationed. He was the commander of the Roman army in Judea, being the governor of Judea. Jesus—notice the language—is led there. Is that familiar language of Isaiah 53, led like a lamb to be slaughtered? Taken to the praetorium, taken to the headquarters. These soldiers were also stationed at the Fort of Antonia. They had been recruited. Very likely, they were non-Jews from Syria who actually spoke Jesus’ native tongue, Aramaic, and that means that all the mocking they directed at Jesus, He completely understood.

They were considered elite soldiers. In fact, the governor’s headquarters or the praetorium was the name of the building, but praetorium was also the name of the elite soldiers that were basically the personal bodyguards of Pilate. These are the men who abused Jesus, but Mark points out in verse 16, they want to make a show of it, don’t they? So “*they called together,*” as the end of verse 16 says, “*the whole battalion.*” Now, a battalion, the Latin word is *cohors*, which in the Greek is a *cohort*. It equals about six hundred soldiers. They invited a whole company of six hundred soldiers to mock and abuse Jesus and assault Him physically. No doubt, not all six hundred came, but the ones who did, received this calling or invitation, made a public mockery of Jesus, and the calling then led to the clothing.

Notice verse 17: “*And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.*” Matthew tells us in his account that they first stripped Jesus. Then they put on Him, as Mark says here in verse 17, “*a purple cloak.*” That would have been the Roman soldier’s mantle that was part of his required uniform, and Mark says that it had a purple hue to it, which means this was an old, tattered, faded, Roman soldier’s mantle because the Roman mantle of a Roman soldier was red. So, they didn’t put something luxurious on Him. They put something that had been faded out by the sun. It had a purple hue, but it stood for royalty. That’s the point to see. They’re mocking Him because He claimed to be the Christ. And verse 17 says, they twisted “*together a crown of thorns,*” and “*they put it on him.*” They meant this to appear to be like

Caesar’s imperial wreath that was made of gold, except this one was made of thorns pressed down on Jesus’ head, causing blood to flow. Someone obviously cruel enough to walk around the palace there and find some thorny twigs and to make this makeshift crown of thorns. “Jesus, you think you’re a king, how about this?” pressing it on His head. Interestingly, Genesis 3:18 speaks about the fact that part of the curse brings thorns and thistles. And so unwittingly, Jesus the second Adam, they don’t realize this is literally bearing the curse of man on His head, and He would go to the cross to fully bear the curse sent to Him by the Father. And next we see in this visual abasement the saluting. Verse 18: *“And they began to salute him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”* This was a mocking statement because the normal way to salute the Caesar was to go before him and say, “Hail, Caesar, the emperor!” Here they say, *“Hail, King of the Jews!”*

And with this visual abasement comes also the striking, verse 19: *“And they were striking his head with a reed.”* Reeds were found all along the marshes next to the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and they were harvested to use as sticks or poles. The soldiers beat Him over the head with this reed. Matthew tells us in Matthew 27:29 that they put the reed in Jesus’ hand to make it look like a scepter. So, now you have the full clothing of the royal mantle, the crown of thorns, and a reed that operated like a scepter. In the Old Testament, it prophesies about Jesus in the book of Micah, in particular. The book of Micah, Micah chapter 5, speaks about Jesus being a ruler of His people. It speaks about the suffering of our Lord. It says that:

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.*

This is a prophecy about Jesus being born in Bethlehem, and it’s also a prophecy about Jesus the shepherd being struck. They’re mocking His authority. They’re mocking His kingship, and yet Micah says that He is a shepherd who will *“shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD.”* They have no clue that they are assaulting the Son of God who would rule over them. But then came, in this visual abasement, the spitting. Verse 19: *“And spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.”* Perhaps a parody. Instead of kissing the king, they spit on Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy of what Jesus gave in Mark 10:34, but more importantly fulfilling Isaiah 50:6: *“I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.”* Then, of course, you see the kneeling in verse 19: *“Kneeling down in homage to him.”* This is feigned worship, but in reality, as I said, they’re bowing to the true King of the universe—unwittingly.

All of this visual abasement was accompanied by continual mocking. You see the mocking in verse 20: *“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.” But as Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:5: *“Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.”* All the chastisement that was inflicted on Jesus, all of the punishment inflicted on Jesus was meant to bring our peace. That is the essence of the gospel, the substitutionary suffering of Jesus Christ and His death in our place. The beginning of verse 20 says, *“They...mocked him.”* Now, you have to go back to the other gospel accounts where we read in John 19, for example, that before they stripped Him of this royal fake clothing, the crown of thorns and the mantle and the reed, John 19 tells us that they paraded Jesus back to Pilate, back to the crowds who earlier cried *“Crucify him!”* And Pilate, who originally didn’t want to crucify Jesus but eventually did says, John tells us, *“So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the man! Behold the man!’”*

A public mockery, a crown of thorns, tattered mantle, reed in His hand, swollen face, bloodied up—Jesus for all to see, a visual abasement, a visual humiliation. Isaiah 53:3 fulfilled: *“He was despised and rejected by men... as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”* Such mocking also fulfilled Psalm 22:6, which says, *“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.”* That was Jesus. And then in all that abasement, in all that humiliation, as verse 20 says, *“They stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.”* Two times in verses 16 through 20—note it—verse 16: *“And the soldiers led him away.”* Verse 20, *“And they led him out.”* It begins and ends with this language of “leading” Jesus to fulfill Isaiah 53:7: *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”* And verse 20 even says, *“they led him out,”* which indicates the fact that He was led out of the city, really to fulfill Numbers chapter 15, Leviticus chapter 16, a number of Old Testament passages that says anyone who is executed as a Jew, and for that matter even as Romans, must be executed outside of the camp, outside of the city limits. Even in His humiliation, even in His abasement, voluntary as it was by Jesus, He was showing that He was God, wasn’t He? He was showing that He came to fulfill the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, not slightly but perfectly to a *T*. The soldiers are clueless. This is the King of the universe that they mocked to be the “King of the Jews.”

But it’s not just the visual abasement that prophetically demonstrates Jesus’ identity as a saving King. The worst part about the gospel—His humiliation, the visual abasement—the lowest part reveals His true identity as a saving king because it fulfills all of Old Testament Scripture. But it’s not just the visual abasement, it’s also the vertical association that Jesus has with sinners. We see this in verses 21 through 28. Mark’s point in this next section of verses is that Jesus would be, to quote Isaiah 53:12, *“numbered with the transgressors.”* Now, we could look at it like this; the throne of King Jesus would be Golgotha and in the middle of this hill, Mount Calvary, would be a cross, and on one side would be one criminal. On another side, another criminal—transgressors, men who clearly broke the law. Jesus was numbered among them, one on His right, one on His left. The vertical association with sinners. The path that led Him there though takes us to someone we’re introduced to in verse 21. Notice your Bibles. *“And they,”* that is the Roman soldiers, probably at the command of the centurion that was overseeing all of this, *“compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry [Jesus’] cross.* You need to understand that crucifixions were sort of like modern day funeral processions. They drew large crowds, and apparently this man, *“Simon of Cyrene,”* is just passing by when the Roman army requisitions him to carry Jesus’ cross. That would have probably just

been the crossbeam. This was common. Criminals were required to carry the crossbeam, and John tells us that He bore His cross for a while, but then He became too weak, and so Simon the Cyrene has to carry it. This happened often to those who were crucified. They couldn't carry their own cross all the way.

You consider all that Jesus had been through just in the last fifteen hours. You understand that He was weak, not just physically, but emotionally. All the way back in the upper room—that seems like a lifetime ago that we looked at that—all the tension between the apostles arguing with one another, Jesus washing their feet, Judas leaving to betray Jesus. All of that agony in the garden of Gethsemane—He sweat drops of blood. Then He's deserted by the disciples at His arrest. He has that ridiculous trial before Caiaphas under the cover of darkness. He's mocked by the temple police and beaten. Peter's denial which He predicted and then witnessed. His trial before cowardly Pilate. The intimidation and sneers of the mob to crucify Him. The violent Roman flogging. His sentencing to death. All of the verbal and physical humiliation that we just saw in verses 16 through 20, all of that occurred in fifteen hours.

So, He bore His cross until He could no longer. He was truly God and He was truly man, and we should never doubt His true humanity. He couldn't even continue to carry His cross. John Chrysostom, the “golden mouth” of all preachers in the early church, sees that Jesus carrying His cross until He was too weak to continue, finds its fulfillment in the Old Testament parallel seen in Isaac, Abraham's son, bearing the wood for his own sacrifice going up to Mount Moriah. That's Jesus. He's Isaac. All bruised, all bloody, bearing His own wood to be burnt up as a sacrifice, but what the soldiers meant for evil in forcing Simon the Cyrene to carry the crossbeam, God turned out for good for this man. Notice in verse 21 that Mark goes out of his way to make mention of his sons. He says that he was “*the father of Alexander and Rufus.*” Now remember, Mark is writing to Roman Christians who live in Rome, so a logical reconstruction follows this line of thought. Simon was originally from Cyrene. That was off the North African coast—modern day Libya. He had gone to the festival to celebrate with the other Jews in Jerusalem. There was a large colony there in Cyrene of Jews. He had traveled there. There was a Cyrenian synagogue in Jerusalem, and apparently, he's returning to the city as verse 21 says, “*from the country.*” He's just passing by, perhaps as Jesus is on the *Via Dolorosa*; that is, the road of sorrows before he is required to carry the cross. But this road of sorrows would surprisingly be this man's road to salvation and glory because by the time he gets to Golgotha and he drops the crossbeam at its place of execution, he witnesses the words and behavior of Jesus.

Apparently, he converts to Christ and becomes a Christian and lives in Rome, and those that Mark writes to know his son, Rufus. Romans 16:13, Paul tells the Roman Christians, “*Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.*” Paul knew this family. They were Christians. And so, God's sovereign hand used the wickedness of the soldiers to make the *Via Dolorosa*, the road of sorrows, the road of glory for Simon the Cyrene, the invisible sovereign hand of God. John 6:44: “*No one can come to me,*” Jesus says, “*unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.*” Simon was part of that elect number. Perhaps it was the words of Jesus' last sermon on the way to the crucifixion that resulted in Simon's conversion. If you turn with me to Luke chapter 23 for a moment, I need to point this out. Mark doesn't point it out, but in verse 27 it says, “*And there followed him a great multitude of the people*

and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.” This was a funeral procession, basically. “But turning to them Jesus said...” This is Jesus’ last sermon:

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, “Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!” Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us,” and to the hills, “Cover us.” For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?

This is Jesus’ last sermon. Jesus is basically saying what He said on the Olivet Discourse, right, that the coming judgment of Jerusalem is nigh? In forty years, Jerusalem’s going to be destroyed. Perhaps Simon understood that, and in fear repented, and saw Jesus after witnessing His words and His behavior of grace and dignity, confessed his sin and came to know Christ as his Savior, a disciple of Jesus.

But notice verse 22. It identifies the place of execution. “And they brought him to the place called *Golgotha* (which means *Place of a Skull*).” Golgotha, as it was identified, quite fittingly outside of the city limits. Hebrews 13:12 says that Jesus, that He might “*sanctify the people through his own blood,*” suffered “*outside the camp bearing his reproach.*” All of that fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures, which said any Jew that was executed must be executed outside of city limits. But there’s something else interesting that we find tucked away in the book of Leviticus, for example. It says this: “*And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their sin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire.*” That was fulfilled in Jesus. Burned up by the wrath of God outside of the camp at Golgotha. Now, notice Mark points out for his readers who were gentile, they were Romans, they didn’t know Hebrew or Aramaic. He points out that Golgotha means in the Greek, “place of a skull.” Actually, Golgotha is a transliterated word in the Greek. It comes from the Aramaic word, *golgota*, and Mark says it means “skull.”

If you read Jerome’s Latin vulgate, it translates the word *calvāria* which means “scalp or bald” and that’s where we get our English word *Calvary*. Now *Calvary* just means “cranium or skull.” *Kranión* is the Greek word. Now, in AD 70, Jerusalem was destroyed, and in particular, the northern wall was destroyed as well, which most people believe outside of that northern wall is where Golgotha was. Then you take into account that in AD 135 it was destroyed again. You take into account all the pagans that built over the Holy Places, and it’s hard to determine exactly where Calvary or Golgotha was. Some people say that it was on what is called Gordon’s Calvary. Otto Thenius proposed Golgotha to be a hill that you can even see today with no vegetation. It looks like a man’s bald head, a skull which appears to have two eye sockets on a hillside. It was called Gordon’s Calvary because Charles Gordon popularized the site in 1885, and he also discovered a beautiful garden tomb next to it. But then other people say it’s the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—that is where Jesus was crucified—because in AD 326, a church known as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built over where it was said Jesus was crucified, and most historians believe that’s where Jesus was crucified. But the important thing is not the site; it’s the symbolism.

Verse 22: The “*Place of a Skull.*” Could it simply be that this was a place of death or uncleanness? You think of a skull and crossbones on a bottle. What does that denote? It means that if you drink

that, it’s like poison and it will kill you. That was Golgotha. It was a place of death. It was a place of poison. Jesus dies in an unclean place for unclean sinners outside of the camp. That was Golgotha. And in any event, verse 23 notes that around the time Jesus got there—notice your Bibles—it says, “*They,*” this refers to women, “*offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.*” These were pious women in Jerusalem who oftentimes provided this sort of primitive narcotic to dull the pain. It was wine mixed with myrrh. Proverbs 31 says that we are to “*give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those [who are] in bitter distress.*” But Mark points out that Jesus didn’t take it. Why did He not take it? For several reasons. Number one, He wanted to keep a clear head. He didn’t want to be under the influence of anything, any narcotic. But secondly, He had told His disciples He wasn’t going to drink from the fruit of the vine, remember in the upper room, until the kingdom of God. And third, perhaps most importantly, He didn’t drink this wine mixed with myrrh because He wanted to ensure—listen to this—that he absorbed the full brunt of God’s wrath. Jesus wouldn’t drink that cup of wine mixed with myrrh. Jesus would drink a sour bitter cup that He saw in the garden of Gethsemane. He would drink it down to the last dregs, the cup of wrath.

And just note with me the beginning of verse 24. Mark says so simply, “*And they crucified him.*” So matter of fact, so succinct. “*And they crucified him.*” But you see, Mark’s original readers were gentile. They were Romans. Romans did not talk about crucifixion. It made their stomach turn. So Mark out of respect, doesn’t go into any detail to describe the actual crucifixion. But you aren’t Romans, so you need to learn a little bit about the crucifixion, not to be mesmerized by its gory details, because the reality is this, folks; the spiritual anguish of Christ far exceeded His physical anguish, and we’re going to see that next week, but the physical pain was there. We start by saying this. In one sense, Jesus’ death wasn’t unique because thousands of people died by crucifixion. What it resulted in was unique because it brought the salvation of God to the world. It originated with the Persians who invented crucifixion, and they passed it on to the Carthaginians who then passed it on to the Romans. It wasn’t original with the Romans. It was a punishment, it was a death penalty reserved for criminals and slaves—not for Roman citizens. It was reserved for the worst of criminals, and historians highlight the ugliness of it. For example, Cicero says, “It was the cruelest and most hideous punishment possible.” Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that it was the most painful of all deaths. And some anonymous person said that the one who is crucified, it’s like they die a thousand deaths. In fact, the Latin word for cross is *crux*, and it’s where we get our English word *excruciating*. The cross and crucifixion was excruciating, the worst imaginable death. And there were many types of crosses. There were single-post crosses. There were crosses that formed an *X*. There were crosses that were an upside-down lowercase *T*, and there were crosses that were an upward lowercase *T*, likely what Jesus was crucified on.

History tells us that there were some thirty-thousand crucified by the day that Jesus walked this earth, and later, after the rebellion of the Jews sometime around AD 70 after its destruction, there were so many rebel Jews that were arrested that there was a shortage of lumbar in Rome because so many of these rebels were crucified. That horizontal crossbeam, that was the one Jesus carried. The condemned criminal had to carry the crossbeam. That was taken to the execution site where there was already a vertical pole in place. And before being lifted up, the soldiers would drive five to seven-inch nails into the wrists of the criminal. Sometimes they would lash the hands to the crossbeam, but we know from the other gospel accounts they nailed Jesus’ wrists to the cross. In fact, archeology has discovered the bones of a man that was crucified they think around the time

of Jesus, actually in Jerusalem, and what they found is that there was a single spike driven through both of his heels in his feet suggesting that the legs really supported no weight. The victim hung more by the hands or the wrists with the legs drawn up and bent back so the body formed an S on the cross, and that was strategic because the weight of the body hanging from the nails would damage the medial nerves and tear at the tarsals. Not to mention the respiratory agony, the muscle cramps because the victim would begin to have repeated genuflexions as he struggled to push his body upward to breathe before slumping down again in exhaustion. The nerve damage would send a pain ringing through the entire body, and then when you slumped back down the constriction of the diaphragm resulted in essentially slow suffocation. As one began to lose strength, they couldn't push themselves up any longer, and they suffocated themselves. Death was slow, in fact so slow that many times they would break the legs of the person crucified to expedite the process. This isn't to mention one's bare back that had been lacerated from the flogging rubbing up and down on the wood. That was what Jesus endured. So, when Mark says here that they crucified Him, I guess you could say that's sort of an understatement.

But notice the rest of verse 24. It says: “*And [they] divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.*” This was basically a lottery for His clothing, His inner and outer tunic and sandals, His head piece. John 19 indicates there were four soldiers in charge under the centurion. They all got something, probably casting dice to see what they would get, but what you really need to understand is all of this fulfilled Psalm 22:18: “*They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*” Jesus went from the glories of heaven, fellowship with His Father, to the humility of earth, receiving the scorn of man, to the cross which was the lowest of all deaths. The Westminster Confession puts it this way: “Christ's humiliation consisted in His being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross.”

It was a cursed death, but note verse 25 because it gives an important word about the time. Mark says, “*And it was the third hour when they crucified him.*” The third hour—that would be 9:00 a.m. by a Jewish reckoning of time because they counted hours beginning at 6:00 a.m., so the third hour would have been 9:00 a.m. This doesn't contradict John 19:14, which says at the sixth hour Pilate sentenced Him to death. That's a reference to the Roman measurement of time, which counted hours with the beginning of the day being at midnight; so 6:00 a.m. was when He was sentenced. That left three hours until He was actually crucified at nine o'clock. We're going to see next week Jesus died. Those hours that He hung on the cross, Jesus was dying at the same time that priests were in the temple slaughtering Passover lambs that were being bought by the people to celebrate the Passover, at that exact hour. The final Passover Lamb was being slaughtered, again, all of this in accordance with the sovereignty of God. You think that's an accident? You think that's some insignificant detail? Jesus was born in the world at the appointed time, and He died at the appointed time—not one minute before, not one minute after. And all the sovereign details, including the fact that He was crucified during the Passover, has massive implications of us understanding what this is all about. This is what all of the Jews were longing for and looking for, and they missed when Jesus came. They missed the Passover Lamb for the symbol and the shadow of those little lambs crucified.

But verse 26 also highlights the sovereignty of God. Verse 25 says, “*And it was the third hour when they crucified him,*” but verse 26 says, “*And the inscription of the charge against him read,*

“*The King of the Jews.*” This is simply a placard that the authorities made, indicating the official charge of the condemned criminal. Now, it’s very likely that Jesus wore that placard around His neck when He was carrying the crossbeam, but eventually it was taken off his neck and it was nailed above Him on the cross. Matthew 27:37 tells us this: “*And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’*” That inscription is interesting to me for a couple of reasons. Number one, Pilate had it made apparently in revenge toward the Sanhedrin because remember he originally wanted to release Jesus. Therefore, the charge that he chose was one that mocked the Jews as a people. “This is your King of the Jews. Look at your King of the Jews. He’s being crucified by the Romans.” It’s a way to mock the Sanhedrin whom Pilate hated.

The Sanhedrin knew what Pilate was doing, and in John chapter 19, if you just turn over there with me quickly, it says they tried to get him to change what was written on the sign. Verse 21 of John 19: “*So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, “The King of the Jews,” but rather, “This man said, I am King of the Jews.”’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’*” “I’m not going to change what I wrote. You want to me to say He said He’s the King of the Jews? I’m going to make a mockery of you and of Him, and we’ll just say He’s the King of the Jews. What a king He is, underneath the heel of Rome.” But also, the sign was written, we read in John 19, in three different languages. It was written in Hebrew, it was written in Latin, and it was written in Greek, “the King of the Jews” in all three of those languages. So that Pilate’s motive to mock the Jews really unwittingly turns out to be a prophetic declaration to the watching world in various languages that this is the universal King of Kings. He’s not just the King of the Hebrews; He is the King of Rome; He is the King of all. What did Jesus say in John 12:32: “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw*” what? “*all people to myself.*” I mean, God may as well have written that sign with His own finger because it was a declaration, as it were, of the Father’s approval of the Son. You remember at Jesus’ baptism: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” Well, this placard at the end of Jesus’ ministry, it’s as if the Father is saying, “This is my beloved Son, who is the true King.” All peoples of the world, the known world, could read it: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

And then we read verse 27: “*And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.*” Josephus repeatedly uses the Greek word here for *robbers* to refer to “Zealots or insurrectionists,” the very thing Jesus was accused of, so that the cross Jesus was on probably was originally meant for Barabbas. You remember, he was a known insurrectionist. He led a whole rebellion. He had committed murder. He was the one meant to hang between the robber on the left and the robber on the right, who were probably with him in that. They were also insurrectionists. Here’s the theology behind all of that. Jesus was accused of being an insurrectionist, though He was innocent; and instead of Barabbas the sinner, Jesus the righteous hung between those two sinners as our substitute. But listen, it all fulfilled Isaiah 53:12. He was “*numbered with the transgressors.*” That’s why God allowed that. God wanted this to look bad. God wanted this to look unthinkable because when we see the righteousness and the innocence and the perfection of Jesus “*numbered with the transgressors,*” we understand how exceedingly sinful our own sin is.

Jesus took upon Himself our sin in our place. He became one of us. That’s the gospel. Jesus was a friend of sinners, prostitutes, and tax collectors. He “*came to seek and to save the lost,*” Luke 19:10. He came to call sinners to Himself as He said—not the righteous. Heaven is not a reward

for the righteous; it’s a gift for the guilty because of the one who was innocent, who hung between two transgressors. Don’t ever think that Jesus died to save you from hell. Jesus didn’t die to save you from hell; Jesus died to save you from sin. And if He can’t save you from sin, He can’t save you from hell. He was punished in our place. Two robbers: one on His right, one on His left. Now, turn with me briefly to Luke 23. We’ll talk more about this next week, but we read something interesting beginning in verse 39 of Luke 23. It says, “*One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying [this is the other criminal] ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’*” I mean, this criminal is taking it seriously. “*And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.*” And then verse 42 says—I love it: “*‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’*” I mean, this is the tax collector in the temple, right? This is a known unrighteous, condemned criminal saying, “I deserve what I’m getting. Jesus is innocent.” This isn’t spiritual fire insurance. That criminal wasn’t merely saved from hell. He was saved from his own sin because he saw the purity of Jesus Christ, and therefore he escaped hell and was with Jesus in paradise. That sign hanging over Jesus was a universal declaration of His friendship with sinners.

Jesus, friend of sinners
A crown of thorns You wore for me
Bruised for my transgressions
Pierced for my iniquities
The wrath of God that I deserved
Was poured out on the innocent
He took my place, my soul to save
Now I am His forever

Jesus, friend of sinners
I love to tell the story
Redeeming love has been my theme
And will be when in glory
Not death nor life nor anything
Can ever separate me
O love that will not let me go
Yes, I am His forever

That was Jesus, numbered among the transgressors. Now, I need to say a word about verse 28 or lack thereof because you may note that you don’t have a verse 28 in your Bible, or if you have a Bible like mine it says “28” and has nothing. Or maybe it’s in the margins of your Bible or maybe it’s in brackets. That’s not anything to worry about. This is indicating to us that some of the Greek manuscripts and really the earlier Greek manuscripts, don’t have verse 28, so that some well-meaning scribe inserted it in there. Of course, what is verse 28? Well, it’s a quotation of Isaiah 53:12: “*He was numbered with the transgressors,*” and all of this fulfills that. Regardless of whether or not Mark originally wrote it doesn’t matter. Anyone with eyes can see that verses 21 through 28 are all about Jesus’ association with sinners. “*He was numbered with the transgressors*” beginning with Simon the Cyrene, going all the way to Golgotha, being vertically associated on the cross, high and lifted up, a criminal on His right, a criminal on His left. Vertical association with sinners. Listen, apart from that, there’s no salvation. There is no salvation apart

from God pouring His wrath upon His only begotten Son in your place, and we’ll see more of what that means next week.

But back to verse 27, just for a moment. Notice it says, *“One on his right and one on his left.”* That should sound familiar. You remember the sons of Zebedee? They had a request and really it was their mommy that went to Jesus to make the request. Read about it in chapter 10:35. They came up to Jesus: *“‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ And he said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”* And I believe at that moment He knew exactly what they wanted. He’s baiting them. *“And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’”* And what did Jesus say? Jesus said,

“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said, “We are able.” And Jesus said [to them], “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

In other words, “The jury is still out on you boys because I’m going to suffer. I’m going to drink the wrath of the Father. I’m going to be baptized into death, and I know that you will be martyrs for me, but you don’t know that. You think my kingdom is all about glory and fame.” No, to be at the right and the left of Christ means that you might die just like Christ did, and we all, as Jesus said in Mark 8:34, will have to bear a cross, right? Regardless of whether or not it’s martyrdom, every true disciple will have to bear a cross for Christ. But we see in these verses, verses 21 through 28, Jesus’ vertical association with sinners as our substitute.

Everything in these verses prophetically demonstrates Jesus’ true identity as King, even though it’s in the context of mocking and scorning Him. His visual abasement, verses 16 through 20. His vertical association, verses 21 through 28. And finally, verses 29 through 32, the vile antagonism. The scorn continues, and Mark reports it as Jesus hung on the cross taking His last breath. Notice verse 29: *“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!’”* I mean, imagine this. It would be bad enough for the soldiers to mock Him, but this is a chorus of scorn. It’s interesting because verse 29 says it’s by those who pass by, sort of like Simon the Cyrene. They weren’t planning on attending this, but there was a major highway that passed by Golgotha, and they see this, and it’s like rolling your window down in the car and mocking someone. They’re yelling at Him, merely passing by. In fact, it says they *“derided him.”* That translates the Greek word *blasphēmeō* means “to heap abuse upon,” and it’s always used in the Old Testament to describe blasphemy against God, *blasphēmeō*, pointing to His deity. They’re unwittingly mocking God with blasphemous, wicked speech, and Mark says they were *“wagging their heads.”* This was a gesture of scorn.

Remember Psalm 22:7: *“All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.’”* I mean, is that not stunning how this fulfills Psalm 22? David was a type of Christ and he said, *“They sneer at me.”* “They wag their heads. They shake their heads.” Psalm 109:7: *“I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads.”* Over

and over and over again, David chased by his enemies said, “All they do is mock me.” David was a type of Christ. Again, if you don’t see Jesus in the Bible, go read it. It’s a “Him” [hymn] book. It sings all about Jesus. David was singing about Jesus. Notice how similar verse 30 is and verse 29 with Psalm 22. They said, “*Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!*” They’re mocking Jesus. So ignorant because remember that statement Jesus made. It’s found in John chapter 2 when He said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” John tells us He was talking about His body. He was saying that He’d stay on the cross. He wouldn’t come down from the cross until He was dead, but three days later, He would rise again.

Jesus is the true temple. He was speaking about the temple of His body. And yet here again, these mockers have no clue that this vile antagonism, mocking Jesus, who in actual fact—listen to this—has the power to get off the cross, but more importantly, would demonstrate His power by dying and then doing something more powerful than stepping off the cross. He would step out of the grave. He’d step out of the tomb. It’s the great irony of this vile antagonism. Precisely because He refused to save Himself, He was able to save you and me. Not coming down didn’t reveal His weakness; it revealed His power, His power.

And if verses 29 through 30 report what others said to Him as they passed by, then verses 31 and 32 report what others said about Him. Notice verse 31: “*So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another.*” That means they’re having a little sermon-fest, preaching to one another. But they’re preaching loud enough for others to hear because they don’t want anyone to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. They are saying to one another, verse 31, “*He saved others; he cannot save himself.*” I mean, essentially what the passersby were saying, but notice they even demand a sign, verse 32: “*Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.*” Yeah, right. Demanding a sign? Phew! That’s always proof of unbelief. Did you hear that? That is always proof of unbelief and an unwillingness to ever believe. You remember that parable Jesus gave about the rich man and Lazarus? Abraham said to the rich man who wanted a drink from his eternal suffering to assuage it. He desired also for someone to be sent to his father’s house to tell them, “Whatever you do when you die, don’t come to this place.” At the end of that parable, you know what Jesus said? He said, listen, “*If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets,*” that is the Scriptures, “*neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.*” And by the way, that’s exactly what happened because they are affirming that Jesus saved others, in verse 31. They’re affirming not only Jesus’ miracles, but that He raised Lazarus from the dead. They still didn’t believe. And when Jesus would rise from the dead, there would be a whole conspiracy to cover it up. They knew He rose.

Here is the order. It’s not see and believe; it’s believe and see. That’s what Jesus told Martha, right, prior to raising Lazarus. “*Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?*” You say, “How does that work? How can it be that it’s not if I see, I believe; it’s if I believe, I see?” Here’s why, because faith is a gift from God. And someone who truly believes will believe in God. He won’t need a sign. He’ll know in his heart because the Spirit of God has revealed that to him. But the end of verse 32: “*Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.*” So the scorn, the vile antagonism, also came from the transgressors that Jesus was numbered among. That second criminal that eventually believed at first was mocking Jesus, almost to his last breath, mocking Jesus, but he eventually believed. Symbolism is amazing. You don’t believe in deathbed

confessions? I do. I think they happen more often than we think. It’s not something to rely upon. What sovereign grace and mercy that this condemned criminal who at first was reviling Jesus would come to bless Jesus. Well, here’s why I think God ordained this to happen. This was a criminal that was granted amnesty based upon the justice of God meted out on His Son at the cross. This king, King Jesus, this is a true king—not like Pilate who called himself the king who granted amnesty to Barabbas, a true insurrectionist. No justice, letting a guilty man go free and punishing an innocent man, and God says, “Yes, that’s exactly what must happen.” But on the cross, God could grant amnesty through Christ to this other insurrectionist because the justice of God was satisfied in the Son. Do you see that? The gospel is all about the justice of God. This isn’t God winking at sin, brushing it under the rug, covering it up, turning the other way. No, Jesus had to be punished, but because He was punished in our place, this condemned criminal was sovereignly snatched from the flames of Hades. A miracle. That’s how all salvation is. It’s how your salvation is. It’s how mine is—a miracle from God.

What is the point of all of this? It’s simply this. The power of King Jesus even in His weakest and lowest moments on earth, reveal His true identity. His visual abasement, His vertical association with sinners, His vile antagonism directed against Him—all of that reveals His strength, not His weakness. The reality is that vile antagonism could have served to tempt Christ, sort of like the devil tempted Him in the wilderness. The devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and said to Him, “*All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.*” And Jesus said what? “*Be gone Satan!*” Satan was not keeping Jesus on the cross. Satan was trying to get Jesus off the cross. Just like Peter when Jesus predicted in Mark 8 that He would go to Jerusalem and suffer, Peter said, “May it never be!” And what did Jesus say? “*Get behind me Satan!*” It’s the same exact temptation on Golgotha, and yet Jesus, though reviled, didn’t revile in return. Though He was slandered, He didn’t slander in return, but He kept, Peter says, 1 Peter 2:23, entrusting Himself to the Father. He knew this was the plan from the beginning of time, that He would be cursed.

As we close, turn with me to Galatians chapter 3. I’m going to give you a sneak peek to next week. I’m really excited about next week because of the detail by which the Scriptures reveal the glory of the gospel. But I’ll give you a sneak peek. Galatians 3:10:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Here it is, verse 13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, [Old Testament] “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

That’s why Jesus’ death was a stumbling block to the Jews. That was Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 1, right? Because everyone knows someone cursed, and someone dying on a tree is cursed, but here Paul says He was cursed for us. “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*” Mosaic law promised a curse for breaking the law, right? But Moses didn’t make that up. That was true in the garden. God told Adam, “*In the day you eat of [this tree], you will*” what? “*surely die.*” It’s another way of saying “You will be cursed.” What’s the opposite of being cursed? Well, it’s being blessed, right. What does it mean to be blessed? It means to be brought

close to the face of God in His very presence where the light of His countenance shines on us. But to be cursed is to be cut off, and that is exactly what happened to Jesus. God the Father turned His lights off on the Son.

Go back with me to Mark chapter 15, and we'll end with this. Verse 22: “*And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*” That's the curse of God. That's Jesus being cut off. That's the light of God's countenance gone. All the sweet fellowship Jesus had had in the light of heavenly glory, the lights were shut off. Jesus was in hell. He was in the darkness of the curse. He did that for you. He did that for me. He was cursed so that we could be blessed. He did not save Himself from the cross so He could save you. Satan didn't keep Him on the cross. It was the promise and plan of the Father that kept Him on the cross. Satan wanted Him down from the cross because if He would have gotten down, there would be no redemption. We are redeemed because of the curse of Jesus, and you say, “Can that happen to the worst of sinners?” You better believe it. What does Paul say in 1 Timothy 2? He says, “I am the chief of sinners.” Jesus came to save the worst people, not the best. Jesus came to save sinners, not the righteous. Jesus came to associate with the lowly, the despised, prostitutes, tax collectors, adulterers, sexually immoral, murderers, thieves, all of it. He bore all of that sin for us. And that is why when we read this passage, beloved, we're filled with the pain and the sorrow of Jesus, but we leave with a smile because He did that for us. And if He wouldn't have done it, there would be no joy, no salvation. The *Via Dolorosa*, the road of sorrow led to the road of joy and glory, and we must worship Him for that. Let us pray.

Father in heaven, thank You for these Scriptures, which testify to the suffering Lamb of God who made an atonement for our sins. Really, Lord, we have just scratched the surface. We can't wait to come back next week because there we will see that Your wrath was satisfied upon Your Son at Calvary. This was the only way to bring about our salvation. Lord, may we never be ashamed of the cross. May we never be ashamed of the bloody gospel that we love. May we rejoice in it. May we bless Christ our Savior for blessing us with so rich a salvation. We give You the glory and the praise as we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.