

“The King of the Jews”
The Gospel According to Mark 15:16-32
February 3rd, 2019

So, this pastor typically preached *very* long sermons during Sunday’s service of worship. One morning, he had been preaching for over an hour when one of his more faithful church members got up from his pew and left the sanctuary.

Sometime later, that man returned to his seat. After the service, the pastor asked the man where he’d gone during the sermon. The member said he’d gotten his hair cut. “Haircut?” replied the pastor, “Why didn’t you get one *before* you came to church?”

The member replied, “Before I came, I didn’t need one!”

Shortly before 1 AM on this date – February 3rd – in the year 1943, the American transport ship *Dorchester* was streaming through the icy North Atlantic from Newfoundland toward an American base in Greenland. There were 902 servicemen, merchant seamen, and civilian workers on board. Suddenly, a German torpedo struck the side of the ship far below the water line. The blast killed scores of men, and many more were seriously injured.

Through the pandemonium, according to witnesses, four Army chaplains ministered to the men struggling to find their way off of the ship. Those chaplains were Lt George Fox, a Methodist preacher; Lt Alexander Goode, a Jewish rabbi; Lt John Washington, a Roman Catholic priest; and Lt Clark Poling, a Dutch Reformed pastor. Above the chaos, the four chaplains could be heard urging the frightened to be brave, praying for the dying, and guiding the disoriented toward the lifeboats.

As most of the men reached topside, the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. When there were no more lifejackets to hand out, the chaplains astonished onlookers, taking their lifejackets off, and giving them to others who didn’t have them.

Then in the darkness, the four chaplains linked arms, grasped the railing of the ship together as it began to slip into the ocean. They began singing and shouting biblical encouragement to the men in the sea in English, Hebrew, and Latin.

Of the 902 men aboard the *Dorchester*, 672 of them died, including those four chaplains. Their sacrificial action constitutes one of the purest spiritual and ethical acts a person can make.

Similarly, Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself for the eternal good of the souls God the Father had given Him to save. Jesus learned obedience in His singular focus to save God’s elect ones. He knew salvation required sacrifice – though Jesus lived a life of perfection – never sinning even once in word, thought, or deed – His stainless life and pure blood shed was the only satisfactory atonement for sinners.

Mark 15:16-32:

¹⁶Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. ¹⁷And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His *head*, ¹⁸and began to salute Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ¹⁹Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and

spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

²¹ Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. ²² And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. ²³ Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. ²⁴ And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.

²⁵ Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. ²⁶ And the inscription of His accusation was written above:

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁷ With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. ²⁸ So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors."

²⁹ And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! *You* who destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

³¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

Since the middle of **Mark Chapter 14** (specifically verse 32), we have travelled the route from Gethsemane to Golgotha. Following their last meal together, Jesus and the disciples went out to the garden so He might pray for God's strength to endure what was about to happen. For three years, Jesus and His disciples had ministered the gospel of grace to all with whom they came into contact. The time of redemption was ripe – Jesus was betrayed – arrested – tried - sentenced – scourged and now heading to His demise.

For today's message, I'll bring up a few observations and applications.

In verse 16, Jesus – at this point declared guilty by Jewish *and* Roman trials – is taken to a royal hall in the governor's headquarters, accompanied by an entire garrison of Roman soldiers. Though commentators are not in agreement, one estimate states this could have been as many as 6,000 men. Even if it were a tenth of those soldiers, 600 soldiers is a large number. The question is, *why were so many armed men on hand?* Jesus had been bound and was being mocked and afflicted. Even so, they knew – whether they had heard from others or they had experienced it with their own senses – the Roman officials they knew there was something about this Man Jesus. They feared what He might do. He was capable of great miracles.

Another observation – note there are three times in the verses before us today that we see Jesus referred to as "the King of the Jews."

1 – The first is verse 18 – where we see the **Roman soldiers saluting Jesus**. They were adorning their prisoner with the garb of royalty – a robe of purple and a crown (though one of thorns). The soldiers in mock deference were kneeling and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Thorns and thistles are mentioned in the Bible's first book – **Genesis 3:18**. That is in conjunction

with Adam's fall. Here in **Mark Chapter 15**, "Jesus is pictured as bearing the curse that lies upon nature, in order to deliver nature and us from it." (Hendriksen, 644)

2 – A second time is found in verse 26 where Jesus is being crucified. It was customary to place a placard on the cross above those being crucified. In Jesus' case, "the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS." This was likely a two-handed slap at both Jesus and the Jews reviling Him. Such a title limited Jesus as the Monarch for a people whom He had given much, but they did not receive Him as such. And, it was a slap at the Jewish religious authorities because they were represented by a King they didn't acknowledge as such, and who was apparently being vanquished.

3 – A third time is found near the end of today's passage – verses 31 and 32. The Jewish religious elite – the chief priests and the scribes – also slandered Jesus. We read, "Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." In acting this way, these men were actually putting Jesus to the test; tempting Him to do wrong, and in so doing, sinning.

In **Luke Chapter 4**, Jesus is being tempted by Satan in the wilderness after Jesus fasted without food for 40 days and nights. Jesus successfully rebuffed Satan's first two attempts to get Him to sin. For the third attempt, Satan brought Jesus to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here." (**Luke 4:9**) Satan even twisted Scripture to justify his demands of Jesus – quoting from **Psalms 91:11 & 12**. But Jesus didn't waver – He responded by quoting **Deuteronomy 6:16** when He said, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (**Luke 4:12**)

Sneaky Satan tried to get Jesus to prove His divinity according to his own rotten requirements. You've likely heard the saying, "You can get statistics to say anything you want them to say?" So, it is today, that people use Scripture in ways to "prove" their distorted theology as biblically correct. When Scripture is used out of context, it can appear to teach something it really doesn't. For instance, Scripture is very clear on who can be an elder or deacon in the church – the requirements are listed for us in **I Timothy 3:1-13** and **Titus 1:5-9**. The Scriptures are also clear about who can be married to one another (a Christian man to a Christian woman), or a pagan (unbeliever) man to a pagan woman, but no mixing of the two spiritually.

Back to **Mark Chapter 15**. While Jesus hung on the cross outside of Jerusalem, all sorts of people mocked Him. They tried to get Him to prove His divinity by coming down off the cross. For the sake of every believer in Christ, He stayed there until the work was finished.

Moving on to another observation - there's the mention of Simon of Cyrene in verse 21. Actually, Simon is mentioned in each of the synoptic gospel accounts. He's also mentioned in **Matthew 27:32** and **Luke 23:26**. We note that Simon is given the honor of bearing Jesus' cross as the procession makes its way out to the place of His crucifixion. Simon was just coming into town from the country – whether he had just travelled to Jerusalem from another place or he

was on his way home from work – Scripture doesn't say. Yet, the soldiers impress Simon into service by commanding him to carry Jesus' cross. What an honor! What a helpful way to serve Jesus! You and I don't have the opportunity to do something similar. Jesus doesn't expect that we bear His cross; rather, He insists that we bear our own cross – daily! We covered that ground earlier in this sermon series when we studied **Mark 8:34 (ff)**.

For now, let us consider once again how we can deny ourselves to follow Jesus; instead of gratifying ourselves, especially our sinful urges. Try it often this coming week. Instead of sleeping in late one day, get up early and read a couple of chapters in your Bible. Read through the rest of this book – we only have a few more Sundays before it's over. Tomorrow is the 4th – read Proverb 4 tomorrow, then Proverb 5 on Tuesday, Proverb 6 on Wednesday. Try to memorize what you're reading – hiding God's Word in your heart so you don't sin against Him!

Or maybe you can forego yet another night of mindless television watching or playing video games – and instead attend a Bible study – or have someone from the church over for dessert – or visit someone in the nursing home or hospital – or write a few notes to others who could use your encouragement.

One last observation. *Does the Bible you're using have a verse 28 in Mark Chapter 15?* Look at it – if you're using a *New International Version* or an *English Standard Version*, you won't find one. Yet, if you're using a *King James* or *New King James Version*, you will have one. *What gives?* Since I use a *New King James Version* Bible to preach, let me read verse 28 again – “So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors.”

You may have a text note in the margin or bottom of the page of the Bible you're looking at. Versions without a verse 28 are based on older transcripts of the book of Mark discovered since the publication of the *King James Version* in 1611. It is a good rule of thumb to use a translation of the Bible based on the oldest manuscripts because they were written closer to the events described. Even so, what is contained in verse 28 is an attempt, probably from a transcriber, to show that Jesus fulfilled **Isaiah 53:12** when He was crucified between two thieves.

In the 11th century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a monk and spend the rest of his life in the monastery.

“Your Majesty,” said Prior Richard, “Do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard for you because you have been a king.” “I understand,” said Henry. “The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you.”

“Then I will tell you what to do,” said Prior Richard. “Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you.” When King Henry died, a statement was written: “The King learned to rule by being obedient.”

When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good farmer or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us, and when he returns, we'll rule together with him.