

Jesus the Great King: The Sacrifice for Sinners

Mark 15:1-20

Introduction: 1) When you consider the passion of the Christ, the suffering and death of Jesus, what do you see? What do you think? Is he simply a martyr dying for what He believed in like a Socrates, Savanorola, Michael and Margaretha Sattler, Mahatna Ghandi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.? Was He a fool who believed He was actually the Son of God who was put to death amidst His delusions of grandeur? Was he a blasphemer and false Messiah who was a threat to the well-being of Israel? Was He a political revolutionary that Rome wisely extinguished before His flame began to burn out of control? Did He simply suffer the misfortune of ticking off the religious leaders who out of envy (15:10) appealed to the political expediency and pragmatism of Pilate who helped them get rid of Him?

2) Or, was He actually the sinless Son of God (1:1; 15:39), the God-man, who suffered in our place, took the beating we deserved, and died the death we should have died? Is He indeed the Great King: the sacrifice for sinners?

3) It is early Friday morning as we reckon time. Our Lord has been betrayed, abandoned, interrogated, beaten, spit upon and denied throughout the night with no rest, no sleep. Within a matter of hours He will be beaten nearly to death by Roman scourging (15:15) and crucified where He will die around 3 pm on Friday afternoon (15:33-37).

4) Mark 15, simultaneously, is one of the most shameful and wonderful chapters in the Bible. What sinful man did to the Son of God can only make us weep. What the sinless Son of God did for man can only make us shout with joy for a “Savior King” who would suffer all that He suffered for you and me.

I. Our Great King’s Silence: the Accusation and Amazement 15:1-5

- Morning, sunrise, has arrived around 6 a.m. The Sanhedrin needs to move quickly to get the “Jesus case” before Pilate if they have any hope of seeing Him executed on Friday before the Sabbath begins at Friday evening at sundown. So the entire body consults and then “bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.” (v. 1).
- Pilate was the Roman procurator (imperial magistrate or governor) of Judea from A.D. 26-36. This information is helpful in dating Jesus’ public ministry and is further confirmation of the Bible’s historical accuracy. He was a cruel and harsh governor who despised the Jews and enjoyed ticking them off. He was also an expedient ruler who would gladly make compromises to keep the peace and stay in the good graces of Rome. Ultimately Pilate held Jesus’ fate in his hands.
- Only one accusation against Jesus concerned Pilate and so “he asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”” (v. 2). This title will occur 6 times in vs. 2-32. It has obvious political overtones for Pilate and Rome. The words are

an exact parallel to those of the high priest in 14:61. Pilate, like the high priest, is an accurate, though ignorant, confessor of the Christ.

- Jesus responds in a somewhat coy and cryptic fashion to his question, “You have said so.” The “You” is emphatic. This is neither a direct affirmation or denial. I think Jesus’ intention is something like this, “Yes, I am a King but not the kind of King you are thinking of. As Jesus said, recorded in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world.”
- At this point the chief priests “accused him of many things.” (v. 3). Luke 23:2 provides the specifics, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a King.”
- Pilate again turned to Jesus raising 2 questions: 1) Have you no answer to make? 2) See how many charges they bring against you?” (v. 4). To his amazement, his astonishment, “Jesus made no further answer” (v. 5). Pilate would try and wash his hands of Jesus and send Him to Herod Antipas, an event only Luke 23:6-12 records. Jesus would not say a single word to this evil ruler and murderer of John the Baptist. He will not cast His pearls before pigs (Matt. 7:6). Once more the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7 is being fulfilled, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth”. Here is the great King’s silence in the face of His accusers. Sinful men can

only watch in amazement. And, so do we. No defense. Not a word. He will see to it that He goes to the cross.

II. **Our Great King's Substitution: the Injustice and Insult** **15:6-14**

- These are some of the most ironic verses in all of the Bible. The true Son of the Father, sinless and innocent, will be beaten and crucified. The other son of the Father, Barabbas, sinful and guilty, will be set free because Jesus became his substitute! The sovereign providence and plan of God could not be more clearly on display.
- Mark informs us that at Passover, Pilate was in the habit of releasing a prisoner, a condemned man, to gain the support and goodwill of the people (v. 6). He apparently let them “make the call.”
- Incarcerated was a notorious rebel, a “freedom fighter” and murderer named Barabbas. His name actually means “son of the father!” (v. 7). He was awaiting his certain execution by crucifixion. He might be a national hero to the common people but he was a revolutionary that Rome and Pilate would gladly put to death.
- The people approached Pilate in the palace forum and began to petition Pilate for his annual Passover amnesty gift (v. 8). Pilate saw this as a way out of a tough situation. He has already told the Jewish leaders, “I find no fault (guilt) in this man” (John 18:38). Further, his wife had warned him,

“Have nothing to do with this righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream” (Matt. 27:19). Superstitious and perhaps with a tinge of conscience remaining, Pilate asks the crowd, hopeful for a positive response, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” (v. 9). Mark adds a third motivation Pilate had for releasing Jesus, “For he perceived (knew) that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.” (v. 10). If the people went with his option he could release an innocent man and stick it to the Sanhedrin as well.

- Things did not go as he hoped, though we know God’s plan is proceeding exactly as He intended. Knowing Pilate and his methods, it is easy to suspect that the religious leaders though he might pull such a stunt. They were ready. They “stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead” (v. 11). The crowd, with the Sanhedrin’s instigation, called Pilate’s hand. Pilate then makes a second play hoping for better result, “Then what shall I do with this man you call the King of the Jews?” (v. 12). Maybe they will ask me to release both Barabbas and Jesus he thought. Unusual, but it could happen! Again, (v. 13) they shouted their wishes, “we want Barabbas released and we want Jesus crucified” (*Gr.* “stauroson”).

- Pilate was at wits end but makes one last overture, “Why, what evil has he done?” (v. 14). The crowd, in response, became even louder and more boisterous with their demand, “Crucify him.” Both times the verb “crucify” is in the imperative. They are demanding the execution of Jesus by crucifixion.
- Pilate has had enough. Matthew 27:24-25 provides additional and helpful commentary, “So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, and putting the blame on them, “released for them Barabbas” (v. 15). Jesus was innocent but declared to be guilty. Barabbas was guilty, but was treated as though he were innocent. Jesus died in his place. He also died in our place, that in an amazing reversal, we might truly become sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. Sinclair Ferguson says it beautifully, “without knowing it, the religious leaders and Pilate and Barabbas were all part of a tapestry of grace which God was weaving for sinners. Their actions spoke louder than their words, louder than the cries of the crowds for Jesus’ blood. Jesus was not dying for his own crimes, but for the crimes of others; not for his own sins, but the

sins of others. He did not die for himself, he died for us!” Sinclair then asks a most important questions, “Have you ever seen what they were all too blind to notice?” (*Let’s Study Mark*, 257).

III. Our Great King’s Suffering: the Pain and Shame 15:15-20

In the gospel’s record of the passion of the Christ, it is interesting what is there and what is not there. The emphasis does not fall on the physical suffering of Jesus as great as it was. Mocking is clearly highlighted, but the focus is much more on the spiritual and psychological agony, vividly expressed in what is called His “7 Sayings From the Cross.” Still, we would be negligent if we passed over too quickly the scourging and physical abuse He suffered.

In verse 15 Mark simply says, “and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.” The question begs to be asked, “What was Roman scourging?” Mel Gibson’s “Passion of the Christ” has provided a vivid picture of just what a man would suffer. William Lane details for us the horrific beating and punishment scourging entailed: “A Roman scourging was a terrifying punishment. The delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or a pillar, or sometimes simply thrown to [the] ground, and was beaten by a number of guards until his flesh hung in bleeding shreds. The instrument indicated by the Marcan text, the dreaded *flagellum*, was a scourge consisting of leather thongs plaited with several pieces of bone or lead so as to form a chain. No maximum number of strokes was

prescribed by Roman law, and men condemned to flagellation frequently collapsed and died from the flogging. Josephus records that he himself had some of his opponents in Galilee scourged until their entrails were visible (*War* II.xxi.5), while the procurator Albinus had the prophet Jesus bar Hanan scourged until his bones lay visible (*War* VI. v. 3).” (William Lane, *Mark*, NICNT, 557).

- Following this life threatening beating, Pilate “delivered Jesus to be crucified” (v. 15). However, there would be more mocking and ridicule before our Savior would be impaled on the tree. Remaining inside the palace (the praetorium) where his beating had occurred (v. 16), “they called together the whole battalion”. This would number about 600 hardened Roman soldiers who would now make sport of the Son of God.
- First they clothed Him in a purple cloak, probably a faded military cloak serving the purpose of a mock robe of royalty (v. 17). Second, they twisted together a mock crown, one made of thorns and pressed it down on the head that earlier had sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane. Without any awareness of what they were doing, the crown of thorns pressed down on our Savior’s head pictured God’s curse on sinful humanity now being put on Jesus (Gen. 3:17-18). He indeed bears God’s curse in our place. Third, they began to mock Him again, this time with false and hypocritical salutes saying, “Hail, King of the Jews” (v. 18). As the Romans would hail Caesar

so these soldiers sarcastically hail King Jesus. Fourth, they hit Him again with a reed stick used also as a mock scepter (v. 19; cf. Matt. 27:29-30).

Fifth, they spit on him again (cf. 14:65). The tense of the verb indicates that they kept on spitting and insulting Him in this manner. Sixth, they knelt down in homage or mock worship. Seventh and finally, when they had finished mocking Him, (v. 20) “they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.”

- Completely alone, humiliated, naked and nearly beaten to death, our Savior endures yet again ridicule, shame and pain at the hands of sinful men, at the hands of those He came to save. Oh how heaven must have looked on in disbelief. Perhaps the angels wept. The Father sent His beloved Son to rescue and redeem a rebel race. Look at what they have done to our Lord. But look, and never forget, what our Lord has done for us!

Conclusion:

- One of the majestic hymns of the faith is “Crown Him With Many Crowns.” The first line says, “Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne.” The vision of this song rightly looks to heaven. However, if we direct our eyes earthward we see the Lamb upon a different throne, the throne of His cross. There He is taken crowned with a “crown of thorns”

(15:17), a reminder of the curse from which He has redeemed us (Gen. 3:15-18).

- Galatians 3:13 powerfully reminds us, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Deut. 21:23).
- Jesus suffered the injustice and insult that I should have suffered. Jesus experienced the shame and pain I should have experienced. Jesus bore the guilt and curse I should have borne.
- The shepherd was struck that the sheep might be saved. The Great King was tortured and killed that His people might live.
- I truly stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how He could love me, a sinner condemned unclean! He bore my sin and my sorrow and made them His very own. He bore my burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone.
- Jesus is the Great King: the sacrifice for sinners!