

The King is Mocked

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going to continue our series on the King's suffering and glory leading up to Easter, and we're still in Matthew chapter 27, so in the Bibles it's on page 834, page 834, and we're reading from verse 27 to verse 44.

Last week we saw how Pilate, in spite of knowing that Jesus was innocent, gave in to pressure and condemned him to the cross. And this unpleasant and very haunting and moving passage follows.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him, and they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand.

And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. When they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. When they came to the place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall.

[1 : 35] But when he tasted it, he would not drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him.

And over his head, they put the charge against him, which read, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Then the two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.

So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, He saved others. He cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel.

Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now. If he desires him, for he said, I am the Son of God.

[2 : 39] And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. So let's pray together.

Brothers, we read a passage like this, a passage which shows human nature at its most dark and devilish. We find we have nothing to be proud of.

We find that we ourselves are so often ashamed and so often let Jesus down. Father, we pray that as we look at these words together, we may find in them a challenge.

But also we may find in them a great encouragement, knowing that this was the only way in which a guilty world could be saved. And so we pray, Lord, that you will indeed open our eyes to see what is in your word and open our ears to what you are saying to us.

And we ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Under the city of Rome, there are miles and miles of underground tunnels and caves, often called the catacombs.

[3 : 59] And in the early days of Christianity, sometimes the Christians would hide there from persecutors and try to keep out of their way. But these caves were used by everybody.

And a number of years ago, there was discovered in one of those caves a piece of crude graffiti. This shows a kneeling figure, and he's bowing down before a man with an ass's head, who is hanging from a cross.

And the caption underneath is, You can see the point of this crude graffiti. This is continuing the mocking of Jesus, which begins here, but continues to our own day.

Alex Semenos worships his God. This section is about the king being mocked. The word mocking, derided, reviled, is the key word in the passage, repeated many times.

Vile and vicious mockery, beginning with the soldiers. Now, the soldiers did not initiate this. The soldiers simply carried on what Pilate and Caiaphas had already decided.

[5 : 15] That doesn't excuse them, of course, nor does it excuse the mocking of Jesus in later times. And there have been many, many rather blasphemous films, like The Last Temptation of Jesus and so on, which have continued this mockery.

But the point is, this passage has much deeper meanings than they realized. People said things, but they didn't realize the deeper meaning of what they were saying.

Had they realized that they would have stopped immediately and fallen down on their knees. Indeed, Peter is to say this later on in Acts. If they had known who he was, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Because this passage fundamentally is about the claims of Jesus. Who Jesus is and why this is happening. And in particular, there are four claims of Jesus in this passage, each of which people mock.

Now, first of all, the king of the Jews, verse 29, verse 37, and then in verse 42, the king of Israel. Now, the soldiers were ignorant of its significance.

[6 : 31] To them, the Jews were just a defeated and despised nation. But the whole establishment were mocking Jesus' claims. Because after all, the official notice by Pilate in verse 37, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

John adds a little detail there. People say, don't say he's king of the Jews. And Pilate said, what I have written, I have written. In other words, Pilate having abandoned principle is now going to be stubborn over a detail.

And this so often happens. There's no point in making a stand once you've sold the past. That's what Pilate does. And then in later verse, verse 42, the king of Israel.

The covenant people. Now, the interesting thing is, this phrase, king of the Jews, is one that, in a sense, dominates Matthew's gospel. Way back at the beginning, in a much happier story than this, wise men came from the east, saying, where is he who is born king of the Jews?

For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him. Now, these wise men obviously had picked up something about the significance of the coming Messiah, which is why they came.

[7 : 54] They didn't. But they didn't know as much as these leaders did. Indeed, perhaps some of these people at the cross had been around then when the Herod asked them, where is Jesus to be born?

They said, well, the prophet Micah says where he's to be born. But they weren't interested. But these wise men, speaking more wisely than they knew, recognized him at the very beginning of the story.

And, of course, the star shows he's not just king of the Jews, but king of heaven. And that's the theme that runs through the gospel. But here, his kingship is mocked.

They'll read better the staff or even scepter, symbol of royal authority. And purple, color of royalty. And these are mocked.

Jesus is still mocked. That's why it's so easy to be ashamed of the gospel, isn't it? I think possibly our great problem often is a kind of cowardly silence when Jesus is mocked.

[8 : 58] Not mocking him ourselves, but keeping quiet when others do. We need to recognize that temptation. So, his first claim, the claim to be the king of the Jews, the claim to be the one to whom the whole of the scriptures are pointing, a king of God's covenant people, but not just the king of God's covenant people, a king of heaven and, indeed, the king of all the nations.

That is mocked. He doesn't look like a king. Of course, he doesn't look like a king. He's now a helpless victim who has gone through untold agonies already.

So, he can't possibly be a king. If you are the king, then behave like one. That is the point. But second claim is he is the one through whom we meet God.

Verse 40. You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself. Now, by the temple...

Now, of course, once again, there's much deeper meaning. By the temple, they meant the building. They meant the place which Herod the Great had beautified, extended, magnificent structure which was admired all over the empire.

[10 : 12] And when you came upon it, it shining in the sun, it was absolutely magnificent. Jesus, when he talked about the temple, meant his body.

What was the temple, anyway? It was the place where people met God. People were no longer meeting God there. It had become an empty shrine.

Beautiful gilded building, certainly. Magnificent stones. And they did not realize that within 40 years, the temple would go up in flames. And the temple would be totally destroyed.

It's amazing. Even after, with the exile, 600 years earlier, when Nebuchadnezzar's armies had destroyed Jerusalem, had burned the temple, taken people away into exile, many of the rabbis were still saying in AD 70, the Lord will come to rescue his people.

He'll never allow his temple to be burnt. And we know, of course, that's what happened. But Jesus is the true temple, the place where sinful people can be forgiven by a holy God.

[11 : 24] By the time the temple was burned in AD 70, by the time that Matthew's gospel was written, which was probably some years later, the gospel was spreading throughout the world.

People were meeting God. The true temple of God was being built. Peter was saying, you are the temple of God. Living stones built up the place where God lives by his spirit.

You see, they tragically misunderstood the symbol. The temple was a visual aid. The temple was a picture of the real meeting place.

Later on, the apostle John is to say, writing about the new Jerusalem, I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

So you see what's happening here. They are rejecting, trying to get rid of the temple itself, the one whom the temple points to. Holding on to the shell, holding on to the outward, and rejecting the inward.

[12 : 35] He is king of the Jews, but he can't possibly be king of the Jews. Kings don't get mocked and crucified. He is the true temple, but after all, what he said about the temple is nonsense anyway.

He said he'll destroy it and destroy it, or is it, in three days. In three days, they were going to look very silly, of course, and we'll see in two weeks' time now, last in Matthew 28, how they tried to cover up the fact that they had got it so tragically and drastically wrong.

The third claim they mock is that he is the Savior. Once again, in verse...

Sorry, I've got the wrong verse here. Yes, verse 42, he saved others. He cannot save himself.

Once again, this is mockery, but it's also profoundly true. Once again, this is the temptation, like the beginning, when Satan said, all the kingdoms of the world, I will give you if you bow down and worship me.

[13 : 44] The temptation to have the kingdom without the cross, the temptation that we saw two weeks ago he wrestled with in Gethsemane. But you see, without the cross, there is no blood of the new covenant.

Short time before this, he had said to his disciples, this cup is the blood of the new covenant. There'd be no blood. There'd be no ransom.

There'd be no forgiveness. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

Indeed, there would be no gospel. If he had come down from the cross, the gospel would have dissolved and there would have been no salvation for any of us.

You see, salvation is a big theme of the Bible. It wasn't an emergency plan that God brought in after the fall in Genesis 3.

[14 : 44] Salvation is always in the heart and mind of God. Peter talks about the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Someone said, before ever there was a sinner on earth, there was a saviour in heaven.

Salvation is not something alien to the nature of God, not some desperate emergency measure. Salvation is something which was planned right from the beginning.

But how can he be a saviour? If he can't even save himself, if he's allowed himself, if he's allowed this to happen, how can he be the saviour? Just as on the line, the witch of the wardrobe, when Aslan is bound on the stone table and is killed, how can he be the great lion, the son of the emperor, from across the sea, who is going to save Narnia?

Which is the fourth claim. He is the son of God. Verse 43, he trusts in God. Let God deliver him now if he desires him, for he said, I am the son of God.

He must be a fraud. God would not allow this to happen to his son. Many of them might have had many of the better ones, because undoubtedly, like every other group of people, there would be decent people as well as others in this group.

[16 : 06] Some of them might have remembered the story of Abraham and Isaac, and how at the very last moment, the angel from heaven intervened and stopped the killing. It wasn't to happen this time.

Notice the flippant way, let God deliver him now. They claimed to be totally in reverence of God, totally in awe of him and in fear of his name.

Let God deliver him now if he desires him, for he said, I am the son of God. See, once again, they failed to understand their story. These men knew what we call the Old Testament very, very well.

Some of them would be able to tell you what the middle verse in Leviticus was, but it did them absolutely no good at all. If they had read their story, who was the son of God?

Adam was the first son of God. Adam failed and dragged the rest of humanity down with him. He failed because he wanted to step outside his own God-given position.

[17 : 18] Like Satan who tempted him, he wanted to be like God. Here is one who did not have to claim that he was he, he was God. This was one who was God himself.

Paul was to say, let this mind be in you, which is in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Adam failed, but now the son who did not fail is going to take. They come back to the Eden story again. Adam and Eve expelled from the garden, a flaming sword turning every way to bar the way to the tree of life.

Now, this is the one son who did not fail. He takes the sword of judgment and by doing so opens the way back to the tree of life for all those who believe in him, one who is one with God and becomes one of us and is one of us still.

So, you see, this story on the surface is nasty and horrible, shows human nature at its most vicious and most brutal. Violence, after all, violence is always a sign of a society that's lost its way.

[18 : 42] Interesting, back in Genesis, one of the reasons God sends the flood is because the earth is filled with violence but underneath there shine stars brightly shining in the darkness of the night.

Four stars. He is the king of the Jews. He will ransom his people. He is the one who redeemed Israel. He is the way to God.

He is the place where we meet God. He is the savior who by his cross is going to open the way for the whole world to come. As he says in John, when I am lifted from the earth, I will draw all kinds of people to me.

And he is the son of God. Come into the world, come to be one of us and to raise us to his throne. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord God, we thank you for the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the love of the Holy Spirit that went to the cross in order to, in order that we might be rescued, who did not turn back from suffering and did not turn back from death so that the world might be ransomed and the new creation begun.

[20 : 07] And so we pray, Lord, that as we move through this time of Easter, we may reflect once again on these great truths. Our hearts and lives be changed. Amen.

Amen.