

## KING JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED TO SAVE US

Mark 15:16-32

Key Verse: 31, “In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself!’”

Jesus’ last night on earth was grueling. His disciple Judas Iscariot betrayed him and had him arrested. His disciple Peter disowned him three times. The Jewish Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy. Then some began to spit at Jesus. They blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and mocked him saying, “Prophesy, Messiah! Who hit you?” (Mt 26:68). Then they took him to Pontius Pilate. The Roman governor gave in to the enemies of Jesus, even though he knew Jesus was no real threat to the Roman government and not deserving of death. Even so, Pilate had Jesus sentenced to death on charges of being an unofficial “king of the Jews.” Why was innocent, righteous Jesus condemned like a common criminal? It was so that those who trust and follow Jesus will not be condemned on the day of judgment before God. One Bible commentary explains it like this: “It was so that we might be set free from every charge on the day of judgment, and be presented before God the Father without fault and with great joy.”<sup>1</sup>

Today’s Bible passage includes the mockery of soldiers and Jesus’ crucifixion, with mockery coming from three more groups. Why was Jesus mocked, and why did he not defend himself or strike down his enemies? These are crucial questions all people should seriously consider. May God help us to see Jesus with eyes of faith, as the author intends us to.

First, the soldiers mocked Jesus’ kingship (16-20).

After the trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin, Jesus was mocked for claiming to be the Messiah and Son of God. They regarded it as a blasphemous claim against God. Pontius Pilate was not concerned about a religious claim, but only any political claim of Jesus—whether Jesus was a threat to Roman rule in any way. So he asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” The title “king of the Jews” was of

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, J.C., “Mark: The Crossway Classic Commentaries,” (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL), 1993, p.251.

course a reference to the Messiah or Christ, the Anointed One of God, the long-awaited descendant of King David.

Pilate wanted to satisfy the demanding crowd, who demanded that Barabbas be released, and Jesus be crucified. So Pilate gave in to their demand. Then he had Jesus flogged or whipped. From historical records, we are told that Roman flogging was severely brutal. The whips often had sharp pieces of bone or metal or hooks attached to them to tear or gouge the flesh. Sometimes the victims even died from the flogging. The intention was to shame and torture them to deter any crime or rebellion against Roman authority. Jesus' flesh was torn and bloodied. Yet none of the gospels record any of this detail.

After the flogging, Jesus was handed over to the governor's soldiers, who led Jesus away into the governor's palace known as the Praetorium. The whole company of soldiers was gathered to do with Jesus as they pleased. The soldiers picked up on the charge against Jesus: the king of the Jews. They decided to mock Jesus on this basis. They put a purple robe on him, since purple or scarlet was considered the color of royalty. Matthew tells us that they stripped Jesus and put a staff in his right hand. Then they twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on Jesus. It was not a beautiful crown of gold but a humiliating, painful crown of thorns. They began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" in a mock greeting or salutation. Again and again they struck Jesus on the head with a staff, driving the thorns deeper into Jesus' scalp. Surely blood was flowing down Jesus' face and neck. They spat on Jesus to further humiliate him. To them, Jesus was too weak to defend himself. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. Of course it was mock homage. It was a complete rejection and ridicule of Jesus, since they knew Jesus had no weapons or bodyguard to protect himself. After they had mocked him, they took the purple robe off him and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

No one wants to be mocked. Everyone wants to be honored and respected. No one wants to be stripped in public or spat upon or struck on the head or slapped or punched or whipped. But Jesus went through all this, though he deserved none of it. We are the ones who deserve to be mocked and humiliated for all the wicked, evil, ugly things we've thought and said and done. We deserve to be punished before a holy and righteous God for all our sins. We deserve to be shamed publicly for all our faults and failures and foolishness. We are the ones who should be whipped and beaten for all our rebellion against God, violation of holiness and

rejection of the truth. But Jesus Christ took all this humiliation, shame and mockery without defending himself. It was for us, so we wouldn't be shamed, humiliated and judged on judgment day. Isaiah had prophesied, "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...for the transgression of my people he was punished" (Isa 53:4,8).

All this was foretold by Jesus. Jesus had said, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise" (Mk 10:33-34).

Second, Jesus was crucified to save us (21-32).

John's gospel tells us that Jesus carried his own cross. But Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that someone was forced to carry his cross. So, according to tradition, Jesus started off carrying his cross, but he was too exhausted and beaten up to carry it all the way through the streets to the place of crucifixion. Scholars aren't sure whether Jesus carried just the horizontal beam or the entire cross.

Whichever it was a man named Simon from Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross. He was passing by on his way in from the country. Almost certainly, he had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When he was singled out to carry Jesus' cross, he must've wondered, "Why me?" and felt most unfortunate. He might not have even known anything about Jesus. But consider this: this stranger helped the Son of God to carry his cross and complete his mission. Jesus' own disciples could not help Jesus at this time. There is an interesting story regarding this Simon. His two sons, Alexander and Rufus, are mentioned by Mark. Obviously, they were known personally by Mark. Romans 16:13 says, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too." Could it be that this Rufus is the same son of Simon of Cyrene, and his mother was Simon's wife? Apostle Paul says that Rufus' mother had also been a mother to Paul. Could it be that by carrying Jesus' cross on that day Simon became a follower of Jesus along with his whole family? Sometimes what we think is a misfortune, like carrying Jesus' cross, can turn out to be a great blessing.

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the Skull"). This was where criminals were executed. There they offered Jesus wine

mixed with myrrh. We don't know if this was further mockery or an act of mercy to offer Jesus this wine mixed with myrrh. In any case, Jesus did not take it. Jesus did not try to escape his suffering, nor did he want his mind to be clouded in the last hours of his life.

Verse 24a says simply, "And they crucified him." Mark does not give any gory details of the blood or any cries of pain. He and his contemporaries were very familiar with Roman crucifixions. It is among the most barbaric forms of execution ever devised. Crucified victims were nailed through the wrist bones not through the palms into to bear the body weight. Shoulders came out of socket. Every breath was difficult and brought searing pain. The victim is said to have "died a thousand deaths." They would faint and awaken repeatedly to the pain and terror. They would become delusional or go mad. Jesus Christ was crucified, but not for anything he had done. Apostle Paul wrote, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2Cor 5:21). And Apostle John wrote, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Dividing up Jesus' clothes, the soldiers cast lots to see what each would get. Hanging on the cross above them was the way for them to receive the ransom for their sins, if they only believed. If they only repented of their sins and accepted Jesus as their true King, they could receive forgiveness of sin, a new and meaningful life, and eternal life in God's kingdom. This is the promise of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.

Mark tells us the time of Jesus' crucifixion: the third hour from sunrise, or about nine in the morning. The written charge against Jesus was written on a placard and placed above Jesus' head. It read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. This was supposedly Jesus' crime. They made Jesus out to be some kind of dangerous political criminal. The Jewish leaders really charged Jesus with blasphemy. Pilate was pressured to crucify Jesus on charges of treason. But neither of these charges were written. Rather the charge was: THE KING OF THE JEWS. Of course it was intended to mock not only Jesus, but the Jews as well. And yet ironically, it was true. Jesus was and is in fact, the king of the Jews, the promised Messiah. Jesus' kingdom is forever. For this, he was born to testify. For this he died.

Two rebels or robbers were crucified with Jesus, one on his right and one on his left. Perhaps it was to shame him all the more as a chief of criminals. But it fulfilled another Scripture in Isaiah 53: "...he was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa 53:12).

At this point, Mark records more mockery and insults from three groups of people. Passersby, the religious leaders, and the robbers. Those passing by hurled insults at Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!" (29-30) Apparently, these passersby had not watched Jesus paraded through the streets. They only saw him nailed on the cross. "Hey! Aren't you the one who said you would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days? Look where your dreaming got you! Come down from the cross and save yourself, if you can!" To them, Jesus was just another false prophet who made false promises.

I want to note the third group and then come back to the second group. The third group was the robbers or rebels crucified with Jesus. Matthew and Mark tell us that they both heaped insults on Jesus. Luke tells us a slightly different account, that one of the rebels defended Jesus. It must be that one of criminals next to Jesus was changed even as he was dying next to Jesus. Jesus promised this man that he would be with Jesus in paradise. He was Jesus' last known convert before Jesus died. But that's Luke's beautiful story. Let's come back to Mark.

In Mark's gospel, the second group that mocked Jesus on the cross was the religious leaders. Listen to their mockery, because it is very significant to Jesus' whole life purpose, which they didn't realize, but were declaring. We find it in verses 31-32a:

"In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.'"

Their mockery among themselves began with three words that they spoke cynically: "He saved others." It meant, "He did a lot for others, but look what it got him!" Their motto of life could be summarized in the following words they said: "...but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Their motto of life was: "Hey, you

got to save yourself! There's no better way to live." That's what they testified. But, in actuality, no one admires those who live to save themselves. No one looks back in history and says, "That person was really wise and great because he saved himself!"

J. Bruce Ismay was chairman of the company that built the *Titanic*, the ship that sank in 1912 after hitting an iceberg in the northern Atlantic Ocean, killing over 1500 people. Despite an order that only women and children were allowed in the lifeboats—of which there were only enough for about half of those on the ship—Ismay boarded a lifeboat. He later claimed that no women and children were in the area, but eyewitnesses subsequently challenged that assertion. Ismay saved himself, but he was publicly branded a coward and was largely shunned.<sup>2</sup>

Another man on the Titanic was John Harper. His wife had died earlier before this trip. He was a London pastor on the way to Chicago to become the new pastor of Moody Church. He was with his 6 year old daughter and his sister. When the Titanic was sinking he put his daughter on a lifeboat and told her he'd see her again. Then he went to help people, sharing the gospel. One man did not believe in Jesus so John Harper gave this man his life jacket. Later, in the water, John Harper was swimming from person to person pleading with them to believe in Jesus. One of these men was the man he had given his life jacket to. That man accepted Jesus. He was also one of six men known to have survived by being rescued by a lifeboat. All others either drowned or froze to death in the icy waters. John Harper's last words were, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Four years after this event, there was a meeting of Titanic survivors in Ontario, Canada. The man he had saved testified, "I was the last convert of John Harper."<sup>3</sup>

It is indeed human nature to save ourselves. But the lives that inspire us the most are of those who live to save others. Jesus Christ lived to save others. That was the whole purpose of his life. Even his enemies could not deny this. They said, "He saved others! Ha!" But it's no joke. It is indeed the beautiful life of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. So Jesus' enemies testified to the wonderful truth of Jesus: he saved others.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/J-Bruce-Ismay>, accessed 9/25/21.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/as-titanic-sank-he-pleaded-believe-in-the-lord-jesus/>, accessed 9/26/21.

Whom did Jesus save in Mark's gospel? Let's review briefly. Jesus saved people tormented by demons. The most memorable of these was the man from the Gerasenes who lived among the tombs and called himself Legion (5:9). Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" and drove the demons out of him into a large herd of pigs. Jesus also saved the diseased: Simon Peter's mother-in-law from a fever (1:31), a man with leprosy; Jesus said to him, "I am willing. Be clean!" (1:41) There was the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof by four friends: "Son, your sins are forgiven...Get up, take your mat and go home" (2:5,11). Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand: "Stretch out your hand" (3:5). Jesus healed the woman with a bleeding problem for 12 years: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (5:34). Jesus gave life to a dead 12-year old girl with a command: "Little girl, get up!" (4:51) Jesus saved a Gentile woman's daughter from demon-possession: "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter" (7:29). Jesus enabled a deaf-mute man to hear and speak with one command: "Be opened!" (7:34) Jesus gave sight to a blind man, by putting his hands on the man's eyes, twice (8:25). Jesus drove another demon out of a young boy: "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again" (9:25). Jesus healed a blind beggar named Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?...Go, your faith has healed you" (10:51-52). Jesus also saved his disciples from drowning in a stormy sea. And he saved them from their meaningless lives, which were only in pursuit of money, like Levi the tax collector. Yes, Jesus Christ saved others! Isn't it beautiful! Isn't it inspiring! Wouldn't you like to have that on your tombstone: "He saved others"?

But they also said something which was not true and yet makes Jesus' power and love all the more amazing. They said, "but he can't save himself." Oh, they didn't know. They didn't know that Jesus could have saved himself. Jesus could've called angels any time he wanted to bring him down from the cross. Jesus could've called fire down from heaven any time he wanted to destroy his mockers. Jesus could've spoke words to the high priest or to Pontius Pilate, with his wisdom, that would've saved his life and confounded his interrogators. Jesus could've saved himself. But he chose not to. Why not? It was to save us. No wonder we call him the Savior.

Years ago I was delighted to read the definition of savior in my pocket Webster dictionary. The definition of savior read as follows: 1. One who saves others. 2. (Capitalized): Jesus Christ. Amen, Mr.Webster. You got it right! Jesus Christ is indeed our Savior and King.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for not saving yourself in order to save us from our sins. Thank you for your beautiful life of saving others. May my life be spent not to save myself but to save others by leading others to you, our true Savior and King. Amen.