

Text: Mark 15:15-23

Title: "King of the Jews!"

Introduction: You know, before the days of Dr. Spock and 'time-outs', disciplining children looked a lot different in this country. I remember when I was a kid that my Mom did not mind spanking me if I needed it, but as I got older, Mom also did not hesitate to say, "Wait until your Dad gets home!"

Now, I don't know about the rest of you, but if I had to wait until my Dad got home, that time period was miserable. The suspense ... the anticipation ... that sick feeling in your stomach ... the hard work of trying to be so nice to your Mom that hopefully she would forget to tell your Dad what you had done earlier (never worked)...

When my Dad got home, here was the routine: Mom taking Dad into their bedroom ... muffled voices with an occasional "Stan" or "Stanley" ... Mom coming out of the bedroom and Dad calling me into the bedroom with a "close the door, son" ... the usual, "You know I love you" and "this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you" ... me wishing I had the guts to say, "Great! Let's trade places!" Then he would pull off his belt. I think my Dad took classes or some sort of military training to learn how to use that thing.

But, you know what I remember? I remember that the emotional pain of knowing I had disappointed my Dad was still worse than the pain of that belt across my back. I knew that my Dad loved me and I had (and still have) the utmost respect for that short little man...

As we approach a pretty short Scripture for today, I do not want us to miss the significance of what was going on in those last few hours of Jesus' life. We have been using the Book of Mark for this worship series and Mark's stories are sometimes a little different than the other stories of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

Please keep in mind that these accounts of Jesus' life were written by different people with different perspectives and, more importantly, were writing to different audiences. So, their account of the last 24 hours of Jesus' life will look a little different.

It's like this: if you tell your best friend a story of what happened you earlier in the day, are you going to tell it differently than if you were telling your boss? Your Mom? A group of people you don't know very well? How about a group of people from another country ... like California or Texas?

You're going to tell the same story, but say it in a way that the audience will get the most understanding out of what you are saying, right?!? That's what the authors of the Gospel stories did.

Here's the Readers Digest version: Matthew was asked by Jesus to become a disciple while he was hated by most Jews because he was a tax collector. Matthew wrote to his own people (the Jews) from the perspective of a Jew who was once despised by others and now loved and accepted by the Messiah. He was writing to the Jewish audience that believed a Messiah would come according to their scriptures and attempting to convince them that Jesus was/is that Messiah.

Mark, whom we are studying, was the first to write down and record the stories of Jesus. Mark was a close friend with Paul (who wrote most of the NT) and traveled with

Paul to share Jesus as the Savior and Son of God with people who were not Jewish. Mark was a Jewish person who ended up in Rome and wrote to the Roman people (Empire) that Jesus was their Savior too ... and the One True God!

Luke, also friends with Paul, is the only Gentile (non-Jew) who authored any of the New Testament and he was writing to a friend, Theophilus and the Gentile people. He is working to convince people that Jesus is the Savior for ALL people!

John, believed to be the disciple that Jesus was closest to in friendship, wrote his stories down after the other three and he was attempting to encourage new and non-Christians that Jesus was worth following in this life and the next.

So, they each have a different perspective on Jesus' physical suffering and ridicule before He was hung on a cross. Luke does not have an account of Jesus being beaten. But, Luke tells us that Pilate had Jesus questioned by another Roman Governor, Herod Antipas, and the others don't.

John tells us that Pilate had Jesus whipped before he asked the Jews which criminal they wanted him to release, in hopes that the Jewish leaders would think that was good enough. Then Jesus would not have to be crucified. That didn't work.

Matthew and Mark have very similar record of what happened.

Regardless of which story we listen to, we know that Jesus was ridiculed and tortured because He loved us that much...

Count the Cost: Here is what Jesus went through because He loves YOU...

I. **Beware the “Scorpion” (15:15)**

- A. Flogging has been a part of humanity's punishment system throughout history. Each society has had their own special twist on how to pay someone back for what they have done. Even the Jews used flogging at times in the 1st Century.
- B. In America, flogging has been used in prisons at certain times in our history and our military used flogging during the Revolutionary War.
- C. In the Roman culture, the idea was to beat a person (man) according to their crime OR according to the message the Roman Government wanted to get across to its spectators.
 1. Often times the beatings were so brutal that it would be very hard to watch.
 2. In one form of flogging, the prisoner was stripped, tied and bent over a post. He was whipped with a short whip that had some sort of material tied into the end of the whip (glass, metal, bone, etc.) to either severely bruise the victim or tear at the flesh.
 3. The worst was called the “scorpion” which had metal ‘talons’ tied in to truly tear open the prisoners flesh and expose veins, muscles and organs.
 4. Needless to say, victims often died before they even made it to crucifixion.
 5. But, the hope was to torture the prisoner so they had just enough strength to carry their cross to the site of the crucifixion.

- D. Again, there was Scripture written hundreds of years before letting the Hebrew/Jewish people know that this was the Messiah. In Isaiah 50, it says:

⁶ *I give my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pull out my beard. I do not hide from shame, for they mock me and spit in my face.*¹

- E. This is in Scripture because it was given to Isaiah by God to speak to the people hundreds of years before it happened. Why? So there was proof that Jesus is Who He says He is when it happens.
- F. Once they flog Jesus close to death, here's what the Roman soldiers do: (15:16-19)

II. **Defending the Emperor** (15:16-19)

- A. Let's start with this: These Roman guards cannot be happy with Jesus. He is not acting like other prisoners ... he hasn't begged for mercy or cried "uncle". He has taken their beatings with a determination to get the job done. Jesus knows he has to die.
- B. Remember that the Roman Empire is the most powerful in the world and they know it. How dare anyone call himself "king" and threaten to lead a rebellion against their Empire? They would defend their Emperor, Caesar. The physical torture had not broken Jesus, so instead of breaking his body, they decide to break his will.
1. Now, Jesus has already been beaten close to death, now they decide that the whole regiment (anywhere from 300-600 Roman soldiers) needs to toy with Jesus. They will fix his wagon! They take Jesus out into the governor's courtyard...
 2. First they strip him for humiliation's sake. Then one of the soldiers grabs an old battle garment of red or purple (royalty) and puts it on Jesus as a mock coronation.
 3. Then they place a crown of thorns on his head as a king's wreath of leaves. Matthew tells us they took a reed and placed it in Jesus hand as a mock scepter ... a rod of kingly authority.
 4. Once they have him exposed and semi-dressed up, they start shouting insults at him, spitting on him, hitting him with the scepter that they'd given him. They shouted, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and laughed at Jesus.
- C. Hopefully, these cruel actions toward a beaten man, gives us a glimpse of how humanity treated God's Son that God sent for us. You know, Jesus could have destroyed them all with a word, but instead He took on the pain and the shame and humiliation ... partly so we could learn something about the human condition and about what God's Grace cost.
- D. We need to ask the questions: Why did these soldiers treat Jesus like this? Why torture? Why humiliation?

¹*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. 1997. Tyndale House: Wheaton, Ill.

1. All Jesus had done was love people that others did not love.
 2. He healed the sick. He made the blind, see.
 3. He preached about how things REALLY were according to God. He preached about joy in this life and the next.
 4. BUT, He also challenged the authority and pointed out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and culture of the day.
- E. We have had to ask questions about evil throughout these 24 hours, haven't we? What kind of men were there in that Sanhedrin who demanded Jesus be put to death? What kind of man was Pilate who sentenced Jesus to satisfy the crowd? What kind of men were these that would torture someone so severely and laugh about it?

III. **Our Evil Potential**

- A. As I think about Jesus being stripped and taunted and tortured, I cannot help but think about the videos and pictures we've seen of American soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners... And we say, "But, they deserved it!" (Roman soldiers did too!)
- B. I wonder what happens to us as humans where we behave in ways that we would not normally behave. We say that we would never act like those Roman soldiers did ... are you sure?
1. 1971 = psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducted an experiment at Stanford University. 24 middle class Stanford students ... 12 guards and 12 prisoners... put them in a basement set up like a prison to observe for 14 days ... had to end it after 6 because the guards were taking their job too seriously. They began to hurt and humiliate their fellow students. They lost sight of the fact that it was just an experiment. 30 years of follow-up research...
 2. 1963 = Stanley Milgram, Yale University invited people off the street to help with an experiment. \$4 for one hour to use gauges and dials to deliver electrical shocks when someone in another room gave a wrong answer. Theory, only 1% of the general population would be willing to give lethal level shocks to people they did not know. No one was actually shocked, but there were shouts of pain in the other room to help the deliverer believe its authenticity. You know what they found? 65% of the general U.S. population was willing to give 450 volts despite the cries of pain coming from the other room ... even after the 'victim' fell silent; they were still willing to give shocks.
- C. Lesson = ordinary people can be persuaded to do awful things...

IV. **Does This Affect Me? (15:20)**

- A. When the soldiers got tired of mocking Jesus, they led him from the courtyard at the Antonia Fortress to be crucified at Calvary (Latin) or Golgotha (Aramaic), which mean "skull".

1. This could have been because of all the skulls and bones there from the crucifixions or maybe because the hill looked like a skull.
 2. When you go to Jerusalem today, pilgrims are shown two possible sites where Calvary would be:
 - a. One is a rock ledge that looks like a skull (pictures) that has tombs, like Jesus would have been buried in, near it.
 - b. The other is more likely (early Church), and is under the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (pictures).
- B. Regardless of the site, it would have been about a third of a mile from Pilate's palace to Calvary... and Jesus would have walked it. But, we are told that Jesus had some help carrying the cross in his weakened state.
- C. Last week we talked about the "Substitutionary Theory of Atonement", which states that Jesus suffered and died in place of all who would put their faith in Him as their Savior. Jesus died in our place for our sins, so we don't have to. I agree!
- D. BUT, there are other theories about the Atonement (made ONE with God through Jesus suffering) that I think deserve some air time too. One of those is the "Moral Influence Theory of Atonement":
1. This theory says that instead of Jesus changing things so that we could be forgiven, this story is about you and I being changed!
 2. This whole story is so you and I have a better understanding of our need for redemption and forgiveness ... this story shows us God's love in a way that we realize we have to repent of our sins and start living life God's way...
- E. Last summer, my family and I were in Washington D.C. and we had a chance to go to the National Holocaust Museum. We went through and saw the pictures and the videos and heard the stories of Hitler's unbelievable inhumanity! What a testament to the evil that human beings are capable of...
1. When we left, I think we were all pretty thoughtful, disturbed, deeply moved and convicted by what we'd seen.
 2. That's the idea ... we have that museum to affect it's visitors so much that they will make sure this never happens again!
- F. In the same way, I think we are to listen to the story of Jesus' last 24 hours and be so moved by the jealousy, pettiness, self-centeredness and spiritual blindness that is not just part of these characters; but US!
- G. Hopefully, we see what Jesus went through for us, the torture, the humiliation and the crucifixion and we say, "NEVER AGAIN!" "God save us from ourselves", "God, forgive me!" and "God, I will strive to learn more about You and who You want me to be and live it out because I get how much You love ME!"

- H. I have to tell this story ... November 2004; Tammy Duckworth was copilot of a Black Hawk helicopter in Iraq. They were shot down and her legs were severed and her arm crushed... thought she was dead, but her team carried her out of that helicopter and risked their lives to save her, knowing the enemy was close by... when they got to safety, she was alive. She is now, with prosthetics, fully mobile and working for the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs in Illinois. When asked about how she felt about the great risk taken by her fellow soldiers, Major Duckworth said, "You have to get up every day and seek to live in such a way as to be worthy of that kind of effort and sacrifice."
- I. Get it? Think about what Jesus did for you ... whether you choose to accept His gift of forgiveness or not. Will it change us? Will we approach today with the thought, "I have to strive today to live in such a way to be worthy of that sacrifice"?

V. **The Legacy of Simon Cyrene (15:21-23)**

- A. Let's start with the ending verse ... they offered him wine drugged with myrrh. This was meant to deaden the pain for Jesus. It was kind of like a mercy offering by the soldiers, but Jesus refused it. Why? Because he wanted to experience all of the pain that it took to carry out His mission. He also wanted to be alert and as clear as possible to the end...
- B. Simon = a Jewish man from Cyrene in northern Africa who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He was forced to carry Jesus' cross, because Jesus just did not have the strength to do any more...
- C. Catch this ... Mark mentions his son's names, Rufus and Alexander. Do you know why? Because Mark wrote this Book 20 years after Jesus' death and Rufus and Alexander had become well known in the early Church!
- D. That moment with Simon carrying His cross ... I wonder what Jesus said to him ... changed the life of his whole family. The next generation was deeply affected by Simon meeting up with Jesus that day.

VI. **Soldier or Simon?**

- A. So let me ask you, do you want your descendant's lives to be eternally changed because you did not blow off you meeting with Jesus today?
- B. Or, will you be one of those who is so caught up in the media of our culture that says it's the right thing to do ... beat on Jesus like he's just some other guy; declare that Jesus deserves whatever he gets because our society says so ... mock Jesus, ridicule Jesus, spit on him... by your words and by your actions, spit on Jesus and His teachings because there is a whole legion of people who will do the same...
- C. If we keep blowing off Jesus' teachings and living like we want to because it feels good ... grab a whip!

Let's Pray!