

Main Idea: We see four acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32.

From last time: We saw two types of mockery at the cross...

1. There was mock worship (16-20).
 2. There was mock concern (21-24).
- I. There was mock lip-service to His Word (25-30).
- A. They mocked Jesus with written words (25-27).
 1. The sign was meant for evil.
 2. God used it for good.
 - B. They mocked Jesus with spoken words (29-30).
 1. They sounded like they knew His Word.
 2. Their actions revealed they didn’t.
- II. There was a mock profession of faith (31-32).
- A. They misunderstood spirituality.
 - B. They misunderstood Christ’s identity.
 - C. They misunderstood salvation.
 - D. They misunderstood the cross.
 - E. They misunderstood faith.
 1. They wanted to see and then believe.
 2. They needed to believe and then see.

The Bottom Line: The cross is pride-shattering.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Nothing is more important to the Christian than the person of Jesus Christ. And nothing is more important regarding Christ than what He endured when He went to the cross. The cross is at the heart of all we are.

That’s why we’re in this series, “Preparing for Passion Week: Seeing the Cross from Mark’s Perspective.” We need to see the cross clearly, again and again.

What would you think if the following happened? Suppose they were executing a prisoner at the Lucasville state prison. The governor announced a 9:00 a.m. execution time for Friday morning. When the guards led the prisoner to the execution room, an unexpected group of visitors gathered, the local ministers group. The pastors of the area churches soon made it clear they weren’t there merely to watch either, as they started jeering the prisoner, mocking him with sarcastic accusations.

Wouldn’t that seem a little odd if men who are regarded as shepherds that care for needy people acted like wolves tearing up their prey? The situation I’ve just described is hypothetical. The one we’re about to consider isn’t.

What happened at the cross is unthinkable, in so many ways. Here’s the one that stands out to me from Mark’s text, as I shared last week, the *mockery at the cross*.

J. D. Jones sums it up, “That men should be able to make a jest and joke of the suffering of anyone would have been bad enough. But that they should turn the dying Christ into an object of mockery argues a wickedness almost beyond speech. For this Christ Whom they mocked was One Who had never done an evil deed...He was absolutely good, utterly loving, entirely holy. And they mocked at Him.”²

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous development of this passage, see the series in Mark’s Gospel preached in 2007.

² J. D. Jones, p. 631.

We see at least four acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32.

From last week: We saw two types of mockery at the cross...

1. *We saw mock worship (16-20).* The Roman soldiers put a purple robe on Jesus, jammed a crown made of thorns on His head, bowed before Him and called out, “Hail, king of the Jews!” The One who indeed rules heaven and earth certainly deserves our worship, but all He received from the soldiers was *mock worship*.

2. *We saw mock concern (21-24).* On the Via Dolorosa Jesus fell under the weight of the cross, and the soldiers coerced a traveler named Simon to carry the cross. Later they offered Jesus a sedative wine mixture which Jesus refused. Upon first glance at these gestures we might conclude that the soldiers felt a twinge of compassion for Jesus, but in reality they didn’t want Jesus to die too soon. They wanted to make sure He made it to the cross—hence their recruitment of Simon—and suffered as long as possible on the cross—the purpose of the sedative. What at first seemed to be concern was merely *mock concern*.

How could they do such a thing? I proposed last time that the mockery at the cross proves the following premise.

Premise: People say what they say and do what they do because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts.

That’s not just true of these Roman soldiers, either. It’s true of us. Why do husbands and wives fight and say cutting things to each other? Because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts—they’re thinking about *self* and wanting to please *self*.

On the other hand, why are our North Korean brothers gathering for worship today even though they might be arrested and sent to prison for it? The same reason—because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts, in this case they’re thinking about Jesus and wanting to please Him.

As we return to the scene of the cross this morning, we’re going to see two more evidences of the premise, *two more examples of mockery at the cross*. My aim is that as a result of this message we might *appreciate more fully what Jesus endured* and consequently *appreciate Jesus more fully*.

I. We see mock lip-service to His Word (25-30).

Verse 25—“It was the third hour when they crucified him.” The writer of this account, Mark, doesn’t explain to his readers (he’s writing this biography of Jesus for a Roman audience) what ‘crucified’ means. He didn’t have to. They knew all too well what happened when the Romans *crucified* someone. Mark focuses instead on the events surrounding the crucifixion scene, the *mockery* of it all. The mock lip-service came in two forms, the first *non-verbal* and the second *verbal*. Note the first...

A. They mocked Jesus with written words (25-27). “The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.” It was common to write the crime of a victim on a board and nail it to his cross so all passers-by would know why the person was being killed. Pilate actually wrote the inscription (John 19:19), putting it in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. John’s account indicates the chief priests objected, insisting (John 19:21), “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” Pilate blew off their request with, “What I have written I have written (John 19:22).”

It is worth noting that each of the Gospel writers record only a portion of the contents of the sign. The full inscription is reconstructed by combining the four accounts: “The is Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.”³

As you scan this chapter you’ll see this title again and again...

Verse 2—“‘Are you **king** of the Jews?’ asked Pilate.”

Verse 9—“‘Do you want me to release to you the **king** of the Jews?’ asked Pilate.”

Verse 12—“‘What shall I do, then, with the one you call the **king** of the Jews?’ Pilate asked them.”

Verse 18—“And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, **king** of the Jews!’”

Verse 32—“Let this Christ, this **King** of Israel, come down now from the cross...”

Do you hear the mockery in those words? Did Pilate believe Jesus was the king? Did the soldier who nailed the sign in place believe it? No, it was a big joke for them.

And yet God used it. To borrow a phrase from the Joseph story in Genesis 50...

1. *The sign was meant for evil.* But...

2. *God used it for good.* The fact is, though the intent was mockery, the sign actually proclaimed for the world to see the identity of Jesus. He *is* king!

This is often how God works. He lets the world know His Son is king from a cross! He invites any and all to come to Him for eternal life, but insists they too must take up a cross. And as with His Son, He allows the world to attack His people yet by their gentle, Christ-like response, He turns mockery into praise.

I see another non-verbal attempt at mockery in verse 27. “They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.” The Greek term translated ‘robbers,’ *lestas*, here carries the sense of ‘insurrectionist.’ We might use the word ‘terrorist.’ It’s quite possible that these two men were involved in the same uprising for which Barabbas was arrested (7).⁴

The very placement of Jesus adds to the mockery. The soldiers put Jesus’ cross right between the crosses of the two insurrectionists, as if to say, “Here’s the ringleader!”

Again, although the intent was evil, God used it for good. The arrangement of the crosses sent a clear message to the world. Jesus *is* a friend of sinners. Throughout His life, Jesus companied with sinners, and in the end, He chose to die with sinners, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, “He was numbered with transgressors (Isa. 53:12).”⁵

At that point, the mock lip-service took a different form...

B. They mocked Jesus with spoken words (29-30). Verse 29—“Those who passed by hurled insults⁶ at him, shaking their heads and saying.” Stop there for a moment and ponder two questions. The first is *who*—who would be passing by an execution scene? The answer is, *a lot of people*. The Romans crucified criminals in public places so people would see and beware.

The second question is *why*—why are they hurling insults at Jesus, why are they saying *anything*?! The Greek word for ‘hurled insults’ is *blasphemeo*, meaning “to blaspheme, insult, slander, or curse.” In its basic sense it means “to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things.” It can also mean “to speak against someone so as to injure

³ Thomas & Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 243.

⁴ Luke’s account indicates the criminals knew Jesus wasn’t guilty (Luke 23:41).

⁵ Verse 28 doesn’t appear in the oldest New Testament manuscripts. The content appears, however, in Luke 22:37, and apparently a later copyist inserted the verse from Luke’s account into Mark’s.

⁶ The imperfect tense indicates they *were hurling insults* over and over.

their reputation; to defame.” Again, I ask *why*? It’s bad enough that no one did anything to prevent this murder of an innocent man, but to scorn Him with venomous words while He’s dying... It’s unthinkable the depths to which depraved sinners will stoop.

Now listen to what they said in verses 29b-30—“So! [Greek *Oua*, an exclamation of mockery and ridicule, like *Aha!*] You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!”

Where’d that accusation come from? They’re referring to something Jesus said a couple of years earlier when, after clearing the money-changers out of the temple, He said in John 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Jesus was talking about His body, not the literal temple (as John 2:21 clarifies), but the people misunderstood Him.

Look again at this mockery. Taken at face value...

1. *They sounded like they knew His Word.* They’re quoting Jesus’ own words. But it’s merely lip-service. Their aim in quoting Him is to discredit Him. They may sound like they know His word, but...

2. *Their actions revealed they didn’t.* If they had really paid attention to what He had said, they would love Him rather than malign Him, believe in Him rather than belittle Him.

My friends, hearing the word of Jesus isn’t enough. Being able to quote Jesus isn’t enough. Even the crowd at the cross could do that, but it was a mockery. Let us beware of the danger of mere lip-service to the words of Jesus.

Which brings us to a final act of mockery, perhaps the most devious...

II. We see a mock profession of faith (31-32).

Verse 31 begins, “In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves.” The words “in the same way” connect the mockery of the people in scene one with the mockery of the priests and teachers in scene two. What the religious leaders say is similar, but they take it a step further.

Listen to them (31-32): “‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.’”

Now the mocking turns to a sickening sort of pious taunting. They act like they are willing to believe in Jesus if only He will give them more evidence, namely if He will break free from the nails and come down. “Do that!” they say, “and we’ll believe!” They may sound noble, but they don’t mean it. It’s a mock profession.

A man came to my office once, knocked on the door, and said almost as soon as he entered, “I want to be saved!” I attempted to share the Scriptures with him to make sure he understood the seriousness of his request, but he seemed in a hurry and almost too quickly answered, “Yes, yes, I understand! I’m ready to be saved!” And so he prayed the ‘sinner’s prayer,’ said his ‘Amen,’ and proceeded to tell me, “I’ve got to go now. I have to get to the court for my divorce hearing.”

And then I understood. Remember our premise? People say what they say and do what they do because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts. What I witnessed that day was a *mock profession* from a man who was trying to use Jesus to impress a judge in a divorce lawsuit.

How do you explain the mock profession made by the chief priests and teachers of the law? The same as with my visitor. They did what they did because of what they were *thinking* and *wanting* in their hearts. Their mock profession was due to five significant misunderstandings.

A. They misunderstood spirituality. I would remind you that the chief priests and teachers of the law were the most ‘spiritual’ people in Jesus’ day—and they would have told you so. They read their Bibles, attended worship regularly, gave money to the poor, fasted and prayed on a weekly basis. The problem wasn’t that they did these things—God commanded these activities. The problem was that, to put it simply...

1. *They thought they were good because they did good things.* They viewed spirituality as an accomplishment, a checklist. Again, their checklist was made up of good things—a person’s spirituality who *doesn’t* read the Bible, attend worship regularly, give to the poor, and so on, is also suspect but for a different reason. But here’s the danger of a checklist. A person can do these good things and still be lost. That’s the point. The Jewish leaders thought they were good because of the merit of their good deeds.

Then Jesus came along, and what happened?

2. *They were exposed by One who truly is good.* Jesus broke the curve. Jesus didn’t just *do good things*. He was inherently good, *perfect* in fact. And that is precisely why the religious crowd hated Jesus. They looked so good, so spiritual, until He walked into their midst and the spotlight of His life revealed the painful truth. They were *not* spiritual. They were spiritually *dead*.

That’s why they’re mocking Jesus so vehemently. They had no choice. When you’re exposed by the presence of light, you must either acknowledge your sin stains or try to get rid of the light.

My friend, spirituality is not something you earn, it’s something you must receive. It’s not by your merit, it’s a gift of God’s mercy.

The wise Puritan pastor, John Owen, said it well, “The person who understands the evil in his own heart is the only person who is useful, fruitful, and solid in his beliefs and obedience. Others only delude themselves and thus upset families, churches, and all other relationships. In their self-pride and judgment of others, they show great inconsistency.”⁷

B. They misunderstood Christ’s identity. “Let this Christ [that’s from *Christos*, the Greek word for ‘Messiah’], this King of Israel, come down now from the cross.” They concluded that Jesus was a fraud, but that’s because of two erroneous expectations.

1. *They were expecting a different kind of Messiah.* And...

2. *They were expecting a different kind of king.* They wanted a Messiah-king who would get rid of the “bad guys,” the Romans, and make the world a better place for them, “the good guys,” to live. But their faulty expectations were linked to their faulty views of spirituality. If you see yourself as basically a good person, then you will be looking for a Messiah who will come to reward you. Not until you see yourself as a sinner will you welcome a Messiah who has come to rescue you.

Which brings us to a third misunderstanding...

C. They misunderstood salvation. Notice their use of the word ‘save’ in verse 31, “He *saved* others, but He can’t *save* Himself!” What did they mean by the term ‘save’?

⁷ John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*.

He *saved* others—they're not talking about salvation from sin; they're talking about the miracles Jesus did to save people from the consequences of living in a sin-cursed world. For instance, He saved a blind man from his blindness and a sick woman from her sickness, and so on. Where did blindness come from, and sickness, and death? They entered God's perfect world when Adam sinned.

Save yourself—in other words, do another miracle, this one for yourself. Get rid of painful circumstances, get off the cross.

What does this request reveal about the religious leaders?

1. *They were willing to be saved from sin's consequences.* They wanted a Messiah that would get rid of sickness, disease, and death. That's what they *wanted*.

2. *They needed to be saved from their sin.* That's what they desperately needed, but they wouldn't admit it. That's what *we* need, too.

You see, when Jesus did miracles He was showing His power to reverse the curse, to remove the consequences of sin (like sickness and death). But we need more than the removal of sin's consequences. Sinners need the removal of their *sin*. And that's why Jesus went to the cross, to deal with *sin itself*.

You say, "Prove that statement." Okay. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

There's a great scene in the movie, *Amazing Grace*, the story of how God used William Wilberforce to abolish slavery in Great Britain. The scene involves a conversation between Wilberforce and his friend and pastor, John Newton. Newton, who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace" in 1773, was once a slave trader that God brought to his knees, saved by grace, and called into service to be a pastor. Wilberforce came to see Newton to get first-hand information about the slave trade. At first, Newton was reluctant to talk about those horrid memories from his past, saying a day never passes but that he is haunted by the souls of 20,000 Africans he sold into slavery. Yet later Newton realizes God can use his past for good in abolishing slavery. And so, as an old man Pastor Newton says to Wilberforce, "Although my memory is fading I remember two things very clearly: I am a *great sinner*, and Christ is a *great Savior*."

My Christian friend, that's our testimony too. I am a great sinner. And Christ is my great Savior.

And my non-Christian friend, this could be your testimony. Will you admit today that you are a great sinner, specifically, that you need to be saved not merely from life's difficulties nor from a future in hell (those are sin's consequences), but *from your sin*? And will you then ask Christ today to become your Savior?

D. They misunderstood the cross. "Come down from the cross!" they said. They thought Jesus was on the cross because He was weak. And so they goaded Him to come down.

Please realize that this was a real temptation for Jesus. It's the temptation Satan dangled before Him again and again throughout His life, *to bypass the cross*. Three years earlier the devil tried to lure Him into a cross-less ministry when he offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, but Jesus resisted (Mark 1:14). Just hours before the cross Jesus faced the temptation again, this time in Gethsemane, but He prayed, "Not what I will, but what you will (Mark 14:36)." And now, while hanging on the cross Jesus hears the temptation again, "Come down from the cross!"

But that He would not do. It's not that He didn't feel the agony of the cross. He felt it more than anyone else would feel it for He was perfect and had never experienced the stain of sin, yet on that cross He became a sin-bearer. No, He did not bear His own sins, for He had none. He took upon Himself *our* sins, children of God!

Jesus chose NOT to save Himself. He could have, mind you. He could have called 10,000 angels. But He chose to stay on the cross.

J. D. Jones is right, "Not all the nails and ropes in Jerusalem could have held Christ there had He wished to come down. What were nails and ropes to One Who could still the tempest with a word, Who had legions of angels at His command? No, it was not the nails and ropes that held Him there—but His own mighty and sacrificial love. No one took His life from Him, He laid it down of Himself. And He laid it down because that was the only way of gaining redemption for the world."⁸

"Come down from the cross," the mockers said.

1. *They thought the cross proved Jesus was wrong. But...*
2. *In reality, the cross proved they were wrong.*

I'll speak frankly. We, just like these mockers, tend to minimize sin. We may think the sin in our lives is not that big of a deal, but I remind you that Jesus faced the atrocity of the cross because of it. The cross reveals how much God hates our sin.

How can we tolerate even 'little sins' in our lives? The cross should convict us when we think that it was because of our sin that the Savior died. Do you have any known, sin in your life, any sinful thought, or attitude, or habit? I invite you to come to the cross, see its severity, and leave it there.

It is believed that John Newton introduced his song, "Amazing Grace," to the church he pastored on January 1, 1773. He also preached a sermon that morning. I read it online—it's in his own handwriting.⁹ Here is what he said towards the beginning of that sermon:

"Who am I...? This question should be always upon our minds. Who am I? What was I when the Lord began to manifest his purposes of love? This was often inculcated upon Israel, Thou shalt remember - Look unto the pit from which we were taken. Lord, what is man! At that time we were: [and then Newton identified the following characteristics]...

...**miserable**: Shut up under the law and unbelief. What must have been the event had the Lord left us there? After a few years spent in vanity, we must have sunk to rise no more.

...**rebellious**: Blinded by the god of this world. We had not so much a desire of deliverance. Instead of desiring the Lord's help, we breathed a spirit of defiance against him. His mercy came to us not only undeserved but undesired. Yea [a] few [of] us but resisted his calls, and when he knocked at the door of our hearts endeavoured to shut him out till he overcame us by the power of his grace."

This was our condition, says Newton, miserable and rebellious... "till He overcame us by the power of His grace."

Then Newton shared, "It was the Lord against whom we sinned and who showed us mercy. He needed not. What just cause of admiration, that he should appoint such salvation, in such a way, in favour of such helpless, worthless creatures."

⁸ J. D. Jones, p. 634.

⁹ www.johnnewton.org, *The John Newton Project*, "Amazing Grace: The Sermon Notes"

After Newton preached that message he went to his home, and within a few hours of delivering that sermon wrote this in his diary: “I preached this Forenoon from 1 Chron. 17.16,17. Hope I was enabled to speak with some liberty, but found my own heart sadly unaffected.”

The religious leaders misunderstood spirituality, Christ’s identity, salvation, and the cross. Finally...

E. They misunderstood faith. “Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Remember, people say what they say because of what they are *thinking* and *wanting*. Based on those words, what’s their concept of faith? Simply put...

1. *They wanted to see and then believe.* Come down, and *then* we’ll believe. Do another miracle, and *then* we’ll believe in you. That happens today too, doesn’t it?

“Lord, fix my life up, and *then* I’ll believe.” “Give me a sign, and *then* I’ll believe in you Jesus.” “Let me feel your presence, and *then* I’ll believe in you.”

But that’s turned around. That’s not biblical faith. This is.

2. *They needed to believe and then see.*

Hebrews 11:6 puts it this way, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Note the order. First *believe* and then *God rewards*.

Where does faith come from? It, too, is a gift from God, as Ephesians 2:8 states, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Verse 32 ends, “Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.” As if mock worship, mock concern, mock lip-service to Jesus’ word, and a mock profession of faith weren’t enough. Here’s more mockery at the cross, now from the men on the other two crosses.

In case you’re wondering, “Didn’t one of these criminals have a change of heart while on his cross?” the answer is *yes*. Mark simply indicates they insulted the Lord, but Luke’s account tells us that something amazing happened to one of the men:

Luke 23:39-43 “One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’”

Do you see the contrast between the religious leaders and this second criminal? The religious leaders misunderstood spirituality, Christ’s identity, salvation, the cross, and the nature of faith, and so they mocked Jesus. The second thief mocked Him too, at first, but then by God’s grace he humbled himself, repented, and believed in Jesus.

We need to look at the cross regularly, dear friends. And here’s the effect...

The Bottom Line: The cross is pride-shattering.

As we finish I want to quote another John Newton hymn. *Amazing Grace*, of course, isn’t the only hymn Newton wrote. Listen to this one about the pride crushing power of the cross.

*In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,*

*Till a new object struck my sight,
 And stopp'd my wild career:
 I saw One hanging on a Tree
 In agonies and blood,
 Who fix'd His languid eyes on me.
 As near His Cross I stood.
 Sure never till my latest breath,
 Can I forget that look:
 It seem'd to charge me with His death,
 Though not a word He spoke:
 My conscience felt and own'd the guilt,
 And plunged me in despair:
 I saw my sins His Blood had spilt,
 And help'd to nail Him there.
 Alas! I knew not what I did!
 But now my tears are vain:
 Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
 For I the Lord have slain!
 A second look He gave, which said,
 "I freely all forgive;
 This blood is for thy ransom paid;
 I die that thou may'st live."
 Thus, while His death my sin displays
 In all its blackest hue,
 Such is the mystery of grace,
 It seals my pardon too.
 With pleasing grief, and mournful joy,
 My spirit now is fill'd,
 That I should such a life destroy,
 Yet live by Him I kill'd!*

Is there pride in your heart today? Perhaps pride is keeping you from admitting your need to be saved. Then humble yourself and accept the Lord Jesus as your Savior today. Perhaps pride is marring your testimony for Christ. Then humble yourself, return to the cross, be reconciled to God, and resolve to make much of Christ, not of self, from this point forward.

The issue isn't what others did with Jesus. The issue is what we are doing with Him.