

Series: “*Preparing for Passion Week: Seeing the Cross from Mark’s Perspective*”

Main Idea: The scene of the cross is full of people who do and say things they really don’t mean. There is mockery at the cross. Sadly, the mockery continues today. We see four acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32. Think about it: People say what they say and do what they do because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts.

- I. We see mock worship (16-20).
 - A. The soldiers pretended to give reverence to Jesus.
 - B. The soldiers revealed the reality of depravity.
 1. Our problem isn’t merely that we do sinful things.
 2. Our problem is that we have a heart that wants to sin.
- II. We see mock concern (21-24).
 - A. The soldiers recruited Simon to carry Jesus’ cross (21-22).
 1. This wasn’t an act of kindness.
 2. This was to make sure Jesus was crucified.
 - B. The soldiers offered Jesus a pain killer (23).
 1. Their aim isn’t compassion.
 2. Their aim is to make Jesus suffer longer.
 - C. The soldiers crucified Jesus (24).

Make It Personal: We are all guilty of mocking Jesus.

1. We do it when we tell Him things we really don’t mean.
2. We do it when we profess to love Him but neglect His Body.

Last week I had the great joy to minister God’s Word as your representative in Romania. Thank you for praying! I want to share two special ways in which God answered our prayers (show pictures).

-God used the teaching of His Word to edify approximately 20 of His people in the area of marriage. I spoke Friday evening and all day Saturday. Towards the end one young lady told me, “I have a bachelor’s degree in psychology and I’m in my final year of a master’s degree in psychology, but this biblical counseling training has been so helpful. All psychology has done for me is describe problems. Biblical counseling gives me solutions. I want to help abused women, and this training prepares me to do that.”

-God manifested His presence at Betel Baptist Church in Timisoara. During the opening singing time in the evening service, I asked the Lord to do something that He alone could do so He would receive glory. Moments later a little girl named Karla about 9 or 10 years old went to the platform and quoted a passage of Scripture from memory. It was quite impressive. I asked my translator what passage she quoted, and he said, “Psalm 13.” I was dumbfounded. That was the text I had chosen to preach later in the service. “Did she know that?” I asked my translator. “No, how could she know?” he replied. I told him she had just quoted the text I had chosen to preach, and he too was amazed. When I later began my sermon, I told the congregation what had happened, and they too were effected. And I said, “The Lord is in this place and I believe He is going to do something special for His glory tonight.” And then I preached, “How to Pray When the Pain Doesn’t Go Away,” an exposition of Psalm 13. And God did manifest His presence in a powerful way. Many tears were shed, and many later expressed how God used His Word to encourage their hearts.

**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.

Two weeks from today Passion week begins. Three weeks from today is Easter, Resurrection Sunday. Jesus suffered and died. Then Jesus conquered the grave.

I want to begin a series today that I'm praying God will use to manifest His presence in life-changing ways, to help us enter into the fellowship of His Son's suffering and resurrection. And we're going to invite the gospel writer Mark to help us.

As you turn to Mark 15, let me tell you about an interesting creature that visits our neighborhood every so often. Whenever he comes you know he's there. You just don't know who *he* is. That's because he is an imitator and he's good at it. I've heard him before and wondered, "What in the world made *that* sound?" And then I saw him, perched on the power line across the street.

There's a reason this state bird of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas is called the *mocking* bird, and that's because he can make over forty different sounds—he can imitate other birds, squeaky gates, pianos, sirens, and even barking dogs!²

A few years ago, something struck me as I pondered the scene of Jesus' cross in Mark 15, something I'd never noticed before even though I've read the biblical account dozens and dozens of times. There is *mockery at the cross*. By that I mean that the scene of the cross is full of people *who do and say things they really don't mean*.

To Jesus, that is. They mock Jesus. It happens not just once in the text, but again and again. I counted at least four different acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32.

Sadly, the mockery continues to the present day. Yes, this very morning in churches across our land and perhaps in this very worship service, people *do and say things they really don't mean*. To Jesus, that is. The mockery continues.

"*How great Thou art!*" the mocker sings in perfect pitch. But he knows it isn't true. God isn't great in his life. It's just a song.

"*Hallowed be Thy name!*" the mocker prays. But that's not what he really means. He isn't passionate about God's holiness, what matters is his own happiness.

Can you relate? I can. I cringe when I think of how many times the words I've spoken about Jesus didn't match the reality of my life.

How can it be that, after all Jesus has done for us, we would mock Him? And yet in reality, *the problem is deeper than we think*. Mocking isn't a tongue problem, not fundamentally. You could cut the tongue out of a mocker's mouth and he would still be a mocker.

Here's why. I'll give you the premise at the outset and then show you the reality of this premise with four examples from Mark 15, two this week and two next week.

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

So when you hear mocking come out of a person's mouth, it's revealing something. It's caused by what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts. We'll see this illustrated in two types of mockery this morning.

² I found this poetic description of the mocking bird: "With expanded wings and tail glistening with white, and the bouyant gayety of his action arresting the eye, as his song does most irresistably the ear, he sweeps around with enthusiastic ecstasy, and mounts and descends as his song swells or dies away. And *he often deceives the sportsman*, and sends him in search of birds that are not perhaps within miles of him, but whose notes *he exactly imitates*..". From www.birdnature.com

I. We see mock worship (16-20).

In the previous text, Pilate, in order to please the crowd, pronounced Jesus guilty, ordered Him flogged, and then condemned Him to die by crucifixion.

Then verse 16 says, “The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers.” Hear the irony in those words, “the soldiers *led Jesus away*.” The One who holds the stars in space, the one who keeps the atom in place, now allows human hands to *lead Him away* to His execution. They took Him to Roman headquarters in Jerusalem. Marks indicates a ‘whole company’ of Roman soldiers was assembled.³ Ordinarily a company consisted of 600 Roman soldiers. In this case, it may have been an auxiliary battalion of 200-300 soldiers, probably men ordinarily stationed in Caesarea but who came to Jerusalem with Pilate for Passover.

Why were so *many* soldiers called out? Was Jesus a dangerous criminal that might escape? No, they’d already flogged Him half to death. Were the Romans afraid Jesus’ followers might try to rescue Him? No, they’d all fled. Why then? The text tells us.

Listen carefully to the purpose stated in verses 17-20, “They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And *when they had mocked him*, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.”

There’s why the soldiers assembled, *to mock Him*. The Greek word for ‘mock’ is *empaizo* which comes from the root word *paizo* meaning “to play.” *Paizo* contains the root *pais* which is the Greek word for child. Children love to imitate, to play by pretending to be what they are not. When soldiers do it, it’s no laughing matter.

With the prefix *em* the term means “to ridicule, make fun of, make a fool of through deceit.” One lexicon offers this definition: “to make fun of someone by pretending that he is not what he is or by imitating him in a distorted manner.”⁴

That’s what the soldiers did.

A. The soldiers pretended to give reverence to Jesus. It’s worth noting that Jesus actually predicted this mockery months earlier when He told His disciples in Mark 10:34, “...[the Gentiles] will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.”

Mark specifies four mocking gestures used by the Roman company...

1. *They put a robe on Him.* Matthew’s account calls it ‘scarlet,’ using the Greek word *kokkinos*. The Greek word Mark used, *porphura*, refers to shades varying from rose to purple. One commentator suggests the robe was a cast off Roman officer’s cloak, “a faded rag but with enough color left in it to suggest the royal purple.”⁵

Where did they get this robe? Luke’s account seems to suggest it came from Herod. Luke 23:11 states, “Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.”

2. *They put a crown on Him.* They actually twisted together thorn branches—a deed that took effort and a wicked imagination—and jammed it on Jesus’ head,

³ The word refers to a Roman battalion.

⁴ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (LN 33.406). New York: United Bible societies.

⁵ J. D. Jones, p. 618.

undoubtedly puncturing His scalp and causing blood to flow down His face. Someone has said, “With this 'crown' the soldiers unwittingly pictured God's curse on sinful humanity being thrust on Jesus.”⁶

3. *They called Him king.* “They”, the text indicates, not one person but the whole company. “They began to call out to Him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ (18)” Those are good words, true words, appropriate words, for Jesus is king. But words dropping from lips that do not originate in the heart are mocking words. These soldiers don’t mean what they are saying.

At that point, verse 19 says they hit Him with a staff and spit on Him. The tense of the verbs indicates continuous action. They *kept hitting Him* and *kept spitting in His face.*⁷

During the previous night at the Jewish trial, Mark 14:65 records, “Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists.” That’s what the Jews did to Jesus—spit at Him and struck Him. But the hitting and spitting in Mark 15 is being done by *Roman* soldiers. The Jews abused Jesus out of self-righteous anger. The Romans abused Him just because they could.⁸

4. *They bowed before Him.* They actually got down on their knees and acted like they were worshipping Him. Even as I say those words I think of how many times I’ve acted like I was worshipping Jesus but really wasn’t.

Verse 20—“And *when they had mocked him*, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.” No doubt the robe had stuck to His bleeding back. When they removed it, there was more pain—you know how it feels when you rip a bandage off a tender wound—but this is so much worse. Oh, how He suffered!

I ask you, “Why did the Roman soldiers do this to Jesus?” You say, “They were just following orders.” No, they weren’t. Their orders were to *crucify Jesus*, not to put a robe on Him, a thorn crown, call Him king, and bow down before Him. How do you explain why the Romans did these four mocking gestures?

They didn’t even know Jesus! He had never hurt them, and they had no reason to hurt Him. To crucify Him was their job, but to *shame* Him with such mockery? Explain that! These are *Roman* soldiers—highly disciplined men, loyal to Caesar, willing to die for the empire they love. No doubt, some of them are *family* men—they kiss their kids goodnight when they are home.

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 do the soldiers’ actions reveal?

B. The soldiers revealed the reality of depravity. Depravity doesn’t mean we are as bad as we could be (which explains why depraved people can do ‘good things,’ like loving their children and dying for their country). Depravity means we are *as bad off as we could be*. We enter the world cut off from God, sinners by a nature we inherited from the first sinners, Adam and Eve. And as we grow up we choose to sin, to break God’s law. We are powerless to do otherwise.

⁶ Observation by *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

⁷ J. Vernon McGee, p. 188.

⁸ I read one suggestion that the soldiers played a Roman game called “hot hand.” Each soldier stuck a fist in Jesus’ face, then blindfolded Him, and all but one of the fists struck Him. Then they would take off the blindfold and make Him guess which fist did not hit Him. Then they did it again. And again.

You say, “I don’t believe in depravity. I believe that people are basically good. Like you said, these soldiers were good citizens who loved their families. Explain how they could do those good things if they were depraved.”

Here’s the explanation. *Common grace*. God is so kind that He grants a measure of common grace to depraved sinners, without which there would be no family love or any other good deed. But every once in awhile God, in essence, holds back His common grace and allows the true colors of depraved men to come out.

Let me put it this way...

1. *Our problem isn’t merely that we do sinful things.* It goes deeper.
2. *Our problem is that we have a heart that wants to sin.* According to Jesus, *men love darkness* (John 3:19). That’s not just the Roman soldiers’ problem. By nature, WE too love darkness. We love to sin.

Someone says, “Not me.” Really? Just ask them what they would do for fifty million dollars if it was guaranteed that there would be no unpleasant consequences to their actions. Would they be willing to lie, or commit adultery, or kill somebody?

Let’s be honest. Can you relate to Paul in Romans 7? I can. “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (18-19).”

I’m convinced of this...

Application: We need a continual reminder of the doctrine of sin.

Ponder this observation by J. I. Packer: “The subject of sin is vital knowledge. To say that our first need in life is to learn about sin may sound strange, but in the sense intended it is profoundly true. If you have not learned about sin, you cannot understand yourself, or your fellow-men, or the world you live in, or the Christian faith. And you will not be able to make head or tail of the Bible. For the Bible is an exposition of God’s answer to the problem of human sin, and unless you have that problem clearly before you, you will keep missing the point of what it says. Apart from the first two chapters of Genesis, which set the stage, the real subject of every chapter of the Bible is what God does about our sins. Lose sight of this theme, and you will lose your way in the Bible at once. With that, the love of God, the meaning of salvation, and the message of the gospel, will all become closed books to you; you may still talk of these things, but you will no longer know what you are talking about. It is clear, therefore, that we need to fix in our minds what our ancestors would have called ‘clear views of sin.’”⁹

Perhaps an illustration will explain why. If I offered you a bottle of medicine and said, “This is really good! You need this! It costs \$250 but it’s well worth it!” How would you respond? You probably would say, “Thanks, but no thanks.” You wouldn’t want the medicine because you don’t see your *need* for it.

Now suppose I was a doctor and examined you, and showed you the test results. I let you see for yourself the undeniable fact that you have a deadly disease, one that will take your life soon if action isn’t taken immediately. At that point I offered you a bottle of medicine, the same bottle from the first scenario, and said, “I have good news. This medicine is proven to cure the disease you have. It’s costly, \$250 to be precise. Are you interested?”

⁹ J. I. Packer, *God’s Words*, p. 71.

Would your attitude be different this time? Without a doubt! What made the difference? The good news of the medicine didn't become good news in your mind until you were gripped by the bad news of your condition.

This is why we need to give attention to the *doctrine of sin*. If we don't understand what sin is, two consequences follow.

1. *If we don't understand sin, the gospel loses its luster.* We will hear, "Christ died for sinners," and respond, "Well why wouldn't He? God loves me. I'm a good person."

But no. Not in God's eyes. I am a creature that has violated His holy standard and I did so because my heart was consumed with pleasing *ME*. I was a rebel that deserved God's condemnation and wrath. Until He rescued me.

That's what makes the gospel such good news. Instead of unleashing His just fury against *me*, God sent His Son to die for me, in my place.

2. *If we don't understand sin, we misrepresent the cross.* Ponder this insight by John Stott: "It must even be said that our evangelical emphasis on the atonement is dangerous if we come to it too quickly. We learn to appreciate the access to God which Christ has won for us only after we have first seen God's inaccessibility to sinners. We can cry 'Hallelujah' with authenticity only after we have first cried, 'Woe is me, for I am lost.'"¹⁰

Have you ever cried, *Woe is me! I am lost!?* If not, you didn't receive Jesus as your Savior. Perhaps your inspiration, or example. But not your Savior. To be saved you must admit you are a helpless and hopeless lost sinner.

So the question isn't, "How could those Roman soldiers do such wicked things to Jesus?" I know how they could because I was born with the same self-consumed heart problem. This is *me* in the story, striking Jesus on the face, spitting, mocking. This is me...and you.

Sadly the mockery continues. First it's *mock worship*. Next...

II. We see mock concern (21-24).

Verses 21-22—"A certain man from Cyrene [north Africa], Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus [possibly the same Rufus mentioned in Rom. 16:13], was passing by on his way in from the country [many Jews traveled to Jerusalem to observe Passover], and they forced him to carry the cross [he certainly didn't volunteer; Warren Wiersbe offers an interesting insight, "Simon had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and he ended up meeting the Passover Lamb!"¹¹]. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull)."

John's account doesn't mention Simon, but simply says that Jesus went out, "bearing his own cross (John 19:17)." Is that a contradiction? No. Jesus did bear His own cross, initially that is, but because of His weakened condition due to lack of sleep and the loss of blood from the scourging, He apparently fell under the load. At that point...

A. The soldiers recruited Simon to carry Jesus' cross (21-22). The text says they 'forced' Simon to carry the cross.¹² Please realize...

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 109.

¹¹ Wiersbe, p. 164.

¹² By the way, are you like Simon? Are you giving attention to the cross this morning because you want to, or because someone made you?

1. *This wasn't an act of kindness.* It's not pity that motivated the soldiers. They haven't grown soft.

2. *This was to make sure Jesus was crucified.* They didn't want Jesus' weakened condition to prevent them from accomplishing their mission. In other words, they didn't want Him to die on the way to Golgotha. They wanted to make sure this "king" got what He deserved.

What we're seeing is more mockery, this time *mock concern*. We see more mock concern in the next verse where...

B. The soldiers offered Jesus a pain killer (23). "Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh..." Once again...

1. *Their aim isn't compassion.*

2. *Their aim is to make Jesus suffer longer.* The Romans made a science out of crucifixion. With just the right amount of pain killer, they could keep victims hanging on their crosses for three, four, even five days or longer.

You may recall that at Jesus' birth wise men brought Him myrrh. Now at His death, He's offered myrrh again.

"But he did not take it," Mark records (23b). This time He refuses the 'gift.' Matthew gives a fuller account, stating, "But after tasting it, he refused to drink it (Matt. 27:34)."

Why did Jesus refuse the sedative? When I have pain, I take medicine. I want to get rid of the pain. Why didn't Jesus? Barclay says it well, "Jesus was resolved to taste death at its bitterest and to go to God with open eyes."¹³ In other words, Jesus chose to experience the full intensity of the pain and suffering of the cross. It was His Father's will that He suffer, and so He suffered, willingly, "with open eyes."

That's not the way we typically look at suffering, is it? Suffering is bad. Suffering is to be avoided. Charles Simeon thought rightly about suffering. John Piper tells his story: In April, 1831, Charles Simeon was 71 years old. He had been the pastor of Trinity Church, Cambridge, England, for 49 years. He was asked one afternoon by his friend, Joseph Gurney, how he had surmounted persecution and outlasted all the great prejudice against him in his 49-year ministry. He said to Gurney, "My dear brother, *we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake.* When I am getting through a hedge, if my head and shoulders are safely through, I can bear the pricking of my legs. Let us rejoice in the remembrance that our holy Head has surmounted all His suffering and triumphed over death. Let us follow Him patiently; we shall soon be partakers of His victory."¹⁴

Now there's a God-honoring perspective on suffering! Brothers and sisters, if people mocked Jesus we ought not be surprised when they mock us, His followers.

I met John last Sunday, a Romanian brother. When he was 38 he swam across the Danube River to escape the communists who viewed him as a menace to society. Pastor Sorin told me about his grandfather, who was arrested by the communists for preaching, then injected with drugs that caused him to go insane, and then die two years later.

Beloved, if the world makes us the butt of their jokes, remember they did it first with our Savior. Indeed, this is our calling, to follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

Then came the worst of the worst for Jesus.

¹³ Barclay, p. 362.

¹⁴ (H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon*, London: InterVarsity, 1948, 155f.).

C. The soldiers crucified Jesus (24). “And they crucified him,” the text states plainly. Mark wrote this Gospel in the late 60's, to a Roman audience that needed no explanation of the horrid details of crucifixion. Someone has rightly observed, “No Gospel writer records the details of the Crucifixion; they give us only incidents around the Crucifixion. The Spirit of God drew a veil over it as if to say, ‘There is nothing here to satisfy sadistic gossip. There is nothing here with which an idle mind should be occupied. It is too horrible.’”¹⁵

Suffice it to say this...

1. *They nailed his body to two pieces of wood.* Then...
2. *They put him on display to die in shame.* And then...
3. *They entertained themselves with his clothes.* Verse 24 concludes, “Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.”¹⁶ More mock concern, this time for His clothes. Did they really *want* His bloodied clothes? I don't think so. What they wanted was another opportunity to have a good time at His expense, and so while He was dying, they were gambling—another example of mockery at the cross.

I wish I could say it was the last, but it's not. Next week, if the Lord allows us to gather again, we'll see *mock lip-service to His Word* (25-30) and a *mock profession of faith* (31-32).

But it would be unthinkable for us to close our Bibles at this point without first looking in the mirror. For indeed...

Make It Personal: We are all guilty of mocking Jesus.

Allow me to mention a couple of ways we're prone to mock the Savior.

1. *We do it when we tell Him things we really don't mean.* Like, “I believe in You, Jesus!” and yet go day after day without spending time talking with Him in prayer and listening to Him by opening His Word. How can we say we believe in Him if we spend so little time with Him? Or if we don't share Him with others. Or trust Him when He takes us into difficult situations. Isn't this a contradiction of terms, a *mockery*?

Here's another way we're prone to mock.

2. *We do it when we profess to love Him but neglect His Body.* If I said I loved you but consistently ignored you, you could rightly accuse me of making a mockery of love, right? Answer this. Where is the Risen Christ right now? He's in heaven, right? But where else is He? Listen to this. It's 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” Where is Christ now? In His Body, the church, right? So if we profess to love Christ but make a low priority of His Body, the church, we are doing what the mocking bird does, making sounds that don't match reality.

Thankfully, there is hope for a mocker like me, and you. That's what the cross is all about! In the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a hymn that we still sing. I'd like to share it with you and make two comments...

*O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!*

¹⁵ J. Vernon McGee, p. 189.

¹⁶ John, who was an eyewitness, gives the fuller account in John 19:23-25.

*What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.*

*What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.*

Stop for a moment and ponder that last line. Is it possible to outlive our love for Jesus? Sadly, yes. Our heart continues to beat but it fails to beat for Him. Our bodies continue to look alive but we're not living for Him. What a fitting prayer! May I never, never outlive my love to Thee! Better to die than to fail to love Jesus and keep living!

The hymn continues...

*My Savior, be Thou near me when death is at my door;
Then let Thy presence cheer me, forsake me nevermore!
When soul and body languish, oh, leave me not alone,
But take away mine anguish by virtue of Thine own!*

*Be Thou my consolation, my shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion when my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfolds Thee. Who dieth thus dies well.*

Do you want to die well? Then *die thus*. Live and die with your gaze fixed on the One who suffered such anguish for you. Make sure your hope is in what He has done for you, not in what you have done for Him. Make sure your faith rests in the secure resting place of His cross. If you will die thus, you will die well!

A Prayer of Response: "O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee" (Bernard of Clairvaux)

Communion to follow