

Mark 15:25-32 “Mockery at the Cross, part two”^{**1}

Series: “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*” Mark 15-16

Main Idea: We see four acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32. We looked at the first two last week, and we’ll ponder the final two in this message.

- I. There is mock worship (16-20).
- II. There is mock concern (21-24).
- III. There is 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.
- IV. There is a mock profession of faith (31-32).
 - A. They misunderstood spirituality.
 1. They thought they were good because they did good things.
 2. They were exposed by One who truly is good.
 - B. They misunderstood Christ’s identity.
 1. They were expecting a different kind of Messiah.
 2. They were expecting a different kind of king.
 - C. They misunderstood salvation.
 1. They were willing to be saved from sin’s consequences.
 2. They needed to be saved from their sin.
 - D. They misunderstood the cross.
 1. They thought the cross proved Jesus was wrong.
 2. In reality, the cross proved they were wrong.
 - E. They misunderstood faith.
 1. They wanted to see and then believe.
 2. They needed to believe and then see.

Make It Personal: The cross is pride-shattering.

1. The issue isn’t what others did with Jesus.
2. The issue is what we are doing with Him.

Passion week is coming the last week of this month, and we’re preparing for it in our current series, “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*,” an exposition of Mark 15.

Next Sunday, the Lord willing, each family will receive the “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” frame as a gift. This gift is intended to serve as a continual reminder of the importance of thinking about, of *surveying* the cross work of our worthy Savior.

What do we see when we survey the wondrous cross? In Mark’s account, we see injustice in verses 1-15, which was our message two weeks ago. Then came the mockery of the cross, which we began to see last time in verses 16-24 and we’ll continue to see this morning in verses 25-32.

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:16-32

Suppose they were executing a prisoner at the Lucasville state prison. The governor had announced a 9:00 a.m. execution time for a Friday morning, and the time had come. When the guards led the prisoner to the execution room, an unexpected group of visitors gathered. Along with the media, there were a dozen members from the local ministerial association. Sort of odd, but there they were, twelve pastors from area churches. They soon made it clear they weren’t there merely to watch either, as they started jeering the prisoner, mocking him with sarcastic accusations.

“Hey tough guy! Thought you could fool the world, did you? See if you can talk your way out of this predicament, Mr. Big Talker!”

^{**}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 look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2007.

Wouldn't that seem out of place, if men who are regarded as shepherds, who have a reputation for caring for needy people, began acting like wolves tearing up their prey? Indeed, it would. Or at least, should.

Of course, the situation I've just described is hypothetical. But then again, it's not. I've read the crucifixion account dozens and dozens of times, but something struck me as I was studying this passage about fifteen years ago, and it continues to amaze me. It is the unthinkable *mockery* poured out on Jesus 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

And not simply once in passing either. There are four waves of mockery at the scene of the cross in Mark 15:16-32. We looked at the first two last week, which I'll mention briefly again, and then we'll focus our attention on the final two in this message.

I. There is mock worship (16-20).

See the Roman soldiers in verse 16. They've called out a whole battalion, between 200 and 600 trained fighters. And what do they do? They put a purple robe on Jesus, jam a crown made of thorns on His head, bow before Him and call out, "Hail, king of the Jews!"

When people do and say things they really don't mean, that's often an expression of mockery. And it certainly is in this case. "Hail, king!" they say to the One who indeed rules heaven and earth, who certainly deserves our worship. But all He receives from these men of standing in the Roman empire is *mock worship*.

II. There is mock concern (21-24).

On the Via Dolorosa Jesus fell under the weight of the cross. So in verse 21 the soldiers coerced a traveler named Simon to carry the cross. Then in verse 23 they offered Jesus a sedative wine mixture which Jesus refused. At first glance at these gestures, we might conclude that the soldiers felt a twinge of compassion for Jesus, but not so. The truth is that 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 seemed to be concern is merely *mock concern*.

These are professional men, respected in the empire, who love and are serving their country. Many of them likely are family men, who would lay down their lives for their spouses and children. So how could they commit such acts of cruelty?

It's not complicated. It's called human depravity, and it affects all of us. 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. Why do husbands and wives say cutting things and at times do hurtful things to each other? It's because of what they are thinking and wanted in their hearts. They're thinking about *self* and wanting to stand up for *self*.

It's true. And it works in positive ways too. Why on this very day are Chinese believers gathering for worship even though they might be arrested and sent to prison? It's the same reason. It's because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts. In this case they're thinking about Jesus and wanting to please Him.

² J. D. Jones, p. 631.

But there's more. As we continue to survey the wondrous cross, we're going to see two more expressions of mockery at the cross.

III. There is mock lip-service to His Word (25-30).

Verse 25 says, "And it was the third hour when they crucified him." The writer of this account, Mark, doesn't explain to his readers what 'crucified' means. He didn't have to. He's writing this account of the life of Jesus for a Roman audience, and they know all too well what happened when the Romans *crucified* someone. Instead, Mark focuses on the events surrounding the crucifixion scene, and specifically, the *mockery* of it all.

The mock lip-service came in two forms, the first *non-verbal* and the second *verbal*.

A. They mocked Jesus with written words (25-27). We see these words in verses 26-27, "And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left."

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. Actually, Pilate 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: "This is Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews."³

As we scan this chapter, we 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 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 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

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).

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).”

If you have the ESV or NIV, you’ll notice there is no verse 28. That’s because 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.

At that point, the mock lip-service moved from non-verbal to verbal.

B. They mocked Jesus with spoken words (29-30). Notice the first part of verse 29, “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and *saying...*”⁵

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 their reputation; to defame.”⁶

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 such venom while He’s dying. It’s unthinkable the depths to which depraved sinners will stoop.

Now let’s listen to what they said in verses 29b-30, “Aha! [in the NIV, “So!” with the Greek *oua*, an exclamation of mockery and ridicule] You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!”

What are they talking about? Where did this accusation originate? They seem to have in mind something Jesus had said a couple of years earlier when, after clearing the money-changers out of the temple, He announced in John 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Of course, Jesus was talking about His body, not the literal temple (as John 2:21 clarifies). But the people misunderstood Him, and now are using their own misunderstanding as a basis for more mockery.

Look again at this expression of contempt. 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 believe in Him rather than belittle Him. And if they had believed in Him, they would have received Him, and received forgiveness and eternal life from Him.

But they had not. And what they’re doing now is revealing what they really think about Him, and really want from Him.

My friends, know this. Hearing the words of Jesus is never enough. Being able to quote Jesus isn’t enough. Even the crowd at the cross can quote Him. But it was a mockery, and a warning to the rest of us. Beware of the danger of giving mere lip-service to the words of Jesus.

You say, “How can I know if I’m giving lip-service to the words of Jesus?”

It’s not complicated. Just ask yourself this question. Is there anything that I have heard Jesus say that I am *not* presently believing or doing? For instance, Jesus invited us to come to Him (Matthew 11:28) and believe on Him (John 3:16). Have you? With simple, childlike faith, have you come to Jesus? He also commands us to repent and follow Him (Matthew 4:17, 19) and treasure Him above all other treasures (Matthew

⁵ In the NIV, “Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying.”

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

13:44). Again, are these actions true of you? Jesus also said that we are to make our allegiance to Him public by being baptized, and then placing ourselves under the teaching ministry of His Word (Matthew 28:19-20). He also says we are to forgive those who sin against us, that we're to love even our enemies, that we're to tell others about Him, and much more.

The question is, is there anything you and I have heard Him say that we are not presently believing or doing? According to James 4:17, "Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Or we could say, it's an indication of lip-service.

But here's the most amazing part. How did Jesus respond to this expression of mockery at the cross? Did He defend Himself? Did He say, "No, you're wrong, and I'll prove you're wrong" No. That's not what He did. What did He do? He simply hung there in silence.

Why? Why the silence? Why didn't He defend Himself? They were wrong, weren't they? He was right, wasn't He? We need to answer those questions, but not yet. For now, we must proceed to a to a fourth expression of mockery, perhaps the most devious.

IV. There is a mock profession of faith (31-32).

Verse 31 begins, "So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another."⁷ The words "So also" connect the mockery of the people in scene one with the mockery of the priests and scribes in scene two. What the religious leaders say is similar, but they take it a step further.

Listen to them in verses 31-32, "'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also reviled him."

Now the mocking turns to a sickening sort of pious taunting. They make it sound like they are willing to believe in Jesus if only He will give them more evidence, specifically if He will break free from the nails and come down. "Do that!" they say, "and we'll believe!"

Sounds 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. People say what they say and do what they do because of what they are thinking and wanting in their hearts. What I had just witnessed was a *mock profession* from a man trying to use Jesus to impress a judge in a divorce hearing.

How do you explain the mock profession made by the chief priests and scribes? The same as with my visitor. Their mock profession was due to five misunderstandings.

A. They misunderstood spirituality. I would remind you that these men 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, for God commanded these activities. The problem was that, simply stated...

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, give to the poor, and so on, is also suspect but for a different reason. The danger of a checklist is

⁷ NIV, "In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves."

that a person can check the list and still be lost. That's the point. The Jewish leaders were convinced they were good with God because of the good they had done.

Then along came Jesus, and what happened?

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

This is why they're mocking Jesus so vehemently. They had no choice. Whenever we're exposed by the presence of light, we must either acknowledge our sin stains or try to get rid of the light.

My friend, a right standing with God is not something we earn, it's something we must receive. It's not by our 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."⁸

B. They misunderstood Christ's identity. "Let this Christ [from *Christos*, the Greek word for 'Messiah'], this King of Israel, come down now from the cross." They had 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". But their faulty expectations were connected to 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 redeem you.

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

Save yourself, they said. In other words, do another miracle, this one for yourself. Get rid of your own painful circumstances and get off your cross.

What does this request reveal about the religious leaders?

1. *They were willing to be saved from sin's consequences.* Sickness, disease, and death. Sure, save us from those things. That's what they *wanted*. But...

2. *They needed to be saved from their sin.* But they wouldn't admit it.

You say, "Why did Jesus do all those miracles, and why doesn't He do one here?"

Good question. When Jesus did His miracles, He was showing that He possessed the power to reverse the curse in Genesis 3. He and He alone can remove the consequences of sin, including sickness and death. But the consequences of sin are not our biggest problem. Our biggest problem is sin itself. And this is why Jesus went to the cross, and remained there. He had come to deal with *sin itself*.

⁸ John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*.

You say, “Prove that statement.” Okay, 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.”

Have you ever seen the movie, *Amazing Grace*? It’s the story of how God used William Wilberforce to abolish slavery in Great Britain. There’s a great scene involving a conversation between Wilberforce and his friend and pastor, John Newton. Newton, who wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace* (in 1773) was a slave trader that God brought to his knees, saved by His grace, and called into His 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*.”

Dear friend, do you believe that, that you are a great sinner and that He is a great Savior? Have you admitted that, to yourself, and to Him? Have you asked Him to save you, not just from life’s difficulties, and not just from a future in hell (for these are merely sin’s consequences)? Have you asked Him to save you *from your sin*?

I have good news for you. If you will, He will.

D. They misunderstood the cross. “Come down!” they said. They thought Jesus was on the cross because He was weak. To the contrary, there’s never been a demonstration of greater strength.

Please realize that this was a real temptation for Jesus. It’s the very temptation Satan dangled before Him again and again throughout His life, *to bypass the cross*. Three years earlier he tried to lure Jesus into a cross-less ministry by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus resisted (Mark 1:14). In Gethsemane, Jesus faced the temptation again, but prayed, “Not what I will, but what you will (Mark 14:36).” And now, hanging on the cross, He hears the temptation again, “Come down from the cross!”

But that He will not do. It’s not that He didn’t feel the mocking agony of the cross. He felt it, indeed more than anyone else could ever feel it. Why? He was perfect and had never experienced even one taste of sin. Yet now, on the cross He has become a sin-bearer. He is taking upon Himself the sins you and I have committed.

And this is the answer to our question. Why didn’t He respond to the mockery? Why didn’t He defend Himself? Why did He simply hang there in silence? The answer is, He wasn’t simply hanging there. He was working. He was accomplishing the mission of love given to Him by His Father. He was paying a debt. He was dying in the place of every mocking sinner who would ever repent and believe on Him.

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.”⁹

1. *The mockers thought the cross proved Jesus was wrong.*

2. *In reality, the cross proved they were wrong.*

May I speak frankly? Most of us, 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

⁹ J. D. Jones, p. 634.

in your life, any sinful thought, attitude, or habit, that you've been tolerating? I invite you today, in full view of the cross, to see its severity, affirm that He died for it, and choose by His power to take the necessary steps to get rid of it.

It is believed that John Newton introduced his song, "Amazing Grace," to the church he pastored on January 1, 1773. He preached a sermon that morning. I read it online (it's in his own handwriting).¹⁰ 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...

...**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..."

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

But there's something else that the mocking reveals. The religious leaders misunderstood spirituality, Christ's identity, salvation, and the cross. One more.

E. They misunderstood faith. "Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those mocking words reveal a concept of faith. What is it?

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 concept of faith is alive and well in churches across our country this morning. "Lord, fix up my broken life, and *then* I'll believe." Or, "Give me a sign, and *then* I'll believe in you Jesus." Or, "Let me feel your presence, and *then* I'll believe in you."

But 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*, then God *rewards*.¹¹

I'm not sure there's a more powerful example of this than one of the criminals hanging right next to Jesus. Notice the end of verse 32. "Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him."

"But wait," you say. "Didn't one of these criminals have a change of heart?" Indeed, he did. Mark doesn't tell us, but Luke does. Listen to 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 Jesus too, at first, but then by God's grace he humbled himself, repented, and believed in Jesus.

Amazing Grace isn't the only hymn John Newton wrote. Here's one about the pride crushing power of the cross.

¹⁰ www.johnnewton.org, *The John Newton Project*, "Amazing Grace: The Sermon Notes"

¹¹ 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."

*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!*

Make It Personal: The cross is pride-shattering.

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.

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

Prayer

Last week I shared the story of the man who wrote the song, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. Isaac Watts, the son of a God-fearing man who went to prison for his faith, who himself became a pastor, wrote this hymn in 1707. In fact, he's considered to be the first person in the English-speaking world to write hymns. Up until this point, congregational singing in the church was basically limited to God's songs, the psalms. But Watts felt that God could be honored by other songs, songs written by people living today. And so he wrote 600 hymns, filled first and foremost with sound doctrine, but then connected that doctrine to the human experience.

If we really believe a truth, for instance, that Christ died for sinners, shouldn't that truth affect the way we think, feel, and live? Watts said *yes*. And he showed us how. And nowhere did he do this more powerfully than in our song.

In *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, Watts certainly describes the realities, the doctrines, of the cross. He tells us in verse 1 that the cross is where the Prince of glory died. In verse 3, he invites us to look at the His head, hands, and feet, to see His sorrow and love flow mingled down. And he asks the rhetorical question, "Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?" The answer, of course, is, no, never.

That's doctrine, said poetically, yet accurately. It's take home theology. But it's more than theology. It takes us where theology is meant to take us, into personal experience. When truth is believed, it will affect our volition and emotion.

How? Like this, says Watts in verse 2. *Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God. All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.* The fact that He died for me is now the most important thing about me. Is that true for you? If it is, says Watts, then tell the Lord. Sing it to Him.

Friends, when we survey the cross, when we truly see Him there, there's no way we're going to keep living as we've done before. Impossible. There's one appropriate response, only one, as Watts expresses it in the closing verse 4. *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Isaac Watt's hymn is worthy of our attention, and more importantly, our use. One proof of this is the fact that this hymn has been set to more than one tune.¹² The tune most familiar to us was composed by Lowell Mason in 1824, who based it on a Gregorian chant. This tune is called HAMBURG, named after the German city, and we sang that tune two weeks ago.

But there are other tunes. One used frequently before 1820 is called RICHMOND. Another, used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is called EUCHARIST. Last week, we sang the hymn using an Appalachian melody (#401 in our books) called, *O WALY, WALY*, which is a Scottish folk song (also known as "The Water is Wide").

To close today's service, we're going to use the tune most popular in British and Commonwealth hymnals. It is called ROCKINGHAM, which was composed by Edward Miller in 1790. Miller was the son of a stone mason who ran away from home to become musician, and eventually a flautist in Handel's orchestra. Miller wrote this tune forty-two years after Watts' death.

Closing Song: #185 "*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*" (four verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. During the Sundays in March, we are preparing for passion week by surveying the wondrous cross, walking verse by verse through Mark 15. For the past two Sundays we've been pondering *the mockery of the cross*. What is mockery? Is it ever appropriate? When is it inappropriate? What is a person typically *wanting* when they mock another person?

2. In Mark 15:16-32, we see four demonstrations of mockery directed at Jesus. After reading the passage again, identify these expressions of mockery.

3. People do what they do essentially because of what they are *thinking* and *wanting*. So, when people mock Jesus, it reveals what is going on in their hearts. What are the various people who are mocking Jesus in Mark 15 *thinking*? What are they *wanting*?

4. What do we learn about the human condition from this passage, and specifically, about ourselves?

5. How did Jesus respond to the waves of mockery that were poured out on Him at the cross? What does this teach us about Him? How should we respond?

¹² <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/when-i-survey>