

Main Idea: We see four acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32, which we’ll ponder today and next week. At the cross we see people who do and say things they really don’t mean. Sadly, the mockery continues today.

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

I. There is mock worship at the cross (16-20).

A. The soldiers pretended to give reverence to Jesus.

1. They put a robe on Him.
2. They put a crown on Him.
3. They called Him king.
4. They bowed before Him.

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.

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

1. If we don’t understand sin, the gospel loses its luster.
2. If we don’t understand sin, we misrepresent the cross.

II. There is mock concern at the cross (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).

1. They nailed his body to two pieces of wood.
2. They put him on display to die in shame.
3. They entertained themselves with his clothes.

Make It Personal: The truth is, 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.

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)

This morning we’re continuing to prepare ourselves for Good Friday, which is March 29, and Resurrection Sunday, which is March 31, by opening our Bibles to Mark 15, in a series we’re calling, “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.”

Last week I mentioned that each family will be receiving a gift, the “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” frame. A team of servants from Wheelersburg Baptist Church is making this gift, and making extras too, so you can invite your neighbors and friends to your home and give it to them on Good Friday.

The gift will be more meaningful if you know the story behind this beloved hymn. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) penned the lyrics in 1707. For some historical perspective, Watts was a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley, John Newton, William Cowper, and George Whitefield. George Washington was 16 years old when Watts died.

Watts was born in England, the oldest of nine children. His father was in prison when Isaac was born, and his mother nursed him outside the prison gate. The crime? Watts’ parents were dissenters, Protestants who opposed the practices of the Church of England.

Isaac was gifted in languages, and learned Latin when he was four, and mastered Greek, French, and Hebrew by the time he was thirteen. By the time he was sixteen, he

**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.

was given the opportunity to go to Oxford University. But he declined because attending Oxford would have meant converting to the Church of England, which he would not do.

So he went to a dissenting school in London, prepared for the ministry, and graduated at the age of twenty. He then moved back home, and one day complained to his father about the dull psalm-singing at the church, and his father encouraged him to do something about the problem. So he did. He started writing hymns.

It was Isaac Watts who introduced the use of the hymn to the English-speaking world. Before Watts, music in the church was basically singing the psalter. But Watts, who himself became a pastor, wrote about 600 hymns to help God's people sing rich theology connected to personal experience.

Some have suggested that *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* is the first known hymn written in the first person, introducing "a personal religious experience rather than limiting itself to doctrine." Such hymns were termed "hymns of human composure".²

I read that Watts had frail health, even as a child. As an adult, he was forced to resign his pastorate because of poor health, and for the last thirty years of his life, he was an invalid. But he saw God's hand in this, and continued to write more hymns, some of which we still sing.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross is based on Galatians 6:14, which says, "But God forbid that I should boast, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." I read that Charles Wesley, who himself wrote more than 6,000 hymns, reportedly said he would have given up all his hymns to have written this one.

Isaac Watts wrote this hymn in preparation for a communion service. Originally, he used a different title, calling it, "Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ," which basically summarizes the message of the song.³

There have been some slight changes to the hymn over the years. In the original version, Watts wrote five stanzas, but he put brackets around the fourth stanza, apparently to indicate it could be left out, if needed. It reads:

*His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er His body on the tree:
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.*

The hymn has been set to more than one tune. The one most popular in Europe is called ROCKINGHAM, which was composed by Edward Miller in 1790, forty-two years after Watts' death.⁴ The tune most familiar to us was composed by Lowell Mason in 1824. It's called HAMBURG, named after the German city. Mason indicated that the tune was based on a Gregorian chant.⁵

So now, let's do what Watts encouraged. As we prepare for communion today and for Passion week later in the month, let's survey the wondrous cross by turning our

² There've been some other slight changes too. For example, line 2 originally read "Young Prince of Glory," but in the second edition of the hymnal, Watts changed it to "When God, the Mighty Maker, died." It has also been "When Christ, the Lord of Glory, died," "When Christ, the Great Redeemer, died," and "When Christ, the Great Creator, died." In the nineteenth century there were numerous collections with extensive alterations to the hymn. See: <https://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/when-i-survey-the-wondrous-cross>.

³ <https://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/when-i-survey-the-wondrous-cross>.

⁴ <https://plymouthbrethren.org/article/10165>

⁵ https://hymnary.org/text/when_i_survey_the_wondrous_cross_watts

attention to Mark 15. What do we see when we survey the cross? First, we see the *injustice* of the cross, which was last week's message, from verses 1-15.

But we also see the mockery of the cross, which we'll ponder today and next week, the Lord willing, four acts of mockery described in Mark 15:16-32.

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:16-24

There's an interesting creature that visits our neighborhood every so often, and when he does 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 *mockingbird*, and that's because he can make over forty different sounds. He can imitate other birds, squeaky gates, pianos, sirens, and even barking dogs.

It's sort of humorous when a bird does it. But there's nothing humorous about the *mockery at the cross*. Mark actually uses this very word twice. In verse 20, "And when they had *mocked* him." And in verse 31, "So also the chief priests with the scribes *mocked* him."

At the cross we see people *doing and saying things they really don't mean*. To Jesus, that is. They mock Him, again and again. I count at least four different acts of mockery at the cross in Mark 15:16-32 which the Spirit of God wants us to ponder. And why? Here's one reason. Sadly, the mocking bird is still singing.

Even now, 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*.

"*How great Thou art!*" the mocker sings in perfect pitch. But he knows it isn't true. God is not great in his life.

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

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

How can it be that anyone would mock Jesus, in light of who He is and all He's done for us? The problem isn't merely the tongue, for you could cut the tongue out of a mocker's mouth, and he would still be a mocker. Here's why.

Here's the premise of today's message, and next week's. I'll state it at the outset and then show you the reality of this premise with four examples from Mark 15.

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

I. There is mock worship at the cross (16-20).

In the preceding passage, Pilate, in order to please the crowd, pronounced Jesus guilty. He ordered Him to be scourged, and condemned Him to death by crucifixion.

In verse 16, his orders are carried out. "And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion." Hear the irony in that statement, "And the soldiers *led him away*." The One who holds the stars in space and everything else in His creation now allows human hands to *lead Him away* to His execution.

They take Him first to the praetorium in Jerusalem. Mark indicates that they called together a 'whole battalion [company]' of Roman soldiers.⁶ Typically, that's about 600

⁶ The word refers to a Roman battalion.

Roman soldiers, probably men who were stationed in Caesarea but came to Jerusalem with Pilate for crowd control at Passover. Some suggest it may have been an auxiliary battalion of 200-300 soldiers.

But still, i begs the question. Why so many soldiers? 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?

Mark tells us why. Listen again to verses 17-20, "And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.¹⁸ And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"¹⁹ And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.²⁰ And *when they had mocked him*, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him."

There's why the soldiers assembled. *To mock Him*. The Greek word is *empaizo* which comes from the root *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 that, 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."⁷

A. The soldiers pretended to give reverence to Jesus. Jesus predicted this mockery months ahead of time. In Mark 10:34 He told His disciples, "[The Gentiles] will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him." And now they are.

Mark identifies four mocking gestures used by the Roman battalion.

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."⁸

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 twisted together thorn branches, a deed that took effort and a wicked imagination. And they jammed it on Jesus' head, puncturing His scalp and causing blood to flow down His face. "With this 'crown' the soldiers unwittingly pictured God's curse on sinful humanity being thrust on Jesus," as one commentator puts it.⁹

3. *They called Him king*. "They" did this, says the text, not one person but the whole cohort. "They began to call out to Him (NIV; the ESV says 'salute him'), 'Hail, king of the Jews!' (18)" Those are good words, true words, for Jesus is king. But these soldiers don't mean what they are saying. For them, these are mocking words, and they soon turn into mocking action.

Verse 19 says they were hitting Him, and spitting on Him. The tense of the verbs indicates ongoing action, that they *kept hitting Him* and *kept spitting in His face*.¹⁰

⁷Louw, 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.

⁸J. D. Jones, p. 618.

⁹Observation by *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

¹⁰J. Vernon McGee, p. 188.

Something similar happened 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 strike Him. But the hitting and spitting in Mark 15 is being done by *Roman* soldiers. The Jews had abused Jesus out of self-righteous anger. The Romans abused Him just because they could.¹¹

4. *They bowed before Him.* They got down on their knees and acted like they were worshipping Him. Even as I say these words, I think of how many times I’ve adopted a posture that suggested I was worshipping the Lord, but really wasn’t.

Verse 20 says (NIV), “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, which meant that when they removed it, there added to His pain. Remember how it felt the last time you pulled a bandage off a tender wound. But this is so much worse. Oh, how He suffered!

So I ask you, “Why did the Roman soldiers do all this to Jesus?”

You might say, “Well, they were following orders.” But that’s not true. 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 the mockery performed by these men?

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. Likely, some of them are *family* men, who kiss their kids goodnight when they are home. So how do explain their actions?

Here again is the answer. 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 a person is as bad as he could be, which explains why depraved people can do ‘good things,’ like loving their kids and dying for their country. Depravity means, not as bad as, but *as bad off as could be*.

This is our problem, and it’s universal. We all enter the world, created in the image of God, and cut off from God. What cut us off? Sin did. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned, and we have inherited their sin nature. And then as we grow up, we live in line with that nature, by choosing to sin, to break God’s law. And though we know it’s wrong, we are powerless to do otherwise. We are enslaved to sin.

You say, “I don’t believe in total 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.”

Okay, here’s how. Two words. *Common grace*. Though God is holy and hates sin, He is also kind and grants a measure of unmerited help and favor (that’s what grace is) even to depraved sinners. Without God’s common grace, a sinner would never deny himself for the good of others, so there would never be family love or any other good deed.

Yet God owes His grace to no one. It’s unmerited, after all. And every once in a while, He removes His restraining influence and allows sinners to do precisely what their depraved hearts want to do. Friends...

¹¹ 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.

1. *Our problem isn't merely that we do sinful things.* It goes much deeper.
2. *Our problem is that we have a heart that wants to sin.* Sin is simply going our own way rather than God's, and that was the soldiers' bent, as ours. According to Jesus, *we love darkness* (John 3:19). The Roman soldiers did. And so do we. By nature, *we* too love darkness. We love to sin, and are powerless to change, apart from God's sovereign, saving grace.

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

Think about sin? Continually? Yes. Listen to 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. Lost 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.'"¹²

Perhaps an illustration will explain why. If I offered you a bottle of medicine and said, "This is really good! It costs \$250 but it's well worth it!" How would you respond? You probably would say, "Thanks, but no thanks. I'm not interested." 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?" 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 to you until you grasped 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 hear, "Christ died for sinners," and respond, "Well why wouldn't He? I'm a good person, in fact, a pretty good catch for God!"

Not true. I wasn't a good catch for God, nor a good guy. I am a creature that has violated God's holy standard, and I have done so because my heart is consumed with pleasing *ME*. I am a rebel that deserves God's judgment.

And this is what makes the gospel such good news. Instead of unleashing His just wrath against *me*, God sent His Son to die for me *a sinner!* Now a second consequence.

2. *If we don't understand sin, we misrepresent the cross.* Listen to 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

¹² J. I. Packer, *God's Words*, p. 71.

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.'"¹³

Have you ever cried out those words? *Woe is me! I am lost!* If not, you didn't receive Jesus as your Savior, even if you did pray a prayer to Him. To be saved, a person must admit they are a helplessly lost sinner.

So, how could those Roman soldiers do such wicked things to Jesus? I know the answer. I know how they did it because I was born with the same heart condition. This is *me* in the story, striking Jesus on the face, spitting, mocking. Apart from the saving grace of God, this is me, and you.

Sadly, there's more. First, we see *mock worship*. Then mock concern.

II. There is mock concern at the cross (21-24).

Notice verse 21, "And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene [in north Africa], who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus [possibly the same Rufus mentioned in Romans 16:13], to carry his cross."

Many Jews traveled from the surrounding regions to Jerusalem to observe Passover. Here we meet one of them, a man called Simon, who had two sons. We're told that soldiers forced Simon to carry Jesus' 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!"¹⁴

Verse 22 says, "And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull)." John's account doesn't mention Simon, simply stating that Jesus went out, "bearing his own cross (John 19:17)." Is that a contradiction? No. Jesus did bear His own cross initially, 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 'compelled' [NIV 'forced'] Simon to carry the cross.¹⁵

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 the weakened condition of this prisoner to prevent them from accomplishing their mission. In other words, they didn't want Jesus to die on the way to Golgotha. They want to make sure this "king" gets what He deserves.

What we're seeing is more mockery, this time *mock concern*. And we see more mock concern at the beginning of verse 23, "And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh."¹⁶

B. The soldiers offered Jesus a pain killer (23). 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.

¹³ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 109.

¹⁴ Wiersbe, p. 164.

¹⁵ By the way, are we like Simon? Are we giving attention to the cross this morning because we want to, or because someone made us?

¹⁶ It's worth noting that at Jesus' birth wise men brought Him myrrh, and now at His death, myrrh is offered again.

“But he did not take it,” Mark states (23b). Matthew gives a fuller account, stating, “But after tasting it, he refused to drink it (Matt. 27:34).”

So 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.”¹⁷ In other words, Jesus chose to experience the full intensity of the agony of the cross. It was the divine plan of redemption that He suffer, and so He suffered, willingly, “with open eyes.”

This is not the way we typically look at suffering, is it? To us, suffering is bad. Suffering is to be avoided. But to our God, there is purpose in our suffering, as there was for His own Son.

Think about Charles Simeon. Enabled by God's grace, he was a man who who thought rightly about suffering. John Piper shares this helpful 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.’”¹⁸

What a great perspective on suffering! Brothers and sisters, if our Savior suffered, can we expect less? If people mocked Him, we ought not be surprised when they mock us as His followers. This is our calling, to follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

Then came the worst of the worst. Notice the first words of verse 24, “And they crucified him.”

C. The soldiers crucified Jesus (24). When Mark wrote this Gospel in the late 60's, he was writing 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.’”¹⁹

Suffice it to say this. When the soldiers crucified Jesus...

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, “And divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.”²⁰ 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. Another expression of mockery.

I wish I could say it was the last, but it's not. In “Mockery at the Cross, part 2,” we'll see *mock lip-service to His Word* in verses 25-30, and a *mock profession of faith* in verses

¹⁷ Barclay, p. 362.

¹⁸ (H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon*, London: InterVarsity, 1948, 155f.).

¹⁹ J. Vernon McGee, p. 189.

²⁰ John, who was an eyewitness, gives the fuller account in John 19:23-25.

31-32. But it would be inappropriate for us to close our Bibles at this point without first taking a good look in the mirror.

Make It Personal: The truth is, we are all guilty of mocking Jesus.

In case you're not convinced, allow me to mention two ways we often do it.

1. *We do it when we tell Him things we really don't mean.* Like, "I believe in You, Jesus!" and yet go days without opening His Word and praying to Him. Isn't that a contradiction of terms, to say we believe in Him, but spend so little time with Him? Isn't that a *mockery*?

Here's another way we mock Him.

2. *We do it when we profess to love Him but neglect His Body.* If I said I loved you but consistently ignored you and refused to spend time with you, you could rightly accuse me of making a mockery of love, right? Where is the Risen Christ right now? If you say, "In heaven," you are right. But where else is He? Listen to 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." The *church* is the Body of Christ. So if we profess to love Christ but make a low priority of His Body, what are we doing? We are essentially mocking Him.

Is there is hope for mockers like us? Yes, this is what the cross is all about!

In the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux, while meditating on the sufferings of Christ, wrote a hymn. Before we sing it, I'd like to read it and make one comment.

*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!*

*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.*

Ponder again 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. Such a fitting prayer! May I never, never outlive my love to Thee!

Closing Song: #178 "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (all three verses)

Preparation for Communion:

The purpose of communion is to remember Christ and the cross. In light of what the Lord endured, it's vital that we prepare ourselves accordingly. By such preparation, some have been converted! Such was the case with Charles Simeon. Again, I'll let John Piper tell the story:

"His father was a wealthy attorney, but no believer. We know nothing of his mother. She probably died early, so that he never knew her. At seven, he went to England's

premier boarding school, The Royal College of Eton. He was there for 12 years, and was known as a homely, fancy-dressing, athletic show off. The atmosphere was irreligious and degenerate in many ways. Looking back late in life, he said that he would be tempted to take the life of his son than to let him see the vice he had seen at Eton...

At 19 he went to Cambridge. And in the first four months God brought him from darkness to light. The amazing thing about this is that God did it against the remarkable odds of having no other Christian around. Cambridge was so destitute of evangelical faith that, even after he was converted, Simeon did not meet one other believer on campus for almost three years.

His conversion happened like this. Three days after he arrived at Cambridge on January 29, 1779, the Provost, William Cooke, announced that Simeon had to attend the Lord's Supper. And Simeon was terrified. We can see, in retrospect, that this was the work of God in his life. He knew enough to know that it was very dangerous to eat the Lord's Supper unworthily.

So he began desperately to read and to try to repent and make himself better. He began with *The Whole Duty of Man* but got no help. He passed through that first communion unchanged. But knew it wasn't the last. He turned to a book by a Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper. As Easter Sunday approached a wonderful thing happened.

Keep in mind that this young man had almost no preparation of the kind we count so important. He had no mother to nurture him. His father was an unbeliever. His boarding school was a godless and corrupt place. And his university was destitute of other evangelical believers, as far as he knew. He is nineteen years old, sitting in his dormitory room as Passion Week begins at the end of March, 1779.

Here is his own account of what happened.

In Passion Week, as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect – "That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter-day, April 4, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, 'Jesus Christ is risen to-day! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul; and at the Lord's Table in our Chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Saviour. (Moule, 25f)²¹

Communion

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

²¹ By John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: www.desiringGod.org. Email: mail@desiringGod.org. Toll Free: 1.888.346.4700.