

Three Distortions of Reality at Christ's Humiliation

Pastor Chris Baker // 04.14.19 // Centralia FBC

Intro

We'll be in Mark 15 this morning. While you're turning there, I want us to see a challenge Paul issued to the church at Philippi:

Philippians 2:5-8

5 Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

**6 who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be exploited.**

**7 Instead he emptied himself
by assuming the form of a servant,
taking on the likeness of humanity.**

**And when he had come as a man,
8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.**

**9 For this reason God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,**

**10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—**

**11 and every tongue will confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Paul's encouragement to the Philippians was to adopt the attitude of Christ, who—though He deserved worship—completely emptied himself as a servant to save His people. That emptying involved Christ pouring out all of His dignity and He spoke of it in Mark 10:45:

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark paints for us a portrait of Jesus as the suffering servant who came to save God's people. That's the embodiment of the mindset Paul is talking about in Philippians. Christ valued others so highly that He emptied Himself of everything He deserved so that we could be showered with blessings that we would never deserve even if we had a million years to earn God's favor.

Nowhere is Christ's emptying of His own dignity on display more clearly than it is as He's being mistreated by the Roman soldiers in Mark 15:16-32. Let's read it together:

16 The soldiers led him away into the palace (that is, the governor's residence) and called the whole company together. 17 They dressed him in a purple robe, twisted together a crown of thorns, and put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They were hitting him on the head with a stick and spitting on him. Getting down on their knees, they were paying him homage. 20 After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple robe and put his clothes on him.

They led him out to crucify him. 21 They forced a man coming in from the country, who was passing by, to carry Jesus's cross. He was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull). 23 They tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

24 Then they crucified him and divided his clothes, casting lots for them to decide what each would get.

25 Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge written against him was: The King of the Jews. 27 They crucified two criminals with him, one on his right and one on his left.

29 Those who passed by were yelling insults at him, shaking their heads, and saying, "Ha! The one who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself by coming down from the cross!"

31 In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

Let's pray.

Mark shows us that in the humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ there are three distortions of reality—three perversions, really, of things that are true about Jesus that we need to understand. They're the photo negatives of some important realities about Jesus. Many of you might not know what photo negatives are because digital photography is all you've ever known. A photo negative is an image on film where light things appear dark and dark things appear light. This happened because of the chemicals used in film and exposure to light and other scientific things I'm not smart enough to understand let alone explain. But negatives were distortions of the reality captured in the correct light on film.

In Mark 15 we see three distortions of reality that were present in the humiliation of Christ. Here they are: **Jesus isn't the true King, Jesus is a criminal, and Jesus isn't Lord.** We know all those things to be untrue, but they were presented as reality by the Roman soldiers who were in charge of this phase of Jesus' punishment.

As we dig into these three distortions we'll take a look at the actual truth as well, then we'll finish up by looking at what applications those truths have in our lives today.

First, in verses 16-20 we see the the distorted reality the **Jesus isn't a true King.**

If we step back one more verse into the passage we focused on last week we'll remember that Pilate had Jesus flogged and then handed over to be crucified. The flogging would have left his back torn to shreds, there would have been significant loss of blood, and many ancient witnesses testify that after the violence of a Roman scourging bones and even organs would be exposed.¹

Mark's gospel gives us the least detail of the horrors of the torture Jesus suffered at the hands of the Romans. Other gospels add more, but none of them are really focused on the physical torment.

There are a couple of reasons for that. First, the audiences the gospel writers had in mind would have been much more acquainted with the details of Roman torture methods than you and I. This was a violent time in a violent culture. They knew the details of scourging and crucifixion. They had seen both, so they didn't need a detailed description. Second, though, is that I believe the physical torture was secondary in the minds of the gospel writers to the spiritual realities that were at play here.

Each of these abuses were physical but they all had an overt spiritual nature to them. Mark tells us in verse 16 that after Jesus had endured scourging—something, mind you, that not all prisoners survived—He was led into the governor's palace and the whole company was called together. This was the standard tactical unit of the Roman military and would have been comprised of somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 soldiers. We don't know if it means they called all 500 of those soldiers together—which seems unlikely—or if it was just the portion of the cohort that was assigned to this particular duty.

But either way they immediately begin mocking Jesus as a counterfeit king. They do six things to Jesus in vv. 16-19 and each of them is a direct insult to the kingship of Jesus.

Jesus is not the true King

¹ <https://www.cbcbg.org/scourging-crucifixion.html>

First, Mark tells us they put a purple robe on him. Matthew actually calls this a scarlet robe. Do the gospel writers disagree? It's not unheard of to disagree over colors, is it? There was a picture of a black and blue dress posted to social media last year.² To many, the dress appeared to be white and gold, to others it appeared blue and black. And the debate broke the internet. Is that what is going on between Mark and Matthew?

I don't think so. Roman soldiers were issued a scarlet-colored wool garment. But worn by a soldier over a long period of time that garment would have faded in the sun as the months and years passed by. And so what started out as a scarlet robe was likely a faded red that resembled a purple or somewhere in between.

Matthew remembered purple from his perspective. Mark, probably having this story dictated to him by Peter, called it scarlet. I don't believe there's a contradiction there at all that should concern us.

What should concern us, however, is the Roman soldiers disdain for the only true King they would ever meet. Remember the flesh hung from his back in ribbons. And they throw this woolen garment over his bare, bleeding back and the **second thing they do is press down a crown of thorns onto his head.** This was likely meant to replicate the gold laurel wreath that Caesar would wear, but this one would have been made of a plant some writers describe as having thorns that were as long as 12 inches.³

They shoved this crown down onto Jesus head and the amount of additional bleeding it caused would have been severe. But, again, the primary focus of Mark is not on the physical pain. There's something more significant in play here and I think this crown of thorns is one of the clearest ways that we see it.

The Romans soldiers had no idea that thorns bore any significance at all. This is comedy for them. They're like cats toying with a mouse before they devour it. That's all Jesus was in their eyes. But when we take all of Scripture into account we recognize that the crown Jesus bore on this day is a result of the curse brought about on all humanity by the sin of Adam and Eve.

Listen to Genesis 3:

17 And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it':

The ground is cursed because of you.

You will eat from it by means of painful labor

all the days of your life.

² <https://www.nationalgeographic.com.au/science/blue-or-white-dress-why-we-see-colours-differently.aspx>

³ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/41-80/the-shameful-scorn-of-jesus-christ>

**18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field. (emphasis added)**

The very thorns the Romans mocked Jesus with were the result of man's sin. That same sin Jesus was laying down His life to reconcile.

But the Roman soldiers didn't stop there. **The third thing they did was to salute him**, hailing him as King of the Jews. **Fourth they hit him on the head with a stick.** This was another way the belittled him as an imposter king. Matthew tells us they put a stick in his hand as a fake royal scepter. So here's Jesus, a soldier's cloak congealing to his bloody back, blood flowing freely from a crown of thorns, holding a stick in the most disturbing dress-up scene I've ever heard of. And that's not enough for these bloodthirsty soldiers. They take that stick from his hands and repeated hit him on the head with it while they **spit on and insult him**. That's the fifth way the mocked Jesus a fake king.

Sixth they knelt down in false worship to Jesus, imitating the way they would bow before Caesar. Little did the Roman soldiers know this wouldn't be the only time they bow before Jesus as king. Though, instead of being filled with pride and anger the next time they'd be filled with fear. Remember what we read when to started our time together?

**9 For this reason God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—
11 and every tongue will confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Jesus is the rightful king. He deserves a king's robe, a king's crown, and the worship of His people. The Bible makes clear that one day, all creation will worship Him—and they'll do it in all sincerity. Not like these Roman soldiers. Because this distorted reality did not catch our Sovereign God off guard.

Neither did the distorted reality that would lead us to believe Jesus was a criminal. That's the narrative the Roman soldiers were trying to create in vv. 20-23

Jesus is a criminal

After they had tortured Jesus some more, after the scourging that would have nearly killed him, after the mocking in verses 16-19, we're told they stripped him of the robe. That would have been excruciatingly painful. Remember, his back had already been shredded. This wool garment would have clung to him, but they placed him back in his own clothes and led him out to crucify him.

The route for his journey from the governor's palace to the place of crucifixion would have been as long and as public as possible. It was customary for the condemned to be led by a soldier carrying a sign showing what crime they had committed. This one simply would have said Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. And what else could it say? There was no crime for them to add to his record.

The extended length of Jesus' serpentine journey to the cross was intentional. This parade of the condemned was meant to grip the city with fear of crossing their Roman occupation force.⁴

As further evidence that Jesus was nothing but a common criminal, it appears as though he was physically unable to endure the weight of the horizontal cross-beam that was to make up his execution device. So the Romans pull a man named Simon out of the crowd to bear it for him. This man had likely made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from his homeland to celebrate the passover and now he's participating in an execution. Jesus isn't just merely a criminal, he's a criminal who is incapable of bearing the weight of his own sins—or at least that's what this distortion of reality would have us believe.

Once he'd been paraded all over the city they arrive at Golgotha, the scene of the most heinous crime committed against this innocent man. But we find in verse 23 something very different about this criminal. There were Jewish women who had committed themselves to offering bitter wine, almost like vinegar, as a narcotic to ease the pain of those condemned to die from crucifixion. They took this as their way of fulfilling Proverbs 31:6-7,

***Give beer to one who is dying (other translations render 'beer' as strong drink)
and wine to one whose life is bitter.
Let him drink so that he can forget his poverty
and remember his trouble no more.***

But this so-called criminal had no desire to forget. No desire to remember his trouble no more. Remember, He was willingly experiencing every moment of this. He predicted this very death three times earlier in the gospel of Mark and he said in 10:45 as we read earlier that He came to *give* his life as a ransom for many.

⁴ Hughes, *Preaching the Word* (p.383)

Psalm 69 tells us much about what the Jewish Messiah would be like when he arrived. We find there in verse 21 these words:

***Instead, they gave me gall for my food,
and for my thirst
they gave me vinegar to drink.*** (Psalm 69:21)

Jesus was no common criminal. He refused the wine mixed with myrrh—Mark gives us that detail. But he gives us very little detail of the actual crucifixion. His original audience would have neither wanted nor needed a description. They were all too familiar with it.

This was the most degrading form of capital punishment derived in the ancient world. It was repulsive to both Jews and Gentiles.

Roman philosopher Cicero, who died about 50 years before Christ, wrote:

“The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears . . . the mere mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man”⁵

To the Jews, crucifixion was linked with Deuteronomy 21:23. . . for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.

This was the epitome of Christ emptying himself. Paul reminds us he didn’t just humble himself to the point of death, but even death on a cross as spikes were driven through his flesh to hold him to the cross in a manner that would have been unbearably painful. He would have likely suffocated or suffered heart failure in a relatively short period of time.

But again, the physical suffering is not Mark’s focus. He immediately points out in verse 24 the soldiers set about dividing up Jesus’ clothes. Giving not a second thought to the man whose life they were in the process of ending.

The perverted reality these soldier saw was they were crucifying a common criminal, just another day at the office. The true reality, that this was so much more, is evident all the way back in the Psalms. See what David wrote in Psalm 22:

***16 For dogs have surrounded me;
a gang of evildoers has closed in on me;***

⁵ <http://www.boldgrace.org/articles/the-terror-of-the-cross.html>

they pierced my hands and my feet.

17 I can count all my bones;

people look and stare at me.

**18 They divided my garments among themselves,
and they cast lots for my clothing.**

Even as this evil plan was carried out we are reminded forcefully that God is still working. They cast lots for Jesus' clothing just like God knew they would and he said it hundreds of years earlier.

Which means, by the way, that he was most likely crucified naked, removing any last shred of human dignity that may have remained. But it was in that naked humiliation that God has wrapped us in Christ's righteousness. John Calvin wrote:

"The Evangelists portray the Son of God as stripped of His clothes that we may know the wealth gained for us by this nakedness, for it shall dress us in God's sight. God willed His Son to be stripped that we should appear freely, with the angels, in the garments of his righteousness and fullness of all good things" (Calvin, Harmony, 194).

Though crucified like a common criminal, between two common criminals (very likely associates of Barabbas), Jesus is very different.

And that brings us to our third distortion of reality: It appeared on this day that Jesus isn't a king, but that He is a criminal. And it also appeared that He isn't Lord

Jesus Isn't Lord

We'll see that in our last four verses but first we need to pause to notice something that might be missing in your Bible. If you look at verse 28 you might notice that it isn't there or perhaps its a footnote at the bottom of your page. It's a quotation from Isaiah 53 that shows us Jesus was counted among the rebels, in the CSB. It's translated transgressors in a lot of other modern versions of the Bible. But verse 28 doesn't show up in most modern Bible translations.

That doesn't mean the Bible is inaccurate or flawed in some way and to have clarity on this you need to understand a little bit about how modern Bible translation works. The New Testament was originally written in Greek and its original authors would have written either on plant-based papyrus or animal-based substances such as sheepskin. Neither of those media hold up very well over time. And so we don't have any examples of an original manuscript of any book of the New Testament. In fact, we don't have any original copies of Greek writing that are that old. They simply don't exist.

But we do have over 5,300 Greek copies of the New Testament.⁶ And based on those 5,300, God has given us a really solid foundation for what the original authors of the New Testament actually wrote. There are a handful of little things, like Mark 15:28, that we're not absolutely clear on, however. Some of the oldest manuscripts of Mark that scholars have studied (the oldest dates back to around 150⁷) don't have Mark 15:28. Others do have it, so some Bible translation committees have chosen to include it in English versions, while others haven't. We know the words of Mark 15:28 are found both in Isaiah 53 and in Luke 22:37, so they're undoubtedly Biblical. We're just not entirely sure if they were meant to be in the 15th chapter of Mark or not. It really doesn't impact what we're studying either way, though, because there is so much Old Testament reinforcement already present. And we'll see even more.

The distortion of reality here is that Jesus isn't Lord. Even those who passed by on the road yelled insults at him and shook their heads. Remember that messianic Psalm we looked at a few minutes ago? Here's what David wrote in Psalm 22:6-8

***But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by people.***

***7 Everyone who sees me mocks me;
they sneer and shake their heads:***

***8 "He relies on the Lord;
let him save him;
let the Lord rescue him,
since he takes pleasure in him."***

Perhaps the biggest irony of this whole chapter comes out when the chief priests say in verse 31—he saved others but he cannot save himself. What they failed to understand, though, is that for Jesus to save anyone He had to offer up Himself in our place.

They mock him for saying he'd rebuild the temple in three days. In Israel the holy place in the temple was where the spirit of God resided—on the mercy seat. But now the presence of God was not just in the temple, but it would be with every believer in a special way. Because, after the resurrection of Jesus there would no longer be a need for a priest to stand between God and man. Access to God was granted through the very sacrifice Jesus is making.

Distorted reality tells us Jesus can't be Lord because He's being killed. True reality tells us Jesus is the Lord who saves because He was killed in our place.

⁶ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/may-web-only/mark-manuscript-earliest-not-first-century-fcm.html>

⁷ *ibid*

And that's where we come to our application. We've seen the distortions of reality in this passage. So what is reality?

Jesus is king. I am a criminal, but He is my Lord. Jesus wasn't guilty, but He was treated as guilty so that His people could go free. He was our substitute not just in death but in humiliation.

If you belong to Christ, the scene we have just read about is the coronation of our king. The suffering servant who gave his life as a ransom for you. Is that the reality that defines your life today? If we can't look at this passage and be awed by God's goodness to us, by putting his Son in my place, and in your place, I don't know how we're ever going to see it.

Let's pray.