

Insulting the Savior ***Mark 15:16-24***

***I held the whip that beat the back
Of Him who healed the blind and lame.
The Savior winced at each whip's crack,
And I'm the one who is to blame.***

***And when the mallet tore His flesh
(the Temple that the Spirit built)
And royal blood flowed free and fresh,
I can't and won't deny my guilt.***

***Mine were the sneering lips that spat
Foul phlegm into His holy face.
My selfish sin's the reason that
He died my death and took my place.***

***My best and brightest, dearest Friend
Endured that pain and agony
Unto the black and bitter end,
And did it all because of Me.***

Nazareth's village carpenter was heartbroken. For weeks, he had drifted off to sleep dreaming about Mary. Now she was pregnant.

Joseph hadn't said a single word to Mary since the day he discovered she was with child. It didn't matter to the carpenter who the father was. He knew he wasn't. And the very thought of that ached like acid in his heart.

The great God of eternity who counts every tear His servants weep saw Joseph's agony. So He sent an angel to speak to the carpenter in a dream.

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. Matthew 1:20-21

Now Joseph's dream was coming true. The conniving of the priests was over. And the trials were all finished. Nothing was left for our Lord to do but to wet whips and thorns, nails and spears with His pure and perfect blood.

The ugly events of that day will never be repeated. Never again will Jesus give His back to brutes who are ready to beat Him raw.

Neither will He ever be nailed to a rough wooden cross again. He died once, for all time and for all men.

***Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,
1 Peter 3:18***

But butchery and brutality weren't the limit of our Savior's suffering. His sacrifice was also seasoned with heavy doses of ridicule and ugly insults. And that not only can be repeated. It often is. Our Lord is still insulted today.

Mark's account paints a picture of the Savior surrounded by sneering, leering faces. Grinning with greed, they heap shame and sorrow on a Man who never reached out but to heal and who never spoke but to help. Yet the faces Mark portrays weren't those of malevolent monsters.

They were people like you and me. In fact, if we study them very carefully, we just might catch a glimpse of our own face among those who ridiculed our Redeemer that day.

Mock Submission

The old priests smiled. They had finally won. Backed into a corner, Pilate had no other alternative but to agree with them. The Carpenter must die. So, however reluctantly, Pilate issued orders. And soldiers led Jesus back into the inner courtyard of the palace.

The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. Verse 16

It was a surprising thing to do. But the soldiers called the entire battalion out of the barracks. For some reason, they all understood this was much more than another mundane chore.

Scores of them gathered around to ridicule the Man who dared to call Himself a king. To them, only Caesar was king. So they dressed Jesus just as Roman senators arrayed Caesar.

They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Verses 17-18

Caesar wore a purple robe. So someone ran into the barracks and found old officer's purple robe. Caesar also wore a wreath around his head as a crown. So someone else pulled some branches off a thorn bush, wove them into a crown, and jammed it onto the Jesus' head.

But every ruler must have a scepter. So another soldier found a reed and thrust that into Jesus' hand.

And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; Matthew 27:29

Then someone thought it might be great sport to beat this would-be King with His own scepter. So that is what they did.

They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. Verse 19

Those soldiers lived a hard, violent life. So what they called fun was vile and vicious. But aside from the severe sin of causing Christ great physical pain, what was so wrong with what those soldiers did?

After all, they not only praised Jesus as King, they dressed Him as a king. And that isn't all. Those soldiers knelt before Jesus and praised Him as their King. What is so bad about that?

The answer is obvious. Their greatest sin was that it was all a joke. They treated Jesus as their King. But they neither believed it nor intended to honor and obey Him.

Their worship was an intentional lie. They were saying what they didn't believe and promising what they had no intention of living up to. Their submission to Christ as King was a mockery.

That was an insult then. And it still is today. When we worship Jesus as our King but don't really want Him to reign and rule over our lives, it is an insult to the Lord of love.

It is ridicule to piously call Christ our King when we don't mean it. And it is a slap in His holy face to kneel before Him in submission when we have no intention of living as if He really is our King.

How insidious it is! We piously pretend Jesus is our Lord and our God. We even worship Him as such.

But in our hearts, He occupies no throne at all. We jealously occupy that place ourselves. And our daily lives show it.

Mock submission is always an ugly insult to the Savior who gave His life that we might be free and forgiven. It is nothing at all like real worship and submission. It is a lie, plain and simple.

Mandatory Service

The soldiers soon tired of their sport. After all, throughout it all the Carpenter never opened His mouth. They couldn't even catch a glint anger in His eyes.

There was nothing on His face but great pity: pity for them. So a squad of four soldiers led Jesus out of the fortress to be crucified.

After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. Verse 20

It had been a long night for our Lord. Without a moment's rest, He had endured a string of savage trials.

Temple policemen had slapped and slugged Him. And Roman whips left His back a mass of bloody wounds.

Still, the Savior shouldered the heavy wooden crossbeam as best He could and started staggering up the steep streets toward the city gate. But it wasn't long before He sprawled down onto the cobblestones under the crushing weight of the cross.

Each time Jesus fell, the soldiers beat His wounded back until He got to his feet, picked up the cross and continued on.

Eventually, the soldiers became irritated and impatient with the slow pace of the procession. But just then, a Jew visiting from the desert shore of Libya was passing by on his way to the temple.

They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. Verse 21

Seizing Simon by the arm, those Roman soldiers did something the Savior had never done in all His life. Not only that, they did what God Himself never did, never does and never will do.

They forced a man to serve Jesus. Simon didn't want to carry Christ's cross that day. But it was a matter of Roman law that legionnaires could force civilians to serve.

Our Redeemer referred to that law in the Sermon on the Mount.

Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Matthew 5:41

Even when Roman soldiers force you to carry their packs, the Savior said, do so willingly. And prove your willingness by carrying the load further than the soldiers demand.

But Simon had never heard those words. And he didn't want to carry Christ's cross. He had no desire to carry a heavy load under an increasingly hot sun that day.

He only did so because he was given no other choice. That Cyrenian Jew didn't intend his service to be an insult to the Lord Jesus. But it was.

Mandatory service is always an affront to our God. That is why His Word doesn't offer us even one instance of a man, woman or child who was forced to serve the great God of Heaven.

It is always a choice to serve our Savior. His Holy Spirit honors a precious few by calling them to speak and stand for Him.

He offers every saint the matchless opportunity and marvelous privilege of serving the Savior. But no one is compelled to serve.

If we don't want to do God's bidding, all we have to do is refuse His call. And He will willingly

allow us to go our own way, even though it is to our everlasting regret and remorse to do so.

Like Simon, we don't intend to mock the Master. But by serving Christ out of a sense of obligation, we insult Him.

Jesus is never pleased when those who are called by His name and trust in His blood serve Him because they feel they must. Christ wants volunteers to serve Him. And only volunteers.

Our Lord would have us serve Him out of nothing more and nothing less than sincere love. He wants us to serve Him gladly, rejoicing that we are given the opportunity to work for the great God of glory. Anything less is a rude slap in His face.

But such service isn't only an insult to Jesus Christ. Also, forced labor is seldom fruitful. It never draws men to our Master and molds them into His image. There is no joy and satisfaction in mandatory service to attract others to the glory of God's Son.

There is only the disgusting stink of a servant who feels trapped and compelled to serve Christ. And that is always repugnant.

Materialistic Saints

The procession wound its way past the city gate to a rocky knob of a hill that had the macabre appearance of a grinning skull. On top of that hill, God's Son finished His terrible trudge out of the city.

Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. Verse 22

Soldiers stretched Him out on the crossbeam He had carried. And with a wooden mallet, spikes were pounded between bones in His wrists. Then the soldiers lifted the crossbeam with ropes and fastened it to a standing pole. Finally, a third spike was driven through Jesus' feet into a support block.

Flung up against the sky, our Lord hung there, naked for all to see. But that wasn't the end of the insults the Man the soldiers called the King of the Jews had to endure.

And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. Verse 24

It was a ghastly, gruesome scene. Blinking away blood that oozed from His brow into His eyes, the sinless Son of God groaned and writhed in agony on a Roman cross.

Meanwhile, as blood dripped from the nails in our Lord's feet, the soldiers huddled together on the ground. And with crude oaths and offhand jokes, they gambled for the only possessions Jesus had on earth: His clothes.

We dare not weep with regret over our Redeemer's stark poverty. He chose to live as a Man who was too poor to afford a pillow to soften the stones when He laid down at the end of the day.

It was His choice to live with not so much as a nest or a hole in the ground to call home. He spent His life looking to a higher path than being preoccupied with what this world can offer.

He chose to give Himself away. He gave Himself to His heavenly Father in prayer and devotion. He gave Himself to the distressed and the diseased, to the sick and the sorrowing.

He had nothing more than the clothes on His back when He died because He gave everything else to poverty stricken people He met along the way. And on that stark, stony little hill, He was giving His body and His blood for sinful men.

So the soldiers weren't taking anything from Jesus that He valued. In fact, if they had asked Him, He would have given His clothes to them. But they never bothered to ask.

Theirs was a problem of focus. The sinless Son of God was dying near enough for them to touch. And He was dying for them.

But all they could think about was what they might be able to gain from it. All that mattered was what they might be able to acquire from this crucifixion detail.

We can't blame them for that, of course. They never professed to trust in Christ. But we can

blame those of us who have chosen to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The sin is materialism. And it runs rampant through Christianity. Some preachers proudly proclaim the Savior who willingly chose poverty actually wants those who trust in Him to be wealthy with all this world treasures.

They even teach techniques to tap into the power of Christ's cross to gain this world's wealth. And that is anathema to our Lord. Our Lord would have us choose the path He chose and set our eyes on the celestial city that is above and beyond this world. He would have us seek His presence and His purpose in life

That means living out our days with no other aim than to love Christ as our Savior, our Friend and our God. To draw near the cross for no higher purpose than gaining material wealth is an ugly insult to our Savior.

Don't misunderstand. In itself, possessing this world's wealth isn't a mockery to Jesus. But craving and hungering for riches is.

It is gambling for used, homemade garments when our Savior wants to give us the Kingdom of God. It is focusing our eyes below instead of on high. It is insulting Him and depriving ourselves of the abundant life He longs to give us.

But that isn't the only insult our Savior endured on the cross. Before the soldiers lifted our Lord and skewered Him on the cross, they offered Him a swig of drugged wine to numb the mind wrenching agony of crucifixion.

They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. Verse 23

At first glance, it seems men who had not the slightest compassion for Christ were acting out of pity. But even this act kindness was motivated by rank selfishness.

If a crucified man's pain was eased, he was easier to handle. More important than that, he also died quicker. And the soldiers could go back to their barracks a few hours earlier.

Our Redeemer refused to dull the edge of what He suffered on our behalf. But that isn't the only reason He chose not drink the myrrh laced wine they offered Him.

Our Lord is never pleased when we serve Him for no better reason than that we might personally benefit by doing so. Instead, He would have us give our time, our talents and our treasures to Him with no thought of how it might profit us.

The lesson is unavoidable. We cannot be ruled by self and serve the Savior.

That is an ugly insult to the Lord who loved us so much He gave His very life that we might live.