

King of the Jews

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[0:00] My name is Sean, for those of you who don't know me, and I'm one of the pastors of Trinity! Cambridge Church. It's my great joy and privilege to preach God's word to you this morning. Please turn with me to Matthew chapter 27. Matthew chapter 27, verses 27 to 44.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, as surely as the heavens are higher than the earth, surely your ways are higher than our ways.

Ours is the way of vengeance and retribution. Ours is the way of grace and mercy. We try so hard, Lord, to make our own way, find our own righteousness, find our own power and wisdom.

But Lord, in Christ Jesus, your Son, you present to us a different way. Teach us that way. Form us. Change us. In accordance with that way, the way of Christ, the way of the gospel. As we submit ourselves to your word, as you address us this morning.

[1:40] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's word. Let's honor God together. I know it's a little harder to stand up here, but let me read.

And you can follow along with me in your Bibles. Matthew chapter 27, verses 27 to 44. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, verse 1.

And they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. And twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall.

[2:53] But when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

And over his head, they put the charge against him, which read, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.

So also the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him, saying, He saved others. He cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him.

He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, I am the Son of God. And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

[3:57] This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. When heads of state meet in a high-level diplomacy meeting, they're not merely meeting for conversation.

Of course, they are meeting to talk and to discuss matters, but they have a larger, broader audience in mind when they gather for those meetings. And they will be photographed, and that photograph will be shared with thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands.

And so each meeting is highly choreographed. Every detail of the visual matters. How are they dressed? A suit? A military uniform? A traditional ethnic attire?

Who extends the hand first for a handshake? Who is standing and who is walking toward them?

What order are they seated in? How are the national flags displayed and in what order?

These details matter to them because the rulers of this world carefully want to project power and authority, majesty, and control. And they don't want in any way to project weakness, inferiority, or

subjection to other powers and authorities.

[5 : 19] But see how our King Jesus is here, received and treated by the Roman and Jewish authorities. At Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds hailed Jesus as the Messianic King.

In Matthew 21, verse 9, the crowds cried out, Hosanna to the Son of David, a Messianic title for the Davidic King that is to come. They were clamoring on that day for Jesus' enthronement.

But less than a week later, on Good Friday, the crowds clamored for Jesus' execution. A drastic turn. And at the beginning of the book, when Jesus was born, the Magi, the wise men from the East, visited him and called him the King of the Jews.

And once again here at the end of the book of Matthew, in chapter 27, as Jesus is dying, he is presented once more as the King of the Jews. The only two times in the Gospel of Matthew he is called by that title.

But this time, it's not a sincere acclaim, it's a mockery of Jesus as the King of the Jews. In this passage, Jesus is mocked, reviled, blasphemed, stripped naked, sped on, struck, and crucified.

[6 : 42] And this image of public humiliation and execution is the image that Jesus leaves to most of the world.

Of course, a select group of Jesus' disciples will be witnesses of his resurrection. Mary Magdalene and the other woman, Peter and the twelve, James and the other apostles, and about 500 brothers as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 6.

But for the rest of the tens of thousands of people, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people who saw Jesus and met him in his earthly ministry, this humiliating image on the cross is their lasting image of him.

The rulers of this world project power, authority, control, but King Jesus chooses the way of weakness, humiliation, and death.

If you saw a king, someone who claimed your allegiance and asked you to follow him, humiliated and defeated, would that inspire your confidence?

[7 : 53] Would that inspire you to pledge allegiance to him and follow him? Of course not. Yet that is precisely the point. A crucified king looks foolish to a power-hungry world.

But God shuns the wisdom of this world and the power of this world. He shuns the rulers of this world. He chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

What is weak in the world to shame the strong. What is low and despised in the world to shame the high and esteemed, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God?

He saves us in such a way that the only way to gain our souls is by surrendering and losing ourselves. So that the only way to attain eternal life is by dying to ourselves.

And the only way to glory is through humility. God saves us through the folly of Christ crucified. And so in this passage we see first Jesus mocked by the Gentiles on the one hand in verse 27 to 31 and then mocked by the Jews in 32 to 44.

[9 : 07] First we find in verses 27 to 31, Jesus being utterly degraded and humiliated by the Gentiles. He says in verse 27, Gentiles meaning the Greeks or non-Jews.

He says in verse 27, the soldiers of the Roman governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole battalion before him. On what might have been an otherwise boring ordinary day in the lives of these common Roman soldiers, they find themselves in custody of the king of the Jews.

And that's too good of an opportunity for them to pass up. So they gather the whole battalion before him. A battalion, a full battalion, a Roman battalion is usually 600 men, 600 soldiers.

So at least six times the size of our gathering, more so here. So imagine all those people gather just to make sport of Jesus, to bully Jesus.

First they strip him. They strip Jesus of his clothing and then they play dress up with him like he's a plaything. In the place of a royal robe, they put the scarlet robe of a Roman soldier, Roman robe on him.

[10 : 12] In the place of a bejeweled crown, they weave together a crown of thorns and place it on his head. In the place of a golden scepter, they gave him a little stick, a reed. And then kneeling before him, they mocked him, he says, their eyes wild with insolence, their voices dripping with sarcasm.

They say, hail king of the Jews. And boisterous laughter erupts from the soldiers, battalions of soldiers. Egged on by their comrades, laughter, the soldiers continue.

They spit on him, took the reed and struck him on the head. Spitting on anybody in any culture is a grievous insult, but especially in a Jewish culture, especially in the ancient culture.

And especially for Jews who considered being spat on to confer uncleanness coming from a Gentile. They're intentionally defiling Jesus.

They strike him on the head, another act of violence and defiance and disrespect. Your royal highness, please lend to me your scepter for a moment. And then whack on the head.

[11 : 23] As they clobber him and jeer him, more laughter erupts from the crowd. The irony of the scene is not lost on the readers of Matthew's gospel. Despite the Gentile soldiers' mockery, Jesus is the king of the Jews.

He is the son of God and he is the promised Messiah. Yeah. These soldiers' mockery of Jesus is so grossly unfair and wrong.

Yet Jesus does nothing to stop it. He could have. Jesus said in Matthew 26, 53 that he could appeal to God the Father and that he would at once send more than 12 legions of angels to Jesus' aid.

I think Steve preached on this a few weeks ago and he mentioned 2 Kings 19, 35 where one angel wipes out 185,000 armies strong. Sending 72,000 angels would have been an overkill for a battalion of mere human soldiers.

He didn't have to do that. But at least he could have sent lightning or something. Strike these arrogant presumptuous soldiers down. But he doesn't do that. Jesus quietly endures the mockery.

[12 : 38] And when they had mocked him, it says in verse 31, On his way to the cross, Jesus' humiliation continues.

As they went out in verse 32, they found the man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. According to Roman custom, the person on death row is supposed to carry his own cross.

But the fact that Jesus is unable to carry his own cross and they must compel another man to do so shows how weak already he is. From all the beating and the flogging, he is already physically incapacitated.

He can't even carry his own cross to the place of the skull. When they finally get there, he says in verse 34, They offered him wine to drink mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. Psalm 69, 17 to 21, speaks of a righteous sufferer who becomes a prophetic type, a prophetic forer to Jesus. And shows us what the Messiah will be like when he comes.

[13 : 44] And in Psalm 69, the righteous sufferer says, You know, Lord, my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor. My foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart so that I am in despair.

I looked for pity, but there was none. And for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food. And for my thirst, they gave me sour wine to drink. The word translated poison in that prophecy is gall in Greek.

The same word used here in our passage, which is what they mixed with the wine to give to Jesus. It's not true poison, but it is an intensely bitter herb.

Later in verse 48, they will also offer him sour wine. Thus fulfilling in minute detail the prophecy of Psalm 69. The pungent smell of wine that has gone bad would have immediately pierced Jesus' nose as they offered it to him.

In most places in the U.S., those who are condemned on death row are allowed to request a specific last meal that they want before they are executed.

[14 : 49] This is Jesus' last meal. A meal not of his own choosing, but gall and sour wine. And like the psalmist, Jesus looked for pity, but there was none.

And for comforters, but found none. Instead, it says in verse 39, Verse 41 says, From the Jewish criminals to the passersbys to the chief priests and the elders, Jesus is rejected by every stratum of Jewish society and Roman society.

He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. People mocking and wagging their heads and the Jewish leaders' specific words in verse 43, He trusts in God, let God deliver him now if he desires him.

All precisely echoes Psalm 22, fulfilling another very specific prophecy from a thousand years before. They encircle him, pierce his hands and feet, stare at him and gloat over him and cast lots

for his clothing, all of which were prophesied specifically in Psalm 22.

He, how can his own people be so ignorant? Sure, we might say these Romans might not know any better, but shouldn't the Jews who have had the scriptures, who have had God's revelation, who have had God's law, shouldn't they, who have had the prophecies, shouldn't they know better?

[16:33] Jesus' heart is for them. He came to save them. Even if all the other nations rejected him, they at least should have received him. But no, Jesus is rejected by his own people.

His last remaining dignity is taken away from him in verse 35, when the soldiers cast lots and divide his clothing, his garments. The last piece of property that he can call his own on earth is stolen off of his back and completely naked and exposed to the elements and exposed and naked before the gawking crowd.

Imagine the pathetic sight. That's how our King Jesus died. And while Jesus is reduced to this gruesome spectacle, where are his disciples, his closest friends?

When a man of Cyrene is compelled to carry Jesus' cross in verse 32, notice how Matthew specifically says that the man was called Simon by name. His name is really kind of irrelevant for us.

It's kind of like a nobody. He's just like a side character, an extra in the scene. We don't need to know his name. But Matthew intentionally includes his name and say he was called Simon by name. Why? Because it invites a contrast to another, more prominent Simon we know from Matthew's gospel, Simon called Peter, who had insisted to Jesus in chapter 26 that even if all the other disciples fall away on account of him, I will stay with you, Jesus.

[18:11] I am willing to die for you, Jesus. And this Simon Peter is nowhere to be seen. Earlier in Matthew 16, Jesus had told his disciples, whoever would follow me must deny himself and pick up his cross and follow me.

And here there is no disciple left to help Jesus carry a literal cross on his way to execution. None of his disciples are there. Similarly, early in Matthew 20, earlier in Matthew 20, the mother of James and John, remember, approached Jesus with an unusual request, saying of him, say, make these two sons of mine, James and John, sit one at your right hand and one on your left, asking for positions of glory.

However, as Jesus ascends the cross to usher in the kingdom of God, John and James are not flanking Jesus to his right and to his left. No, that exact same expression is used to hearken back to that instance.

Instead, the people flanking Jesus are two robbers being killed alongside him. These parallels highlight intentionally for us the intense loneliness and the sharp betrayal that Jesus must have felt. Rejected by all, forsaken by his own disciples. This is a cross that Jesus must bear alone. Only his shoulders can bear the weight. We can see why this is the case in the chief priests' misplaced mockery in verse 42.

[19:50] They say he saved others. He cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. They taught Jesus to come down now from the cross.

If he really is a savior, he should be able to save himself. A fitness coach should be fit himself. A dentist should have good teeth himself. So likewise, they argue, the savior of the world should be able to save himself.

But they don't understand that in order to save others, Jesus must not save himself out of this situation. Jesus said earlier in Matthew 20, verse 28, that he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In order for many to be saved, he must die as a ransom price for their freedom. All of humanity has sinned against God and we are there for spiritual debtors.

And debtors cannot go free until their debt has been paid. But God, the creditor, the lender, is merciful and gracious.

[21:08] And instead of insisting on their punishment, on our punishment, he has graciously provided a way of absorbing the enormous debt himself. His son, his heir, heir to all of his wealth and all of his kingdom, Jesus Christ himself, will pay the price, the debt that we owe by dying on the cross as a substitute for sinners to pay the debt that we enslaved sinners could never pay so that you and I might be free.

If Jesus came down from the cross at that moment, the debt would not be paid, the wrath of God would not be satisfied, and we would still, to this day, be enslaved to sin and death.

A crucified king looks ridiculous and foolish to the world. Look at verse 42 again. The chief priests say this, Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him.

See how even to the very end, these Jews demand signs. If you show us a sign, if you prove yourself to my satisfaction and satisfy my demands and requirements and standards, then we will believe in you.

This is exactly what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1, 22-24. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

[22 : 40] But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God. The Jews seek power. The Greeks seek wisdom. That's what the world looks for in their kings and rulers.

They want someone powerful. They want someone wise. Jesus is both, but not in the way this sinful world expects. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

He seeks to save the humble. Sinners who acknowledge their own wickedness, the weak who acknowledge their own neediness and call out to God alone for salvation.

In order to be saved, we must acknowledge that what Jesus endured on the cross on that day, 2,000 years ago, is precisely, exactly what we deserved.

But the proud and the strong will never admit that. This is why the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

[23 : 42] Those who are powerful and wise in the world think that they could find another way to save themselves. They think that their own ingenuity, their own resources, their own philanthropy, their own righteousness can save themselves and the world.

But at the cross of Jesus Christ, God makes foolish the wisdom of the world. He displays once and for all that there is no other way of salvation because God saves us through the folly of Christ crucified.

God saves us and for all that God saves us and for all that brothers and sisters, where is your hope of salvation? Really? Is it in the power and wisdom of this world?

The academics, the geniuses, the entrepreneurs, the billionaires, the activists, the politicians? Do you think they will save the world?

No. 1 Corinthians 2.8 tells us that none of the rulers of this age understood the secret and hidden wisdom of God. For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

[24 : 54] In every generation, the rulers of this sinful world, those who are wise and powerful in their generation, crucify the Lord of glory all over again because they do not understand the secret and hidden wisdom of God.

brothers and sisters, do not crave the world's approval. Do not seek intellectual and cultural respectability in the eyes of the world.

If it comes, it comes. Don't fret if it doesn't. The gospel of Jesus Christ will always be a stumbling block and folly to those who are perishing.

If you win them with worldly wisdom rather than with the folly of Christ crucified, they will ever remain worldly people. Likewise, brothers and sisters, do not expect your life as a Christian to be free of suffering, derision, mockery, and persecution.

1 Peter 2, 21-24, it says, God has called us to endure unjust suffering. Why? For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

[26 : 04] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. All the mockery that Jesus endured at the hands of the Jews and the Gentiles expect to endure the same.

For that is the example that Jesus set. For that's the pattern that Jesus has set for us to follow. Jesus is crucified along with two robbers in this passage.

They very well may have been accomplices of Barabbas. If you remember Barabbas from last week's passage, because it says in Mark 15, 7 that Barabbas was a rebel who participated in the

insurrection.

Since he's a Jew, his name is Barabbas, an Aramaic name, he was probably a participant, a zealot, who participated in the Jewish insurrection to overthrow Roman rule.

[27:13] And that middle spot on the cross was probably reserved for Barabbas, but Jesus took his place as a substitute. Jesus sets a different pattern from the pattern of Barabbas.

Barabbas is the way of pride and power. Jesus is the way of humility and faith. Barabbas is the way of conquest. Jesus is the way of suffering.

Barabbas is the way of this sinful dog-eat-dog world, the law of the jungle, eat or be eaten, kill or be killed, the survival of the fittest. Jesus is the way of heaven, the law of grace, mercy for sinners, justification for the ungodly, salvation for the weakest.

When we model weakness and humble suffering under mockery and persecution, that's when we most follow the way of Jesus, the way of the cross.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, this is so countercultural, this truth, that we are strong in you when we acknowledge our weakness, that we are forgiven when we acknowledge that we are sinners, that we are saved when we acknowledge that we are poor and needy and come to you alone for salvation.

[28:44] Would you grant, please, to everyone here the humility and faith that you require, that we might walk the path that Jesus has walked, that we might pick up our cross and follow him in faith and obedience.

please move in that way in the hearts of every single man and woman, boy and girl here. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.