

Insult of the King – Mark 15:16-32

Mark's gospel tells the story of Jesus of Nazareth, how He accomplished what no other man ever has, a perfect life, one lived for the benefit of others. In the closing narrative of Mark's Gospel account, we see how Jesus was handled, and we see sickening brutality and cruelty. We have to wonder why? We have to ask the question why is it that Jesus Christ is the most insulted person who has ever lived?

One thing that stands out when reading the gospel accounts of the death of Jesus is what's not included by the Evangelists who wrote them. Any film portrayal of the life and death of Jesus shows the physical agony He endured, yet this isn't the focus. For those living during the time these gospels were first scribed, the horror of scourging and crucifixion would be well known to all. Living in a sanitised, 21st century western society, it isn't inappropriate for us to learn about such things. However, we must do our best to understand the nature of Christ's physical suffering, without glorifying it beyond what the scriptures intend.

1) Insult His Name

Appendix A describes some of the agony that Jesus would have been subjected to. But what Mark's gospel focusses on is not the pain and torture, but the mocking Jesus experienced. A whole battalion (600 soldiers) gathered to mock Jesus; Robed and forced to wear a crown of thorns; mockingly saluted "King of the Jews"; spat on; stripped; insulted. Even those crucified next to Him joined in the verbal assault.

Even now, Jesus continues to be mocked. Christians are insulted and ridiculed on account of their faith. It appears the safe way to discuss Jesus is sarcastically and mockingly. Why is Jesus the subject of such ridicule? What has He done to cause this reaction? Jesus claimed to be The Truth. That is uncomfortable.

Jesus believed Himself to be God, because Jesus said of Himself that He is 'The Way, The Truth, The Life'. If you are saying 'I don't believe that to be true' then you must therefore conclude Jesus either to be a lie, a liar or a madman. To be told you don't exist is insulting! To be told you are a liar is insulting! To be told you are a madman is insulting! You either; adore Him, or you mock, insult, despise Him.

Q. Considering the physical pain Jesus endured, why is the insult and mocking such a focus in Mark's Gospel?

Q. How do friends / family respond to the claim that Jesus is 'The Truth'? Why is this claim controversial?

...who are...

2) Saved by His Name

Read Romans 10:13

In Mark's Gospel, we read about Jesus hanging on the Cross. Crowds jeering, challenging Him to prove His power. At this moment, Jesus – the one through whom the universe came to exist – remained on the cross. He was taking into himself the hostility of people like me who once insulted His name and in return giving me the ability to call upon His name to be free from the darkness in my life and to know God.

Jesus wasn't interested in winning an argument; Jesus was interested winning souls. He has made a way so that ALL who call on His name will be saved. He held back His power and preferred weakness, and in doing so made it possible for those who insulted his name to be saved by his name.

Q. What temptations do we face to 'prove God'? What are the risks we encounter?

Q. How can Jesus example and focus inspire us in how we reach our friends and family?

...to...

3) Worship His Name

Read Luke 23:39-43

Mark's account tells us that the thieves mocked Jesus. Luke's account tells us that one went on to call upon His name. At some point, while on the cross, this thief saw something different in Jesus. Jesus was reacting differently on the cross, and the thief was moved in his heart to believe Him to be truly whom he claimed to be. Even in the final moments of his life, hanging, dying there was hope.

No matter what you may have thought or said about Jesus in your life, today you can call upon His name and know peace with God. For those of us who know Him, the challenge is to be like Him, to be willing to suffer insult, derision and mockery as we stand by Him and declare Him to be 'THE way, THE truth and THE life'. We may need to endure the suffering. We may experience ridicule and mocking. We need to remember the Jesus who endured so that we can be saved.

Q. Why does the thief's view of Jesus change on the Cross? How does this inspire us?

Q. Read John 15:18. How can we be encouraged and stand firm when people mock us for our faith?

Appendix A –

This description comes from a medical journal that analysed the torture Jesus suffered according to gospel evidence and the nature of the particular punishments they reference:

Although the Romans did not invent crucifixions they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering

For scourging, the man was stripped of his clothing, and his hands were tied to an upright post. The back, buttocks, and legs were flogged either by two soldiers (lictors) or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging depended on the disposition of the lictors and was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death.

A flagrum was used for the flogging, which was a leather whip containing beads of steel, bone and glass

As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.

When the soldiers tore the robe from Jesus' back, they probably reopened the scourging wounds.

The driven nail would crush or sever the sensorimotor median nerve. The stimulated nerve would produce excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms.

Adequate exhalation required lifting the body by pushing up on the feet and by flexing the elbows and adducting the shoulders. However, this manoeuvre would place the entire weight of the body on the tarsals and would produce searing pain. Furthermore, flexion of the elbows would cause rotation of the wrists about the iron nails and cause fiery pain along the damaged median nerves.

Since speech occurs during exhalation, these short, terse utterances [Jesus' words from the cross] must have been particularly difficult and painful.

Death by crucifixion was, in every sense of the word, excruciating (Latin, *excruciat*, or 'out of the cross').