



His Rejection – Our Rejoicing

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Mark 15:16-21

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¹⁶ And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. ¹⁷ 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. ²¹ And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

(Pastor Prays)

On November 18, 1986, the Washington Redskins were playing the New York Giants on Monday Night Football. Two years prior, Joe Theisman had led the Red Skins to the Super Bowl, but now, at age 36, he was a few years removed from his prime. Late in the first quarter, Theisman got the ball at the 50-yard line. He had dropped into the pocket but couldn't find a receiver. Meanwhile, on the blitz, the most terrifying and feared linebacker in the league, Lawrence Taylor, hit Joe Theismann's leg like a cannonball, and the camera angle was perfectly situated so as to catch the compound fracture happen live. And many Americans watched that terrifying event in real time. Even today, if you look it up, there will be a warning that the video is unsuitable for some audiences. It's the kind of warning that Mark could have put on this

passage. It's hard to read the mistreatment that the Lord Jesus endured. He should be honored and worshipped. Instead, he is abused and mocked. And you wonder why Mark writes it like he does. It helps to remember the context. Mark writes this gospel for a very specific group of people. There is a small church in the heart of pagan Rome, and Mark is encouraging the beleaguered church in Rome by letting them see the rejection of Jesus and strangely reminding us that...

We Can Rejoice Because He Was Rejected

Let's go back slowly through the passage, interpreting it and getting a good grasp on it. Then we will make some applications. Let's back up and start in verse 15. *¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

And the text says they had him scourged. So, the scourging involved two Roman soldiers and the criminal, or the victim in this case. Jesus would have his hands hung up on a hook so that his feet barely touched the ground. A Roman soldier would be on each side. They would both have a cat of nine tails. That would be a short handle with long cuts of leather embedded with bone and rocks. They would take turns hitting him, and each hit would rip into his flesh. That would go on and on and on, and sometimes the scourging would be punishment enough to kill the criminal. Oftentimes, the scourging was there to expedite the process of crucifixion. They didn't want somebody to hang on the cross all day and all night. And so, they could expedite the crucifixion by getting the criminal almost dead. That's what happened with Jesus. He has scourged here to a point, but he's not dead. His back has been torn open, just mangled.

And after that, Pilate turns him over to the soldiers in verse 16. Who are these soldiers? They led him away inside the palace. Your Bible might call it the pretorian. It's a courtyard around the palace. Pilate would come there when he's visiting in Jerusalem. He would stay there at this palace. The pretorian guard would be there. They called together the whole battalion, so a Legion would be about 1000 soldiers, and a battalion is 1/6 of that, so it would be maybe 200 up to 600 soldiers. So, probably a few hundred soldiers have gathered around. It's a mob. You know how a mob does. People will act in a mob like they would not act by themselves. So here you have the mob of soldiers. They have learned to disconnect their emotions. They've been in

this Legion for a long time. They're accustomed to rebels. They're accustomed to zealots. They think Jesus is just another fool. They are merciless. In fact, this will turn into a sport for them. The best way to think of it would be like Adolf Hitler and especially his SA with the lightning bolts on their shoulder. They are the ones that would be so terribly cruel.

Here, the soldiers decided to do a mock worship, or you might call it a mock coronation. They treat Jesus in a mocking way, like he's a Caesar. In verse 17, they put a purple woolen cloak on him. That is what a Roman emperor might wear. Matthew says that it is scarlet. It is probably what the Roman soldier would wear. It started out red, but if you are in the Middle East with the sun beating down on it, it now has started to fade and, therefore, is close to purple. They put that rough cloak on Jesus in verse 17, and then they decided let's crown him with a crown of thorns. We are familiar with this. You've seen pictures of a crown of thorns. You may have seen Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. It gives this gruesome detail of the physicality of what happened to Jesus. The Crown of Thorns could have been made of thorns that are an inch or two long. Possibly, it's just thorns and thistles. They quickly put it together to symbolize the crown that an emperor would wear. They slam it down on his on his head. He is already bleeding from his back and shoulders and arms, and now the thorns have pierced his head. You know how it is when you get hit in the head, or you cut your head, for some reason, the skin is so thin that you just bleed profusely. So now blood is coming down his head into his eyes and down his face.

And then they started, in verse 18, to salute him. They started to praise him. They used something from what you would do when a Caesar comes by in a parade. You would say, Hail Caesar. We don't use the word hail very much. I went to Wofford College, and our fight song was Old Wofford, Hail. Hail means that you want success, that you want honor, that you're enthusiastic. Hail, King of the Jews. They are making fun of him. They're mocking. This is a mock coronation. They are now hailing him like you would a Caesar. In verse 19, they started to get even more violent. Here, the text says that they started striking him. If you read over in Matthew, Matthew gives us another detail. Matthew says that stick that they're using is just like a broom handle. He says that at first, they used it like a scepter. They put it in his hand like he would a royal authority. A crown and a scepter would be the symbols of royal authority. The scepter would show the sovereignty of the one ruling. So, they put this stick in his hand like he's

a real ruler. But at some point, they get frustrated at that, and they just take it out of his hand, and Mark tells us now they are beating him with it. If you ever held a broomstick in your hand, you cut the broom part off, so it's about 4 feet long. Think of the velocity that you can swing that. So now they're hitting him about the head and face with the Crown of thorns on his head. They're driving that into his head. I mean, it's hard to read what's going on here.

And if that's not enough, they decide to humiliate him. So, they start spitting on him. They're beating him with the reed and spitting in his face. Even today that is the most denigrating thing. It was disrespectful. Instead of praising him, they are spitting on him. They are playing a dangerous game now, but they don't know it. We know it. Now they're kneeling down in front of him, paying homage. So, finally, they've had enough of that in verse 20. The mob dies down, it gets boring after a while, even if you enjoy that sort of thing.

In verse 20, they reach up, and they take off the purple cloak. The way it's written is that the woolen cloak has been across his shoulders long enough that the blood has started the clot, and it is stuck to his back. Now they come and rip it off. All those wounds are back open again. It's a terrible sight. They put his clothes back on him, and the fun is gone.

And then Mark adds this odd detail in verse 21. It's unusual. Mark tells us that as they're walking out with Jesus to crucify him, and as they do, just randomly comes a man that has traveled a long way. He's from North Africa. There's a Jewish population in northern Africa. He comes from there. He's come to Jerusalem as a Pilgrim. He's there for the Passover week and he's there with his family. And Mark tells us this odd detail. We know his name, and we know the name of his two boys.

Now, when you read Matthew and Luke, you find that Jesus comes out, and he's bearing his own cross. He starts out carrying the cross or maybe that cross beam. It is a 50-pound beam, and an average-sized man could carry that. But Jesus has been beaten so terribly and lost so much blood that even the 50-pound cross beam is too much. It takes him to the ground, so they get Simon and put that cross beam, that is smeared with the blood of Christ, on Simon. And Simon carries that cross, and his two boys watch him do that. What's amazing to me is that years later, to that same group of people, a man named Paul would write another letter called Romans. And at the end of Romans, he would say, make sure you greet Rufus and his mother.

So why is this here? Why does this tragedy help us rejoice? Let's go back through, and I'll give you a couple of things to think about and maybe apply. How do we rejoice? Here's the first one: #1

Rejoice that he makes us righteous

We can rejoice because he has made us righteous. Even though you were born a sinner when Jesus Christ lived perfectly and died on the cross, he not only paid the debt for your sin, he covered you in his perfect life. They clothed him in purple, the royal color, and he would be stripped of that so that you and I might be clothed in his righteousness. You understand that legalism, and you trying hard, and you seeking to earn God's favor does nothing to please God. Outside of Christ, the Bible says that our righteousness is like filthy rags.

So we go to God, and here's what the Lord says in Isaiah 61:10. Maybe you could make it your prayer. Isaiah writes, *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.* Do you know what this is right here? This is the doctrine of imputed righteousness, that God has put the righteous perfect life of Jesus on you. You not only are saved at the cross because Jesus died in your place, but you are also saved because Jesus lived in your place, and that righteousness covers you so that when God looks at you, he sees the perfect life of Jesus. We call it the great exchange. The great exchange is that Christ takes our sin, and we get his righteousness. It's the gospel that will save you. It's the gospel that makes you live. It's the gospel. I'm asking you to trust. If I say to you, I want you to trust Christ, here's what I want you to trust. Trust that he lived perfectly in your place, that he died on the cross in your place, that God has raised him from the dead in your place, and that when God accepts you, he accepts you on what Christ did in your place. I want you to picture putting on the righteousness of Christ. If you put on a shirt today, think of putting it on with Christ covering you. If you put on a dress, the righteousness of Christ covers you. You can rejoice because he has made us righteous. That's what this passage teaches. There's something else. There's a second reason to rejoice: #2

Rejoice that the curse is removed

You can rejoice that the curse is removed. I get that down in verse 17 when they start the mock coronation. They covered him with the purple robe, and then they put on him the Crown of Thorns. Do you see that in verse 17? The thorns symbolize something. Look, there's more going on here than just the physicality. There's more going on here than just the thorns piercing the brow of Jesus. There's more going on here than just the pain and humiliation. A lot of people over history have died with pain and humiliation. There's more *happening here*.

I want you to think with me, not about the crown, think about the thorns. When you read Genesis chapters one, two, and three, you learn about the creation of Adam and Eve and how they fall into sin in the garden, doing what God told them not to do. And after they sin, God curses the ground. Let me read it to you. I think there's a connection in Genesis 3:17-18. *¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

There's the curse. They've twisted it together without knowing it. They've put it on the head of Jesus so that he will carry the curse that our sin brings. Jesus wears a cursed crown for us. He picks that crown up, and it's a promise that there will one day be a new Heaven and a new Earth. What did Paul say about this? Paul wrote in Galatians 3:13, *¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"*

This should change how you see God. This should change how you see yourself. Whatever your view of God is, you should see him as a good creator that created everything. He hates sin and will punish it. And you should see yourself as someone who is created in the image of God, and yet your sin is such that you are under the curse. Our world, it's terrible because of a curse. When you believe the gospel, you believe that Christ took the curse for you, that at the cross, the wrath of God has been taken away, and the mercy of God is given. So, you see yourself not under the curse but as loved and received and adopted in Christ.

Let's think about your past. Some of you have some terrible past, but now, you see yourself as forgiven and cleansed. You see yourself as a family. You see yourself as part of God's people.

You see yourself as being taken care of because the curse is lifted. You see yourself as someone whose prayers are being answered. There's a reason for us to rejoice because Christ is taking the curse. Let me move quickly here: #3

Rejoice in His Lordship

Look at verses 18 and 19. Watch, there's a mockery here. It is a mock coronation. Let's see what the text says. 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.* That is mockery right there, making fun, ridiculing, straight persecution.

So, let me make a statement here. You're living right now, in 2024, as a Christian. So, as a Christian, there are certain things that you believe, and your beliefs have an impact on your lifestyle, and your lifestyle will then set you against the world. So, for instance, let's just say you don't get drunk on weekends, you don't sleep around, and you go to church on Sunday. It's not because you're trying to be a great person. It's because you've been redeemed by Christ, and you live a certain way. Let's say you believe what the Bible says; you just believe the book. If you believe that abortion is a sin, it's heinous, and it's murder; if you believe that marriage is between a man and a woman, if you believe that a man created in the image of God should stay a man and a woman created in the image of God should stay a woman, if you just believe those simple things out of the Bible, it sets you on a different course than the rest of the world around you, and you will be persecuted.

It's mockery here. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi in Philippians 1:29, It would be good for us to memorize this, Paul says, ²⁹ *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* If you just live your life for Christ, it's going to happen that you will be mocked and derided and may be persecuted. You received that as a gift from God. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, ¹² *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

If that's the case, what do we need to do as Christians in 2024 here at Hickory Grove Baptist Church? What do we need to do? Well, there are a couple of things. We should be preparing. If you're going to go off in the battle, you need to be trained. We need to be training. We need to

be memorizing God's word and learning how to pray. We need to create and resolve in our hearts, knowing how to resist temptation. We need to be preparing our children. We do this with them now. We send them off to school so that they can be prepared to go to college and then, hopefully, one day get a job and move out of the house. We prepare them for that. So, if we're going to do that with the world, why would we not go to great lengths to prepare them for the persecution that is coming? We need to strengthen our own souls and our own hearts. By God's grace, through his word and worship, we need to be strengthened. And look, we need to rejoice when it comes down to when you actually find yourself in hardship because of the gospel. Rejoice that you've been counted worthy to be someone that suffers like that.

That's verse 18. Let me take you to verse 19. You find this terrible abuse. There's no way to describe it other than abuse. They're striking his head with a reed, it's a broomstick. Think of that. Now they're beating him with that. It's unjust. They are treating him in a way that his actions don't deserve. If you have ever been cheated, if you've ever been treated unjustly, if something has happened to you that has been unfair, go here to this verse. This is unfair. Jesus takes the poison out of abuse here. There is healing in the wounds of Jesus. There is hope there.

There are two words that you ought to have. One is efficacy. It's an old word. It means the ability, the power, the efficacy. The blood of Christ, the wounds of Christ, they can heal. The other word is sufficiency. That is that God and his grace, the gospel, is sufficient. Christ is sufficient. The Holy Spirit is sufficient and has the power to sustain you.

Go down a little further in verse 19. Now, let's go to the humiliation. Have you ever been humiliated? There's humiliation there. Verse 19. ¹⁹ *And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.* They are spitting. It's embarrassing. They're spitting on him now. There's a difference between being humbled and being humiliated. One of the things that I've found is that the more you struggle with pride, the more humiliated you can be. One of the ways to fight being humiliated is to ask God for humility. God brings you humility; strive for humility, and once you get to a spot of humility, it's almost impossible to humiliate you. You're already there. We find that strength here in Christ.

In verse 19, this is a dangerous game they are playing. They were striking his head with a reed, spitting on him, and now they are kneeling down, playing a game here. And what they are doing for fun right here, one day they will do for real. What did Paul say? He said that one day, every knee will bow in heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Rejoice in his lordship. Confess his lordship. Submit to His Lordship and trust the Lordship of Christ. Speak of the goodness of God's lordship in your life. Two more things to rejoice in, and I'll be done.

Rejoice in deliverance

Rejoice in our deliverance. Here's salvation down in verse 20. So they're tired of all the games that they're playing. The mob is now growing weary. It's time for the crucifixion, and the text simply says there in verse 20 that they led him out to crucify him. Here is our hope: This is why we have a cross behind us; this is why the cross is central to us. It is our hope. It's the centerpiece of the gospel. It is the sign that God loves us. God loved you enough to kill his own son instead of killing you. You deserve death, but you get love and mercy. That's the gospel. This is Christ in our place. What do we rejoice in? This was an odd point to me. I didn't expect it. It's the last one we need to rejoice in.

Rejoice in providence

The providence in verse 21 is an odd thing. You might call it a coincidence. You might say that things like this just randomly happened to some random guy. As Christians, although we sometimes use that language, we don't actually believe that things are random and happen by coincidence. We believe that it is providence, that there is an overruling Lord that has all things in his hand, and he brings all things around for his own glory. It's a strange place for Mark to put this. It's strange that he would leave this detail. It's odd that we would have these names. ²¹ *And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.* Jesus was unable, physically, to carry his own cross. He had lost too much blood and is too weak, so they compelled a passerby named Simon of Cyrene. It's interesting that Mark would know his name. Simon, who's from North Africa, and

then would add, of Cyrene. He came in from the country. He is the father of Alexander and Rufus. And you remember (this is why we do exposition) John Mark is writing this gospel for a small little church in Rome. That same little church would receive a letter from the apostle Paul called the Book of Romans. And as Paul closed his letter in the Book of Romans. In Romans 16:13. Paul says to the church, hey, make sure you greet Rufus and his mother. Now, we can only conjecture, but somewhere along the way, Simon of Cyrene, who was carrying that cross, that this had some sort of effect even though it felt random. This was not a random event; this was the Providence of God that would bring those young men to see what happened with their dad. And somehow, we don't know where, somewhere along the way, they believed in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. That's providence. Now we rejoice in the good providence of God. When you read this story, it's hard to look at, but when you read it, when you read about his rejection, it's good to remember - Because he was rejected, you and I can rejoice.

(Pastor prays)