



Mark 15:27–32

27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!’ 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. ‘He saved oth-

ers,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Reflection

Jesus is hanging like a piece of meat on a wooden cross; only we treat animals far better than this. Red fire is consuming his wrist and ankles, a nail each through his wrists and one through both his ankles. His entire body weight is supported by those nails which are more like metal stakes. Only they're more than supporting him, he needs to pull himself up by them if he is going to breathe. Fresh and dried blood covers his face from his crown of thorns.

The lacerations on his back throb and bleed. He's reeling from the shock, weak from blood loss, and bruised and swollen from the beating that he's received. And the interminable cycle of horror continues, over and over again. He pulls himself up with his arms and pushes with his legs, just enough to open his chest cavity so that he can breathe, his wrists and ankles screaming with the pain. One breath and then he collapses down again, until the demand for oxygen forces him to pull and push himself up some more. Over and over again. Sometimes this went on for days, often more a spasm or convulsion than a voluntary movement; as the will to live fades, natural instinct takes over, and the body fights on its own for survival. In the end death would come through exhaustion and suffocation, cardiac arrest,

or loss of blood. Unless the Romans were in a particular hurry. If this were the case they'd simply shatter your legs leading to a quick suffocation.

Mark spares us these details. His original readers would have been only too familiar with the details. We know this because all ancient sources universally viewed crucifixion with horror. Instead, Mark focusses on the mockery. It's coming from every direction. The physical torment is not enough for them. The shame and humiliation of stripping Jesus quite likely naked and crucifying him in full public view, at eye-level, alongside a busy public thoroughfare is not enough for them. Add to this, Jesus' last moments on earth are filled with vitriol and hate. He's hanging on Barabbas' cross, not robbers or thieves

alongside him, but rebels and insurrectionists. The word can mean both in the Greek, but the Roman's didn't crucify you for theft. From Jesus' left and right these rebels heap insults upon him. And then there's the steady stream of passers-by,

29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!'

Stranger after stranger, the wash of humanity insulting the Lord of Life as he dies on their behalf.

The chief priests, teachers of the law and elders are there delighting in their crime.

Humiliated and silenced in their own temple courts on Tuesday, this Friday morning they're determined to have the last word, and again, they show what kind of men they are, imagine the leaders of God's people acting like this! They speak loudly to each other, ensuring Jesus can overhear their taunts,

'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.'

Surely this is Jesus' greatest temptation. Even now he is holding the very universe into being by his powerful word, legions or angels stand at his beck and call. In excruciating pain, these children of Satan

taunt him further (in Matthew's account) with their true father Satan's words on their lips,

Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" ... 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

But it's love, not nails, that is keeping him there. If Jesus were to step down from that cross there would be no blood of the covenant for the forgiveness of sins, no ransom for many, no salvation from sin, no fulfilment of Scripture, and no gospel of the kingdom to be proclaimed to nations everywhere. And Peter, forgiven and fearless, would not later be able to say,

24 “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

or

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 1 Peter 3:18

Neither would Paul, similarly forgiven and pouring out his life for his Lord, be able to say,

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we

might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

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 hung on a tree.” Galatians 3:13 (ESV)

But Jesus did not step down. It was love, not nails, that kept him there. Paraphrasing J C Ryle,

‘Was he whipped? It was that “through his wounds we might be healed’. Was he condemned, though innocent? It was that we might be acquitted, though guilty. Did he wear a crown of thorns? It was that we might wear the crown of glory. Was he stripped

of his garments? It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness. Was he mocked and reviled? It was that we might be honoured and blessed. Was he reckoned a criminal, and numbered among transgressors? It was that we might be reckoned innocent, and justified from all sin. Was he declared unable to save himself? It was that he might be able to save others to the uttermost. Did he die at last, and that, the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? It was that we might live for evermore, and be exalted to the highest glory.'

Think & Pray

Stand again at the foot of the cross today and look at our Saviour. Have you accept-

ed him into your heart as your Lord and Saviour? Is he your King? Do you believe in what he did for you on that cross for you? Is your life lived in honour of him? Because if not, in ignoring what he's done for you, then you are taking your place in that great crowd of passers-by, hurling insults at him as they move along with their daily lives. Hebrews 2:3 says it best,

3 how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

Accept Jesus into your heart today as your Saviour. Then tell a Christian friend about it, ask them what to do next. And if you are a follower of Jesus, recommit yourself to him today as you consider afresh the length and the depth of his love for you that he demonstrated on that cross. Love

him as he loved you. Rededicate your life today to loving him as he has loves you.