

## Divine Mercy for the Blasphemers

Mark 15:22-32

41-81

Now we are in Mark chapter 15 and today is going to be a special day, both this morning and evening. We're going to be looking at the portion of Scripture that begins in verse 22 and describes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

I want to read to you verses 22 down through verse 39. "Then they brought Him to the place, Golgotha, which is translated, 'Place of a Skull.' They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it. And they crucified Him and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. It was the third hour when they crucified Him. The inscription of the charge against Him read, 'The King of the Jews.' They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And He was numbered with transgressors.' Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'Ha, You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross'

"In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes were mocking Him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others, He cannot save Himself. Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with Him also were insulting Him. And when the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?*' which is translated, 'My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, 'Behold, He is calling for Elijah.' Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave Him a drink saying, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.' And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last and the veil of the temple was torn into from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly, this man was the Son of God.'"

As we have learned in our study of the previous portions of Scripture, a stunning, unparalled, blasphemous farce is being perpetrated on Jesus Christ. He is viewed by the people as a joke, as a ludicrous claimant to being the King, God's King, God's Messiah, God's Son, the Chosen One. It is all a joke as far as the Jews are concerned. It is ridiculous. Thus, starting with the treatment with the Sanhedrin in the trial in Caiaphas' house, Jesus is ridiculed.

As I told you last week, the Bible does not focus on the physical aspects of His suffering. It does not focus on the details of His scourging, it gives us no description whatsoever. Nor does it focus on His crucifixion. It says twice, I just read it, "They crucified Him," and it says nothing more than that. There are no adjectives. There are no descriptive phrases and there is no discussion as to what crucifixion was.

But what is carefully described here is the blasphemous mockery that was launched at the mocked trial in the courtyard and the hall of Caiaphas' house and has now followed all the way to the cross. He is being treated with scorn and mockery and as much cruel disdain as can possibly be imagined or unimagined. He has been punched in the face, slapped in the face, spit on, mocked as a King by having a crown of thorns crushed into His brow, a soldier's mantle to be a false robe thrown over His lacerated shoulders and a reed put in His hand as if it is some kind of scepter. He has been heaped with scorn. The notion that He is any kind of king is nothing but an utter farce. They treat Him with such dishonor, they treat Him with such shame and such hatred, that it never ceases to shock me, no matter how many times I read the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And while it was Pilate who was holding the tribunal in which the final verdict was rendered that He would be crucified, it was not Pilate who declared that verdict, it was the people. They said, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him." They pronounced the final sentence. Pilate will be culpable for his cowardice and his acts of unrighteousness and injustice. The Roman soldiers who carried on the scorn and the mockery and carried out the parody as Jesus as a king, certainly, eternally bear the weight of their own scorn. But in John 19:11, Jesus says that it was the Jews who committed the greatest sin. It is those who delivered Me into your hands, He says to Pilate, who bear the greatest responsibility.

Theirs is the epitome of blasphemy. It is the treatment of Jesus by the Jews, inaugurated by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court, a religious court, made up of the high priest and an equal number of scribes, the religious experts, elders, the wisest of the wise and chief priests, the very ones who were to intervene between men and God, it is that Sanhedrin that started the entire mocking abuse. It was they who first punched Him, slapped Him and spit in His face and mocked the idea that He could be the Son of God or the Messiah, or the King. Theirs is the severest apostasy, for they have defected from Holy Scripture. They have defected from the revelation of the Old Testament in which the details of Christ are prophesied so as to make the Christ who did appear recognizable to them for He, in fact, fulfilled all that the prophets anticipated. They have therefore rejected their own holy scriptures which they purport to uphold and to know. Theirs is a defection from God, theirs is a defection from Scripture, theirs is an apostasy from righteousness, theirs is an unparalleled, unequalled blasphemy. Here you see sin at its apex. They are mocking the Son of God, sneering at God Himself, spitting scorn is blasted on the face of their Creator and their Redeemer and their Savior. Blasphemy cannot exceed this.

And one might ask the question at this point, "How does God hold back? How does God restrain Himself for this is His beloved Son, the Son of His love in whom He is well pleased?" Shouldn't such blasphemy be instantly responded to by God? Wouldn't we expect that these people carrying out this sneering scorn at the expense of the blessed Son of God would be instantly annihilated and catapulted into hell? Shouldn't fire fall from heaven and burn them up? Shouldn't the ground open and swallow them whole into Sheol? Shouldn't they be hit by God out of heaven and eaten by worms and died? You would expect our God, true and holy, to do that to these merciless, compassionless, wicked, sarcastic blasphemers of His beloved adored, magnificent, perfect Son. What is God doing? It appears as if He's doing nothing.

And by the way, God, the Old Testament is pretty clear on the penalty for blasphemy. Leviticus 24:16, "It is death." God required death as a penalty for blasphemy. Here is the ultimate blasphemy ever, why isn't God acting? God repeated again and again and again through the Old Testament prophets that He would bring judgment and death and eternal punishment on blasphemers, impenitent blasphemers. What's He doing? Nothing? If any have ever been guilty of blasphemy, it is

these. And in a very deranged way, in a very ironic way, the blasphemers are accusing the one they blaspheme of blasphemy. God had every holy right to kill them, to judge them at that moment.

Maybe if the prophet Habakkuk had been there, he would have said what he wrote in the beginning of his prophecy, "How long, O Lord, how long? How long?" Or maybe if the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:10 had been there, they would have cried what they cry in that passage, "How long, O Lord, how long, how long are You going to allow wickedness to go on before You step in, in judgment?" Or if Moses had been there, maybe Moses would have said, "Lord, in Exodus 19 You said that the mountain was so holy that if anybody touched the mountain, they would die. How is it to touch the mountain is to bring about divine judgment and death, but to spit in the face of Your Son, brings no such judgment?"

What's going on here? How can this be? Well let's go back to the text. The outline that we gave you, just some little points to kind of keep you involved in the process of going through this text, the first was the soldiers' parody. We saw that in verses 16 to 20. It's all about the comedy. We've laid that all out. It's all about the mockery, the scorn. That is what dominates this entire scene. We've seen the soldiers parody and that's what sets Jesus' execution apart from say the two thieves who suffered the same physical punishment, or the thirty-thousand other people who at this time in history at that place in the world also were crucified. Everybody suffered the same physical. What sets Jesus apart from a human perspective is the ridicule which dominates the event. That's from the human perspective. From the divine perspective, what sets this crucifixion apart is that God is accomplishing through His death redemption for His people.

So when the Bible looks at Calvary, it doesn't look at the physical suffering. It doesn't say anything about that. It is more concerned to look at the wretched apostasy and blasphemy of people. On the one hand, or on the other hand, to look at the mercy and grace of God in providing a Savior for even the blasphemers. So we saw the soldiers' parody in verses 16 to 20. And then we saw the stranger's providence, how the Romans just grabbed a guy out of the crowd who happened to be named Simon and he was from Cyrene, which is where Tripoli and Libya is today. And he was a Jew who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. He has an encounter with Jesus that is by divine providence and they put the cross on his back and make him carry it. Obviously, Jesus isn't moving fast enough for them. And so they have this man do that, in that way he meets Jesus as the story then follows history. He goes back to his Jewish community a different man, a saved man. Somewhere along the line, he not only met Jesus physically, he met Jesus spiritually. He is part of the church, a church develops in Cyrene. He leaves there with his family, he ends up in Rome and one of his sons is a leader in the church in Rome to whom Paul writes. This is the providence of God in the midst of this comedy. We saw then the stranger's providence.

Now today, we look at the Savior's punishment, first of all, the Savior's punishment. Verse 22, "Then they brought Him to the place, Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. Golgotha is, I guess, a transliteration of the Aramaic, the Aramaic is Golgotha. The Latin is a derivative of that, Calvary. That actually is the Latin, that's why we talk about Calvary in English. And by the way, there's nothing in the New Testament accounts of the crucifixion that tells us that He was crucified on a hill, or any particular hill that we know of. They were all crucified along main highways so that they might be examples of what happens if you tamper with Rome. He would have been crucified in a very familiar place for crucifixion, it may well have been a lifted up place, because He was lifted up. And they would, no doubt, put it at a high spot so that everybody could see the execution.

Why it's called "the place of a skull," which is a translation of the Aramaic, we don't know. Some say because it was a place where people died and it was associated with death. And skulls are associated with death, and people were left on the cross in the blazing sun long after they were dead on occasion, and the carrion birds would tear at their flesh and skulls would be revealed. You can see the connection there. Others say that the hill itself looked like a skull, and that was the suggestion of a man named Gordon who developed the location called Gordon's Calvary which many people visit. That place, you can take all kinds of angles and maybe it looks like a skull, it's kind of hard to tell because the diesel smoke from the Jerusalem bus station just keeps covering that side of the hill, which is right adjacent to it.

We don't know where the place is. The traditional place is inside the city in modern times. It would have been outside the city then. But it's inside the city in modern times and many churches have been built on it. It could be that that is the actual place, the tradition goes back a long way. It doesn't matter, but it is a historical location known to people which reinforces the reality of this event.

Then it says in verse 23, "They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it." Matthew 27:34 in Matthew's parallel account, Matthew says, "He tasted it and did not take it...He tasted it and did not take it."

What was this for? Well in the process of executing people in this horrific way, nails that were at least a half-an-inch wide and up to seven inches long, more like railroad spikes were driven through the wrists and the feet were overlapped and one massive nail driven through both feet. Prior to crucifixion, there was scourging in which the very bones of the back and shoulders and around the sides would be laid bare, the muscles ripped and shredded. The combination of the wounding through scourging and the wounding through the nails and then suspending a person who's basically hanging on the wounds, and to breathe has to push himself up by his feet, or pull himself up by his arm and thereby rub his back up the rough-hewn cross, would make the pains so excruciating there was at least a small dose of human compassion, this would be a mild analgesic, some kind of a sedative, some kind of mild narcotic that could help ease the agonizing pain.

Historians tell us the Jews did this or asked that this be done based upon Proverbs 31:6, that calls for the use of some kind of narcotic for pain. They wanted to mitigate some of the horrendous suffering. By the way, that fulfills Psalm 69:21 which says that this would be offered to Him, He did not take it. He would drink the cup of the Father's wrath with full awareness, full consciousness.

And then verse 24 says this, "And they crucified Him." That's it. No adjectives, and no descriptions, and they crucified Him. Much has been written about that. I've told you just a few things, and that's really all you need to know. Who's death by asphyxiation because eventually without any kind of relief, without any water, without any kind of protection, with bugs flying into your eyes, and your ears, in your mouth and you fighting and wrestling against the wounds, exaggerating the bleeding and unable to finally pull yourself up or push yourself up, the weight of the body drove the lungs to empty and one couldn't bring and died a horrible death. That was what was intended. It's enough to know that.

In other studies, we've gone in to other details. There's a wonderful article on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that was placed in The Journal of American Medical Association in 1986 that you might find and if you're interested, read more. But that happened to virtually everybody that was crucified.

Another thing that happened to people who were crucified is indicated in this verse. "And they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take." Mark just gives us a general reference to that. That's what the soldiers did. That was kind of compensation for having such a very ugly duty, to be the execution squad in a really gory, horrific kind of execution. And if you want to know more detail about that, in the nineteenth chapter of John, John fills in some of the features. "The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus," verse 23, "took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic. Now the tunic was seamless, woven in one place. There would have been a headpiece, shoes, an undergarment, a tunic and then on top of that, a seamless robe." And that's the next verse. They said to one another, "Let's not tear that seamless robe, woven in one piece, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be. This was to fulfill the Scripture, they divided My outer garments among them and for My clothing, they cast lots." That's directly quoted from Psalm 22:18, that they would cast lots for His garments. That's what they did. It was customary for executioners to get those pieces of clothing from their victim.

Verse 25 says, "It was the third hour when they crucified Him." Nine in the morning. Now remember, this has happened so fast, hasn't it? It was Thursday night, they were still in the upper room and they sang a hymn and they went out. And they went to the familiar Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane owned by a believer in the city where they frequently went and they were there praying, or at least Jesus was praying while the disciples were sleeping. Judas shows up with a huge entourage that could have been as large as a thousand people, because they feared reprisals if the Jews knew they were going to arrest the one that they had been hailing all week. They arrest Jesus. Judas discloses himself. And that's all sometime in the early hours of Friday morning. He's arrested. He's taken before Annas for an indictment. They couldn't find one. He's taken before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin for a trial. There is still no crime. But they decide they're going to kill Him anyway. They...they send Him to Pilate. Pilate sends Him to Herod. He comes back, there's a mock trial in the daylight to give some legitimacy to it for the Jews. Six different phases of His trial, three with the Jews, three with the Gentiles, all that has happened and they have Him on the cross by nine in the morning. What's the hurry?

From their viewpoint, I'll tell you what the hurry is. They don't want the crowd to turn. What's the Romans' hurry? Well they're ready. This is what they do. Bring it on. But God is really in charge of all of this because it is in the plan of God that Jesus will die at three, or around three in the afternoon at the very moment when they're slaughtering all the Passover lambs. He will be the one true Lamb.

This horrible form of execution was invented, as best we can tell, by Darius the Mede. The Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire and history says that Darius crucified three thousand Babylonians. And he's credited with sort of inventing this, or at least doing it on a large scale. Alexander the Great when conquering the world in the fourth century, B.C., the 300's, was moving east with his massive force and they came across the southern part of Europe and to the land of Palestine, the city of Tyre which would be where Lebanon is, on the north coast there, on the Eastern Mediterranean. And he let everybody know he was coming, obviously moving a massive force, they were aware he was coming, so the people didn't want to help him, he was going to ask for supplies and support and when they found that out, they all got in their boats because they were a seafaring city, and they went off shore to an island and they felt secure because he didn't have a navy. So when he demanded certain supplies from them, they said no. Well, Alexander didn't take no, so he destroyed the city of Tyre, picked up all the rubble, threw all the

rubble in the ocean and built a causeway from the mainland to the island, just exactly as the Old Testament prophet said he would, and came over and massacred the citizens of Tyre and history says crucified two thousand of them.

In the first century, B.C., Alexander Jannaeus moved this into the experience of the Jews themselves because he crucified eight hundred Pharisees before their wives and children. And by the way, in Roman law, it was forbidden for women to ever see a crucifixion, it was so horrendous, let alone children.

When Titus Vespasian in 70 A.D. conquered Jerusalem, 40 years after the death of Christ, he crucified so many Jews, we don't know how many he crucified, but the record says they ran out of trees and locations for crucifixions. It's a horrific, horrific way to die.

That the Messiah, Son of God, Chosen One would die by crucifixion was not acceptable to the Jews ever. Still today. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, the cross to the Jews is a stumbling block. You can't have the Son of God crucified by pagans. You can't have the Messiah rejected by His own nation, crucified by Romans. That is why Justin, in his first apology in A.D. 152 summarizes the view of Christ that the world has. He says, they say, the world says, "Our madness as Christians consists in this, that we give to a crucified man a place equal to the unchangeable and eternal Creator, God. This is ridiculous.

It was not only a stumbling block to the Jews, it was foolishness to the Gentiles. Again 1 Corinthians 1, "Neither Jews nor Gentiles could believe that." That's what made preaching the gospel so difficult, so humanly impossible. The explanation for the impact of the gospel as it went for the establishment of churches is not that they had an attractive message. They were preaching that a crucified Jew is God, the Messiah, the only Savior and Lord. And then they were asking people to become His everlasting slaves.

Now the Gentiles thought slavery was a wretched condition and a crucified God was stupidity. So the only explanation for repentance and faith was the work of the Holy Spirit, and it still is....it still is.

Think about this. I just gave you a history, a little bit of a history of crucifixion, sixth century, hundreds of years before that, hundreds of years before that, David wrote of the Messiah. Crucifixion didn't exist, and yet David said this, "I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, broken piece of pottery. My tongue cleaves to My jaws. You lay Me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded Me, a band of evil doers have encompassed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. They look, they stare at Me, they divide My garments among them and for My clothing they cast lots." A thousand years before Jesus was crucified, David described His crucifixion when there was no such thing as a crucifixion.

Isaiah three hundred years later, in 700 wrote, Isaiah 53, "He was pierced for our transgressions." How did they know this? A hundred and fifty years after Isaiah, Zechariah writes, "They will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son."

How could anyone know that? The writer of Revelation, only by divine inspiration, by the way, is the answer. Revelation 1:7, "Behold, He's coming with clouds and every eye will see Him, even those

who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him, so it is to be. Amen.” He will bear the wounds of His piercing, even in His return. Amazing that the Old Testament knew the details laid them out.

You see here then the apostasy of men, you see here the wrath of God and you see here the veracity of holy Scripture.

Now we’ve looked at the soldiers’ parody, the stranger’s providence, Simon of Cyrene, we’ve looked for a moment at the Savior’s punishment, crucifixion, I want you to look for just a moment, kind of flipping the first letters to Pilate’s sarcasm....Pilate’s sarcasm. Now remember, this is being carried off as a farce, a joke. And so verse 26 says, “The inscription of the charge against Him read, “The King of the Jews.” That was not the actual crime. That was not the actual crime. That placard was written by the Romans. When a criminal was taken to be crucified, his crime was indicated above his head. What was the crime of Jesus? Well if you composite the Matthew, Mark, Luke, John accounts, the full statement is this, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, this is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” in three languages. That’s the full statement. And Mark, in his abbreviated form, says, “The most important part, they put the inscription of the charge against Him, “The King of the Jews.”

That was really not the charge that the Jews wanted over His head. When they first came to Pilate, you remember they had a whole list of possible crimes, perverting the nation, they tried that one and it didn’t fly. An evil doer, kind of a generic one. A rebel, somebody leading the Jews to not pay their taxes. And all of that disintegrated in a chaotic cacophony of false witnesses who couldn’t get their story right. And what they finally came up in Caiaphas’ Hall was blasphemy. Remember that? Because He claimed to be the Son of God, thus making Himself equal with God. So the real crime, He’s a blasphemer. And they finally said that to Pilate, “He is a blasphemer, and by our law, He has to die.”

They were right. Leviticus 24:16, “Blasphemers are deserving of the death penalty.” That’s what they would have wanted over His head. Blasphemer. But Pilate gets his petty revenge. And he puts this and drags it out in three languages, “This is Jesus of Nazareth,” that’s a joke in itself because nothing good comes out of Nazareth. “The King of the Jews.” They hated that. John tells us in John 19, Pilate wrote an inscription, put it on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews.” Verse 20, “Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews were...they came to Pilate. They were saying to Pilate, “Do not write the King of the Jews.” You can’t have that stated as a fact. But that He said I am King of the Jews, and then everybody will know it’s a joke. You have to put it as a bizarre profession, not as a fact.

Pilate said, these are his famous words. “What I have written, I have written.” That’s Pilate’s petty revenge. His way to mock the Jews who have forced him into this by threatening to report him again to Tiberius Caesar when they’ve already reported him twice before on huge issues and both times he was severely reprimanded by Tiberius. One more and he’s done. They had a three-strike rule, no doubt, in his mind. He hates the Jews. He’s hated them since the day he arrived in town with his banners flying. And he hates them more now and his little petty revenge is to slap on this man’s cross, “This is the King of the Jews.” He will join the joke himself.

We come then to the sneering participants. The soldiers parody, the stranger’s providence, the Savior’s punishment, Pilate’s sarcasm, and then the sneering participants. Now I’m not much for

outlines, but I have to use them sometimes because I know you come and go mentally. I know that. You've already had lunch, looked at the menu in your mind, figured out what you're doing today, gone back to your business, back to your yard, back to your house, back to your kids, grandkids. I know, welcome back. Periodically I give you points so you can get back in, otherwise you're not going to know where we are. So, number five is the sneering participants...the sneering participants.

I think...you have to start really with verse 31. But I want to back it up first. Verse 31 says, "The chief priests also, along with the scribes were mocking Him." They actually here are mentioned after the others, but in point of fact, they start the mocking. If you read Luke 23 verse 35, it says, "The rulers were sneering at Him." And Matthew 27:41 says the same thing, that the ridicule and the mockery and the sneering was led by the Sanhedrin. They're still at it. They are still doing this that they started hours before in the deep early darkness of night. They're still in the same mode. And we'll get to them in a minute. Verse 27, however, says, "They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left." Likely these two robbers were involved in the rebellion that was led by Barabbas, you remember Barabbas had been released because the people said, "Kill Jesus and give us back Barabbas." Barabbas had led a rebellion in which there was plundering and murder, according to Luke 23:18 and 19. These men were very likely a part of that rebellion and therefore guilty of murder and that's why they were being given the death penalty. There's one on each side. They are there to add another mocking element to this parody. They put Jesus between two thieves. And may I hasten to say, I don't think His cross was bigger and stood up higher. That wasn't the point. The point was to say your King is no better than a common criminal. Verse 28 draws back to Isaiah 53:12, the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors." Some of the manuscripts have that, some don't. That's why it's in brackets in the NAS. But it's certainly in Isaiah that He would be numbered with the transgressors in His crucifixion and in fact He was. It is a fulfillment of prophecy.

Go down to the end of verse 32, quickly. "Those who were crucified with Him," meaning those two thieves," were also insulting Him." So the sneering participants are the thieves to start with. This is amazing, isn't it? I mean, this has now reached them. These are guys being executed in the same way. We can assume they had been scourged. We can assume they had been nailed. We can assume the same agonies are going on and they join the fun. They join the party. That's how this wretchedness is contagious. In fact, in Matthew 27:44, it says, "They were insulting Jesus with the same words they heard from the rulers." They just got into it.

And then the people get into it, verse 29. "Those passing by, the bystanders," the same, cruel merciless crowd that screamed, "Crucify, Crucify, Crucify," back in verses 13 and 14. And you say to yourself, "When did this blood, lust end? How much of this blood sport will satisfy them? They're viciously hateful. You would think somebody would have some compassion, stop the mocking, stop the abuse. Even if this is only a man, how much can a man take in the agonies of this? You would think they would remember His kindness in His feeding of people and loving the poor and delivering people from their diseases and demons and death. But they do not. Theirs is an ugly, very ugly and relentless kind of derision.

When it says that the rulers were sneering at Him in Luke 23. Luke 23 says that they were sneering, *ekmukterizo* is the verb. And *muk* is the nose. And *ek* is the preposition intensifying it. So a verb about a nose gesture. Now we don't make too many gestures with our nose, but we make some. Sometimes you can make a quizzical gesture, turning up your nose a little bit. But this is literally to lift up the nose, an act of disdain. They treat Him with snobbish sneering. And these thieves, who

probably can't do that, join the insults. Those who pass by add another gesture. They start wagging their heads. And by the way, Psalm 22, I just read to you, says they will do that. They will wag their heads at Him, shaking their heads, acknowledging that this is all a joke. Out of their mouth He saved others, Himself He cannot save. And it's the gesture that cancels out the words, to show that it's all scorn, sarcasm and mockery. And you keep looking for mercy somewhere, but there isn't any.

To show you that the gesture was tied to what they were saying, it says, "Ha, You who are going to destroy the temple and built it in three days," sarcasm. "Save Yourself and come down from the cross." That's all mockery. He never said He would destroy the temple. In John 2:19 He said He would destroy the temple of His body and He would raise it in three days. But they came up with this ridiculous idea that He had said He was going to destroy the temple in three days. They mock that. Verse 31, "In the same way, the chief priests, now they started it and they're still in it, along with the scribes." That's the Sanhedrin again, "Were mocking Him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others, He cannot save Himself.'" They don't mean that as an affirmation. That's pure sarcasm. He doesn't save anybody. He saved others, ha-ha, how about that? Claimed to be a Savior, it's all scorn and it's all sarcasm, and it's all mockery. Verse 32, "Let this Christ," say the Sanhedrin members, "the King of Israel," you could see the sarcasm there. They don't believe that. They don't believe anything they said. It's all hypocrisy. "Let Him now come down from the cross so that we may see and believe."

Would they believe? Well He did come down. They took Him down. They put Him in a grave. Three days later He came out of the grave. Did they believe? When it was reported to them that He rose from the dead, what did they do? Did they believe?

No, they bribed the soldiers to lie. It's all mockery, all of it. They wouldn't believe. If they didn't believe Moses and the prophets, they wouldn't believe that one rose from the dead.

This little section ends with a statement we read earlier. "Those who were crucified with Him, were also insulting Him. Now don't leave me for another three minutes, listen. Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him. That's back to the thieves. And this is my final point. The sinner's plea. The thieves are in on the joke. In fact, Luke says one of the thieves said, echoing the Sanhedrin, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us." It's all mockery. They joined in on...they just took whatever was said. They were parrots. They were caught up in the ridicule, even in the midst of imminent death.

But then something very dramatic happened. One of those thieves was literally taken captive by the power of God. And in a moment, that thief said to the other thief, "Why are You doing that? We're...this is a righteous man, we're getting what we deserve. This man's done nothing. And he says, "Remember me when You come into your Kingdom." And he affirms a belief in Christ...in a belief in Christ future life on the other side of death and that He's the King, and the conversion takes place. And you have in that moment, listen to me, a conversion of a blasphemer. How powerful is the cross? So powerful that those who were there at the time, blaspheming Jesus in His face, were redeemed. And Acts 6:7 says, "Many of the priests later came to faith in Christ." They were forgiven. And we'll see tonight that the centurion who was in charge of the execution and some of his soldiers said, "This is the Son of God." And you'll meet them in heaven.

And here, dear friends, is the answer to the questions that I posed at the beginning. The question that I posed at the beginning is why doesn't God come down and kill these sinners? Answer:

because God was pleased to kill His Son for those sinners. That's Isaiah 53, "It pleased God to crush Him." It pleased God.

You mean it pleased God to crush the Son in whom He was well-pleased? Yes. God was pleased to crush Him, this is Isaiah 53:10, putting Him to grief. Why? Because He would render Himself a guilt offering and He would live to see His offspring.

In other words, the whole purpose of redemption was for God to give to Christ a redeemed humanity, an offspring. People saved out of every generation of history, that was to be God's gift of love to His Son, a redeemed people who would spend forever with Him, loving Him, serving Him, praising Him, honoring Him, reflecting His glory throughout all eternity. That's the Father's love gift to the Son. In order for the Father to be able to give that gift to the Son, the Son had to bear the punishment for those who make up that gift on the cross. So, it pleased the Father to crush the one who pleased Him so that He could forgive the ones who displeased Him. Not just for their sake, but for the Son's sake, so that He could give them to the son as His eternal inheritance. And the evidence of the meaning of the cross is there. He became sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, Paul says. Peter says, "He bore in His own body our sins on the tree." Paul says, "He took the curse for us." God punishes Him so that the blasphemers can be forgiven and shows us that with one thief and a centurion, and soldiers as we'll see tonight, and priests and three thousand more and how many of them were screaming, "Crucify Him, and mocking comments?"

Listen, when I was down in Angola Prison, I'll close with this. I was preaching in a D camp which is the maximum of the maximum of the maximum the worst of the worst in the church there. The place was packed, sitting on the floor, all around the walls, back, everywhere, crowded, jammed in, the warden was in there. And I preached. Great time, just standing with my Bible talking to these men. And in the process of preaching, had a wonderful response to the glorious gospel, I made the statement, that it doesn't matter how many people you've killed, it doesn't matter how many people you've killed, Jesus died for the sin of murder, no matter how extensive. Look, Jesus died for the sins of the murderers who murdered Him. You might have killed more in quantity, but you haven't killed more in quality. It's not a question of how many, if the standard is how many, maybe there is a limit, but it isn't, nor is the standard who. They killed His Son and He forgave.

Anyway, I was talking about that and preaching and the warden came to me afterwards and he said, "Look," he said, "do you know how was sitting on the second row and never took his eyes off you, listening to you preach?" I said, "no." He said, "Did you see that guy just transfixed?" I said, "Well I don't know. I'm not sure I picked him out." He said, "Well, he's killed more people than anybody's ever been in this prison. He's killed so many hundreds of people, we don't know how many he's killed. He doesn't know how many he's killed." He said, "He was the number one hit man for Escobar in the Medellin Columbia drug cartel and his job was to murder people who got in the way." And the warden said, "When I first met him, he said it was business, just business, yeah...men, women and children, hundreds of them." And he happened to be traveling through Louisiana and he was headed to Miami to fly back to Medellin, I don't know what he did, ran a stop light or something and they arrested him, found out who he was and somehow he escaped the death penalty and he's for the rest of his life there in the Angola Prison. And he's been, I think, I don't remember the number of years, it's like 18 years in solitary confinement where he gets out a half an hour, or an hour a day. And...but he's sitting in the second row.

He said, "Well we put him in the population." I said, "How did that happen?" He said, "A year ago he gave his life to Christ. He became a believer." And he said, "That message you preached was for him, I watched him. You said, "It doesn't matter how many people you kill, Christ died for all of the." For all those sins, all those murders. He said, "I was just watching his face."

Well you know, you might argue for the death penalty and say, "I believe in the death penalty, it's biblical." But don't argue with the providence of God. He didn't get the death penalty, or he would have been in hell instead. He got life in prison and you'll see him in heaven, and I'll see him the next time I go back. That's why He died. That's why it pleased the Father to crush Him, so that the number one murderer for the drug cartel in Columbia could be in heaven and so can you, by repentance and faith in Christ.

Father, we thank You for the power of this simple narrative text which opens so much to us, so much. What a privilege. What a blessing. I just pray for every soul here to know the full forgiveness provided in Christ. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).