

The Torture and Humiliation of the King

Opening Prayer:

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
You lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!

(Psalm 22:14-21a)

Scripture Reading:

Mark 15:15b-23

He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha

(which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

Video Presentation – Session 5 “The Torture and Humiliation of the King”

Key Insights:

- ✓ The Gospels say very little about the flogging of Jesus, and their accounts are slightly different.
- ✓ In the beating and humiliation of Jesus, we see evidence of an evil kind of cruelty in which human beings torment one whose very existence is a challenge to them.
- ✓ The horizontal beam of the cross Jesus carried weighed nearly 100 pounds. It is likely that after Jesus attempted to carry it some distance, Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service.
- ✓ John tells us that Jesus carried his own cross, undoubtedly wanting readers to see the connection to Isaac carrying the wood on which he was about to be sacrificed.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think the Gospels say very little about the flogging of Jesus? How do you account for the various placements of the flogging in the four Gospel accounts?
2. How do you imagine the scene in which Jesus was mocked? In your mind, how did Jesus respond to this kind of cruelty?
3. During the final twenty-four hours of Jesus' life, we see Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, the disciples' abandonment, the Sanhedrin's jealousy, the crowd's rage, Pilate's acquiescence, and the soldiers' cruelty. What do these sights teach us about what we need saving from?
4. What does the example of Simon of Cyrene teach us about discipleship?

Book Discussion:

In 1963, Stanley Milgram at Yale University invited people to come off the street to take part in a scientific investigation. They were paid four dollars for one hour in which they were set in front of gauges and dials and told to deliver shocks when someone in the other room gave wrong answers to questions they were asked. The experiment was designed to see how far people would go if an authority figure told them they must go on increasing the force of the shock until it reached apparently fatal levels. No one was actually shocked; but the subjects did not know that, since they could hear but not see the person they supposedly were shocking. Before the experiment, researchers estimated just one percent of the US population would administer what they thought were lethal doses of electricity. What the researchers found was that sixty-five percent of the subjects were willing to increase the electricity to four hundred fifty volts, despite the apparent cries of pain coming from the person in the other room.

Even after the cries finally fell silent, the subjects were still willing to give electrical jolts to that person because an authority figure told them they must complete the experiment. Sixty-five percent!

Ordinary people can be persuaded to do extraordinary and awful things. Given the right combination of ideology, authority, and gradual desensitization, all of us can become monsters, capable of destroying others with weapons ranging from words to gas chambers. It is a reality we must face and guard against, looking instead to God and trying to understand who he has called us to be. (pg. 86)

- What particular Christian practices can help us guard against losing our humanity and supporting actions, attitudes, and policies that we should reject?

The subjective or moral influence theory of the Atonement maintains that the Atonement was not about changing God or making it possible for God to forgive us. It was, rather, about changing you and me. Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection constitute a divine drama meant to communicate God's Word to humanity, to make clear to us our need for redemption and forgiveness, to show us the full extent of God's love and lead us to repentance. John's Gospel begins with a prologue in which he speaks of Jesus as God's Word. Jesus was God's vehicle for communicating with us, his Word made flesh. In Jesus, God's divine nature was united with human flesh to reveal his character, his love, and his will for humanity. (pg. 89)

- Describe your understanding of the subjective or moral influence theory of the Atonement mentioned in this passage. Does this theory help you make sense of the humiliation, suffering, and death of Jesus? Why, or why not?

There is one more word we should hear in Jesus' suffering and death, and that concerns the nature of sacrificial love. He has set an example for us of a kind of love that alone has the power to save humanity from its self-destructive ways. Sacrificial love transforms enemies into friends, shames the guilty into repentance, and melts hearts of stone. The world is changed by true demonstrations of sacrificial love and by selfless acts of service. (pg. 91)

- What examples of sacrificial love inspire you to greater service in the name of Christ?

Wrapping Up:

Some of the Roman soldiers have just grabbed you from the crowd of people who have been following Jesus. The soldiers force you to your knees. You can see other soldiers approaching you with the crossbeam that Jesus has been carrying. They want you to carry it! At first you struggle to resist, but then...what?

Closing Prayer:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and deed. Amen. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

For Further Study**Bible Study and Discussion**

Isaiah Mark 15:16

- In this verse, Mark uses “cohort,” a term that originally meant one of the ten subdivisions of a Roman legion, several hundred strong. What do you think Mark is trying to emphasize by giving us an image of Jesus surrounded by not just a few, but hundreds of brutal, mocking soldiers?

Matthew 2:11 (*Compare to Matthew 15:23*)

- Myrrh is mentioned twice in the Gospels: once in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth and again in Mark’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion. What connection do you see between these two offerings?

Romans 5:6-11

- Why does Paul think it so crucial that Jesus’ death proves God’s love for us?