

"That We May See and Believe"

In the trilogy of the Lord of the Rings by Tolkien, Aragorn was an unlikely king at first. If you watched the recent movie series released a few year back, when you first are shown Aragorn, he's presented as a rough Ranger. And yet quickly you find out that he has royal blood in him. He's the only remaining heir to the throne of the kingdom of Gondar. Of course, not everyone is glad to hear that. In absence of a king, Gondar had been ruled by a steward named Denethor, and him and his son Boromir were not so quick to give up their rule. As you get to know Aragorn, he himself doesn't at first seem eager to take up the throne either. And so no one at first in the trilogy treated Aragorn as a king, even though he was rightfully one. He didn't look like one, but he was the king nonetheless. It's in the third and final book in the series, called Return of the King, where Aragorn finally takes his proper position as king in Gondar.

I bring up the Lord of the Rings only as a simple analogy for our passage today. Regardless of the reality, Jesus is not treated like the king he really is. Jesus knows that he is rightfully called King of the Jews. He knows that he is the King of all kings and the Lord of all Lords. Jesus, of course, is not like Aragorn in that he's not hesitant to be the king. No far from it. Jesus is fully aware of what it would mean for him to be King. For Jesus, he was a king on a mission. He was on a mission of suffering. He was on a mission to save his fallen people from their sins.

And yet, though Jesus was the King of all kings, no one in our passage is recorded here as recognizing it. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Jesus had been condemned to death for claiming to be the King of Jews. That was the final charge that warranted the Roman death penalty. And so in this passage, we finally see Jesus crucified. And in these last few scenes, we see Jesus mocked as king. We see him suffer and die as king. And sadly, we see people completely miss him as king. And so whether it was the mob mentality, or just plain the sinfulness of man, everyone in this passage seems to be turning against Jesus, denying that he is the Christ, and therefore denying that he is the King. The inscription that identified in him verse 26, "The King of the Jews" was ironically so right, and yet so fully denied.

And so as we look at this passage today, I want us to consider how Jesus was mocked. I want us to consider all of his suffering. And I want to consider how the people missed recognizing him as the true King and Messiah. In our passage the world was rejecting Jesus as King. The world continues to reject him as King. The world will still says all sorts of lies about Jesus. We can easily get caught up with everyone else who denies Jesus or has some false view about who Jesus is. So as we look at this passage, let's be reminded to be on guard against the world's lies about Jesus. Let's look instead to heed God's word. Let's be refreshed again today through the Biblical testimony about Jesus. The King who died on the cross to save us from our sins.

And so let's dig into this passage. Let's look first at all the people who mocked our Lord. So many different groups of people took this claim that Jesus was the King of the Jews and twisted it and perverted it and used it against him to ridicule him. They tried to make Jesus into a laughing stock.

First you have the soldiers in our passage. Verses 16-20. Jesus had obviously not been on a political mission. He hadn't gone around trying to assume the throne of the Emperor, or even the rule of the local governors like Herod or Pilate. And yet the soldiers dress him up like such a king. Look at verse 16. After Pilate had handed Jesus over to the soldiers to have him scourged, the soldiers take it to the next level. In verse 16 it says they called together the whole garrison. I guess they didn't want any of the other soldiers to miss out in this fun. The soldiers seize this opportunity for a little entertainment at Jesus' expense. They were going to make fun of the one who had claimed to be the king of the Jews. And so they put a purple cloth on him which was the color of kings. They made a crown of thorns for him, also to mock him. They begin to give him a kingly greeting, "Hail King of the Jews." They even start bowing down to him, getting on one knee before him. But this was not in real reverence. This was all in jest. Just look at verse 19. At the same time, they start striking him in the head and spitting on him. Of course today, we'd call this cruel and unusual punishment to treat even a criminal like this. Let alone to mock the falsely condemned Messiah in such a way.

The next people you have mocking Jesus here are the passersby. Verse 29. Obviously once Jesus was on the cross with the other criminals, it would have been quite a spectacle. In fact the Romans wanted it to be that way. Crucifixion was not only punishment, it was deterrence. The Romans wanted people to see what happened to their opponents. And so as Jesus hung on the cross with this inscription of the King of the Jews, people passed by and mocked him. Verse 29 actually says that they blasphemed him. In other words, this wasn't just any light joke. They were slandering him. Their mocking isn't focused on the kingship theme, as it was for the soldiers. They seem to pick on Jesus' ministry. In other words, these passersby were not unaware of who Jesus was. These weren't some random people who just happened to be on a stroll and saw who was being crucified and decided to stop and poke fun. No, in verse 29 they pick up the same accusation that had been used against Jesus in his trial. The charge that he supposedly promised to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, which was a perversion and twisting Jesus' own words. The passersby also mock him about his ability to save. "Save yourself and come down from the cross." But Jesus hadn't come to save himself, but others. And so these passersby mock Jesus. They pervert his words and show they don't understand what it means for him to be the King of the Jews.

The chief priests and scribes also join in on the mocking. Verse 31. They say a lot of similar things as the passersby do, but notice something different. The passersby directed their comments at Jesus. They actually spoke to Jesus. The chief priests and scribes only talk *about* Jesus. They keep referring to him in the third person. They speak as if he wasn't hanging right there being crucified. They ridicule and slander him to others. My how they hated him. Even here they try to discredit him before others. Even now they stir up others to hate him. They too of course mock him for his inability to save himself. "Let the Christ, the *King of Israel*, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

And even the criminals that were crucified with Jesus slandered him. The criminals who were really guilty for crimes. The ones who were being rightly crucified mock the one who had been falsely condemned. Of course, that is a picture of all of us. This is why Jesus had to stay on the cross. We are all like these criminals. Guilty and deserving death. Guilty because all our life we have sinned against God in different ways and at different times. The Bible says that sin against God deserves the punishment of eternal death and damnation. We like the criminals deserve death. And how many of us have not also mocked Jesus at some point in our lives like the many in this passage? But this is exactly why Jesus was on the cross. To save guilty criminals and rebellious mockers. To pay for sins on the cross.

And so Jesus was mocked. His kingship was only recognized in jest. He was mocked as a king. And he was mocked by both Jew and Gentile. Both God's chosen people and the pagan nations were represented here as mocking Jesus. But this was all only the beginning of his sufferings. Look with me now at all the suffering that he bore in this passage. He was a *suffering* king.

Look at verse 19. I told you that the soldiers hit him in the head when they mocked him. But remember what he was wearing. He was wearing the crown of thorns. Surely every time they hit him in the head, it just drove the thorns deeper into him, causing blood to stream down the side of this face like tears.

And notice verse 21. The Roman soldiers had Simon a Cyrenian carry his cross along the way. In other words, Jesus was carrying his cross, and along the way the soldiers compel this Simon to carry it instead. Why? Well, normally when you were crucified, the Romans would make you carry your own cross out to the site of the crucifixion. That was essentially part of your punishment, part of making you a public spectacle for your crime. But Jesus midway through stopped carrying his cross and it was put on Simon. Surely this was not because Jesus was being defiant, as if he just decided to stop carrying it. Jesus had willingly and silently bore all the punishment already up to this point. There's no record of Jesus putting up any fight. Besides, surely the Roman soldiers were experts at this. Surely they knew how to force an unruly captive into carrying their cross, even against their wish. No, it seems Jesus at that point was no longer able to carry his cross. Out of physical exhaustion he surely could go no farther. Remember, Jesus had been arrested that night before. He had been taken at night and put through several trials at night and into the morning. He probably hadn't slept because of this. He was beaten by the Jews. He was whipped by the Romans, which that alone could have left you next to dead. The soldiers had just beat him some more. And now he had to carry some big wooden cross out of the city to Golgotha. Surely Jesus was exhausted at that point. Past the point of exhaustion. Surely that's why they had to have this Simon of Cyrene carry it. Jesus just didn't have enough human strength to carry it any longer. This too shows his sufferings.

His suffering is also seen in verse 23. He was offered wine to drink that was mixed with myrrh. Myrrh was added to wine as a drug. It helped deaden the pain for someone who was going through so much physical suffering. Tradition has it that often Jewish women would make up this drink and provide it for those being crucified in light of Proverbs 31:6. "Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more." So this is probably what's behind this offer to Jesus. The fact that this wine was offered, probably as the merciful gesture of a few, only shows how bad Jesus' suffering was. And yet Jesus didn't take it. Maybe he didn't want any of his suffering to be relieved since he knew he was doing this to bear the sins of many. Maybe he wanted to remain as clear headed as possible because he still had a few lessons to teach us when he was on the cross. But regardless of why Jesus turned it down, it only reminds us all the more how bad his pain and suffering was.

And then it's so simply put. Verse 24. They crucified him. Something so horrible, and yet so simply put. The ancient historian Josephus described Roman crucifixion as the most "most wretched of all ways of dying." Usually you had nails put through both your forearms, and then they'd contort your body and put a single nail through both your heels into the wood. You'd have to slowly pull yourself up to gasp for a breath as you hung on the cross. It was a slow,

miserable, death. And yet the text places it in the simplest of terms. It doesn't go into all the gory details. It so simply says, "They crucified him."

Maybe that's in part because as wretched of a death that crucifixion was, his ultimate suffering was something far worse. It was worse than the physical death on the cross. It was worse than all these other physical afflictions he had. It was worse than everyone mocking him. The worst part of his suffering was the fact that he was bearing the sins of God's people. On the cross, God's wrath was being poured out upon him to death. The weight of that would be expressed in next's weeks passage, when we see in verse 34, Jesus cry out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus bore hell on the cross. To get a sense of what Jesus bore on the cross, you'd have to go to hell for an eternity. Yet for Jesus it would be even worse than that. Remember where Jesus had come from. Jesus from all eternity had sat in glory with God the Father and God the Spirit. He had perfect fellowship with each of the persons in the divine Godhead. But he gave up all that glory to come to earth as a human. To live alongside sinful man in a sin cursed world. But then to come to the cross, feeling the brunt of all mankind's sinfulness. To become sin on the cross. To endure the hell-wrath of God on the cross. After having come from such glory to experience such hell. Who can fathom it?

The king suffered. Jesus suffered physically. He suffered emotionally. And he suffered hell on the cross, for those he came to save. And so the king suffered. The king was mocked. And at the end of the day, he was missed. All these people here missed seeing him as their king. Oh they were told. The inscription that hung over Jesus said he was the King of the Jews. But that was open for interpretation that day.

You see, they thought that inscription was a joke. Regardless of what Pilate's intentions in posting such a sign over Jesus, everyone else saw it as a mockery. The soldiers, the passersby, the chief priests and scribes, and even the other criminals - they all treated Jesus in contempt. They obviously were playing off that notion - that Jesus was the King of the Jews. But at the end of the day, they didn't believe it.

How could they, they thought. Is this the picture of the Christ? Is this the picture of a king? Is this what would happen to the promised King of Israel? Would he be beaten, humiliated, and die the cursed death of the cross? That didn't add up to them. They didn't think it made any sense. The soldiers didn't think he was a king. They probably thought that if he was, Jesus would be controlling them, not the other way around. A real king wouldn't be arrested and be lead by soldiers to his death. A real king would be leading soldiers to victory. The criminals probably had similar logic. How could Jesus be a king if he was up here crucified alongside with us? His fate doesn't look like any better than ours.

The passersby didn't think he was a king either. Nor did the chief priests and elders. And we see their logic here. They all thought that if he was really *the* king, the Messiah, then he could save himself. "Save yourself, and come down from the cross," verse 30. "He saved others, he cannot save himself," verse 31. "Let... [him] descend now down from the cross, that we may see and believe," verse 32. This was their logic. They thought the real Christ could save himself the death of the cross. They thought the real Christ could prove who he was by somehow supernaturally coming down from the cross. They were basically saying, how can he be *the one*, if he's dead? This was their logic. This was their wisdom: suffering and death wasn't fitting for the promised Messiah. They thought that what they saw happening to Jesus proved definitively that he wasn't a king. This was all the wisdom of the world. This was what the mob mentality had decided. Jesus couldn't suffer and die like this and be a king.

But they were wrong. All these groups of people got it wrong because they decided to judge the situation from their own logic. They listened to the voice of worldly reason and wisdom. It sure sounded convincing. If only they had listened to the voice of God. The world's assessment was wrong. But God's Word had a different assessment. Just consider Psalm 22.

Today we recognize Psalm 22 as a Messianic Psalm. It's a Psalm describing intense suffering. We read it earlier in the service. And if you compare Psalm 22 up against this passage in Mark, there are a number of parallels between the suffering described in Psalm 22 and Jesus' suffering. For example, Psalm 22:7 talks about the psalmist being mocked by people shaking their heads at the psalmist. That is clearly alluded to in verse 29 with the passersby wagging their heads and mocking Jesus. That's just one example of several allusions in this chapter back to Psalm 22. I think Mark is being very intentional to paint this comparison for us in how he is explaining Christ's suffering. Psalm 22 even begins with the famous cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It's that same cry that Mark records Jesus saying. That cry begins Psalm 22 which then goes on to describe the suffering that evoked that cry. And Mark tells us this in reverse. He shows the suffering of Christ who then evokes that cry on the cross.

I hope you are beginning to see how the wisdom of the world here got it wrong. All these people looked at Jesus' suffering and concluded that it meant he couldn't be the King. He couldn't be the Messiah, the promised offspring of David. But Psalm 22 disagreed. Who was the psalmist of Psalm 22? It was David. King David. The great King David penned this psalm. He captured his own experience of suffering in this somber psalm. Biblical wisdom said that suffering is not alien to being a king. Psalm 22 ultimately looked to the suffering that the Christ would undertake. But even if the religious leaders at that time didn't read Psalm 22 Messianically as they should have, they should have still recognized that suffering wasn't something absent from a king. If King David's sufferings could be described in such bleak terms as in Psalm 22, then certainly the greater Son of David would know these same struggles as well. Even as a king. Even as the King. Scripture's view of what the coming King would look like was different than what the people were expecting.

Jesus knew this would be the case. Back in Mark 8:31 Jesus said that he *must* suffer like this. You see the masses looked at Jesus' suffering and saw it as a sign of weakness. They thought that it was weakness that kept him on the cross. In reality, it was strength that kept him on the cross. Jesus certainly had the power and authority to call down angels from heaven to free him. But Jesus knew his mission. The people with their faulty logic said that Jesus could save others but not save himself. But the reality is that Jesus could only save others by not saving himself. He had to have his life destroyed on the cross. Then on the third day he would rise again; he would rebuild the temple of his body on that Easter morning.

The scriptures said that the Messiah would suffer and die. Psalm 22 embodied the suffering of King David and ultimately looked forward to the greater suffering that would be endured by the greater King. The suffering expressed by King David in Psalm 22 would find its greatest, most literal, fulfillment, in Jesus.

Oh how the religious leaders got it wrong in their hardness of hearts. They said about Jesus in verse 32, that if he would only come down from the cross, then they'd see and believe. But we know better than to believe that line. They had hardened their hearts against Jesus already. They openly acknowledge here his healing of others, but they deny that as evidence. They had the Scriptures like

Psalm 22 that right before their eyes was being fulfilled, and they ignored it. If Jesus did come down from the cross before them, he would be no Messiah. But even when he would rise from the dead in three days, they would still not believe. This reminds me of the Parable of Lazarus that Jesus told in Luke 16. In that parable Lazarus is pictured talking to Abraham, asking that someone from the dead be sent back to warn his friends of the punishment of hell. In Luke 16:31 Abraham said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" Oh how true that is here. The chief priests and scribes demanded more and more signs from Jesus. But the reality is that no number of signs would be sufficient for them. Even his resurrection wouldn't convince them. They had already ignored what Scripture had said. If they just looked around, they'd see the prophecies of Scripture unfolding right before their eyes. It was the very Word of God that spoke even of that day. It confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the King of Israel, the King of God's chosen people. The one who had come to bring salvation. And he was bringing it that very day even as he died on the cross.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, which voice will you heed today? Will you heed the wisdom and logic of the world? The one that concluded on that Good Friday 2000 years ago that Jesus was not a king and not the Messiah? Or will you heed the Word of God? The Word that predicted that the Christ must suffer this way? The Word that finds strength in weakness? Forgiveness for God's people through the suffering of Christ? Paul says it better than I can in 1 Corinthians 1:18. 18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Again I ask, whose voice will you heed? Whose logic will you follow? God's or man's? I urge you today to accept anew the testimony of Scripture. Christ's suffering and death represents the victory of God. It means for each of us the way of salvation. Faith in Christ crucified and faith in Christ resurrected is the only way of salvation. That is the what the Bible says. I urge you all to believe in Christ today. Turn from your sins and the foolishness of the world's testimony concerning Jesus. And believe in the Biblical testimony of Jesus.

As we have read and considered this passage for today, we are each confronted again with the suffering Jesus. With Christ crucified. How will you respond today? Don't keep hardening your hearts like the chief priests and scribes. They kept challenging God in our passage. For them there was no sign sufficient enough to believe in Jesus. God is calling you today to turn from the voice of the world and to heed his Word. His Word is being preached to you today.

This is a message for all of us today. Whether you walked in today as an unbeliever or as a long time Christian. Having been confronted again today with Christ crucified, how will you leave? Let's not be like the soldiers in our passage. In verse 24, they divided up Jesus' clothes by lot. In their confrontation with Christ crucified, they took home some old clothing. They should have gone home with a new heart. With changed lives. Clothed in Christ's righteousness like a robe. You see this is a message for all of us today. What will you walk away with today? Whether you are a new believer today or a long time Christian. Don't just take home a bulletin today. Don't just leave with a warm feeling because we sang your favorite hymn. Don't just leave feeling intellectually stimulated. Leave have been renewed in the preaching of Christ crucified. That your Lord went to the cross to become your Savior. That your life has been dramatically altered. That you no longer are on a path toward eternal destruction, but through faith in Christ you will now spend eternity in heavenly bliss with God. Leave changed today!

How can this picture of Christ crucified not affect us? Especially when we remember that the King is coming back. There will be a real Return of the King! Jesus is coming back. And when he does it will no longer be in suffering. It will be in glory when he comes in the clouds in power. But while we await his return, he has given us our orders. Our King has left us with instructions. We are to grow more like him. That's called Discipleship. And we are to tell others about him. That's called Evangelism. And we are to honor and praise him as king. That's called Worship. Let us be faithful to these tasks. That's part of responding to the crucified Christ. And as he promised, he will be living inside each of us who are called by his name. So we will never be alone. He will be with us even while we await the great return of the King.

And about that task of evangelism. As we saw in our passage for today, and as we know to be the case still today. There are so many different voices out there about who Jesus is. Let's go share the Biblical Jesus while we await his return. Amen.

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