In Ironic fashion, Mark is going to present Jesus to us as true King and Savior through the abusive treatment of the Romans and the abusive insults of the Jewish leaders—even though they mock Him, they unknowingly spotlight Him as King and Savior through their mockery.

What I want you to see in Mark 15 is that by refusing to save Himself, Jesus is a King and Savior that rescues those who trust in Him. He is not to be pitied, but exalted through His suffering and death.

We are going to walk through 6 different movements in today’s passage (see bulletin outline). Of those six, the two most dominating ones are the mocking of Jesus’ kingship by the Romans and the mocking of Jesus as a Savior by the religious leaders.

This is a bit surprising because we would expect Mark to focus most of his attention on the brutality of the scourging or the horrific gruesomeness of the crucifixion. But in this passage, Mark only mentions them matter-of-factly (vs. 15, 24). There may be a need today to explain the horrors of scourging and crucifixion but such images were all to readily in the minds of Mark’s readers—like imprints in our minds of the twin towers on 911.

In hindsight Mark’s readers will see Jesus being taunted and mocked as a king and a savior and recognize the irony that that is precisely who He is—His persecutors spoke truth without knowing it.

**The Scourging (Mark 15:15)**

We begin in vs. 15 simply to set the stage for vs. 16. Mark seems to understate that before Jesus was handed over for crucifixion, Pilate had him scourged. I simply want you, in your mind’s eye as you envision the soldiers mocking Jesus, to see the shredded, blood-stained flesh of Jesus’ back.

Scourging was a gruesome form of torture where the prisoner was bound to a post and repeatedly beaten with a leather whip that had pieces of bone and meddle connected to it like a chain.¹ The scourging would shredd the victim’s bare back until the muscles and bones were exposed.² Jewish law prohibited more than 40 lashes, but the Romans had no such “mercy.” Roman soldiers were encouraged to use their imaginations to “creatively” maximize one’s suffering. Often men would die in the scourging. This is the torture Pilate inflicted on Jesus.

**The Mocking—“What a King!”** (Mark 15:16-19)

The soldiers then proceeded to mock Jesus. Vs. 16 tells us the whole Roman cohort of 600 soldiers was there. It was like being thrown to the lions. Here Jesus appears so weak and helpless, having been whipped into a bloodied mess. Imagine Him struggling to stand for loss of blood, wreathing with pain. “What kind of king is this!? Where is his majesty and glory now? This is what you get for even thinking you could rival the sovereignty of the Roman emperor! We will show you that you are nothing. We will crush you until your only aspiration is to die.”

Vs. 17: With cruel mockery they dress Jesus up in purple. The fabric, like Velcro, grabs His flesh-wounds and tears them yet further apart. After twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!”—mocking both the Jews and Jesus. Their laughter is cruel and their sole purpose is to ridicule, humiliate, and degrade Jesus as much as possible.

Vs. 19: “And they kept beating His head with a reed…and spitting on Him…and kneeling and bowing before Him” repeatedly in mockery so as to delight in stripping Him of all dignity and dressing Him in utter shame.

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1 Larry Hurtado, NIBC: *Mark*. p.263.
There was no category in their minds of a king who would not fight to save Himself—a king who would subject Himself to humiliation, torture and shame. Yet looking back, ironically their sarcastic mocking was actually true. He is a King—One they will truly bow before again because God would vindicate Him. His suffering would lead to victory and the Almighty will give Him all authority in Heaven and on earth. But in the moment they were blind and they subjected to evil abuse the One who would be their final Judge.

The Journey (Mark 15: 20-22)

[Mark 15:20-22]

It was customary for the Romans to lead their criminals in a procession to the place of execution by way of the longest possible route. This would expose the condemned to as many people as possible, making him an example and deterrent to breaking Roman law. A runner would go ahead of the procession announcing the conviction while the victim followed under Roman guard being required to carry his own cross-beam upon which he would be crucified.

In vs. 21 we are told that the soldiers grabbed a man from the crowd, Simon from Cyrene, and forced him to carry Jesus’ cross the final distance to the Golgotha. Mark doesn’t tell us why, but there can only be one reason—utter exhaustion. Jesus’ physical strength is absolutely depleted. He could no longer carry His cross-beam one step further. Surely the soldiers jabbed and jeered Jesus to get up and keep going but He could not. I believe this helps us to see how powerful vs. 23 is.

The offering—refused (Mark 15:23)
[vs. 23]

In all the long hours of Jesus suffering, the only possible glimmer of mercy was to be offered wine mixed with myrrh. This was a primitive narcotic that would attempt to dull the sharp edge of such severe suffering—yet Jesus refused it. In all of His unjust sufferings, this is the only resistance Jesus offers—to not drink the numbing wine. Why would He refuse? His physical pain and exhaustion from the beatings have already taken Him beyond His physical limits of stamina—Simon had to carry His cross. Certainly the wine would be welcomed hope of even slight relief. Yet Jesus would not drink. He has resolved in His heart that He would not drink from the vine again until kingdom of God was finally established. In the moments of His greatest suffering Jesus would remain fully conscience. He refused to let His mind be clouded in any way. He would drink the Father’s cup of wrath for our sin with a clear mind to experience its full fury…for us.  

The Crucifixion (Mark 15:24-28)

In vs. 24, Mark simply states, “and they crucified Him…” Mark does not give the horrific and gory details of the crucifixion because his goal is not for us to feel pity toward Jesus in response to His physical torture. Certainly His suffering at every level should sober us, but Mark’s concern is for us to see that more is being said about Jesus at the cross than anyone realized at the time. Notice the details of Mark’s account:

a. In vs. 24 the soldiers divided up Jesus’ garments and gambled for them. This is a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18—the most messianic of all Psalms. Here the psalmist writes, “a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierce my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. The look, they stare at me;
“they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots” (Ps 22:16-18). Mark wants us to see that Jesus is the righteous man of suffering from Ps 22). These pagan soldiers, unbeknownst to them, are declaring and confirming with their actions that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, God’s righteous One.

b. In vs. 26 Mark notes that the inscription over the cross bearing the charge against Jesus was, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.” Apparently this is not a small detail to Mark because 5 times in chapter 15 Mark uses the term, King of the Jews and a sixth time Jesus is referred to as the King of Israel. Even though it is always used derogatorily of Jesus, Mark wants us to see that God is working, even through the hardened hearts of Jesus’ enemies, to display who He is—a suffering King not by man’s choosing, but by God’s. One who through His suffering will be established by God to be the King over all kings and the Lord of all lords.

c. Finally, in vs. 27 Mark notes that Jesus was crucified between two thieves pointing to the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12 which speaks of the suffering servant of the Lord who “…was numbered with the transgressors, yet He Himself bore the sin of many…”

Mark wants us to see through the horrors of the crucifixion and see how the divinely-arranged events of Jesus death point to who He truly is—the suffering righteous One who fulfills the messianic prophecies of Psalm 22, the unsuspecting King of the Jews, and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 that will save His people from their sins.

The Mocking—“What a Savior!” (Mark 15:29-32)

As we come to the second major mocking scene by the religious leaders, Mark uses their mocking words to ironically drive home his message—that this One who had the power to save Himself refused to. Why? So that through His death, He would save those who trust in Him as King and Savior.

Notice how all three taunts in vs. 29-42 are for Jesus to save Himself:

a. [Vs. 29-30] The wagging of their heads alerts our attention back to Ps 22 again. Ps 22:6-7: “I am...a reproach of men and despised by people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘commit youself to the Lord; let Him deliver [you].’” They ridicule Jesus for not destroying the temple and rebuild it in three days failing as they thought He had said. Yet, Mark’s readers get exactly what’s going on. The temple that is being destroyed is Jesus’ own body and in three days He will rise from the dead. “Save yourself, and come down from the cross,” they taunt Him, but He will not.

b. Then in vs. 31 the chief priests and scribes mock Him in the same way: “He saved others; He cannot save Himself.” The great irony is that Jesus is saving many more by refusing to save Himself—that’s the gospel—One righteous man saving many unrighteous by His death on their behalf.

c. The final taunt comes in vs. 32 climactically mocking Jesus as Messiah, King, and Savior: “Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe.” But He would not come down from the cross. This was His mission. He refused to drink the wine mixed with myrrh so that He might drink the full cup of the Father’s fury against our sin. By not saving Himself, He becomes King and Savior to all who trust in Him, rescuing them from the hell their own sins deserve.
Just step back for a moment and consider how Jesus has been treated in the last couple chapters of Mark. Consider all the reproaches that have been heaped on Him. He’s been...

- Betrayed
- Abandoned
- Denied
- Tried unjustly
- Falsely accused
- Blasphemed
- Condemned
- Spit upon
- Beaten
- Slapped
- Lied about
- Handed over to ruthless men
- Traded for a murderer
- Stripped of all dignity
- Scourged
- Mocked
- Crucified

He has been...

- Counted as a criminal
- Taunted with verbal abuse
- Insulted
- Hated
- Disregarded
- Rejected
- Tortured
- Ridiculed
- Humiliated
- Forsaken
- Brutally killed

Could He have been treated any lower than that? His suffering does not stop short of paying for the worst of sin and deepest depravity. And therefore, He is able to save the uttermost sinner.

How deep is your sin? I assure you, the Father’s love is deeper still. And that love will rescue you if only you take hold of the truth that Jesus is both King and Savior.

Don’t be like the Romans soldiers or the Jewish leaders who only lived by what they could see and despised what they were blind to. Live by the truth—see Jesus as He truly is crucified, risen, and reigning as King and Savior.

There is great hope in the exhaustive reproaches of Christ—He bore the full weight of human sin; and because He did, we may find forgiveness by putting our entire confidence in what He has done for us. Will you trust Him? Will you follow Him? Will you count the reproaches of Christ as your own?

There is one detail that I passed over in vs. 20 where it says they led Jesus out—out of the city to crucify Him. The writer of Hebrews picks up on the significance of this in chapter 13. Jesus suffered outside the city gate just as the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement were burned outside the camp. And then he says, “let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb 13:13). In other words, let us count His sufferings for us so precious that we are willing to identify with Him even when the world regards us with the same reproach and disgrace that they heaped on Christ.

We are living in a time when true-followers of Christ will be increasingly regarded with greater reproach by this world. Our biblical values are being continually undermined every day. What will we do prepare for the day when simply defending a biblical view of marriage is considered a hate crime against those who don’t agree with us?
Just this week I read portions of a news article to my girls about a military chaplain who is under severe fire because He maintained a biblical view of marriage and sexuality. I told them that there may come a time when I need to choose between preaching what the Bible truly teaches and going to jail. Will I be prepared—will you be prepared for those days? How? I’ve been asking myself this.

Don’t wait until the day of trial comes and then find yourself unprepared. We need to read the prophets. We need to familiar with prophets like Jeremiah who suffered greatly for doing what was right. We need to soak ourselves in books like I Peter that teach us how to live Christ-like lives when the pressure of persecution is on us. We need to meditate often on the sufferings of Christ and count them precious, knowing that Jesus identifies with our suffering and born its ultimate weight. How I pray that you will love Jesus so deeply, that you will gladly bear His reproach.