

Torture and Humiliation Mark 15: 15 – 25

Several years ago, *The Passion of the Christ* was released in theaters to much controversy. Some objected to its content being anti-Semitic. Others objected to the fact that it was not in English. But one of the main objections was that it was too violent. I will agree that it is a difficult film to watch, but to say that it was too violent fails to understand just what it was that Jesus suffered on our behalf. The graphic depiction of Jesus' crucifixion was an accurate portrayal of Roman brutality that accompanied crucifixion. It is a part of the story that we want to pass by quickly, to not concentrate too much because it makes us uneasy and uncomfortable. And let's be honest – it isn't pretty, it isn't pleasant. But it is real: Jesus Christ suffered brutally painful torture at the hands of a Roman cohort, 360 soldiers led by 6 centurions assigned to the detail in Jerusalem.

With the release of Barabbas, the fate of Jesus was sealed. Crucifixion at the hands of the Romans was intended to inflict maximum pain. But before a person went to the cross, they were handed over to be scourged – a legal precursor for all crucifixions except women, Roman soldiers, and Roman senators. The convicted person would be tied to a post, stripped of his clothing, and beaten with a flagellum – a short whip in which iron balls and pieces of bone or metal were imbedded to cause severe bruising and tearing of the flesh. The result was a loss of blood so severe that most victims were close to being in shock even before they were led out to the cross.

In addition to the physical torture, there was emotional torture inflicted as well. The soldiers, who had little regard for their victims to begin with, did all they could to demean the convicted. On this Friday morning, Jesus Christ was taken to the courtyard of the fortress, stripped and beaten, and humiliated by these soldiers. They took a purple robe – possibly one of the soldier's - and placed it on his bleeding shoulders. But that was not enough. He needed a royal scepter, so they placed a reed in his hand. And a king needs a crown, so they forced a crown of thorns onto his head. "Hail, King of the Jews," they mocked. Wasn't it outsiders from the east who came to Jerusalem approximately 30 years earlier asking of Herod the Great, "Where is he who was born King of the Jews?" The wise men came to worship, but the event sparked a violent outcome for the innocent young children of Bethlehem. On this day, Jesus Christ faced the tearing of his flesh and the tearing down of his spirit, but according to the scriptures, he stood silent with dignity, confident of God's plan. That Jesus died for our sins doesn't come close to describing the agony and suffering that he bore on our behalf – suffering innocently for the salvation of the world.

Why would these soldiers be so cruel? What was it about Jesus that was so threatening that innocent blood would be shed with a sense of almost gleeful satisfaction? Perhaps the Roman soldiers were so tired of being the object of hatred by the Jews that they were taking their frustrations out on him. Or were the soldiers simply following orders and protocol? We look at such inhumanity

This was a primary reason why crucifixions took place just outside a city gate along the main roads. It was a perfect place to remind others that this could be their fate, but it also allowed the passers-by to mock and humiliate those hanging on the cross.

“Hail King of the Jews” – over thirty plus years before this day, wise men had come from the east asking the question, “Where is he who is born King of the Jews?” It was a question that sparked fear and a violent reaction from Herod the Great, who held that title himself, but only because the Roman emperor allowed him to do it. Now thirty plus years later, there were others, non-Jews again, who were calling Jesus the King of the Jews. This too would have a violent ending – but not for innocent children, but for an innocent man who was taking upon himself the sins of the world. What was once a title of praise had become a phrase of derision.

Once again, an innocent suffers at the hands of an evil and corrupt world. The torture and humiliation of Jesus are a fulfillment of the suffering servant imagery of Isaiah.

- ¹ Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
- ² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- ³ He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering[£] and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces[£]
he was despised, and we held him of no account.
- ⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.