

## 8.3.25 Saturday evening preparatory Service: THE CALL TO THE CROSS

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Date: 08 March 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews?

And he answered him, You have said so. And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, Have you no answer to make?

See how many charges they bring against you. But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the feast, he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews? For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.

[ 1 : 05 ] But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate said to them, Then what shall I do with the man you call the king of the Jews?

And they cried out again, Crucify him. And Pilate said to them, Why? What evil has he done? But they shouted all the more, Crucify him.

So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas. And having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the governor's headquarters. And they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on them.

And they began to salute him, Hail, king of the Jews. And they were striking his head with a reed, and spitting on him, and kneeling down in homage to him.

[ 2 : 10 ] And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

And they brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull. And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh. But he did not take it.

And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him.

And the inscription of the charge against him read, The King of the Jews. And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, Save yourself and come down from the cross.

[ 3 : 21 ] So also the chief priests and the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, He saved others. He cannot save himself.

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Amen. This is once again the word of the Lord. And we pray that he would bless it to us in its reading and in our hearing of it. Before we come back to this chapter together, friends, we're going to sing once more.

This time in Gaelic, Psalm 106 in Gaelic. I'll read the verses in English, first of all.

Psalm 106, picking up our reading at verse 4. Remember me, Lord, with that love which thou to thine dost bear.

[ 4 : 38 ] With thy salvation, O my God, to visit me, draw near. That I thy chosen's goods may see and in their joy rejoice. And may with thine inheritance triumph with cheerful voice.

We with our fathers sinned have and of iniquity. Too long we have the workers been. We have done wickedly.

We'll sing these three verses now in Gaelic to the praise of God. Dear God, thank you.

Dear God, thank you. Dear God, thank you. Dear God, thank you.

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CHOIR SINGS Well, friends, for a short time this evening, let's turn back to the chapter that we read together, Mark's Gospel, chapter 15.

Mark 15. And considering together the words that we have in verses 16 to 20. Mark 15, 16 to 20.

And the soldiers led him, that is Jesus, away inside the palace, that is the governor's headquarters.

[ 10 : 37 ] And they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak. And twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.

And they began to salute him. Hail, King of the Jews. And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him off the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Life, in many ways, is what you might call a very rich tapestry.

A tapestry in which there are golden threads and threads that are perhaps a little bit darker. Many scenes in our lives, as we know that our lives to be, are scenes which we can fairly analyze as being bittersweet.

[ 11 : 46 ] For example, when a child is born. For the mother, there is, of course, the bitterness of the pain of childbirth. But yet, along with that bitterness, there is, of course, the sweetness of holding that child for the very first time as her own.

And then at the other end of the spectrum of life, as our brother Stuart prayed, there is, of course, the death of a loved one, the loved one who was a believer.

This is, of course, undoubtedly a bitter parting for those of us who are left behind to mourn their passing. For those who are left behind, their lives are very much never the same again, never to hear their voice again.

It's a bitter parting. Yet in the death of the believer, friends, it's true, is it not, that there's also a very real sweetness. A sweetness in knowing that someone whom we have known and loved in this world, in taking that breath from time into eternity, is face to face with Jesus.

What a glorious thought, that bitter, sweet experience of losing someone who has died in the Lord.

And really the scene that we have tonight before us, friends, is one that we can call bittersweet.

[ 13 : 19 ] Because we notice two things, do we note? We notice the bitterness of Jesus being mockingly called to the cross by those who hate him, those who despise him, those who want to see him dead.

We see that as being bitter. But we also see, do we not, if we dig a little deeper, the sweetness of the fact that Jesus is here being called to the cross by Jesus, his Father, to die the sins for the sins of his precious redeemed.

A sweetness that has surrounding it undeniable majesty. And that's our two headings tonight, friends. Mockery and majesty.

Now in terms of context, what we see here, without going into too much detail as to the whole of the chapter, but what we see here is that Jesus has just been before Pilate.

And as Jesus has come before Pilate, we've seen that Pilate has struggled to find any reason to condemn Jesus. Verse 12. And Pilate again said to them, Then what shall I do with this man that you call the king of the Jews?

[ 14 : 40 ] And they cried out again, Crucify him. And Pilate said to them, Why? What evil has he done?

So that even Pilate himself, he struggled to find anything to lay a charge at the feet of Jesus with. However, nonetheless, in true, I suppose, reality of mankind, we see that Pilate relents.

He relents to the pressure of the crowd, the crowd who instead would rather set this criminal, this murderer, Barabbas, free. A man who's characterized by wickedness, by evil, a man who's a danger to society, yet a man who the people favored over Jesus.

Essentially, choosing darkness over light. And even that in itself is a real insight, is it not, into the heart of man. Choosing darkness over light.

Verse 16. And the soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is the governor's headquarters, and they called together the whole battalion. Now, the governor's headquarters is thought to have been either the Antonian Fortress on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, or perhaps even the palace of Herod, which could easily have been accommodation for the Roman governor.

[16:09] But either way, we see that Jesus is taken there. He's taken there, not only by the soldiers, but with the whole garrison. A number that could have amounted to as many as 600 men.

Why? Why is such a great number summoned? Well, really, essentially, to see the spectacle that was Jesus.

Motivated by the mockery that was about to be unleashed, they go. They have a hunger in their hearts to see this scene unfold before their eyes, and they're not disappointed.

Because from other accounts, we know that by this point, Jesus has already been physically beaten and lashed within an inch of his life, and now was the time for, really for him to be emotionally abused, emotionally humiliated, a very powerful tool, a powerful tool, friends, when we want to bring someone down.

Verse 16, The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is the governor's headquarters, and they called together the whole battalion, and they clothed him in a purple cloak.

[17:31] In other accounts, we see that this is a scarlet cloak. And most likely, this is referring to one of the military garments that the soldiers would have worn.

But why? Why are they dressing Jesus up? Quite simply, mockery. Mockery.

You see, the color purple, it was considered a regal color, a color of royalty, one that would be worn by monarchs, monarchs who would wear beautiful purple gowns.

And so, if Jesus, this man, was claiming to be king in the eyes of his persecutors, let him be dressed up as king. And so, that's what they did.

They made a show of him. They sought to humiliate him, to mock him, to deride him. And they don't stop there. Because in verse 17, we see that they clothed him in a purple cloak, and they twist together a crown of thorns, and they put it on him.

[18:39] Now, the word crown here is Stephanos, which comes from the word stepho, which really means to encircle. And to encircle gives to us that picture of a wreath, does it not?

And so, what these men were doing was, they were creating a circle, a wreath, that was possibly out of the prickly parts of the palm tree, or another thorny plant that was found in Israel at the time. We don't 100% know what that was. But what we do know is, that they're trying to mimic. They're trying to mimic that laurel wreath, that wreath that would have been worn by Caesar, that man to whom they had full allegiance.

Not Jesus, but Caesar. And of course, this was the man that Jesus was being accused of attempting, wrongly accused, of tempting to usurp.

And so we see this theme continued when they shout out, Hail, King of the Jews. A nod to the common salute to Caesar, which would have been, Hail, Caesar.

[19:52] And so while undoubtedly having such a crown of thorns piercing his scalp would have been physical agony, and it would have been. More than that, at this point, the intention is emotional humiliation.

And you know, friends, when you're not well physically, it's far more difficult, is it not, to deal with things emotionally. Even when we're tired, we find it far more difficult to deal with things.

Things that are normally small and easy for us to deal with in the ordinary every day, they become big. Maybe you know what that's like just now. Maybe you're struggling physically in your body, maybe even in your mind.

And because of this, things are difficult to cope with. Emotionally, you struggle, so that if anyone says something to you, even a wrong word, it goes through you like an arrow.

It's no different here, friends. We must never ever forget the humanity of Christ. We must never ever forget the sufferings that were his.

[ 21 : 02 ] In every and in all aspects of his humanity, yet without sin, he suffered. He knows what it's like. He's one who can come alongside us even tonight as the one who's been there.

The one who knows what it is to be mocked, to be tired, to be emotionally stripped of his integrity. That's what we see here.

And then verse 19, we see these men doing everything they can to add salt to his wounds. And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him.

Isn't that the most degrading thing that anyone can do to a fellow human being? To spit on them. It really is a sign of disdain and disgust for someone else when someone spits on them.

I don't know if that's ever happened to you. I sincerely hope not. I hope that none of us have ever done that to someone else because it shows really that we think that they are someone who's worth absolutely nothing but the worst.

[ 22 : 23 ] And we can picture them all having a go here, taking a turn, showing their collective and individual hatred for God incarnate. In verse 19, we see theatrically they bow the knee in a pretense of worship, the sound of sneers and sniggers filling the air as they mockingly salute, Hail, King of the Jews.

Verse 20, And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his clothes on him and they led him out to crucify him.

When they were done, we read that they take the cloak off him, inflicting even more pain. Bearing in mind at this point, his body is lashed, it's torn, it's lacerated.

This isn't a few marks on his back. This is a slicing open of his flesh. Flesh that is torn in two. Flesh that had shed blood.

Flesh that, as he wore this purple garment, would have seen that blood congealing and sticking to that garment.

[ 23 : 39 ] We've got young folk here with us tonight. I don't know if you've ever had a plaster taken off. Have you had that before? When you've got a plaster on a cut and the day comes when the plaster has to be torn off, it can be quite sore sometimes, can't it?

And that's the picture that we have here. But so much worse. As they rip off that purple cloak from the one whom they are mocking as king, we see the pain, the agony, as his robe is peeled off from his lacerated body.

What a scene to behold. What a scene of malicious mockery that God incarnate is subject to here in his call to the cross.

And this is his call to the cross. Last night we looked at the cause of the cross. Tonight is the call to the cross. That call of callous cruelty. That call that has in the air surrounding it those words, crucify him.

Crucify him. That's what they're calling for Jesus. that's what they're calling to happen to Jesus, that he'll be crucified, that he'll be killed.

[ 24 : 58 ] But friends, let's not be fooled. Because in all things he will have the preeminence, even in the scene that we see before us here.

Because as horrific as his mockery was and is, believe it or not, that underneath it all there is majesty.

That's our second point. There is majesty. And you might be thinking, well, how? How can there be anything majestic in what we see here?

God being treated in such a way, a way that you wouldn't even treat your own animals. There's nothing majestic here, but there is. There is.

Because as we hear that call, crucify him, crucify him, calling him to the cross. We also hear another call, a call that comes from heaven itself, a call that has echoing around Christ those words, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

[ 26 : 08 ] A call that has at its core that which is quite majestic. What is it they say? That many is a true word is spoken in jest.

We can say something joking or supposedly joking, but underneath what we say there's an element of truth. We're maybe trying to make a point.

Many is a true word was spoken in jest. Well, so it is here. But these men, they don't realize.

They don't realize that as they put this purple robe upon Jesus, that in actual fact, what they're doing is they're affirming that he is the king of kings. And more than that, more than that, more than the putting on of this royal robe, what we see is that crown of thorns.

[ 27 : 12 ] That crown of thorns. But thinking about the robe, what does it tell us? It tells us, does it not, as a symbol that Christ is being led away to die on that cross, a symbol of why this is about to happen.

That he had to suffer in this way. He had to have this garment placed upon him in pain and in mockery so that sinful mankind could in turn so that you and me tonight, that we could all, if we are his, if we know him as Lord and Savior, that we could have the robe of his righteousness placed upon us.

us, sinners, as we saw last night, who have been lacerated, who have been torn, who bear the scars of our own sinful hearts.

Metaphorically speaking, this scarlet robe drenched in the blood of the Lamb. And that's why we see Jesus saying nothing throughout all of this.

he remains silent as a sheep before its shearers is silent. He says not a word. Why? Because he knows the bigger picture and he could have said plenty.

[ 28 : 40 ] And that's what's astounding really in all of what we see here. The obedience of the Son. He had every right, friends, to protest his innocence.

Isn't that what Adam did? We saw that last evening. He blamed his wife. This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't given me this wife. He passes the blame on to his bride.

And yet here tonight we have the second Adam, Jesus, well within his rights to blame us, to blame his bride, the church. And yet his silence speaks volumes.

His silence says, don't blame my bride. Blame me. If that's not worthy, friends, of our love and our worship this evening, I don't know what is.

Let you and I sit on this Saturday evening around God's word, looking forward to that sacrament on tomorrow, God willing, with this reality in our hearts, and I pray in our lives one and all, don't blame me.

[ 29 : 56 ] Don't blame my bride, rather, but blame me that he died for you and for me. Yes, he hears the call to the cross from those around him, but overriding and overpowering all of that, he hears the call to the cross from his heavenly Father.

He knew the eternal implications of why all of this was happening. He knew that he loved his people with an everlasting love.

But what about coming back to the crown of thorns? What can we say about this? Well, this is interesting because it links really back to what we saw last evening in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3, verses 17 to 19. we reflected on the source of sin. And we read in verse 17 there that Adam, and to Adam he said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field.

[ 31 : 23 ] By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

This is of course referring to the fall that we thought about last evening, the fall of mankind into sin, the consequences of such a fall. What were the consequences?

What are the consequences? Present tense, well the earth would be cursed. The earth would be cursed and bring forth thorns and thistles.

That's why I believe we ask a blessing on the food that we're about to eat. We give thanks for it but we ask a blessing because it's come from the ground that is cursed and cursed it was, cursed it is with thorns and thistles.

Thorns and thistles of sin even that choke the very fabric of who you and I are as humans and yet in the mockery of this crown piercing the head of Jesus we see glorious majesty tonight.

[ 32 : 37 ] Friends, how? Well, as one commentator puts it, the Roman soldiers unknowingly took an object of the curse and fashioned it into a crown that would deliver us from the curse.

Remember what the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 53, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon him and by his stripes we

are healed.

The Roman soldiers unknowingly took an object of the curse and fashioned it into a crown that would deliver us from the curse.

There is majesty in the mocking. Yes, Jesus is crowned with thorns, that is true, but he is crowned with so much more.

Hebrews 2, 9, but we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death.

[ 33 : 56 ] Explicitly telling us this, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Isn't that wonderful? There is majesty in the mocking. He is crowned with glory and honour so that he might taste death for you and for me, even for those who were mocking him.

They weren't out with the realms of salvation, spitting on him, humiliating him, deriding him. These are the very ones who Christ died for. No one is too far from the reach of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And whether they wanted it or not, one thing is for sure, and many of them didn't want it, didn't want him. But nonetheless, this wouldn't be the last time.

We notice they bow their knee. This wouldn't be the last time that they theatrically bow their knee before Jesus. Because in Philippians 2 we read that God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[ 35 : 27 ] Friends, when Christ returns again, every knee will bow. Every knee of every man who spat upon Jesus who shouted out crucify him crucify him every knee will bow before him as king as Lord but not as saviour not a saviour some will be bowing that knee to their eternal condemnation why because they rejected Jesus they rejected him as king and lord over all or to their exaltation because they repented and trusted in Jesus and the point is that the majesty of the mockery is the reality of the sufficiency of Christ for all the majesty of the mockery is the reality of the sufficiency of Christ rather for all the inspiration and the motivation for all of us being here tonight

I hope the inspiration and motivation for our taking and eating tomorrow from that feast of repentant responsive remembrance he died for me friends it's easy is it not for us to forget just the glory of who we are in Christ to be so taken up with who we are by nature even to be taken up with good things profitable things things that benefit the church but yet even in these good things we lose sight of the greatest thing the greatest person the Lord Jesus Christ himself so that as we come and as we reflect upon this majesty in this mocking that we remember the majesty that is ours if we are his because scripture tells us what that we are heirs we are joint heirs with

Christ so that all that is his will be ours but I wonder friend is it yours do you see majesty in Christ tonight or is it mockery what is your experience of the Lord Jesus Christ and when we say mockery we don't necessarily mean spitting on him but we do say crucifying him because we can crucify him in our hearts can we not we can crucify him in our hearts when we refuse to have him rule and reign over us when we choose as we thought last evening the things of this world over the God of this world and yet we see here tonight the reality of who it is we seek to worship one who does for us that which no one else will ever do one who died and gave himself the king of kings and the lord of lords last night we saw the cause of the cross sin tonight we saw the call to the cross one in which we saw mockery but also majesty a majesty that god willing will focus on further as tomorrow we think about the curtain and the cross a majesty that we have the opportunity and indeed the privilege because that's what it is it's not a burden to come to the lord's table friends it's a privilege a privilege to publicly acknowledge and give thanks for at the table of the one who by faith we acknowledge to be king of kings to come and to openly confess and profess all that we see here as being our testimony that we see the majesty in the mockery we see the beauty in the crucifixion and I wonder friend as we close tonight if you're here and you do see beauty in

Jesus you see what he's done he's touched your life I wonder tomorrow will you be joining us at his feast and if not why not let's pray lord we mourn this evening that you had to go through all that you did for us and we mourn all the more for the little we reflect upon such loving kindness for all that you've suffered and gone through on our behalf as our loving heavenly father we bless and we thank you for a love that knows no bounds a love that has its foundation in eternity a love that led you to that place where you were willing to be mocked by mankind so that in and through that

mocking the majesty of who you really are would come through help us oh lord to to even be moved this evening by your spirit by the power of all that you've done for us and that if there are any here tonight as our brother prayed earlier who are haltering between two opinions who perhaps love you in their hearts but are yet to profess you publicly with their lives give to them the strength enable them to to know that it's not until we step out of the boat that we will ever walk on water and as we do so we don't look within or around us but rather we look to

Jesus the one who promises to keep us afloat the one who promises to be with us every step of the way you do not call perfect people to your table for none exist you are the only one who is perfect but what you do ask is that imperfect people like us put our trust in a perfect saviour and that we come with that testimony upon our lips I can't Lord but you can and you did because you died for me so we pray that you would bless us as we go into tomorrow be with us as we remember around word and sacrament your death until you come again that your Holy Spirit would lead us and guide us in all that we seek to do God we ask seeking forgiveness for our sin in Jesus name Amen well friends let's conclude singing to

[ 43 : 16 ] God's praise from the hymn how deep the father's love how deep the father's love mission praise 988 how deep the father's love for us how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to make a wretch that's you and me tonight if we're it's all of us really to make a wretch his treasure we'll stand to sing in conclusion how deep the father's love for us how deep the father's love for us how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure how great the veil of stealing laws the father turns his face away as wounds which mar the chosen one bring many sons to glory behold the man upon a cross my sin upon his shoulders a shame

I hear my walking voice called among the scoffers it was my sin that held in bear until it was accomplished his dying breath has brought me life I know that it is face I will not boast in anything no gifts no power no wisdom but I will boast in Jesus Christ his death and resurrection why should I gain from his reward I cannot give an answer but this I know with all my heart his wounds have made my ransom now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and remain with you now and always Amen