

The Condemned King

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'm sure most of you are familiar with the plot of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. David must be rubbing off on me because I'm using a Shakespeare quotation.

That's normally his field. But Romeo and Juliet is a really good play and it's got different kinds of irony throughout, whether it's irony in the events that take place or irony in the dialogue or in the speeches.

And it's all included by Shakespeare really to drive and move the plot forward. To use it effectively in a sense to entertain the audience. And perhaps one of the best examples of the dramatic irony that you find in Romeo and Juliet is at the end of the play.

So spoiler alert here if you haven't seen or read it yet. At the end of the play, Romeo sees Juliet who appears to be dead. And the substance of the whole thing is they're lovers.

So it's the end. Romeo sees Juliet and she appears to be dead. But the audience know Juliet isn't in fact dead. She has drunk a sleeping potion.

[1 : 0 6] In a sense, she's been drugged to make her appear dead. But she is actually still alive. But poor Romeo thinks that she is dead. And so he then drinks poison to end his life.

And then Romeo dies. But Juliet wakes up. I think that's right. That's how it goes. Plot of Romeo and Juliet. And it's dramatic irony because the audience know exactly what is going on.

Even though the characters in the play have no idea what is happening. Now, when we read Mark chapter 15, there is a dramatic irony here. And we see this as Jesus is condemned to death.

And it's all the way through chapter 15. Jesus knows what's happening. We, as the reader of Mark's gospel, the audience, as it were, we know what's happening. But the characters involved in the death of Jesus have no idea what is happening.

Because Jesus' death is really the heart of his purpose, his mission here on earth. And whilst he is moving towards his death, all of these characters, in a sense, are fulfilling Jesus' mission for him.

[2 : 1 5] They are the ones who, in sending Jesus to his death, they're accomplishing God's purposes. And that's what's going on here. And that's why it is full of irony.

Because despite the tragedy of Jesus' suffering and death, that is the reason why Jesus came. Jesus came to die. And his death is the way that God accomplishes his purposes.

Now, the commentators are good at bringing out the irony all the way through this chapter. And so I'd like us to look at it this afternoon here in Mark chapter 15.

Because Mark's not just giving us a historical account of what happened. He's not giving us any less than a historical account. But he wants us to understand the significance of who Jesus is and why Jesus came.

He came to die. And the dramatic irony helps us see this. So let's look at this in the narrative. And then we'll apply the message of the death of Jesus to our own lives.

[3 : 15] And so we're going to look at three things this afternoon. First, the king is mocked. Second, the innocent is condemned. Third, the powerful is powerless. The king is mocked.

The innocent is condemned. And the powerful is powerless. So first of all, the king is mocked. Now, the irony here is that Pilate mocks Jesus as king, the king of the Jews.

But he's got it spot on. So earlier in chapter 14, the religious authorities put Jesus on trial because they wanted Jesus dead. They got his identity wrong.

And they accused him of blasphemy. Now, they've turned Jesus over to Pilate, who is the Roman governor. So verse 1 says, Very early in the morning, the chief priests and the elders and the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin made their plans.

So they bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Now, what is interesting as well as ironic is that these are the religious elites, the religious authorities.

[4 : 18] These are the people who spend their lives reading and studying the scriptures. So they should have known about the Messiah. Messiah meaning God's chosen king.

So the irony is that they miss the one their very scriptures were pointing to and all about. They were waiting for the promised Messiah. Jesus, the Messiah, has come.

He is in their midst. And yet they want to kill him. Of course, they didn't have the power to kill him themselves. That's why they hand Jesus over to Pilate, because Pilate is the one who has the power to crucify Jesus.

So verse 3, the chief priests accused him of many things. They bring all these charges against Jesus. So get this, the religious people who thought they were so right actually get it so horribly wrong when it comes to Jesus.

And yet none of this is news to Jesus, because Jesus knew this is how it would all play out. Remember from Isaiah chapter 53, Jesus is the suffering servant who was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

[5 : 28] And so Pilate questions Jesus. Verse 2, are you the king of the Jews? Asked Pilate. You have said so, Jesus replied. Pilate uses the expression king of the Jews with contempt.

He's wanting to mock Jesus. And yet he also speaks the truth without realizing it. And so Jesus gently acknowledges his divine kingship when Pilate asks by saying to him, you have said so.

It's like Jesus is saying, I am the king, but not the kind of king that you think I am. So notice the irony here, because the term king of the Jews comes up six times in Mark chapter 15.

Look along if your Bible is there. Verse 2, Pilate asked Jesus, are you the king of the Jews? And verse 9, Pilate asked the crowd, do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?

And verse 12, again, Pilate asked the crowd, what shall I do then with the one you call the king of the Jews? And verse 18, the soldiers mocked Jesus by shouting to him, hail, king of the Jews.

[6 : 41] And then after the passage we read further on, verse 26, the notice of the charge against Jesus read, the king of the Jews. And then verse 32, when he was on the cross, they mocked him by saying, let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.

And so this term, this phrase, the king of the Jews is used with contempt all the way through Mark chapter 15. It's an insult hurled at Jesus to mock him.

After all, Jesus looked nothing like a king. And so as far as Pilate was concerned, Jesus should have been released. And the whole narrative makes this clear.

Pilate didn't see Jesus as a threat to Rome. And Pilate wasn't interested in the Jewish religious arguments or the accusations of the religious leaders. And that's why Pilate makes this attempt to let Jesus go, to avoid making a decision on Jesus' fate.

Now, Pilate knew that Jesus was not worthy of death, even as the so-called king of the Jews. And so Jesus remained silent, which is what the scriptures said would happen.

[7 : 56] So amidst the questioning before Pilate with all the accusations and the mocking, Jesus is actually, in his silence, revealing his true identity as God's chosen king.

And yet nobody could see it. And the irony is that the one who is mocked as king is king. And as readers of Mark's gospel, we already know this.

Remember Mark's opening words, Mark chapter 1 and verse 1. He said, The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God.

So Mark wastes no time in identifying Jesus to us. He says that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Christ. He is the Son of God. Messiah, Christ, means God's anointed king.

God's chosen king. Not a king, but the king. And so Jesus is more than the king of the Jews. He certainly is not less than the king of the Jews.

[8 : 58] But Jesus is God's chosen king. And he is the king of kings. He is the king of the universe. Because Mark chapter 1, verse 1 tells us that Jesus is also the Son of God.

Which means Jesus is the king over everyone who has ever lived, including you and me. And all of those who were mocking him before his death.

And so Jesus is king of us all. Whether we like it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, Jesus is the king. And so while the characters here all get Jesus' identity horribly wrong, we certainly shouldn't get it wrong today.

We shouldn't fail to see Jesus for who he really is. Because the mocked king is the king. And so this isn't just irony here. This is, in fact, tragedy.

Because whether we're talking about the mocking of Jesus back then, by the people who crucified him and condemned him, when Jesus was a man here on earth. Or whether we're talking about the mocking of Jesus today, by those who misunderstand Jesus.

[10 : 09] The reality is that one day, the religious authorities who wanted to kill Jesus, Pilate who condemned Jesus, the soldiers who crucified Jesus, and everybody else who has ever lived, will one day bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He's Lord. He's king. He's the ruler. He has authority over our lives. He's the king. That's the first thing we see. The king is mocked. Second thing is the innocent is condemned.

And this is in verse 6 to 15, where you notice Jesus, the innocent, is condemned to crucifixion. Whereas this man, Barabbas, the guilty, the criminal, he is set free.

Now, the name Barabbas means son of the father. It's an Aramaic name. So Bar means son. And Abba means father. Bar, Abbas. And Barabbas was a notorious prisoner.

So here, and then described elsewhere, he's an insurrectionist and he is a murderer, basically a terrorist. And therefore, he's guilty of a capital offense. And that's why he's locked in a Roman prison, awaiting execution for his crimes.

[11 : 23] But we read here that there's a custom. And the custom is that a prisoner can be released, one chosen by the people. Now, it's clear that Pilate wanted Jesus to be released. And so he gave the crowd a choice, presumably expecting that they would want to see Jesus released instead of Barabbas.

But the crowd choose Barabbas over Jesus. Now, Pilate had the power to release Jesus if he wanted to. And in fact, three times he attempted to defend Jesus.

Just notice in verse 9 to 14, the three questions he asks the crowd. Verse 9, And in one thing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate releases Barabbas.

And he has Jesus flogged, handed over to be crucified. So when Pilate asks, why, what crime has he committed? The answer is, well, there's no answer here because Jesus committed no crime.

So no answer could be given. Everybody knew that Jesus was innocent. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but peer pressure and mob mentality meant that Pilate was swayed by the crowd and he caved in to the pressure of their demands.

[13 : 00] And it is full of irony, isn't it? Essentially, Barabbas, the guilty murderer, was released. And Jesus, the innocent victim, was condemned to death.

The innocent is condemned and the guilty goes free. And yet there's a deeper significance to what is going on here. Because Barabbas, although he has this minor role in the narrative, in the death of Jesus, actually, he illustrates the major message of the cross.

What I mean is, well, Mark is giving us the historical details of the death of Jesus, but he also wants us to understand what the death of Jesus actually means.

And because this incident with Barabbas is here, it shows us something significant. It describes what the death of Jesus achieves. Because you notice that Jesus died in place of Barabbas.

And so if you were able to interview Barabbas and ask him after this and say to him, Barabbas, what happened on that day when you were released from prison? He'd have to say, Jesus died for me.

[14 : 10] I was the guilty one. I was in prison for my crimes. But Jesus was condemned in my place. And I got set free. You see, Jesus swapped places with Barabbas like a substitute.

So Barabbas can say, Jesus died for me. And yet he's not the only one, is he? Because Barabbas illustrates the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death for everybody who puts their faith in him.

Barabbas graphically describes the position that all of us are in. Because we're all guilty. We all deserve condemnation for our sin against God.

And yet what has God done? He has sent his son, Jesus, to die in our place so we can be free from the condemnation, our sin deserves when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

And that's why the irony of the innocent being condemned so the guilty can go free is a fantastic illustration of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 17] Because what Jesus did for Barabbas, Jesus came to do for you and for me. Jesus was the perfect, innocent son of God who died for guilty rebels like you and me.

Jesus gave himself as a substitute for us. He died so that we might live. So that Barabbas, remember, means son of the father. So that Barabbas, son of the father, is set free by Jesus, son of God the father.

And we can be too. Because Jesus the innocent was condemned for our sin on the cross. So guilty sinners like us can be forgiven.

And so that's the second striking irony in the account of the death of Jesus. The innocent is condemned. So first of all, the king is mocked. Secondly, the innocent is condemned.

And thirdly, the powerful is powerless. And in verse 15 to 20, we see this in the irony of Jesus, the powerful king, looking completely powerless.

[16 : 27] Now, Jesus seems to be at the mercy of Pilate and the soldiers. But even when he seems powerless, Jesus is, in fact, in control. But just look at the economy of words that Mark uses to portray Jesus' suffering and death.

It's interesting that the death of Jesus is never really sensationalized in any of the Gospels, especially here in Mark. And that doesn't mean that we should miss what is actually going on.

Verses like verse 15, which read that Pilate had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. So to ensure maximum suffering, and the Romans knew how to torture people, to ensure the suffering, flogging or scourging, as it was also called, it came before crucifixion.

And in and of itself, this was such a horrific form of punishment. Some are even on record as being dead before they even reached their crucifixion because the scourging or the flogging was so bad.

And how it would happen was that a whip would be made with long leather straps, lots of long leather straps. And embedded in these leather straps would be tiny bits of bone and bits of metal.

[17 : 41] And this was designed to sink into the shoulders and the back and the buttocks and the legs of the victim who was being flogged. And then once the hooks, bones and metal had sunk into the flesh, the whip would be ripped out and the skin would be ripped off.

And the insides would be revealed and there would be blood everywhere. So the flesh of the victim would be in shreds. And that's what happened to Jesus.

Summed up in the brief statement, he had Jesus flogged. And again, Jesus submitted himself to this. And again, it was predicted in the scriptures of the suffering servant.

Again, in Isaiah, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being. And his form marred beyond human likeness. So Jesus willingly became powerless, allowing himself to be tortured like this.

And after the flogging, Jesus was handed over to the soldiers to be crucified. And we read this in verse 16 to 19. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace, that is the praetorium, and called together the whole company of soldiers.

[18 : 56] 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 spat 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. Now the whole company of soldiers, that is hundreds and hundreds of soldiers, all there, all gathered to watch Jesus being flogged and crucified.

And to add in to the mocking and the insulting. And so Jesus is clothed in a purple robe. Purple was a sign of royalty. A crown of thorns is put on his head. He's dressed up to look like a pretend king.

And so the soldiers salute Jesus. Hail, King of the Jews! This was a parody of Caesar's salute. Hail, Caesar! And then they struck him on the head. They spat on him.

They bowed on their knees, pretending to worship Jesus. All mocking the very notion that Jesus is a king. And yet Jesus endured the humiliation.

[20 : 05] And so we are meant to see here the irony in everything that is happening. Because even as Jesus is mocked as a king, and even as Jesus looks weak and looks powerless, he still is the powerful king.

The man they called the king of the Jews is the king of the universe. And the irony is that he was willing to be arrested, willing to be accused, and mocked, condemned, tortured, and eventually killed.

He walked into it. And so Mark wants us to see that the man who came to die on the cross is God. And Jesus acknowledges this himself.

He claimed divinity when questioned by the high priest back in chapter 14. And again, he claims divinity here when questioned by Pilate in verse 2. Are you the king of the Jews?

Asked Pilate. You have said so, Jesus replied. And so as Jesus moves towards his death, the message communicated by Mark's gospel is that in Jesus, God became man and humbled himself to die on a cross for the people he made.

[21 : 19] People like you and me. People like us who have rebelled against our loving creator, God. This is who Jesus is, and this is why Jesus came to die.

And this is what Christianity is all about. And that's why we call it good news. It is the best news our world could ever hear. Gospel means good news.

Good news for me. Good news for you. That although we have rebelled against the God who made us, he has come himself to suffer and die. To pay the punishment that we deserve so that we can be accepted by him.

Well, how does this good news apply to us? How should we respond to the message of the death of Jesus? Well, by recording the death of Jesus, Mark doesn't just want to tell us what happened.

He wants us to grasp why it happened and what it means for his readers then and now. He's telling us who Jesus is and why Jesus came to die. But we're not supposed to be passive observers to this historical event and just gawk back and look and say, Oh, that's quite nice.

[22 : 28] Or that's sad. Or that's tragic. Jesus died on a cross. Terrible suffering. And walk away as if it's got nothing to do with me. The identity of Jesus and the death of Jesus carry enormous significance for every single one of us.

Because just like the religious authorities and Pilate and the soldiers had to make up their minds on Jesus, so do we. Mark is forcing us to decide what we will do with Jesus.

Remember the question that Pilate asked the crowd. Verse 12. What shall I do then with the one you call the king of the Jews? So what should we do with this man, Jesus?

Because the religious leaders had to choose, didn't they? And they wanted Jesus dead. Pilate had to choose, didn't he? And he wanted Jesus released. The crowd had to choose, didn't they?

And they wanted Jesus crucified. The soldiers had to choose. And they mocked and beat and crucified him. And so we also must choose what we do with Jesus Christ.

[23 : 39] And I think we can summarize the responses from this passage. Three responses are here. Reject, ignore, and mock. Reject, first of all. The religious leaders rejected Jesus again and again and again.

And they wanted rid of him. They had no place for Jesus in their lives. And many people today are exactly the same. And maybe you're one of them. You want absolutely nothing to do with Jesus Christ.

You don't want him in your life. And so you've rejected him. So that's reject. And then there's ignore. And that's really to try and adopt some kind of neutral position on Jesus.

Just like Pilate did. It's like sitting on the fence. Not a deliberate rejection of Jesus. But hoping that you can just get away with politely ignoring Jesus forever.

And Pilate here is just too weak. He gives in to the pressure of the crowd. For the sake of a quiet life, he didn't take Jesus seriously enough. And many people today are the same.

[24 : 46] And perhaps you are one of them. You recognize Jesus as important. You believe he was a historical figure. You admit that there is something to him. And yet you choose to ignore and dismiss rather than deal with him.

You don't want Jesus to be a threat for your life. And so rather than acknowledge his rightful authority over your life as king, you just try and ignore him.

So there's reject. There's ignore. And then there's mock. And it's what the soldiers did. And yet it's what many still do today. Mock Jesus. Because the claim that Jesus actually is king and we must submit to him doesn't go down well with many people.

And that's why Jesus is mocked and viewed as an irrelevance to our lives. And so believing in Jesus and following Jesus is regarded as being ludicrous by so many people.

Why? Why waste your life following Jesus Christ? Why bother going to church? What a waste. It doesn't make any sense. And maybe you mock any notion of needing Jesus.

[25 : 58] And yet rejecting, ignoring, mocking Jesus are the wrong responses to him. And yet there is a right response to Jesus. And it's really the response that Mark wrote his gospel for because he wants his readers to make this response, including you and me.

What is the response? The response is to follow. To follow Jesus. Jesus willingly came to suffer and die because we needed him to. Jesus lived a life that we could never live, a life without sin.

Jesus died the death that we deserve to die, a death for our sin. And he did this even though he is the ultimate king. He was prepared to be mocked for you.

He was innocent, yet he was prepared to be condemned for you and for me. He is all-powerful, and yet he gave up his power and died in weakness and shame for you and me.

Jesus gave his life to save all those who will believe in him. And so let's make sure we trust Jesus as our savior and we follow him as our king.

[27 : 10] He was saved. And so let's make sure we trust you. He died the unbelief that had for you.

He died the unbelief that he may no longer and has the■■■ that you were Accepted. He went to a plane he■■■ the Octistles and see, Jesus really ■■■■■■■itarized. I lost the story of the righteous and did what is he Zealand, the holy Lawry making it for you and me.

Genesis 2 and then to be a mystery podcasting.