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## Sermon Summary #49

### Seven Stunning Sins Mark 15:16-32

Aside from a few notable biblical exceptions such as Enoch and Elijah, *all men die*. I suppose I should also include as exceptions to that otherwise unbreakable law the final generation of Christians who will be alive when Jesus returns. But, again, aside from these obvious and unusual exceptions, the law of life is that all men die.

How they die and what their deaths accomplish is another matter entirely. Some die quietly and calmly, after a long life and without much physical pain. Others die young and suffer greatly. The effects and influence of their deaths also varies widely. Most die in obscurity. Few even notice their passing. Others die very much in the public eye and their deaths can lead to either to war or peace. Some die as righteous examples while others die as an embarrassment to all that is good and decent.

A little more than 2,000 years ago, three men died together, having been executed as perceived threats to the peace and welfare of Rome. To an uninformed passerby, there wasn't any way to know that one was any different from the other two. Death by crucifixion was common in that day and time. They were all pretty much alike. Except for one.

**So what made the death of Jesus different from the deaths of those two men crucified on his left and his right?** Why should we care more about his suffering than we do about theirs?

The answer of course is clear to anyone who reads and believes the Bible. Jesus wasn't suffering for himself or his own sins and crimes, as were the other two. He was suffering for the sins and crimes of others. Jesus didn't die because of his own guilt. He died because of my guilt. He died because of your guilt. His suffering and death weren't merely the result of a civil judgment passed by human beings. His suffering and death were the punishment imposed by divine judgment, at the hand of God.

The suffering and death of those two men crucified on either side of Jesus have no affect on me or you, but the suffering and death of Jesus is our only hope for forgiveness of sins, our only hope for reconciliation with God, our only hope for salvation and redemption and eternal life in his presence.

That's what made the suffering and death of Jesus so utterly and entirely different. Our aim today and in the next two weeks will be to unpack the significance of this death for our eternal destiny.

Today we are going to approach the description of the suffering and death of Jesus by taking note of what I am calling **seven stunning sins**. In our passage are seven statements or descriptive declarations of what Jesus suffered at the hands of sinful men and women. I'm going to briefly mention the first six, and then focus most of our time on the seventh.

1. ***They put a purple robe on him*** (v. 17a)

This was obviously in mock imitation of the robe which was the insignia of the vassal kings of the day. Whereas some have suggested it was the short red cloak worn by Roman soldiers, it was more likely some shabby rug or faded cloak. Why "purple" or "scarlet"? See Isa. 1:18. As the soldiers clothed Jesus in a scarlet robe, Jesus clothed himself in the scarlet sins of the world.

The verb *endidusko* occurs elsewhere only in Luke 16:19. This verb carries the connotation of grandly dressing up, heightening the mockery of Jesus. The Roman military was intentionally putting on a show in order to magnify their disdain and contempt for our Lord.

2. ***They put a crown of thorns on his head*** (v. 17b)

The significance of the crown of thorns is seen when we note the symbolic importance of the "crown" in the ancient world.

The crown was a sign of life and fruitfulness. The Roman victor's crown was a bent twig or perhaps two twigs

tied together. Often a single wreath of grass or often one made of gentle flowers and leaves was used that it might caress the brow of him whom it honored. Holders of national office wore crowns as signs of their dignity and respect. Thus the action of the soldiers was a mocking, scornful imitation of the royal crown worn by the rulers of Rome. Worse still, it was designed to intensify his pain. It was an act of both *scorn and sadism*.

James Stalker says this of the crown of thorns:

"When Adam and Eve were driven from the garden into the bleak and toilsome world, their doom was that the ground should bring forth to them thorns and thistles. Thorns were the sign of the curse; that is, of their banishment from God's presence and of all the sad and painful consequences following therefrom. And does not the thorn, staring from the naked bough of winter in threatening ugliness, lurking beneath the leaves of flowers of summer to wound the approaching hand, tearing the clothes or the flesh of the traveler who tries to make his way through the thicket, burning in the flesh where it has sunk, fitly stand for that side of life which we associate with sin -- the side of care, fret, pain, disappointment, disease and death? In a word, it symbolizes the curse; and as he lifted it on his own head, he took it off the world. He bore our sins and carried our sorrows."

3. ***They mocked him with false and hypocritical praise*** (v. 18).

"And they began to salute him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" This was yet another illustration of human depravity as they pretend to recognize his regal claim. The cry, "Hail, King of the Jews" (v. 18) corresponds formally to the Roman acclamation, "Hail, Caesar!" It was all an insulting parody of what was required of everyone in the presence of a ruler of Rome.

4. ***They placed in his hand a reed for a sceptre and beat him with it*** (Mt. 27:29-30; Mk. 15:19)

The reed was again an instrument of mockery, for the monarch's sceptre was a symbol of his authority and power. Thus, the point of the robe, the crown, and the reed was to portray Jesus as a caricature of the kings with which they were familiar. After all, had not Jesus claimed to be a king? Knowing this, they scornfully and sarcastically decked him out as the king he claimed to be, and made him an object of ridicule. Clearly, then, the soldiers treated Jesus this way because he did not live up to their expectations of what a king should be.

Only Matthew tells us that they actually put the reed in his hand, again mocking his claim to be a king who rules with a rod of authority. In hitting Jesus with it they aggravate the injuries already inflicted by the scourging.

Why did they beat him on the head? Undoubtedly in order that with each blow the thorns might dig deeper and more painfully into his scalp.

5. ***They spit on him*** (v. 19)

It is inconceivable that it could have happened once, but here in v. 19 we see that it happens yet again: they spit upon him! Literally, it says "they kept spitting [repeatedly] on him." This may be a parody on the kiss of homage which was customary in the ancient world. They may have said to themselves, "This so-called king of the Jews isn't deserving of the kiss of homage and respect, but only fit to be the target of vile spitting!" Cf. Ps. 2:12.

Spurgeon's comments strike deeply:

"I do not know how you feel in listening to me, but while I am speaking I feel as language ought scarcely to touch such a theme as this: it is too feeble for its task. I want you to get beyond my words if you can, and for yourselves meditate upon the fact that he who covers the heavens with blackness, yet did not cover his own face, and he who binds up the universe with the girdle which holds it in one, yet was bound and blindfolded by the men he had himself made; he whose face is as the brightness of the sun that shineth in its strength was once spit upon. Surely we shall need faith in heaven to believe this wondrous fact. Can it have been true, that the glorious Son of God was jeered and jested at?"

I have often heard that there is no faith lacking in heaven, but I rather judge that we shall need as much faith to believe that these things were ever done as the patriarchs had to believe that they would be done. How shall I sit down and gaze upon Him and think that his dear face was once profaned with spittle? When all heaven shall lie prostrate at his feet in awful silence of adoration will it seem

possible that once he was mocked? When angels, and principalities, and powers shall all be roused to rapture of harmonious music in his praise, will it seem possible that once the most abject of men plucked out the hair? Will it not appear incredible that those sacred hands, which are 'as gold rings set with the beryl,' were once nailed to a gibbet, and that those cheeks which are 'as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers,' should have been battered and bruised? We shall be quite certain of the fact, and yet we shall never cease to wonder, that his side was gashed, and his face was spit upon? The sin of man in this instance will always amaze us. How could you commit this crime? Oh, ye sons of men, how could ye treat such a one with cruel scorn? O thou brazen thing called sin. Thou hast, indeed, as the prophet saith, 'A whore's forehead'; thou hast a demon's heart, hell burns within thee. Why couldst thou not spit upon earthly splendours? Why must heaven be thy scorn? Or if heaven, why not spit on angels: was there no place for thy base deed but the well-beloved's face? Was there no place for thy spittle but *his* face? *His* face! Woe is me! *His* face! Should such loveliness receive such shame as this? I could wish that man had never been created, or that, being created, he had been swept into nothingness rather than have lived to commit such horror."

6. ***They knelt before him and mocked him*** (v. 19)

Anyone who appeared in the presence of a king in the ancient world would instinctively kneel down and pay homage. Their derisive mocking of this expression of submission to him, calls to mind what Paul says will quite literally occur on the day of final judgment. See Philippians 2:9-11. . . All will bend the knee and bow down and declare him truly to be Lord. Some will do so joyfully and with deep delight. Others will be forced to their knees and compelled to acknowledge what they, during this life, denied.

7. ***Finally, they re-clothed him and led him away to be crucified*** (v. 20)

Normally the victim was forced to walk naked to the place of crucifixion and was scourged along the way. But since Jesus had already been scourged this custom was abandoned. If it had been repeated, Jesus would surely have died before reaching Calvary.

Custom also required that the victim carry the cross-beam on which he would be nailed. It weighed between 30 and 40 pounds. But it was physically impossible for Jesus to do so. Following the emotionally tense atmosphere in the upper room, the betrayal by Judas, the agonies of Gethsemane, the denial by Peter, the trial and torture by the Sanhedrin, several hours in a filthy dungeon, another trial by Pilate and Herod, the ordeal of being scourged, and the abuse from the soldiers, it comes as no surprise that Jesus was incapable of carrying the beam.

Simon was either a Jewish pilgrim who had journeyed to Jerusalem for Passover, or was a member of the community of Jews from Cyrene who had settled permanently in Jerusalem. Cyrene was the equivalent of modern Libya. There is an important lesson in his role:

In seeing Simon carrying the cross of Jesus to Calvary we ought to see ourselves carrying the cross *we* justly deserved to *our* own Calvary. It is *we* who escorted Jesus to Calvary and nailed him to *our* cross. Might we not imagine ourselves in Simon's place, bearing that heavy load to Calvary, not knowing if the soldiers might decide to impale our bodies to it as well, only then to hear the voice of Jesus say: "Give it here friend; it is for me to suffer thereon, not you."

The place of Jesus' crucifixion is called *Golgotha* (v. 22), lit., "place of the skull." It was located outside the city proper in accordance with Jewish and Roman custom (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35f.; Acts 7:58; Heb. 13:12-14).

According to v. 23, "they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it." This has been interpreted in two different ways:

- 1) The traditional view is that it was customary for Jewish women to provide a narcotic drink to those condemned in order to deaden their sensitivity to the pain of crucifixion. See Prov. 31:6-7. If so, then Jesus' unwillingness to drink reflects his determination to endure with complete consciousness the agonies of the cross and the Father's wrath.
- 2) Others argue that this was not an act of compassion on the part of the women but an act of cruelty and torment on the part of the soldiers ("they" refers to the soldiers). The mixture was designed to make the wine undrinkable and extremely bitter. Thus the soldiers teased Jesus under the pretense of giving him good wine. Their real purpose was to aggravate his agony and humiliation.

The reference to his garments being divided by the casting of lots (v. 24) is an allusion to Psalm 22:16-18. It was customary to divide the victim's clothes among his executioners. Jesus would have had only a bloody inner and outer garment, a belt, and a pair of sandals.

The inscription placed above his head read: "The King of the Jews" (v. 26). This charge is, of course, highly ironic. Pilate, wishing to offend the Jews and to mock their hopes of one day throwing off Roman rule, rubs their noses in their subservient status. Unknowingly, of course, he charged Jesus with being precisely who, in fact, he was.

The "two robbers" (v. 27) who were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left, were probably insurrectionists caught in the same uprising that had led to the arrest of Barabbas (cf. Isa. 53:12).

One would think that Jesus had been subjected to enough public humiliation, yet we read in vv. 29-32 of the taunting of the crowds. See Psalm 22:6-8. As noted, crucifixion was purposely public in order to deter others and especially to add to the humiliation of the victim by exposing him to the taunts of passersby. With expressions of malicious glee, they sadistically mock him and take delight in his pain.

The first taunt (vv. 29-30) recalls the charge of Mark 14:58. These were men who likely had been present with the Sanhedrin when the original accusation had been made.

The second taunt (vv. 31-32) not only reminds us of his trial (Mark 14:61), but also of Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness: Matthew 4:3,6! "Through the passersby Satan was still trying to get Jesus to evade the Father's will and avoid further suffering" (Carson, 576).

Evidently they did not address Jesus directly but spoke among themselves in the sort of whisper that one intends to be overheard by the object of one's scorn. Note that they spoke "to one another" (v. 31).

"He saved others" is probably a reference to his healing ministry. There is a double meaning here. In the sense in which the Jewish leaders meant it, they were obviously wrong. He who healed others and raised the dead could certainly have saved himself. And yet, on the other hand, if he is to accomplish that redemptive work for which he went to the cross, he cannot save himself. He *must* yield himself up to crucifixion.

Do we not all, at times, measure God's power by what we see? We think that what God does not do, he cannot do. But here we see that he does not save himself, not because he cannot, but simply in order that by not saving himself he might save us.

The challenge to come down from the cross has several levels of meaning: (1) It is yet one more malicious mockery of Jesus' apparent helplessness. (2) It is as if these hypocrites are suggesting that their failure to believe Jesus is *Jesus'* fault! "It's your fault; if we don't believe, you've got no one to blame but yourself. Come on down and we will bow before you!" (3) Finally, whereas the taunt implies that Jesus could gain a following by coming down from the cross, in reality he can secure a people for himself only by staying on it! Someone once said, "These men would have believed him if he had come down from the cross. We believe in him precisely because he stayed upon it!"

Not knowing that their taunts were a fulfillment of Psalm 22:8, these men hurl their final blasphemy. Based on their belief that God must honor and deliver his Messiah, they conclude that Jesus' helplessness is proof that his claims were false and his death was deserved. Of course, God *did* vindicate and deliver him, but this was not the hour. That glorious confirmation of Christ's deity and messianic identity awaited the resurrection.

Verse 32b may well have led us to conclude that neither of the robbers repented, for together they "reviled" Jesus in the same way as the religious leaders. However, we are thankful that Luke provides information that one of the robbers repented, moving from insult to loving adoration and trust (see Lk. 23:39-43). Here our Lord sees the initial fulfillment of Isa. 53:11 - "*he shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.*"

Conclusion:

Three men died that day. In the eyes of many who witnessed it first hand, there was no difference separating them. They were all three enemies of the state, condemned criminals, and they deserved to suffer such torments.

But we know that one death differed not only from the other two but from all other deaths that men and women die. Jesus was not dying because of his own sin, but because of ours. The only question that must be asked, and only you can supply the answer, is this: "What do you see in the death of Jesus? Was he merely a martyr dying for his cause? Was he a blasphemer and a threat to the sanctity of the Jewish people? Was he a victim of political pragmatism, a thorn in Pilate's side who had to be disposed of? Or was he the sinless Son of God, the man who is God, dying your death, suffering for your sins, satisfying the wrath of God that you deserved to endure?" That is the question we must all answer.