

Evotional – 23 June 2013 – Mark 15:15-32

What does Mark tell us?

Commenting on his 2004 film 'The Passion of the Christ' (2004). Mel Gibson said: "I wanted it to be shocking and I wanted it to be extreme ... the actual crucifixion was more violent than what was shown on the film."

But the Bible does not make much of Jesus' physical suffering; Mark just says:

- "He had Jesus flogged" (v15). (Flogging was vicious; people sometimes died of it.)
- "And they crucified him" (v24). (People being crucified normally died of asphyxiation; they had to push themselves up on their nailed feet to breathe; when they no longer had the strength, they died.)

What today's passage emphasises is the mockery, the degrading treatment Jesus experienced. This comes in three parts:

1. The mockery by the soldiers in the palace (v16-20):

- This was after the flogging; Jesus would have been in a pitiful condition
- They put a robe on him; then a crown of thorns; called him king; smacked him on the head; spat on him; knelt before him

2. The mockery by the soldiers when they reach Golgotha:

- Wine and myrrh (v23)
- Stripping naked (v24)
- "The King of the Jews" (v26)
- Between two robbers (v27) – identifying him with sinners and sin, when he was sinless

3. Then others joined in:

- Those who passed by (v29-30); NB it probably happened on a roadside
- Religious leaders (v31-32)
- The robbers (v32)

What does that mean for us? [NB: We will look at the more positive aspects of Jesus' death when we come to Mark 15:33-41]

1. Jesus gave up CONTROL

Until now we have a sense of Jesus being in charge, but now we see submission. Although he is God, here we see him primarily as a man, humbling himself and becoming obedient to death. Yes, God is always in charge, but here the soldiers are in charge. Most of us do not like to submit. In fact the fear of becoming dependent on others is perhaps the hardest fear for modern people to conquer. We see it in the debate on assisted dying; nowadays it is not so much the physical pain that people dread, but the loss of control and "dignity".

But dependence, helplessness and the need to wait upon the initiative of others have all been sanctified by God in Christ Jesus. Sometimes the big lesson God wants to teach us in life and death is submission and dependence on those whom God has placed round us; to be willing to enter the kingdom of heaven like a little child.

2. Jesus was INSULTED

None of us would behave like the soldiers, would we? The NT speaks of insults in two other ways, both challenging to us all:

- Often it encourages us to be willing to be insulted, even to rejoice when we are insulted for Jesus' sake. Eg: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me". When Jesus told his followers to be willing to take up their crosses and follow him, this is part of what he meant. It doesn't mean we enjoy insults – Jesus didn't enjoy them any more than he enjoyed the hammering in of the nails – but we don't run from them.
- On two occasions, once in Galatians and once in Hebrews, we are warned that if we carry on deliberately sinning when we have come to know the truth, we are insulting / mocking God, and there will be bad consequences for us. This is not about people who have repented but keep struggling with sin – we are all in that position. It is about people who don't bother to struggle; it's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace ... grace without the cross"; saying religious words but not meaning them or having any intention of letting them change us. You can't mock God in this way, not in the long run.

3. Jesus was ABUSED

If anything like this happened today it would be called abuse. Physical, emotional, even sexual abuse. Jesus became the victim.

- If you are someone who has suffered abuse, Jesus identifies with you, he stands with you. He shares your sense of shame and anger and hurt, even though it wasn't his fault just as it wasn't your fault.
- If you are someone who has abused, Jesus has met you before at the cross; he hates what you have done and one day your deeds will be revealed; you can't escape your past or your future by your own efforts. But he loves you; it was for you too he died, it was for you too he said "Father forgive them".

Emotional and psychological healing is not always instant, but it starts and ends at the cross, where Jesus identified himself with you and me, and enables us to identify ourselves with him.

Questions:

1. What is your reaction to Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of the Christ'?
2. What does it mean for you to surrender total control of your life to God?
3. When were you last insulted for Jesus' sake?
4. Have you ever insulted Jesus? (see Galatians 6:7-8 and Hebrew 10:29)
5. How does all this help you to worship?
6. [Not for group discussion, although you could discuss how we as a church can support those for whom this is an issue.] Has abuse been an issue in your life and still needs to be dealt with? [If so, please talk to someone you know you can trust.]

Prayer:

Thank you for the cross, Lord; Thank you for the price You paid; Bearing all my sin and shame; In love You came And gave amazing grace. Thank you for this love, Lord; Thank you for the nail pierced hands; Washed me in Your cleansing flow; Now all I know, Your forgiveness and embrace.