



Lenten studies 2018 - Mark: Crown and Cross

Study 6 - A different kind of King - Mark 15:1-16:8

Read Mark 10:32-52, then watch Pete's talk: https://youtu.be/6_FYJc9Cf6g

1. So many people think that all religions are much the same and are on about the same thing. What is clearly wrong with such thinking? What would you say to someone who says to you 'all the religions are much the same?'

The King and a Question (vv1-15)

2. What was significant about Pilate's question 'are you the King of the Jews'?
3. Why was Jesus secretive about his identity earlier in the gospel? And why does Jesus allow himself to be designated as God's King now at this crucial time?

The King and his Worship (vv16-20)

4. What was both true and tragic about the way Jesus was worshipped?
5. What is both true and tragic about the way people will 'worship' Jesus over Easter across the nation?

The King and his Throne (vv21-39)

6. What is the significance of Jesus' cry "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (See Psalm 22:1-3; 7-11; 16-19)
7. Why did things have to end this way? Pete says the answer comes in v38. What was the significance of the tearing of the curtain in the temple?

Pete said: "Do you want to know what God is like? You'll never see it more clearly than right here. God is gracious and loving and sacrificial, and he is prepared to become an utter disgrace, so that his people might be made perfect and glorious..." He "submits to his own creatures - that he might find a way to perfectly forgive them for their sin."

8. Explore and comment on the quote from John Stott which Pete used.
9. Why is a dead Messiah - a dead Jesus - such a stumbling block to many?
10. Next week, someone asks you - "You go to church, don't you? Can you tell me what Easter is all about?" How would you answer?
11. Three responses to Jesus' death - for many - blindness; from the Gentile Roman centurion? His understood that Jesus must surely be the Son of God... and your response?
12. Pete challenged us at the end, that many of us believe this account and we know Jesus paid the price; but "we then get on and live our lives almost fundamentally unchanged by that". True? Why?
13. How might Easter be different for us this year in the light of our Lenten studies?

Mark: Crown and Cross

Our Lenten studies for 2018 have come to a close.

We'd love your feedback.

1. Has the format this year been helpful?
2. What have been the advantages/disadvantages?
3. What have been the highlights for you?
4. Would you like to see us retain this format for 2019 – talk 1 live and then the remainder in our connect groups?
5. Any comments you'd like Mark to pass back to Pete?
6. Anything else?

Study 6 - A different kind of King - Mark 15:1-16:8

Introduction

I'm not sure how much you know about Islam, but my guess is you know enough to know that there are some fundamental differences between what Muslims believe, and what Christians believe. And perhaps the most significant difference in opinion is around the differing accounts of what happened to Jesus Christ, and how he died.

So this is the Koran's teaching about Jesus' death from chapter 4, 157 and following: 'They neither killed nor crucified Jesus, but it was made to appear so unto them. Indeed those who differ about him are in doubt about it, their knowledge does not go beyond conjecture. They did not kill him - for certain - rather Allah raised him unto him. Allah is mighty and wise'.

Within Islamic theology it is unthinkable that a holy prophet - as Islam sees Jesus - could undergo crucifixion. Allah would not allow such a prophet to undergo such a torturous failure.

And yet, what is unthinkable in Islam, is the central thought of Christianity. God has indeed revealed himself in the world. And most potently through a crucifixion.

But there is a sense in which Muslims are right to be scandalised by the cross. Scandalised that God could do something beautiful and victorious through a roman death sentence. How is it that an instrument of torture and brutality and failure become a symbol of glory and victory and love? Well, that is what we'll be seeing today in Mark 15.

If you've been with us on the journey over the last 6 weeks, you'll know that the name of our series through Mark has been called Crown and Cross. And that is because one of Mark's major themes, one of the biggest things he wants us to see through his Gospel, is this new idea of real Kingship. Of divine Kingship.

You'll remember that the word used in Mark's Gospel for this is Messiah - in the Hebrew or Christ - in the Greek. That is what those words mean = God's anointed King. And we have seen time and time again - that this King that Jesus says he is; this Messiah, this Christ - is nothing like what any one was expecting. And today it culminates and confounds and crashes together, in the cross upon which Jesus is crucified.

So here is what we're going to see today. We're going to see the king and a question; the king and his worship; and the king and his throne.

The King and a Question (1-15)

We pick up our story in verse 1 of chapter 15, and we see that Jesus finds himself before the Roman prefect or governor of the region – a man by the name of Pontius Pilate. And the reason that Jesus finds himself before the Roman authorities is because whilst the Jewish leaders had their own courts, they did not have the power, the authority to kill anyone. That power lay with the Romans alone. So they took Jesus to Pilate.

Have a look at verse 2. Pilate asks Jesus 'are you the King of the Jews?' You know, in a sense – this is the question the whole book of Mark asks of Jesus. Who are you? Are you the King? Are you the Messiah? Are you the one that will bring the rescue of God's people? Whilst Pilate certainly couldn't have known what he was asking, this is the question of the moment. It is the question that has been begging for an answer.

This is the question of Jesus identity that has been hidden from people throughout Mark's Gospel. You do remember that, right? So in Mark 1, when Jesus starts to cast demons out of people, we're told '[Jesus] also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.' When Jesus heals a man who has had leprosy for years, we read this "Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone." When Jesus' own disciples start to work out who he is, we read "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him."

And all the way through we have sort of been scratching our heads and wondering why? If Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the King – why not come out and say it? Why not let everyone know?

And so during his ministry, before he heads to the cross – Jesus is secretive about having the title Messiah or King applied to him. But that has all changed now. In the chapter before this - Mark 14 - at Jesus trial before the Jewish leaders – the Sanhedrin - when Jesus is asked "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answered "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

And again here – Pilate asks him 'are you the king of the Jews' – Jesus says 'you would do well to consider that'. It is an affirmation – a confirmation – but one that carries a personal challenge to Pilate within it.

What is going on? Jesus keeps his identity quiet in Mark's Gospel, and then goes public with it here. And not just once – but twice in two chapters – once before Jews and once before gentiles. Why? What has changed? The answer is the timing. Now – and only now – will people understand rightly what being God's King is all about. Because Jesus claim to be God's King is about to be absolutely linked with the most un-king-like action ever. Roman crucifixion.

You see, if Jesus publically claimed to be the Messiah whilst he was doing miracles and healings and casting our demons – everyone would have thought that the Messiah was a King who had come to do miracles and healings and cast out demons. But that would have been deeply misleading.

You know, the only time in Mark's Gospel that Jesus allows himself to be designated as God's King, is in the shadow of the cross. Why? Because Mark wants us to know that whatever sort of King this Jesus is – you have to consider his Kingship in terms of his cross. You have to know that his kingship is linked to his death.

Here is the thing we are being shown. You cannot know who Jesus is, if you consider him apart from his cross. Any understanding of who Jesus is that does emphasis the cross upon which he died, is deficient. If, when you consider who Jesus is – the main idea that comes to mind is - Jesus was a good man. Or a good teacher. Or a political activist. Or a revered prophet. Or a man who did powerful signs and wonders.

If those attributes – whilst perhaps true – are the prevailing idea that is in your head – you don't know him as the Gospel would have us know him. You don't know him as he wants you to know him. Jesus wants his identity as the Messiah, the Christ, God's King – to be deeply enmeshed with what is about to happen to him on a Roman cross. Are you the King of the Jews? Well, that was the question. Let's now look at the King and his worship.

The King and his Worship (16-20)

So in verse 16, and having been handed over by Pilate, Jesus is taken into the custody of those who will crucify him – the Romans. And so begins a time of worship of Jesus. You can read that in verse 17 “[The soldiers] 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 spit 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.

Finally! Now that Jesus has revealed who he is, and why he has come – we see the worship of him commences. He is clothed like a King. He is crowned like a King. And he is acclaimed like a King. But of course, this is perverse worship. This is mocking homage. You do see the irony of this section?

Everything that happens to Jesus here is the opposite of the way you would treat an earthly king. Kings were blessed but crucified people were cursed. Kings were honored but crucified people were ridiculed. Kings were dressed in flowing robes but crucified people were stripped naked. Kings were crowned with Gold; Jesus was crowned with thorns. What is going on here is meant to represent everything that was the opposite of kingship.

The worship that we read about here is both perverse and obscene. It's actually quite a dark picture that is painted for us. *But when you think about it – it is just one picture of darkness of blindness that we see amongst*

many across these two chapters. Because if you read Mark 14 and 15 together, what you find is this sense of enveloping blindness that affects almost everyone.

It starts back in chapter 14 with Peter – one of Jesus' closest friends, who denies Jesus three times; then we have another disciple Judas betray Jesus. We then see the Jewish leaders condemn him as worthy of death. Then in chapter 15 – we have Pilate who has Jesus flogged, and handed over to be crucified; we have the Roman soldiers mock Jesus; and we also see the crowds call for a murderer to go free, so that Jesus will be killed in his place.

Blindness abounds. No wonder the worship of the King is mocking. The darkness that is about to fall across the land, has already fallen across the hearts and the minds of all who were there that day. And Jesus is all alone.

The King and his Throne (21-39)

And then our story, our sermon series, Jesus' life comes to its end. We read in verse 22 that 'They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.'

Jesus was crucified. The King upon his throne. And some hours later, he died. We're told that in verse 37 'With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.'

It just seems like a great mistake has occurred. That Jesus somehow let things get out of control, and – like so often happens in political and religious affairs – they have snow-balled, and Jesus now finds himself in a place he never thought it would end up. That is certainly how the disciples understood things to have occurred.

But what you have to know – is that what happens here is exactly what Jesus both knew and planned would happen. This is no mistake. It is the blueprint. And here is how we know that. Look at verse 34. In verse 34. Jesus on the cross cries out 4 strange words - Eloi eloi Lama Sabachthani. Which we're told means 'my God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' Which has become known as the 'cry of dereliction'. It sounds like Jesus is crying out in rage and confusion to His father.

But here is what you may not know. Those words there – Jesus isn't just saying – he is quoting. He is quoting a very famous song. A song that was written 1000 years earlier. A song that was actually a prediction of what would happen to God's Messiah. God's King. And it comes from Psalm 22. And Jesus knows this psalm – because every Jew knew this Psalms. And Jesus also knew what that Psalm went on to say. Listen to this.

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises...

7 ...All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

8 "He trusts in the LORD," they say,
"let the LORD rescue him.

Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."

11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

16 Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

17 All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

18 They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

19 But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

Remarkable. Jesus knew this was the way it would go; because with his Father he planned for this to be the way it would go. Jesus came to die. God's King - the Messiah - came to die. The King is finally enthroned. But not on a throne. On a cross.

The question has to be - Why? Why would Jesus and his Father plan for this to happen? And the answer is shown to us in verse 38. "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." That seems like a strange bit of information to put in there. Until you realise what it was talking about.

In the temple - the place where Jews would go to meet with their God, there was one room that no-one could enter. The room was called the Holy of Holies - and they believed that is where God himself lived. No-one was allowed in there - except the High Priest - once a year. And he went in there to pay for people's sin. He went in there to make atonement that God would pass-over peoples' sin against him.

And there was a curtain dividing this room from other parts of the temple. And it symbolised the great gulf between the perfection of God and the grubbiness of sin and people. And this was no ordinary curtain. The curtain was more like a wall. It was made of fabric and it was as thick as a man's hand. And yet we are told that the moment Jesus died – that curtain – 20cm thick was torn in two from top to bottom.

Do you see what that means? It shows us why Jesus died. Jesus died to bring God to people, and to bring people to God. It means that no priest ever needs to deal with your sin – because Jesus has done that. Jesus has died in our place, on our behalf – and he has taken God's anger at our sin on himself, so that those who trust in Jesus never need to take that anger themselves.

Do you want to know what God is like? You'll never see it more clearly than right here. God is gracious and loving and sacrificial, and he is prepared to become an utter disgrace, so that his people might be made perfect and glorious.

I wonder if you can now see why Islam rejects that Jesus is God? Because here we see God revealed not as one who demands submission, but who himself submits to his own creatures – that he might find a way to perfectly forgive them for their sin.

Listen to how John Stott describes what happened there: "Any contemporary observer, who saw Christ die, would have listened with astonished incredulity to the claim that the Crucified was a Conqueror. Had he not been rejected by his own nation, betrayed, denied and deserted by his own disciples, and executed by authority from the Roman procurator?

Look at him there, spread-eagled and skewered on his cross, robbed of all freedom of movement, strung up with nails, pinned there and powerless. It appears to be total defeat. If there is victory, it is the victory of pride, prejudice, jealousy, hatred, cowardice, and brutality.

Yet the Christian claim is that the reality is the opposite of the appearance. What looks like (and indeed was) the defeat of goodness by evil is also, and more certainly, the defeat of evil by goodness. Overcome there, He was Himself overcoming. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, he was Himself crushing the serpent's head. The victim was the victor, and the cross is still the throne from which he rules the world."

Our series has been called Crown and Cross. And for 6 weeks we've been wrestling with who Jesus is. What sort of King is he? What does the Messiah do? And now we see it – clearly and powerfully. God's King has come to defeat the enemy of God's people. And it's not Rome. It is sin - that great and real and pervasive and powerful desire that lives within every one of us to live our own way; and to tell God to get

stuffed. Jesus died on a cross so that those who repent of that innate desire that beats in our breasts, and who give themselves over, and follow Jesus - find forgiveness for their sin.

And of course, it's not merely that Jesus died; it is also the fact that he didn't stay dead. He rose from the grave - the tomb was empty. Because death has no power over those who do not sin.

Conclusion

You know, as you read Mark chapter 15, there are two responses in this story to Jesus. The first we've already seen - it is the blindness of the many. The darkness that enfolds the majority. They mock, scorn and spit - they do not see Jesus for who he is.

And there is a response we haven't seen yet. It is the response of one man. A most unlikely man.

He is Roman. He is pagan. He is rough. He is a dealer in death, really. Actually - he was responsible for Jesus' very death. You can read about him in verse 39. It is the Roman centurion charged with the responsibility of crucifying Jesus. This is a man who had seen a lot of death; inflicted a lot of death. And yet at the moment of Jesus death he found life. Did you notice that the very first person in the bible after Jesus death to get his identity right - to declare him the Son of God - is not a priest, or a minister, or a Jew, or even some moral upright person. It was a rough, hardened, Roman soldier. And it is actually an insight into who can find their way to God - it is those who recognise Jesus as his son.

They're the two responses in the story. But there is a third response. It's not in this story, but it's a response to this story. And not pagan soldiers, and not from blind religious types. But actually a response that is very common amongst your average Noosa Church attender. You and me.

And I was reminded of this when I was reading some of the writings of AW Tozer this week. This is what he says: "In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Mansoul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility."

You see, in your bible studies tonight there will be some who are blind to Jesus, and who think everything we've seen in the bible, and that I have just spoken about is madness. They're here. There'll also be people who like that soldier, see Jesus and his death on the cross - And they know they need to respond. Something today has touched their heart. They know this is true, and they want to give themselves over to Jesus.

But the vast majority of us are people who have heard this story 100 times. We know it. We quite like being reminded of it. And we know that Jesus died for us. We gave ourselves to Him, once. And yet – Tozer is right. Functionally, we live as if we want to be saved, but Jesus does all the dying. We know Jesus paid the price – and if you're anything like me – we then get on and live our lives almost fundamentally unchanged by that.

And to you, and to myself I say we need to repent. We need to look at this king who kept nothing back to buy you for himself. And every morning when you wake; when you feel the pull of the world to forget and neglect your saviour and your king – bow your knee. Repent. Believe. Follow, Serve. Do not forget your king. And do not forget His cross.