



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 15: 16-20

Mark

"Christ Before the Soldiers"

TRANSCRIPT

We are in Mark chapter 15. If you have your Bibles follow along with me, beginning with verse 16:

The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You that we have this time again this Sunday morning to come together and to study the Scriptures, and we thank You for it. We thank You that we can look into the life of our Lord, even into this very painful moment in His life. This time in which He had shame and contempt heaped upon Him. He who was without sin being abused by sinners. And yet, as we look at this, we are blessed, Father, because we see so much of what You were doing for us in all of the events that took place, as difficult and as shameful as they were. You teach us so much through those details and those events. And not only that, Father, not only do we see some things of doctrinal significance, but we see the love

that Christ had for us, in that He was willing to suffer in our place, suffer the indignities, the abuse that we deserve because of our sin. And yet, He willingly took it upon Himself as our substitute. We thank You for that, Father.

And yet, we confess we don't thank You enough. We don't have the depth of gratitude that we should, the depth of understanding. We lack that. We pray that You'd bless us that we might increase our understanding and our appreciation. And yet, we'll never have that to the degree that we should. We'll spend eternity growing in that. But we pray, Father, that You would cause us to advance this morning as we study, and consider the life of our Lord.

We thank You for that, Father, the opportunity as Your people to come together in this place, open the Scriptures together, and read them and study them. But we also thank You, Father, that at this moment, we as believer priests can intercede. We can come to the throne of grace, and we can make our petitions known to You. For ourselves, for our church, for one another. And we do that, Lord. We ask Your blessings upon those who are in need, those who are in physical need, those who are recovering from surgery, those who are recovering from the loss of a loved one and are experiencing sadness and grief, those who are in financial difficulty. The whole spectrum of difficulty is broad, Father, and we don't need to cover it all because You know the needs.

And yet, we do intercede for those, Father, knowing that You do hear prayer, and You do answer prayer, and You do heal, and You do provide, and You encourage us to come daily, come boldly to the throne of grace and to make our petitions known. So we do that, Lord, and we ask Your great blessings upon those in need. We are all in need, Father, in one way or another. And yet, many of us do not have the breadth and the depth of need that others do. We need to be grateful, and we need to have hearts that appreciate what You have provided for us every day, and to be content in whatever circumstance we are in.

Help us, Father, to be content. Help us to be grateful, and help us to focus our intention and our minds on the things that are before us now. We pray for our meeting at this time, that You would bless it, bless us as we sing our hymn now, and bless us as we study together. May this be a profitable time together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Our study this morning is entitled "Christ Before the Soldiers." It's an account of the cruelty and the shame that our Lord was put through before being led away to His crucifixion. And in some ways, it's a very difficult passage to deal with.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "I always feel as if my tongue were tied when I come to talk of the sufferings of my Master." And I suppose that should be the response and the reaction of all of us as we consider these things. It's a passage that can stir the emotions. That's inevitable, I suppose. And yet, I think that also is something of the danger of this passage. It's not uncommon to hear this portion of Scripture taught in such a way as to play upon our emotions. And unfortunately, that can frequently be done and is done at the expense of the very significant and instructive details of this passage, because it does give us a great deal of instruction.

That emotional response is not always indicative of understanding and of faith. I think you see that in the gospels themselves because you remember: after the Lord was led away, from the events that we study this morning, and was led on His path to Golgotha, Luke records how the women of Jerusalem wept over Him. That was a natural response, a response of pity, as they looked at His bruised and His bloodied appearance. And yet, what does the Lord say to them? He says, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for Me. Weep for yourselves and your children." I think in that statement, what He was saying is: you really don't understand these wounds that I have received, and you don't understand the purpose of the cross that I'm carrying.

So, we can express emotion and feel emotion, and people can elicit an emotional response from us that is not always indicative of faith and of understanding. So, I think we need to be careful about that and the way we treat these passages and this subject. And yet, if our emotions are not stirred at all at the sight of our Lord, and if we enter into this passage in merely academic way, then I think we have to ask ourselves if maybe we're not a bit cold toward our Lord.

There needs to be a balance between the two, and I think that genuine emotion follows a true understanding. And so, we'll try to strike that balance in our approach to the passage. Look at the details in a way that hopefully we can bring out the significance of the passage, because the picture that Mark presents to us is a very significant picture of our Lord, and one that gives us a great deal of understanding

about His person and His work. In the midst of terrible abuse and humiliation, we see His majestic character, and we see His work as our redeemer.

And others must've seen something of His character as well, because at the end of this ordeal, before He is given His cross and before He is led off to Calvary, Pilate brings Him out to the crowd one last time and says, "Behold the Man." That's a very significant statement. and it's what we want to do this morning. Behold Him in these five poignant verses as the suffering servant who endured pain with remarkable patience. We want to behold Him as the Savior, because we see Him as our Savior in these verses, and we want to consider Him as the king, because though He is mocked as a king and dressed as one writer has put it as a carnival king; nevertheless, there's a statement of truth in that because that is exactly who He is. He is the king. But to accurately behold Him, behold Him as the man, we need to first consider Him from all eternity as He was before He became a man. The greatness of His sufferings can only be understood in light of the greatness of His person.

He was no mere man. He is as the author of Hebrews says: the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of His nature. He is the one who upholds all things by the word of His power. That's how the author of Hebrews begins that great book of His in chapter 1 and verse 3, describing Him with those words in those very eloquent and theological terms. He is the one who upholds all things by the word of His power. In fact, John calls Him "the word." It's how he opens his gospel, John 1:1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God. And the word was God. That is, He is eternal with the Father. He was with God from all eternity. He's of the same essence of the Father. He was God. And yet, He is at the same time distinct from the Father. He is God, God the Son who created all things, who sustains all things, who upholds all things. Paul gives the same description in Colossians 1 and verse 17. "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." He is supreme over the world, in other words. There was never a time where He was not. It was always with the Father. He was before all things. He is eternal, and He is the agent who keeps all things in their place. Without His continuous, sustaining activity, everything would disintegrate, become as nothing. Now, that statement that Paul makes in Colossians 1:17 is very similar to the one we just read in Hebrews 1:3, that He upholds all things by the word of His power. And yet, there's a bit of difference between Him.

BF Westcott, commenting on that statement, writes that "He upholds all things not like an atlas sustaining the dead weight of the world." There He is in that description, the sense of movement, as well as holding things up. And so, the picture we have in Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 3 is of Him carrying all things along, moving them, directing them to their appointed end. And so, Christ is the sustainer of all things. He holds everything together. He is the bearer of all things. He's moving and carrying all things: the universe, and history, to its goal and conclusion.

That's the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our great God. And yet, this great the second person of the Godhead became a man. Born in a stable in little Bethlehem, an insignificant village outside of Jerusalem, grew up to laborer in a dusty carpenter's shop in Nazareth. Before having a brief ministry in what was an insignificant corner of the Roman empire. I think that gives us a sense of what Paul meant when he wrote in Philippians 2 that "although He existed in the form of God, and didn't regard it as a thing to be grasped, nevertheless, He emptied Himself taking the form of a bond servant and being made in the likeness of men.

He emptied Himself, but Paul doesn't mean by that, that He emptied Himself of His deity. That would be impossible. That can't not be. But He emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives. He humbled Himself and became a man. And in so doing, submitted Himself as a man to the will of His heavenly Father. And in so doing lived as a genuine man, lived life as you and I do. That is a great act of humbling Himself to do that. As Paul writes, "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death."

Now, as we come to our passage this morning, we begin to see just how far He humbled Himself, and the degree of His obedience to the Father. When He, the eternal Son of God, the Lord over all the universe, the sustainer of all things, the sustainer of even Pilate himself and his soldiers, we see how greatly He humbled Himself when He allowed Himself to become the object of man's abuse, and then go to the cross itself.

You see it in the very first statement of verse 16. "The soldiers led Him away." Christ, the one who upholds all things, is led. He is led by sinful men. The emancipator of the world is a captive. What a picture that is. And He'd been a captive from the time of His arrest. From that time of His arrest until the time He will

go to the cross Himself, He will be led by sinful men. He allowed Himself to be led away, just as Isaiah said that He would be, "like a lamb that is led to slaughter."

He's already been brutally scourged. We saw that last week. His open wounds and loss of blood must've left Him very weak and in terrible pain. But there's one more stage of humiliation that He must endure before He bears His cross. This is at the hands of Roman soldiers who mock Him as a king. They led Him away, we read, into the palace, into the courtyard, and then called together the whole Roman cohort.

Now, a cohort consisted of between 200 to 600 soldiers. That probably is not what is meant here, not all 200 or 600 of the cohort, but probably what is being referred to as all of those of the cohort that were available in the palace were called to gather around the Lord. And there, they made sport of Him. These men were probably recruits from the provinces, perhaps Syria or some area such as that. Non-Jewish men, Gentile men, who had no sympathy with the Jewish Messiah. They were rough, battle-hardened men whose only loyalty was to Caesar. And so, when they learn that a simple carpenter from Galilee claimed to be the king of the Jews, accused of being a rival of great Caesar, well they thought it was so absurd when they saw Him that all they could do was treat Him with complete contempt, treat Him as a joke.

A few hours earlier, that was really the response of the priests and the officials, you remember how they amused themselves by blindfolding the Lord, then hitting Him and demanding that He prophesy, tell us who hit you, they would say to Him. In so doing, they were ridiculing Him as the Messiah.

Well now, the Gentiles would really do the same thing. They will entertain themselves by giving Him a mock coronation. A king needs a robe, and so they provide Him a robe, having stripped Jesus of His outer garments. They threw a purple cloth around His shredded, bleeding back. Matthew describes it as a scarlet robe. It was probably an old military cloak that was so faded that it had just enough color in it to suggest purple. This word that is used here is a word that has a rather wide range of meaning in terms of color. And so they used it as a purple robe. Used it to mock Him as a king, and that's what it was done in. It was all done in derision and ridicule.

And yet, it was all true. Of all men, it is Christ who deserves to wear the purple. He is the king of kings, and so there's a great deal of irony in all of this, in fact, all of the events of the crucifixion. But there's irony here because in their

attempt to mock Him as a king. They make a statement of truth, because He is a king. He is the king. He is a king, but He's also the suffering servant. Both truths are painfully expressed when the soldiers give the Lord a crown. A king needs a crown, and so they give Him one, but this one is a crown that's made of thorns. There is a wide variety of prickly, thorny plants in Israel. They are so common that the Arab Bedouins use thorns as fuel for fire, And perhaps, the Romans had a pile of these thorns for fuel right there in the courtyard. And so, some of the soldiers took some of those thorns out of the pile and wove them into a wreath, probably a parody of Caesar's crown. And then, they crushed it down on our Lord's head.

As they press it into His scalp, it would've caused a great deal of bleeding, a great deal of pain, and this is the one who had shown a great deal of kindness to the Roman centurions throughout the gospels. You see Him extending mercy whenever a centurion comes into the scene of our Lord's life. I know I've brought this point out before, but it always stands out to me that here is one who's done nothing but kindness to all of those with whom He has had contact. The Romans, as well as the Jews. He has shown mercy and blessing to all, and what is He given in return? Abuse.

DA Carson, in his commentary on this writes that: "Here we have humanity at its worst." What makes that statement true is not the cruelty of the act. As brutal, as insensitive as it was, men have acted with cruelty toward other men in ways that are far more barbarous than this. What makes their act so cruel and so wrong is the one to whom they do it. If He was sinful or had been an imposter or a criminal or a revolutionary, then we can understand their anger. We could say in a sense He invited it on Himself. We can understand the ridicule, we can understand the abuse. But He wasn't. He wasn't sinful. No crime had been proven against Him. He was innocent and He'd been pronounced innocent several times. You see that through the record of the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, all of the texts. You see that from the beginning.

Matthew records Judas after he had betrayed the Lord, begins to sense the wrongness of his act, and he goes to the priest and he declared: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood." The testimony of Judas is that He's innocent. Pilate's wife, you'll remember, gave the same, basically the same testimony. She said to Pilate, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man." Pilate himself declared repeatedly: "I find in Him no fault at all." Herod found Him blameless when He was

brought before him. The same testimony will continue at the cross when one of the dying thieves declares: "This man has done nothing wrong." Then at the foot of the cross, the centurion says, "Certainly, this man was innocent." His innocence and His person, and in saying that, I mean, his deity, because He is the Godman. It's that that makes this act, this whole series of acts sinful and uniquely painful for Him.

And yet, it's because He was innocent, because He is the Godman, that these acts are significant. If He was just a man, a sinful man though innocent of the charges, it would be a brutal thing. But it wouldn't be particularly significant. But it's the fact that He is pure, that He is holy, that He is innocent in the absolute sense of the term, that this act and these acts that they commit against Him are significant.

And I think that's particularly true of this crown of thorns. For the soldiers, the making of this crown and the placing it on His head was nothing more than a cruel joke. But in putting that crown of thorns on His head, they made a profoundly significant statement of truth, because the head that bore the crown of thorns would bear the curse of sin. That's what thorns were symbolic of. You remember back in Genesis chapter 3 verses 17 and 18 after Adam had sinned, God came to him and to Eve, and God declared that the ground was cursed because of his sin, and would grow thorns and thistles. So, thorns and thistles are a symbol of the curse. They're a result of the curse and symbolical of all the curse of sin.

And so, you look at this and you say, "How cruel to place a crown of thorns on the innocent head of our Lord? And yet, how appropriate." Because He is innocent. Because He is the eternal Son of God become man. Only He could bear the curse. And in so doing, remove it.

And as the blood trickled down His face, it was a reminder that He would remove the curse through His bloody, violent death on the cross as the substitute for sinners, the one who on the cross bore the curse of sin in our place. That's what He came to do, and that's what explains His conduct in all of this, because the abuse continues. Soldiers continue to mock Him. They put a reed in His hand as a scepter. A king needs a scepter, and so they gave Him this reed. Then, one by one, they kneel down before Him in mock adoration, mock homage saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" A parody of, "Hail, Caesar!" Then they spit in His face repeatedly, and then took the reed and struck Him on the head with it.

He emptied Himself, Paul said, and stooped to become a man, but He didn't empty Himself of His deity, as we said. He was still the eternal, infinite Son of God, the omnipotent second person of the Godhead as He endured the beating and spitting and laughter. And at any moment, He could've stood up and shaken off the robe and the thorns, and with one look, brought the soldiers to their knees in terror, and swept away His enemies, Pilate, the Jews. With one word, He could've rained down fire and brimstone on Jerusalem. He had the power. It was there, but not the will, because He had not come to do that. That was not the reason for His incarnation. He emptied Himself in order to humble Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. That's why He came.

So, He endured all of this, the pain, the indignity, the humiliation in silent patience, because He had willingly accepted the mission that His Father had given to Him, to be our substitute in judgment. And while these sufferings did not atone for sin, that lay ahead with the suffering of the cross. Only on the cross could sin be removed, because it was there and there alone that the Father struck Him. Here, men are striking Him. But it's at the cross where God will strike down the shepherd. That's where sin will be atoned for.

Nevertheless, His sufferings at the hands of the soldiers showed His willingness to go to the cross and suffer the pains of hell on behalf of His people. Here, He suffered for righteousness' sake, which was part of the path to the cross, and in part the means to perfecting Him as our Savior and our high priest. And He endured it not only with patience, but with dignity, with the dignity of a true king. That's what shone through the pain and the insults, His composure in the midst of mockery. He suffered these indignities acutely. His endurance was not the response of a stoic, which was the prevailing philosophy of Rome, a philosophy which encouraged iron will, indifference to pain, to keeping a stiff upper lip. Nor was this the response of superior indifference, which characterized many of the Greeks in their attitude.

The story is told of Pericles, the statesman and leader of Athens. Coming home from a party one night, and he was accompanied by one of his slaves who was carrying a torch, leading his way through the darkness. And all the way home, he was followed by one of his enemies. Pericles had a number of political enemies in Athens, and all the way home, this enemy followed him and hurled abuses and insults

at him, all the way. But all the way, Pericles didn't pay any attention to him, didn't give any notice to him, didn't listen to him or his insults. And then when he finally arrived home, he turned to his slave and said, "See the fellow home."

The point of that story is that Pericles viewed himself as being too superior to his enemy to even consider him. Well, that's not our Lord's attitude here. It's not one of superior indifference to those who are mocking Him, and it's not an indifference, an insensitivity as a stoic might have to pain. In fact, because of His perfection, because of His innocence, the abuse pierced His soul more acutely, more deeply than any abuse could ever pierce our hearts, could ever affect us.

And yet, He endured all of this abuse, all of this pain for the sake of His elect people. Out of love for them, whom those who He came to save. Listen, don't let it escape your notice that Christ endured all of this, and much more, because the worst was yet to come when He goes to the cross. But He endured all of that out of love for you. Despising the shame, the author of Hebrews tells us. What He would gain for us, and what He would gain in us through the cross. All of this is done out of love.

So, I guess as we consider that we should ask ourselves if He's done that for me. And I've gained all that I've gained because of what He's done on my behalf. What should I do for Him? What should I be willing to suffer in His place? What should I endure? What kind of shame should I be willing to accept for Him?

Well, we look at that and we are amazed at His endurance. And we could certainly develop it more thoroughly than we have, and as I say, deal with it a little more emotionally as well. But, just at the reading of the text in a simple reflection upon it, can't help but amaze you at the endurance that we see in Him. And perhaps it was this was endurance that, at least in part, moved Pilate when, as John tells us, the Lord was brought out before the people this last time wearing the purple robe and the crown of thorns, and Pilate introduced Him those words, "Behold the man."

Now, whether or not Pilate meant much more by these words than, "Here is the accused," is hard to say. But certainly, the Holy Spirit would have us see more in those words than simply that because they do express a profound truth. Whether Pilate meant it or not or realized it or not, they express a profound truth. He is the man of history. No one compares to Him. And He was no mere man. What mere man could take such abuse with such composure and such control? Could suffer such humiliation with such dignity?

Well, whether or not, Pilate was moved by the sight of our Lord, it's hard to say, but it's not unlikely that some were. Spurgeon speculates on that when he asks the question how it is that Matthew and Mark, who are not with the soldiers when they mock the Lord, could describe the events, the event in their gospel accounts. In fact, no one but the soldiers were present in that courtyard. And yet, we obviously have an eyewitness account of these events. Who told the tale? He asks. Then he speculates, perhaps it was the centurion, who later at the crucifixion declared, "Certainly, this was the Son of God." Maybe that same centurion was there in the courtyard, and he saw all of the abuse that the Lord took. Seeing that, and then seeing Him on the cross and the way He conducted Himself there was moved to that conclusion. Or maybe it was another soldier who began to participate in the mockery of the Lord, but soon saw something different in His composure, got a glimpse of His character and began to sympathize with Him.

As Spurgeon writes, "I would almost venture to assert that our Lord's marred but patient visage preached such a sermon that one at least who gazed upon it felt its mysterious power, felt that such patience was more than human and accepted the thorn crown savior as henceforth his Lord and his king." That may be. That may be, that some were moved, some felt sympathy and compassion and came to faith. But very few were affected that way. Pilate brought out the Lord to the people in the hope that His bloodied appearance would move them to pity. But it didn't.

In fact, it excited their hostility even more. John records that when Pilate said, "Behold the man," the people responded, "Crucify! Crucify!" Now, these events reveal something about our Lord's character, then they also certainly reveal something about man's character as well. Why would men respond with such hostility and hatred to a man who is so obviously innocent? The gentlest, kindest man who ever lived, the prince of peace, and they want to crucify Him, and they want to beat Him. How do we explain that?

I suppose some might offer a plausible psychological explanation, but the only explanation that satisfies is the spiritual one, the scriptural one, one that is consistent with Scripture. John explains, I think, the whole nature of this event in the third chapter of his gospel. You're familiar with the verses. In verses 1 and 20, we read, "This is the judgment that the light is come into the world and men love the darkness

rather than the light for their deeds were evil, for every one who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

What bothered these people on Good Friday is what bothered them all along. The awareness of His sinlessness and our sinfulness. This is the case with our Lord as He stood before them. The awareness of their sinfulness and their guilt as they looked upon His marred visage, the bruises and the blood was a testimony to their guilt against Him and they did not want to see that. They see His sinlessness, they see His righteousness, and in the bruises and the blood, they see their guilt, and they want to do away with Him. They want to be rid of that sight. Men love the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil.

HI Ironside told the story of a meeting of the senate of the Free Church of Scotland many years ago. And one of the ministers was invited to preach the sermon in the morning, and the sermon that he preached was one in which he gave a marvelous oration on the beauty of virtue. And he concluded by saying, "Oh, my friends, if virtue incarnate could only appear on earth, men would be so ravished by her beauty that they would fall down and worship her." And many left that sermon saying, "What a magnificent oration it was."

Well, that same evening, another man preached a sermon, but he didn't preach about virtue and beauty. He preached Christ and Him crucified. And as he closed his sermon, he said, "My friends, virtue incarnate has appeared on earth, and men, instead of being ravished with His beauty and falling down and worshipping Him, cried out 'Away with Him. Crucify Him. We will not have this man to rule over us.'" Well, it's the second man that had the truth. Men hate holiness. Men love sin, and that's true of you, and me. All of us, left to ourselves, apart from the grace of God, would choose sin every time because we love it. It's only the grace of God that can remove the blinding power of sin and enable us to see the beauty and the virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ and fall down and worship Him.

Only that can give us an appreciation of the saving work of our Lord and enable us to enter into that saving work, and that's what the cross offers. That's the promise of the gospel: salvation, eternal salvation, the grace of God. As Paul writes in Romans 1, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." For salvation, he says, salvation that begins upon the exercise of faith. Salvation from the penalty of sin and salvation from the

power, the enslaving power, the blinding power of sin. The gospel offers that to all who believe. And what it offers in offering that salvation is a supernatural life, a life that changes the individual, breaks the power of sin, and truly does give life and power to live a different life, a life that we see, for example, in the apostle Paul, who then willingly suffered the abuse of men as our Lord did here, suffered with our Lord's sufferings as he took that gospel of salvation to a lost world.

Well, it was following this final presentation of our Lord that John describes when Pilate brings Him out before the Jewish people, that as Mark writes, "they took the purple off Him and put His garments on, and they led Him out to crucify Him." Evidently, He still wore the crown of thorns. That wasn't removed. So He suffered a great deal of abuse. Open hostility.

Now, we live in a day when few men ever revile Christ openly. There are examples of that. Charles Swinburne, the 19th century English poet wrote of Him, "Thou has conquered O pale Galilean, the world has grown grey from Thy breath." Swinburne was a virulent anti-Christian poet of the late 19th century, and he expressed open hostility. And there's still open hostility toward Christ from men who directly attack His name and His influence, but that's not the norm.

More commonly today, people say nothing, say nothing at all about our Lord. They do nothing. They simply ignore Him altogether, which really is no different than abuse, no different than hurling abuse. Because in effect what that is saying in ignoring Him is saying He's unworthy of our attention. The eternal Son of God who became man and suffered in men's place in the place of sinners is not worthy of our attention. We live in what some have called a post-Christian era. Others have called it a neo-pagan age. It's an age in which Christianity and its influence have been eclipsed by secularism, materialism, me-ism. A word that is frequently used to describe our society is narcissism, self-love, excessive interest in one's own comfort and importance. It's a society that is increasingly turned in on itself, not turned into the basic need of the soul, but turned into other things. An interest in self, in things, in personalities, but with little or no interest in Christ. He's ignored.

I couldn't help but think of that this past week as the 30th anniversary of John Kennedy's assassination was commemorated. The television, the radio, the newspapers, magazines were filled with programs and articles and editorials covering his family, and his political life, his private life, theories on the assassination. You'd

see well-known media personalities begin to weep as they recalled their memory of him. It's a subject that commands a great deal of interest some 30 years after it all took place. And the interest even seems to be growing.

But when have you ever seen anywhere near that kind of interest in our Lord and His death? Not in the media. Not on the college campuses. Not in social conversation, because for the most part, men ignore His person and His work. From the attention given to Christ, you might wonder if there was anything at all significant about Him. And yet, what man, no matter how great he may be, can compare to Christ and His influence? How do you explain that kind of neglect?

Well, I think you explain it the same way you explain the violent hostility of these soldiers and the mob that rejected Him. Men love the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil. And so, they either try to snuff out the light or simply ignore it altogether. But it's all the same. To consider Christ unworthy of our thoughts is the same as mocking Him just like those soldiers did.

So in an age of indifference, it remains for us, it remains for the church to raise up Christ to the world, to say to the world, "Behold the man, the Godman, the Savior of the world." That's what we're to be doing. We're to shake the world out of its indifference, not let it ignore Christ; bring its attention to Him. And when we do that, we can expect to have the same kind of response that the Lord received: indifference or hostility. But that's what we're called to do.

And yet to do that, we must first behold the man. We must first give our interest to Him and devote our interest to Him. That can be quite a challenge in this day in which we live, because Christians face the real danger of being caught up in the spirit of the age and follow in the drumbeat of this world. We all feel the powerful influences of this age, I think, one way or another. It's all around us.

And there's nothing unique about our day. It's not something that we feel that others didn't, because Paul wrote to timothy about those very problems. He wrote of those who want to get rich. Don't we live in an age where men want to get rich? Who of us haven't dreamed about winning the lottery or something like that? Well, that's not unique to our age. Paul wrote about those who want to get rich and how those desires and pursuits plunge men into ruin and destruction. Such men, he says, "pierce themselves with many a pang." I know men who, as young men, showed a great interest in the Lord and the things of the Lord. But as they got older and began to

make their way in the world, they got caught up in the world's pursuits and had little time for the Lord, little time for the things of the Lord, began to separate themselves from the people of God. And as a result, they ruined themselves, ruined their lives. I'm sure you know people like that as well.

Paul urges timothy to instruct the rich not to fix their hope on the uncertainties of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all good things to enjoy. We have a brief time in this world. He's going to supply our needs. Don't look to the world. Don't look to the things of the world. Look to Him. We could be more specific about that. We could add: fix our eyes on Christ, consider His crown of thorns, which He bore on our behalf, that we might escape the curse that fell on Him. Fixing our eyes on Christ with prayerful consideration is the antidote to worldliness and indifference. It's as we do that that we will stand for Him, that we will witness for Him. And as I mentioned, we do that. When we declare the Lord to the world, we call the world's attention to the Lord, we can expect to be treated the same way that our Lord was, for righteousness' sake, we will suffer His sufferings, either hostility or indifference, either we will be struck by the world or we will be mocked by the world. Whatever it may be. But we have our Lord's example before us on how we're to respond to that kind of response.

Spurgeon, after speculating on who might have recorded the incident in the courtyard, the centurion or perhaps another soldier, and may have come to faith through what they saw in our Lord, wrote, "This I do know, that if you and I want to conquer human hearts for Jesus, we must be patient too. And if when they ridicule and persecute us, we shall endure without repining or retaliation. We shall exercise an influence which even the most brutal will feel, and to which chosen minds will submit themselves."

That's our task. Our task is to be like Christ in the midst of a fallen world, to be light in the midst of darkness, and that responsibility, that task has great reward, because He's coming back, and He's coming back with His reward. Not as the suffering servant, but as the conquering king. That's when the heavens will open up, and He will appear seated on a white horse, not wearing a fated purple robe, but a robe, John writes, that's dipped in blood. Not wearing a crown of thorns, but many diadems. Not holding a reed for a scepter, but an iron rod with which He will shepherd the nations. His name is a name that will be written on Him, the king of

kings and Lord of Lords. That will be the day of judgment, when He treads the winepress of His wrath, when the justice that was withheld when He was in that courtyard, allowing Himself to be led away and mocked by the soldiers, then it will be poured out. It will be a day of judgment.

But it will also be a day of great salvation when all of His people will be delivered from this present evil age and gathered into His kingdom, a day of great reward for all of those who served Him faithfully down through the ages. Are you looking forward to that day? Are you ready for it? Are you ready to meet your king? Or do you find yourselves being caught up in the world and then led away by the spirit of this age, becoming more like the world than like Christ. And the thing to do is to consider Christ, is to behold the man, to see Him in His suffering and realize that it was for you that He suffered, and ask God to give you a desire for Him, a desire to live for Him, a desire to be like Him, a desire to serve Him.

He's coming again not, as we said, in humility but in glory. And someday, all men will stand before Him. Those soldiers who mocked Him as king will someday stand before Him as king, and they will bow before Him not in mock adoration, but in fear and trembling. Those who have not believed in Him, all who have not trusted in Him as Savior and Lord, will be guilty of terrible sin, the sin of rejecting Him, of treating Him with contempt, and will give an account of that.

But those who have believed, everyone, regardless of their sin, regardless of who they are. All who have believed will receive forgiveness of sins, and all of that will be wiped away. Your sins will be separated as far as the East is from the West, plunged into the depths of the sea never to be remembered again. That's the promise of the gospel. Forgiveness of sins, life everlasting; it's for all who believe in Him. If you've never believed, I'll urge you: trust in Him, look to Him as savior and Lord, and receive Him as such. May God help you to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the grace that has been given to us. We look at our Lord in this humiliated condition, this moment of great abuse and pain, and we're reminded that all of that was suffered out of love for us. Help us to respond with the proper sense of love and gratitude and seek to live lives that honor His name. Break the power of the world's influence over us, cause us

to look to Him, reflect on Him, and live for Him. We pray these things in our Lord's name. Amen.