

From Majesty to Mocking

Sunday School Lesson

Matthew 5:10; Matthew 27:27-31

April 13, 2025

Cruelty is defined as the intentional infliction of suffering or the failure to act when one can alleviate another's suffering. It encompasses various forms, including physical and emotional harm, and is often associated with sadism. The term can also refer to a quality or state of being cruel, indicating a lack of compassion or kindness. Examples of cruelty include abuse towards animals or humans, and it is generally viewed as morally repugnant. Understanding the causes of cruelty can provide insights into human behavior and societal issues.

While cruelty is often inflicted by humans in the stories of the Old Testament – the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, and the Roman Empire. We find this cruelty present in the discovery of the New World by atrocities of The Spaniards, the Portuguese, the British, and the French. We are very well acquainted with human slavery and its aftermath.

The cruelty of the twentieth and twenty-first century is with us as well. I have been to two Holocaust museums and highly recommend them to anyone who thinks it cannot happen again. The Soviet Union committed many atrocities both within its own borders and in the east block countries. We have witnessed what has happened in Afghanistan and the Middle East with Isis, Hamas, and various radical groups.

Governments are made up of people but, it is those people often lacked compassion when it comes to their own desire to maintain control and power. Governments often forget that government is not about their personal power – governments exist at the consent and for the service of people. When we dehumanize people and see them only as objects to be manipulated and controlled, we are all capable of great cruelty and evil. Christians are not immune to this sin, and we see that evidenced in history over and over.

Let us pray

O Holy God, transform our lives as we follow you. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and most of all, hearts that do not judge. Amen.

Our Purpose Statement: To understand what the mocking from the soldiers revealed about Jesus

Crucifixion was not only a very slow and painful death, but it was intended to be humiliating as well. The soldiers mocking the prisoner before crucifixion is all part of the punishment. They hope the humiliation and the cruelty would be a deterrent for anyone wishing to start an uprising. This was the Romans exercising their full authority as the Empire. Before you criticize them, you need to ask yourself if our government is willing to do the same.

Jesus' crime when presented to Pilate was claiming to be the King of the Jews, so the mocking by the Roman soldiers relates to this claim:

- They dressed Jesus in a scarlet robe.
- They placed a crown of thorns on his head.
- They put a staff in his hand, then struck him with it.
- They jeered at Jesus, saying "Hail, King of the Jews."

It had only been a few days ago that Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem to praise and great celebration. Jesus rode in on a donkey, a symbol of peace, humility, and service. He was not claiming power or aspiring to be a king. A horse would have conveyed that message, not a donkey. Jesus did ride in with authority and he immediately used that authority to cleanse the Temple, an act that at the time, no one understood. It was also at the point that Jesus ceased to be human. He was now a threat bother to the religious authorities and the political authorities. That threat needed to be removed.

By the time he was arrested, he had already been betrayed. His disciples would scatter, and he would be left to face the empire on his own. He would be tried, shuffled from one authority to the next, and finally condemned. As if all that was not enough, now he was turned over to the soldiers. He was whipped 39 times then he was taken to be mocked.

Our lesson today is not about the cruelty but about Jesus' response. Jesus did not react, Jesus responded. What is the difference? When someone says something hurtful, our first inclination is to react in the moment. That means we have not taken the time to think about what we are feeling, why the person said what they did, and how do we want the relationship to go forward in the future. We react emotionally and that usually escalates the situation in a negative direction. Jesus responded, not with his emotions, but with his character. Jesus did not allow the soldiers to make him into someone he was not.

This cruelty makes his words on the cross even more meaningful – "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Let us pray:

Loving God, you not only know right from wrong, but you also know our motivations. Give us pure and clean hearts, O Lord. Align our will with your will. Help us to do the right thing for the right reason; in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.