

Introduction

Fear has been used over the millennia to instill obedience. Obedience that functions through the power of those in control requires submission, but that submission is based on preservation and does not function well in the long term.

We see this today through the lens of our Empire: America. The American Military and the way they have used torture to instill fear and respect in the end causes our destruction: our understanding of humanity wanes into looking at people as objects, animals, and means to an end. Torture is justified for our nation's interests. But torture does not win. The human spirit wins in the end, which is why torture and war and violence against our "enemies" only creates more enemies.

Torture: it is numbing and mind-blowing. Its whole purpose is to create physical, and psychological, and spiritual pain. It is all designed to inflict such immense pain to that it dehumanizes the person and shames them. And if it is done publicly it serves a purpose in keeping order to society and culture.

The Abu Ghraib scandal highlights these things. Muslims were humiliated through acts that defamed their religion and themselves as persons. The violations included physical and sexual abuse, torture, rape, sodomy, and murder.

Evil is brutal. Torture is Brutal—its whole purpose is to dehumanize a person to the point that they give up.

Sadly, we don't have to be in the military to undergo torture or participate in it. Hazing in schools, bullying in schools and online are forms of bullying are aimed at creating shame and publically humiliating the individual. Torture is brutal.

Crucifixion: Allegiance

The crucifixion was the most brutal form of capital punishment ever devised. There were three forms used by Rome during the 1st century in increasing severity: decapitation, burning, and crucifixion.¹ Now, think

¹ David Noel Freedman, ed., *Crucifixion*, vol. 1 A-C, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1207.

about that for a minute. Crucifixion is the worst. In the past couple of months, we have seen evil at work with the decapitation of people by ISIS. It's brutal. How do you feel? Angry? Sad? Afraid? ISIS is decapitating people...and the Romans thought that was the most humane form of capital punishment. Let that sink for a moment.

Crucifixion was done to humiliate and shame the person through the entire process from beginning to the final death. Every moment along its cruel path was designed to shame. The Romans perfected the torture involved, and it was done for the most despicable criminals: High treason, and then also as punishment for slaves and violent criminals.

Jesus was not a violent criminal. Jesus was not a slave. But the Jewish leaders were able to make the claim for high treason: they said that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews. Yet, for the Romans, that was a slightly less of a concern than for Jesus claiming to be the Son of Man.

Now emperor worship was in full swing and there was only one lord to be worshipped: Caesar. To claim to be a King of a religious sect under Roman rule threatened the Empire, and that was worrisome enough. But to claim being Lord threatened allegiance. Jesus' claim as Son of Man was a claim that Jesus was the Son of God, worthy to be worshipped. This was treason.

Where are our allegiances?

Do we claim allegiance to one political party or another? Do we claim allegiance to money? Do we claim allegiance to being Mennonite, over and above our claim of allegiance of Jesus?

Do we recognize that we are worshipping what we do? Do we worship Jesus? Or do we worship at the alter of power, or money, or sports? Where is our allegiance?

Crucifixion: Mark 15:20b-37

The Crucifixion deepens our understanding of our own allegiances, of suffering and persecution, and it also deepens our understanding of our salvation: we are saved by grace through faith, as Ephesians says (2:8). That is the proclamation of scripture.

If you want to open your bibles to Mark 15, we will be walking through the text this morning.

V. 20 (read)

- Jesus was mocked. He was insulted, taunted, bullied, and stripped bare of all human dignity. Do you know what it feels like to have your identity as a human being stripped away?
- Jesus was mocked. They false worshipped him. They jeered. They sneered. They scorned. They spit on him. They hit him.

Vv. 21-23 (read)

- Roman crucifixions involved scourging. If you watched Mel Gibson's *The Passion* you would have seen the most violent form of scourging. In this most violent form, the person being scourged is left within an inch of death. The Gospels do not indicate that Jesus was scourged to the degree that Gibson's portrayal indicated. We do read about the suffering servant, in Isaiah 53, and there was certainly extra-biblical evidence to Roman scourging. Likely, though, Jesus' scourging was not as severe as it could have been. Nevertheless, Jesus is not able to carry the cross himself. He is not strong enough.
- Physical pain. Dehydration. Agony. Dehydration alone would be enough to render Jesus incapable of carrying the cross.

[Story of Climbing Pikes Peak]

- Wine mixed with Myrrh was a type of mild narcotic.
- It fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 69:21: "But instead, they give me poison for food; they offer me sour wine to satisfy my thirst."
- Jesus refuses. Jesus endures the pain. Jesus endures the mocking. Jesus endures the humiliation. Jesus endures the shame. Jesus endures the torture.

V. 24 (read)

- Every point along the journey of crucifixion is to heighten the shame, and the pain, of the individual. Jesus' body has already endured pain we cannot imagine. And they take nails—and these aren't just any type of nails; they are huge spikes that are about 5-7 inches long and almost a ½ inch thick and – and they nail his wrists to the cross. Each hit of the hammer sent shock waves through Jesus' already torn and tortured body.

- He cries out with each hit.
- The agony of each one being driven in...

I'm the one with the hammer. You are the one with the hammer. Together, we hammer the tortured body of Jesus. Our sin—past, present, and future—hammer the nails. Together, we crucify our Lord.

V. 25-27 (read)

- The Title indicates the reason why the Romans are persecuting him: King of the Jews. They were using the power of the cross to show their ultimate authority, and their ability to grant life...or take life. They were playing god.
- Jesus was crucified as a criminal. He was surrounded—on each side—with criminals. Was this just coincidence? Or was it further to humiliate and shame Jesus—to show the world and Jesus himself that he was no king?

V.29-32 (read)

More emotional abuse is heaped on Jesus. More mockery. More pain. More shame.

- And in an act that echoes Satan's temptation in the Desert, the leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus, and ask Jesus to save himself. They mock God, just like Satan.

V. 33 (read)

For three hours darkness covered the land. What is going on here? Was this God's way of covering up the shame? Or is there something radically important about the three hours of darkness? We will come back to this in a moment.

V. 34 (read)

- Jesus is quoting Psalm 22 here. In the midst of his pain, he is crying out to God. He is asking a valid question: where are you? In the midst of suffering and pain he cries out to God for assurance, for validity, for help.
- Theologian Rudolf Multmann says this: "Unlike the speaker in Psalm 22, Jesus is not just making a claim upon the faithfulness of the God of Israel, as he had promised to the whole people; in a special way he is laying claim upon the faithfulness of the Father to himself."²

² Kathleen D. Billiman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 71.

- Jesus—the incarnate Word of God—has gone to the depths of human misery. Karl Barth says of this moment, "No one but Jesus has ever known the true breadth and depth, the true essence and darkness, of human misery. What we see and note and know and more or less painfully experience of it is only the shadow of his cross touching us."³

Vv. 35-36

- Again, fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 69:21, Jesus is offered sour wine.

V.37

- And in one last breath, Jesus dies. As one writer says: "God dies."⁴ Let that sink in for a moment. God dies. As Christians we understand God as Trinitarian: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; so it's not quite accurate to say, "God dies." But it gets our attention to the fact that Jesus was not just a man. Jesus was also divine. And that is critical because it is how we are saved by Jesus' blood. Jesus was not just a man. Otherwise we might as well be following Buddah or Ghandi or Mother Theresa. No...Jesus was a man, but Jesus was also God. There was only one spotless lamb; only one capable of perfection: Jesus Christ.

The Atonement

The ugliness of the cross is the beauty of love. The violence of the cross served a purpose. Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin and redeems us.

So...what happened in those three hours of darkness from 12-3pm?

- God's judgment is poured out on all of humanity, and God's judgment is fulfilled (Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:15).

[Judgment and mercy of God—the grace of the cross]

- And God's power and wisdom subvert the power of Empire. The Symbol for Rome's power is subverted and becomes the greatest symbol for God.

³ Kathleen D. Billiman and Daniel L. Migliore, 64.

⁴ Eric Ludy, "The Gospel," *Ellerslie Mission Society Films*, April 22, 2011.

The entire book of Ephesians is about the subversive nature of God's power, through Jesus and the cross.

The cross becomes a sign of beauty. The cross becomes a sign of hope. The cross becomes a sign of love. The cross becomes a sign of salvation.

As Paul says in Galatians (2:20): "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who lives, but Christ in me."

[Nail Baggage to the Cross]

We are no longer defined by these things: they are nailed to the cross too because Christ overcame!

We are no longer bound by these things: they are nailed to the cross because Christ overcame!

We are FREE because of what Jesus did.

Hallelujah. And because of that, we too can say and sing and claim the beautiful and powerful hymn from Philippians (2:9-11, NLT):

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.