

## **Confess Him Now**

Mark 15:21-47

Lent 5, March 21, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Roman practice, when it was possible, was to write a notice of the charge against a crucifixion victim and attach it to his cross above his head. This served as a deterrent. Anyone who passed by a crucifixion victim, and who could read, could read what the charge against the executed individual was. In this way the people who passed by crucifixion victims would know not to do what that man had done or they would wind up the same way.

Jesus is a crucifixion victim. Pontius Pilate has the opportunity and the means to put the notice of the charge against Jesus on the cross of Jesus. It read simply, "The King of the Jews." From Pilate's perspective this served two purposes. One, it served as a deterrent to any other Jew who might fancy himself to be their king. Two, it served the purpose of keeping his thumb and Roman power over the Jews and their ruling council. See what happens to your king. We Romans can put to death even a Jewish king.

In the other gospels this notice raises controversy and comment, but in Mark's Gospel nothing is said about it. Nothing negative is said about the notice. Nothing positive is said about the notice. Mark tells us that the notice was there. That is all.

Could it be that a crucifixion victim was indeed the King of the Jews? And if as we have noticed earlier Jesus only receives the marks of royalty, that being the purple robe and a crown when and because He is crucified, then it could be that not only is this crucifixion victim the king of the Jews, it is His crucifixion that makes Him the King of the Jews.

But could that possibly be? Wouldn't a king be resplendent with power and glory? Wouldn't He have had followers to prevent His arrest and crucifixion? Would not He have commanded some kind of power to keep this from happening? But if He only becomes king when He is crucified, perhaps He wanted these things to happen.

If indeed the crucifixion of Jesus is the atoning sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world, then we all owe Him an eternal debt of gratitude for His death. But if we owe Him an eternal debt of gratitude for His death, then He holds sway over us. He has charge over our debts. He is our creditor and benefactor in everlasting life. Thus He is our king and if He is our king, why not king of the Jews?

Here is Jesus. Is He king of the Jews? If He is, confess Him now. When He comes in power and great glory, it will be too late.

There was a time prior to our Lord's crucifixion when He met with great success. Great crowds followed Him around to receive healing and the Word of God. The disciples enjoyed a certain notoriety for being disciples of such a successful rabbi.

Peter had confessed that Jesus is the Christ. That means that the disciples knew that Jesus was the proper king of Israel, the proper chief priest of the temple, and the proper and consummate prophet of God.

Two of them want to seal their positions of power next to the Christ. Knowing that He would enter into His glory at some point, James and John approach Him and ask for His permission to sit at His right and His left when He enters His glory.

The Lord responds that they do not know what they are asking. He asks them if they are able to drink the cup that He is going to drink. They respond in the affirmative and He replies that they will

drink His cup, but to sit at His right and at His left is not His to grant. Those people have already been chosen.

Then Jesus is crucified. The gospels are all specific on this point. One criminal is crucified at His right and the other at His left. Here is the one time in the gospels where someone is at His right and someone is at His left. That would then mean that the crucifixion of Jesus is His glory. And if indeed the whole cosmos owes it salvation to Jesus for this offering of His life, then in spite of how it looks, it is indeed His glory.

Not all recognize this. Some specifically deny that the cross of Jesus is His glory.

If you think it is His glory, confess it now. When He comes again in obvious power and glory, it will be too late.

Jesus commands power over others even in His death.

His enemies come out to witness the crucifixion. I suppose that executions do draw a crowd as they always have, but this is Passover. The Jews have other things to do. The chief priests have sacrificial responsibilities to which they should be attending. Instead they are going out to the Place of the Skull to witness the death of Jesus from Nazareth.

If Jesus from Nazareth were truly irrelevant, they would not have bothered to go out to His crucifixion. Their attendance at the crucifixion in spite of their duties shows that it truly was out of envy that they had handed Him over to Pilate. Now they are going out to make sure that He dies or more obviously to see His death and enjoy it.

In this way Jesus commands power even over them. In their actions they confess His importance and just how big of a threat to their power He really represented.

Not only do they go out, they mock.

“You, who were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself by coming down from the cross.”

It is curious that this is the only point of testimony that Mark chooses to record. Out of all the false testimony made against Jesus at His trial, why record only this? Furthermore why record the fact that it was repeated at the cross. There were other things that were said in mockery of Jesus at His crucifixion, why emphasize this?

Well, we know that He rises from the dead on the third day. Could it be that the temple about which Jesus had spoken was not the building in Jerusalem which Jesus predicted would be thrown down, no one stone being on top of another, but rather that He was speaking about His own body. He dies, is buried, and on the third day rises. When He rises His resurrection is not done by the hands of men.

What Mark so often implies and expects you to figure out the other Gospels say explicitly just in case you can't figure Mark out. John's Gospel confirms that this is the case.

So even though it is said in mockery, it is nevertheless what Jesus is doing right in front of their very eyes.

They say it in mockery. If you say it in sincerity, say it now. If you believe that Jesus commands power from His cross, confess it now. When He returns on the clouds, it will be too late.

Furthermore the chief priests mock Him. “He saved others. He cannot save Himself. Let this Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross in order that we may see and believe.”

In saying this the chief priests and scribes admit that He did save others. But turning that admission aside they want to see if He can save Himself. They offer faith in return for His coming down

from the cross. In mockery they call Him Christ and the King of Israel even though they do not believe such things.

The King of Israel has a calling from God to execute God's judgments on God's behalf. He exonerates where God wants the person exonerated. He condemns where God wants the person condemned. The king's responsibility is to execute God's justice on earth that His kingdom may be established forever.

When Jesus cries out that He is God forsaken, He is indicating God's judgment. God's judgment for sin has fallen upon Jesus and not upon us. This is what gave Jesus the power throughout His ministry to absolve sinners and to purify lepers and to cast out demons.

If the judgment of God has fallen upon Jesus and not upon sinners, then Jesus has the right to absolve sinners. If the judgment of God is the only means by which Satan and his hoard can have power over us by accusing us of our sins, then they have lost all of their power when God forgives us by having His judgment fall on Jesus and not on us. If indeed leprosy brought defilement and defilement required sacrifice then Jesus is making the sacrifice which empowered all of His healings in particular His healing of the leper.

That being the case, it is precisely when Jesus dies that He executes God's judgments the way that God wants them executed. He is therefore the king of Israel.

If you believe this, confess it now. Do not wait until He is returning in final judgment and power and on the clouds.

Joseph of Arimathea was a decent member of the council.

He was waiting for the Kingdom of God.

It makes me wonder what was going through his mind when he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Did He believe as the disciples on the road to Emmaus believed that with the death of Jesus all of their hopes were lost? If so, why then would he go and ask Pilate for the body of Jesus? To do so puts Joseph's life at risk. What if the rest of the ruling council finds out that he requested the body of Jesus and gave it a decent burial? Would they not throw him off of the council? Would not Joseph lose his position of authority among the people?

Why ask for the body of Jesus if you were waiting for the Kingdom of God? Unless you believed that the work and legacy of Jesus had brought about the kingdom of God. As we have seen Jesus becomes king precisely when He is crucified. The Kingdom of God has come. Joseph seems not to have lost faith in this because he does not go into hiding as the disciples do. He boldly goes to Pilate and asks for the body that bore his sin and saved him from death. He asks for the body that he will soon be consuming in the Sacrament of the Altar. He lays it in a tomb.

There is no way to know, but it is hard to avoid that Joseph knew that Jesus would rise from the dead. Why not have Jesus put into a mass grave like all of the other crucifixion victims? If He rises from the dead in a mass grave, who will be able to tell that His is the body that is missing? But if His body is in a tomb by itself! Then if He rises the empty tomb can be presented as evidence.

Now here is the deal. Joseph does not wait until Jesus is raised to honor the body of Jesus. Joseph confesses His faith by requesting the body beforehand.

If you believe that the Kingdom of God has come in His death and resurrection. Confess it now. You have the advantage of living after the resurrection of Jesus. Joseph confessed His faith in the body of Jesus before the resurrection. Confess it now before you see Him again in glory because by then it will be too late.

The centurion saw the events of our Lord's death and confessed Him, "Truly this man is the Son of God!"

What the centurion knew of God before this we do not know. We know only the events that he saw and Mark and his fellow evangelists have recorded them for us. We know what he knew and he confessed the truth. He confessed it without knowledge of Jesus' resurrection and we have knowledge of His resurrection.

There is no reason for not confessing Him to be the unique Son of God and there is no reason for not confessing it right now.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.