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Passion Scenes: Condemned!

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TEXT: Mark 14:53-65 (ESV)

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards received him with blows.

Dear friends,

Have you ever watched a TV show or a movie and thought to yourself when it ended, "Man, I'm glad that's over. It was too dark for me, creepy and disturbing. How can people treat each other like that?" Well, reading the Passion story can be a lot like that

experience, especially today's passage. This one always gets to me – reading of this unjust, inhumane treatment Jesus received at the hands of religious people... It's just so dark. In fact, it happened in the dark, didn't it? It was the middle of the night. Jesus has been arrested. He's brought before the Sanhedrin court, which was the Supreme Court of the Jews. On this particular night, though, it was more of a kangaroo court. This trial had been hurriedly thrown together to try Jesus and to get rid of Him. It's being held illegally at night and during a festival, the Passover, not even in the courtroom hall. They were gathered instead in the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. Falsehoods and lies are brought against Jesus as He stands before them, but none of them could stick. For men who were so bent on having a guilty verdict, they were not very well organized in this kangaroo court. Witness testimonies brought against him couldn't agree on the facts. There were too many discrepancies and so they were inadmissible.

It actually took Jesus to bring down the hammer on Himself. When asked by the high priest, "Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed?", Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the son, a man coming on the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of Heaven." In other words, "Yes, I'm the Messiah and I'm divine and I'm coming again." The high priest tore his robes in disgust, made quite a show of this, and declared to the others, "You've heard His blasphemy. What's your decision?" And they all condemned Jesus, said He was deserving of death. And then they began to cruelly mistreat Him. They spit on him – a humiliating, insulting, degrading action. His hands were bound behind His back so He couldn't even wipe it away. Then they blindfolded him and took turns hitting Him mockingly asking, "Prophecy, tell us who hit you." They thought it was hilarious. The guards who had brought him then beat Him up badly, jeering and delivering blows all over His body, hitting, kicking. It's a gruesome scene.

Now, three things stand out in this story. First, how beastly people can be. There are some ugly, disappointing things going on here, aren't there: the animosity, the slander, the injustice, the spitting, the hitting, the mocking... All of these things are evidence of their hatred for Jesus, that hatred being motivated by the sense of being threatened by Jesus. Their pride and selfishness viciously came out that evening. They were threatened by His popularity. The crowds loved Him. They were threatened by His acting with such authority. Remember, He caused that scene in the Jerusalem temple, driving the merchants and money changers out and then pointed a finger at everyone in charge, that they turned this place of prayer into a den of robbers. They were threatened by how smart He was. They couldn't get the best of Him when they tried to debate

Him. And yes, they were threatened by his goodness...His goodness. Dark things don't like to be exposed by light.

But let's be careful as we consider these people before we get too judgmental and demonize them. They may be enemies of Jesus at the moment when He's arraigned, but they're not different from us, really. They're quite as complex as we are now, and we have been what they are: enemies of Jesus. I can't help but see a reflection of myself in this. Admit it: we can be pretty mean to those who are a threat to us. At times, we can be harsh and cruel to others around us. We find ourselves slandering and putting people down with innuendos and lies. And sometimes our jealousy rears its ugly head in us, causing us to think and say and do some pretty ugly things in order to elevate ourselves over others. Jesus described it as a heart problem. We've all got it. He says, "From within the heart of man come evil thoughts: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All of these evil things come from within and they defile a person. We got a heart problem.

Christian author Max Lucado writes about the spitting on Jesus in his book, *He chose the Nails*. He writes, "Spitting isn't intended to hurt the body. Spitting is intended to degrade the soul. And it does. What were these people doing to Jesus? Were they not elevating themselves at the expense of another? They felt big making Jesus look small." Ever done that? Maybe you've never spit on anyone, but have you gossiped, slandered? Have you ever raised your hand in anger or rolled your eyes and arrogance at someone else? Ever made someone feel bad so you would feel good? That's what this crowd did to Jesus, and when you and I do the same to others, we're doing it to Jesus, too, He says. "You did it to the least of these, you did it to me."

We must face the fact that there's something beastly within each and every one of us that makes us do things that surprise you and us. Have you ever surprised yourself? Have you ever reflected on an act and wondered, "What's gotten into me?" The Bible has a three letter word for that question: S-I-N. Though made in God's image, we have fallen; we're corrupt at the core, the very center of our being is selfish and perverse. We got a heart problem.

So allow the spit of the Sanhedrin to symbolize the filth in our hearts, and then observe what Jesus does with our filth, he wears it to the cross. And that's why Jesus is there, in

the high priest's house, hands bound behind His back, taking all this dark behavior on that very dark night. It was sin... our sin.

The second thing that stands out in this story is the innocence of Jesus. They could not bring charges against him that stuck. He didn't return insults to the insulters, did He? Or shout "Liar" to the liars. Instead, He obeys the Father, and then courageously tells the truth, which He knew would bring down condemnation and mystery mistreatment upon Himself. He could have denied, could have backed down, but He didn't. He's the innocent one, making Him the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. Making Him the "unblemished lamb who takes away the sin of the world," as John the Baptist described him earlier. And as you consider this scene, it's kind of ironic, isn't it? Here's the great high priest for the world, standing condemned in the house of a high priest. He was like us in every way, but He did not sin, scripture says. He was innocent.

Finally, you can't help but notice the silence of Jesus – He remained silent. It's as if He's in control of the situation somehow; there's a calmness there. After all, He knew this would come, right? He predicted three times to His disciples: we're going to Jerusalem, I'll be rejected, and I'll suffer and die, and on the 3rd day, rise. He had prepared for this. He'd been praying in the garden of Gethsemane for strength to take on this burden and carry out His father's will. And He took it silently. He's in control. And when He finally does break His silence and tells the truth of His identity to the high priest, knowing what would happen, He knows He's pulled the trigger Himself. And that's when all hell breaks loose and it all comes down on Him. Notice the words He uses are filled with such confidence. He knows what he must do: He must drink the cup of suffering that His Father wanted Him to drink. But He also knows the end, where it's headed. Jesus looks to the future. While going through this hell, we see Jesus keeping His eyes on Heaven while surrounded by His enemies. He keeps His mind on His Father while abandoned on Earth. He keeps His heart on home. All the cruelty and humiliation, and He took it without a word. As Isaiah 53 says, "Like a lamb led to the slaughter, He opened not His mouth." Surely Jesus could have called down an army of angels upon these beasts that night to protect Him. But He didn't. He just took it silently.

You have to ask "why?" And we find the answer to that question in John 3:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through

Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

Why'd He do it? He loves us. Beloved, oh, how He loves you and me. All of this He took for you and me: the condemnation, the beating, the cross. He did it to take care of our sin, our heart problem. It's been said that the gospel boils down to this: that we are more sinful than we dared believe and more loved than we dared to hope. How true. That dark and horrific night, Jesus, the son of God, allowed Himself to be condemned so we wouldn't be. And as the apostle Paul has written in Romans 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." That's what He's done for us that night and the next day.

First, the promise notices to those who are in Christ, no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Let me ask you, are you in Christ? Do you trust Him and what He's done for you? Have you asked Him to come into your life right now and take over? Have you moved, then, out of condemnation and into salvation, eternal life with him forever? And for those of you who have asked him into your life, trust in this forgiveness he gives you. No condemnation for those who are in Christ. Build your present and future upon that; marvel at it, revel in it, don't live the rest of your life as condemned women and men, burdened by your past. : Live as forgiven and freed daughters and sons of God through Christ. Jesus was condemned so you and I wouldn't be. Praise God.

I'd like to close with a story. While aggression and racist remarks are vicious and foolish at the best of times, a Chicago man back in 2014 learned that some people are particularly unwise to pick on. Angry that a 79-year-old woman was smoking near him, David Nicosia started an argument with her before allegedly slapping the woman in the face and spitting on her, referring to her as "Rosa Parks," (intended as a derogatory reference to her skin color.) But unbeknownst to Nicosia, the victim of his rage was Judge Arnette Hubbard, a longtime community icon in Chicago who has long been a voice on civil rights and women's issues. Deputies came to Hubbard's defense, and now Nicosia is looking at four charges of aggravated battery and a hate crime, besides the unenviable prospect of having to explain his actions to another judge, likely one of Hubbard's co-workers.

Think about this: there is another judge who is the victim of our many crimes. While He was among us in the flesh, we even slapped Him and spit upon Him and crucified Him.

But consider the supreme folly of our sins committed against God and His son: the victim of so many of our crimes is also our judge. He will come to judge the living and the dead and consider this. But praise God: that same victim has become an advocate on our behalf. Guilty and foolish though we may be, He was condemned, you see, so we wouldn't be.

Let's pray together and give God thanks for His good news.

Gracious God, thanks be to you for your inexpressible gift. I was condemned, but because of Jesus, I am free. I am blessed. Help us to always trust Him and rejoice in the freedom and future that is ours in Christ Jesus. In His name, we pray.

Amen.