

Mark 15. ²²⁻³⁸

²²And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. ²³And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. ²⁴And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. ²⁵And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. ²⁶And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. ²⁸And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, "And he was numbered with the transgressors." ²⁹And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, ³⁰Save thyself, and come down from the cross." ³¹Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. ³²Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." And they that were crucified with him reviled him. ³³And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is, being interpreted, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ³⁵And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, "Behold, he calleth Elias." ³⁶And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, "Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down." ³⁷And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. ³⁸And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

In a laudable desire to comfort, the writer of Hebrews assured his readers that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."¹ Thus, we have a tutor to direct us through life's labyrinth of temptation. The writer succeeded in comforting, at least, he did with me. I believe his witness and make use of it constantly. But, in declaring that Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are," it seems to me that he was not being exactly accurate. It is saying far, far too little of Jesus' temptations.

It seems certain that Jesus temptations went well beyond, infinitely beyond any temptation any other human being ever faced or will face. Indeed, he "descended below them all."² It is, in fact, impossible to imagine the sorts and levels of temptation that Jesus assuredly endured and transcended. But, as usual, the impossibility shouldn't stop us from imagining as much as we are capable.

Imagine, for example, having the power to deliver oneself from any discomfort, any suffering, any form of death. Imagine then experiencing the worst possible discomfort and the worse possible suffering, and facing the worse possible sort of death. Imagine, finally, not using the power you possess to deliver yourself from that discomfort, that suffering, and that death. What willpower! What love!

And then, imagine that nearly everyone around you, friend and foe alike, tempts you to demonstrate the power you claim to possess to deliver yourself from discomfort, suffering, and death. Imagine the

¹ Hebrew 4.¹⁵

² See DC 122.⁸

appeal to action at the time of your arrest. Imagine the appeal to action at the time of humiliation. Imagine the appeal to action during your suffering. Imagine the appeal to action, not only to relieve yourself from the discomfort, suffering, and death, but from the humiliation of ridicule. Imagine how tempting it is to prove yourself right and everyone else wrong. Imagine how tempting it is to justify all that you have said and done, indeed, to justify your very existence. Or, if you are better than all of that, imagine how tempting it is to act so that others will be convinced of your righteous claims and thereby be saved.

It is no accident that the Gospels record the temptations that Jesus faced to ease himself of and deliver himself from all discomfort, suffering, and death. Though the first recorded incident of this temptation took place in the desert at the urging of Satan, it seems almost certain that it was part of his life long before that. Though it might seem the temptation ended with his death, I often wonder. Does he suffer still? Does he suffer because of us? Is he ever tempted to end the suffering by eliminating us, the cause of so much divine suffering? But, no, he continues to suffer with an eye towards others' advancement.

In Jesus' final, "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'" which is, being interpreted, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" we hear, perhaps, Jesus at his lowest, deepest suffering. He found out what all the rest of us so often feel, alienation from God. But, oh how much worse for him; for he had always lived in an intimacy with God that is beyond our present experience or even imagination.

"And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him."³

If there was ever a moment when he examined the possibilities of self-preservation, this must have been it. But, he endured. He resisted. He conquered. And thereby, he revealed the unimaginable grandeur of the Divine Character. And by that revelation, we are, or can be saved. So, focusing on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross is most certainly not an exercise in morbid focus on the dying and dead Christ.

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."⁴

Good Friday and the Easter Season are times to more deeply examine, learn, and apply the many, many lessons Jesus taught us from his high and lofty cross. It is a time to discover that humble portion of power that we have and commit ourselves to use it, not for self-preservation, but for the betterment of all those around us. Lent and Easter represent a time to commit ourselves to "deny" ourselves and "take up [our] cross, and follow" Jesus. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."⁵

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: April 9, 2025)

³ John 8.²⁹

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1.^{18, 23-24}

⁵ Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁵