

Ransom: It Cost Jesus His Dignity

Have you ever been bullied? Some statistics say 1 in 2 young people have been bullied. But because so many don't report bullying, that number probably is much higher. Stats say that girls report bullying more than boys do. Boys bully more than girls do.

What's the worst part of being bullied? Isn't it that you feel controlled or helpless at the moment, like there's nothing you can do. It's like slavery – even if it's momentary – because someone else is robbing you of the basic decency that any person has a right to. It's robbing someone of their dignity.

"The state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect." That's dignity. Every person by virtue of being a human being should have a right to their dignity, to be being treated with dignity. It shouldn't matter who you are, what you look like, what you can or can't do, your age, your limitations – everyone has a right to dignity. But when someone takes it from you, it's humiliating, degrading, and makes you feel full of shame. Dignity is precisely what it cost Jesus as he ransomed us and allowed the Roman soldiers to rob him of pretty much the last thing he had left.

Read Mark 15:16-20

The Roman soldiers had just flogged Jesus. Pontius Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but thought the flogging would evoke sympathy on the part of the Jewish leaders. He guessed wrong. They still wanted to crucify him. Now Pilate sends Jesus inside and allows – maybe commands – the soldiers to mock Jesus' claim to be a king. This would be another little jab from Pontius Pilate toward the Jewish leaders whom he despised.

But notice the ***bitter irony*** in what the soldiers were doing.

- Dressing Jesus in a purple or scarlet robe (probably an old soldier's jacket) was suggesting royalty. But there was no honor or respect that went along with this. It wasn't a fashion statement or a rank in society. It was ridicule.
- The crown of thorns was an obvious reference to a king's crown but no authority went along with that. With blood running down his face and nerves screaming pain signals to his brain, Jesus has no kingly powers at the moment.
- The chant "Hail king of the Jews!" – what people shouted to kings as a way of honoring them – wasn't honor but sheer scorn as it brought loud laughter from the proud Romans who detested the Jews.
- Bowing down to Jesus should have been the recognition of who he really was and who they were in comparison. Bowing shows humility and respect. But there was no humility, no respect, no reverence, no deference, no esteem, no sign of any appropriate behavior toward a king.

But Jesus was a king, and there's the bitter irony! He was not only the king of the Jews, their promised Messiah whom God had predicted would be a king like King David, but he was greater. He was also the king of those Romans. Jesus was the one who gave authority to Tiberius Caesar and to Pontius Pilate. Jesus, the Creator, the one who holds this world together, who designed and regulates the position of every single planet and star, still preserves his creation. Jesus is truly King of the world. Then and now.

The soldiers gave their king fists, slaps, and human spit. They added that to the cost of Jesus' ransom. But there Jesus sat, silent, still. Those soldiers didn't just *take* his dignity. Jesus was willing to give it up.

As we have said the last five weeks, it wasn't just the tough guys dressed in Roman military gear that are guilty in this scene. We weren't there to put the purple robe on Jesus, but maybe we have dressed ourselves in pride, thinking that we personify royalty to people around us. We weren't there to push the crown of thorns onto Jesus' head, but maybe we have pushed our way with someone until we got what we wanted, selfishly thinking we were their king or queen. We didn't chant "Hail, king of the Jews," but maybe our words brought shame and ridicule to the Savior who has called us honor him. We weren't there for the bowing down to Jesus in jest, but maybe we have been right here in church bowing our heads with a million different things on our mind – outward

actions of honor fit for the King yet inwardly empty of thought, heart, and meaning.

The bitter irony of our lives is that we understand who Jesus is and understand who he has made us to be, but we find ourselves at times giving mockery instead of worship, ridicule instead of praise, scorn instead of honor. This whole Lenten season we have seen Jesus paying more than his life. He who owned everything as King paid everything to buy us back. The *sweet reality* of Jesus' suffering at the hands of the soldiers is that it's the price he paid to save us.

In spite of what was happening in those painful moments, Jesus reacted with the dignity of a king. Being 100% God in the flesh he could have unleashed his righteous anger on the brutality of the savage soldiers, but he didn't. His silence and ability to endure the constant ridicule was the perfect Savior in action. The one enduring ridicule and scorn is at God the Father's right hand ruling everything for the benefit of his believers. He is now exercising all his power and authority that he held back for those two hours on that horrible morning. Jesus does have divine dignity.

So why would he give it up on Good Friday? Why would he let his creatures inflict pain on him, mock him and spit on him? The answer is simple: he wants us to have the same dignity he has. He loves all of us – all people he's ever created – to the extent that he would give up his dignity for a time so we could have dignity forever. His complete silence, his perfect submission, his total stillness paid our ransom. It cost his dignity so we can be given the status of children of God and one day we would be dressed like royalty. We will wear crowns meant for princesses and princes, kings and queens. We will eternally hear songs of praise – not that we are God or anywhere close to equal to Jesus, but that we will *share in his royal dignity*.

So what does this mean for you and me today? First of all, the ransom is paid. If you add up what it cost – it cost Jesus his friends, his serenity, his power, his authority, and even his dignity – you see that Jesus' payment is complete. It's complete and it covers every sin you've ever committed. It covers every time we have robbed him of dignity: times we have dressed ourselves in pride. Jesus' ransom covers us for the times our words ridiculed someone else or even him. His complete suffering covers us for the time our outward shows of respect or worship were merely going through the motions. As Jesus would make so clear later that day with his statement, "It is finished."

Last week I paid for something and I witnessed something I haven't seen in a long time. Before the person gave me my receipt, she grabbed a wooden thing in her hand, opened up a little container that was red and wet, she pushed the wooden thing into the container and then pressed it onto the receipt. It said, "PAID" - in red. It means I didn't owe any more. Nothing! That's exactly what I owe God for my sins now that Jesus has paid it all.

So now as forgiven children of God we go forward with a new desire to show dignity to the one who deserves all dignity. We go forward with new strength to honor the King who has used his strength – the strength of silence – to give us the honor of being his royal family members. We go forward with the Holy Spirit working in us to live up to what we are in God's eyes, perfect sons and daughters of the King.

No bully can ever take that away from you. The bullies under Pontius Pilate's command tried to bring down the Savior with the bitter irony of their cruelty, but the sweet reality is that Jesus is stronger than any bully. He even defeated Satan, the worst bully ever. Jesus' power and love combined to defeat sin that day....and then he would defeat death the Sunday after. (You'll hear more on that in 7 days!)

The ransom is paid, and we are free. Amen.