

Good Friday 2018: King of Fools

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[0 : 00] Maybe you think of someone with a charismatic personality, a winsome communicator or vision caster.

Now certainly when I think of a king, one of the first people that comes to mind is the character Aragon in the movie The Lord of the Rings. And we're going to watch a short clip from the movie The Return of the King Now at a time in the movie just before the good guys head into a pivotal battle.

And in this scene, it seems to me that Aragon displays a lot of the qualities I associate with a king. Let's watch this clip now. Aragon is accused the copious the striccadok of fighting, sh gesehen, at that time.

The hero is not responsible, a gun high in the light worden. I've seen your eye, the same being of the regular horsemen.

The day we come from the coming of Mandate, and we will say our friends have made all of them the world, but it is not this day.

[1 : 28] An hour of war, and a second of steel, and the age of men are crashing down, but it is not this day, this day he went.

I hope that you hold dear, and for now, I will be sad, and for now.

Now that's a king, isn't it? So there he is, on a fine battle horse, motivating and encouraging his men with this inspirational speech.

He leads by example, putting himself on the front lines, ready to fight for the forces of good. And as he rouses his men to stand near ground, he's also ready not just to fight, but to win.

Let me just read to you part of his speech again. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is not this day.

[2 : 40] An hour of wolves, and shattered shields, when the age of men comes crashing down, but it is not this day, this day we fight. Now compare that picture with what we've just heard in Mark chapter 15.

We have King Jesus. But all throughout, he is silent. Indeed, it is striking how silent he is.

Not a single word comes out of him as he enters this palace, as the soldiers hammer him, as he is stripped naked and everyone shouts at him.

Only at noon does he say something. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That is hardly the voice of victory. That is no inspirational speech. That's the opposite of this day we fight. Indeed, there seems to be no battle.

[3 : 43] His disciples are not standing their ground, ready to die for their master. No, they are nowhere to be seen. And towards the very end, all we hear is a loud cry from Jesus' lips as he breathes his last.

What kind of king is this? How can this be a good Friday? Black Friday, maybe. Shameful Friday, even.

It seems like a pitiful end, the abrupt failure of a revolutionary who said and did some provocative things, but has now fallen afoul of the political powers.

This? This is what Christians celebrate and commemorate? This is the kind of king they honour? How confounding.

How completely confusing. And it's so confusing because we say the good news is that this king dies in this way.

[4 : 51] And it doesn't make any sense how this could be good news. It would make much more sense if we celebrated his healings, his power over demons, even his teachings on Good Friday.

Those are kingly things. We can understand and honour that kind of king. And certainly for much of Jesus' life, that seems to be the kind of king he is.

But instead, we focus on the very end of his life, when everything seems lost. And that seems upside down.

It feels like celebrating the final year of Steve Jobs' life, when he was ravaged by cancer and looked so tired and thin, rather than celebrating his famous keynote speeches, or his achievements of inventing the iPad and the iPod and the iPhone.

But Mark makes it clear, this is where the focus should lie. In Mark chapter 15, Jesus is referred to as king at least six times.

[5 : 54] We only heard it three times in our Bible reading, but if you read the whole chapter, it's six times. In one chapter. Are you the king of the Jews? Pilate asks.

Hail, king of the Jews! The soldiers call out to him. The written notice says, king of the Jews. And so on. Now, if you were to read the rest of Mark, not a single time does Mark ever call Jesus king.

But now, in the chapter about his death, he is named as such over and over again. Mark is insisting, this is where we discover how Jesus is truly king.

So let's take him at his word. Let's explore what kind of king Jesus is really. What kind of king does Mark 15 show Jesus to be?

And the very first thing that jumps out at us, I think, is that he's the king of fools. By that, I mean he's the most humiliated one of all.

[7 : 01] There's no doubting his humiliation, is there? Mark seems to focus on it, more so than any physical pain that he's enduring. Look at him.

The soldiers do treat him as a king of sorts. They bring him to a palace, verse 16, most likely the courtyard of Herod's palace. Herod is the local ruler of that time. So he's at a royal place.

He has the praetorium with him, who are like the Roman equivalent of the secret service, the best personal bodyguards they have. In verse 17, they lay a purple robe on him.

Purple is the most expensive and prestigious of the ancient dyes, and it was royalty who typically wore them. And then he gets a crown. Well, not only that, he gets a military salute.

Hail, king of the Jews. That's the kind of declaration that Caesar, the emperor, gets. Hail, Caesar. And then verse 18, they fall to the anise and pay homage to him.

[8 : 07] So Jesus is treated as a king. Kind of. Except, of course, we all know that they're simply mocking him.

It's a cruel parody. It's a soap opera that the soldiers are fashioning for their own amusement. For he's at the palace courtyard, not as a royal visitor, but as a lowly prisoner.

His crown is a crown of thorns. It's very Spikes, meant to serve as a reminder that he's not Caesar, who would have worn a laurel wreath during gatherings celebrating a victory.

And by giving him this crown, they are mocking his apparent defeat. And look at the way they pay homage to him. Verse 19. They strike him on the head with a staff.

They spit on him. And verse 20, they pay their ultimate homage. They lead him to be crucified. In verse 25, we find once again the title, King of the Jews, spelled out.

[9 : 20] But this is no sign announcing a coronation. It is a sign announcing why the person is being punished. It is the written account of the accusation against Jesus that he claims to be the king of the Jews.

But he is treated as the king of fools. They laugh at him. They insult him. And then they punish him.

Indeed, he does not even stop when he is on the cross. Look at verses 27 to 32. While Jesus is hanging there, it seems like every group goes out of their way to mock him.

They are the passers, passersby's. Verse 29. Those who pass by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, So, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself.

And the word that is translated hurled insults at him is actually a stronger word. It's actually blaspheme. In other words, they were saying words of evil to Jesus, the kind of words that you would throw at God when you don't really believe in him, but you oppose him.

[10 : 38] It's hate speech in the truest sense. And then there's the Jewish leaders. Verse 31. In the same way, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves.

He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross so that we may see and believe.

Here is unbelief in the strongest sense. They think of him as a fool because he doesn't save himself. After all, who in their right mind, who supposedly has the ability, wouldn't escape if he could from this instrument of torture?

Which king wouldn't want to live to fight another day against his enemies? This is the King of Fools who says he can save others, but if he can't even do anything for himself, how is he going to do anything for others?

And the Jewish leaders think of themselves as in control. Calm down, they say, that we may believe. They sneer at him.

[11 : 55] Fulfill our conditions and then maybe we'll pay you some attention. Bend to our will. That's what they're saying. But they're really mocking him.

And then to literally add insult to injury, even the criminals alongside Jesus throw insults at him. Verse 32. Those crucified with him also heap insults on him.

These are people who are also on crosses, who are being executed for their crimes, and yet they see themselves as morally superior to Jesus. Now we know from Luke, another one of Jesus' followers, that eventually, it appears that one of them seems to have reconsidered what he was doing.

But Mark simply wants to show us that when Jesus initially goes to the cross, everyone mocks him, even the criminals. Everybody regarded him as the king of fools, Gentile soldiers, and Jewish leaders alike.

He has no friends. Everyone is united against him. But there's something deeper going on.

[13 : 13] Because as we look a bit closer at this story, we begin to notice something. Mark is very, very specific with his details. Now it could be that Mark is just a very detail-oriented reporter, but I don't think that's all that's going on.

There's the mocking and spitting that we've heard about already in verses 16 to 20, for instance. And when we hear that, immediately, if we had been reading the rest of Mark's Gospel beforehand, we would recall that this is exactly what Jesus predicted back in chapter 10, verse 33 to 34.

Speaking of himself, he had predicted that he would be condemned and handed over to the Gentiles who will mock him and spit on him, flog him, and kill him.

And that's exactly what happened. Not just generally, but down to the specific detail. We didn't hear of the flogging in our Bible reading, but it happens in Mark chapter 15, verse 15.

And so Jesus seems to know exactly what is going to happen to him. He's anticipated it. And Mark is showing us things are going exactly according to how Jesus said it was going to be.

[14 : 38] The one who looks powerless is ensuring that it's all going according to plan. But the question remains, if he knows, why didn't he stop it?

Why plan it this way? Maybe he still is the king of fools, not just humiliated, but the most foolish person in the universe.

But there's something deeper going on because there's a deeper story at work. As Jesus is being mocked and crucified, he's not just fulfilling his own prediction.

He understands very well, as Mark shows, that he is actually fulfilling a bigger story. In our second Bible reading this morning that Deverage read really well from Psalm 22, we heard about a psalm written by King David, Jesus' ancestor, in which he expresses deep distress and suffering.

In Psalm 22, verse 6 to 8, King David is scorned by everyone, despised by the people. He is mocked and insulted. He trusts in the Lord, they say, verse 8.

[15 : 58] Let the Lord rescue him, let him deliver him, since he delights him. And then down in Psalm 22, verse 17 to 18, we read this. My bones are on display.

People stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. Is that sounding more and more familiar?

Isn't that Jesus' literal experience? We've already seen the insults. But now come back with me to Mark chapter 15, verse 24.

Dividing up his clothes, the soldiers cast lots to see what each would get. You see, just like David, Jesus has become the righteous sufferer.

But here's the big thing Mark wants us to get. That's only half of the story. In the last section of the psalm, there is a turning point.

[17 : 01] God has not abandoned David. God will save. Indeed, the last part of the psalm celebrates God's victory and vindication of David. Let's just take one verse, Psalm 22, verse 24.

For he, that's God, has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one. He has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help.

Well, David knows he's going to have a happy ending. He knows that God has everything in his hand. And if the God who stands behind David is the same God who stands behind Jesus, then we know his suffering isn't the end of the story.

What God did for David, God will do for Jesus. What God did for David, God will do for Jesus. And Jesus knows that.

He's going to win. That's what we'll hear about in today's time. And so the question becomes, who's the fool now? Is it Jesus who knows the end of the story?

[18 : 14] Or is it the Gentiles who have prematurely mocked Jesus without knowing the end of the story? Is it the Jews who should know the end of the story but refuse to believe it?

The answer, I hope, is becoming obvious. Rather than being the king of fools, the most foolish person in the universe, Jesus is actually the king to fools.

The king to fools. We heard it in our first Bible reading this morning. The fool says in his heart, there is no God.

And in Mark chapter 15, we discover that's everybody by the way they react to King Jesus. The fool isn't so much the one who doesn't believe in the existence of God.

The fool is the one who denies God can be God. The fool is the one who thinks that God has lost control. Or God has become foolish. Or God doesn't actually care how they treat him or others.

[19 : 23] The fool is the one who thinks he knows God and his story without consulting the author. And Mark chapter 15 delivers the verdict.

We are all fools. Practical, down-to-earth men like soldiers laugh at Jesus and crucify him. Intellectual, religious people like the Jewish leaders mock Jesus and call him a liar.

Carefree and impulsive people like the criminals think that they're better than Jesus. And even non-religious people, the passerbys, the free thinkers of their day have to stop and offer their negative opinions of Jesus.

They all think in one way or another that God has failed. They think that they know better than God. And Mark says that's us.

We're all fools. I was a fool. Why? Because I think I know better than God. Although I was made to know God to enjoy his very blessing and to be his image to the world, I naturally did not want to acknowledge God but do things my way.

[20 : 41] And I said there is no God and thought that freed me to pursue whatever I wanted whether that's my pleasure or my career or sexual desire.

but actually instead of having no God those things became gods. And Mark in agreement with the psalmist says that's everybody.

No one seeks the true God or have turned away and as a result became enslaved by other gods. And Mark shows us the result of doing that.

in verse 33 darkness comes over the whole land. Well this is no solar eclipse. In the Old Testament darkness covering the land is a sign of judgment.

Now I'm sure that many of you will have experienced what absolute darkness is like. There are probably many parts of Sarawak today that you can still go to where there are no streetlights or any other kinds of light and you experience total darkness.

[21 : 53] You can't even see the hand in front of your face. I remember a long time ago being in the wind cave and having that experience. I don't know if it's still like that. And it has a completely disorientating effect.

You can't figure out where it's up or down left or right. And there's not only disorientation but isolation. You can't see anyone around you.

You don't know who's there and who's not there. You can't have a face-to-face conversation with anybody. And the effects of God's judgment is like that.

That's probably why darkness is chosen as the sign of judgment. If God is the king, the center, the orienting point of our lives, it's no surprise that when we abandon him, when we deny his right to be God, we get disorientated and isolated.

We live in darkness. In the beginning, God, when God created, he said, let there be light. And then he brought order into the universe. And to move to darkness is in a sense to move from that order back into the chaos of uncreation.

[23 : 17] But if that's the bad news, we now finally come to the very heart of the good news. For you probably noticed that I haven't actually answered the question yet.

Why didn't Jesus stop himself from going to the cross? Why did he choose to suffer like a king of fools, fools, if he was indeed the king to fools?

Well, here's the answer. Because he's the king for fools. He's the king for fools. That's the last part of our story today.

For as darkness comes over the land and God's judgment is being poured out, something else is going on. As those who are fools, we should be on the receiving end of God's judgment.

But that's not what happens because we're not the ones on the cross. Jesus is. He's the one absorbing God's judgment. We know that because in verse 34, he's the one who cries out, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[24 : 32] You see, he's echoing King David in Psalm 22 so that we don't have to. Those words never have to be ours. That's why he goes through all the mocking and the insults.

That's why he stayed silent and even rejected the wine with mirth, which would have acted as a painkiller of sorts. That's why he went to be crucified.

It's so that he can become the king of fools to be the king for fools. for you and for me.

He's chosen to be the substitute, taking God's judgment for you and for me. Just last Friday, in France, there was a gunman who stormed into a supermarket and took some hostages.

You might have heard about it on the news. And a policeman called Arno Beltram was one of the first to respond. And as he and his colleagues negotiated with the gunman to release the hostages, he offered to exchange places with the final hostage.

[25 : 44] To rescue his fellow human being, he took his place. And it cost him his life. Later on, he died in a crossfire.

And his colleagues honoured his sacrifice with this statement. Colonel Beltram gave his life for the freedom of the hostages.

And that is exactly what King Jesus did on the cross. He gave his life so we might go free. He exchanged places with us.

We need to understand that when we come to the cross and look at him hanging on this piece of wood, we have to say to him, what happened to you, Lord Jesus, is what should have happened to me.

This is the great exchange. And as he died, we're suddenly told this strange detail in verse 38. The curtain of the temple was torn into from top to bottom.

[26 : 51] And that's Mark's way of telling us, you are free to approach God again. You are free to dance like a fool in the presence of the Creator.

Darkness has turned to light. The curtain that represented the barrier between us and God is gone. It's torn. Why?

Do you remember what the Jewish leader said earlier? he saved others because he can't save himself. Well, let's modify that a bit.

He saved others because he didn't save himself. That's what Jesus did for you and for me.

He saved others because he didn't save himself. himself. He lived through the experience of God forsakenness so that we might experience once again the warmth of God's embrace.

[27 : 55] He chose to become isolated so that we might never be excluded from God. Those words of Jesus, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We will never have to be ours if we trust in him.

this is Jesus the King. This is what he has done. Can you see? This is the good news of Christianity.

This is the good of Good Friday. But do you see? For at the end of the story, we find one more response and for once, it's not an insult.

Verse 39. And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the son of God.

You see, this man is no fool. As the king dies, instead of saying, there is no God, he says, behold our God. Is that your response today?

[28 : 59] This is our God. Christianity is the only religious faith in the whole wide world to say that God has actually suffered on our behalf. Christianity says Christ the king came up close and personal to people who rejected and hated him and died for them.

He orchestrated things in such a way that it turned out exactly as he planned and he chose to go to the cross. He reconciles guilty people with their past, not simply by sweeping their past under the carpet, but by burying them and carrying their sins far away.

This is how he loves you. This is the good of good Friday. And the question is, do you see?

You might call yourself a Christian today because you come from a Christian family or Christian long house, but that doesn't fit the Bible's definition of a true Christian.

To be a true Christian, you must see that apart from God, you are completely disorientated. You and I are fools, and you and I deserve the very judgment of God.

[30 : 19] But if you see that Jesus is the one who reorients your entire life by exchanging places with you so that you can go free, well, if you see and accept that, well, you are a true Christian.

And you will live your whole life by this truth. You wouldn't be merely religious like the Jewish leaders going to church every Sunday and that's it. You wouldn't be merely a passerby where God is of no concern to you 99% of the time.

You wouldn't be like those standing around the cross thinking he's calling Elijah, showing a complete lack of understanding. Instead, you would live a life abandoned to Christ, a life that makes you look like a fool to the world, but wise to God.

For if we are Christians, that's what the cross calls us to. It calls us to a life where we pay true homage to Jesus, not by spitting and mocking him, but by worshipping him.

he calls us to an obedience that flows from faith. You know that French policeman I told you about earlier? Well, it's no surprise to discover that he was a Christian.

[31 : 37] His own mother said that as soon as she heard that a policeman had exchanged places with a hostage, she knew it was her own son. For that's what Christians do, follow the way of the cross.

But as the theologian Dietrich von Haifa puts it, we must always remember it is only because he became like us that we can become like him.

The way of the cross is possible only because of the fact of the cross. So never ever lose the wonder of the cross. As Christians we must be like little children who as soon as they hear the story finish want to hear it again.

As King David said centuries earlier he has done it. It is finished. So let's go pour out our lives in worship to our King knowing that he is with us always to the end of this age.

Let's take a few seconds now to reflect on what we just heard and then I'll say a short prayer and we will sing our final song. Father this good Friday we come again astonished at what you have done.

[33 : 19] Lord your very foolishness is wiser than our wisdom and Father we thank you that you chose to send your son to be the king of fools so that he might be a king to fools and a king for fools as he exchanges places with us.

help us to be grateful for this great exchange and help us to pour out our lives in obedience to him to walk the way of the cross.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.