

THE CROSS AND THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Mark 15.21-41

In May 2023, Charles was crowned king of England. He arrived in the “state coach”, was presented with one of the world’s largest diamonds, and was the focal point of elaborate pageantry. During the ceremony, the Archbishop of Canterbury chose as his theme that the king, like Jesus, came to serve others. This is the problem we face.

It is common in our time to conflate power and office with authority. We see the abuse of power and then become suspicious of influence and authority in general.

Let’s think of the differences between these following definitions:

Authority as a right to act due to an office or position.

Authority as a power or influence derived from reputation or respect.

All four gospels make mention of a sign placed above Jesus on the cross that read, “King of the Jews” (Matthew 27.37; Luke 23.38; John 19.19-22). It was common for Romans to place the charge above the head of those they condemned.

The corrupt office holders miss Jesus

Neither the Romans nor the Jews believed that Jesus was a king. We learn from John’s gospel that the sign was authorized by Pilate (John 19.19).

The Romans created the sign to mock the Jews. This is why the Jewish establishment objected to the sign (John 19.21).

Up to this point, those in positions of power (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, the Roman governor, King Herod) have acted out of jealousy. They have lied, cheated, and mocked. This reinforces our suspicion of power as a right to act from position.

The people in positions of power have no positive influence in the long term. They use their offices to kill Jesus. In the end, they suffer a terrible fate and legacy.

That Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the creeds is a stunning reminder of his complicity in Jesus’ death and of accountability for actions.

Jesus exercised true authority on the Cross

The way that Jesus suffered won the souls of those who watched Him. It had to do with the way that Jesus suffered. He persuaded people with grace while under pressure. It is his lack of intimidation before the corrupt officials.

Simon of Cyrene and his sons, Alexander and Rufus, probably became followers of Jesus (Mark 15.21). Had they not, their names would have been meaningless to the Markan community.

We know from the other Gospels that one of the condemned thieves came to believe in Jesus (Luke 23.39-43).

The centurion, facing Jesus, made what seems to be a sincere declaration of Jesus' identity (Mark 15.39).

The women who followed Jesus never abandoned Him (Mark 15.40-41).

Jesus still wins souls by the message of His vicarious suffering. In the events of Easter, the same Jesus who gave His life holds all power and authority.

Key Idea: May the Church exercise Christ-like influence.

The office holders abused their power from their positions. They have neither lasting authority nor influence.

Jesus exercised authority derived from His character exhibited through suffering. He has influenced more people than anyone in history.

As Christians this side of heaven, we should think about the nature of Jesus' influence and authority. Are we striving for offices and power as the world thinks of it? Let's think about influencing people from a posture of sacrifice, weakness, and Christian character.