



## Dear Friends,

I was sitting in a cafe earlier this week reading the Bible with a friend from church. We were looking at Mark 15. It recounts the death of Jesus.

What struck me from the passage was the number of times it speaks of Jesus as king (15:2,9,12,18,26,32). None of those verses says anything positive about Jesus as king. He's either accused for claiming to be "the king of the Jews," dressed up as a king only to be mocked by soldiers, or he is ridiculed by on-lookers for claiming to save others but couldn't save himself. Pilate also placed a sign on the cross that read, "King of the Jews." It's an ironic sign. Jesus looks nothing like a king while hanging from the cross.

And yet, the passage concludes with the words of a Roman centurion who stood in front of Jesus as he writhed in pain and spiritual anguish before finally dying. The centurion declares, "Surely this man was the Son of God" (15:39).

What could the Roman centurion see that most people missed about Jesus, including his male disciples? Surprisingly, many of Jesus' female disciples were still with him to the end (40-41). But their male counterparts are nowhere to be seen. They "deserted him and fled" (Mark 14:50).

While my friend and I were discussing the passage, a man from a nearby table approached and spoke to us. He said something like, "I overheard you two speaking about religion and politics. Don't believe what religion tells you. Believe in your own higher power, in love and honesty."

After he offered us his thoughts, I wondered if he had seen our Bibles open in front of us. What was he trying to say? I wasn't sure. If I had told him I was a Presbyterian minister, how would he have responded? What were his views about the Bible?

This man's interruption to share his thoughts about his scepticism toward organised religion and to invite my friend and I to do the same made me think about my response to the story of Jesus' passion in Mark 15. In that passage, almost everyone is blind to who Jesus truly is. Pilate is sceptical. The Jewish leaders are hostile and reject Jesus as king. The soldiers ridicule him. People passing by taunt Jesus. His male followers either betray or deny Jesus or go missing.

It never ceases to astound me that a Roman centurion sees what most people cannot. He sees that Jesus is the Son of God. I'm not sure this hardened Gentile soldier understood the full meaning of his words. But what he says becomes God's word by the Spirit who inspired the gospel writer, Mark to record his declaration about who Jesus truly is.

Going back to that bloke who interrupted us, I wondered if he was biased toward the kind of Christianity to which I belonged? His words made me think about my own biases. What keeps me from seeing Jesus for who he reveals himself to be, instead of who I want Jesus to be?

I am just as tempted as the next person to want Jesus on my own terms. If Jesus says or does things that don't meet my expectations of what God's king should be like, do I ignore him?

This experience has helped me realise – if I feel comfortable with who Jesus is and what he says, so that he does not challenge my beliefs and way of life, I have to ask, what am I missing? What are my biases? Where are my blind spots?

I pray that God will show me my heart to reveal my biases and blind spots so that I trust and follow Jesus on his terms, and not mine.

I wonder whether you might do the same?

God Bless,  
Mark Adams