Introduction
If you already read the chapter for this week in the book, you read about a 1963 study done at Yale University. Stanley Milgram invited people to come in off the street to take part in a scientific investigation. They were paid 4 dollars for one hour in which they were set in front of gauges and dials and told to deliver shocks when someone in the other room gave wrong answers to questions they were asked. Now participants could not see the respondents, but they could hear them.

What the researchers wanted to find out was to see how far people would go if an authority figure told them they must go on increasing the force of the shock until it reached fatal levels. In reality, no one was shocked, but participants would hear screaming when a shock was “administered.” They discovered 65% of the participants were willing to increase electricity to 450 volts, despite the cries of pain coming from the other person. Even after the other person was silent, many continued to obey the authorities who told them they must complete the experiment. 65% of people off the street.

Consider this as we walk spend some time in the torture and humiliation of Jesus. Today, we’ll be reading from Mark 15, which I invite you to turn to. However, if you read other accounts of these same events in other gospels, you will find the details of Jesus’ torture and humiliation differ in different gospels, in some cases significantly. Luke does not include any flogging. John does not include Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross beam. This may be because the various gospel writers had different information, or chose to emphasize different aspects of the suffering. It is possible they interpreted the events slightly differently. The fact that we have four different accounts adds to the richness of our understanding of Jesus’ passion. Invite God to help you see and understand the passion of Christ as you read these accounts each day. With that, let us read together the account in Mark 15, starting in verse 15:

15 He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. 16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and
they forced him to carry the cross. Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

Jesus Flogged
Now we hear these events time and again this time of year. We saw them visually represented quite graphically in the movie *The Passion of Christ*, and while we are familiar with the accounts, how much do we really know about what is going on. First, we read of Jesus being flogged. Thankfully, we are not terribly familiar with what flogging is. Our society has pretty much done away with this practice, and while I do not want revel in the violence of these actions, we still should know what Jesus experienced during this final day.

Flogging was the choice of physical torture of the day. The main tool: a whip. Over time, the style and form have changed, but for the Romans they used a leather whip braided with bits of stone, metal, glass, bone, or flesh. There were some variations that would cause greater amounts of pain if desired. This tool was deftly handled by trained bodyguards who specialized in inflicting pain, and this truly was the purpose of flogging. It was not meant to kill, quite the opposite. The purpose of flogging was to inflict as much PAIN as possible WITHOUT KILLING the victim. The reading for the week quotes an historian, Eusebius, who writes of the practice, “the sufferer’s veins were laid bare and the very muscles and tendons and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.” This is what Jesus endured for the sake of humanity. This is what he did for you and for me. I wonder if these words of Isaiah were floating through Jesus’ head as he endured the flogging, “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting,” (Isaiah 50:6) Still, after all of this, we are not finished with the torture and humiliation of Jesus.

Jesus Mocked
After physically destroying Jesus, his captors went for his heart. Adam Hamilton brings up an interesting point in his discussion of the events. He writes, “Jesus did not beg for mercy...that no doubt angered the soldiers administering his punishment. They were not content to tear his flesh; they decided to ... break his spirit.” Here we find our “coronation” of Jesus as “King of the Jews.” Of course, this was a complete mockery of who Jesus was. Matthew 27 describes these events well, “Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns...
and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”

So hundreds of soldiers, not the handful you may see in the movies, hundreds decide show this Jesus how much of a King he really is. They take Jesus, strip him down, bloodied, beaten, and exposed. Then hold a coronation! [pic of Jesus] They put a robe on him, which probably did not cover more than his back. That’s not enough, though, a king needs a crown. They fasten one out of thorns that parodied the royal laurel wreath of the emperor. Place it on his head, and then push it in so it digs into his skin. They even give him a mock scepter and mock the shouts the greeted Jesus only 5 days earlier when he entered Jerusalem, “HAIL KING OF THE JEWS! HAIL!” Then the game truly began as they beat him with the very “scepter” they gave him. It is indeed a humiliation of the grossest kind.

This in fact was probably an act of mercy on Pilate’s part. If you read carefully in Luke and John, you see Pilate doing all he can to avoid killing Jesus. After all, he says he finds no fault in him. Perhaps if he inflicts enough pain and humiliation, the Jewish leaders won’t fear him so much. Perhaps then he can avoid this whole mess. Sadly it is not enough, and the crowd calls for his crucifixion all the more, and through it all, we see the depths of evil humanity is capable of doing.

Evil in All of Us.
The evil afflicting Jesus begins with the betrayal of a friend, followed by the abandonment of the most of the rest of his followers, continues with beatings, torture, and humiliation of Jewish leaders and the Romans, and only ends with his death. This is the evil that lead Nazi soldiers to fulfill Hitler’s “Final Solution” to the Jewish “problem” in death and work camps. It is an evil that is in each one of us.

Remember the experiment I told you about earlier. 65% of the participants were willing to increase electricity to 450 volts, despite the cries of pain coming from the other person. Hamilton describes another in 1971 by Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University. They transformed the basement of the psychology building into a temporary prison. They gathered 24 students and randomly assigned 12 to be prisoners and 12 to be guards. The plan was to observe the guards for 14 days, but the experiment did not last half that. After 6 days, they had no choice but to end it as student guards fulfilled their roles so enthusiastically that they began to hurt and oppress their
prisoners: their fellow students. They had forgotten it was just an experiment. These are not Nazi trained soldiers or Roman occupiers. Students capable of such acts that were not all together dissimilar from what Jesus experienced. It is a severe message to us to be weary of condemning evil we see in others too quickly. It is an evil in us, and that is the point of recounting these events every year.

What’s the point?
The point is not condemn all of humanity for the mistakes past, present, and future. Behind all of this remembering and mourning and deep conviction is the reminder of just how much God’s grace AND mercy costed... NOT US but the Triune GOD we worship.

There is real brokenness in humanity. It is revealed by how the disciples reacted in these 24 hours we are recounting throughout this series. One disciple denies knowing Jesus. Another betrays Jesus to his enemies. Others fall asleep or flee when Jesus needs them most. This brokenness is revealed in the actions of the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers. It is revealed when atrocities like the Holocaust happen. It is revealed when we discover the depravity within each of us through studies like those we learned about today. Still what God seeks is not condemnation. Condemnation leads us no where. There is no redemption of the condemned. Instead, God uses these actions here to rightly convict us for the purpose of taken an internal inventory and recognizing just how much we need the forgiveness, grace, and mercy God offers. The suffering of Jesus Christ is of such an extent that how can we not be moved by it? How can we not see and hear what happen and not beg for the very forgiveness God freely offers. But not only forgiveness, but we should be moved to turn away from the evils of our past, both individually and collectively, towards the repentant heart and mind God desired in humanity from the moment sin entered into the world.

Jesus suffered all of this to remind us how broken humanity was and is and will be without Him. It also reminds us of the kind of love and affection God has for each one of us. He is willing to do whatever it takes to wake us up from the evils within to move us to the good we are also capable of doing through the power of the Holy Spirit within each of us. It is a sacrificial love that demands a RESPONSE. The question is what are we going to do with it?

Conclusion
Even before that, ask yourself, what have you done with it until now? Have you been so changed by the events of this time of year that you have gone out and shared that change with others? If not, then ask yourself why you
are here in the first place? I wonder how often we come here out of habit and routine instead of devotion and desire. I know I’ve done it, and then I am reminded how much was given up for me to experience what I do here not only on Sundays, but throughout the week, and I feel guilty regarding my response. Each one of us needs to ask ourselves periodically, why we are here?

I wonder if it was a questioned asked by someone else along the journey Jesus was taken. It may have been the very thing running through the mind of Simon as he participated in his yearly routine of coming to Jerusalem for the Passover, except this year would be drastically different. As Jesus is lead to his crucifixion, we read Simon is picked out of the crowd when Jesus is no longer able to carry his cross bar. However, Adam Hamilton points out some clues that what happened on this day had lasting effects on the life of Simon and his family.

You see in Mark we find mention of not only Simon, but that he is the father of Alexander and Rufus, which would be strange unless the people Mark is writing to is familiar with them. Another clue is in Romans 16, when Paul again mentions Rufus. Perhaps it is the same Rufus, and if there is a familiarity of Simon’s children to the people Mark and Paul write to, then we can infer that Simon experienced the very transformation Jesus was after during these 24 hours, the same transformation he wants us to experience. 30 plus years later, Simon’s children are active in the very church founded by the man who’s cross he carried. He followed Jesus on that day so long ago and never stopped.

This is the desire and purpose of the torture and humiliation Jesus suffered to move us to such a transformation that we would never be the same. That change should not only change us, but those around us. So perhaps another question worth considering is who are you changing? Has Jesus so revolutionized your life that you are taking that revolution to others? Are you bringing others here to experience that revolution? These are the questions that Jesus begs us to consider in the wake of his suffering. He does not desire us to feel sorry for him or for ourselves. He desires transformation. That is why we desire so strongly here to reach out to the community, to create a space that can impact our community, to consider the needs of the community. The simple fact is that Jesus went to such lengths to suffer to give humanity a wake up call it would never forget. And if we are not transformed by these events, if we are not transforming those around us then we missed the point. Jesus suffered for nothing, and his sacrifice fell on deaf hearts. Are our hearts listening to what Jesus did? Are our bodies acting on it? Are our friends, families, and communities changed by it?