

“The Crucifixion”

February 19, 2017

Mark 15:16-32

I. Introduction

The early hours of that Friday, that we call Good Friday, were a whirlwind of activity. As we have already seen, Jesus’ supposed trial consisted of two phases, a Jewish phase and a Roman phase. During the Jewish phase of His trial, Jesus was interrogated by Annas ([John 18:19-24](#)), put on trial by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin ([Mark 14:55-65](#)), and then officially sentenced by the Sanhedrin after daybreak early Friday morning ([Mark 15:1](#)). The Roman phase began with Pilate ([Mark 15:1-5](#)), who several times declared Jesus to be innocent ([Matthew 27:19, 24](#); [Mark 15:14](#); [Luke 23:14-15](#); [John 18:38](#); [19:4, 6](#)). When he learned that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who ruled over that part of Israel. As we saw last week in [Luke 23:8-12](#), Herod soon dressed Jesus in an “**elegant robe**” and then he and his soldiers mocked and ridiculed Him. Because he couldn’t get anything out of Jesus, Herod sent Him back to Pilate. Pilate then tried to use a custom of releasing a condemned criminal of the people’s choice to release Jesus ([Mark 15:6-10](#)), but his scheme backfired as the people, at the instigation of the Jewish leaders, demanded that Barabbas be set free instead ([Mark 15:11-13](#)). Afraid for his job and for his life, Pilate gave in and “**handed him, i.e. Jesus, over to be crucified**” ([Mark 15:15](#)).

None of the gospel writers recorded the details of the crucifixion. In that day, crucifixion was a common form of capital punishment. From the 4th century BC until the death of Jesus and after, tens of thousands died by crucifixion at the hands of the Persians, Greeks, and Romans, so a detailed description of the horrors of crucifixion was unnecessary. What the gospel writers did emphasize were the incidents around the crucifixion, including the mockery of Jesus that occurred throughout His trial. From Annas and the courtyard of Caiaphas to the judgment hall of Pilate to the cross itself, Jesus was continually treated with scorn and derision. [1 Peter 2:23](#) says that “**When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**” In his description of Jesus’ crucifixion and His shameful treatment, Mark focused on those who mocked Jesus, beginning with the mocking soldiers.

II. Jesus’ Shameful Treatment

A. The Mocking Soldiers Having yielded to the Jewish leadership, Pilate gave the condemned Jesus to his soldiers to be scourged or flogged and then crucified. So “**the soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium).**” Here Jesus was flogged with the lash which consisted of several

leathers thongs plaited with pieces of bone, lead, or bronze. This beating would cause significant blood loss and critically weaken the victim—sometimes even resulting in death.

After the flogging, the soldiers called together the whole company or cohort of soldiers (a full cohort consisted of 600 hundred soldiers) who joined in the mockery. Jesus' face was already battered and swollen from being hit repeatedly and his back was lacerated, cut to ribbons, but this didn't stop the soldiers from their taunts. In order to give an appearance of royalty, **"they put a purple robe on Him."** This was probably an old, faded outer cloak that was part of a Roman's soldier's uniform. Originally, it had been scarlet but over time it had faded to purple. Improvising with what they had at hand and imitating the laurel wreath worn by Caesar, the soldiers had **"twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him."** **Matthew 27:29** adds that **"they put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him."** They completed their charade by calling out to Him, **"Hail, king of the Jews!"** 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."** Days earlier Jesus had predicted this—**turn to Mark 10:33-34.** **Isaiah 50:6** had also predicted this: **"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."** The ridicule of the soldiers expressed their contempt for the Jews as much as it did for Jesus. Officially, the Jews had no king after the death of Herod the Great; in the eyes of the soldiers, this pitiful, weak figure was the kind of king they deserved. **"Then they led him out to crucify him."** The Mosaic Law required that executions be performed outside the city (**Numbers 15:35**), so Jesus was taken outside. Here we see . . .

B. Jesus' Suffering According to the law, the condemned had to carry his cross, or at least the cross beam, to the place of his execution, and Jesus was no exception. **John 19:16-17** says that He left Pilate's hall bearing His cross, but was unable to carry it the whole way—He had been weakened by the sleeplessness, blood loss, and the severe injuries inflicted on Him during His beatings and floggings. So to keep things moving, the soldiers *"drafted"* Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross in Jesus' place.

Simon, like many others, was in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. He was from the port city of Cyrene located on the North African coast in present-day Libya. Most likely, his name is remembered because he later became a Christian. Mark identified Simon as the father of Rufus and Alexander. Perhaps Mark mentioned the names of his two sons (who had no part in the story) because they were known to the original readers of his Gospel because of their activity in the church in Rome. Paul mentioned a Rufus and his mother in **Romans 16:13**. It would seem that Simon had come to Jerusalem

to celebrate Passover and ended up meeting the Passover Lamb and embraced Him in saving faith, as did his wife and sons.

On the way to the crucifixion site, Jesus gave a final public message—[turn to Luke 23:27-31](#). Jesus' words to these weeping women (many who were most likely professional mourners, like those in [Mark 5:38-40](#)) was a prophetic warning of the destruction that would come to Jerusalem in AD 70. It also was a warning of the coming destruction of the great Tribulation that will occur at the end of the age ([Mark 13:6-37](#)).

The procession ended at “the place called Golgotha (which means ‘the place of the skull’).” Located outside the city gates, along a major highway, and possibly on a hill, so that the crucified victims would be visible to anyone walking past, Golgotha was a site where crucifixions were regularly performed. The Aramaic word “*Golgotha*” means “*skull*”; in Latin the word for *skull* is “*calvaria*,” from which the word “*Calvary*” is derived. Some scholars believe that the place was so named because it was located on a hill that looked like a skull. Others feel that this was just the name of the place for executions. No one knows the exact place Jesus was crucified—this isn’t particularly important. What is important is that Jesus+ was crucified outside the city walls and that He died for the sins of the world.

It was customary for the victims to be given a narcotic to help deaden the pain, so “they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, a mild narcotic.” The executioners weren’t showing compassion, they wanted to give the victim a spurt of energy so that he would last longer and suffer more. “But he, i.e. Jesus, did not take it.” Wanting to maintain full awareness as He completed His atoning work, Jesus refused to drink it.

In three Greek words, Mark related what happened next, Καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτόν; “And they crucified Him.” It wasn’t the purpose of any of the gospel writers to arouse pity for Jesus but to assure our faith in Him. Most of their readers had seen crucifixions, so any details weren’t necessary anyway. Psalm 22, a psalm of David, is a description of some of Jesus’ agonies on the cross—[turn to Psalm 22:12-18](#). As David had prophesied, after securing Jesus to the cross, the soldiers divided “up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.” After distributing His clothing among themselves, the soldiers posted a watch around the cross. The squad, called a *quaternion* because it consisted of 4 guards, was required to stay until the crucified victim was dead, keeping anyone away who might try to rescue or ease the suffering of the condemned criminal. Mark recorded that “it was the 3rd hour” (or 9 AM) “when they crucified him.”

Above the heads of the crucified victims, wooden boards were placed that listed their crimes. In the case of Jesus, “the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.” A comparison of all four gospels reveals that the full inscription was, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” John 19:20 says, “The sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.” The Jewish leaders had brought several charges against Jesus, but Pilate had listed the one that would be the most offensive to them. Unknowingly, but fulfilling Scripture, Pilate had Jesus crucified like a common criminal along with 2 robbers, “one on his right and one on his left.”

C. The Mocking Spectators Finally, there were the mocking spectators, led by the Jewish leaders. Not satisfied with having Jesus crucified, the Jewish leaders went out to mock Him and to fan the flames of hate and abuse in the “common” people. “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!’” Those who had screamed earlier for Jesus’ death joined the religious leaders in following Jesus to the site of His execution. As they “passed by,” they “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 off the cross and save yourself!’”

In their hatred and pride, envy and jealousy, the mocking spectators continued their harassment and abuse of Jesus. In Psalm 22:7-8 David had prophesied, “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ‘He trusts in the LORD,’ they say, ‘let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.’” In spite of all the miracles Jesus had done, the love He had shown, and the things He had taught, they refused to believe in Him. Even after He rose from the dead three days later, the chief priests and teachers of the law would not believe. Instead, they bribed the Roman soldiers to spread lies about what happened, claiming the disciples stole Jesus’ body (Matt. 28:11-15). No miracle would have persuaded them to believe. They loved their sin too much.

III. Conclusion

In the midst of all this anger, hatred, and fear, we see the love, mercy, and grace of God. God the Father could have destroyed the mockers on the spot and rescued His Son from the cross. Instead, as Isaiah 53:10 says, “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.” As Jesus said in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The crucifixion of Jesus Christ wasn’t an accident; it was God’s plan; 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Because of Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice, all who place their faith in Him, i.e. make Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior, will be saved from divine wrath and have

eternal life; John wrote in [John 20:31](#), “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

There is no doubt that the cross is one of the most horrible forms of death devised by man. So by dying on the cross, Jesus demonstrated how much God hates sin. At the same time, by dying on the cross, Jesus demonstrated how much God loves us. [2 Peter 3:9](#) says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” God is love, but He is also a God of justice and in [Hebrews 9:22](#) we read, “The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” That’s why Jesus died on the cross—as [1 Timothy 1:15](#) says, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

There is only one way to be saved from an eternity in hell—as Paul told the Philippian jailor in [Acts 16:31](#), “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” If you have believed, if you have made Jesus your Lord and Savior, then the cross is something to cherish—the Lamb of God gave His life for you. You have eternal life. When it comes time to leave this earthly existence, you will be in heaven with the One who died for you. This story of Jesus’ death is a story of victory and celebration.

On the other hand, if you haven’t believed, if you haven’t made Jesus your Lord and Savior, the cross means nothing to you. It is just an offensive way to kill people. But more than that, this story of Jesus’ death is not a story of victory and celebration; it is a story of sadness. As we read a couple of weeks ago from [John 3:36](#), “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.” If you haven’t made Jesus your Lord and Savior, why not do so today, before it is too late? Talk to me, talk to one of the members of Tabernacle and find out how you can become a member of God’s family. If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, thank Him for His forgiveness and then go, tell others of His love.