

Mark 15 - The Crucifixion

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Mark chapter 15. Go ahead and turn there please. When we left off last Wednesday, covering chapters 13 and 14, Jesus had been arrested and already condemned by the Sanhedrin. And this chapter begins by saying,

"As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate."

Let me stop there for a moment and just explain why they're doing this. The reason that Jesus, of course, had to be taken to Pilate is because although they had—they, the Sanhedrin—had the authority to condemn Jesus, and even condemn Him to death in the sense of charging Him with something that was worthy of death, under Roman law, they couldn't carry out the execution. Remember, they're under the thumb of the Romans.

And what they have to do is they have to convince the Roman procurator that the charges against this man are such or serious enough for him to be put to death. And of course, that means they have to put a spin on it that is going to somehow satisfy Roman law. Because, really, what they truly have against Jesus has nothing to do with Roman law. But that's, of course, how they have to spin it, in order for Pilate, really, to even care and go along with this.

Verse 2. *"And Pilate asked him 'Are you the King of the Jews?'"* And this is really the only question he cared about. The answer to this was the only question that he cared about. Because Roman law had no room for another king, of course competing with the emperor in Rome. If Jesus claimed to be a king, then that would of course be treason and it would be punishable by death. And this is the question that Pilate most wants an answer for.

And you'll notice that, *"And he answered him, (and said) 'You have said so.'"* Interesting; a strange response, but it says, *"³ And the chief priests then accused him of many things."* And this is the question that Pilate most wants. *"⁴ And Pilot again asked him, 'Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.' ⁵ But Jesus made no further answer, (In fact, it says) so that Pilate was amazed,..."* Because of it.

Now, Mark omits the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate related to his kingship. And it's given us actually in a different account in a broader way. But to read this account, you almost get the impression that Pilate confronted Jesus about being a king. And Jesus semi-claimed to be a king and Pilate didn't do anything about it. That's the impression that Mark leaves you just because he doesn't give the full dialogue that went on between these men.

But John is the gospel writer who, in fact, helps us to understand what really was said between these two men. He develops it further. And I'm talking about between Pilate and Jesus, to the point that Pilate came to the understanding that Jesus was not a threat to Rome. Let me put this on the screen for you from John chapter 18. Quite a bit of verses here, but he says,

John 18:36-38 (ESV)

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" And Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him."

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This better explains why Pilate didn't feel like this was a threat to Rome. Again, the question he put to Him is, "... are you a king?" And Jesus said, essentially, I am, but, He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." And what that means is, I'm not a threat to Rome. I'm not a threat to the established kingdom of Rome.

And that's where Pilate basically decided, okay, I don't care. You're nothing to me. If you're not causing any problems to the authority and the establishment of authority from Rome here in Israel, I don't care. You can go and say you're the

kingdom of Tweedledum, Tweedle-dee, I don't care. As long as it doesn't affect us right here, it's not my problem." Of course, that's not where Pilate's going to get to leave it.

But it says in verse 6, *"Now at the feast (and it's talking about here, this is during Passover. So it's essentially saying, during Passover) he (Pilate) used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, (and there were obviously several,) who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priest had delivered him up."*

And that's, of course, a correct perception. And you can see here that Pilate is hoping that the people are going to demand the release of Jesus, and give him an out; and help him to be able to release Jesus. Because that's what he wants to do about Him. And then he can just tell everybody it was the will of the people. Right? No big deal.

"But (verse 11 tells us) the chief priest stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him!" 14 And Pilate said to them, (Look at this question) "Why? What evil has he done?"

This is where you can see Pilate is arguing for Jesus' release at this particular point. He's basically... He knows that this is a trumped-up charge as it relates to all these things that they're accusing Him of. He sees no evidence that this man might be crucified.

But it says here at the end of verse 14, *"But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!"* And to make the situation worse for Pilate; you would not want to be Pilate, by the way. But to make the situation even worse for Pilate, Matthew tells us that his wife even got involved in the process.

Let me put this passage up on the screen for you. Matthew 27,

Matthew 27:19 (ESV)

...while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

...while he was sitting on the judgment seat, (this is while all this is going on. It says that) his wife sent word to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

Men take note of that: Listen to your wives. But ultimately it made no difference. It says in verse 15, *"So Pilate, (look at this) wishing to satisfy the crowd, (and that's always going to get somebody in trouble) released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."*

16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. (They wanted to have a little fun with Him) 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, (mocking him obviously for the color of a king) and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking (him) with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Verse 21 tells us, *"And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, (obviously for the celebration of Passover. And it tells us here that he was) the father of Alexander and Rufus, (and they demanded that he) carry (the) cross."* Of Jesus.

Interesting, isn't it, that Mark mentions Simon by name, even his sons. Includes his son's names in the passage. Which tells us that, Simon and his sons, were known to the early Christians, and those who Mark, assumed, were probably going to read this letter. Otherwise there would be no reason to add these names to the account. But the fact that the names are in there are that these men became well known to the early Church.

And it says that in verse 22, *"And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it."* That was something to dull the pain. But Jesus wanted to drink the full brunt of this cup, which was the wrath of God, and take it for us.

And it says, *"24 And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each (one) should take."* And, of course, all of this was in fulfillment of various prophecies. But one specific prophecy. I just love Psalm 22. We'll look, actually, at a few passages from it. But let me show you this first one from Psalm 22, 16 through 18. David writes,

Psalm 22:16-18 (ESV)

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— I can count all my bones- they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

For dogs encompass me; (And that was a term used for Gentiles.) a company of evildoers encircles me; (Look what he goes on to write) they have pierced my hands and feet— (That never happened to David. This is spoken prophetically) I can count all my bones- they stare and gloat over me; (Look at the specifics of this part of the prophecy) they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

This was written 1,000 years before the birth of Christ. And with such incredible, specific, detailed accuracy of the crucifixion. By the way, it says in this prophecy, *"they pierced my hands and my feet—"* This is before crucifixion was invented. They weren't crucifying people yet, at the time that this prophecy was given. The Romans came up with this crucifixion form of execution for the worst of the criminals. It was illegal to do it to a Roman citizen. It was so cruel, so torturous, so evil, and they even thought it so. And yet, the Lord speaks of it a thousand years before it took place.

Verse 25, *"And it was the third hour when they crucified him."* Now according to the Jewish reckoning of time, that would be 9 am. Because according to the Jews, the day essentially began to be counted at 6 am. The third hour is nine. And that's a detail that Mark alone records for us.

And it tells us in verse 26, *"And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.'"* We're told in other Gospel accounts it was actually written in three different languages. And when someone was crucified for any crime, it was the Roman custom to write the name of the individual who was being condemned, and then a description of their crime on a plaque, which was then hung above their head on the cross. And all four Gospels record this practice.

And although we know Pilate didn't consider Jesus to be a threat to Rome, as it related to Him being a king, this was all, pretty much all he could write. What else is he going to write? Is he going to put on there, Jesus of Nazareth, we crucified Him because the people bullied me into it. I mean, that was the only other thing to say. He had to put what he could, and that is, *"King of the Jews"* although Jesus made it clear, His kingdom was not of this world.

Verse 27, *"And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left."* Pilate had no idea he was fulfilling prophecy when he set that whole thing up. Let me show you a passage from Isaiah chapter 53. Speaking of the Messiah,

Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)

...he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors;...

...he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors;...

What that means is, He was crucified right next to criminals. He was numbered right along with them. Although He had done nothing wrong, He was numbered right there with them.

Verse 29, *"And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, (And you know that's a misunderstanding of what Jesus said. They said,) ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!'" ³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.'"* (And it says that even) *Those who were crucified with him also reviled him."*

At least at the beginning, both of them did. Check out this interesting prophecy from Psalm chapter 22, once again,

Psalm 22:7-8 (ESV)

All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

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Once again, a thousand years before Jesus was crucified, this prophecy was fulfilled; written down to speak of the suffering of Messiah.

Look at verse 33. Fascinating verse. It says, *"And when the sixth hour had come, (which again would be noon by Jewish reckoning) there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour."* Now this is one of several phenomena

that Mark records related to the death of Jesus. This is the first of these things. And he speaks here now, of three hours of darkness, inexplicable darkness in the middle of the day.

And by the way, the Gospel writers don't attempt to try to give some a scientific explanation for what happened. I'm sure they didn't know. They just said it got dark. Now, we know what time of year this was. We know that this wouldn't have been an eclipse of any kind. Unless God supernaturally did something beyond the usual times, and seasons, and rotations of planets, and so forth.

But again, they don't try to do that. We're left here to deduce, rather, that it was nothing less than a sign of God's judgment on human sin. I really believe that the darkness that took place there for three hours visualized was taking place on the cross.

Because darkness is often a sign that we see in the Scripture that is connected to judgment, when judgment is going on. You guys remember, right? In Egypt, when God was pouring out the plagues upon Egypt—judging Egypt for their sin. And particularly Pharaoh, for his relentless rebellion against the Word of the Lord. Do you remember that one of the plagues that God brought upon the nation of Egypt was, it says, a darkness that could be felt. (Exodus 10:21) It wasn't just dark. It didn't just look dark. It felt dark. I don't even know what that feels like exactly. I don't think I want to know.

But it was a connection that we make in another passage of Scripture, related to judgment that is going on. Darkness, also expresses lamentation and sorrow. Let me show you a fascinating passage from Amos chapter 8. This is buried in the Book of Amos. It says,

Amos 8:9 (ESV)

"And on that day, "declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."

"And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."

Now, this connection is made in Amos about the judgment of the Lord. And the mourning and lamentation that go along with the heaviness that that sin produces in the heart of God, to the degree that the sun stops shining. And I believe that's what's going on here on the day of Christ's crucifixion. There is judgment happening. And the heart of God is heavy with the sin of man. And darkness covers this area for a period of 3 hours.

Moving on to verse 34. *"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"* ³⁵ *And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'Behold, he is calling Elijah.'* ³⁶ *And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.'*

But you can tell they completely misunderstood what Jesus was saying— this cry of Jesus from the cross. And had they been better acquainted with their own Scriptures, they might have known that Jesus was once again speaking the words of prophecy again from Psalm 22 on the screen here,

Psalm 22:1 (ESV)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?"

It begins this Psalm by saying, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?"* The exact words that Jesus would utter on the cross.

And then in verse 37, it says, *"And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last."* We know what that loud cry was. It was a victory cry.

One thing I don't like about some of the Hollywood versions of the Crucifixion. Some of them don't give the ending cry like I think Jesus meant it. It was a victorious thing. It was a loud cry. It wasn't just this whispered sort of a thing, *"It is finished!"* He said, *"It is finished!"* And what He meant was, it is paid in full. It was a cry of victory. It's done. It's finished. It's paid. It's completed. There's nothing remaining that needs to be paid related to this. And it's a glorious thing. It's a wonderful... It's a life changing declaration for you and I.

Oh, if Christians across the centuries would meditate and embrace the full understanding of what it means to say, *"It is finished!"* We wouldn't have gotten into all this theological, doctrinal junk where we add things on-to believing in Jesus Christ. And say, you have to do this and you have to do that. You have to take this and you have to go there. And you have to do...

And if we would just believe that what Jesus said on the cross was true, it's done. It's paid in full. Put your wallet back in your pocket. There's nothing more to be paid. Done. I love that phrase. I got to tell you, I always have loved that phrase.

Verse 38. This is one of the other phenomenon that Mark tells us about. It says, *"And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."* He doesn't even explain what that is. It was a powerful sign of what Jesus had just accomplished on the cross.

The curtain, you'll remember, separated in the temple, the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. And only the high priest could go past that curtain into the Holy Place. And he'd only go there once a year. And he alone could go into that Most Holy Place. And he had to be carrying the blood of the sacrifice. And there he would make atonement for his own sins and the sins of Israel, once a year on the Day of Atonement. Nobody else could go in there. It was closed.

And that was a... That was the exact message God was wanting to convey. The way is closed. You can't go. You can't get in there. You want to go into the presence of God? Sorry. Closed. Door shut. You can't go. Only the high priest can go there.

Now what's happening? Jesus dies on the cross. He breathes His last after this victorious cry. And the curtain of the temple is torn in two. Showing what? The way is now open. The way has been made open for you and I, to enter into the very presence of God.

You know what's crazy about that? How very few people actually go there. I mean, you have the right to go there? How few Christians really ever take time to enter into the presence of God to say, God I'm coming into Your very presence. I'm going to spend time in the Holy of Holies with You. Not by my own power, not by my own authority, not by my own ability. I'm going to come now through the Blood of the Lamb. I am literally clothed in the righteousness that You have earned for me on the cross. That is how I come into this Holy place now.

How often do we do it? The Bible says that we can come with confidence into - before the presence of God. Unfortunately we don't do that. But this is such a powerful sign. Come. The invitation is now to, come.

Verse 39, *"And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"*

"⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem."

42 And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died.” And that's because it was not uncommon for people to hang on a cross for days before they would actually die.

Middle of verse “*And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. 45 And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. 46 And Joseph brought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.*”