

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

Mark 15:16-47

Key Verse: 15:34

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’--which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

In today’s passage, the author Mark records the accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion. He tells us about the soldiers’ mockery, the procession to Golgotha, the crucifixion, the anguish of Jesus on the cross, his death, and his burial. During our trip to the Holy Land, we had a chance to follow the same road that led Jesus to Golgotha. It’s called Via Dolorosa. We sang the song, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” I was deeply moved by what Jesus had done for me and tears welled up in my eyes. As we study the sufferings, death and burial of our Lord Jesus, let us think about why our Lord Jesus had to suffer and die in this way.

I. “AND THEY CRUCIFIED HIM” (16-32)

Look at verse 16. *The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers.* As soon as Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified, they led Jesus away to the governor’s headquarters. They called together the whole company of soldiers as they began the procession of the execution. How did the soldiers behave toward our Lord as they led him to the place of execution? Look at verses 17-20. *They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call 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. 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.*

The soldiers began mocking Jesus. They picked up on the charge, “The king of the Jews,” (26) and with a sickening sense of humor, dressed up Jesus like a king. They put a purple robe on him. They twisted a crown of thorns and set it on Jesus’ head. Drops of blood began to flow down on his cheeks from the thorny spikes. Then they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” with a gesture they used to salute their emperor: “Hail, Caesar!” Again and again, they struck him on his head with a staff. The beating continued until blood mingled with sweat smeared his face and his purple robe. They spit on him. Falling on their knees, they pretended to worship him. Why did they mock Jesus in this manner? Probably this was part of their fun and game whenever they executed a criminal. The tragedy was that they didn’t know who they were mocking. They were mocking the Savior who had come to save them from their sins.

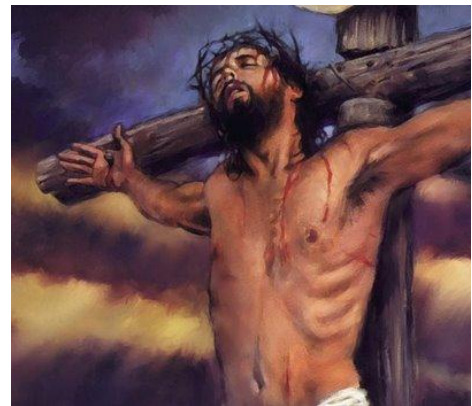
Look at verse 21. *A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.* Simon was from Cyrene, a Libyan city in North Africa. He was probably a Jew who was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (cf. “Jews of Cyrene” in Ac 6:9). Why did they force Simon to carry the cross? A beam of the cross weighed about 30 to 40 pounds. Jesus

started out by carrying it himself (Jn 19:17). But he had been so weakened by the all night trial and flogging that he repeatedly collapsed to the ground. Simon witnessed the suffering of Jesus with his own eyes. He could not comprehend why such a good man had to go through so much pain and humiliation. Then a Roman soldier tapped on his shoulder and forced him to carry the cross. Simon was terrified at the moment. However, something happened in his heart as he was carrying the cross for Jesus. He was moved by the divine grace of Jesus. An experience with Jesus can change a person's life. And this was certainly true for Simon. He became a very influential Christian who raised many gospel workers (Ro 16:13; Ac 13:1).

Look at verse 22. *They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).* Jesus' hands were bound and he was surrounded by the execution squad. The procession took a long way to the place of execution so that many people along the road might see and take warning. Jesus was completely drained. He was covered with blood.

Look at verse 23. *Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.* Someone could not bear to look at the agony of Jesus and offered him a pain-dulling drink. But he refused it. Jesus resolved to taste pain and bitterness to the fullest. He refused to take the painkiller despite the excruciating pain. He did this so that he might obey the will of God thoroughly. How beautiful Jesus was in obeying God's will! His obedience to God's will was from his heart. He didn't seek an easy way. Jesus carried our pains to the fullest. May we learn from Jesus how to endure pain and sorrow willingly in order to obey the will of God and participate in his redemptive work!

Look at verse 24a. *And they crucified him.* What a simple way to describe the crucifixion of Jesus! Mark simply says, "And they crucified him." Behind this simple sentence, however, was the excruciating pain and suffering which our Lord Jesus had to endure for our sins. We must know what crucifixion meant to our Lord. As soon as they arrived at the place of execution, the soldiers placed his cross flat on the ground and they stretched Jesus upon it. They nailed heavy, wrought-iron nails through his hands and feet with hammers. They projected a ledge of wood between his legs and raised the cross upright and set it in its socket. Then they left him hanging on the cross to die of dehydration.



A medical doctor can better explain the pain and suffering of crucifixion. On the cross, as the victim slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the hands, excruciating pain shoots up the arms to explode in his brain. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet. As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through his muscles, knotting them deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps, he is unable to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in

order to get even one small breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subside. Sporadically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in a little oxygen. Hours of searing pain, cycles of twisting, and joint wrenching cramps continue as his back is also lacerated as he moves up and down against rough timber.

Then another agony begins—a crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. Now the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level. The compressed heart is struggling to pump thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues. Finally, death arrives but not a moment too soon.

All these pain and suffering, the Bible records with the simple words, “And they crucified him.” Crucifixion was so cruel and inhumane that no Roman citizens were put to death by this method. Even the Jews considered it a curse of God (Dt 21:23).

What had Jesus done to be crucified in this horrible way? He had no reason to suffer and die in this way. In fact, he was the only one in the whole world who was without sin. So why did he suffer such pain and torture silently? The Prophet Isaiah says that he was crucified in our place, in order to take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows. On the cross, he was pierced for our transgressions. On the cross, he was crushed for our iniquities. By his punishment we have peace with God. By his wounds we are healed (Isa 53:4-5; 1Pe 2:24).

Look at verse 24b. *Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.* As Jesus suffered on the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes. They hardened their hearts and had some more fun and game. How could they be so indifferent? But they are a picture of some people in our generation. They couldn't care less how Jesus suffered and died for their sins, because they are preoccupied with some pleasure-seeking activities.

Look at verses 25-27. *It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.* Jesus was crucified at 9:00 o'clock in the morning. The religious leaders brought the charge of treason, trying to make Jesus a political criminal against Rome. Yet the written notice was a fitting title for our Lord because he is our spiritual king. The soldiers crucified him in between two common criminals. Clearly they wanted to maximize the degree of humiliation by executing Jesus in between the two robbers. He was despised and rejected by men. He was crushed for our iniquities.

There was a crowd gathered on the execution ground. How did they react to the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus? Look at verses 29-30. *Those who passed by 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 from the cross and save yourself!”* 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! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (31-32). The two robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him, even though one of them later repented (Lk 23:39-43).

The challenge to come down from the cross might be the most difficult temptation for Jesus to overcome, because he had the power to do so if he wanted. All the other people tried to save themselves. The Jewish leaders tried to keep their power by eliminating Jesus, the popular shepherd among their people. Pilate tried to save his political career by sentencing Jesus to death to avoid a riot. The soldiers gambled for the clothes of Jesus. Even the disciples fled trying to save themselves. But Jesus did not come down from the cross. Instead, he prayed for the people, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). He stayed up there enduring all the pains and insults. He was determined to be the sacrificial Lamb of God, so that all sinners like us may be saved through his precious blood. Praise Jesus who did not come down from the cross! Praise Jesus who did not save himself in order to save us!

II. “MY GOD, MY GOD” (33-41)

For six grueling hours Jesus was hung on the cross. He was completely drained. His blood flowed down on the beam steadily and made a small pool under the cross. Look at verse 33. *At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.* Even the nature could not bear to look at the anguish of our Lord. It was 12 noon, but darkness came over the whole land until 3:00 p.m.

Look at verse 34. *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”--which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* What does it mean that Jesus cried out to God on the cross? His cry wasn’t about his physical pain. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 that had prophesied the agony of the Messiah suffering. It was much more than physical suffering. At the moment he took upon himself the sins of the world, his love-relationship with God was severed temporarily. This is what sin does. It breaks a love relationship. It cuts us off from God. However, Jesus had to endure the separation on the cross, not because of his sin, but because of the sins you and I committed. He became a curse in order to save us from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13). He put all the burden of our sins on his shoulder and died on the cross as a ransom sacrifice for us. His precious blood washed away all our dirty sins. This is the reason why John the Baptist said of Jesus, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29) Jesus knew about the agony of the separation. That was why he had to struggle so hard in Gethsemane. Still it was hard for him to endure the mental anguish of the separation. He cried out, “My God, my God!”

Jesus died to restore our broken relationship with God. Our relationship with God was broken because of our sins. We lost the image of God in us. We were condemned to eternal punishment. We were separated from God, the source of our lives. We became like cut flowers in a vase, looking good for the moment but without the real life in us. Jesus

died to restore the relationship between God and us. Jesus died to give us eternal life. He died to bring us back to the kingdom of God.

One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. It seemed like a kind gesture. But he didn't know why Jesus was suffering. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. These people were witnessing a historic moment. Tragically, they didn't realize what they were witnessing.

Look at verse 37. *With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.* According to John, his loud cry was three words, "It is finished" (19:30). Jesus had finally completed the redemptive purpose of God. What happened at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross? Look at verse 38. *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.* This curtain was hung in the entrance to the Most Holy Place in the temple. Symbolically, the curtain separated the sinful people from the holy God. But the death of Jesus opened the way for us to approach God freely. The barrier of sin between God and us was broken down (Heb 9:8-10,12; 10:19-20).

Look at verse 39. *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"* This centurion was probably in charge of the execution. He personally witnessed everything from the beginning. And the death of Jesus deeply touched his heart. He confessed Jesus as the Son of God. Since then, many men and women in history have been touched by the cross of Jesus. The cross is a symbol of shame and guilt. But to us believers, the cross of Jesus is a symbol of love and sacrifice.

Look at verse 40-41. *Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.* Each of these women had a deep love-relationship with Jesus through his grace of forgiveness and his teachings. They loved Jesus. Out of their own means they cared for his needs. They supported the ministry of Jesus in the background with a joyful heart. And now they had followed him all the way to Jerusalem. Beneath the cross, they watched the crucifixion of their beloved Lord. Their love did not die with the death of Jesus. They were faithful to him to the end.

III. THE BURIAL OF JESUS (42-47)

Look at verses 42-47. *It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.*

We learn two things from these verses. The first is that the cross of Jesus also touched a man named Joseph. Apparently he had been a closet Christian. As a prominent member of the Council, it wasn't easy for him to identify as a Christian. But the cross of Jesus moved his heart. He boldly came forward to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body for burial. The cross of Jesus made him a man of courageous faith. Joseph became a historical figure by his act of faith.

More importantly, the burial of Jesus established his death as a fact in history. The Son of God was buried like an ordinary person in an ordinary tomb. But it was not the end. It was only the prelude for his glorious resurrection.

May God help us to remember how our Lord Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins so that we may follow him as his committed disciples!