

DAY 7: MEETING GOD ON THE DARKEST DAY OF HISTORY

Mark 15

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE (MARK 15:1-15) “*As soon as it was morning,*” begins the account. Pilate is the crucial link in the chain of events because only the Romans had the authority to inflict capital punishment (John 18:31). Normally Pilate was unconcerned about Jewish religious matters, but the charge that Jesus claimed to be “King of the Jews” identified Him as a political threat. To Pilate’s question “*Are You the King of the Jews?*” Jesus replies, “*You have said so.*” It is not a direct affirmation, which would give Pilate immediate grounds for execution. Rather, the reply invites a response from Pilate, as if to say, “You would do well to consider the question.”

The chief priests join in the accusation, but Jesus does not speak. It is not the silence of defeat but the silence of commitment to God’s will. Pilate evidently decides that the legal case against Jesus is a sham, and he hopes to free Jesus. It is his custom “*at the feast ... to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked*” (Mark 15:6). The crowd calls for the release of an imprisoned revolutionary, Barabbas, who had committed murder during “*the insurrection*”—evidently a well-known incident. Pilate, “*wishing to satisfy the crowd,*” releases Barabbas and has Jesus flogged and crucified.

THINK ABOUT how the New Testament lays the *responsibility* for the actual crucifixion on the Romans, but it lays the *instigation* of it at the feet of the Jewish authorities. Therefore, some people are convinced that the Jews were (and are) responsible for the death of Christ. Paul teaches that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). The Crucifixion displays the essential characteristics of what *all* people in one way or another do to God.

THE SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS (MARK 15:16-20) A company of soldiers bedeck Jesus with a “*crown of thorns*” and a “*purple cloak.*” Their salute, “*Hail, King of the Jews!*,” is a parody of the common salute to Caesar. The soldiers unknowingly acknowledge Jesus’ true identity. A squad of four soldiers and a centurion march the condemned to the site of crucifixion. The whole episode, in which Jesus’ royal dignity is bespattered with blood, spit, and ridicule, fulfills the prophecy: “*I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not My face from disgrace and spitting*” (Isaiah 50:6).

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (MARK 15:21-32) The Romans press Simon of Cyrene into the service of bearing Jesus’ cross to Golgotha, outside the city limits. The soldiers offer Jesus “*wine mixed with myrrh,*” a primitive narcotic to lessen the suffering. He refuses it, fulfilling His vow at the Passover meal, willing and desiring to undergo His final act of obedience with unclouded mind. “*And they crucified Him.*”

Crucifixion was a Roman punishment designed for non-Roman citizens, unleashing cruelty on the lowest, most defenseless classes of society—slaves, violent criminals, and prisoners of war. It was a Roman and Jewish custom to post the reason for execution, and the title “*King of the Jews*” was affixed to Jesus’ cross.

Jesus was crucified at the third hour of the day. Two robbers are crucified with Him, thus fulfilling Isaiah’s prediction that He “*was numbered with the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53:12).

Mark concludes this section with a chorus of mockery—from the bystanders, the chief priests, and even one of the two crucified with Him: “*those who passed by derided Him.*” Their mocking of the crucified Jesus is blasphemy against God. The crux of the priests’ derision is that “*He saved others; He cannot save Himself.*” Here, in fact, they are both furthest from—and closest to—the truth. Precisely because Jesus came to save others, He will not save Himself.



THE CROSS IS THE DOORWAY TO GOD (MARK 15:33-41) Coinciding with the death of Jesus, “*there was darkness over the whole land*” (15:33). Darkness signifies life without God (1 John 1:5). This darkness magnifies Jesus’ cry of abandonment, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” The words are the opening line of Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes in Aramaic, revealing the event they

prophesied about. Jesus' final sense of isolation and desolation echoes in this lonely cry. Rejected and scorned by Israel, sacrificed as a political pawn by Rome, denied and abandoned by His closest followers, forsaken even by God, Jesus now feels the horror of sin and separation so deeply that His pain is almost unbearable. Then, in one triumphant shout, Jesus rejoices that He has completed the work His Father sent Him to do. With an expression of confidence in His Father, He relinquishes His spirit into the hands of God.

As Jesus dies, two more exceptional events transpire:

- The curtain that hung in front of the Holy of Holies in the temple is torn from top to bottom. The destruction of this curtain confirms that the veil between God and man has been removed forever.
- The Roman centurion declares, in awe, "*Truly this man was the Son of God!*" (Mark 15:39). This is the ultimate moment of revelation to which the Gospel of Mark has been driving.

Mark concludes the Crucifixion account by naming several women who are present. These women, and "*many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem*" (16:41), are significant, for they have remained close to Jesus to the bitter end.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS (MARK 15:42-47) Late Friday afternoon, a man named Joseph, from the town of Arimathea, hastens to Pilate. He is "*a respected member of the council*" (probably the Sanhedrin) who is "*looking for the kingdom of God.*" He "*took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*" Pilate releases Jesus' body to Joseph, who then lowers the body from the cross, "*wrapped Him in the linen shroud and laid Him in a tomb.*"

PERSONALIZE this lesson. Words cannot express the thoughts of our hearts as we meditate on Jesus' final act of self-giving love. Because He, in that last cataclysmic moment, went through separation from the Father for all of us, we can be cleansed from our sin, delivered from the fear of death, and made new in Christ! "*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

There is perhaps no better response to these marvelous truths than worship. Set aside some time in the next few days to worship the Savior. Sing hymns or praise songs, dance, write poetry or prose, bow before the Lord—anything that expresses the gratitude and wonder in your heart at what Jesus has done for you. If you haven't already, would you like to make a special time of worship a regular part of your schedule?

REVIEW: MEETING GOD ON THE DARKEST DAY OF HISTORY

8. Was there something in the Scripture, Commentary, or teaching time that is now so vividly etched on your mind and heart that it will actually alter the way you think or act?