

**Mark 15:21-47**  
**July 7, 2024**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Jesus refused to save Himself so He could save us. What life adjustment does this call from us? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** In today's passage, the crucifixion of Jesus was not an accident of human history. It was a divine appointment ordained by God and prophesied in Scripture. We will see that Jesus is forsaken and alone as he is crucified and bears the sins of the world. And as he hangs alone, Mark shows us a wide range of attitudes toward Jesus, from hatred and violence to devotion and courage, to seeing Jesus clearly for the first time. Mark intentionally highlights different characters' actions and words they say:

- The Scribes and the crowds
- Jesus
- Those being crucified with Jesus
- The Centurion
- Female Disciples
- Joseph of Arimathea
- And WHERE ARE JESUS' DISCIPLES????

Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**The Crucifixion**

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). <sup>23</sup> Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

<sup>25</sup> It was the third hour when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>27</sup> They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> come down from the cross and save yourself!"

<sup>31</sup> 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! <sup>32</sup> Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

*The Death of Jesus*

<sup>33</sup> At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup> 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?” (Ps 22:1)

<sup>35</sup> When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

<sup>36</sup> One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

<sup>37</sup> With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

<sup>38</sup> The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> 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!”

<sup>40</sup> Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> 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.

### *The Burial of Jesus*

<sup>42</sup> It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. <sup>45</sup> When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

Jesus endured all the rejection, insults, mockery and pain while dying on a cross to pay the penalty of our sins. He didn’t deserve the abuse. Yet he agonizingly endured the shame of our sin against God and opened the way to be forgiven and have a relationship with God. Whenever you hear someone make a negative, derogatory or insulting comment about God, Christianity, faith or spiritual issues, take a moment to ask God to reveal Himself in an undeniable way to him or her.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 164-166). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

### **The Servant's Death (Mark 15:21–41)**

Three specific hours are mentioned in this section of Mark: the third (Mark 15:25), the sixth (Mark 15:33), and the ninth (Mark 15:33–34). The Jews reckoned time from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M., so this means that the third hour was 9 A.M., the sixth hour noon, and the ninth hour 3 P.M. Mark followed the Jewish system, whereas the Apostle John used Roman time in his Gospel. This means that “the sixth hour” in John 19:14 is 6 A.M.

**The third hour (15:21–32).** According to law, the guilty victim had to carry his cross, or at least the cross beam, to the place of execution, and Jesus was no exception. He left Pilate's hall bearing His cross (John 19:16–17), but He could not continue; so the soldiers “drafted” Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross for Him. Roman officers had the privilege of “impressing” men for service, and the way they used this privilege irritated the Jews (Matt. 5:41).

When you consider all that our Lord had endured since His arrest, it is not surprising that His strength failed. Indeed, “He could have called 10,000 angels,” yet He willingly bore the suffering on our behalf. There was a higher purpose behind this act: the victim carried the cross because he had been found guilty, *but our Lord was not guilty*. We are the guilty ones, and Simon carried that cross on our behalf. Simon Peter boasted that he would go with Jesus to prison and to death (Luke 22:33), but it was Simon of Cyrene, not Simon Peter, who came to the aid of the Master.

In one of his folksy letters to his mother, Harry Truman wrote, “I went to the White House to see the President and discovered I was the President.” Simon had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (Acts 2:10; 6:9), and he ended up meeting the Passover Lamb! We have good reason to believe that Simon trusted the Savior and went home and led his two sons to the Lord. No doubt many of Mark's Roman readers knew Alexander and Rufus (Rom. 16:13), and perhaps they had even known Simon.

*Golgotha* is a Hebrew word that means “skull,” though nowhere does the text explain why the place bore that name. Visitors to the Holy Land today are shown “Gordon's Calvary,” which does have the appearance of a skull, but guides also point out another possible site in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We do not know the exact place where our Lord was crucified, nor is it important that we know. He was crucified outside the city walls, the place of rejection (Heb. 13:12–13); and He died for the sins of the world.

It was customary for the victims to be given a narcotic potion that would help deaden the pain (Prov. 31:6), but our Lord refused it. For one thing, He wanted to be in full possession of His faculties as He did the Father's will and accomplished the work of redemption. He would enter fully into His sufferings on our behalf and take no short cuts. He refused the cup of sympathy so that He might better drink the cup of iniquity (Matt. 26:36–43). What an example for us to follow as we do God's will and share “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10).

None of the Gospel writers gives us a description of crucifixion, nor is one necessary. Their aim is not to arouse our pity but to assure our faith. Many of their readers had probably witnessed crucifixions, so any details would have been unnecessary. Crucifixion was such a detestable thing that it was not mentioned in decent society, any more than today we would discuss the gas chamber or the electric chair. Suffice it to say, crucifixion is one of the most horrible forms of death ever devised by man. Read Psalm 22 for a description of some of our Lord's agonies as He hung on the cross.

The victim usually wore a placard that declared his offense. Pilate wrote the one that Jesus wore and that was later hung above Him on the cross: “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The Jewish leaders protested, but Pilate for once stood his ground (John 19:19–22). It may be that the message of this sign first aroused the hopes of the repentant thief (Luke 23:39–43). He may have reasoned: “If His name is Jesus, then He is a Saviour. If He is from Nazareth, then He would identify with rejected people (John 1:46). If He has a kingdom, then perhaps there is room for me!”

The soldiers at the execution were not only doing their duty, but they were also fulfilling prophecy as they gambled for our Lord’s garments (Ps. 22:18). The fact that the innocent Son of God was placed between two guilty criminals also fulfilled prophecy (Isa. 53:12; and see Luke 22:37). The word used for “thieves” is rendered *robber* in John 18:40 in reference to Barabbas, so perhaps these two men had been members of his rebel band.

It seems incredible that the religious leaders so hated Jesus that they even went out to Golgotha to mock Him. Thomas Carlyle called ridicule “the language of the devil,” and in this case, that definition is certainly true. The idle spectators who passed by were only too eager to follow the bad example of their leaders, so enduring mockery was added to the sufferings of our Lord. They mocked Him as Prophet (Mark 15:29), as Saviour (Mark 15:31), and as King (Mark 15:32). It is possible that their sarcastic “He saved others!” may have encouraged the one thief to trust Him. The thief may have reasoned, “If He saved others, then He can save me!” So God uses even the wrath of man to praise Him (Ps. 76:10).

***The sixth hour (v. 33).*** At noon, a miraculous darkness came over the land, and all creation sympathized with the Creator as He suffered. This was indeed a miracle and not some natural phenomenon, such as a sand storm or an eclipse. It would not be possible to have an eclipse during full moon at Passover. By means of this darkness, God was saying something to the people.

For one thing, the Jews would certainly think about the first Passover. The ninth plague in Egypt was a three-day darkness, followed by the last plague, the death of the firstborn (Ex. 10:22–11:9). The darkness at Calvary was an announcement that God’s Firstborn and Beloved Son, the Lamb of God, was giving His life for the sins of the world. It was also an announcement that judgment was coming and men had better be prepared.

***The ninth hour (vv. 34–41).*** Our Lord made seven statements from the cross, three of them before the darkness came: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34); “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43); and “Woman, behold thy son!... Behold thy mother!” (John 19:26–27) When the darkness came, there was silence on His cross, for it was then that He was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

At the ninth hour, Jesus expressed the agony of His soul when He cried out from the cross, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (see Ps. 22:1) The darkness symbolized the judgment Jesus experienced when the Father forsook Him. As was so often the case, the people did not understand His words; they thought He was calling for Elijah the prophet. There was not only darkness over the land, but there was darkness in the minds and hearts of the people (2 Cor. 4:3–6; John 3:16–21; 12:35–41).

Then Jesus said, “I thirst” (John 19:28), and the kind act of the soldier in giving Jesus a sip of vinegar (see Ps. 69:21) assisted Him in uttering two more wonderful statements: “It is finished!” (John 19:30) and “Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46; and see Ps. 31:5). Jesus was not murdered; He willingly laid down His life for us (John 10:11, 15, 17–18). He was not a martyr; He was a willing sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Two remarkable events occurred at His death: there was an earthquake (Matt. 27:51), and the veil in the temple was torn in two. The veil had separated man from God, but now, through His death, Jesus had opened for the whole world a “new and living way” (Heb. 10:12–22; also see John 14:6). There had been an earthquake at Sinai when the Law was given (Ex. 19:16–18), but now the Law was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and its curse removed (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:10–14). Through His sacrifice, Jesus had purchased not only freedom from the Law, but also freedom from the entire sacrificial system.

It is thrilling to read the witness of the Roman centurion, especially when you consider that his words could have gotten him into trouble with both the Jews and the Romans. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God is one of Mark’s important themes (Mark 1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61–62). This makes His servanthood even more wonderful (Phil. 2:1–11).

It is touching to see how the women stood near the cross until the very end. John had also been there, but he had taken Mary, our Lord’s mother, to his own home where he could care for her (John 19:25–27). Faithful women were the last at the cross on Friday and the first at the tomb on Sunday. What a contrast to the disciples who had boasted that they would die for Him! The church of Jesus Christ owes much to the sacrifice and devotion of believing women.

### **The Servant’s Burial (Mark 15:42–47)**

The Jews recognized two evenings: “early evening,” from 3 to 6 o’clock, and “evening,” after 6 o’clock, when the new day would begin. This explains how both Matthew (27:57) and Mark could call late Friday afternoon “evening.” It was important that the place of execution be quickly cleared, because the Jewish Sabbath was about to begin, and that Sabbath was a “high day” because of the Passover (John 19:31).

God had a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, ready to take care of the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:57). He was assisted by Nicodemus, also a member of the council (John 19:38–42). We must not think that these two men suddenly decided to bury Jesus, because what they did demanded much preparation.

To begin with, Joseph had to prepare the tomb in a garden near the place where Jesus died. This tomb was probably not for Joseph himself, since a wealthy man would not likely choose to be buried near a place of execution. The men also had to obtain a large quantity of spices (John 19:39), and this could not be done when the shops were closed for Passover. And all of this had to be done without the council’s knowledge.

It seems evident that God prepared these two men and directed them in their activities. Nicodemus had come to Jesus privately (John 3) and had even defended Him before the council (John 7:45–53). I believe that Joseph and Nicodemus searched the Scriptures together and discovered, led by the Spirit, that the Lamb would die at Passover. It is possible that they were hiding in the new tomb when Jesus died. It was a simple matter for Joseph to go to Pilate for permission to take the body, and for Nicodemus to guard the body until the official release was given. Had these men not acted boldly, the body of Jesus might have been disposed of like rubbish.

It was important that His body be prepared for burial so that the empty graveclothes could be left behind in the tomb (John 20:1–10). Also, the way He was buried fulfilled prophecy (Isa. 53:9). The fact that He was buried is proof that Jesus actually died on the cross, for the Roman officials would not have released the body without proof that Jesus was dead.

**Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 187-192) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

## 2. JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH (15:21–41)

Death by crucifixion was one of the cruelest forms of capital punishment ever devised. Mark's account of Jesus' physical sufferings is vivid but restrained. They were secondary to His overwhelming spiritual anguish (cf. 14:36; 15:34). (For the order of events, see the "Harmony of Events at Jesus' Crucifixion," at Matt. 27:32–38.)

a. *Jesus' crucifixion and the crowd's mockery (15:21–32) (Matt. 27:32–44; Luke 23:26–43; John 19:17–27).*

15:21–22. Customarily a condemned man carried the *patibulum* of his own cross, that is, the crossbeam weighing about 100 pounds, through the city streets out to the place of crucifixion. Jesus started to carry His (cf. John 19:17) but was so weak from being flogged that His strength gave out near the city gate. The soldiers randomly seized a passerby named **Simon** and **forced him to carry the** beam the rest of the way.

Simon was a native of **Cyrene**, an important coastal city of North Africa that had a large Jewish colony (Acts 2:10). He was either an immigrant living near Jerusalem or more likely, a pilgrim who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival but had to stay in **the country** at night because there was no room in the city. Only Mark mentioned Simon's sons, **Alexander and Rufus**, suggesting that they were disciples known to his readers in Rome (cf. Rom. 16:13).

The soldiers took **Jesus to the place** outside but near the city wall (cf. John 19:20) called **Golgotha**, a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word meaning **The Place of the Skull**. The word "Calvary" comes from the Latin Vulgate rendering *Calvaria*, a variation of *calva*, "a skull." Golgotha was a rounded, rocky knoll (not a hill or mountain) vaguely resembling the shape of a human skull. Its exact location is uncertain. It was either at the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the traditional site dating from the fourth century, or "Gordon's Calvary," a more recent suggestion. The traditional site is more probable.

15:23–24. According to Rabbinic tradition certain Jerusalem women provided sedative drinks for those about to be crucified, to decrease their pain (cf. Prov. 31:6–7). On arrival at Golgotha, **they**, presumably the Roman soldiers, **offered** (lit., "were attempting to give") Jesus such a drink, **wine mixed with myrrh**, a plant's sap having anesthetic properties. But after He had tasted it (cf. Matt. 27:34) He refused **it**, choosing rather to face suffering and death in full control of all His faculties.

With restrained simplicity Mark wrote, **And they crucified Him**. His Roman readers needed no elaboration and he offered none. Normally a condemned man was stripped (except possibly for a loincloth), laid on the ground, and both outstretched forearms were nailed to the crossbeam. Then this beam was raised and fastened to an upright post already stuck in the ground and the victim's feet were nailed to it. A wooden peg partway up the post on which the victim sat helped support his body. Death from extreme exhaustion and thirst was painful and slow and usually came after two or three days. Sometimes death was hastened by breaking the victim's legs (John 19:31–33).

A victim's personal belongings became the property of the execution squad. In Jesus' case the four-man squad (cf. John 19:23) **cast lots**, probably dice, for **His clothes**—an inner and outer

garment, a belt, sandals, and perhaps a head covering—to see what each one would get. Unwittingly they fulfilled Psalm 22:18, another aspect of Jesus’ humiliation.

15:25. Using the Jewish method of counting hours from sunrise (and sunset) Mark alone recorded that Jesus’ crucifixion took place at **the third hour**, that is, 9 A.M. This seems to conflict with the time reference “the sixth hour” in John 19:14. But John probably used the Roman (modern) method of counting hours from midnight (and noon); thus he put Jesus’ trial before Pilate at “about the sixth hour,” that is, approximately 6 A.M. The interval between 6 and 9 A.M. was filled with the soldiers’ mockery (cf. Mark 15:16–20), Pilate’s verdict on the two robbers (cf. 15:27), and preparations for the crucifixions.

15:26. It was a Roman custom to write the name of the condemned man and a description of his crime on a board and attach it to his cross (John 19:19). All four Gospels record the words of Jesus’ notice but with minor variations, probably because it was written in three languages (John 19:20). Mark recorded only **the official charge against Him** ... **THE KING OF THE JEWS** (cf. Mark 15:2, 12). Pilate’s wording was intended as an insult to Jewish aspirations for independence (cf. John 19:21–22).

15:27–28. Pilate had Jesus **crucified** between **two robbers** who, like Barabbas, were perhaps guilty of insurrection (cf. v. 7; John 18:40). They may have been convicted of treason at the same time as Jesus because they were familiar with His case (Luke 23:40–42).

Unwittingly Pilate’s action fulfilled Isaiah 53:12, which is cited in Mark 15:28 (NIV, KJV; cf. Luke 22:37).

15:29–30. Again Jesus was subjected to verbal abuse (cf. 14:65; 15:17–19). Passersby **hurled insults at Him** (lit., “kept slandering Him”). **Shaking their heads** refers to a familiar gesture of derision (cf. Pss. 22:7; 109:25; Jer. 18:16; Lam. 2:15). They taunted Him for His alleged claim regarding **the temple** (cf. Mark 14:58). If He could rebuild the temple **in three days** (a great feat), then surely He could **save** (from *sōzō*, “deliver or rescue”; cf. 5:23, 28, 34) Himself from death by coming **down from the cross** (a lesser feat).

15:31–32. Similarly the Jewish religious leaders **mocked** Jesus indirectly in conversations **among themselves**. Their long-standing desire to kill Him was successful at last (cf. 3:6; 11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 64; 15:1, 11–13). Their words **He saved** (from *sōzō*) **others** refer to His healing miracles, which they could not deny (cf. 5:34; 6:56; 10:52). **But** they ridiculed Him because **He** seemed powerless to **save** (from *sōzō*; cf. 15:30) **Himself**. Ironically their words expressed a profound spiritual truth. If Jesus was to save others, delivering them from the power of sin, then He could not save (rescue) Himself from the sufferings and death appointed to Him by God (cf. 8:31).

They also mocked Jesus’ messianic claims (cf. comments on 14:61–62) replacing Pilate’s words “King of the Jews” (cf. 15:26) with **King of Israel**. They challenged Him to prove His messianic claim by a miraculous descent **from the cross** so they could **see** the compelling evidence **and believe** that He is God’s Messiah. The issue, however, was not lack of evidence but unbelief.

The two men **crucified with** Jesus **also** joined in reviling Him. But one of them soon stopped and asked Jesus to remember him in His kingdom (Luke 23:39–43).

*b. Jesus’ death and the accompanying phenomena (15:33–41) (Matt. 27:45–56; Luke 23:44–49; John 19:28–30)*

Climactically Mark recorded five phenomena that accompanied Jesus' death: (a) darkness (Mark 15:33), (b) Jesus' cry, "My God ..." (v. 34), (c) Jesus' loud cry (v. 37), (d) the temple curtain torn from top to bottom (v. 38), and (e) the Roman centurion's confession (v. 39).

15:33. Jesus hanged on the cross for three hours in the daylight (9 A.M. till noon) and then **at the sixth hour** (noon) total **darkness** engulfed **the whole land** (Palestine and environs) **until the ninth hour** (3 P.M.; cf. comments on v. 25). The darkness, whether caused by a sudden dust-laden wind, or thick clouds, or, more likely, a miraculous solar eclipse, was probably a cosmic sign of God's judgment on human sin (cf. Isa. 5:25–30; Amos 8:9–10; Micah 3:5–7; Zeph. 1:14–15) which was placed on Jesus (cf. Isa. 53:5–6; 2 Cor. 5:21). Specifically, it pictured God's judgment on Israel who rejected His Messiah, the Sin-Bearer (cf. John 1:29). The darkness visualized what Jesus' cry (Mark 15:34) expressed.

15:34. Mark (and Matthew) recorded only this one of Jesus' seven sayings from the cross. **At the ninth hour** (3 P.M.), **Jesus cried ... Eloi, Eloi** (Aramaic for the Heb., 'Ēlî, 'Ēlî), **lama sabachthani?** (Aramaic from Ps. 22:1) Mark translated the saying into Greek for his readers, **which** in English means, **My God, My God, why** (lit., "for what [reason]") **have You forsaken** (lit., "did You abandon") **Me?**

This was more than the cry of a righteous Sufferer affirming His faith that God would cause Him to triumph (contrast Ps. 22:1 with Ps. 22:28). Nor did Jesus merely *feel* abandoned. Instead, Jesus' cry combined (a) abandonment by God the Father in a judicial not relational sense, and (b) a genuine affirmation of Jesus' relationship to God. Bearing the curse of sin and God's judgment on sin (cf. Deut. 21:22–23; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13) He experienced the unfathomable horror of separation from God, who cannot look on sin (cf. Hab. 1:13). This answers Jesus' question, "Why?" Dying for sinners (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18), He experienced separation from God.

Also, Jesus' cry affirmed His abiding trust, reflected in the words, "My God, My God." This is the only one of Jesus' recorded prayers in which He did not use the address "Abba" (cf. Mark 14:36). Far from renouncing Him, Jesus claimed the Father as His God. He died forsaken by God so that His people might claim God as their God and never be forsaken (cf. Heb. 13:5).

15:35–36. **Some** Jewish bystanders apparently misunderstood or more likely, as a mockery, deliberately misinterpreted Jesus' cry as a call to **Elijah**. Popular Jewish belief held that Elijah came in times of distress to deliver righteous sufferers.

Probably in response to Jesus' additional words "I thirst" (John 19:28–29) a bystander, likely a Roman soldier, soaked **a sponge with wine vinegar** diluted with a mixture of eggs and water, a common inexpensive beverage, and raised **it on a stick** to Jesus' mouth so He could extract some refreshment from it (cf. Ps. 69:21). Jesus' cross was probably higher than normal, holding Him two or three feet off the ground. If the drink prolonged His life, the spectators would have a chance to **see if Elijah would take Him down**.

In Mark the words **Leave Him alone** were spoken by the soldier to the bystanders just before he offered a drink to Jesus. The verb is plural, "You (plural) leave...." In Matthew 27:49 the same words are spoken by bystanders to the soldier apparently while he was giving Jesus the drink. The verb is singular, "You (singular) leave...." Both expressed the taunt about Elijah coming to rescue Him.

15:37. Jesus' **loud cry** (Luke 23:46) before He **breathed His last** indicated that He did not die the ordinary death of one who was crucified (cf. Mark 15:39). Normally such a person suffered extreme exhaustion for a long period (often two or three days) and then lapsed into a

coma before dying. But Jesus was fully conscious to the end; His death came voluntarily and suddenly. This accounts for Pilate's surprise (cf. v. 44).

15:38. Simultaneous with Jesus' death **the curtain** (veil) **of the temple** (*naou*, "sanctuary"; cf. 11:11) **was torn in two from top to bottom**. The passive verb and the direction of the tear indicate that this was God's action. It was no doubt observed and reported by the priests (cf. Acts 6:7) who at that moment were conducting the Jewish evening sacrifice. This could have been the outer curtain hung between the sanctuary itself and the forecourt (Ex. 26:36–37) or the inner curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place (Ex. 26:31–35). If it was the outer curtain, then the tear was a public sign confirming Jesus' words of judgment on the temple, later fulfilled in A.D. 70 (cf. Mark 13:2). Probably the inner curtain was torn, for it was a sign that Jesus' death ended the need for repeated sacrifices for sins and opened a new and living way of free and direct access to God (Heb. 6:19–20; 9:6–14; 10:19–22).

15:39. **The centurion who stood** nearby facing **Jesus** and observing these unusual happenings (cf. vv. 33–37) was the *Gentile* Roman officer in charge of the execution squad (cf. v. 20) and thus accountable to Pilate (cf. v. 44). Only Mark used the Greek word *kentyriōn* ("centurion"), a transliteration of the Latin word referring to a commander of 100 soldiers (also vv. 44–45). All other New Testament writers used the equivalent Greek word *hekatontarchos*, also translated "centurion" (e.g., Matt. 27:54). This provides additional evidence that Mark wrote to a Roman audience (see *Introduction*).

The manner of Jesus' death, especially His last loud **cry** (cf. Mark 15:37), prompted the centurion to declare, **Surely** (lit., "truly," despite all insults to the contrary; cf. Matt. 27:40; John 19:7), **this Man was**, from the centurion's perspective, **the Son of God**.

The Roman officer probably did not use the phrase "the Son of God" in its distinctive Christian sense, as a reference to Jesus' deity (cf. Luke 23:47). Because of his pagan background he probably viewed Jesus as an extraordinary "divine man" much like the Roman emperor who was acclaimed "son of God" (cf. comments on Mark 12:16). Consequently some interpreters translate the phrase with an indefinite article, "a son of God" (NIV). However, Mark regarded the declaration in its distinctive Christian sense; the centurion unwittingly said more than he knew.

The centurion's confession is the climax of Mark's revelation of Jesus' identity (cf. comments on 1:1; 8:29–30). This confession by a *Gentile* Roman officer contrasts with the mocking response of those mentioned in 15:29–32, 35–36. This Gentile's confession also exemplifies the truth of the torn curtain.

15:40–41. In addition to the mocking crowd and the Roman soldiers, **some devoted women were** also (in Gr.) carefully observing **from a distance** all that occurred. Earlier in the day—probably before the sixth hour (noon; v. 33)—they had stood "near the cross" (John 19:25–27).

**Mary Magdalene's** surname indicates she was from Magdala, a village on the Sea of Galilee's western shore. Jesus had released her from demon possession (Luke 8:2; she is not the sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50). The second **Mary** (the "other Mary"; Matt. 27:61) is distinguished from the others by the names of her sons **James the younger** (lit., "the small one," in stature and/or age) and **Joses**, who apparently were well known in the early church. **Salome**, whose name appears only in Mark (Mark 15:40; 16:1), was the mother of Zebedee's sons, the disciples James and John (Matt. 20:20; 27:56). She was probably the sister of Jesus' mother whom Mark did not mention (John 19:25).

When Jesus was **in Galilee** these three **women** used to follow **Him** from place to place and used to care **for** ("serve,") **His** material **needs** (cf. Luke 8:1–3). **Many other women who did**

not accompany Him regularly **were also there**. They had **come ... to Jerusalem** for the Passover festival with Jesus, perhaps hoping He would establish His messianic kingdom (cf. Mark 10:35–40; 15:43).

Mark mentioned the women as eyewitnesses of the Crucifixion in anticipation of their eyewitness role at Jesus' burial (15:47) and His resurrection (16:1–8). Their devotion surpassed that of the 11 disciples who had deserted Him (14:50). Mark may have intended these words as an encouragement to faithful discipleship among women in the church at Rome.

### 3. JESUS' BURIAL IN A NEARBY TOMB (15:42–47) (Matt. 27:57–61; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42).

15:42–43. Jesus' burial officially confirmed His death, an important point in early Christian preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–4). The designation **Preparation Day** is used here as a technical name for Friday, **the day before the Sabbath** (Saturday) as Mark explained to his non-Jewish readers. Since no work was allowed on the Jewish Sabbath, Friday was used to prepare for it. This reference confirms that Jesus was crucified on Friday, Nisan 15 (cf. comments on Mark 14:1a, 12, 16). "Evening" referred to the hours between mid-afternoon (3 P.M.) and sunset, when Friday ended and the Sabbath began.

Under Roman law the release of a crucified man's corpse for burial was determined only by the imperial magistrate. Usually such a request by a victim's relatives was granted, but sometimes a body would be left on a cross to decay or be eaten by predatory animals or birds and the remains were thrown into a common grave. Jewish law required a proper burial for all bodies, even those of executed criminals (cf. Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 6. 5). It also dictated that those hanged were to be taken down and buried before sunset (cf. Deut. 21:23).

Aware of these regulations, **Joseph of Arimathea** went **to Pilate** and requested **Jesus' body** for burial. He did this **as evening approached** (lit., "when evening had already arrived," i.e., probably about 4 P.M.). This gave urgency to his intended action.

Though Joseph probably lived in Jerusalem he was originally from Arimathea, a village 20 miles northwest of the city. He was **a wealthy** (Matt. 27:57), reputable **member of the Council** (*bouleutēs*), a non-Jewish designation for the Sanhedrin. He had not approved of the Sanhedrin's decision to kill Jesus (Luke 23:51). He **was personally waiting for the kingdom of God** (cf. Mark 1:15) which suggests he was a devout Pharisee. He regarded Jesus as the Messiah though so far he was a secret disciple (John 19:38).

But he took courage and **went** to Pilate **boldly**, a description unique to Mark. His action was bold because: (a) he was not related to Jesus; (b) his request was a favor that would likely be denied on principle since Jesus had been executed for treason; (c) he risked ceremonial defilement in handling a dead body; (d) his request amounted to an open confession of personal loyalty to the crucified Jesus which would doubtless incur his associates' hostility. He was a secret disciple no longer—something Mark impressed on his readers.

15:44–45. **Pilate** was amazed (*ethaumasen*, "astonished"; cf. 5:20) **that** Jesus had **already** died (cf. comments on 15:37). He summoned **the centurion** in charge of the Crucifixion (v. 39) to find out from a trusted source if the report were true. Once he was assured that Jesus was **dead**, Pilate **gave** (lit., "gave as a gift," i.e., without requiring a fee) **the body** (*to ptōma*, "the corpse") **to Joseph**. Pilate's favorable response to Joseph's request was exceptional; perhaps it arose from his belief that Jesus was innocent (cf. vv. 14–15). Only Mark recorded Pilate's questioning of the centurion, thereby highlighting to his Roman readers that Jesus' death was confirmed by a Roman military officer.

15:46–47. **Joseph** undoubtedly had servants help him to accomplish a proper burial before sunset, a time span of about two hours. Nicodemus, a fellow Sanhedrin member, joined in, presumably by prearrangement (John 19:39–40).

After Jesus' **body** was removed from the cross, it was probably washed (cf. Acts 9:37) before it was wrapped tightly in strips of **linen cloth** with aromatic spices placed between the wraps. All this was in accord with Jewish burial customs (John 19:39–40).

Then the body was carried to a nearby garden **and placed** on a stone shelf inside Joseph's own previously unused **tomb** (Matt. 27:60; John 19:41–42) hewn **out of rock**. **The tomb** was sealed shut with **a circular flat stone** that rolled down a sloping groove till it was securely in front of the entrance to keep out intruders. To roll that stone back up again would require the strength of several men.

Two women who had witnessed Jesus' death (cf. Mark 15:40) **saw** (lit., "were observing,") with interest **where He was buried**. Apparently the other women had returned home to prepare for the Sabbath, a day on which they rested (Luke 23:56).

**Leavell, L.P. (1972). *Mark*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 632-633). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.**

### **Crucifixion and Burial (Mark 15:21–47)**

*The passage*—The crucifixion represents the zenith of man's rejection of God and rebellion against his revelation (15:21–37).

With his entire back one open raw mass of bleeding, quivering flesh, the weight of the cross probably caused Jesus to stumble. The soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross. This was a city on the coast of North Africa. Simon had likely come to Jerusalem for the Passover and was identified as "the father of Alexander and Rufus." These could have been two outstanding Christians, and one may be referred to in Romans 16:13.

The procession finally reached the hill shaped like a skull. In present-day Israel, Gordon's Calvary more nearly fits the New Testament description than the traditional site inside the ancient city.

Jesus was offered wine mingled with myrrh as a form of sedation. When he tasted it, he would not drink it.

Having nailed him to the cross, the soldiers began gambling for his garments even before he died. Others in the mocking multitude joined their voices in reviling Jesus. Just as during his ministry, they continued to ask for a sign. They wanted proof that he was the Christ, which would be given in the form of his coming down from the cross. Even this they would not have believed.

In verse 37 we find again the voluntary nature of Calvary. Jesus' life was not taken from him, he gave it. In his dying breath Jesus permitted his spirit to leave. He was in control to the very end.

The completeness of redemption is described in 15:38–39. The rending of the veil in the Temple was significant. It was torn from the top, indicating an act of God and not man. This was the veil which secluded the holy of holies. Man now has direct access to God through Christ, and not through human priests.

It is likewise significant that the Gentile centurion recognized the acknowledged Jesus as the "Son of God."

Mark mentioned the names of some devout disciples in 15:40–41. Mary Magdalene was a woman Jesus healed, Salome was Jesus' aunt, the mother of James and John, Mary had already been taken away by John. These were Galilean women who loved Jesus and had ministered to him on many occasions. Their reasons for being present were both intimate and also less personal. Jesus afforded all womanhood a dignity never known previously.

The burial of Jesus is told in 15:42–47. Joseph of Arimathea, a well-known Jew and a member of the Sanhedrin, was a secret disciple of Jesus (19:38). Perhaps Joseph was grieved for having failed to defend Jesus in the preceding trial. He asked Pilate for permission to give the body of Jesus a decent burial. Joseph purchased a supply of linen and Nicodemus provided the spices for burial (v. 39). When the body was prepared and placed in the tomb, a stone was rolled against the door.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 15:21-47. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

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