

Mark Chapter 15

15: 1 – 15

Jesus before Pilate

Having concluded that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy on the basis of his own words, the chief priests, along with the elders and teachers of the law, reached the decision to hand him over to Pilate. It is obvious from Pilate's immediate question to Jesus that they have told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be king of the Jews. But, as verse 3 informs us, they actually 'accused him of many things.

Mark seeks to show that:

- The Romans had no essential quarrel with Jesus, and that Pilate was pushed by the Jews into making the decision that they wanted. Even when putting Jesus and Barabbas before the crowd, he doesn't actively condemn Jesus. He merely allows Barabbas to be the one who is released.
- Pilate acts against his better judgement.
- We note the silence of Jesus – even that makes an eloquent point.
- Jesus is crucified as Messiah, or King of the Jews – terms that are not used earlier in the gospel – a sign that the Jews tried to put a political connotation upon the trial.

The crowd

Note the choice of the crowd:

- Lawlessness instead of law
- Violence instead of peace
- Hatred instead of love

The crowd was manipulated by the priests [v.11]. There seems to be no indication in any of the gospels that anyone in this crowd objected to the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, Matthew reports that the crowd took upon themselves and their children the guilt of his blood [Matthew 27:25].

How little did they realize what was going on here!

Scourging: one of the most horrendous forms of punishment ever devised. Often, victims died during it.

15: 16 – 20

The Soldier's Mockery

The soldiers see Jesus as object of ridicule: an opportunity for a bit of fun. They have, like Pilate, recognized the key accusation: that Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews. They mock him on that basis. We see echoes of the Suffering Servant passages from Isaiah in this story. This is further evidence that it was as King of the Jews that Jesus suffered.

15: 21- 47 The Crucifixion

It would seem that those who showed most compassion to Jesus were the Roman soldiers: they forced Simon to carry the cross for him because of his obvious weakness, and they offered him a drink containing myrrh, which would have eased the pain.

15: 21 – 32 The Cross

Simon of Cyrene is described as the father of Alexander and Rufus. He was probably just an innocent bystander when he was pulled out of the crowd by the Romans and compelled to carry the cross, but this experience must have had a profound effect upon him? Note the following:

- Romans 16:13 : Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me also.
- Acts 13:1 : Simeon called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene are mentioned amongst the prophets who commissioned Barnabas and Saul to go off on their first missionary journey.

Do either of these verses suggest that Simon of Cyrene became one of the first Christians, and that his whole family were counted amongst the believers. Of course, we cannot be certain, but it is possible. If so, in Simon, we have another eyewitness – a trustworthy source of information about the events which are recorded.

The written notice: It was customary that the crimes for which a criminal was executed were written on a notice nailed to their cross. The charge for which Jesus was crucified was his claim to be King of the Jews. When the chief priests requested Pilate to change the sign to ‘this man claimed to be king of the Jews’, Pilate refused. By this action Pilate unknowingly proclaims the truth: that Jesus is King of the Jews. That is what he is, and more.

Wine mixed with myrrh: a sign of compassion. Drugged wine to ease the pain was normally offered to victims. Jesus refused it – a sign of his commitment to endure death at its absolute worst.

The soldiers dived for his clothes. The dead person's immediate possessions were traditionally one of the perks for the soldiers. Here is a sign of the OT prophecies being fulfilled.

Crucified between two thieves: we note here the ultimate symbol of the reason why God came to earth - to share with sinners and to call sinners to repentance. Jesus dies between sinners.

The ultimate love: the fact that Jesus remained on the cross is the ultimate sign of God's love for us. God's love contrasts with the hostility of the Jews and their leaders to Jesus.

15: 33 – 41 Jesus dies on the cross

A number of things happened at 'the ninth hour'.

- The period of darkness ended.
- Jesus cried 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'
- Jesus died.
- The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
- The centurion said 'Surely this man was the Son of God'.

Mark is seeking to guarantee the facts and to establish their essential meaning.

Jesus cries from the cross: We can hardly imagine what it was like for Jesus to feel that he was totally abandoned by God. In John's Gospel, Jesus shouts, 'It is finished'. Through his death, his work on earth is accomplished. The words that Jesus cried out from the cross are from Psalm 22:1. Here in this cry we are given a brief glimpse into the emotional, mental and spiritual suffering experienced by Jesus as he bore our sin.

The bystander (v.35): we see in this verse passive indifference. How easily we can see our Saviour and remain indifferent to his call, like the bystanders who simply adopted an academic disinterest.

The centurion: clearly, there was something about this episode that even touched the heart of a cold-hearted centurion.

The women: note that they were present. Their love for Jesus compelled them to stay close, despite their anguish.

As we read the Gospel accounts, we realise that Jesus death was deliberate. Death did not overtake him, as it does us. He faced it, and knew he had to go through with it. His words in John 10:17,18 are instructive: '... I lay down my life ... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.' John reports the moment of Jesus' death with '... he bowed his head and gave up his spirit' (John 19:30), Mark writes simply 'he breathed his last'.

Mark tells us nothing of the reaction of the chief priests and teachers of the law. Maybe they have all by this time gone about their business. But Mark does tell us of one person who observed and drew his own conclusion from what he observed. When the Roman centurion heard Jesus' cry and saw how he died, he said: 'Surely, this man was the Son of God'.

The curtain in the Temple: torn from top to bottom i.e. it is God's initiative. Through the death of Jesus, God has opened up the way for the human race to be reconciled with Him.

This curtain separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. The Most Holy Place represented the presence of God, from which we humans are banned by our sin. On this very thick, seventy feet tall curtain, there were embroidered golden cherubim (Exodus 26:31-33). The first place we come upon cherubim in the Bible is in Genesis 3:24, where they are placed by God on the east side of the Garden of Eden, barring human access to the Tree of Life. On the temple curtain, they bar the way into the symbolic presence of God.

But now, at the very moment Jesus dies, that curtain is ripped away. The separation that sin has caused between man and God has been removed. Now, through the blood of Jesus permanent, present access to God is restored.

15: 42 – 47 The Burial of Jesus

Time was short. Either the body was buried before the Sabbath, or else he wouldn't be buried at all, simply left to rot. Joseph of Arimathea was probably present at the trial – maybe he was Mark's source of information. Clearly, he has been profoundly affected by the events, and now shows due respect. It seems highly likely that Joseph became one of the early believers.