

The Gospel of Mark

Walking with the Servant Savior

Lesson 20 Mark 15:1–47

Day One: The Sentencing

The importance of the events leading up to the Crucifixion are evident in the fact that Mark devotes six of the sixteen chapters in his Gospel account to the final week of Christ's life. As he nears the end of his account and the climax of the story, he takes on an increased sense of urgency in his writing.

Read Mark 15:1-47 for the overview. Today's focus will be verses 1-15.

The Jewish trials were now over; they had concluded that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and that His "crimes" warranted the death penalty. In order to carry out a death sentence the Jews needed the approval of the Roman governor, which meant taking their case to Pilate.

1. Who handed Jesus over to Pilate? v. 1
 - a. Since Jesus was charged with treason, what question did Pilate ask? v. 2
 - b. What was Jesus' response?

The other Gospel writers offered more of the details of the conversation between Jesus and Pilate; Mark narrows the focus to the primary question: "*Are you the king of the Jews?*"

2. Contrast the above question with the other charges leveled against Him. Notice His response to these false accusations. See Luke 23:1-2.

No doubt expecting Jesus to defend Himself, Pilate was amazed that He did not say a word!

3. What request did the crowd make of Pilate that was customary during the Passover festival? vv. 6–8

Pilate returned his own verdict regarding Jesus, saying to the Jews, "*I find no fault in Him at all*" (John 18:38). Knowing He was not guilty of the charges leveled against Him, Pilate sought a way to free himself from the guilt of taking the life of an innocent man.

4. What did he offer? Why? vv. 9–10
 - a. What made Pilate offer to release Barabbas instead? v. 11

This is the first time we read about in Mark's Gospel that the crowd of people turned against Jesus, and Mark emphasized that they were led to do so by the chief priests.

Left wondering what to do with Jesus, once again Pilate turns to the crowd (v. 12).

5. How does the crowd respond? v. 13
 - a. What additional detail does Luke 23:15–16 offer?
 - b. When Pilate asks what Jesus had done, what does the crowd respond with all the more? v. 14
 - c. Hoping to pacify the growing unrest of the crowd, how does Pilate attempt to satisfy them? v. 15

Reluctantly, Pilate released Barabbas and had Jesus scourged. This particular form of torture, which usually preceded execution, was enough in itself to kill a man. The Romans often did it to weaken the prisoner and hasten death on the cross.

Getting a workout . . . (Word study) Using the resources you have on hand, write a definition of the word *scourged* (*flogged*).

John's Gospel records that Pilate hoped the scourging would rouse the pity of the crowd (John 19:4); but when that didn't happen, he released Jesus to be crucified.

6. *Personal:* Pilate played to the crowd, allowing himself to compromise. He permitted what was *right* to be overruled by popular opinion. Can you recall a time when you compromised what you knew to be right in order to appease the opinions or feelings of others? What did you learn from the situation?

Heartbeat . . . (Memory verse) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Day Three:

The Cross

What to look for...

Jesus began His walk to Golgotha (the Place of the Skull) carrying His own cross; but weakened from the beatings, He was unable to carry it all the way. Simon from Cyrene was picked out of the crowd to carry it the remainder of the way.

Read Mark 15:21–41

Golgotha in the Hebrew means *skull*. It derived its name from the shape formed on the location at the top of a hill. The name Christians know it by—*Calvary*—is taken from the Latin word also meaning *skull*. Executions were held there in plain sight of those entering and leaving the city as a deterrent to criminals.

1. What did they offer Jesus that He refused? v. 23
 - a. What did the Roman soldiers divide among themselves? How? v. 24

It was the third hour, or nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified Him.

- b. What did the written notice of the charge against Him read? v. 26
 - c. Who were crucified on His right and left? v. 27
 - d. What Scripture quoted from Isaiah 53:12 was fulfilled? v. 28
2. The people passing by shook their heads in a gesture of contempt. In what way did they also taunt Him? vv. 29–30
 - a. How were the chief priests and scribes also mocking Him? v. 31–32
 - b. Who else reviled Him? v. 32b

Selah... What the people mistook for utter failure on the part of Jesus, we know to be the ultimate demonstration of His *amazing love!* Jesus could have come down from that cross, but instead of showing His power, He revealed His love. What is the only suitable response you can make?

When it was noon—the sixth hour—darkness covered the land for three hours, until three o'clock in the afternoon. This was supernaturally caused to coincide with the time when Jesus experienced the darkness of separation from the Father as the bearer of our sin.

3. Just before His death, what loud outcry did Jesus make? v. 34

This is the only saying from the Cross that is recorded by Mark (a quote from Psalm 22:1). It is difficult for us as human beings to begin to fathom the depth of this horrible moment for Jesus, who was always in perfect and unbroken fellowship with the Father.

Some of those nearby misinterpreted Jesus words to mean He was calling out for Elijah. In response to Him thirsting (John 19:28–29), a man filled a sponge with wine vinegar and offered it to Jesus while the people watched to see if Elijah would come to rescue Him.

4. How does Mark describe the moment of Jesus' death? v. 37

a. How does Luke 23:46 record the moment?

b. What does John 19:30 say about it?

5. What remarkable happening occurred at the moment of Jesus' death? v. 38

The *veil* was the term used for the curtain that hung in the Temple between the *holy place* (where only the priests could enter to perform their duties) and the *Holy of Holies* (the most holy place reserved only for God). The tearing of the veil from top to bottom symbolized the removal of the barrier to God through the atoning death of the Son (see Hebrews 9:7–12; and 10:19–22).

6. Who was standing nearby, clearly impressed by what he had witnessed, and what did he say? v. 39

7. What other spectators were looking on and what do you learn about them?
vv. 40–41

These faithful women who were not allowed to speak on Jesus' behalf, raise their might against the Romans, or prevail against the crowds, stayed at the cross when everyone else dear to Jesus had fled. They prepared His body for burial and, in response to their devotion, God blessed them as the first to witness the Resurrection!

Day Four:

The Burial

What to look for...

Risking the disapproval of his peers, a respected figure—*Joseph of Arimathea*—compassionately steps forward to claim the body of Jesus and prepare it for burial in his own tomb. Mark mentions only this man; John's account also names Nicodemus (John 19:38–42).

Read Mark 15:42–47

Jesus died at about three o'clock in the afternoon, just a few hours before sundown on Friday. It was *Preparation Day*, the day before the Sabbath when work had to cease. It was against the law to do any work on the Sabbath or to leave a dead body exposed.

1. How does Mark describe Joseph? v. 43
2. Who was surprised by the suddenness of Jesus' death? Who verified it? v. 44

It was a bold move for Joseph to come forward and ask for the body of Jesus. It was also unusual for Pilate to give the body to someone who was not a relative of the condemned man. Perhaps he consented because he still believed Jesus was innocent.

3. What preparation did Joseph make? v. 46
 - a. What preparation did Nicodemus make? John 19:39–40

Together these men wrapped the Lord's body in layers of linen with the spices in between, and laid Him in an unused tomb. It was a burial befitting a king!

4. Who was standing nearby carefully watching the goings on? v. 47

These two women wanted to know where the body of Jesus was laid to rest so that they could return after the Sabbath and anoint the Lord with their own spices. Little did they know that they would not have occasion to use them—for He had risen!

Today, more than ever before, there are repeated attempts made to discredit the Crucifixion and deny the Resurrection. By Mark's own account, Jesus' death was confirmed by the Roman centurion, Pilate himself, Joseph, and the women who stood by as witnesses of His physical death on the cross and His Resurrection. Those of us who believe in Him will also testify that He is alive!

5. *Personal:* What are you willing to risk today for your Christian witness? If speaking out on His behalf threatens your reputation, remember Joseph's act of kindness. Please share your thoughts.

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

It's time to do some *prayer walking*—not in the literal, but the *spiritual* sense. The Holy Spirit will lead you today as you consider three points from your lesson, write them in the form of a prayer, and lift them to the Lord. If practicing the presence of God is new to you—be patient—it will come, and you will be blessed!

"... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26-27 NLT

A prayer for taking up the cross . . .

Jesus declared: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). Are you willing to *daily* die to self—whatever it takes? Tell Him about it.

A prayer for His touch . . .

Love for you is what kept Jesus nailed to the Cross! "Consider Him who endured such hostility against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your soul" (Hebrews 12:3). Ask Him to strengthen you where you need it most today.

A prayer for loving remembrance . . .

The women at the cross are remembered for their loving devotion to Christ. What will you be remembered for?

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes