



CRUCIFIED!

Catalog No. 1145

Mark 15:16-32

44th Message

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June 18th, 2000

I. Introduction

On a warm spring night in 1972, Jesus Christ invaded my life. As I lay on my bed, wide awake, the glow of a nearby streetlight filtering in through my window, I suddenly was intensely and soberly aware that God was calling me to give him my heart and my life. I didn't know why. I didn't fully understand what was happening to me. But I knew very deeply that God was real and he was calling me to commit my life to Jesus. It was truly a surprise invasion.

Having grown up in the Baptist church, the natural thing for me to decide was to go forward in church the following Sunday. At the end of every service an altar call was given, and this time I knew I was one whom God was calling. So, without telling my parents or anyone beforehand, when my pastor gave the invitation, heart pounding and palms sweaty, I got up and went forward. The organ swelled and the congregation sang as I walked to the front. There in front of me, my pastor, Emory Campbell, stretched out his arms. He leaned forward to hear my voice.

As he did, I began to weep. After choking out the fact that I wanted to give my life to Jesus, I continued to weep. Five, ten minutes passed and still I wept. The poor deacon assigned to take me aside and talk with me didn't quite know what to do with me.

It took nearly two decades before I finally understood why I wept that day, two decades of reflection on that turning point of my life to understand what was happening in my soul.

In our study of Mark today, our drama comes to an astounding and shocking crescendo, in which much of our Lord's life and ministry is completed. In this passage we see the completion of the circle of denial and abandonment of Jesus; we see Jesus as the truly complete Suffering Servant, and we see the completion of judgement upon the Jewish nation and religious hierarchy, the very ones who should have heralded the coming of Messiah.

The tension of the passion week has built to the bursting point, particularly as we have seen in the last two studies through the trial of Jesus and the simultaneous cross-examination of Peter, in which we found the story of our own fearful and faithless hearts.

That scene was followed by Jesus' hearing before Pilate, in which the people rejected his desire to release Jesus, instead choosing the violent insurrectionist Ba-

rabbas who, as we have seen, represented what Israel had become. We now find ourselves in the midst of unrestrained evil. Jesus has no one to give comfort, to ease the searing pain.

This now leaves us at the threshold of history's most profound injustice, an act so remarkable and outrageous that when we stop and truly, carefully consider what occurred, we must pause and ask: Why? Why did this happen? Did it have to happen? Did it have to happen this way? What does it mean for us? Why do we study it, consider it, remember it? Does it really have relevance to us in 2000, in this enlightened, post-modern age where information flows at startling rates and billions of dollars change hands each minute? What bearing does this have when there are products to be developed; IPOs to be executed; college educations to be planned; playoffs to be played; concerts to be performed; homeless to be cared for; mission trips to be taken, life to be lived?

Why should we care what happened to this non-violent revolutionary, calling himself a king, yet being clandestinely tried and brutally killed on a Roman cross?

II. The Completed Circle of Denial – All Humanity Drawn Together to Put Christ on the Cross (15:16-20)

And the soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. And they dressed Him up in purple, and after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews." And they kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting at Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. And after they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, and put His garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. (Mark 15:16-20, NASB)

The first thing to note is that at this point in the drama, the Sanhedrin (the high priest, the chief priests, the elders and teachers of the law) have lost their voice. Two weeks ago, when we studied chapter 14:64-65, Mark quoted the Sanhedrin: "You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. And some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!' And the officers received Him with slaps in the face." From this

point, Mark records their actions but gives them no words. They have no voice in the story. I would offer that Mark has taken away their voice because the limits of their power have been reached. They no longer have voice, only swift, desperate actions.

We then noted that the heinous mocking and beating of Jesus by the Sanhedrin and their guard was quickly followed by Peter's denial. Peter, indeed all mankind, stood in the courtyard and denied our Lord. The circle of rejection widened. The chorus of denial was then joined by the crowds of Jerusalem: "Crucify Him!" they screamed.

Now, in verses 16-20 of chapter 15, we see the circle of rejection and denial completed as the Roman soldiers to whom Jesus is handed over mimic the Jewish religious hierarchy. They spat upon Jesus and beat him, just as their polar opposite counterparts, the Sanhedrin.

The rejection of the very Son of God is complete. Notice what Mark has done. From the Jewish high priest to the pagan Roman soldiers, from Jesus' intimate friends to the crowds of common people gathered in Jerusalem, all of them reject Jesus. Mark has woven his account of these events to show the world symbolically united, hated enemies arm in arm, to reject, mock, and deny the very Son of God.

What does this mean for us? Why do we study the crucifixion? First of all, we see the disturbing reality that we are a part of this wicked chorus. Our sin, our rebelliousness, our selfishness give us no choice but to be included in this hideous song. We cannot escape that reality. Isaiah makes no distinction among people when he says, in chapter 53: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

If any of us hold to the notion that it was the Jews who crucified Jesus, then we are terribly misled. Mark makes it clear that all mankind drove Jesus to the cross. The amazing reality is that as true as this is, he went willingly and as a part of his Father's method to fulfill justice and extend mercy to his creation. Indeed, we denied him, and beat him, and spat upon him. And indeed he suffered the full measure of the wrath of God on our behalf.

III. The Complete Suffering Servant (15:21-24)

And they pressed into service a passerby coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), that he might bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. And they tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. (Mark 15:21-24)

Suddenly, into the scene enters an unknown, common man who is thrust to center stage. Simon, a Cyre-

nean Jew, is on his way into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Hurrying along, he nervously anticipates the preparations necessary for himself and his family. He mentally reviews his grocery and supply list, all of which must be completed before sundown. At the city gate, Simon finds himself in the midst of a crush of people and animals. Suddenly, a disturbance ahead gives way to a clearing of people. Simon anxiously looks around, wondering if he will make it on time.

As he scans the scene, his eyes fall on an imposing Roman centurion, pointing at him. "Me?" "Yes, you." Then Simon understands, as before him is a beaten and bloodied man stumbling, now falling, his raw wounds mixing with the dry dust of the road. In a flurry of moments, Simon is forced to pick up the large wooden beam, which this condemned and dying man can no longer carry. Confused and scared, Simon obeys. To object would be pointless.

I wonder how long it was before Simon understood that day's events. Jesus invaded his life on that day, in that moment. Mark zooms his camera in on this Cyrenean peasant, tells us his name and gives us the names of his sons, so that there will be no doubt as to who this is. Fascinating detail, isn't it?

The most amazing thing about these verses, however, is the description of the actual crucifixion. A mere four words in the English; in the Greek, three words, two if we take out the "and." Isn't this amazing? Mark gives the actual crucifixion of Jesus only two words. Now, this tells us something. The crucifixion itself, as horrific as the act was, is not the core of what Mark is communicating. It is those activities occurring around the crucifixion on which he wants us to focus.

Lest we whitewash the reality of this form of capital punishment, I quote to you excerpts from Walter Wessel's commentary on Mark as he quotes from Davis' *Crucifixion of Jesus*:

As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward... Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled... Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then, another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart... tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air...¹

It's unbearable isn't it? It's as difficult for me to read to you now as it was for me to read the first time. But, the amazing thing is, Mark only gives it two words.

The actual crucifixion is almost a sidebar, a footnote to the story. I would offer that this is because we are to be struck not by the horrific reality of the act of crucifixion, but instead by the fact that the very Son of God

willingly took it on. He willingly experienced the utter depths of shame, abuse and pain in order to take the wrath that was due each one of us.

Jesus was the complete Suffering Servant. He took it all. Physically, he took the pain — pain and abuse that defies description. Mentally, he took the shame, the embarrassment, the derision, the mocking of mankind. The Creator submitted to utter humiliation from the created. Mark tells us that the soldiers rolled dice to determine who would get Jesus' garments. Oh, the humiliation. Roman soldiers cavalierly dividing up the garments of the perfect, complete, Suffering Servant, the Messiah, Son of God. Spiritually, he underwent the ultimate horror: complete rejection by his Father, YHWH, the great "I AM." The Lord of Lords turns his back on his Son.

Why do we study and consider the crucifixion? Because he was the perfect, complete Suffering Servant.

In the end, Mark leaves no doubt in our minds as to the magnitude of agony undergone by our Lord. Beginning to end, he suffered in every way. It was unspeakable agony from which he could have escaped. Yet he endured it for you... and for me.

IV. The Completion of Judgement (15:25-32)

And it was the third hour when they crucified Him. And the inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." And they crucified two robbers with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Ha! You were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests along with the scribes were also mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" And those who were crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him. (Mark 15:25-32)

Mark now brings us full circle, back to Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. We see that the abuse of the trial continues, unabated, even now that Jesus is on the cross.

Reentering the scene now are the chief priests and the teachers of the law. These leaders of Israel have observed an astonishing series of events. And, the fact of the matter is, despite their trial and conviction of Jesus, they still have a chance to save themselves and their people.

Jesus has made it clear that temple destruction was imminent. He gave every clue to them that the physical temple was no longer the dwelling place of God on earth, and that it was doomed because of Israel's sin and rebellion. But Jesus was willing to become that temple and take the destruction upon himself: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

Tom Wright, in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, says: "... [Jesus] announced the end of the present evil age... and the reconstruction of the people of YHWH on a basis that would leave no future role for the temple. Jesus... told the second temple story of the suffering and exile of the people of YHWH in a new form, and proceeded to act it out, finding himself called... to undergo the fate that he announced, in symbol and word, for Jerusalem as a whole."

The temple had become the epicenter of activity for a future, armed rebellion. The Sanhedrin, rather than walk in humility and service to the Lord, providing light to the nations, instead chose to take on the methods of their hated oppressors. Armed rebellion had replaced fear of the Lord. A passion for throwing off Rome had replaced their passion for God. Control, power and influence were their gods.

And now the chief priests and teachers of the law have a choice. They have a final opportunity to recognize their depravity and recognize the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice.

For the first time since the trial, the Jewish religious establishment has a voice again. And what do they do with it? Mark tells us "they mock." In the same way as the passersby, they mock. Their doom is sealed. The true temple has been destroyed, to be raised again on the third day. The true temple, the perfect and complete sacrifice is doing his work, taking on the death and destruction promised a chosen but rebellious people, and they are missing it! Indeed, within a generation, the physical temple was destroyed. Rome, under the leadership of Emperor Titus, sacked and utterly destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The very ones who should have recognized Messiah, are the very ones who mock the most.

So now, as the Suffering Servant completes his sacrifice, Mark brings us back full circle to complete the judgement. The scene has moved from the kangaroo court of the Sanhedrin, in which they mock the Son of God, to the courtroom of heaven, in which they plead guilty by mocking yet again. By book ending these scenes with their mockery, Mark shows us the completion of judgement upon the Jewish religious hierarchy.

V. Summary and Exhortation

So, Mark shows why it had to happen this way. God then takes this moment and makes it the center point of history. He uses the very device of our crucifixion of the Messiah to become the very device by which our sins are righteously and justly dealt with. There is not one among us who, left to ourselves, will not reject the living one who created us. Our sin runs so deep, our selfishness so pervasive, our rebelliousness so thorough that no earthly device can save us.

Why did the crucifixion have to occur?

We all, because of God's mercy, had to be gathered to participate in this horrific drama. Rejection was complete. Jesus, the perfect Suffering Servant, became the

presence of God on earth. He became the temple of God and took on the fate of the physical temple in order to save its inhabitants, and indeed all mankind. He took on our fate. Will we mock? Or will we fall to our knees in humility?

In the crucifixion, perfect and complete justice was rendered on our behalf. Without it, there is no justice. Without it, there is no mercy. Without it, there is no victory. Without it, there is no life.

Tom Wright says: Jesus went to the cross in the ultimate act of “turning the other cheek, going the second mile.” He exposed his whole body, carried the whole load of sin and decay, and the judgement it deserves. Through this act, Jesus fulfills Israel’s destiny to save the world. The cross, the ultimate symbol of helplessness and shame, becomes the symbol of victory over Satan.

Beaten and bloodied, Jesus invaded Simon’s world. Too weak to do what the convicted had to do, Jesus wouldn’t have made it. He had already endured far more than what it would take to kill most of us. But yet there was more. And rather than call down a legion of angels to rescue him, Jesus pressed on, the complete Suffering Servant. And in the midst of it all he invades Simon’s life. Evidence suggests that Simon was a believer, as his sons are specifically mentioned by both Mark and Matthew, and Paul greets Rufus by name in his letter to the Romans. Mark leaves no doubt as to exactly which Simon this is: *the* Simon, the one they all knew!

I would offer that Simon is us. As we scurry about, busying ourselves with the concerns of the world, Jesus invades our lives. God in his mercy and grace pulls us aside and makes us a part of this great drama. And in doing so, he covers us in his complete justice. We gather together to condemn the Son of God; he responds by being the perfect Suffering Servant, becoming the lamb led to slaughter to pay the price of our depravity.

Why did I weep that day in 1972? Nearly 20 years later, I finally understood. Though I didn’t know it then, I wept that day because I put Jesus on the cross. I wept that day because I knew the sin and decay in my heart, even as an 11-year-old. I wept that day because my soul sensed the magnitude of what happened 2000 years ago, even though it was far beyond my mental understanding.

I wept that day because God in his infinite mercy invaded my life. He lifted from me the mantle of judgement, and put it on his Son.

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1. Walter W. Wessel, “Mark,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 767.