

**THE CRUCIFIXION**

Mark 15:16-26

**Intro:** We come in our text for today to what, in many respects, was the most tragic hour in human history. Nothing that came before it, nor has there been anything like it since, that can compare with it. Of course I am speaking of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the one hand, nothing ever has demonstrated so clearly the total depravity of man as this event. Nor has anything ever demonstrated so fully the love and grace of God. But it is not just the fact that our Lord died, but it has to do with *why* He died. The emphasis, particularly in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is upon the fact that our Lord died. And yet none of them fails to set before us the purpose of His death. In the text before us here in the Gospel of Mark, Mark does not say why He died. We know that He died because He was hated in a very special way by the Jewish religious leaders. They were jealous of Him because of His popularity with the Jewish people, and we know that He was popular mainly for two reasons: first, because of His teaching, and second, because of the ways in which He met the needs of the people – healing their sick, giving sight to the blind, curing the lepers, enabling the lame to walk, and even raising the dead. His teaching and His miracles proved beyond any doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was more than a man. *They proved that He was God in human flesh, the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel.*

We know that the public ministry of our Lord began when He was thirty years of age. We are told this in Luke 3:23. And by the best calculations of most Biblical scholars, His ministry was not a long ministry, but actually very short: approximately three years long! So, when we read our text in Luke, let us remember that we are reading of the death of One Whom we would consider to have been in His prime.

But He knew all along why He had come to earth. He had not come just to perform miracles, nor just to proclaim the wonderful truth which He taught. We cannot minimize the importance of any part of His public ministry. But He came to earth to die. And yet if we leave our explanation there, we still do not know the whole story. It is that He came to die for others. He came to die for sinners. He came to die as their Substitute that they would not have to die for their sins, but instead, through His death would receive forgiveness for their sins and the gift of eternal life. That certainly was not in the minds of those Jews who demanded His death. Nor did Pilate have any idea that the death of Christ was any

different from the deaths of the hundreds, probably thousands of others who were put to death under Roman rule. Nor did the soldiers who mistreated Jesus like they did have any idea of Who Jesus was, or what He had come to the earth to do, or what the significance of His death would be.

But the Lord knew it when He was twelve years old, and perhaps even younger. But when He was twelve He went with His parents and other relatives to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. When the Passover was concluded, His parents, their relatives, and friends left to return to Nazareth, they thought that Jesus was with them. But when they discovered that He was not with them, they returned to Jerusalem to find Him. After three days they found Him in the temple with the Jewish doctors of the Law. He was listening to them, and asking them questions. And we are told in Luke 2:47 that those Jewish scholars “were astonished at His understanding and answers.” When Joseph and Mary asked Him to explain why He had not stayed with the family as they returned to Nazareth. Most of you know His answer. He said to them, “How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not (or, did you not know) that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Joseph and Mary did not understand what He meant. But our Lord went with them, and submitted Himself to them.

So even though the Lord Jesus was born as a baby, and grew up as any other Jewish child, yet there was a sense of mission in His heart even when He was twelve years of age.

Early in our Lord’s ministry, that is, soon after He was thirty, He went to a wedding in Cana. His mother was there, and so were His disciples. They ran out of wine, and the Lord brought this to our Lord’s attention, evidently believing that He could do something about it. And eventually He did. But His first response to His mother, was, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” And then He followed those words with these: “Mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:4). His words meant that He knew that He was on a mission.

I just want to point out to you two other times that the Lord referred to *His time* or *His hour* (although there are others beside these).

In John 7 when opposition to the Lord and His ministry was growing among the Jewish leaders, the Apostle John simply made this statement

which is recorded for us in John 7:30:

Then they sought to take Him: but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come.

This definitely place “His hour” with His arrest and death, or the time when in the providence of God the Jews would succeed in laying their hands on Him and ultimately see their desire when Jesus was put to death.

The other verse I have in mind is in the first verse of John 17, the chapter in which we have what is often called, *our Lord's high priestly prayer*.

Listen to the way the Lord began that prayer. He said,

Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee.

His time, or His hour, was the time appointed by the Father when the Lord Jesus would die – *not die as everyone is appointed to die, but die as a Sacrifice for the sins of all who had ever, or would ever, believe in Him for their salvation*.

Here in Mark 15, Mark is telling us about the historical event about the death of Christ. People will never believe *why* Jesus Christ died unless first they believe *that He died*. All four Gospel writers tell us that He died. He really died. In the mouth of only two or three witnesses any fact is established. The evidence that He died is overwhelming. The Apostle Paul said that this is the first fact of the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul was speaking about the Gospel that he had preached with such blessing in Corinth. And he wrote:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3).

Notice the very words that Paul used: “Christ--died--for our sins--according to the Scriptures.” If you are going to be saved, you have to believe Who He is, what He did, why He did it, and that this is the foundational truth of the Gospel found in type, in prophecy, in doctrine, and as an historical fact in the Scriptures. Mark told us back in Mark 10:45,

45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Jesus Christ did not come that we might do something for Him, but He came that He might do something for us—“to give His life a ransom for many.”

The Bible teaches us that “the wages of sin is death.” Jesus Christ was not a sinner. If our sins had not been charged to Him, He never would

have died. But He died, as Isaiah said long before the Lord Jesus Christ was born into the human family, because “the Lord (the Father) hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” God laid our sins upon Jesus, and that is why He died, as our Substitute, that we might not have to suffer the penalty of our sins forever in hell. In fact, the Apostle Paul expressed this great truth also in his second letter to the church at Corinth which we have in our Bibles. He said, speaking of Christ, in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Can you understand what it meant for the Lord Jesus Christ “to be made sin” for you and me? I can’t explain what it meant to Christ, but I know that behind, and yet included in the physical sufferings that are described for us in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus suffered the full penalty for our sins, that we might be declared righteous in God’s sight. He took our place that we might share His place before a holy God!

The Apostle Peter said it this way:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

This is what was going on in our text for today. The Jews and the Romans were carrying out the sovereign will of God, but they didn’t know what they were doing. Didn’t our Lord say that as He was dying on the Cross? “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Let me encourage you to read at one sitting all that Mark had to say about the death of the Lord Jesus. Then go to Matthew, and read His account. And then to Luke to read His account. And finally to John, to read what he said. All of this might be too much for us to do at one sitting because of the effect that it could have on us. No one has ever suffered on earth like our Lord suffered. There has never been any sorrow like His sorrow. There has never been a great example of man’s inhumanity to Man, to a Man Who was also God!

As I prepared my message I kept thinking about a statement that I read years ago, and I believe that it was in the introduction of a life of Corrie ten Boom, written by some man of God. And he said concerning the suffering of people under the Nazis during World War II that when the restrictions of society are removed from people, it is amazing to see the atrocities which they are capable of committing. We hear about it even

today when we read what is going on in Baghdad and wherever else ungodly men are able to do whatever they want to do. Here in our Lord's treatment by the Roman soldiers we see the wickedness, the depravity, the depths to which men will go when all restraints are taken away.

What did those Roman soldiers have against the Lord Jesus Christ? Nothing. What had our Lord ever done to hurt them? Nothing. Why did they do what they did? They did it just because they could. It was there opportunity to do to the Lord whatever they wanted to do. And they would have done worse if the Father had not restrained them to a great degree. The worst periods in human history have been when men could do whatever they wanted to do. Those soldiers were having a great time at our Lord's expense. They didn't worship Him as God; they mocked Him as the King of the Jews. And it wasn't long after this that the wrath of Rome was turned upon the Jews. There was no sense to what they did to the Lord. It just demonstrated what was in the heart of those soldiers. Death by crucifixion was not sufficient for those soldiers; they had to have their own "fun," and they were masters at doing that worst to people that could be done. Some prisoners condemned to die by crucifixion never died on crosses; they died at the hands of the soldiers so that they never got to the crosses.

(Read Mark 15:16-20.)

It must have been a different experience for those soldiers. They were used to prisoners crying out for mercy, pleading for the soldiers to have mercy upon them, or cursing them, and threatening them in way that they could. But our Lord took all that they did silently, without railing upon them, or threatening that somehow He would get even with them. Even with all of the terrible things that they did to the Lord, they had to recognize that the Lord was a prisoner unlike any prisoner that they had ever tormented before.

But did it take its toll on the Lord? Verse 21 gives us our answer. It was customary for prisoners to be forced to carry the cross upon which they would be crucified. Why did they "compel" this man Simon from Cyrene in north Africa to carry the Lord's Cross. There is just one reason: the Lord had been so weakened by what the soldiers had done to Him that He could hardly walk. And so the soldiers forced Simon to carry His cross. I don't think that we can prove that Alexander is the man which Paul mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:14 or the Rufus that Paul mentioned in Romans

16:13 is the Rufus that was the son of Simon the Cyrenian. There may be a connection in both cases. But our main interest in verse 21 in our text should be, why another man had to carry the Lord's cross.

Let me take you for a moment back to Isaiah 52 where the last three verses of that chapter actually belong to Isaiah 53. Isaiah 52:14 tells us this:

14 As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:

The Holy Spirit enabled the prophet Isaiah to look ahead into the future when the Messiah would be on earth, and this is what he prophesied. David Baron, a well known Hebrew Christian and Jewish scholar who published a book on Isaiah 52:13-53:12 the year after I was born, had this to say about Isaiah 52:14. He said that "astonied," or *astonished*, as we would say it today, means "to be thrown by anything into a desolate or bereaved condition; to be startled, confused, as it were petrified by paralyzing astonishment. Even to *such an extent* will many be astonished at Him because of the greatness of His suffering, which shall cause His blessed countenance and form to be so 'marred' that it shall appear, as it were, 'disfigurement' itself, without any trace of the grace and beauty which belong to the human face and figure" (p. 60).

All of this means that our Lord suffered to such a great extent that as He was hanging on the Cross, you could look at Him and wonder not only if He were the Christ, but if it were a human body at all! I can't help but wonder what all of this meant to His mother, because she was there when He was hanging on the Cross.

But David Baron then added this paragraph which I pass on to you:

By these strong words and expressions the Spirit of God seeks to give us a glimpse into the depth and *intensity* of the vicarious sufferings of our Savior, and of the greatness of the cost of our redemption; and as we contemplate this picture of the Man of Sorrows, with the "face" which for us was "marred" more than any man, and His form bowed and disfigured more than the sons of men, may our hearts be stirred with shame and sorrow for the sin which was the cause of it all, and with greater love and undying gratitude to Him who bore all this for us (pp. 60-61).

(Close by reading Mark 15:22-26.)

**Concl:** Even as the Lord was hanging upon the Cross dying, the soldiers were gambling at the foot of the Cross, to see what part of His garments each one should take. Those men not only had evil hearts, but they had hardened hearts.

But let me ask you a question. What if, when we get to heaven, you learn that some of the soldiers who drove that crown of thorns on His head, who spit upon Him, who slapped Him and beat Him, *are there?* Would you be surprised? Remember, as I reminded you last week, that the centurion, evidently the one who was in charge and a participant in what the soldiers did to the Lord, was heard saying, as we read in verse 39 of this fifteenth chapter of Mark, and as he saw the Lord Jesus die, “Truly this man was a Son of God.”

If he and some of the others are in heaven, let us remind ourselves that it was the same grace of God that got them there, that will get us there. Maybe some of you are holding back from Christ because you feel that your sins are so great that you cannot be saved. Take encouragement from the Apostle Paul. At one time he hated Jesus Christ, and caused a lot of suffering for the people of God, sometimes even to death. But in one of his last epistles, he said this which ought to encourage all of us:

15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (1 Tim. 1:15).

Since the Lord saved the chief of sinners, there is hope for every other sinner. There is hope for me and for you. O come to Christ, if you do not know Him, trust in Him, and He will save you.