

SESSION ELEVEN

The Crucifixion of Jesus: *Persevering in Chaos (Mark 15:1-39)*

“We must not forget that it wasn’t the Jews that put him on the cross, and it wasn’t the Romans. It was my sins, it was your sins, the sins of this world.” ~ Franklin Graham

I. Overview

With Jesus’ confession in hand, the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Adapting Jesus’ messianic claim into a political assertion, the religious leaders hoped Jesus’ charge of claiming royal authority would force Pilate to execute Jesus. The numerous references to the “king of the Jews” throughout this chapter only highlight this point (vv. 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). While various individuals and groups of individuals are noted in Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, the disciples are clearly missing in action. Jesus faces his enemies alone.

These two scenes are horrific as the Son of Man is handed over to His executioners. And yet, there exists an undertow that represents the purpose of God’s fulfillment on earth. Jesus’ willingness to serve as the atoning sacrifice affords Him the opportunity to be the Savior of the world.

II. The Content

A. The Trial of Jesus (15:1-15)

v. 1 - “*early in the morning*” The Jewish leaders must act quickly before the scheduled crucifixion at 9:00am.

“*handed over*” - The phrase recalls Jesus’ words in 8:31 and 14:21. It was a divine necessity that God handed over His Son as a ransom for humanity (10:45; 14:27, 36).

vv. 2-5 - Jesus’ limited response to Pilate suggests that Pilate’s understanding of the title “King of the Jews” is not synonymous with Jesus’ use of “king”.

vv. 6-11 - While the release of a prisoner during Passover lacks corroboration outside of the Gospels, it was not uncommon to release prisoners on holidays in the ancient world (cf. Evans, *Mark*, 480).

Matthew 27:16 describes Barabbas as a “notorious” insurrectionist and murderer. The one who had taken life is exchanged for the One who will give life! Irony also exists surrounding the meaning of “Barabbas”. The name in Aramaic means “Son of the Father”.

vv. 12-15 - Despite Pilate’s attempt to release Jesus and the Roman governor’s questioning of Jesus’ innocence, both the Jewish religious leaders and the crowds call for Jesus to be crucified.

The first stage of Roman crucifixion, scourging, involved whipping with leather thongs on whose ends were tied pieces of sharp metal, bone, stone, or lead.

B. The Death of Jesus (15:16-39)

vv. 16-20 - The fulfillment of what would happen to Him by the hands of the Gentiles now is coming to pass (cf. 10:34). As aptly noted by one scholar, the Roman soldiers' enjoyment of humiliating the "king of the Jews" is in keeping with their contempt for Jews in general. These soldiers are eager to focus their brutality on a Jew who had dared to challenge the imperial power (cf. T. E. Schmidt, *NTS*, 41 [1995], 1-18).

v. 21 - Most likely a Hellenistic Jew living in Jerusalem, Simon assists Jesus in carrying the 75 to 125 pound vertical beam of the cross. It appears that Simon's sons were known by Mark's readers because these two young men were mentioned by name.

vv. 23-24 - Psalm 22, a psalm depicting the suffering of God's faithful servant by the hands of the wicked, resonates throughout this passage (e.g., Psalm 22:18 in verse 24, Psalm 22:7 in verse 29, and Psalm 22:1 in verse 34).

vv. 25-27 - Mark's wording concerning the location of the thieves is a bit cumbersome. The language probably expects the reader to remember the request of James and John to sit at Jesus' right and left in glory (10:37, 40). One commentator writes, ". . . there is scope for ironical reflection on the sort of glory Jesus now enjoys and on the quality of those who share it with him, and also perhaps on the fact that now the time has come James and John are not there to fulfill their boast of 10:39." (*Mark*, 646).

vv. 28-32 - The paradox of the crowd's mockery is that if Jesus had chosen to save Himself, then He could not have served as the Savior of the world.

vv. 33-34 - Darkness served as a sign of God's displeasure and judgment (cf. Deut 28:29), and it was the penultimate plague at the time of the first Passover (cf. Exod 10:21-23).

Jesus' cry is not made with a whimper, but with a shout, indicating full possession of his faculties. Here Jesus temporarily enters into the state of God-forsakenness from which we needed to be rescued (cf. Gal 3:13). The world-renown New Testament scholar, Cranfield, observes, "The burden of the world's sin is complete self-identification with sinners, involved not merely a felt, but a real, abandonment by his Father. It is in the cry of dereliction that the full horror of man's sin stands revealed." (*Mark*, 458).

The basis for the cry, Psalm 22, indicates not one of total despair, but a lament psalm that ends in a confession of confidence and praise.

vv. 35-36 - Various Jewish traditions taught that Elijah would come to rescue the righteous.

vv. 37-38 - The splitting of the curtain could either indicate: (1) an act of divine judgment on the Temple and the nation; or (2) an access which is now made available for all to God (cf. Heb 6:19-20; 9:3-14, 24-28; 10:19-20).

v. 39 - The centurion's declaration is the climax of the crucifixion scene. He is the first human witness—not a disciple, not even a Jew—who describes Jesus as God's Son. And thus, the crucifixion takes the reader back to 1:1—the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

III. The Intersect

The cross reminds us of the horror of our sin. John Stott states it well, “Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us.”

Two pertinent questions:

1. Have you accepted God's gift? Have you come to recognize Jesus as your Savior and repented of your sin?

John 3:16 —

2. If you know Christ as your Savior, what specific area in your life “cheapens” Christ's sacrifice upon the cross? Charles Spurgeon challenged his parishioners with these words: “Look to the cross, and hate your sin, for sin nailed your Well Beloved to the tree. Look up to the cross, and you will kill sin, for the strength of Jesus' love will make you strong to put down your tendencies to sin.” The successful Christian life requires us to live with an offensive, not a defensive, approach!

Romans 12:1-2 -

“Love was compressed for all history in that lonely figure on the cross, who said that he could call down angels at any moment on a rescue mission, but chose not to - because of us. At Calvary, God accepted his own unbreakable terms of justice.” ~ Philip Yancey