

91 Mark 15:21-32

The Crucifixion

Text

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. 22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. 25 And it was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. 29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

The Passerbyer

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

After Jesus is scourged, mocked and beaten, they dress him in his own clothes and lead him to be crucified. It was typical to have the criminal carry the horizontal beam of his own cross. As Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, so now Jesus carries the wood for his. As Isaac carried the wood but God provided a ram in his stead, so too Simon carried the wood but Jesus will be offered in his stead.

Some detail is given regarding Simon of Cyrene. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Usually a man is identified by his father, but in this case he is identified by his sons. While Simon was a common name, Alexander and Rufus are not. His sons and likely he himself, became followers of Jesus. His sons were probably well known to the Christian community and so Mark includes them here to identify the man who carried Jesus' cross.

Simon apparently had no interest in Jesus. He was coming in from the country. He had business to which to attend. He was probably not even aware that there was to be a crucifixion. While he had no purpose to be there at that time (other than an incidental purpose) Providence did. When Sim woke up that morning as he did every morning, little did he know that he would meet the Christ in the midst of his passion. When he went about his business, even on a festival day, little did he know that he would soon be pressed into the service of carrying the bloodied cross of the Ancient of Days. It seems that this was a turning point for Simon.

The electricity that was in the air was too much to forget. His forced service to carry along the way of suffering the most heinous instrument of death was undoubtedly something etched into

his memory. But more than that, it may have been the jeers and taunts and ridicule heaped from the crowds, not upon him, but upon the one whose cross he bore. And what crime did he commit that he would be so hated? The accusation was this: He saved others. Meeting Jesus in the midst of his passion and hearing the taunts changed his life, and the life of his sons.

They pressed into service Simon of Cyrene, but where is Simon son of Jonas? Where is Simon who declared he would follow Jesus to the death? That Simon is nowhere to be found. He is likely still weeping and feeling sorry for himself. Sorry for himself I say for if it were true repentance, would not Peter have come again to be with his Lord and carry his cross? But he is not here, and it is Simon of Cyrene that the Roman guards press into service. Fear and pity still haunt Peter's mind. So while he sits and weeps under his troubled brow, his Savior dies alone.

The Place

22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

The place called Golgotha here in Mark is unknown. Tradition places it at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There is another, vaguely skull shaped mound that is a popular tourist place, but it has nothing archaeologically to recommend it. The best guess we have still is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

He was given wine to drink. Again, we do not know who actually did this, but tradition has that it was the women who attended that gave Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to drink. The design is to give him something to deaden the pain. Something to make his execution just a bit more tolerable. Yet we read that he took it not. He intends to experience the fullness of this horrible event. He will not drink a cup of wine in order that he may drink the cup of wrath down to its bitter dregs. Never was there a cup so dry as the cup of wrath when our Lord finished it.

24 And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.

"And they crucified him." Crucifixion, contrary, perhaps to popular understanding, was not monolithically performed. People sometimes talk about how the Romans had crucifixion down to a science. It seems, however, that crucifixion varied a bit. Sometimes their wrists, rather than being nailed to the cross were instead tied on. Some people, such as Peter, were crucified upside down. Some people had their arms fixed in the expected way, but their feet were wrapped around the vertical beam and nailed on either side. There was no one way in which it was done. That was part of the cruelty of it. It was up to the creativity of the executioner as to which way a man would be crucified.

Our traditional understanding, however, does seem to be the way that Jesus was crucified. Jesus was likely thrown back down onto the cross member. The legionnaire would kneel down and sink a large square nail through the wrist of Jesus and deep into the wood. He quickly moved to the next arm and did the same, allowing some room for movement. The feet were then placed one on top of the other and a single nail driven through the top of the feet into the vertical member.

The soldiers then divide his garments. This fulfills Psalm 22:18. Psalm 22 begins with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It continues in verse 16 to say, "For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet."

Finally, verse 18 says, "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

The Position

25 And it was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

Here it was the third hour of the day, that would have been about 9:00 am. On the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, when they should have been in the temple offering peace offerings, they were instead here at the place of the skull heaping scorn on the Prince of Peace.

His accusation read, "King of the Jews." The religious leaders objected saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" **22** Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

In the days of the Judges, Samuel was the last judge. The people were asking for a king like all the other nations and Samuel became angry. But God said to him, "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." Nowhere is this seen to more true than when God took on flesh and dwelt among man only to be rejected and crucified as an impostor. The people in Samuel's day desired Saul whereas God's choice was David. Saul failed but David ushered in a peace and level of prosperity that the people had never enjoyed until that point or since. The people in Jesus day wanted a revolutionary. They wanted a Barabbas when God's choice was Jesus who would usher in a kingdom that will never come to an end. Since its inception it has not stopped growing, nor will it until it comes in its consummate form at Christ's return.

The sign read, "King of the Jews." And so he was and is. But it is broader than may first be imagined. For we are all children of Abraham if we are part of the household of faith. We are children of the promise. The kingship of Christ is over us all, and he continues to reign and conquer. I want to draw some application on this point but I will save it for the end of the sermon because it is something I don't want us to forget.

27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

This was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53 which states, "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors."

Jesus, on the center cross is given the place of prominence as if to say that he was the greatest offender. As with so much of what has gone on, this too was true but not in the way they imagined. He was accused of claiming to be the Son of God, and indeed he was. He was accused of being a king, and in the most profound sense he was. He is now set up in a place reserved for the most prominent criminal, and though he was innocent, he took upon himself the sins of the world.

29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

The mocking continued up until his death. Jesus continued to exemplify the kingdom ethic. He who wants to be great must learn to be the servant of all. He who is first shall be last. Whoever receives a little one such as this receives me. whoever gives you a cup of water to drink" (act of service) "because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward." Jesus, though he could call 12 legions of angels to his aid, will not do so. It is through his death that he not only saves others, but is himself exalted to the highest position. It is through the destruction of his temple that he will be raised up.

Matthew Henry comments:

They triumph as if now that they had got him to the cross, there were no danger of his *destroying the temple*; whereas the *temple* of which *he* spoke, he was now *destroying*, and did within *three days build it up*; and the temple of which *they* spoke, he did by men, that were *his sword* and *his hand*, destroy not many years after. When secure sinners think the danger is over, it is then most ready to seize them

Herod's temple took some 85 years to finish. It required thousands of bricks. The largest foundation stone that was found was 11' x 16.5' x 46' and weighed approximately 600 tonnes. The foundation stones were likely carved out of the quarry using wooden beams and then flushing them out with water. Once removed they were carved into a block shape and then transported through gravity assist down to the temple. At that point they were shaped using harder stones into the exact shape they needed to fit each joint precisely. It was truly a marvel to behold.

Though they destroyed the temple that was his body, He was raised from the dead. Not only that, but he is constructing a temple the likes of which no one has ever seen. He has been building this temple, not for a scant 85 years, but for what is approaching 2000 years now. You and I are the stones.

Application

Jesus continues to reign over us today. This is an exceedingly hard doctrine for us to appropriate. Intellectually we can come to terms that scripture teaches the continued reign of Christ, but existentially we struggle to possess it.

I would like for us to focus this year on a radical change in the way we live. We need to live as if Jesus were alive and we were under his rule right now, for he is and we are. Let us live in light of his kingship. We need to make some radical changes this next year. Let us see how God may be pleased to grow this work if we are obedient.

One of the reasons I wanted to get into ministry, and one of the reasons I accepted this call was because I wanted to stop playing church. I think that to so much of what we do is still playing church. I believe that we have made significant improvements over the status quo, so I want to give credit. However, status quo is not our standard. Jesus is our standard. If that is too high for you to attain, too bad, but lest we harbor feelings of unfairness, then imitate Paul as he imitates Christ. Live up to his life first and then we will worry about Christ.

Let us see what happens if we pull out all stops and obey to the utmost if our ability under the enabling of the Holy Spirit. The next book that am going to be preaching through is Hosea, but I think before then I am going to take a break and do some topical preaching on how we should live as a church and what covenant community looks like. May we yet exist to be a city on a hill

that the hearts and minds of all people will be consumed by the matchless glory of Christ. May we serve our King with reckless abandon!