

15. The Final Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus

This chapter follows Jesus' betrayal and trial before the Sanhedrin. Since the leaders of the Jews had long sought to kill the Lord, they had no choice but to take him before Pilate—the Roman governor, who had last say on the death penalty. Thus, chapter 15 begins with the Jewish leaders meeting for the sole purpose of expediting the Lord's death. An important note to make about this lesson is that modern day Jews reject and, in fact, dispute the fact that the Jews killed the Lord. Of course, they reject the New Testament text that attests to this historical fact. In the study of Mark, it is clear that the Jewish leaders plotted against Christ from the beginning of his ministry. Mark 3:6 begins their effort to kill him, "6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." Mark 11:18 confirms their continuing efforts and their fears as Jesus grew in popularity, "18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching." Mark 14:1-2, sets the stage for the final trial recorded here in Mark 15:

14 Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."

After the resurrection, the New Testament writers continue to emphasize the Jews' role in the death of Jesus. Peter consistently called the Jews into account for the death of Jesus. On the Day of Pentecost, he preached in Acts 2:22-23, 36:

22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This theme continued in the sermons of Acts as illustrated by Acts 3:13-16:

You handed him [his servant Jesus] over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

This chapter is best taught in one reading, where it will attest to the power and glory of Christ's humiliation and crucifixion.

Jesus Handed over to Pilate

Mark 15:1-5

15 *Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole*

Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

All the leaders of the Jews – the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin – handed Jesus over to Pilot. Since Roman law disallowed local bodies from administering the death penalty, the matter had to go before Pilot. Jesus agreed that he was King of the Jews, but by his silence indicates that this is a very different answer than was expected; for his kingdom was a spiritual kingdom. John 18:33-37 offers this segment in more detail:

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Pilate Gives into the Jews and Releases Barabbas Instead of Jesus

Mark 15:6-15

6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

It is evident from the passage that Jesus had committed no crime. Indeed, it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed him over to Pilate. Pilate's motivation was his desire to satisfy the crowd. Prior to his acquiescing, Pilate washed his hands of the matter, apparently in an effort to justify himself. The account of Matt 27:24 includes Pilate's feeble effort to remove his guilt and responsibility from himself:

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was

starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

The Humiliation of Jesus

Mark 15:16-24

16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

These passages on the humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus present the agony of the cross in a way that needs no elaboration. Peter summed it up best in 1 Peter 2:21-25

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Mark 15:25-39

25 It was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

33 At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

36 One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"*

Matt 27:51-53 details the events at the point of Jesus' death:

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

The poignant plea, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" shows the mental and spiritual despair of Jesus, who had emptied himself of everything to fulfill the will of the Father. Phil 2:6-8 traces the depths of Jesus journey, now climaxed by this desperate, desolate despair:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death –
even death on a cross!

With the tearing of the temple curtain from the top to bottom, the physical and spiritual vestiges of the Mosaic Law disappeared, giving rise to a new covenant sanctified by the shed blood of Christ. Jesus had foretold this in Matt 26:28-29:

28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." NKJV

Paul explained how the cross was the end of the Mosaic Law and the beginning of the New Covenant in Col 2:13-15:

He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Events after His Death

Mark 15:40-47

40 *Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.*

42 *It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead.*

Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

These women were witnesses to Jesus' death and now the witnesses to his secure burial with a stone closing the entrance to tomb, cut out of rock. Thus, they secured Jesus body for the miraculous event of his resurrection. Matt 27:62-66 gives other details of how they secured the tomb making it impossible for anyone to steal the body:

62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."
66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.