

Mark

Chapter Fifteen

Introduction

The Gospel writers - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - are all very reserved in describing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. None of them describes the driving of the nails; it is simply put in these stark terms, "And they crucified Him." Their intention seems to be to encourage your faith rather than to evoke your feelings.

Mark's account of the crucifixion is unique among the Gospel writers in that he leaves out a great many things that the others include. For instance, Mark includes only one sentence out of the seven spoken by Jesus from the cross.

Mark's view is not that of the crowd looking at Jesus on the cross; it is the view of Jesus looking upon the people in the crowd! You don't get a view *of* the cross; you get a view *from* the cross! Beginning with Pilate - who sent Jesus to the cross - and ending with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus - who saw where Jesus was laid after the cross - Mark brings a great number of people before you so that you can see Jesus looking upon them from the cross.

As we study Mark's account of the crucifixion, we should follow his unique approach. We should see the crowd gathered around the cross. Then, we should see ourselves as the crowd gathered around the cross. We should see what we look like to the Lord as He looks out upon us from the perspective of having been crucified for us.

The cross was a historical event that occurred nearly two thousand years ago. In a spiritual sense, though, it is still occurring! I'm not trying to be mystical...I'm only trying to emphasize the central importance of the cross to all mankind for all time. Its effects are always occurring. Everyone must at some time or other during their life encounter Jesus on the cross. As they gather at the cross, the cross exposes their hearts.

As the Lord looks out upon us, out upon any crowd, out upon the whole crowd of the human race gathered at the cross, He sees both unbelievers and believers. As He sees them, He exposes their hearts, and this is what they can expect: #1 You Can Expect The Cross To Expose What Is Hidden In The Hearts Of Unbelievers, and #2 You Can Expect The Cross To Expose What Is Hindering The Hearts Of Believers.

#1 You Can Expect The Cross To Expose
What Is Hidden In The Hearts Of Unbelievers
(15:1-20; 22-39)

As we look out upon humanity from the perspective of the cross, unbelievers come into focus first. You see Pontius Pilate, the chief priests, the Roman soldiers, the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus, many passersby, and a Roman centurion. The cross exposes what is hidden in the hearts of these unbelievers. What is hidden there is a good sampling of what is hidden in the hearts of all unbelievers of all ages as the cross exposes them.

We begin with Pilate:

Mark 15:1 Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate.

Jesus had been found guilty of blasphemy by the Jewish leaders. The penalty for blasphemy was death. But the Jews were subject to the Romans and could not legally put anyone to death. The Jews would need to prove Jesus guilty of a crime against Rome worthy of capital punishment; they would need Rome's cooperation. They would need to convince Pilate.

Mark 15:2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered and said to him, "It is as you say."

Mark 15:3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing.

Mark 15:4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!"

Mark 15:5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

Among their accusations, the Jews told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be king instead of Caesar. This would make Him an

insurrectionist, a traitor to Caesar - a crime which, if one was found guilty, was punishable by death.

Pilate despised the Jews and seemed to be looking for any opening by which he could release Jesus. Jesus was uncooperative. "He answered nothing"; that is, He didn't defend Himself against their false accusations. It was His moment, and He was in control. It was quite possible for Jesus to save Himself from going to the cross. He refused to do so. He would go to the cross to die for the sins of the world.

Mark 15:6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested.

Mark 15:7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.

Mark 15:8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them.

Mark 15:9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

Mark 15:10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

Mark 15:11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them.

Mark 15:12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

Mark 15:13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"

Mark 15:14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

Mark 15:15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

Barabbas was a bloodthirsty revolutionary; he was a murderer. Pilate gave the people a choice - Jesus or Barabbas. Almost inconceivably, they chose Barabbas!

There is an interesting play on words. "Barabbas" means *son of the father*. According to certain first century manuscripts, there is some evidence that his name was Jesus Barabbas! So the people were choosing between two men who were "Jesus, son of the father."

This gives you insight into why they would choose Barabbas. A few days before, this same crowd had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as their Messiah. All their ideas of Messiah centered around Jesus delivering them from Rome. When it became clear that Jesus had no intention of fulfilling their plans, they turned to Barabbas

- another Jesus, one who would try by force to accomplish what Jesus Christ offered by faith.

Pilate ordered Jesus scourged, perhaps to arouse sympathy for Him and avoid the need to crucify Him. Scourging was a brutal process of whipping a prisoner tied to a post. The whip consisted of leather thongs imbedded with pieces of jagged metal and broken glass.

The crowd was not satisfied; Pilate ordered the crucifixion.

The other Gospels give you various insights into Pilate's conduct and character. Mark simply says that he was "wanting to gratify the crowd." The cross exposed what was in his heart.

Looking out upon unbelievers, the Lord sees many who want to gratify a crowd. The crowd may be one person, or it may be many. It may be a wife or a husband who sees Jesus on the cross but fears losing their mate; it may be a student who sees Jesus on the cross but fears losing their classmates.

Many unbelievers need to let the cross expose their desire to gratify some crowd. Once it's out in the open, perhaps they can recognize the consequences of choosing the crowd over Christ. Will it be the crowd? or the cross?

The chief priests are the next to be seen gathered at the cross...

They had "...handed [Jesus] over because of envy."¹ Like a plow cutting through the hard earth, the cross exposed their envy.

They express their envy in verses thirty-one and thirty-two, saying,

Mark 15:31 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save.

Mark 15:32 "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

¹Mark 15:10

Jesus had demonstrated His power to save others. He went about healing and helping all, doing good to everyone. The chief priest did not have a clue as to how to heal or help others - let alone how to save others. In their envy the chief priests would rather *no one* be helped, healed, or saved. They would rather people remain lame or leprous, deaf and dumb, blind and demonized.

There are plenty of unbelievers who are like this today! They have no real answers to life's perplexing problems...But as soon as you suggest that Jesus is the answer, they do everything they can to block His healing, helping, saving power.

Two groups of soldiers come into view...

The first group are the garrison at the Praetorium:

Mark 15:16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison.

Mark 15:17 And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head,

Mark 15:18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Mark 15:19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him.

Mark 15:20 And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

Cruelty of this magnitude should always shock you. A clue to their cruelty is given in their mock salutation, "Hail, King of the Jews." The Jews were a difficult and unruly people. The garrison of Roman soldiers at Jerusalem was constantly struggling against Jewish insurrectionists, as well as Jewish sentiments of hatred towards them. Here now in their grip was one Jew Who some claimed to be a King of the Jews. They took out all of their pent up frustration against the whole nation upon Jesus.

Beloved, anti-Semitism is nothing new! The cross has a way of exposing hatred for God's chosen people, the Jews. There are many groups in the world today who name the name of Jesus but who hate the Jews. There is no anti-Semitism in Jesus, no prejudice at all. Where prejudice is present the cross is exposing what is hidden deep in the depraved heart of unbelievers.

There is another group of soldiers, those who are at the foot of the cross:

Mark 15:22 And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.

Mark 15:23 Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.

Mark 15:24 And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.

The Latin word for "Golgotha" is *calva*, where we get *calvary*. They both mean "skull," or "place of a skull." If you've seen pictures of the hill believed to be the site of the crucifixion, you've seen how the hillside looks like the outline of a skull.

The "wine mingled with myrrh" was a narcotic to deaden pain; Jesus refused it, wanting to retain all of His senses.

The soldiers were indifferent to what was happening on the cross. They were living for the now, thinking only of how they might profit and better themselves as they cast lots for Jesus' garment. While Jesus died to offer them a spiritual robe of righteousness, they contented themselves with an earthly robe.

The cross exposes the gross and callous indifference of unbelievers. The things of the world are their only concern. Jesus still offers His robe of righteousness; they prefer and pursue the world.

Two thieves were crucified with Jesus:

Mark 15:25 Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.

Mark 15:26 And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Mark 15:27 With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left...

Mark 15:28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors."

Mark 15:32 ...Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

The Jews reckoned time from 6am to 6pm. The "third hour" was 9:00am, the sixth hour was Noon, and the ninth hour, 3:00pm.

The two thieves may have been companions of Barabbas. Mark omits the marvelous detail that one of the thieves turned to

Jesus and was saved. He wants us to think about both of them reviling the Lord.

Everyone deserves to be crucified for their own sins; you deserve crucifixion. Most unbelievers, when confronted with what they deserve, revile against God. The cross is an offense to all men. Gladly, many come to realize that they *do* deserve the cross, but that One Who *doesn't* deserve it was crucified in their place!

Our attention is next drawn to many passersby...

Mark 15:29 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days,
Mark 15:30 "save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

The world is always filled with passersby who love to see Christians fail. Christians do fail; Christ does not! "The church is full of hypocrites" is a common criticism; the answer to it is, " There's always room for one more!" The cross exposes the excuse unbelievers use to avoid their own submission to Jesus.

Among the passersby is a guy who offers Jesus refreshment:

Mark 15:33 Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Mark 15:35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!"

Mark 15:36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down."

It was only fitting that darkness covered the world while Jesus was made sin for all mankind. Jesus cried out the opening line of Psalm 22 - "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" He did so to direct the Jews back to that passage, which hundreds of years earlier had prophesied His agony on the cross. By the way, in Psalm 22 David describes the agony of crucifixion before crucifixion was known as a form of capital punishment, and before there ever was a Roman empire!

In the crowd was a man who wanted to prolong Jesus' agony because the people had a superstition that Elijah might come and take Jesus off of the cross.

Superstition about Jesus abounds - just look at the headlines on the tabloids as you check out of the market! Many unbelievers *believe* there are supernatural powers at work in the world, but they fail to believe on the Son of God. The cross has a way of exposing their superstitions.

The final unbeliever in the crowd at the cross was a Roman centurion...

Mark 15:37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

Mark 15:38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Mark 15:39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

The "veil of the temple" signified the separation between a holy God and sinful men. When Jesus offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for your sins, God reached down and tore that veil from top to bottom to signify that the way into His holy presence was wide open! The Jews repaired the veil in the temple...But it is forever torn!

The centurion was an unbeliever. Notice he says "Truly this man was the Son of God." He looked on the cross and understood that God was at work, and that Jesus was more than a mere man; but that was as far as his confession goes. He may later have become a believer, but for the moment he was unconvinced.

Millions of unbelievers acknowledge that there is a God, that Jesus was more than a mere man, and that God was at work in the death of Jesus. Nevertheless their only confession is, "Jesus was..." There is no personal, saving faith in Jesus.

The cross always exposes what is hidden in the hearts of unbelievers! There were also believers in the crowd at the cross...

#2 You Can Expect The Cross To Expose
What Is Hindering The Hearts Of Believers
(15:21; 40-47)

Simon from Cyrene, a group of women, and Joseph of Arimathea were in the crowd. In their responses to the cross you who are believers can see something about yourselves.

Simon...

Mark 15:21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.

The cross-beam weighed around a hundred pounds. Weak from His spiritual and physical scourgings, Jesus fell under its weight. A pilgrim from Cyrene was compelled to bear the cross-beam for the Lord.

You, beloved believer, are pilgrims on this earth. There will be times when it seems as though you are being forced to bear the cross as you are called upon to share in the sufferings of Jesus in this world. Rather than refuse, *rejoice!* God intends the suffering you share to be a blessing.

Simon was blessed, and he was a blessing to others - starting with his own family. Mark mentions his sons, Alexander and Rufus. These boys were well known believers to Mark's readers; they are mentioned later in the New Testament. Simon went home after bearing the cross and shared its blessing.

Is some suffering hindering your joy? Let the cross expose it as you bear it, sharing in the sufferings of Jesus.

There were women in the crowd at the cross...

Mark 15:40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,

Mark 15:41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem...

Mark 15:47 ...And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.

These women thought that this was the end. In Chapter Sixteen you will hear them say, "Who will roll the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" They were not expecting any resurrection. Their hopes were over at the cross.

Do you ever feel hopeless? Does it ever seem to you that God's power is not sufficient for you? Does your faith ever seem to be failing, even though your love is fervent? If so, then the cross is exposing these things so you can return to and remain in your joy!

Joseph of Arimathea was in the crowd at the cross...

Mark 15:42 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

Mark 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Mark 15:44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.

Mark 15:45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

Mark 15:46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

Crucifixion was a long, slow, painful death. Pilate was surprised Jesus died so soon. Jesus dismissed His Spirit when He had suffered enough, when God's wrath against all sin for all time was satisfied.

Joseph was a secret believer. He lacked courage during the life of Jesus, but now he took courage. The cross constrained him to identify as a believer in Jesus.

Perhaps you are feeling weak in your witness, a secret believer...Whatever is hindering you, the cross exposes it and gives you courage. Take courage in the cross! Jesus died for you openly, publicly; you can therefore live for Him openly, publicly.

Conclusion

You can expect the cross to expose what is hidden in the hearts of unbelievers in the vast crowd of humanity. The cross exposes sin in order to invite to salvation!

D.L. Moody once, in a message, gave an imaginative account of what Jesus might have instructed His disciples to do regarding some of the unbelievers in the crowd at the cross. Moody said that he gathered His disciples in Jerusalem and said to them, "Men, I

want you to go and find the priests who mocked Me, who hurled in My teeth the taunt, 'He saved others, Himself He could not save.' Explain to them that if I had saved Myself, they would have been doomed men. But tell them that [now] there is a way wide open..."

Moody said further that Jesus said to His disciples, "Go find the soldiers who cast lots for My garments, for My seamless robe, and tell them that there is a far greater treasure awaiting them if they will come to Me. They shall not have a seamless robe, but a spotless heart. All their guilt can be washed away; all their callous cruelty can be forgiven if they come."²

You can expect the cross to expose what is hindering your heart, believer! The Church is also at the cross. It exposes what is hindering you in order to encourage you. The cross encourages contentment, courage, and constraining love.

Look at yourself from the perspective of the cross.

²quoted by Ray Stedman, *The Ruler Who Serves*, p. 206-207.