

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 15:22-39

Topic

Mark gives us a view of the crowd at the crucifixion
through the eyes of Jesus

Title

"When I Survey the Slandorous Crowd"

Introduction

You video gamers are all too familiar with the term "first-person perspective." It means you see everything in the game as if you were looking directly at the action. You're the shooter with the gun in your hands; you're the pilot in the cockpit; you're the driver behind the wheel.

You see your hands, maybe a little bit of your arms, but that's about it, to preserve the perspective that you are actually there. The action takes place directly in front of you.

The Gospel of Mark has been called the Gospel of Action. Mark moves quickly from place to place. He skillfully uses present-tense verbs that draw you into the text. Reading Mark's Gospel, you feel as though you are there.

Mark's treatment of the crucifixion goes one step further.

He gives you the perspective of Jesus. You don't so much see Jesus *on* the Cross; you see what Jesus saw *from* the Cross.

Mark divides the crucifixion into two three-hour blocks of time:

- In the first three hours, you see what Jesus saw looking *out* upon the crowd.
- In the second three hours, you see what Jesus saw looking *up* toward Heaven.

I'll organize my thoughts about this first-person perspective around two points: #1 Jesus Directs You To Look Out Upon Humanity From His Perspective While On The Cross, and #2 Jesus Directs You To Look Upward To Heaven From His Perspective While On The Cross.

#1 Jesus Directs You To Look Out Upon Humanity From His Perspective While On The Cross

(v22-32)

We spend too much time discussing, and describing, the procedures and the pain of crucifixion.

While all the Gospels state the historical fact of the crucifixion of Jesus, **none of them has a single word of description of the physical agonies involved.**

I think it wise to follow their lead and say as little as possible about the suffering.

Here's something I didn't realize before: The person crucified was lifted only high enough to get their feet about one foot above the ground.

The crowd was practically at eye-level with Jesus during His ordeal. It lends support to our first-person approach to the text.

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

We went into some detail in our last study on "Golgotha... [the] Place of a Skull." The Latin for "skull" is *calvaria*, where we get our word "Calvary."

(We're still working on our new "Skull Chapel" logo).

From the wording we can deduce that Calvary is a knoll, or a hill - it is elevated ground. It probably got its name because it looks somewhat like a skull from a distance.

Jesus could see Calvary as He approached it. It's our first point of interest from His first-person perspective.

Jesus is the Creator of all things. In Colossians 1:16 we read,

Col 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible...

Jesus made Calvary. He formed the hill far away upon which would be placed the old rugged Cross.

We can't even begin to speculate what it would be like to be Jesus, in eternity past, making that hill. Choosing to make it in the shape of a skull, just outside where Jerusalem would be founded and built, so that He could die upon it.

But through Jesus' eyes, as He sees Calvary for the last time before dying, we can get a sense of the entire plan of redemption in-between its creation and the crucifixion. He made Calvary anticipating the Cross, and now He was there, to finish things.

The "A-Team" had a slogan, "I love it when a plan comes together." Well, Jesus' plan from eternity past, to die on a Cross at Calvary, was coming together.

His slogan would have been something like, "I love them, so My plan is coming together."

[Mar 15:23](#) Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.

The Talmud is the record of the teaching of Jewish rabbis that spans a period of about six hundred years, beginning in the first century and continuing through the seventh century.

In it we learn that it was customary for certain Jewish women from Jerusalem to aid the victims of crucifixion. Specifically, they provided a sedative, to ease the pain. It was "wine" which had anesthetic properties because it was "mingled with myrrh."

Jesus refused it. His refusal meant He would remain in control of His mental capacities.

Have you ever had serious drugs prescribed for your pain? I have, and you definitely lose control.

Nothing Jesus said or did while on the Cross could be attributed to an altered state of consciousness. It wasn't "the wine talking."

Whatever strength He had could only be attributed to God.

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

One commentator wrote, "[Typically] a Jew wore five articles of clothing - the inner robe, the outer robe, the sandals, the girdle [belt] and the turban. When the four lesser things had been assigned, that left the great outer robe."

I must mention that this was a fulfillment of a prophecy, from Psalm 22:18, which reads, "They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."

Jesus looked down upon the soldiers, who were acquiring His earthly garments while He was naked on the Cross.

Do you see their vain pursuit? After having His garments laundered, they'd probably have to sell them. After all, Roman soldiers didn't go around dressed like Jews.

They were captivated by a few pieces of clothing, for which they'd get a handful of salt, when all the while the One Who could grant spiritual riches and eternal rewards was right there, right next to them.

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

As the Jews reckoned time, the "third hour" was 9:00am. This first section of verses will take us from 9am until Noon.

It reads as though a countdown had begun; as if a timer was ticking down.

Six hours... After three-and-one-half years of public ministry... After some thirty-years of relative obscurity... After an eternity of preparation and planning.

Have you ever been in the home stretch of some project, or accomplishment? Jesus was counting-down the minutes until His work was finished.

"And they crucified Him." That is all the description of Jesus' suffering that you're going to get from Mark. It's not important that we describe it in words, or recreate it on film. If it was, the Holy Spirit would have inspired the writers of the four Gospels.

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

Jesus couldn't see the placard, but He could watch as passers-by read the words, then looked upon Him. Jews were obsessed with the promises of the Kingdom of God on the earth. They only thought about it in material terms, as a physical rule of their King. The placard challenged them to wrestle with all the Scriptures that predicted a suffering King Who would first save them spiritually.

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

Mar 15:28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS."

We can almost see Jesus looking to His right, then to His left, at these two men about to enter eternity. Because Jesus hung there, "numbered" with them, either or both of them could be declared righteous, and enter Heaven. He was taking their place in death, taking upon Himself their sin, offering His righteousness.

Jesus could see, first hand, the urgency of His sacrifice as our Substitute. Both of these men were at their earthly end, but only at the beginning of eternity.

Mar 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,

Mar 15:30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

Jesus had used the Temple as a backdrop for telling the Jews that if they destroyed the temple of His *body*, He would rise from the dead after three days. They totally misinterpreted His words.

Seeing the spiritual blindness of human beings was nothing new for Jesus. But, from the Cross, He was on the verge of the coming of the Holy Spirit He had promised to His disciples. His death, resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven would trigger Pentecost.

The disciples would preach the Gospel with power, and blinded hearts would be illuminated by grace.

I can only wonder if some of those who passed by, blaspheming, were among those saved on the Day of Pentecost?

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

Mar 15:32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

If Jesus had saved Himself, He could not have saved others; the only way He could save others was precisely by not saving Himself.

We always think that seeing is believing. When it comes to salvation, you believe, *then* you see.

Mark chose to not mention that one of the condemned men received the Lord before he died, and was promised Paradise. Mark wants us to see all of humanity in stubborn, stiff-necked opposition to Jesus.

It was validation that there was no other way for God to save humanity. All have sinned; there is none righteous - not even one.

If I dare use the word - The total opposition was a **comfort** to Jesus that He was, and is, the only way to Heaven. His dying was crucial.

If you're a Christian, you've come to the Cross, where Jesus died, and you have believed it was for you - to have your sins forgiven, and to impart to you eternal life.

Now you, too, can look out upon humanity, from the perspective of the Cross.

- Do you see folks pursuing good works, like the Jerusalem women, thinking it will earn them salvation?
- Do you see folks distracted by the pursuit of wealth, like the soldiers gambling for goods, and ignoring eternity?
- Do you see religious leaders teaching false doctrines, like the chief priests and scribes, and thereby leading millions with them to Hell?

- Do you see men dying, on every side, and sense the urgency of the Gospel?

We're in a first-person mission that isn't a game. In fact let me suggest something that I hope you won't think is too mystical.

If you're a believer, God the Holy Spirit lives within you. The apostle Paul once said, "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

He also said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Without taking it too far, I think we can see ourselves being animated by the indwelling Holy Spirit. We are His hands and arms, feet and legs, as He leads us out and about in the world.

It's as if He's using us in His first-person pursuit of souls.

We're not holding a gun, but we do have the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Walking forward, in obedience, He uses us.

A question to mull over: If your walk with the Lord were translated into a first-person perspective game, what level would you be at?

And what are you doing to get to the next level?

#2 Jesus Directs You To Look Upward To Heaven From His Perspective While On The Cross

(v33-39)

The next three-hour block of time begins, and it's very different in its focus. There is a darkness covering the land during which something transpires between Jesus and His Father.

Furthermore, although Jesus uttered seven sayings from the Cross, Mark only records one, and it is the one that directs us to look upward to understand what was happening.

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

From Noon, when the sun was at its peak, until 3:00pm, a strange "darkness" came upon "the whole land."

The language seems to localize it to Jerusalem, or maybe all of Israel. But that doesn't lessen its eerie supernatural quality.

It wasn't an eclipse, or any natural occurrence. It was God ruling the Heavens.

Remember, it was Passover, which always falls on a full moon, making an eclipse impossible.

Many commentators have waxed eloquent on what took place during those three hours. I don't think we have enough biblical data to do so. All I can say is that Jesus 'went dark,' as He and His Father concluded the work of His atoning sacrifice for sin.

Mar 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?"

The first thing to note about these words is that they are the opening of Psalm Twenty-two. We call them Psalm 22:1.

In Bible times, there were no numbered chapter and verse designations. If I were going to teach at a synagogue, I wouldn't get up and say, "Now open to Psalm twenty-two, verse one.

I would quote the opening words of the psalm. I would get up and say, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?," and everyone would know where I was reading from.

I submit to you that the primary importance of Jesus' quoting Psalm Twenty-two was to draw the attention of the crowd to that particular portion of their Scripture.

Why? Because Psalm Twenty-two is a prophecy about the crucifixion that was written centuries before Jesus died on the Cross. It depicts, in great detail, the death of the Messiah.

A sincere, rational Jew, being directed to that psalm, could have had a lightbulb go off in their head in the midst of the darkness. They could have seen, from God's Word, that this Man on the Cross was none other than the Man predicted in the psalm; and that He was doing a mighty spiritual work.

What I'm going to say next always gets me into trouble because it's not traditional. It isn't a heresy; there are other, solid Bible teachers who say this (even though we are in the minority).

I am not one who thinks that God the Father forsook Jesus while He was on the Cross, turning His back on His Son.

Yes, Jesus shouted, "Why have You forsaken Me?," but that was to direct the crowd at the Cross to Psalm Twenty-two.

A little later in Psalm Twenty-two it says, *twice*, "be not far from Me" (v11 & 19). Then it says,

Psa 22:24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; **Nor has He hidden His face from Him;** But when He cried to Him, He heard.

It isn't necessary for us to believe that God turned His back on Jesus while He was being made sin for us. In fact, it's a little weird to suggest He did, since Jesus told His disciples, "I and the Father are One" (John 10:30).

The main argument you'll hear is that God is too holy to look upon sin, and therefore He had to turn away. *Except that He looks upon sin all the time; doesn't He?*

Jesus was directing the crowd to look upward, to God, in order to understand what was happening, and why it was happening.

Before we leave verse thirty-four, notice Jesus cried "with a loud voice." A few hours earlier Jesus had fallen under the weight of the Cross as He carried it, or a portion of it, to Golgotha. Then He'd been nailed to the Cross, and had been upon it for six punishing hours.

According to Psalm Twenty-two its pretty clear that demonic forces were torturing Him as well.

Yet here, at the end, He cries "with a **loud** voice." God the Father must be strengthening Him from Heaven.

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

The Jews had a superstition that Elijah might come to help you in your time of need. Yeah, it's weird. I liken it, today, to people who pray to saints, or to Mary, rather than to God.

The Jews spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. In Aramaic, Elijah is *Elia*.

The word "my" is *iya*. So "My God" would be *Eli-Ya*, sounding very similar to *Eli-a*.

The crowd misunderstood Jesus' cry. They *did* look upward; but it was in mockery that Elijah would come, rather than in wonder at Psalm Twenty-two being fulfilled before their very eyes.

Mar 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."

This was a different beverage, one that would be carried by the soldiers. It seems to be a sour wine vinegar that would have eggs in it.

I know; it sounds disgusting... But I point out many people today are sold on the properties of a certain apple cider vinegar as a cure-all.

In the Gospel of John we're told that Jesus said, "I thirst," but Mark omits it. He uses the incident to further emphasize the continued misunderstanding of the crowd.

They were looking upward, but not to God. Their own superstitions kept them from seeing the pure Word of God.

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

Mark tells us just enough to know that Jesus was in control, and that He dismissed His spirit in His own timing. It's Mark's way of letting us know the work was finished.

Something else happened to let us know Jesus' work was not just finished, but was highly successful:

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

We think of the Temple as the huge complex of buildings and courtyards that King Herod designed, and that were still under construction.

The Temple is two small rooms - the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies was only 225sq.ft. It was a perfect cube - its length, width and height were all equal to 15 feet.

It was God's special dwelling place in the midst of His people. During the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, God appeared as a pillar of cloud or fire in and above the Holy of Holies.

His presence had left the Holy of Holies during the time of the Babylonian invasions of Israel; it had not returned. Neither was the Ark of the Covenant, or the Mercy Seat, in the room.

But the Holy of Holies still *represented* God's presence among His people.

A thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. It symbolized humanity's separation from a holy God. This curtain, known as the "veil," was made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. Archaeologists say the veil in the Second Temple was four-feet thick.

It was torn from top to bottom, as if God the Father reached down from Heaven and ripped it in two. The significance of its tearing was that, at the moment Jesus died, there was no longer any separation between humanity and God on account of sin. The way into His presence was open to all who would come through Jesus Christ.

Mar 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!"

Chances are this centurion had seen many men crucified. There was something remarkable about Jesus. No one had ever died on the Cross in quite this manner, with quite this majesty.

Don't get too excited about his statement. He said that Jesus "was," *past tense*, "the Son of God." It means he thought of Jesus in the past tense, as being dead and gone.

A lot of people, today, think of Jesus in the past tense. They keep Him on the Cross, where they don't need to deal with His claims upon their lives.

Jesus was no martyr, dying for His cause. He was the sinless Son of God sacrificing Himself as the Substitute for sin for the entire human race.

He is the Savior of all men - especially those who believe. Lifted up on my the Cross, He draws all men to Himself, providing the grace to free the will that we might repent of our sin, and receive Him.

I'll close with this portion from *Throned Upon the Awful Tree*, by John Ellerton (1875).

*Throned upon the awful tree,
King of grief, I watch with Thee.*

*Darkness veils Thine anguished face:
None its lines of woe can trace:*

*None can tell what pangs unknown
Hold Thee silent and alone*

*Silent through those three dread hours,
Wrestling with the evil powers,*

*Left alone with human sin,
Gloom around Thee and within,*

*Till the appointed time is nigh,
Till the Lamb of God may die.*