

RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

mark 15

Mark chapter 15 is our text. Let's read it.

Mark 15.1-47 - 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.

Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

He answered and said to him, "It is as you say."

And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. 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?"

So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"

Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

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

Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. 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.

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. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.

And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.

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

With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors."

And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!”

Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.

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.

Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 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?” Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, “Look, He is calling for Elijah!” 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.”

And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 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!”

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

Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 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. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 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. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.

There are 2 different looks I'd like us to take at this text. The first is to look at Jesus. We can't come to the crucifixion story without pausing to reflect on what it is Christ did for us and how horrifying it must have been. As we look at the verses, in one sense, we see Jesus *doing* very little. He doesn't say much or take much action. He simply goes along with what is unfolding around Him. Yet, we understand that this chapter is the pivotal point of human history. It is the culmination of God's plan of redemption. And in these verses we see what great things Christ suffered and what great lengths He went to that He might save us. This is the demonstration of how much value God places on the people of earth, that He would pay this sort of price in order to repair the broken relationship between us. A rift we created.

The text says that He was numbered with the transgressors. It was a prophecy that we see fulfilled as Jesus was shamefully hung between two thieves. But it also reminds us that **we** are the transgressors. Jesus made Himself sin for **us** that we might receive His righteousness. The King of the whole universe, the Creator of all things, determined to identify with us so that He could pay a debt He did not owe.

And, without being too graphic or reveling in the violence of the crucifixion, I think it is important to realize that God *could* have orchestrated a different kind of execution. It was death that was required for the sins of the world, but God did not settle on a painless injection or a simple beheading when offering up His Son. Because in the crucifixion we see how far God is willing to go in His love for us. Farther than anything in imagination. Farther than any person should have to endure. More excruciating than any other punishment or sentence.

The crucifixion reveals the thoughts of God and His heart for us, that He considers us priceless. As you look at the physical and emotional and shameful lengths the Lord went to that He might offer the people of earth salvation, you may not see Jesus saying many things, but what He was saying was, “Yes. Yes, I will do this for you.” He was willfully offering Himself to this terrible, torturous death because of the value He places on your life and my life. He was numbered with us by His own design, and by His own free will, because of His personal love for you and I. And anyone, any person or group or teaching that would attempt to limit Jesus’ love or His sacrifice or devalue God’s feelings for the people of earth is an affront to the crucifixion which fully accomplished what we can not.

When we read this account, we should remember that each stage of His suffering, each one worse than the rest, was a step Jesus took with you in mind. And you are worth it to Him. You are the object of His affection. And though He despised the shame of the cross, the Bible says that the prospect of making right what we made wrong was a joy to Him. And as He hung, exposed to the passersby, it also exposed the love that God has for the people of earth. A love that cannot be overcome by any force or any evil. A supreme, conquering, enduring love.

Now our desire is to not only see Jesus, but also to apply these things to ourselves. And, of course, looking at these verses probably starts a new set of thoughts spinning in our heads when we remember what Jesus said a few chapters ago; that we are to take up a cross *ourselves*. To hear Him say that back in Mark chapter 8 is one thing, but then to see what that actually meant is pretty shocking. But, again, we find that the life God is calling us to is not a partial commitment or a weekend hobby. We’re called to the kind of surrender and willingness that we see God demonstrating in His act of saving us from sin. Even if we’re not going to end our lives in martyrdom, the Lord says that what He’s looking for is the kind of submission and selflessness and discipleship that Jesus embodied as He carried His cross to Calvary.

But then, devotionally, there’s a lot of stuff we can learn by looking at the other people in this text. Because there’s a whole bunch of people here. The religious leaders and Pilate and the crowd. Simon the Cyrenian and the soldiers and the Centurion. The passersby at Golgotha and the man who offered Jesus sour wine. Joseph of Arimathea and the women watching from afar. There are a ton of people who each can teach us something. Largely, this is the compilation of people who didn’t do the right thing when the time came. Obviously, Pilate is the guy who most embodies that statement. He very willfully and knowingly sent Jesus to torture and death despite the fact that it was clear that He had done nothing criminal at all.

But there at the end we see at least one guy doing the right thing. Joseph of Arimathea. As so many others abandoned Jesus or looked the other way or just went along with the crowd or participated in what was going on, we see this guy taking a stand and doing what was right. And I’m glad that it’s at the end of the chapter because we believe that discipleship and living the Christian life is about *seeing* what God has done for us and then *acting* in response. Seeing

that God isn't waiting for us to earn His favor but that He's already gone the distance to reach out to us. And then, because of His love for us, we choose to follow after Him and love Him in return.

And there was a moment for this guy, Joseph, where he could respond and take a stand and follow Jesus, even when all others had abandoned Him.

Look at verse 42 again:

Mark 15.42-46 - Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 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. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 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.

What I like about this little section is the fact that first we see Joseph described as a man who was "waiting for the Kingdom of God" and then we see him actually being an active *part* of the Kingdom of God. And those are 2 things we're all called to as Christians. We're to watch and to wait and to be excited about the future, eternal Kingdom of God. But it's also essential that we actively participate in Kingdom work right now.

And that's what Joseph did. Really it wasn't anything huge or spectacular. It was a simple thing he did. But it wasn't without risk or sacrifice. He understood that he was potentially laying his life down for Christ when he went to Pilate. This was the guy who just tortured and murdered an innocent Man because some Jewish leaders asked him to. So to go and identify with Christ on the day of His execution was not without risk.

But, the text says, he took courage. And I love that. Because I'm sure he was afraid. You don't need courage if you aren't afraid. But he took courage and took at step of faith. He did what he could to honor his Lord.

And, while I said what he did was simple, it definitely wasn't easy. It wasn't glamorous or exciting. He went and detached Jesus from the cross, carried His body down, wrapped Him and buried Him, then the text says he rolled the stone against the door.

This was not the kind of work that this guy did day to day. It says that he was a prominent council member. A man of wealth and influence. But, when it came to his discipleship, he humbled himself and did what needed doing. It was difficult. I'm sure it was even disgusting on some levels. But in that moment, he moved from *just* waiting for the Kingdom to being an active part of it.

That's us. We're going through life. Different areas of work. Different circles of influence. All day, from morning till evening, our faith and our Lord are being assaulted by the people of this world. Look at this chapter and see how many people were lashing out against the Lord and all the things they said and all the wickedness that was surrounding what was going on.

But Joseph's job wasn't to overcome all of that. God is the one who is working on the hearts of men. Joseph didn't have to go out and convert the entire nation.

Joseph's job was to do something simple. It took courage, it took faith, it took willingness and humility, but it was the right thing to do in God's eyes. And God honors our efforts when we act righteously and rightly. He honors our lives when we take up the work of His Kingdom.

So, today, this morning, maybe you're going to be barraged with anti-Christian attacks when you leave this place, maybe you're not. But wherever you go, to whatever people God has placed you beside, take courage in the fact that Jesus Christ has gone the distance so that He can remove separation between you and Him. He's gone all the way so that you can have victory and you can know your Creator. Be courageous. Then, when those moments arise and you feel the Holy Spirit tugging on your heart, don't just go along with the crowd. Don't scatter away from the Lord. Don't give up when the task before you isn't easy. Take a step of faith. Do what is right and righteous.

Most things God calls us to do are simple. They may not be easy, but they're simple. And if we're willing to do those things with courage and faith, then we'll be accomplishing the work of God's Kingdom and we'll be living life the way God's called us to.

He has identified with us. We have identified with Him. Let's continue the work He started on the earth as He continues His work in our hearts.