

Mark 15:16-47, Enemies and Friends at his Crucifixion
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Overview

This section traces the events of his crucifixion.

1. 16-38, the actions of various enemies
2. 39-47, the actions of unexpected friends.
3. Turns the corner at his death in 37; after this point, no further abuse. The work is complete. Now he can rest.

A. 16-38, The Lord's Enemies

Each abuses him in a different way.

1. The soldiers *crucify* him.
2. The bypassers *rail on* him--blasphemy, focusing on their malice, yet they are the ones with least ground for this malice.
3. The priests and scribes *mock* him among themselves, but he who knows the hearts knows what is in their hearts.
4. The thieves *revile* him, accusing him of doing wrong, yet they are justly condemned.
5. The Father *forsakes* him.

1. 21-28, The Soldiers crucify him. Note their vacillation between superficial kindness and the deepest cruelty. This is just their daily duty--hardened, coarse, unfeeling.

a) 21-22, Help:

- 1) 21, Someone to carry the cross.
- 2) 22, They "bring," lit. "bear," the Lord to Calvary. May suggest that he had to be carried.
- 3) Notes:

- a> May just have been to speed up their work; the Lord has been up all night and would be weak from loss of blood.
- b> The mention of Simon of Cyrene is unique to this gospel, probably for Mark's Roman readers, since this man's sons and widow were known in the assembly in Rome (Rom 16:13).

- b) 23, offered him a painkiller, which he refused. His suffering is deliberate, purposeful. He must sense the forsaking by the Father to relieve us of that agony.

- c) 24-28, crucified him nonetheless, at the third hour, a reference that sets us up for a later point in vv. 33-34. In spite of their wrath, God demonstrates his control. Note three prophetic circumstances of this event:

- 1) 24, the soldiers cast lots for his clothing, according to the prophecy in Psa 22:18.
- 2) 26, the placard declares him to be "king of the Jews," recalling Psa 2:1-6. At the culmination of the raging of the "kings of the earth" (Pilate) and the "rulers" (the Jews), the Lord declares (v.6) "yet have I set my king upon

my holy hill of Zion."

- 3) 27-28, with two thieves (robbers, brigands--perhaps associates of Barabbas in the insurrection), fulfilling Isa 53:12.
2. 29-30, The Bypassers rail on (*blaspheme*) him.
 - a) What they did: The verb means "defiant irreverence." It emphasizes their impiety, their disregard for the things of God. Shows the shallowness of the multitudes, who swarmed after Jesus out of curiosity and herd instinct, not because they truly feared God.
 - b) How they did it: They pick up the same corruption of his claim to resurrection that the false witnesses did during the Sanhedrin's trial. NB: Does this suggest that these bypassers may in fact be those who brought that witness?
 - c) The irony of their blasphemy: as originally spoken (John 2:19-21), this is his promise to rise again! So he will answer their mockery, but only after he has completed the work of redemption.
 3. 31-32a, The Chief Priests and Scribes *mock* him.
 - a) What they did: Note two details.
 - 1) "Mock." They are making his suffering the point of a joke. *Application:* Remember them if we are ever tempted to join the world in making levity about the things of God. We do not want to be in their company.
 - 2) "Among themselves." They do not address themselves to him. Amazing reticence; are they afraid he might actually call down judgment on them? Or is it simply a desire to maintain their dignity before the crowds that they do not openly blaspheme him as do the passersby?
 - b) How they did it: They recall his claim to be Christ and King, which implies the ability to deliver his people, yet he cannot deliver even himself.
 - c) The irony of their mockery: Had they recalled Isa 53, they would realize that if he were to deliver himself, he would then be unable to deliver his people! He must bear their sin for them if they are to be free from it.
 4. 32b: The Thieves *revile* him.
 - a) What they did: Scold, rebuke. Not necessarily the defiant, irreverent tone of blasphemy; our Lord sometimes rebukes but never blasphemes. (Though Luke calls this blasphemy too.)

- b) How they did it: the parallels show that they are asking him to save himself and them. If they were indeed members of Barabbas' insurrection, this is a more serious request; they hate the Romans and hold the popular desire for a militant Messiah to overthrow the government.
- c) The irony of their rebuke: They are truly evildoers, and are in no position to accuse him of evildoing.

5. 33-39, The Father *forsakes* him.

- a) 33, The time notice. Mark records three points of time that mark off two periods of our Lord's suffering on the cross:
 - 1) Third hour (about 9 AM) to sixth hour, occupied by the abuse from people.
 - 2) Sixth hour to ninth hour, the sky was darkened supernaturally. NOT an eclipse (critical text in Luke 23:45 is in error), since this is passover (full moon) and it lasted for three hours, while an eclipse is a matter of minutes. A sign of divine wrath against human sin; cf. Amos 8:4-9.
- b) 34, our Lord's cry from the tree: he is forsaken by God, bearing the full brunt of divine wrath for us. Quote from Psa 22:1, which prophesies many details of his suffering.
- c) 35-36, Response of the bystanders is suddenly much more serious than during the first three hours. They are terrified by this sudden blackening of the sky, and engage in a token act of kindness (giving him a drink) in the expectation that Elijah may suddenly appear. Note how references to Elijah surround the gift of vinegar; it is given in the desire to be approved by Elijah. Fulfills Psa 69:21.
- d) What actually ensues is far more significant than the appearance of Elijah:
 - 1) 37, the Lord expires. The price has been paid.
 - 2) 38, the temple veil is torn in two, from top to bottom.
 - a> The veil separates the holy place from the holy of holies, the inner sanctum where God's glory dwells and where only one person (the HP) can go, only one day a year (the day of atonement). Represents the inaccessibility of God under the old covenant.
 - b> When the Lord dies, that veil is severed, showing that he has made open the way into the presence of God. Heb. 10:19-22.
 - c> The veil is severed from top to bottom, as by the hand

of God.

- d> This happens at 3 in the afternoon, just as the priests are sacrificing the passover lambs! Shows
 - 1> that our Lord dies as our passover lamb;
 - 2> the hardness of the priests, who keep right on with their obsolete ritual even though the veil has been severed.

Application: What does the death of Jesus of Nazareth mean to you? Is it just another execution (as it was for the soldiers)? Is it a subject for mockery and blasphemy (as for the passersby, the priests, and the robbers)? Or do you recognize it as the most important transaction in the history of the world, your only hope for forgiveness of sin and fellowship with your creator? The next section shows a rather different pattern of response than that which we have seen so far.

B. 39-47, The Lord's Unexpected Friends

No mention here of the Twelve. From Mark's perspective, they have totally fled (though we know from John that he was there, probably alone of the Twelve). What we see here are unexpected friends: one of the executioners, some women, and a member of the Sanhedrin.

1. 39, Confession of the Centurion.

How many men has he seen die, or even himself put to death? Yet the Lord's patience in suffering, the supernatural sign of the darkened sun, his words from the tree, and the rapidity and deliberateness of his death (cf. v.44) persuade even this hardened man that this is God's son.

2. 40-41, The women at the cross. Faithfulness of the sisters, when the men have fled. This is the first mention of these women in Mark; we would not know that the Lord had women among his followers! Thus the unexpected nature of their faithful vigil.

a) The names are given to prepare for 16:1; these three came to anoint the body, and thus discover the resurrection, and as witnesses they need to be identified. There were many other women there too (41b), not named here for us. We know from John's gospel that the Lord's mother was there.

b) 41, Their activities:

1) Followed the Lord. So should we all. But more,

2) Ministered to him. Luke 8:1-3 shows that they did this out of their substance, their belongings. When the band needed food, they found a few coins to buy provisions and prepare them. Not that they were rich; cf. the widow's mite in 12:42. In general, sisters are much more sensitive to spiritual values than brothers are, and their nurturing instincts have encouraged many of God's servants down through the centuries.

- 3) They have come with him to Jerusalem. We need not imagine that they have abandoned their families in so doing; this was one of the great festivals that every Jewish man was to attend, and their menfolk would have been with them. But at the cross, only they are willing to brave the opposition and come out of hiding.
3. 42-47, Joseph of Arimathaea
- a) 42-43, his character:
 - 1) "counsellor," member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish body that condemned the Lord. He would have been one of the elders, a representative of high society, a wealthy, prominent family.
 - 2) "honorable, (Lk 23:51) he had not agreed with their verdict.
 - 3) "waited for the kingdom of God." He truly feared the Lord and loved his appearing; recognized Jesus as the Messiah.
 - 4) "boldly." Contrast Jn 19:38; he had been a secret believer; Jn 12:42, fearing excommunication. But now that he sees the full depth of their perfidy, he allies himself with the believers.
 - b) 46-47, he places his resources at the Lord's disposal, to provide him a burial. This is a temporary disposition, to get the body off the cross for the Sabbath; more needs to be done to prepare the body, and the women note where the Lord is placed, so that they can come back.
4. *Application*: The Lord's loving sacrifice for us demands a response. The centurion, the women, and Joseph all show us the response of faith:
- a) acknowledging him as the Son of God,
 - b) being willing to associate with him even when it is dangerous;
 - c) forsaking our previous associates to stand with him.
- His offering opens the way into heaven for us. How shall we respond?