

From Darkness to Light
Mark 15 – 16:20
January 15, 2012

What Does the Bible Mean?

Read. Mark 15:1-5

In the early morning the Sanhedrin met to conclude the meeting held in the night. They handed Jesus over to Pontius Pilate who was the Roman governor of Judea under Tiberius Caesar from 26 to 36 AD. He was in charge of collecting taxes and commanding troops. The Jews had no power to carry out the death penalty. In their own council they had tried Jesus on blasphemy but that would mean nothing to Rome. They charged Jesus with insurrection when they went to Pilate. He claimed to be King of the Jews. The Jews knew the charges were a lie and so did Pilate. The Jews wanted Jesus to die, but the Romans would actually execute him.

“Are you King of the Jews?” Jesus answered neither yes or no. The religious leaders continued with accusations but Jesus remained silent.

Silence can be more eloquent than words.

- There is *wondering admiration*. Applause often greets great performance, but often silence is the more appropriate.
- There is the *silence of contempt*. One can communicate that some statements or excuses or arguments aren't worth answering.
- There is *silence of fear*. Fear may gag us to shameful silence.
- There is the *silence of a hurt heart*. Deep sorrow is silent sorrow and silence can rebuke.
- There is the *silence of tragedy*. Nothing need be said. Here words would not become a bridge of reconciliation between Jesus and the Jews. Words would not work. It was hopeless to speak.

Read. Mark 15:6-15

Although there is little, if any, other source for the custom the gospel tells that at Passover it was the custom to release a prisoner to the people. The people called on Pilate to release Barabbas – a revolutionary and a murderer. Pilate appealed to release Jesus but the crowd called even more loudly for Barabbas. Pilate asked what should be done with Jesus. The crowd called to crucify him.

Why the change from Palm Sunday to a week later? The trial was in secret. Likely this was a predominantly different crowd. They chose *lawlessness over law*. They chose the *revolutionary* Barabbas over the *peaceful* Jesus. They chose *hatred over love*.

Pilate released Barabbas and scourged Jesus and handed him over to be crucified. The Roman scourge was terrible. The criminal was bound and bent over with his back exposed. The scourge was a long leather thong studded with sharp pieces of lead and bone. It tore people to ribbons. Few remained conscious. Some died.

Read. Mark 15:16-20

The Roman ritual of condemnation was fixed. The judge said that the man should be taken to a cross. He then commanded the guard, "Go soldier, and prepare the cross." During this time the guards mocked Jesus. It was horseplay. Another man was to be crucified. They carried their pantomime of royalty and worship. There was more to come.

Read. Mark 15:21-28

Crucifixion was a set matter. The cross was prepared. The condemned carried it to the place of execution by the longest possible route to warn as many people as possible. A soldier led the procession with a board stating the crime. It was later attached to the cross. At the place of execution the cross was laid down and the victim was attached by nailed hands and loosely bound feet. The cross was lifted and the criminal left to die. Sometimes it took a week.

What about Simon of Cyrene who was told to carry the cross? He was called for grim duty while he was in Jerusalem as a pilgrim to eat his one Passover in Jerusalem. He apparently stayed around after his duty because he was identified as the father of two men familiar to the readers, Alexander and Rufus. Paul's letter to the Romans in 16:13 asked to, "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord,..." In Acts 13:1 when Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch on their first missionary journey some men are mentioned. One is Simeon (a form of Simon) *that was called Niger*. Niger was a name for men of swarthy skin. Cyrene is now Libya. Maybe Simon's grim task turned his heart to Jesus.

The guards offered Jesus drugged wine but he would not drink. The soldiers threw dice for his clothes. This was extra compensation for crucifixion duty. Jesus would have been wearing five articles of clothing – the inner robe, the outer robe, sandals, a girdle and a turban. Jesus was crucified between two thieves. All his life he was accompanied by sinners!

Read. Mark 15:33-41

Let's look at the scene and the character of events at the crucifixion. It was dark from noon to three.

- There was *Jesus*. He cried out, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" It was a quotation from Psalm 22:1. Up to now Jesus had known all human experience but sin. When he took our sin he knew what it was to be a sinner separated from God. He also gave a loud cry and died.
- There was the *bystander*. He wanted to see Elijah come. He had no apparent feelings – only curiosity.
- There was the *centurion*. He was a tough, well campaigned veteran. He had seen men die, but none like this. The centurion said, "Surely this man (*human being* in the Greek) was the Son of God." The centurion symbolized future believers who must stand before the cross and must repent.
- There were the *women in the distance*. They were bewildered and full of sorrow but they were there not because of intellect, but of love.
- The curtain of the Temple split from top to bottom. The curtain had shut off the Holy of Holies from man. The way now was open. God was no longer hidden.

Read. Mark 15:42-47

Jesus died at 3:00 pm. At 6:00 pm the Sabbath began. No work could be done on the Sabbath.

Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body. Pilate was amazed that Jesus was dead but the centurion confirmed that he was. Joseph took Jesus from the cross, wrapped him in linen, laid him in a tomb cut from rock and covered the entrance with a large stone. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus who saw the crucifixion saw the place.

Joseph of Arimathea is interesting. He was a member of the Council. He may have been the source of information from the trial. He was a member of the Sanhedrin but we have no record of his protesting or intervening in Jesus' behalf. Too often we hold our praises for people until they are dead. In life Joseph had an attraction for Jesus but the cross changed the attraction to love.

Read. Mark 16:1-8

The Sabbath had lasted from 6:00 pm (on our Friday) until 6:00 pm (on our Saturday). Very early in the next morning (our Sunday) Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Jesus (and Salome and James the younger) went to anoint the body but they wondered how could they roll away the stone.

It was already rolled away! Inside was a messenger dressed in white. He told them not be alarmed. Jesus the Nazarene is risen! He was no longer there! Go tell the disciples and Peter that he is going ahead to Galilee and there they would see him.

The message was very important to Peter. He likely tormented himself after the denials but he must have been cheered by the message. Jesus would much rather forgive a penitent sinner than punish sin.

The message is also important to us. Jesus is not a character in a book. He is a living presence. He is not a memory but a presence. He isn't one we know about but is one we know.

The final verses in Mark are not part of the earliest manuscripts. My sources date the section as early as the 2nd century and perhaps as late as the 4th. It is a mixture of excerpts from Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter and 2 Kings.

It can be seen as an outline of the duties and truths of the church.

- We have the duty to tell the good news.
- We are to heal minds and bodies.
- We have a source of power to cope.
- We are not alone in our work.

What does the Bible mean to me?

1. Have your actions ever mocked the name of Jesus? How can we resist this behavior?
2. What would you have done in Pilate's place?...in Barabbas' place?...in the soldiers' place?
3. Does any curtain still separate us from God?
4. What is the riskiest thing you have done because of your faith in Jesus?
5. Is Jesus sending you to tell anyone that he is risen?