

Week 20: Mark 15:21-47: Passion Week: Friday

Hook



Main Point: Jesus endured a shameful, painful Crucifixion for our salvation.

Q: Have you ever walked away from a project – not because you wanted to, but because the cost just became too high?

In 1978, construction began on a nuclear power plant in Marble Hill, Indiana. Seven years in, the project was only 25 percent complete. The original \$800 million budget had exploded to \$2.8 billion, and projections showed it could take nearly \$7 billion to finish. The price tag had simply become too much. So, after years of effort and immense investment, the plant was abandoned – unfinished and unusable.¹

Transition: That project collapsed under the weight of its cost – but the mission we'll see in Mark today didn't. The Crucifixion reveals a Savior who faced a price no one else could pay, yet He saw it through to the end so that we might have life.

RECAP: In part 1 of Mark, the story moved quickly, showing Jesus' great power and the urgency of His mission: His preparation for ministry (1:1–13), His ministry in Galilee (1:14–9:50), His journey to Jerusalem (10), and His ministry in Jerusalem (Mark 11–13). Now that we have hit the Passion Week, the story slows dramatically, showing us that this is where Jesus' ministry was leading all along.

In lessons 17–19, we saw the events of Tuesday through Thursday night – the plot to kill Jesus; His anointing at Bethany; the Passover dinner; His prediction of Peter's denial; Peter, James, and John unable to stay awake with Him in the garden; His betrayal by Judas; His arrest and sham trial before the Sanhedrin, which was illegal by their own standards; His appearance before Pilate; the crowd's rejection of Him in favor of Barabbas; and His beating by the soldiers.

Now things really slow down as we see Jesus endure the Crucifixion. This is the climax of the story, the point that all hope seems lost. Except we know He will rise again. Which is what the last lesson is about – Resurrection Sunday and the hope and mission we find in it.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus endured a shameful, painful Crucifixion for our salvation.

Mark 15:21–32 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus patiently endured pain, mocking and great shame to save His enemies.

Q: Why was the charge against Jesus ironic?

Q: In what way were the mocking taunts directed at Jesus on the cross ironic?

In the Roman empire, a Roman soldier had the legal right to force any civilian to carry their equipment for one mile. No matter what the civilians were doing, they had to put down their own belongings to carry what the soldier demanded. This wasn't just a nuisance; it could cause real issues. If they left their stuff, would it be there when they returned? If they were on their way to something important, would they miss it? The Jews deeply resented this, not just for practical reasons but because it was a dehumanizing reminder of Rome's control over them. In crucifixion, the crucified had to carry their own crossbeam to the execution site.² But if they were too weak, the soldiers could force a bystander to do it. This is most likely what happened with Jesus; if He had had the strength to carry it the whole way, the soldiers would have made Him do it (John 19:17).

Simon, in Jerusalem for Passover, was from Cyrene, a region in North Africa with a large Jewish population. He was a "passerby" at this point, but Mark's mentioning that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus implies that his family was known to the original readers of Mark's Gospel, which meant they likely later became part of the Christian community. Church tradition says Alexander and Rufus became missionaries like Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Mark, etc., and this was the same Rufus Paul mentioned in Romans, who was a coworker of Paul, and his mother was like a mother to Paul (Romans 16:13).³ At this point in the story, Simon physically picked up Christ's cross and carried it for Him, but later he would choose to pick up his cross and follow Jesus as a disciple (Matthew 16:24–26).

Jesus' needing someone else to carry the crossbeam (about 30 to 40 pounds) shows us how weak He was after the beating. The skin and muscles of his back would have been severely lacerated, and He could have had internal bleeding. The Romans used many different forms of capital punishment, but crucifixion was the worst, both because of

the pain and the public humiliation. The Romans used it particularly for political criminals because the public nature of crucifixion squashed rebellion. It was used as a warning: This is what happens to those who defy Rome. This is one of the reasons Jesus' disciples' message of the Resurrection is believable. They couldn't have made it all up; they wouldn't have endangered themselves this way for something they knew was not true.

Golgotha was named the "Place of the Skull" because it was the site of so many crucifixions. Some scholars believe it was named this because the topography made it look like a skull. Just north of the Old City stands a limestone knoll pocked by two large cavities and a nasal-like ridge.⁴ The crucified were often given wine mixed with myrrh to dull the pain; myrrh had a kind of narcotic effect on top of the alcohol. Jesus refused it - He would experience every bit of the pain of the Crucifixion, which was considered the most agonizing way to die. It was customary to put the crime on a sign above them, but Jesus' posted "crime" was ironic; He really *was* the king of the Jews. And not just of the Jews, but the whole universe.⁵

It was also customary for the soldiers to divide the clothing; criminals were crucified naked to add to their shame. But this fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 22:18, which also includes lines about piercing His hands and feet (v. 16), His bones on display (v. 17) and out of joint (v. 14), His mouth dried up (v. 15), and being mocked by all who saw Him, even specifically mentioning wagging their heads (v. 7) and challenging Him to let God deliver Him if God really delighted in Him so much (v. 8). Jesus quoted the first line of this psalm on the cross, calling people's attention to the prophecy (Mark 15:34).

The word "robbers" or "bandits" was a term used for revolutionaries like Barabbas. These were not ordinary criminals, but likely Barabbas's colleagues.⁶ Jesus took Barabbas's place between them, executed as a failed revolutionary. Though they did not recognize it, the Roman soldiers and Jewish religious leaders were acting in fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus' being "numbered with the transgressors" fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, but in the same verse, Isaiah said He "bore the sins of many" and "makes intercession for the transgressors."

The religious leaders, the rebels beside Him, and even those who passed by mocked Him. It must have been extremely difficult for Jesus to just hang there and take it, knowing He really was the Christ and could save Himself. Yet He knew His mission was more important than the satisfaction of proving them wrong in that moment. He knew what He was doing could save them, and these people desperately needed the salvation He offered. Even as they were mocking Him, He was thinking of them first (Romans 5:8).

Q: What do these details about the Crucifixion tell us about Jesus and the Gospel?

Q: How might God be calling you to endure pain and suffering to reach people for the Gospel?

Mark 15:33–41 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus' sacrifice opened full access to God for all people.

Q: What details do you notice in this passage? What do they tell you about Jesus' death?

Q: How did the Roman centurion react? What does this tell you about Jesus?

Crucifixion was a very long, slow, painful death, intentionally so. Criminals often hung for days, though Jesus died after six hours. The cause of death was usually asphyxiation, though it could also be loss of blood, shock or dehydration. The crucified were nailed through their heels and wrists, not palms (the palms would have ripped through, and they would have fallen off the cross). Hanging like that made breathing impossible. For each breath, He would have to push Himself up on His nailed feet, which would scrape His already lacerated back against the cross. This created repeated cycles of intense pain, suffocation and exhaustion every few minutes.

Mark gave us time markers throughout the story: The Crucifixion began at the third hour, 9:00 a.m. When the sixth hour came, at noon, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, 3:00 p.m., when He died. Darkness represents judgment, showing us that on the cross, God's judgment fell on Jesus instead of us.⁷ This supernatural control over the sun reminds us of when God made the sun stand still for a whole day so Joshua could win a military victory and save Israel physically (Joshua 10). Here the sun went dark during the time Christ was losing His life but winning a spiritual victory that would save the whole world eternally. The name "Jesus" is the Greek version of the Hebrew name "Joshua," which means "Yahweh is salvation." Jesus is the new Joshua who brings salvation not just to Israel but to all people.

At 3:00 p.m., Jesus cried out with a loud voice the quote from Psalm 22:1, reminding the crowd of the prophecies of that psalm. Because the Jews had all the psalms memorized, a worship leader would just sing the first line and the congregation would join in the rest.⁸ The crowd immediately would have been reminded of the whole psalm, about the righteous sufferer and his hope for divine vindication. But some of the bystanders misunderstood Him, which is strange considering He said it "in a loud voice." They thought He was calling for Elijah. Jewish tradition said Elijah would come like an angel to

rescue famous rabbis in addition to his role of coming back in the Day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5–6).⁹

Crucifixion was a very shameful and degrading way to die. Only slaves, rebels, and non-citizens were crucified. Roman citizens were beheaded because it was quick and painless, therefore the most honorable. For Jews, it was especially shameful because God's law said those who hung on a tree were cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). The irony is that through crucifixion, Jesus took on the curse of the law so He could free us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). Jesus intentionally took on this deep shame to save us from our sin.

Just after Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1, He uttered a loud cry and breathed His last. This meant He was only on the cross for six hours, a short time for crucifixion, an indication that He was beaten more than most and simply didn't have the strength. At the moment Jesus died, the curtain of the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, where God's presence dwelled on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, tore in two from top to bottom. This had to be a supernatural phenomenon. Josephus tells us the curtain was 40 cubits long (60 feet), 20 cubits wide (30 feet), and a handbreadth thick (four to five inches).¹⁰ There is no way that curtain could have been torn from top to bottom by any human means.

Theologically, this symbolized that Christ's death and Resurrection removed the barrier between the presence of God and humanity. The purpose of the veil was to separate sinful people from God's holy presence (Exodus 26:33). Only the high priest could enter once a year with the blood of the sacrifice of Yom Kippur. But Jesus tore open the veil so we could draw near to God with confidence and be in direct relationship with Him, with no barriers. Christ's body was the curtain torn open to give us full access to God (Hebrews 10:19–22).

The old covenant had been fulfilled; the temple system was no longer needed. God's presence was no longer confined to that sacred space behind the veil. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on God's people, and they would become His temple, carrying His Spirit with them into the world (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The tearing of the veil would have been shocking to the priests working at the temple and difficult to explain for the chief priests who'd had Jesus crucified. But the Roman centurion who saw Jesus breathe His last exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" This is a contrast we see over and over throughout Acts as the church spread around the world; the Jewish leaders who should have recognized Jesus as Messiah often rejected the Gospel while the Gentiles believed.

Mark also noted that the women who had followed Jesus throughout His ministry were there, looking on from a distance. This is another contrast; the women stayed with Him while the male disciples fled, except John (John 19:27). Women were less likely to be arrested than men, but it was still very courageous of them to be seen at His Crucifixion. This focus on the women and the Roman centurion reminds us of the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God. Those in whom the religious leaders would have seen little value were the ones who demonstrated great faith.

Q: Think about the lonely experience on the cross, have you ever felt isolation? How did God minister to you during that time?

Q: How have you experienced God's presence in your life? What difference has it made to walk with the Holy Spirit in your day-to-day life?

Q: How are you carrying God's Spirit with you into the world? What impact does it have?

Mark 15:42–47 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Following Jesus requires sacrifice and boldness in the face of danger.

Q: Why would it take boldness for Joseph of Arimathea to ask for Jesus' body?

Q: As a secret disciple of Jesus who was a member of the Sanhedrin – those who had plotted to arrest and kill Jesus – how might Joseph have felt about the events of Jesus' death?

Most of the Sanhedrin were greatly opposed to Jesus, but two members, Joseph of Arimathea and the pharisee Nicodemus, secretly followed Him or were at least sympathetic to His mission. Joseph was a good and upright man who had not consented to the Sanhedrin's actions toward Jesus (Luke 23:50–51). Nicodemus came to Jesus secretly at night to ask questions in the first year of His ministry. We don't know whether he became a follower, but he said he knew Jesus had to be from God because of the signs He had been performing (John 3:1–2). Three years later, when the Sanhedrin was trying to arrest Jesus, Nicodemus held them accountable to Jewish law that they couldn't condemn a man without giving Him a chance to defend himself (John 7:50–51). Together, these two men buried Jesus (John 19:38–40).

Jesus died at 3:00 p.m. on Friday. At sundown, around 6:00 p.m., the Sabbath would begin. Jews used Friday as the "Preparation Day" for Sabbath. Since no work was allowed during Sabbath, they made sure all cooking, chores and tasks were done before sundown. They would not have been allowed to bury Jesus on the Sabbath, and they

wouldn't have wanted to wait until after Sabbath; they did not embalm their dead, so it needed to be done quickly. Burying the dead was a crucial and pious duty for the family. So, Joseph went to Pilate to ask for His body, to prepare it before sundown.

Mark said he "took courage" to do so; this was for two reasons. First, asking Pilate for the body was a risk. Crucifixion victims were typically thrown into a common grave and were not allowed to be mourned publicly, but exceptions were made if wealthy, powerful people interceded for the body.¹¹ It was also a risk because Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, like those who'd had Jesus arrested and crucified. He had followed Jesus secretly out of fear of the Jewish leaders (John 19:38). This act would show the rest of the Sanhedrin that he was a follower.

Though John didn't explicitly say that Nicodemus was a secret follower, too, it's implied by his actions. Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloe to prepare Jesus' body. The typical amount required for burial was only five pounds. Seventy-five pounds was an extraordinary amount, only used for royalty. Nicodemus was honoring Jesus as king.¹² Together, they wrapped His body in strips of linen with the spices, according to Jewish burial customs. Linen cloth was specifically used for the righteous when they were buried. They didn't do the complete process of anointing because they were in a hurry to get it done before sundown.¹³

Joseph and Nicodemus would have had help from servants to roll the stone over the tomb, because it would have taken several strong men. Once the tomb was sealed, the body would normally be left there for a year to decompose, then they would return to gather the bones and put them in a box in the tomb wall. But because Jesus' body had been prepared in a hurry, the women wanted to come back after Sabbath and finish anointing the body, so they watched Him be buried to know where to return. Jewish law was adamant that none of this was to be done unless you were certain the person was dead. These men were confident Jesus was dead; the Resurrection was not a hoax.

Joseph and Nicodemus show us great courage. They had been following Jesus secretly from a distance out of fear of what the rest of the Sanhedrin would do. But when the hour was the darkest, when His closest disciples had deserted Him, they risked a great deal to come forward and honor Him in death. This was a public declaration of loyalty to Jesus, which could have cost them their reputations, their place in the Sanhedrin, even their lives. Their actions highlight the great cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25–35). To align yourself with Jesus takes great courage; it puts you at odds with the world (James 4:4).

Q: In what ways is it a risk for you to openly follow Jesus? What sacrifices have you had to make to follow Jesus?

Q: In what areas is God calling you to step out in faith to follow Jesus more boldly and courageously?

Q: What examples of courageous faith have seen in your life?

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Took

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Things seem bleak at this point in the story of the Passion Week but rest assured – Sunday is coming! In preparation for next week's conclusion in the Gospel of Mark add the following reading plan to your daily devotionals:

- **Monday:** Mark 1–3 – Jesus' identity and early ministry
- **Tuesday:** Mark 4–5 – Parables and demonstrations of His power
- **Wednesday:** Mark 6–8 – Miracles, mission and Peter's confession
- **Thursday:** Mark 9–11 – The call to discipleship and entering Jerusalem
- **Friday:** Mark 12–14 – Conflict, final teaching and the Last Supper
- **Saturday:** Mark 15–16 – The Cross and Resurrection

As you read this week, keep consider these questions:

- ***What does this passage reveal about who Jesus is?***
- ***How do I see His love, His humility or His suffering throughout the story?***
- ***How should this passage impact the way I navigate the rest of today?***

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the way Jesus' followers felt as He was being crucified. The women and John, who were there watching from a distance. The disciples who were hiding. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who were part of the Sanhedrin that had Jesus arrested and killed. What emotions might they have been experiencing? What other choices could they have made?

PRAY a prayer of thanksgiving for the sacrifice Jesus made for you. Reflect on the great pain, suffering, mocking and shame Jesus endured on the Cross. Thank Him for loving us more than even His own life. Ask Him to give you that same kind of love for others.

ACT: Meditate. Take extra time this week to meditate on the Crucifixion. Imagine what it would have been like for Jesus on the Cross, knowing He could have come down or been rescued by angels ... but choosing to stay. Imagine what it would have been like for the soldiers, the rebels, the religious leaders, and the crowds who mocked Him. Imagine what it would have been like for His followers. Ask God to speak to you through your meditation and help you appreciate Christ's sacrifice for you even more than ever before.

¹ https://www.ibj.com/articles/15630-bill-could-pave-way-for-indiana-nuclear-power-plants?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² Plutarch, "On the Delays of Divine Vengeance," *Moralia* 7.554

³ James Orr, John Nuelsen, Edgar Mullins, Morris Evans, and Melvin Grove Kyle, ed. "Alexander" and "Rufus," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939)

⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

⁷ Leland Ryke, James D. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Intervarsity Press, 1998).

⁸ A. J. Berkovitz, *A Life of Psalms in Jewish Late Antiquity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 5.5.4.

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

¹² Dennis D. Sylva, "Nicodemus and His Spices," *New Testament Studies*, vol 34, 1988, p. 148–151.

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).