

The Crucifixion & Death of Jesus

Mark 15:16-41

Crucifixion was invented by the Persians, according to Herodotus, but perfected by the Romans. It became a symbol of power and fear for the Empire. This punishment was primarily for slaves, pirates, rebels and enemies of the state. Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator, led a famous revolt against Rome, was crushed in 71 BC and 6000 of his men crucified, lining the Appian Way, 120 miles between Rome and Capua, the distance between Seattle to Ellensburg. After Titus destroyed Jerusalem, he crucified thousands making it resemble “a forest of crosses.” Having seen it, they recoiled. Cicero said it was “the most cruel and disgusting penalty”, and Josephus “the most wretched of deaths.” How did the cross, an instrument of torture and disgraceful death, become a symbol of love and beauty, crowning steeples, gracing the necks of billions? This is how.

Coronation

He has been scourged with a cat of nine tails, a beating so severe that it killed many (v15). The soldiers take him into the Praetorium and call the whole battalion, hundreds of soldiers to mock and abuse him (v16). They wrap a purple cloak, put on a crown of thorns, salute him as king, beat his head with a reed scepter, spit on and kneel before him before ripping the cloak off his blood encrusted back (vv17-20; cf. Is. 52:14). Mark moves rapidly through this scene, but the consistent thread woven throughout is that Jesus is, ironically, the true King (vv18, 26, 32, 39). He did everything that Adam and all of Israel’s leader should have.

Crucifixion

The distance to Golgotha is a little more than a third of a mile, but he is so weak he collapses under the weight of the *patibulum*. Simon, a pilgrim from Cyrene and father of Alexander and Rufus, literally takes up the cross and follows Jesus (8:34; cf. Rom. 16:13). Prisoners often carried the crossbeam which they would be nailed to. The vertical pole would be waiting on site. Like the police taking your vehicle to prevent a crime, Simon gets commandeered by the soldiers but in this instance it’s to commit the greatest injustice in the history of the world. Golgotha is smooth like a skull and perhaps looks one, a common the execution spot outside the western wall (Heb. 13:12). Jesus won’t mitigate his sufferings or compromise his ability to love his people and his enemies; he loves them until the bitter end (v23; 10:38; 14:36). Behold the plan of God for our redemption! They divide his garments (v24; Ps. 22:18); he is numbered with transgressors (v27; Is. 53:12); they mock and jeer at him (vv29-32; Ps. 22:7-8, 12-13). When everything seems as horrible and out of control as it can get, we see the perfect plan of God coming to fruition (Acts 4:27-29). To come down from the cross would make Jesus a worldly king, one the chief priests and scribes would worship (v32).

Death

The darkness of judgment falls on the land for three hours, like it did on Egypt and Babylon multiplied (Ex. 10:21-23; Isa. 13:9-11). This is the horror of Calvary, when the Son suffered for the only time in eternity alienation from the Father. “If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. . . . Unless his soul shared in the punishment, he would have been the Redeemer of bodies alone.” Jesus suffered the *condemnation* that falls on souls: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). The cost was being forsaken by the Father (v34). Elijah was the patron saint of lost causes, but Christ has nearly finished his atoning work (vv35-36). His last agonizing cry completes it, and the 80-foot temple veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place where only the high priest could go once a year is torn (v38; cf. 1:11). Jesus has now made the way to Father and in him we come directly to God. Jesus has trusted God to the end, fulfilled his call of Messiah, the anointed savior and true King. What happens? The centurion, a mighty Gentile soldier, sees the way he dies and gives the clearest pronouncement of anyone in the Gospel: “Surely this man was the Son of God” (v39), the beginning fulfillment of Ps. 22:27: “All the families of the nations will bow down before him.”

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 15:16-20, 33-39

16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

33 And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 35 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." 36 And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." 37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

1. How did the soldiers mock and hurt Jesus (verses 10)?
2. Irony is a use of words or characters or story-line to mean the very opposite of what they appear. The soldiers being ironic when they make of Jesus, hailing him as "King of the Jews." How is this really ironic in light of who Jesus really is? It would be fun to ask your parents to answer this, too.
3. The Bible says that Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us when he suffered on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). When he suffered this way, what happened between him and Father (verse 34)? What does this tell you about how much God loves you?
4. Draw a picture of Jesus dying on the cross with two thieves being crucified next to him and the women watching from a distance.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
"Truly this man was the Son of God!" --Mark 15:39*