

Mark Study
Week 23
Mark 15:35-16:8

Day One

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."
36 One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.
37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

vs. 35&36 – People misinterpreted what Jesus said then and they still do today. Jesus was committing His life to the Father and people were still looking for a bizarre spiritual experience, a divine manifestation that would “prove” that Jesus was the Messiah. Yet they were beholding all they would ever see – His death on the cross and His ultimate resurrection.

The man offered Jesus something to keep Him alive, not because He cared for Jesus, but because the man wanted to witness something spectacular; He wanted to see Elijah come and take Jesus down from the cross.

Are you seeking Jesus or the miracles? Do you apply what Jesus taught to the basics of life – family, friends, work, church – or do you seek supernatural experiences for their own sake? Jesus was interested in day-to-day life, and you need to be as well.

v. 37 – Jesus died on the cross. That is an historical fact. Paul had much to say about the effects of the cross. Here is a summary of all that he wrote:

- For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the **cross** of Christ be emptied of its power (1 Corinthians 1:17).
- For the message of the **cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).
- Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the **cross** has been abolished (Galatians 5:11).
- Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the **cross** of Christ (Galatians 6:12).
- May I never boast except in the **cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14).

- and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the **cross**, by which he put to death their hostility (Ephesians 2:16).
- And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a **cross**! (Philippians 2:8).
- For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the **cross** of Christ (Philippians 3:18).
- And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the **cross** (Colossians 1:20).
- having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the **cross** (Colossians 2:14).
- And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the **cross** (Colossians 2:15).

Take out your journal or a sheet of paper and write what your thoughts on the significance of the cross.

Day Two

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" 40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

v. 38 – The curtain in the Temple was torn because Jesus' death did away with any obstacle between God and man. The blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, made a way into the heavenly holy of holies for you and me. You would think that the Jewish authorities who discovered the torn curtain would have come to the correct conclusion that Jesus' death had something to do with the tear. They did not, however; yet I wonder how Mark found out about this. It must have been known among the people or else a converted priest told of this event at a later date.

v. 39 – It seems to us that death is so final, yet it was Jesus' death that brought life to you and me. His death also caused many to emerge from the shadows, so to speak, and identify with Jesus' in His death. The first was this centurion, a Roman soldier, who watched the events of the day unfold. This man had undoubtedly seen many die, but none had ever died like Jesus. What was the centurion's conclusion? He concluded that surely Jesus was God's Son! The Jews watched with scorn and contempt, while this Roman watched with admiration and reverence.

So in His death, Jesus touched the thief on the cross next to Him and then the Roman centurion. **When you behold Jesus on the cross, does it have the same effect as it had on this Roman soldier? Does it cause you to declare that Jesus is Lord?** I hope it does, for no man lived or died like Jesus. He is worthy of all our praise.

v. 40 – While there was one Roman man who watched the scene at the cross unfold, there were no Jewish men and none of Jesus’ disciples! Yet there were plenty of women. How could this be? These members of the “weaker” sex were strong as they followed Jesus. They watched in anguish, I’m sure, yet they did not run away. Many probably saw them and concluded they were weak women. That was the wrong conclusion. They were strong in the Lord!

I will have more to say on women in ministry in the next day or two. Suffice it to say today that these women were courageous and devoted disciples of Jesus. Today I know many women who follow in their footsteps. I want to honor their commitment, gifts and purpose as much as I would any man’s. **Do you do the same?**

v. 41 – Jesus had an entourage of women who had followed Him *up* to Jerusalem. (Notice that one always went “up” to Jerusalem, even if one was traveling southbound. Jerusalem was the high point of all Jewish worship.)

We cannot overlook this significant fact, for no other Jewish rabbi of the day would have had such a following, nor would he have wanted one. Jewish men did not want to be with women, for women could make them ceremonially unclean if the men should touch the women at the wrong time of the month. Jesus was not afraid of being “contaminated” by contact with women, and I’m sure the women sensed this. That is why they wanted to follow Him.

We must be careful not to communicate to women today what men communicated then – women are somehow unclean by the nature of their femininity. **Are you doing what you can to promote and encourage women as they follow their Lord? Are you open to their gifts and purpose?**

Day Three

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died.

v. 42 – Judaism was still the order of the day, so the Jews all prepared to celebrate the Sabbath. I have been in Jerusalem on a Friday and seen Jews shopping early in the day so they can be home early, so as not to profane the Sabbath that begins at sundown.

Those shoppers want to be home early so that there isn't any chance they will break the Sabbath ethic.

While commendable, this was legalism at its worst. A man had just been unjustly tortured and executed and the nation's main concern wasn't justice. The main concern was keeping the Sabbath. They had just killed the Lord of the Sabbath, by His own testimony, but their thoughts turned to Jewish rituals.

v. 43 – Yet Jesus' death caused the thoughts and intents of men's hearts to be revealed, just as had been predicted to Mary:

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:34-35).

The leaders' hearts were revealed when they conspired to do away with Jesus. The mob's heart was revealed when they choose Barabbas over Jesus. Pilate's heart was revealed when he saw truth but could not act on what he saw. Now we see people coming forward who identified with Jesus even though in their minds, He was dead and gone.

After the centurion, the first Jewish man was Joseph of Arimathea. He was a member of the ruling Council, but he wanted to see the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Good for you, Joseph! He could not stop the madness, but he could do what was right as an individual. Joseph did not want Jesus' body to be left until after the Sabbath was over, so he moved boldly to take it down.

There was no way Joseph could hide his actions, nor did he want to. He identified with Jesus in His death. You have to believe that he also identified with the risen Lord. **Are you bold in identifying with Jesus and His death on the cross?** Remember what Jesus said:

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

v. 44 – Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead. Many survived on the cross for days, gradually drowning as their lungs filled with their own bodily fluids. So Pilate sought word from his centurion. Why did Jesus die so quickly? Obviously He was weakened by the events of the preceding days.

Yet I have to believe that the Father would not allow Jesus to remain a focus of mocking and scorn any longer than necessary. The Father ended His agony quickly, Jesus having made the sacrifice that needed to be made.

That is how it is with your trials, with the cross that you must bear. God won't allow you to bear it one moment longer than necessary. He knows the plan He has for you and it isn't for humiliation, but rather for exaltation.

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (Hebrews 6:12).

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Hebrews 10:35-36).

Are you fretting that you have more to bear than you can manage? Do you think your trial is too long? Be encouraged! God won't do that to you or any of His children. You can be encouraged that when the trial or lesson has achieved its full purpose, it will be gone as quickly as it came.

Day Four

45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

v. 45 – Pilate gave the body to Joseph. What an honor the Father bestowed on Joseph. He was entrusted with the body of God's Son! Joseph was chosen to help fulfill the Scripture that pertained to Jesus

I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand (Psalm 16:8-11).

That's the kind of person I want to be, like Joseph. I want to be someone whom God can trust, whom God can use to fulfill His purpose and plan. I want to carry out special missions and tasks for God. **Do you want the same thing?** Some of them may be dangerous and others may be mundane. Yet I want to carry them all out with the same level of commitment and faithfulness.

What has God entrusted you to do? Are you being faithful and obedient? Remember, even the small things can be a means to promotion and increase.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you

have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" (Luke 16:10-12).

v. 46 – Joseph was a good Jew, so he wanted to do something quickly, so he could honor Jesus and still observe the Sabbath. We know from another gospel that Joseph used his own grave, and even bought some linen cloth for burial. This whole process cost Joseph something – his reputation among those who killed Jesus along with the money that the tomb would have cost (This kind of tomb was personally chiseled out of the rock and indicated that Joseph had some personal wealth.) He was willing to put all that on the line for Jesus.

What are you willing to put on the line for Jesus? What public stand are you willing to take to identify with your crucified Lord?

v. 47 – Joseph did not operate alone, for at least two women followed him to see where Jesus was laid. Where were Jesus' disciples? What happened to them? They had run off in fear, but then Joseph and now these two women emerged as those who stayed close enough to know what was happening and to do something to identify with Jesus.

These people were the firstfruits of many who would then and now come to identify with Jesus in His death. These people were moved to know that it was important to do so, and they were soon to find out why. Their loyalty was rewarded when Jesus came to life again. I suppose the best way to identify with Jesus' cross is to pick up my own and follow Him. **Is that what He would find you doing today if He returned?**

Day Five

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

v. 1 – Then some more women came forward to identify with Jesus, but where were the disciples? These women were not afraid, but the disciples were terrified and disillusioned. This is why I don't understand why women are so discriminated against in the Church. They are often brave, spiritual, sensitive and gifted. Yet more often than not, we ignore them only because they are women! It makes no sense. Yes, Paul wrote that Eve was deceived and then Adam fell, but should that now affect how women are treated and utilized in the Church?

It seems that the Church is trying to accomplish its mission with one arm tied behind its back when it doesn't fully utilize women and their gifts. I know it can be said that the women were only coming to anoint Jesus' body, something that was women's work anyway. I say it took tremendous courage to do so in the face of what had just occurred. The Jews or Romans could have taken offense at or even arrested them for what they were about to do. Yet they did it!

William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army, once said, “Some of my best men are women.” He would often send women into tough situations and see them produce great results. I think the Church today could learn from Booth’s wisdom, and from the Scriptures themselves.

What is your attitude toward women in the church and ministry? Keep in mind, women can be the greatest opponents of other women having an active ministry role. Why do you feel like you do? Is it time to change your attitude?

v. 2 – These women did not procrastinate. They went to the tomb right after sunrise. They were up early to do what was in their heart to do. **Do you procrastinate? If so, why? What are you afraid of? Why do you put off tomorrow what you can and should do today?**

v. 3 – These women had faith! How do I know? First, they trusted that they would not be abused or arrested for what they were going to do. Second, they had faith. Their reconnaissance told them that a large stone was across the tomb, and they had no idea how they were going to move the stone. Yet they did not let that stop them. They didn’t figure out how the stone would be moved and then set out for the grave. They set out for the grave, trusting that things would work out and they would be able to get to the body.

What faith! Of course, their faith was rewarded in that the stone was already moved when they arrived. What aren’t you setting out to do because you don’t have all the answers? **Do you think that is operating in faith? What can you do to change that?**

Day Six

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

v. 4 – “When they looked up.” That makes me think of several other people who “looked up” and saw the answer to their problem. One example of looking up was Abraham. That means you should not be looking down for your answers, but looking up:

I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2).

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son (Genesis 22:13).

Are you looking up or down? When you look up, those large stones in your life that no one can moved will be rolled away by God Himself.

v. 5 – These women were fearless! They proceeded into the tomb, not knowing what or who they were going to find. The men were nowhere to be found at this point, but the women were marching forward!

The women encountered something or someone that did indeed frighten them. They saw a young man in a white robe – an angel! These women had a supernatural encounter with an angel because they weren't afraid and didn't stay at home until they had all the answers of how they were going to do what was in their hearts.

Where does fear have you bound? What is your greatest fear? Failure? Criticism? Looking stupid? Poverty? Death? Rejection? You do understand that courage isn't acting in the absence of fear, but in the midst of it? So what is fear keeping you from being and doing? What are you prepared to do about it?

Day Seven

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" 8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

v. 6 – The young man put their minds at ease and proclaimed the good news that Jesus was risen! Hallelujah! Jesus is alive. Jesus, the Nazarene, the Rejected One, the Despised One, was not dead, but alive! He had told the truth. He would be rejected and killed, but on the third day would rise again!

v. 7 – **Is too much attention given to the fact that Peter is mentioned apart from the disciples? Was that because he had denied the Lord, or did the angel single him out because of his special place in God's plan and Jesus' heart?** I tend to think that Peter needed to be restored after His denial and perhaps had even separated himself, thinking that he wasn't worthy to be counted among the disciples. Of course, the Bible doesn't tell us this. That is just my opinion.

Why do the gospels differ so much at this point? Mark tells us nothing about Jesus' appearances in Jerusalem. Instead, Mark reported that Jesus told the disciples to meet Him in Galilee. That is where they were to meet their Risen Lord.

Each of the gospel writers wrote to a different target audience and selected material that was consistent with the message that they wanted to communicate. The writer in Jesus' time wasn't interested in presenting a chronology of all that happened, but a report of what happened that was consistent with their theme.

Mark painted the picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant and Mark spent no time talking about the resurrection. For him, the end of his gospel comes with the cross, with only a mention of the events after the Resurrection.

We must not approach the gospel imposing our modern editing or writing expectations on the ancient writers. Instead, we must approach not scrutinizing the details, but searching for the overriding message in each gospel. The main message of Mark was and is that Jesus was to suffer and die, which He did, on behalf of His people, who rejected Him and played a role that indicated Israel's lack of interest in a suffering Messiah.