



Mark 15

An OCF Bible Study

Mark 15

Jesus underwent two trials—a religious trial before the Sanhedrin (Jewish leaders) and now a civil trial before the Roman authorities (Pilate). Why did the Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pontius Pilate for a civil trial when they had already condemned him? The Jews did not have the legal right to execute their own criminals. Rome had revoked that right in 7 A.D., which was a big blow to the Jewish community. It meant they no longer had the basic right of Jewish self-government—to punish their own criminals—and it was the last straw that demonstrated that they were totally under the oppressive control of Rome.

The Sanhedrin also wanted Jesus to suffer crucifixion—and the Romans offered this form of execution. To the Jews, a crucified person was clearly cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). The Sanhedrin wanted to make a statement. They wanted this “heretic” to be on display as a disincentive for anyone to follow after Him. They wanted Jesus to suffer the most horrific, shameful death for all the Jewish people to see. Stoning was the Jews traditional method of execution. **Why was it key that Jesus be crucified?** It was prophesied. There are as many as sixty prophecies fulfilled by the crucifixion.

What was another reason why the Sanhedrin didn’t take things into their own hands regarding Jesus? Because they knew the multitudes had a favorable opinion of Jesus, and if they could get Pilate to pass judgment, sentence and execute Him, they would be able to distance themselves from the political fallout. They could point their finger at Pilate and redirect the emotion of the crowd.

Jesus was convicted of blasphemy (14:64). Why did the Jewish leaders bring Him before Pilate with the charge that He claimed to be the King of the Jews? The Jewish rulers knew that if they brought Jesus before Pilate on the blasphemous charge of claiming to be God, the Roman authorities would not have prosecuted Jesus for claiming to be God. Pilate would merely yawn. He would say, “We Romans have hundreds of gods. What is the harm with one more?” Pilate would have dismissed them.

How was Pilate between a rock and a hard place? Pilate knew that Jesus was an innocent man. Luke 23:14 records him as saying, *I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.* Yet Pilate had a politically explosive situation on his hands. Will he do what is right by freeing an innocent man? Or will he do what is politically expedient—please the Jews by executing a man brought before him for treason because He claimed to be a king, and there could be no king except Caesar? Pilate is in a dangerous place; the crowd is almost becoming a riot. If there was one thing that would get him in trouble with his Roman superiors, it was a riot.

What did Pilate do to please the crowd and defuse the situation (v. 15)? First he handed Jesus over to be flogged and crucified. Secondly he released Barabbas. It was customary for a prisoner to be released at the Passover Feast. Evidently this custom served to improve relations between the Roman ruler and his subjects. Barabbas was one of the popular Jewish freedom fighters whom the Romans had “imprisoned” for participating in an uprising against Rome.¹ From the Roman perspective, he was a terrorist. If anyone should be able to really say, “Jesus died for me,” it should be Barabbas. They literally swapped places on death row. Barabbas could look at the crucified Christ and say, “That should have been me. He took my place.”

Five days earlier on Palm Sunday Jesus had entered Jerusalem under ticker-tape parade conditions. Now the people are shouting, “Crucify Him” (v. 13-14). Why did the crowd turn on Jesus? He didn’t live up to their misguided expectations. He didn’t overthrow the Roman oppression and set up an earthly political kingdom.

They struck, spat upon, and mocked Him, Hail, King of the Jews! Then they lead Him out to be crucified (vv. 17-20). The purple robe and crown were symbolic of what? Royalty. They taunted Him for claiming to be a king.

Why didn’t He take the offered wine (v. 23)? Jesus refused any drug that would numb the pain. He would face the agony of the cross with a clear mind and not be “medicated” in any way.

What was the significance of dividing His garments (v. 24)? This was in fulfillment of the prophecy: *They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:18).*

He was crucified at 9 a.m. (v. 25). Darkness came over the whole land from noon to 3 p.m. (v. 33). This is especially remarkable because at the time of a full moon—during which Passover was always held—a natural eclipse of the sun is impossible. So you can't explain away the darkness by using naturalistic phenomenon. This was an extraordinary miracle in the heavens. Jesus apparently breathed His last shortly after 3 p.m.

What was going on during the time of darkness (v. 33)? Jesus was drinking the cup He had referred to at the Passover meal (Mark 10:38-39), which represented the outpouring of the Father's wrath upon Him as a substitute for sinful humanity.

The Father/Son relationship that had existed for all eternity between God the Father and Jesus was shattered temporarily for three hours. The Father looked upon His Son with disgust and repulsion. Jesus was made/became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). And God cannot tolerate the presence of sin. When the Father looked at the Son, all He saw were the sins of the world. Jesus became an *enemy* of God. And the Father turned His back on His Son—which was the ultimate act of rejection. Jesus' death was much more than a case of another martyr dying for another cause.

At some point right before He died, an awesome spiritual transaction took place. God the Father set upon Jesus all the guilt and wrath our sins deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the wrath of God toward us. It's as if God said, "I am satisfied—the debt of the world caused by sin is paid for in full."

Jesus' strong "loud cry" indicates that this was not simply the last gasp of an exhausted, demoralized or defeated man. Jesus' "cry" was a *shout of victory*. He triumphantly announced: "It is finished!" (John 19:30).²

What does the crucifixion tell us about God? He loves us. He loved the world. He was doing all this for us. He knew we were helpless and hopeless and He made a way where there was no way.

What was the original purpose of the veil/curtain of the temple (v. 37-41)? It separated sinful man from the presence of holy God. In the mind of the Jews, God lived in the Temple, specifically behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was located. The people were not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies; they didn't have direct access to God. They needed a mediator, a go-between, when dealing with God. Once a year the High Priest would serve as a mediator and would enter the Holy of Holies and make sacrifices for the sins of the nation of Israel, *And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins (Leviticus 16:34).*

What is the significance of the tearing of the temple curtain? People now have free access to the presence of God. The Jewish high priest is out of a job. He is no longer needed to serve as a go-between. Instead Jesus is seated at right hand of God, interceding for us as our great High Priest: *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).* No one should ever think again that God dwells in a temple made with human hands. **What's the significance that the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom?** Only God could do that. It was too high for human hands to reach (reportedly as high as sixty feet). Man would have had to tear it from bottom to top. It represented God opening a way into His presence by the death of His Son.

What do we know about Joseph of Arimathea (v. 42-47)? Who was he and how would you describe what he did? Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, though he was apparently silent when the Sanhedrin sentenced Jesus to death (Mark 15:1). He shrunk back then but is not ashamed to identify with Jesus now. Asking Pilate for Jesus' body is a bold and courageous move.

How was Joseph's generosity rewarded? He got his tomb back three days later.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®) copyright ©2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

This is copyrighted material provided by Officers' Christian Fellowship (OCF). Permission is granted for use in local groups. For more information about OCF: www.ocfusa.org.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Mark, 2014 Edition* (published by Sonic Light, www.soniclight.com), pp. 197

² *Ibid*, pp. 206