

The Murder of the Great King

Mark 15:21-47

Introduction: The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, (Mark1:1) was not an accident of human history. It was a divine appointment ordained by God and prophesied in Scripture. It was as Isaiah 53:10 says, “the will of the Lord to crush Him.” And, it was the fulfillment of numerous prophecies that had anticipated a day that was both tragic and glorious all at the same time. Note just the following in Mark’s gospel:

1) Psalm 69:21

“For my thirst they gave me
sour wine to drink”

2) Psalm 22:18

“They divided my garments among
them, and for my clothing they cast
lots”

3) Isaiah 53:12

“He...was numbered with the
transgressors”

Mark 15:23 (also 15:36)

“They offered Him wine mixed with
myrrh”

Mark 15:24

“And they...divided his garments
among them, casting lots for them”

Mark 15:27

“And with Him they crucified two
robbers”

4) Psalm 22:6-8

“But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by
the people. All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag
their heads; “He trusts in the LORD;
let him deliver him; let him rescue
him, for he delights in him!””

5) Psalm 22:16

“They have pierced my hands and my
feet”

Mark 15:29-32

“And those who passed by derided
him, wagging their heads and saying,
“Aha! You who would destroy the
temple and rebuild it in three days,
save yourself, and come down from
the cross!” So also the chief priests
with the scribes mocked him to one
another, saying, “He saved others; he
cannot save himself. Let the Christ,
the King of Israel, come down now
from the cross that we may see and
believe.”

Mark 15:24

“And they crucified Him”

6) Amos 8:9

“And on that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.”

7) Psalms 22:1

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

8) Isaiah 53:9

“And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death”

Mark 15:33

“And when the sixth hour had come [noon], there was darkness over the whole land until the 9th hour [3pm]”

Mark 15:34

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?”

Mark 15:46

“And Joseph (cf. Matt. 27:57-60) bought a line shroud, and taking him down...laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of rock”

- No, what King Jesus endured on the cross took place right on schedule and went exactly according to divine plan. The horror of it is also the glory of it. Jesus is dying the death we should have died that we might live now and forever.
 - He is our Substitute: Jesus died our death.
 - He is the Passover lamb (Exodus 12) who saves us with His blood.

- He is the covenant keeper (Exodus 24) who seals us with his blood.
- He is our Propitiation: Jesus endured our condemnation and bears the full wrath of God on our behalf.
 - The cup of the cross is not primarily physical suffering: it is mainly spiritual suffering. (Mark 14:36, Ps. 75:8, Is. 51:17).
 - Jesus was not a martyr on the cross; He was a Savior who experienced divine wrath and satisfied the holiness and justice of God.
 - “Before the cross, we were afraid of God; because of the cross, we are now friends of God”. (David Platt)
- He is our Reconciliation: Jesus suffered our separation that we might be brought back to God.
 - The cry on the cross is a cry of physical agony, spiritual anguish, and most of all relational alienation from His Father.
 - The curse of the cross is this:
 - Jesus was cut off from the Father’s favorable presence.
 - Jesus endured the full penalty of our disobedience. (2 Cor. 5:21).
 - Before the cross, we were separated from God’s presence; because of the cross, we are now given access into God’s presence. (Mark 15:38).

I. Jesus was crucified to save others not Himself. 15:21-32

- Crucifixion was the cruelest, most painful, most humiliating form of capital punishment in the ancient world. A man could suffer for several days. And Rome had perfected the technique to ensure maximum suffering. A Roman citizen could not be executed by crucifixion, and the shame of such a death was so great that the Roman orator Cicero said, “the very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears...the mere mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.” (*Defense of Rabirius*, 5,16)
- 2000 years of Church history unfortunately have domesticated and sanitized the cross for modern persons. We have lost the horror of what it involved. And, our 4 gospels say almost nothing in terms of its details. Why? I think there are several reasons. First, people in Jesus’ day were fully “up-to-date” on this method of capital punishment. They had seen it too many times. They knew all they wanted to know. Second, it was not the suffering that is important to the gospel writers but the one suffering. It is the Son of God hanging on the cross taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29). That is their rightful focus.

1) **The great King was crucified naked.** 15:21-24

- Normally a man condemned to death by crucifixion would carry the cross beam, called a *patibulum*, to the place of execution. It could weigh as much as 100 pounds. Jesus began his journey to the cross by carrying it (John 19:17), but in his weakened condition he apparently fell and needed help. A man named Simon of Cyrene, a coastal city in North Africa with a large Jewish Colony (see Acts 2:10) was enlisted to give aid (v.21). It is possible he was a black man. Interestingly, we are told he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. A Rufus is mentioned in Romans 16:13 along with his mother. Is it possible all 3, plus the wife/mother had come to trust Jesus as their Lord?! I like to think so.
- Jesus was taken to a place called Golgotha meaning “Place of a Skull” (v.22). This would have been outside the city walls and along a public highway. The Romans wanted as many as possible to see how they handled criminals worthy of death.
- They offered Jesus “wine mixed with myrrh” (v.23, cf. Ps 69:21), a primitive drug that would dull the pain of the crucified victim. Jesus said no. He would face the agony to come with full control of his mental faculties.

- Verse 24 informs us that as they crucified our Lord they stripped Him of his clothing and gambled (“cast lots”) to see who would go home with these meager prizes. It is possible our Savior died completely naked. Maybe he was allowed to retain his loincloth. We cannot be certain. What we do know is He was humiliated. What we do know is this was a fulfillment of divine prophecy in Psalm 22:18, the “Crucifixion Psalm”. John Calvin captures something of the theological import of this when he says, “The Evangelists portray the Son of God as stripped of His clothes that we may know the wealth gained for us by this nakedness, for it shall dress us in God’s sight. God willed His Son to be stripped that we should appear freely, with the angels, in the garments of his righteousness and fullness of all good things.” (John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark & Luke*, Vol, III, Translated by A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 194).

2) **The great King was crucified with sinners.** 15:25-27

- We are informed that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, around 9 a.m. as we reckon time (v. 25).

- As an act of further mockery they nailed the charge against him above his head, “The King of the Jews” (v.26). John 19:20 informs us that the inscription was written in 3 languages: Aramaic, Latin and Greek. This would account for the slight variations in the gospel records.
- And, as Isaiah 53:12 had promised, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” Verse 27 informs us, “with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.”
- Ironically James and John had asked to be on Jesus’ right and left hands “in your glory” (10:38). Jesus informed them that they did not know what they were asking and truly they did not. This is the hour when the Father will glorify the Son and the Son will glorify the Father (John 17:1). This is not the glory James and John had in mind.

3) **The great King was crucified amidst ridicule.** **15:29-30**

- Jesus is again subjected to mockery and verbal abuse (v.29). Those walking past Him or hanging around for the show “derided Him” (*NIV*, “hurdled insults”, “slandered”, lit. “blasphemed”). The text emphasizes they kept on jeering at Him. It was not a one time occurrence.
- They also “wagged” or “shook” their heads at Him in ridicule and sarcasm and taunted Him for His claim to “destroy the temple and

rebuild it in three days.” Before He takes on that assignment He might first consider His immediate problem, “save yourself and come down from the cross” (v. 30).

- This temptation to “come down from the cross’ is not new. It was the same one Satan threw at Him in the wilderness temptations (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). It is the same temptation He faced just a few hours earlier in the Garden of Gethsemane to forego the cup of suffering (14:36). Even up to the last moment the evil one is trying his best to persuade Jesus to reject the cross. He did not want Him there! He knew it would be his ruin and our redemption.

4) The great King was crucified to save others. 15:31-32

- The religious leaders could not resist getting in one last dig at the Great King as He hung naked with sinners ridiculing Him from the roadside and on each side (v. 32). “He saved others; He cannot save Himself” (v. 31). They then challenged Him like the others to come down from the cross. If he did that then they would believe (v.32). How ignorant and ironic. If our Lord saved Himself He could not save other! If He was to save others, Himself He could not save. And save Himself He would not do. These men claim that they would

have believed if He had come down from the cross, but we believe precisely because He stayed on it!

- Mark informs us the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus “also reviled (“insulted”) Him” and that they did so repeatedly (v.32).

However, Luke 22:34-43 tells us one of them will have a change of heart before the day ends. He saw something in Jesus that moved him from insulting Him to trusting Him. He would not be disappointed.

He would meet the Lord after death in Paradise. We must never forget. No sinner will be disappointed who flees to the crucified

King. It is never too late!

II. **Jesus died forsaken even though He was God’s Son 15:33-41**

- Mark in climatic fashion selects 6 specific events that took place as Jesus died on the cross: 1) the darkness (v. 33); 2) His cry of anguish (v.34-36); 3) a final cry and His death (v. 37); 4) the tearing from top to bottom of the temple curtain (v. 38); 5) the confession of the Roman centurion (v. 39); and 6) the witness of women (v. 40-41).
- Students of the Bible have noted, when you compare all four gospels, that Jesus uttered “Seven Sayings From the Cross”. The text recording them, their likely order, and emphasis are:

- 1) “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:24
(Forgiveness)
- 2) “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” Luke 23:43 (Salvation)
- 3) “Woman, behold your son.” John 19:26 (Relationship)
- 4) “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Matthew 27:46;
Mark 15:34 (Abandonment)
- 5) “I thirst!” John 19:28 (Distress)
- 6) “It is finished!” John 19:30 (probably Mark 15:37) (Triumph)
- 7) “Father, into your hands I commit My Spirit.” Luke 23:46 (Reunion)

Mark will only record the words of one (15:34) and the cry of one of the others (15:37). It is the abandonment and forsakenness of the Great King that is his focus.

1) **The great King died in darkness. 15:33**

- Jesus has been on the cross for 3 hours. Suddenly at “the 6th hour” (high noon), darkness engulfed the whole land “until the 9th hour” (3pm). This is nothing less than a miracle of God, a cosmic sign of God’s judgment on sin poured out on His Son (cf Isa. 5:25-30; Amos 8:9-10; Micah 3:5-7; Zeph 1:14-15). Warren Wiersbe says, “all Creation sympathized with the Creator as He suffered” (*Be Diligent*, 148).

- Might the Jews have remembered the 9th plague in Egypt was a 3 day period of darkness followed by the final plague, the death of the firstborn (Ex. 10:22-11:9)? Wiersbe again notes, “The darkness of Calvary was an announcement that God’s firstborn and Beloved Son, the Lamb of God, was giving His life for the sins of the world!” (148-149).

2) **The great King died alone. 15:34-36**

- The cry of v. 34 may be the most heart-wrenching in all of the Bible. It is a quote from Psalm 22:1 and identifies Jesus as the righteous sufferer of that Psalm. The Hebrews never saw it as Messianic. We now know that it is.
- In the 4th saying from the cross our Savior cried out in Aramaic, His mother tongue, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabchthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 34). The cry was not one of physical pain, psychological confusion, or dread of death. No, it was the cry of the Son of God who was now experiencing something He had never known in all of eternity, separation from and forsakenness by God. Tim Keller captures beautifully the transaction of the moment,

“This forsakenness, this loss, was between the Father and the Son, who had loved each other from all eternity. This love was

infinitely long, absolutely perfect, and Jesus was losing it. Jesus was being cut out of the dance.

Jesus, the Maker of the world, was being unmade. Why? Jesus was experiencing our judgment day. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It wasn’t a rhetorical question. And the answer is: For you, for me, for us. Jesus was forsaken by God so that we would never have to be. The judgment that should have fallen on us fell instead on Jesus.” (*King’s Cross*, 202).

Jesus’ cry and the darkness that covered the land declared the same truth: there was real abandonment from the Father as He took on every sin of every man, woman, and child. As Isaiah 53:6 teaches, “the Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all.” This was the price He paid “as a ransom for many” (10:45).

- And why “my God” and not “my Father?” Because in this one moment in all of time and eternity, He views Himself and knows Himself not as the Father’s Son, but as the sinner’s sacrifice.
- Some standing by mistakenly thought He was calling out to Elijah (v. 35). Someone ran to fill a sponge with sour wine (v. 36), possibly in response to His cry recorded in John 19:28, “I thirst.” They waited, probably with additional ridicule, to “see whether Elijah would come to

take him down.” However, if the Father would not intervene to spare His Son, it is certain Elijah would not come. The Great King would die alone as the sinner’s substitute.

- “God separated from God, who can understand?” I may never understand it, but I will forever praise Him for it.

3) **The great King died and opened the way to God** **15:37-39**

- Atonement has been made and the task is complete. “Jesus uttered a loud cry” and he died (v. 37). Almost certainly it was the cry recorded in John 19:30, “It is finished!” The work of salvation is done. It is accomplished. As tangible evidence Mark notes that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two”, and do not miss this, “from top to bottom” (v. 38). This was God’s doing. The significance of the tearing of the curtain, probably the one that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, is highly theological and rich in symbolism. Pastor Sam Storms notes at least 3:

“What was the symbolic significance of this rending of the veil?

Surely three things: (1) It points to the complete, perfect, and altogether sufficient sacrifice for sins that Jesus has offered in himself on the cross. The sin that had created a barrier both spiritually and naturally between God and man has been atoned for. (2) It also points

to the end of the Mosaic Covenant and its laws, which have been fulfilled in Christ. The “old order” has passed away! (3) It points to the fact that God in all his glory is now freely and fully accessible to all men and women who come to him by faith in Jesus Christ. For centuries before the coming of Christ, God had confined the revelation of his glory and majesty to the Holy of Holies. Now he bursts forth to dwell no longer behind a veil in a house built with wood and stone and precious jewels, but to dwell in the hearts of his people. See Hebrews 10:19-22.”

- At this point we arrive at the destination Mark has intended since Mark 1:1. On the lips of a Gentile Roman Centurion, we hear the confession, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (v. 39). Amazingly, it was not one of His marvelous miracles or tremendous teachings that evoked this confession: it was His passion. Like the centurion, Mark wants his readers to confess Jesus as the Christ. The question is have you? Will you? It is a question only you can answer.

4) The great King died with women looking on in love. 15:40-41

- While no men are mentioned by Mark as being anywhere in the vicinity (John 19:26-27 does indicate John was there), he does note 3 women who were there: Mary of Magdala that Jesus had delivered from demonic

possession (Luke 8:2), a second Mary who had 2 sons named James and Joses, and Salome who is only mentioned by name in Mark (15:40: 16:1). She was the mother of the disciples James and John, and probably the sister of Jesus mother (Matt 27:56).

- Their presence establishes eyewitnesses to his death and burial (v. 47). Further, they were “true disciples” who had “followed him and ministered to him” (v. 41). They, along with “many other women”, were faithful to Him to the bitter end. They may have watched the brutal events of the cross “from a distance”, but unlike His male disciples, their devotion was not marked by absence. Their love and devotion to Jesus would not go unrewarded (16:4-8)!

III. Jesus was buried because He was dead. 15:42-47

- Jesus is dead. John 19:34 tells us “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear” just to be certain. Normally a man who died by crucifixion would be left on the cross to rot or be eaten by predators like dogs or birds of prey. What was left of the corpse would then be thrown into the garbage heap outside the city known as the Valley of Hinnom. Jesus, however, would be spared this humiliation because 1) Jewish law demanded that even executed criminals receive a proper burial and that those hanged on a tree be taken down and buried before sunset (Deut 21:23) and 2) a member of the

Sanhedrin named Joseph of Arimathea “took courage” and asked for permission to bury the body of Jesus” (v. 43). Luke 23:51 informs us he did not support the Council’s decision to seek Jesus’ execution.

1) **The great King was buried in a rich man’s tomb.** 15:42-46

- It is late Friday afternoon. The Jewish Sabbath will begin at Sundown. Preparation for the Sabbath would already be underway and so any decision as to what to do with the body of Jesus must be made quickly (v. 42).
- Joseph of Arimathea, who 1) “was a respected member of the Council” and 2) “was also himself looking for the Kingdom of God...went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus” (v.43). He may have even thought Jesus was the Messiah (John 19:38). Like the others, such hopes had now been lost. Still, his love for Jesus moved him to “go public” and make clear his affection for Jesus.
- Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus “should have already died” (v. 44). Often a man would suffer several days on the cross before dying. Receiving confirmation from the centurion that Jesus was in fact dead (vs. 44-45), “he granted the corpse to Joseph” (v. 45).
- Carefully removing the Lord’s mangled body from the cross, Joseph purchased and wrapped the Savior in a “linen shroud and

laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock” (v. 46)

Matthew (27:60) informs us the tomb belonged to Joseph.

- Once His body was laid in the tomb, “he rolled a rock against the entrance’ (v.46). Once again the Scripture was fulfilled, “And they made his grave with the wicked” (Isa 53:9).

2) **The great King was buried and women saw where He was laid. 15:47**

Mark informs us that in addition to Joseph of Arimathea and also

Nicodemus (see John 19:38-42), Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses (and James the younger, v. 40) “saw where he was laid” (v. 47).

Thus the only people at His grave as the sun set that “Black Friday” was two Pharisees who had up until now been “silent” or “anonymous”

disciples and two women. The apostles are nowhere to be found. Those

who had professed proudly and loudly that they would die for Him

(14:31) are in hiding. In contrast those who once remained in the

shadows or where hardly noticed by the really important people are there

by His grave. They do not care who knows of their loyalty to Jesus.

They do not care who see their love for Jesus.

Conclusion

And so it is over. He is finished. Or...is He? I know it's Friday. But Sunday is coming! S. M. Lockridge (1913-2000) was a powerful and passionate African-

American preacher. He captured so well what just happen and...what's coming in just a few days.

“It’s Friday. But Sunday’s Comin!”

It’s Friday. Jesus is praying. Peter’s a sleeping. Judas is betraying. But Sunday’s comin’.

It’s Friday. Pilate’s struggling. The Council is conspiring. The crowd is vilifying. They don’t even know That Sunday’s comin’.

It’s Friday. The Disciples are running like sheep without a shepherd. Mary’s crying. Peter is denying. But they don’t know That Sunday’s a comin’.

It’s Friday. The Romans beat my Jesus. They robe him in scarlet. They crown him with thorns. But they don’t know That Sunday’s comin’.

It’s Friday. See Jesus walking to Calvary. His blood dripping. His body stumbling. And his spirit’s burdened. But you see, it’s only Friday. Sunday’s comin’.

It’s Friday. The world’s winning. People are sinning. And evil’s grinning.

It’s Friday. The soldiers nail my Savior’s hands to the cross. They nail my Savior’s feet to the cross. And then they raise him up next to criminals.

It’s Friday. But let me tell you something, Sunday’s comin’.

It's Friday. The disciples are questioning, what has happened to their King.

And the Pharisees are celebrating that their scheming has been achieved.

But they don't know It's only Friday. Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. He's hanging on the cross. Feeling forsaken by His Father.

Left along and dying. Can nobody save Him? Ooooh It's Friday. But

Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The earth trembles. The sky grows dark. My King yields his spirit.

It's Friday. Hope is lost. Death has won. Sin has conquered. And Satan's just a laughin'.

It's Friday. Jesus is buried. A soldier stands guard. And a rock is rolled into place. But it's Friday. It is only Friday. Sunday is a comin'!