

Lesson Thirteen

(Mark 15:16 - 16:20)

Christ on the Cross

(Mark 15:16-32)

16 The soldiers took Jesus inside the courtyard (that is, of the governor's palace) and called together the rest of the company. 17 They put a purple robe on Jesus, made a crown out of thorny branches, and put it on his head. 18 Then they began to salute him: "Long live the King of the Jews!" 19 They beat him over the head with a stick, spat on him, fell on their knees, and bowed down to him. 20 When they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to nail him to the cross.

21 On the way they met a man named Simon, who was coming into the city from the country, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (This was Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.) 22 They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which means "The Place of the Skull." 23 There they tried to give him wine mixed with a drug called myrrh, but Jesus would not drink it. 24 So they nailed him to the cross and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing dice to see who would get which piece of clothing. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross. 26 The notice of the accusation against him was written. "The King of the Jews." 27 They also nailed two bandits to crosses with Jesus, one on his right and the others on his left. [28 In this way the scripture came true which says, "He was included with criminals."]

29 People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the temple and build it up in three days! 30 Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law made fun of Jesus, saying to each other, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! 32 Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

Also the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also.

"As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles" 1 Cor. 1:23). This must be understood as "God's ACT in Christ to set men free!" CHRIST-ON-THE-CROSS is THE sacrificial ACT which allows God to forgive sins and accept the believer as righteous. (Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God rather than in the heart of man.)

Not a warrior Messiah, flashing signs of great power from the sky, but a Messiah dying helplessly in shame and disgrace. Compare 2 Cor. 4:10; 13:4. The Jewish Talmud calls Him HATTALUY --the hanged (compare Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). This is offensive to the Jews, because they expected a warrior Messiah who would liberate them from Roman occupation. This was nonsense to the Gentiles, because the Eternal Logos dying helplessly on the cross was an impossible idea to them. Mark gives us the details in stark simplicity. He makes no attempts to interpret the event as a "sacrifice," but simply records the things as they take place. Yet for those who know the Old Testament portion of the Bible, the interpretation stands out clearly in certain words and phrases.

Compare Isa. 50:6-7; 53:3-5; Prov. 31:6; Psa. 69:21; 22:18; Lam. 2:15; Psa. 22:7-8. Mark has already made it clear that he was to give his life for many (see Mark 10:45; 14:24). Christ's death (and resurrection) was in accordance with God's own plan (Acts 2:23).

Before killing Jesus, the soldiers made fun of him (verses 16-20). They dressed him up in a scarlet/purple robe (probably a worn-out robe thrown away by Herod). Scarlet and purple were the "royal colors." Then they "crown" him as "king" with thorny branches -- all to make fun of his claim to be the king of the Jews (this was the official charge against him). The greatest insult was to spit on him, but they were no worse than the Jewish council (Matt. 26:67). John shows us that after this had taken place, Pilate tried again to set Jesus free (John 10:5-16). Since Pilate was staying in Herod's palace (see John 18:28), this must have been the location of these things.

A condemned man carried his own cross to the place of execution. But Jesus is now too weak from all that has happened to him and he must have fallen underneath its weight. Simon of Cyrene in north Africa was forced by the soldiers to carry it (Luke 23:26 may imply that Simon carried only one end of the cross). Mark mentions Simon's sons because they were well known to his readers, and the Rufus of Rom. 16:13 may be one of them. (Some think Simon was a black man.) *Vinegar* in Bible times was a sour wine made out of grapes. This wine mixed with myrrh (Matthew says "gall," that is, a *bitter substance*, and both words probably refer to the same thing) was a drug to kill pain. The condemned man's clothes were usually given to the executioners. The way they divided the clothes fulfilled Psalm 22:18. He was crucified between two bandits ("armed terrorists," compare verse 27), and Luke says this fulfilled scripture (see Luke 22:37). The written notice of accusation said simply: "*The King of the Jews*." Luke says this was written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, so that everyone would be able to read it. To the crowd, the crucifixion was proof of Jesus' "self-delusion." But for those who believe, the words are proof of *Who He Is!!!* "*For even though it was in weakness that he was put to death on the cross, it is by God's power that he lives*" (2 Cor. 13:4a). Compare 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

The Death of Jesus (Mark 15:33-39)

33 At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. 34 At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

35 Some of the people who were there heard him and said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah!" 36 One of them ran up with a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and put it on the end of a stick. Then he held it up to Jesus' lips and said, "Wait! Let us see if Elijah is coming to bring him down from the cross!"

37 With a loud cry Jesus died.

38 The curtain hanging in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 The army officer, who was standing there in front of the cross, saw how Jesus had cried out and died. "This man was really the Son of God!" he said.

The ancients had no means to precisely measure time. Thus Mark says it was nine o'clock (the third hour) when they crucified Him, and John says almost noon (the sixth hour). But since time was measured in quarters of three hours, John's "almost noon" would not contradict Mark's "nine o'clock." Crucifixion was the most hideously cruel death known to the ancient world. The victim might hover between life and death for two days or more. It was painful and drawn-out, with the victim suffering from fever and dehydration, but death did not usually come in less than 36 hours. Jews did not crucify Jews, nor did Romans crucify Romans. Intense hate is shown by the Jewish leaders demanding that Jesus be crucified!

At noon (the sixth hour) the whole country was covered with a supernatural darkness. Since it was *full moon* at the time (Passover was keyed to the full moon), this could not have been an eclipse of the sun *in the ordinary sense*. Alford says: "Those whose belief leads them to reflect WHO was then suffering, will have no difficulty in accounting for these signs of sympathy in Nature, nor in seeing their applicability." Perhaps three million Jewish people crowded Jerusalem at this time, and they were eyewitnesses of the darkness and the other signs. The heavy curtain (veil, KJV, a heavy tapestry of double thickness) which divided the "Holy of Holies" from the "Holy Place" was torn *from top to bottom*, showing this to be an act of God and therefore symbolic (see Heb. 10:19-21). Matthew mentions an earthquake, which would also be a sign at this time. (The raising of some dead at this time, Matt. 27:51-53, properly belongs with the resurrection of Jesus, and will be studied there.)

The loud shout of Jesus in verse 34 uses the word of Psalm 22:1. The question is: how would a Jewish person understand these words??? When some said: "Listen, he is calling for Elijah," they were probably *deliberately misunderstanding* what He said. (There was a tradition that Elijah would come to the aid of a devout Jewish person). Some were claiming that Jesus was praying to Elijah. They were making fun of Jesus when they said to wait and see if Elijah would come (verse 36b). (The offer of sour wine was a rough kindness, and this time Jesus drinks. See John 19:30.)

Why did Jesus shout: "*My God, my God, why did you abandon me?*" Some think God had to briefly withdraw his *presence* from Christ, so he could experience death. Some think the fact that Jesus "shared our sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) caused God to briefly turn his back on Jesus as he held the world's sins on the cross. The words show that Jesus felt he hung on the cross *alone*. Yet He calls: *My God, my God.*" his inner consciousness of union with God must have been complete and indestructible. Chadwick says: "The only explanation is in his own words, that his life is a ransom for many, Mark 10:45. The chastisement of our peace, not the remorse of our guiltiness, was upon him." This was no *make-believe*, no *play-acting*. It was a true sacrificial act of death. It had been *pictured* by all the animals killed on Jewish altars (compare Heb. 9:23 - 10:9).

The army officer (centurion standing in front of the cross, who was in charge of the execution squad, made a declaration of faith. Although a Roman, he could not fail to know something of Jewish life, and he was aware of the charges against Jesus (see John 19:7). Certainly then he knew what he was saying: "*This man was really the Son of God!*"

The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:40-47)

40 Some women were there, looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. 41 They had followed Jesus while he was in Galilee and helped him. Many other women were there also, who had come to Jerusalem with him.

42-43 It was getting on toward evening when Joseph of Arimathea arrived. He was a respected member of the Council, who looked for the coming of the Kingdom of God. It was Preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath); so Joseph went in bravely to the presence of Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. He called the army officer and asked him if Jesus had been dead a long time. 45 After hearing the officer's report, Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. 46 Joseph bought a linen sheet, took the body down, wrapped it in the sheet, and placed it in a grave which had been dug out of the rock. Then he rolled a large stone across the entrance to the grave. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching, and saw where Jesus was placed.

In an age when women had no more status than a slave, Jesus was unique in the fact that he treated them with respect. Some of his disciples were women (compare Luke 8:1-3; Acts 1:14), and the very first person to see him after the Resurrection was a woman (Mark 16:9). Women were first at the tomb, and first to announce that Jesus had risen from death. There were many women at the cross. Perhaps they felt less threatened by the Jewish leaders, because they were women. Alford thinks there was another group of disciples within sight of the cross, but at a distance.

Mark mentions three women in verse 40, and again in 16:1. They were eyewitnesses of the crucifixion, two of them saw the burial (verse 47), and the three came to the tomb at the resurrection. There would be no possibility that they were mistaken as to where Jesus was buried. They would know the fact of his death, and we see them come on Sunday morning to complete embalming the body. Mary the mother of Jesus was also at the cross, but Alford thinks she was led away by John (compare John 19:27).

Preparation Day was Friday (Thursday sunset to Friday sunset, as the Jews counted). Usually the bodies of the crucified were allowed to hang on the cross for some days before being thrown in a common grave. But because this was an especially holy Sabbath, soldiers were sent to take sledge-hammers and crush the legs of the victim to speed up their death (see John 19:31-37). The Jewish leaders wanted to get it over with quickly to avoid defiling their Sabbath. But Jesus was already dead and not a single bone was broken (compare Psalm 34:20; Exod. 12:46)! To be certain of Jesus' death, the soldier plunges his spear into Jesus' side. John tells us *both* blood and water poured out. This must have some special significance, since John puts so much emphasis on the fact.

Joseph of Arimathea was a believer in Christ, as well as a member of the Jewish council. (Probably he hadn't been notified of the Jewish trial, since he would have been favorable to Jesus.) John says he was a "secret believer" (John 19:38) but the death of Jesus brings him "out into the open." Only John tells that Nicodemus also helped with the burial (John 19:39). It is important that Jesus was wrapped in a new linen sheet and buried in a new unused tomb. Jews believed that the spirit of a dead man (a demon) could come into a dead body and *animate* it (i.e., a zombie). The new tomb made it impossible to claim this. Pilate no doubt felt relieved to give the body to Joseph for

burial. And so Jesus was given a decent burial according to Jewish customs. Mark carefully describes the whole thing for his Gentile readers.

Matthew shows the Jewish leaders going to Pilate the next day and asking for a guard to be placed on the tomb. Pilate gives them an armed guard of Roman soldiers. Since Pilate did not expect Jesus to rise from death, there was no irony in his statement: *“go and make the tomb as secure as you can.”* The grave was a cave dug in the rock, with a large stone rolled across the entrance to block it. It was sealed by stretching a string across the rock and fastening it at each side with wax. Moving the stone would break the seal. The guard is posted and everything humanly possible has been done to prevent the body from being stolen. All these things happened while Jerusalem was crowded with people.

The Resurrection

(Mark 16:1-8)

16 *After the Sabbath day was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. 2 Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, they went to the grave. 3-4 On the way they said to one another, “Who will roll away for us the stone from the entrance to the grave?” (It was a very large stone.) Then they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back. 5 So they entered the grave, where they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe -- and they were filled with alarm.*

6 *“Don’t be alarmed,” he said, “I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was nailed to the cross. He is not here -- he has been raised! Look, here is the place where they placed him. 7 Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: ‘He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

8 *So they went out and ran from the grave, because fear and terror were upon them. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

The Sabbath had ended at sundown Saturday, and it was still dark as Sunday morning is dawning and the sun is just about to rise (see John 20:1). This is the third day since Jesus was buried. (In Jewish usage, “three days and three nights,” “on the third day,” and “after three days” all mean the same period of time. Compare 2 Chron. 10:5, 12; Esther 4:16; 5:1). Christ was buried Friday evening before sundown, was in the grave Saturday, and was raised from death very early Sunday morning. The fact that they had brought spices to anoint the body shows they really were not thinking in terms of a resurrection. They think their biggest problem will be to find someone to roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb. They would not have known about the guard and the seal. Matthew shows that as they were still on the way to the tomb, there was a strong earthquake, and an angel rolled the stone away and sat on it. Mark shows them arriving after the stone has been moved, and the angel speaking to them to quiet their fears. But they were terrified and dumfounded by all that had taken place. The fear and amazement which these first witnesses felt is in sharp contrast to what we today would expect. But this day was unique in all of time and eternity!!! Matthew says they were afraid yet filled with joy. They run to tell the disciples! (From what Mark says, the women must have

first been driven by fear as they ran, but this changed to joy as they began to realize the meaning of what had happened.)

Scholars have tried to reconstruct the events of that day from the Gospel records. Both Mark 16:9 and John 20:11 say that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. The sequence of events must go like this: 1) The women go very early to the grave, with Mary Magdalene taking the lead. 2) She arrives at the grave while it was still dark, just after the earthquake, sees the stone taken away, and runs back to the city by a different route, to tell the apostles. 3) The other women arrive at the grave, see the angels, are told Jesus has risen, and run to tell the disciples. 4) Peter and John, followed by Mary Magdalene, run to the grave, and then return to the city. 5) Mary Magdalene remains, sees the angels, and is the first person to see the risen Christ. 6) A few minutes later, Jesus appears also to the other women before they reach the homes of the apostles. (The women had left the grave on their way to the city before Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene came to it.)

The Gospels place before us the fact of the empty tomb. If the Jewish leaders had stolen the body, they certainly would have produced it to quash the preaching of the apostles. If the believers had stolen it, how would we account for the faith and boldness which they showed from then on??? Only the *bodily resurrection* fits the facts. And the fact that the disciples found it so difficult to believe that Jesus had risen from death is proof that they did not invent the story.

Appearances of Jesus

(Mark 16:9-20)

AN OLD ENDING TO THE GOSPEL

9 After Jesus rose from death, early on Sunday, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had driven out seven demons. 10 She went and told it to his companions. They were mourning and crying: 11 and when they heard her say that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe her.

12 After this, Jesus appeared in a different manner to two of them while they were on their way to the country. 13 They returned and told it to the others, but they would not believe it.

14 Last of all, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He scolded them, because they did not have faith and because they were too stubborn to believe those who had seen him alive. 15 He said to them, "Go to the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 Believers will be given these signs of power: they will drive out demons in my name; they will speak in strange tongues; 18 if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they will not be harmed; they will place their hands on the sick, who will get well."

19 After the Lord Jesus had talked with them, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God. 20 The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by giving them the signs of power.

ANOTHER OLD ENDING

9 The women went to Peter and his friends and gave them a brief account of all they had been told. 10 After this, Jesus himself sent out through his disciples, from the east to the west, the sacred and ever-living message of eternal salvation.

Time has confirmed both endings to Mark's Gospel, even though someone other than Mark may have written them. Since the New Testament writers wrote through the power of the Holy Spirit, this is no problem at all. Both endings must have been in existence at the end of the First Century. Both are considered authentic. The Regius and Athos manuscripts, along with others, give both endings, as do all the Greek New Testaments since (and including) Westcott & Hort.

Here is the sequence of appearances: 1) Jesus was first seen by Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18). 2) Then he was seen by the two women returning from the grave (Matt. 28:9-10). (There must be some special meaning to the fact that the first two appearances were to the three women who were at the cross and saw him die.) 3) He was seen by Simon Peter alone (Luke 24:34). 4) He was seen by two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). 5) He was seen by the apostles at Jerusalem, with Thomas absent (John 20:19). 6) By the apostles at Jerusalem, with Thomas present (John 20:26-29). 7) He was seen at Lake Tiberius (Galilee) by seven disciples (John 21:1). 8) He was seen by eleven disciples, on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16). 9) He was seen by five hundred followers in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6). (This might have been the same time as #8.) 10) He was seen by James only (1 Cor. 15:7). 11) He was seen by all the apostles on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:51). 12) He was also seen by Paul, to offer him a commission as an apostle (Acts 9:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:8). 13) He was seen by John on Patmos (Rev. 1:12-13).

Remember that Jerusalem was crowded with people at this time. They had come from all over the world for Passover. Certain of Jesus' appearances were to qualify certain people to be legal witnesses of his resurrection (see Acts 10:40-42). If he appeared to others besides those mentioned, we are not told (but see Acts 1:3; 13:31, which may imply that he did). However, Matthew records an amazing sign, in Matt. 27:51-53. Part of the supernatural and symbolic signs that accompany the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the resurrection of many of God's people who were dead and buried in the area of Jerusalem. Matthew states it in such a way as to show that it was not Jesus who raised them from death, but that as Jesus himself was raised to life, they were raised also. (Col. 1:18 shows Christ was the first one to conquer death -- rising from the dead never to be recaptured by death. This implies that all who had been raised from death before this, had died again later. See also 1 Cor. 15:20-28.)

Note also that the Risen Christ could be touched and handled (see Matt. 28:9), and that he ate food to show that he was not a ghost (see Luke 24:39-43). Yet he could pass through locked doors (see John 20:19). His *resurrection body* showed the proofs of his death and his love! Some sixty-five years later at Patmos, John saw "The Lamb" which appeared to have been killed. Jesus must have taken his *body* with him when he ascended to the Father. It may be that Jesus in Eternity continues in this BODY which shows the evidence of the cross. If so, the Redeemed will be eternally reminded of God's act in Christ which set them free!!!

Verses 14-20 parallel the Great Commission as given in Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-53. Mark emphasizes baptism as an *initiation* into Christ. Faith is *obedient*. One who lacks the faith to obey Christ, does not have enough faith to be saved (compare Acts 22:16). Jesus works through his followers to send out “*from the east to the west, the sacred and ever-living message of eternal salvation.*” These things *had happened*, and the early Christians took this as their mandate to tell all the world the Good News of Christ Jesus!!!

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 15:16-16:20)

1. How did the soldiers and Pilate think of the title, “King of the Jews”? Why?

2. Since wicked men crucified Jesus (Acts 2:23), in what sense could it have been *God’s act*? Was this death only “make-believe”?

3. What interpretation do the Old Testament scriptures put on the death of Christ?

If Jesus had come down from the cross, what would have been the reaction of those who made fun of him? Would they really have believed? Why didn’t they believe before this?

5. Who forced Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross? Do you think he carried only one end? Why was Simon coming to Jerusalem?

6. Did both outlaws continue to insult Jesus (Luke 23:39-43)?
7. Have those who deny the resurrection any grounds for saying that Jesus never really died?
8. How do we know the darkness was not an eclipse of the sun?
9. When Jesus gave the loud shout of 15:34, was he quoting scripture intentionally or was this a spontaneous expression of his deep need? Did God abandon him?
10. Why did some say he called for Elijah?
11. Did Jesus control his own death -- that is, chose the time his *spirit* would exit from his body? Compare John 10:17-18.
12. Why did the death of Christ have more effect on the army officer (centurion) than on the Pharisees?
13. Why does Mark mention the women of 15: 40? What status did women have at that time?

14. Which day was Preparation day? What relation did it have to the Sabbath? What day was the Sabbath?

15. How many of Jesus' bones were broken during the crucifixion (Psa. 34:20; Exod. 12:46)?

16. Was Joseph of Arimathea a follower of Christ? What kind of disciple was he? Why does he act at this time?

17. Why is it important that Jesus was buried in a new tomb?

18. How was the tomb closed? How sealed? Why the guard?

19. What time was it when the women came to the tomb?

20. How would you describe the thoughts of the two Mary's as they come to the open tomb?

21. Why call Him, "Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified"?

22. Why promise to meet them in Galilee? When was this promise kept?

23. Mark says the women were afraid and said nothing to anyone (16:8). How long were they quiet?

24. Whom did Mary Magdalene tell about his resurrection? Why did they find it so hard to believe?

25. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ. Describe her activities from her first visit to the tomb until Jesus appeared to her.

26. When and where did Jesus appear to the “other women”?

27. Jesus did not first appear to his apostles. Why would this be?

28. Jesus had much unbelief to overcome in the minds of his apostles. How did he prove He was not a ghost or disembodied spirit?

29. Read the following and see who performed the miracles: 1) Acts 8:7; 16:18; 2) Acts 2:4-11; 3) Acts 28:5; 4) Acts 3:7; 5:12-16; 9:34.

30. Mark 16:20 summarizes the theme of which New Testament book?