

“HOW DO YOU KILL THE SON OF GOD?”

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Scripture Text: Mark 15:16-32

Introduction.

If you want to start an interesting conversation sometime ask, “What’s the most important event in human history?” You will hear an amazing variety of answers.

The beginning of civilization, the invention of writing, the codification of law, the rise of the Roman Empire and western civilization, the invention of the printing press, the Renaissance, the discovery of electricity, penicillin, the atomic bomb, landing on the moon, tearing down the Berlin Wall, 9/11. And on and on.

It’s a bit unsettling that for Christians our most important event in human history is a torture and execution on a Roman cross. But the fact is the cross is central to the Gospel of Jesus, central to the Christian faith, and central to the whole of human history.

This is the dividing moment, the crossing of the Rubicon, the point of no return, the laying down of the gauntlet, the continental divide. Everything flows from this event. Everything before anticipated and pointed to this event; everything after looks back to this event.

This is God’s answer to the question, what’s the most important event in human history.

Of the tens of thousands of crucifixions that have taken place in history, this one towers above all the rest in significance. This is our focus this morning, the cross of Jesus.

Mark 16:16-20, the mocking of Jesus.

Let me remind us of the verse before our text.

Mark 15:15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, *he delivered him to be crucified.*

Before Pilate turns Jesus over to the Roman soldiers he had Jesus scourged. A scourging was a Roman judicial penalty involving being whipped with a cat of nine tails, long stripes of leather imbedded with pieces of bone and metal. The standard punishment was thirty nine lashes that left gapping wounds, profuse bleeding and often internal injuries.

“And [then] he delivered him to be crucified.”

Jesus was in very bad shape before the Roman battalion of 500 or 600 soldiers started playing their games with Jesus. They made a sport of Jesus, something to break up the monotony of the day. There are people who do violence or vandalism out of boredom, for pleasure, for kicks. They dressed Him up with a royal robe, put a crown on Him, and made fun of Him. “Hail, King of the Jews.”

Instead of the typical laurel wreath, they made a crown out of thorns. Their mocking gave way to violence, beating, spitting, striking His head, driving the thorns into His skull.

And all of this was only a prelude, a horrible appetizer before a more horrific main course. “And they led him out to crucify him.”

Mark 16:21-32, the crucifying of Jesus.

The distance from the governors palace to this place called the skull was perhaps a few hundred yards, maybe a half mile. Yet it was a road Jesus had been walking for 33 years, every step a step toward a cross. Jesus was born into our world to die for our world.

Jesus was already so physically weak that He couldn't carry the cross arm of His cross as those sentenced to crucifixion had to do. So the Romans grabbed a man from Cyrene on the northern coast of Africa, *Simon*, to carry Jesus' cross.

A Roman execution squad consisted of four soldiers led by a centurion. They marched Jesus to the execution site with a small crowd following made up of Jesus, Simon, the other criminals, a number of chief priests and scribes, and some of the women.

What an assortment of characters assembled around the cross. Gentiles from Rome, visitors from Africa, Jewish upper class, religious authorities, corrupt politicians, convicted criminals, notorious sinners, marginalized women.

These are the ones Jesus came to die for, these are the ones His cross could most benefit.

In this crowd were those who would receive Jesus and believe in Him. Mark mentions Simon's sons, one of whom, Rufus, is mentioned in Romans as being a part of the church in Rome. One of the two thieves believed, the women believed.

And in this crowd were those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and Savior from sin, the Romans and Jewish leaders and authorities.

The offer is open to all, to thieves, soldiers, bystanders, mockers, rich and poor, deniers and haters, sinners, anyone. Salvation is open to all, to anyone who doesn't reject Jesus, who doesn't think he can make his own way, or get to heaven on his own efforts or merits. To any who don't take offense at his cross.

Only at the cross do we find the offer of forgiveness. Only at the cross do we do we hear the offer that we can be with Jesus in paradise. Only at this greatest moment in history do we find eternity.

Golgotha, it's Hebrew for the place of the skull. In Latin the word is Calvary.

Jesus was offered a drugged wine which was an act of mercy to help ease the pain, but He refused it. Jesus had already told the disciples He wouldn't drink wine again until with us in heaven.

But more importantly Jesus refused to have His senses dulled by drugs. He came to suffer and to die and He would do so fully awake and fully aware of what was happening. Jesus renders His obedience in a fully conscious state of mind.

There is a lesson worth meditating on here about our American aversion to pain and suffering.

“And they crucified him.”

All the Gospels are minimalist when it comes to describing the *crucifixion*. They don't play on our emotions, they don't sensationalize it or sentimentalize it. In fact, none of the Gospels say a word about Jesus' hands and feet being nailed. They all simply say they crucified Him.

Crucifixion was the Roman form of execution, reserved only for non-Romans, for slaves, violent criminals and prisoners of war. A criminal was fastened to a wooden cross and left until he died of exposure, asphyxia and loss of blood.

Historians refer to it as the most cruel and horrifying punishment. It was designed to not just for its torture, but for its shame. It was socially degrading as it was always done publically so to be a deterrent to others.

No wonder the writer of Hebrews called the cross a cross of shame (Hebrews 12:2) and Paul called the preaching of a crucified Messiah “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (I Corinthians 1:23).

The sheer agony of the slow painful death is preserved for us in the English word, *excruciating*.

It comes to us from a Latin word that means to torment or torture especially by means of being crucified. The word means an intense, agonizing, piercing pain, a kind of pain that causes intense mental and emotional suffering. It's a word reserved for the most extreme kinds of pain.

As if the physical torture wasn't enough, the crowd and the chief priests and the criminals all taunted Jesus and *mocked* Him. Talk about kicking a man when he is down or heaping insults upon injury. If there is a hell on earth this is surly it.

They said if He is the Messiah He should come down. They had no understanding that if He came down He would cease to be the Messiah. To show that He is the Son of God He had to remain on the cross. They were tempting Him to not be God.

I want us to take notice of something here. Jesus was a righteous man without sin, yet He was mocked, ridiculed and insulted. Mark says they derided Him, pouring contempt and scorn on Him. It still happens today.

The world hates Jesus, the world considers Him a scandal. The world laughs at Jesus and spits on Him. He stands against what they desire. Increasingly our culture is turning against Jesus and the Gospel.

The media mocks Him.

Politicians push Him out of the public square.

Professors deny His authority.

Hollywood makes fun of those who believe in Him.

Sinners spit on Him and His Word.

The hardhearted hate Him.

We need to prepare our children to be mocked for their faith. Christian parents need to be raising our children to suffer for their faith. If we don't they won't understand what is happening or why and they won't be able to stand. We need to prepare them that what is happening in other countries will someday happen here. We need to teach them about a suffering Jesus and what it means to be a Simon and take up His cross and bear it.

And if we think that we can just mind our own business or lay low or present a nice, acceptable form of Christianity then consider this. If our Christianity isn't mocked and ridiculed and hated it may not be the Christianity of the NT. Be careful when all men speak well of you.

Those who stand for righteousness and truth will increasingly be mocked and called names.

Hebrews 12:3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Application and Conclusion.

Let's summarize what we can take away from this text this morning. [see J.C. Ryle, *Mark*]
This isn't just an historical event from long ago, it's practical and personal.

First, the judge of the universe was delivered over to Roman soldiers as a criminal condemned to death.

Why? So that we would not have to face that terrible judgment day as guilty sinners and be condemned to hell, but be set free to come into the Father's presence with great joy.

Second, the Son of God was made a laughing stock, mocked, treated like the scum of the earth.

Why? Because that is what we were, vile, offensive, a stench in God's nostrils, but Jesus endured that so we could receive glory and honor and eternal life through faith in Him.

Third, Jesus was stripped of His clothes and crucified naked before His enemies, His clothes gambled away.

Why? So that we who have no righteousness of our own would not have to stand naked before God on the last day, but be clothed in the robes of Christ's righteousness. He bore this shame so that we would not be put to shame, but have proper wedding garments for the marriage feast of the lamb. He became poor that we might be made rich.

Fourth, Jesus endured the most humiliating of all deaths reserved only for the worst criminals and became a curse, taken outside of the city to die.

Why? So that we who were cursed might instead be blessed and brought into the city of God.

Galatians 5:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Fifth, Jesus who had done no sin was reckoned a transgressor being crucified between two criminals.

Why? So that we who are guilty transgressors both by our sinful human nature and by our repeated sinful actions may be reckoned innocent for His sake. We who are guilty are pronounced not guilty.

All of this is meant to show us how great is the severity of **God's just wrath** against our great sin. Jesus had to suffer this much to satisfy the righteous wrath of a holy God.

Everything He bore, we deserved. Every blow, every curse, every spit was meant for us.

I Peter 2:22-24 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin** and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus offered His life in total surrender. He didn't fight back or try to have the last word or defend Himself. He didn't try to preserve a small measure of dignity and pride.

He refused no insult, no mocking, no slur. He refused no pain or suffering, no affliction, no hits or blows or spitting. He refused no injustice, so He could show us the *depths of His love* for us.

All of this ugliness, all of this malice and evil and violence and hate, becomes for us grace. Jesus sank to these depths to raise us to the heights of glory.

I began by saying this is the greatest event in the history of the world. I owe everything I am and everything I have and everything I hope for to the cross of Jesus.

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor; Daily I'm constrained to be.”

This is cause for worship.

This is cause to no longer live for ourselves.

This is cause for forsaking all sin and all the world offers and living for Him and Him alone.

This is God's greatest moment and greatest gift and we will glorify Jesus for all eternity because of it.

II Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Jesus, thank you. Thank you for humbling yourself, for condescending to become human and to suffer and to die, even death on a cross. Thank you. Grant us the grace and courage to do whatever you ask, even if it means suffering or dying for you. You are worthy of such devotion for the love you have shown us.