

Who is JESUS?

Why a Cross?

April 30, 2006

Mark 15:12-20

What does the story surrounding the death of Christ teach us about ourselves? What does it mean that the Son of God died on a cross for us? This is the central theological base upon which our faith rests. What does the fact of his suffering and death matter to you, to me – to us all?

Pilate spoke to the crowd, "What do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, after flogging Jesus, handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. Mark 15:12-20

For Personal Study

As described in the Bible, God's definition of grace is "unmerited favor" on our behalf which means we cannot earn it simply by decent behavior, extra money given in the weekly offering, or good deeds done for others. This grace reaches out and assures you of God's love even when you are amazed that God will have anything to do with you. God's grace was ultimately poured out on us when God sent Jesus to die for our sins. God loved us so much that he sent his Son as the final and ultimate sacrifice to provide us a way back to him.

If you were to look at Rembrandt's painting of *The Three Crosses**, your attention would be drawn first to the center cross on which Jesus died. Then as you would look at the crowd gathered around the foot of that cross, you'd be impressed by the various facial expressions and actions of the people involved in the awful crime of crucifying the

Son of God. Finally, your eyes would drift to the edge of the painting and catch sight of another figure, almost hidden in the shadows. Art critics say this is a representation of Rembrandt himself, for he recognized that by his sins he helped nail Jesus to the cross.

Each of us have taken part in the crucifixion of Christ. We have each sinned. Our sins are not that different from those who betrayed, doubted, mocked, abandoned, accused, wounded, and ultimately killed him. And yet he would have taken on this suffering for each and everyone of us. That is the true definition of grace.

Related Books:

He Chose the Nails by Max Lucado
The Cross of Christ by John R. W. Stott

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel
The Case for Easter by Lee Strobel

*view *The Three Crosses* online at <http://artrenewal.com/asp/database/image.asp?id=1553>.

For Group Discussion

1. One of the central elements of our current sermon series "Who is Jesus?" is the power of questions. What questions do you have about the crucifixion and death of Jesus? How have you sought out answers for your questions?
2. What does a gift that comes at great personal sacrifice from another say about that person's heart toward you? What might they hope for from you?
3. There were many ways that Christ suffered in his journey to death on a cross. What part of his suffering can you particularly relate to and why? How does this impact your faith?
4. Many believers mistakenly think that if they are "good Christians" they will not suffer. Why is this understanding dangerous? What helps you to have hope and perseverance in this sometimes difficult life of faith? How can you help one another?

Daily Reflections

This week's Study Guide will continue our study of the Gospel of Mark. This week we will read through the events of Holy Week - the last week of Jesus' life. Walk with Jesus through each day's events.

Monday, May 1

Read Mark chapter 11. As you read verses 1-11 take a moment to read Zechariah 9:9 where the prophet foretold that the messiah would come riding on a donkey. Jesus and the people were familiar with this verse. Jesus intentionally fulfills it as a sign to the people of his identity - a sign the people of his day recognized.

The cursing of the fig tree in verses 12-14 is thought to be a metaphor in which Jesus was trying to teach the disciples (and us) about the importance of bearing fruit.

The moneychangers in the temple were set-up in the Court of the Gentiles - that is the place set aside for non-Jews to worship. Instead it had become a market - which meant the Gentiles had no place of worship in the temple.

What does Jesus' reaction to the moneychangers taking over the Court of the Gentiles teach us about his heart? How do you think the Sadducees, who were responsible for maintaining the temple grounds, felt after Jesus' actions in the temple?

Tuesday, May 2

Read Mark 12. Knowing what fate lay ahead of him, describe Jesus' feelings as he is telling the parable of the tenants in verses 1-12. Why did the religious leaders begin to look for a way to arrest him after he told this parable?

Picture Jesus sitting in the temple courts, surrounded by the crowds, and the religious leaders, in their special robes, coming and asking him questions to trap him. Write down the things you learn from Jesus as you read the teachings he gives throughout the text assigned for today.

Wednesday, May 3

Read Mark 13. It took decades for the Temple of Herod to be completed - started before the time of Christ and not finished until years after his death - it was magnificent. It was also destroyed, just as Jesus predicted, in 70 A.D. by the Romans. Today all that remains are the foundation walls - including the Western Wall (also known as the Wailing Wall) where Jews go daily to pray. In this chapter Jesus describes the events that will take place in the future as his disciples are persecuted. He also points to his second coming. No one knows the day or hour of his return. What message does Jesus give to us in light of this fact?

Thursday, May 4

Read Mark 14. Why do you think the woman took what may have been her most treasured possession - her perfumed ointment -

and poured it upon Jesus?

What do you learn about people by watching the actions of this woman, Judas, Peter and the other disciples in today's reading? Describe what was on Jesus' heart as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Describe what is going through Peter's mind in verses 66-72.

Friday, May 5

Read Mark 15. Pilate didn't feel Jesus was guilty of a crime worthy of death, yet he crucified him at the request of the people - what do we learn about human nature from him? How could the crowds shout for Jesus' death when he had done nothing wrong? What does this teach us about the human condition and what can happen in the midst of a mob of people?

Read carefully, slowly and deliberately the story of Jesus' suffering and death beginning with verse 16. Imagine yourself a bystander watching these events unfold. Verse 38 describes the tearing of the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies - the throne room of God in the temple - from the rest of the temple. What is the connection between Jesus' death and the tearing apart of this curtain that kept people out of the holy place?

Look over last weekend's sermon notes and questions regarding the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross. Spend time in prayer about what you have read.