

# THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS

## Mark 15:16-23

### INTRODUCTION

Recall: we have studied in the gospel of Mark - the Upper Room Discourse, the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane and into the series of mock trials of Jesus. We are now at the point of transition from the trials to the crucifixion of our Savior to gain a better understanding of the weight of the cross – not just the physical weight, but the emotional and spiritual weight. Jesus was determined to take the full weight of suffering on our behalf.

### READ Mark 15:16-21

**Innocent Man** – we have seen this in the trial

- the false witnesses, Judas, Pilate, Herod, Pilate’s wife, and the crowd testify to the innocence of Jesus

**Proposition:** 3 Portraits of Christ

He is a:

1. Mocked Man
2. Tortured Man
3. Determined Man

**So That:** We will better understand the weight of the cross

**1<sup>st</sup> two portraits** of Christ, He is a ...

### I. Mocked and Tortured Man Mark 15:16-19

Point – **Mark 10:34** – “they will mock Him and spit upon Him”

- fulfillment of what had been prophesized
- 3<sup>rd</sup> occasion of Christ being mocked before His crucifixion
  - 1<sup>st</sup> – before Caiaphus (**14:65**)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> – before Herod (**Luke 23:11**)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> - now – by the soldiers of Pilate
  - 4<sup>th</sup> – by the mob at the cross (**15:29-32**)

“**mocked**” – play with, trifle with, derision, ridicule, to have sport with – ‘in the last days mockers will come with ridicule’ (**Peter 3.3**).

Consider this Illustration:

Recently, I was in my yard where I had hosed down my dusty running shoes to clean them. Once dry, I was putting the shoelaces back in the shoes when my cat, Isabella, started reaching

with her paws for the end of the laces. She wanted to play with the laces. The way a cat plays with a mouse when it has caught one – for a little sport prior to eating it.

- same type of imagery here - what soldiers are doing to Christ

Proof: **Mark 15: 16-20**

**Mark 15:16 – “And the soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole *Roman* cohort.”**

“**Praetorium**” –

- outer court of the estate that was the residence of the governor

“**cohort**” – normally 600 men, 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a legion

- because this particular cohort served the Roman governor at his **Praetorium** at Fort Antonia in Jerusalem, it was probably composed of elite legionnaires.

**Mark 15:17 – “And they dressed Him up in purple, and after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on Him;”**

- mock robe of a king – “**purple**” was often associated with royalty
- the purple cloak is thrown across His already shredded back – added pain
- the “**crown**” – to mock Him as king
- the “**crown**” adds to the pain – the thorns were more like daggers – 2” long and sharp
- the scalp is one of the most sensitive areas of the body

**Matt 27:29** – “they put ... a reed in His right hand” – as a mock scepter

- the **reed** mocks a monarch’s scepter, symbol of authority and power
- a scepter is seen in Caesar’s hand on Roman coins

**Mark 15:18** – “and they began to acclaim Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!””

Recall:

- this expression is used 5 times in **Mark 15 – 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26**
  - here the soldiers are gentile enemies of Christ - blasphemers
- the only other occasion of “King of the Jews” in the gospels is **Matthew 2:1-2**
  - the Magi from the East came as gentile friends of Jesus – to worship Him

His position as Prophet was mocked (**Mark 14:65**)

Now His position as King is mocked (**Psalms 110**)

- see God’s truth – God promised there would be one unique prophet and one unique king
- Christ is the one man who is both
- we worship the one man promised to come and take care of the problem of sin

They probably had no previous contact with Jesus. They have total scorn for the idea of a Jewish King.

**Mark 15:19** – “**And they kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting at Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him.**”

“**beating ... spitting ... kneeling ... bowing**” – all imperfects – continue for some time Isa 50:6; 53:4-5

“Some king you are. You get beaten over the head with your own scepter.”

“**spitting**” – grossest personal insult  
Isa 50:6; Mark 10:34

“**bowing**” – mocking worship

Consider this:

One of the (many) problems with Mel Gibson’s movie “The Passion” was its emphasis on the physical torture of Jesus Christ. While we don’t want to minimize that, we need to remember the spiritual and emotional suffering of Jesus on our behalf.

**Turn to: John 19:4-16** → Pilate makes one final appeal to the crowd

“Behold the Man!” – **John 19:5**

- recall → Pilate is a pragmatic coward
- he is trying to find a way out of condemning this man that he knows is innocent
- v.4 – then why did he have Him beaten?
- v.7 – they are correct – He is God - but it is blasphemy to them
- v.9 – Jesus remains silent
- v.11 – the one who handed Him over refers to Caiaphus

**Mark 15:20** – “**And after they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, and put His garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.**”

**Isaiah 53:3** – “a man of sorrows”

- outside the Praetorium, outside the city

**John 19:17** – “**He went out bearing His own cross.**”

- the Romans forced the condemned criminal to bear the cross to the place of execution

Jesus carries the cross (the transverse beam of the cross – could weigh over one hundred pounds) Himself at the beginning of His journey to Golgotha.

- the wooden cross is on His shredded shoulders and back
- he is surrounded by 4 soldiers who escort the prisoner through the crowds to the place of execution

Because He was shamed, we do not need to be ashamed when we are walking with Christ

- God gives us victory over sin and death

**Mark 15:21** – “**And they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.**”

No Roman soldier would lower himself to carry the cross

“**Simon**” – common Jewish name (from “Simeon”), a native of Cyrene on the northern coast of Africa (what is now Libya)

- Greek settlement located west of Alexandria on the North African coast of the Mediterranean, directly south of Greece in what is modern Libya
- it was a prosperous trade center and had a large population of Jews
- Jews from Cyrene had a synagogue in Jerusalem (**Acts 6:9**)
- Cyrenians were present at Pentecost (**Acts 2:10**) - pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover

Perhaps they picked Simon because he looked strong

Why the parenthetical mention of “**Alexander**” and “**Rufus**”?

- in Mark alone
- well-known in the early church in Rome
- probably members of the church in Rome (Mark’s audience)

**Romans 16:13** – “**Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.**”

- Paul’s epistle to the church in Rome mentions Rufus
- if so, Simon’s wife became like a mother to the apostle Paul (“his mother and mine”)

Consider the imagery God is giving us - Simon is compelled to do literally what all of Jesus’ followers must do spiritually – taking up the cross of Christ

Imagine: was Simon there right next to Barabbas?

- Barabbas being the only man for whom Christ literally physically and immediately died
- Simon being the only man who literally and physically carried the cross of Christ
- ⇒ Perhaps Barabbas had a special place in his heart for the doctrine of Justification
- ⇒ Perhaps Simon had a special place in his heart for the doctrine of Sanctification

The early church said that Simon and his sons became loyal followers of Jesus

Luke adds detail that Mark did not:

**Luke 23:27-32** – Jesus’ words to the mourning women of Israel who are following Him

Having children was considered a greatest blessing for a Jewish woman. Jesus’ reference to the green and dry tree is a popular proverb that meant if something bad occurred under good circumstances, it would be much worse under bad.

Point → if the Romans did such a terrible thing as to crucify this innocent Jewish man, what could they be expected to do to the guilty nation of Israel?

**Mark 13:17** – “**But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days!**”

Back to:

**Mark 15:22** – “**And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.**”

“**Golgotha**” – Aramaic, "Calvary" is from Vulgate (Latin *calvaria*)

- outside the city (**Heb 13:12**), but close to it (**John 19:20**)
- apparently near some public thoroughfare (**Matthew 27:39**)
- visible, from some points, from afar (**Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49**).

Christ was a mocked and tortured man...but...

**3<sup>rd</sup> Portrait** of Christ, He is a ...

**III. Determined Man**                      **Mark 15:23**

Point – this is an understatement  
Silent, Submissive, Sovereign

Still silent – **1 Peter 2:23** – “and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously”

- he was determined to bear the full weight of the cross – the suffering, the shame, the agony.

Proof – **Mark 15:23** – “**And they tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it.**”

“**tried to give**” – imperfect– repeatedly tried to give Him the wine

- the Babylonian Talmud records this tradition intended to deaden the pain

“**myrrh**” – part of the gifts brought by the wise men from the east, who came to worship the infant Jesus **Matthew 2:11**

**Matthew 27:34 – “and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.”**

- there is no sparing of self in His giving of self!
- He is fully determined to drink the cup His Father gives Him (**Mark 14:36**)

All things are accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

- every jot and tittle of Scripture is fulfilled

Point – Why didn't He just come on a Thursday, die on a Friday, raise on a Sunday and be done with it?

- Why all this agony?
- Why all this pain?
- Why all this suffering?
- Why NOT take the pain-deadening drink?

Sin requires the death of a man

- death, blood AND ... Justice → **Romans 8:3-4**
- his human *body* is tormented by excruciating pain
- his mortal flesh is sharing in the agony of the inward spirit.”

Jesus is resolved to die with an unclouded mind

- He is determined to remain conscious to the end and to take the full measure of pain on Your behalf
- Jesus will not accept anything that might hinder His entering fully into all the cross involves

**Application:** The next time You are in pain or suffering weariness of spirit, remember that Your Lord understands it all, for he has practical, personal experience of it. We have a sympathetic High Priest on our behalf. When God hands us a cup...of cancer, job loss, etc...we can pray like Jesus and ask God to take it from us but as His will be done as we keep drinking fully from the cup.

**Hebrews 5:8 – “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”**

**Consider this illustration:**

Athanasius, early bishop of Alexandria, opposed the Heresy of Arius, who denied the deity of Jesus. He was the first to lay out all 27 books of the NT in his 39<sup>th</sup> *Easter Letter* – A.D. 367. He was hounded through five exiles, and was finally summoned before emperor Theodosius, who demanded he cease his opposition to Arius. The emperor reproved him and asked, “Do you not realize that all the world is against you?” Athanasius quickly answered, “Then I am against all the world.”

Don't deaden the pain while ignoring the disease.  
Take the full measure of the cup.

## CONCLUSION

A man carrying a cross is a man who is going to die

- deny himself
- take up cross
- follow Me (**Mark 8:34**)

We must accept the conditions for discipleship

- a suffering Messiah requires a suffering disciple

**John 15:20** – “A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also”

**2 Tim 3:13** – “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” – written by Paul while in prison awaiting execution

- not a bargaining table
- not come and try Jesus...

→ **Light Yoke**

→ **Heavy Cross**

Augustine – “there is no other way for you to follow the Lord except by carrying [your cross]”

Paints a very powerful picture of **Mark 8:34; Luke 9**

May God open our eyes, minds and hearts to the price Christ paid – to the full weight of the cross.