

### The Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ

#### Mark 15:21-32

Mark 15:21-32 – *“Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. <sup>22</sup> And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. <sup>23</sup> Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. <sup>25</sup> Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. <sup>26</sup> And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

*<sup>27</sup> With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. <sup>28</sup> So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors.”*

*<sup>29</sup> And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” <sup>31</sup> Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.”*

#### Background Notes

Those who were condemned to be crucified by the Roman authorities were required to carry the heavy crossbeam of their own cross to the place of crucifixion. Because of our Lord's weakened physical condition after the Roman scourging, the soldiers compelled a man named Simon to carry His cross. Simon was from Cyrene, a coastal city of North Africa. At that time there was a large Jewish population in Cyrene, so most likely Simon was a Jewish pilgrim who was in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. There's a good possibility that Simon became a believer, because verse 21 says that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. These sons apparently became Christians, because Mark mentioned them casually, as though they were well known to the readers of his Gospel. It's possible that the Rufus mentioned here is the Rufus of the last chapter of Romans.

The place of crucifixion was called *Golgo'tha* or *Gol'gotha*, the Aramaic word for “skull.” *Calvary* is the Latin word for “skull.” The name “Place of a Skull” may mean that the hill was shaped like a skull, or it may simply mean that it was the place where executions took place.

The Lord refused to take any drink that would deaden His pain or dull His senses during the crucifixion (v23). Our Lord chose to be fully conscious, with all His senses intact, when He suffered and died for our sins.

When they crucified Him they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take (v24). Here we have a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. In that Messianic Psalm, it was predicted that the Roman soldiers would gamble for our Lord's garments.

The *third hour* of verse 25 was 9:00AM, according to the Jewish reckoning.

Those who were crucified with Him reviled Him (v32). In Luke's account we learn that one of the two men who were crucified with our Lord changed his mind and became a believer.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The physical sufferings of Christ were secondary to the spiritual sufferings of Christ.

It's very significant that the Holy Spirit did not have Mark dwell on the details of the crucifixion. With remarkable and amazing restraint, the physical agonies of the cross were passed over with just a few words: *"And they crucified Him."* If we were writing up this account, I'm sure we would have included the details of how the Lord was nailed to the cross and the cross was raised up and roughly dropped into its hole. We would have included a description of how a victim of crucifixion dies an agonizing death by suffocation when he no longer can support his body to gasp for breath. But Mark did not describe our Lord's physical sufferings throughout the crucifixion. Why did the Holy Spirit have Mark pass over the details of the physical agonies that our Lord went through? Because the physical sufferings of Christ were secondary to the spiritual sufferings of Christ.

It's important to realize that the physical sufferings were very real and not insignificant, but the spiritual sufferings involved in bearing the wrath of God against sin, and God's judgment for the sin of the world—these were of **crucial** significance. Because of God's love for us, the physical sufferings of Christ were secondary to the spiritual sufferings of Christ.

### 2. In order for Christ to save others, He could not save Himself.

Verses 29-30: *"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!'"* The self-righteous Jews who were on their way into the city to celebrate the Passover would have been among those who passed by the place of crucifixion. They mocked the Lord, calling on Him to save Himself if He were indeed as powerful as He had claimed. But the Lord could not save Himself from the cross if He was to save others.

*"Likewise the chief priests also, with the scribes, mocked and said among themselves, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross that we may see and believe'"* (v31-32). Here was a final demonic temptation to escape the cross - but the Lord did not come down from the cross, because if He was to save others, He could not save Himself.

I guess it's only natural to wish that the Lord had come down from the cross in a great show of power, zapped those self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, single-handedly wiped out the Roman army and set Himself up as King right then! That's what we would have done, right? But the Lord stayed on the cross, because it was the only way that we could be saved.

Humanly speaking, could the Lord have escaped the cross if He chose to? Of course! In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord said that twelve legions of angels would have come to fight for Him if He called on them (Matthew 26:53). But our Lord chose to stay on the cross and suffer for others – for you and for me. He could not save Himself from the cross if we were to be saved from our sin. In order for Christ to save others, He could not save Himself.

## Practical Applications

### 1. We have an option to carry the Cross.

Simon of Cyrene was *compelled* to bear the cross for Christ (v21), but we have the *option* to carry the cross. However, if we truly want to be disciples and followers of Christ, we will take up our cross and follow Him. In Mark 10:21, the Lord said to the rich young ruler, “*Come, take up the cross and follow me.*” You know the story. The rich young ruler refused to take up the cross and follow Christ. The Lord says to us, “*If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.*” Luke 9:23 uses the word *daily* there: “*...let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*”

What does it mean to take up the cross? It doesn't mean that we can in some way share in the Lord's sufferings for sin on the Cross. No, that's a *finished* work; that's complete. And it doesn't mean to learn to live with your problems. Some Christians talk about their physical handicap or their migraine headaches as their “cross to bear.” I know of a Christian man who talks about his mother-in-law as his “cross to bear.” [laughter]

Well, all joking aside, the idea of a cross means only one thing: death. Taking up our cross means “dying to self.” It has to do with discipleship, not salvation - that's why it's an option. And taking up your cross daily means *dying to self daily* - not just on Sunday, and not just when we feel like it. In other words, it means to put the Lord first and not ourselves. It means becoming unselfish - doing what the Lord wants us to do, not what our natural, selfish inclinations want to do. For a trite example: husbands - if you just sit around the house, eat, and watch football while your wives do all the work – you're selfish. You're not dying to self.

Dying to self and selfish desires is what it means to take up the cross daily. We have an option to carry the cross.

## 2. We have an option to believe and see.

Notice what the chief priests and scribes said in verse 32: *“Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the Cross that we may see and believe.”* That’s typical of the unbeliever. Show me. Let me see and then I’ll believe. But God’s order is just the reverse: **Believe, and then you will see.**

The unbeliever says he will believe if he sees, but that is a lie. Remember the rich man who was in Hades in Luke 16? He wanted someone to rise from the dead, and convince his lost brothers about the truths of Scripture. Do you remember what the answer was? *“If they will not believe Moses and the prophets [the Scriptures], they will not believe **even if someone were to rise from the dead.**”* The unbeliever says he’ll believe if he sees, but he lies.

The unbelievers here said they would believe in the Lord if He came down from the cross, but they saw nothing - because God’s order is to *believe* and then *see*. In contrast, those who believed saw the Lord after His resurrection - over 500 believers saw Him at one time, down from the cross, resurrected (1 Corinthians 15)! How wonderfully ironic – those who said they would believe if they saw, saw nothing. Those who believed first were privileged to see the greatest sight of all—the risen Lord, no longer on the cross!

I trust you have opted to believe and see! I hope you’re not like one of the unbelieving skeptics saying, “I’ll believe if I can see a miracle. Show me - and then I’ll believe.” No, God’s way is to believe first, and then you will see. You step out in faith and believe, and then He confirms your faith.

This same application can be made to Christians. We have an option to believe and see. It could be applied in many ways. For example, doubts about the faith. God’s order is to believe and see. Remember “doubting Thomas”? So often we’re like Thomas. He was a believer, but he wanted some proof: “Let me see the nail-prints.” Remember what the Lord said, when He graciously confronted Thomas and showed him His scars? The Lord said, *“Thomas, you have seen and believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

We have an option to believe and see.