

19. The King on the cross

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Paradox – according to a dictionary, it is “A seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true.” How interesting!

The cross is one of the many paradoxes of the Christian faith for that reason. It is at once the greatest tragedy of the ages and the most glorious victory of earth and heaven. This is one of the reasons why liberal Bible critics have such a hard time accepting it as truth. In their faithless mind, they cannot see how the death of Jesus could bring eternal life to those who believe in Him by faith.

They are right about one thing though. The Bible is full of paradoxes. Here is one good example:

Matt 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

The bottom line of believing these paradoxes in the Bible is faith in Jesus. Through one Man’s death, all the sins of humanity were taken care of. All we have to accept this fact and the One had done it. But many refuse to do so. We will find out more about it in this chapter study.

A. THE ROMAN TRIAL

Mark 15:1-5 Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. 2 Then Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” He answered and said to him, “It is as you say.” 3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, “Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!” 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

Why did the Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pilate at all? First, they did not have the legal right to execute their own criminals because Rome revoked that right in 7 A.D. The Jewish rulers knew that if they brought Jesus before Pilate on the charge of claiming to be God, Pilate would throw them out. He would say, “We Romans have hundreds of gods. What is the harm with one more?” Yet, if they brought Jesus before Pilate as the King of the Jews, Pilate would have to take Jesus as a potential political threat, because there could be no king except Caesar.

History tells us that Pilate simply didn’t like the Jews. Since he was constantly suspicious of the Jews, when they brought him a prisoner for execution, he knew that the Jewish leaders were not interested in seeing justice done. What they really wanted was vengeance by envy.

The Book of John gives us the most details of the Roman trial. When we combine the Gospel records, we discover that Pilate repeatedly stated that he found no fault in Jesus. His problem was that he lacked the courage to stand for what he believed. He wanted to avoid a riot, so he was “willing to appease the people”. Pilate did not ask, “Is it right?” Instead, he asked, “Is it safe? Is it popular?” A typical cheap politician who tries to please everybody, but actually please none.

B. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME DO WITH JESUS?

Mark 15:6-15 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. 8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. 12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" 14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!" 15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

Since Pilate couldn't get his way, he offered the people a choice – Jesus the Nazarene, or Barabbas, the murderer and insurrectionist. It is more than comparing Billy Graham vs. Osama Bin Laden.

If anyone should be able to say, "Jesus died for me," it should be Barabbas. He knew what it was to have Jesus die on his behalf, the innocent in the place of the guilty. Jesus represented the law of God, while Barabbas presented lawlessness. The people chose lawlessness over the law, and people really haven't changed much over the years.

We can imagine that many in this crowd had, just a few days before, been crying "Hosanna" to Jesus. But there has never been a shortage of people who will just do whatever the rest of the crowd will do.

Today every person must also answer the question that Pilate asked the crowd, "What do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" This is the universal question that every person must face. This question is as relevant for us as it was for Pilate.

What will you do with Jesus? You have to make the decision. Will you receive Him or reject Him? Will you submit to Him or rebel against Him? It is the ultimate question of everyone's life.

C. THE HUMILIATION AND MOCKERY TO THE SON OF GOD

Mark 15:16-20 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. 17 And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, 18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. 20 And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

These soldiers' disgraceful mockery and beating were not from their own. Behind the scene, Satan was really enjoying the torture he is dishing out to the Son of the Living God whom he hated with everything within.

D. THE CRUCIFIXION AT THE THE THIRD HOUR

Mark 15:21-24 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and pass-

ing by, to bear His cross. 22 And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. 24 And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.

According to law, the guilty victim had to carry his cross beam to the place of execution and Jesus was no exception. It was not surprising that our Lord could not carry the cross beam due to no food, no water and all the tortures. Simon Peter boasted that he would go with Jesus to prison and even to death, but it was Simon of Cyrene, not Simon Peter, who came to the aid of the Master.

Simon was from Cyrene in North Africa. He had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and he ended up meeting the Passover Lamb! We have a good reason to believe that this Simon trusted the Savior and led his two sons Alexander and Rufus to the Lord, since their names were mentioned in Romans 16.

Golgotha is a Hebrew word that means "skull," and "Calvary" in English word. I guess we can call our church as "Skull Chapel of Sahuarita". Golgotha is located outside of the city walls, the place of rejection. That is where our Lord died for the sins of the world.

The wine mingled with myrrh was a drug to help deaden the awful ordeal of the cross for those about to die. It is interesting to note that when He was born, the wise men brought Him myrrh. When He was dying on the cross, He was offered myrrh. Myrrh speaks of His death. Jesus refused it. He wanted to enter fully into His sufferings on our behalf and took no short cuts. He refused the cup of sympathy so that He might better drink the cup of iniquity for us.

Crucifixion is one of the most horrible forms of death ever invented by man. Psalm 22 gives a description of some of our Lord's agonies as He hung on the cross a thousand years before the actual event happened. Jesus was fulfilling this prophecy.

Mark 15:25-31 Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. 26 And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. 28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." 29 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32 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.

The third hour of Jewish hours was 9 A.M., the sixth hour noon, and the ninth hour 3 P.M. Mark followed the Jewish system, whereas the Apostle John used Roman time in his Gospel. When John said, "the sixth hour," it was 6 A.M.

It seems incredible that the religious leaders hated Jesus so much that they even went out to Golgotha to mock Him.

What these mockers said was true in v30. Jesus could not come down from the cross, because He wanted to save us. That was the choice He made at the Garden

of Gethsemane. Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

E. THE CRUCIFIXION AT THE THE SIXTH HOUR

Mark 15:33 Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

At noon, a miraculous darkness came over the land. This was indeed a miracle and not some natural phenomenon, such as a sand storm or an eclipse.

Let's think about the first Passover. The ninth plague in Egypt was a three day darkness, followed by the last plague, the death of the firstborn in Ex. 10:22-11:9. This started as a remembrance of God's mercy to His people. Those Israelites who were obedient to God's commandment and had their Passover lambs were spared from the judgement and wrath of God. The darkness at Calvary was an announcement that God's Firstborn and Beloved Son, the Lamb of God, was giving His life for the sins of the world. It was also an announcement that judgment is coming and men need to make a choice.

F. THE CRUCIFIXION AT THE THE NINTH HOUR

Mark 15:34-41 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" 35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" 36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down." 37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. 38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" 40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, 41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

Our Lord Jesus made seven statements from the cross, three of them before the darkness came:

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

John 19:26-27 He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

When the darkness came, there was silence on His cross, because it was then that He was made sin for us. The darkness symbolized the judgment Jesus experienced when the Father forsook Him.

Mark 15:34 "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

John 19:28 "I thirst."

John 19:30 "It is finished."

Luke 23:46 "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Two remarkable events occurred at His death:

1) The veil in the temple was torn in two.

The veil had separated man from God, but now, through His death, Jesus had opened for the whole world to have a direct access to God Himself not through priests.

2) There was an earthquake.

According to Ex. 19, there had been an earthquake at Sinai when the Law was given, but now the Law was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and its curse removed. Through His sacrifice, Jesus had purchased not only freedom from the Law, but also freedom from the entire sacrificial system.

The Roman centurion saw Jesus for who He was, is a picture of all who come to Jesus through the cross.

John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

Author Mark revealed the most faithful disciples of Jesus. They are His female followers, not the eleven male disciples: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome and many other women.

G. THE KING IN A BORROWED TOMB

Mark 15:42-47 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. 45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed where He was laid.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had a lot of things to lose by taking care of the body of Jesus: their reputation, social status, even their places in the families. At this point, nothing mattered to them. Out of their sincere love, they came to Jesus and out of their genuine adoration, they lowered His body and gingerly prepared Him for a burial as best as they could in short time they had before the Preparation Day which was in a couple hours later. Had these men not acted boldly, the body of Jesus might have been disposed of like rubbish.

They put Him in a tomb nearby Golgotha. Tombs such as this were very expensive, and it was quite a sacrifice for Joseph of Arimathea to give his up. But Jesus only needed it for three days!

H. APPLICATION

What will you do with Jesus?

You have to make the decision. Will you receive Him or reject Him? Will you submit to Him or rebel against Him? It is the ultimate question of everyone's life.