

And they crucified him

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[0 : 00] Turn again to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 15. And the summary statement in verse 24. And they crucified him.

And they crucified him. Now in recent weeks we have seen some of the main incidents in the life of Christ. What are sometimes called the crisis of the Christ.

And we have seen that half of this Gospel consists of the story of the Passion. The road from Caesarea Philippi to Calvary.

And we now come to the end of this road. To the actual cross itself. The cross which cast its shadow before.

And which lays so heavily on the mind of the Lord himself. It is by any standards a climax of the life of our Saviour.

[1 : 10] And of course the critical point also in the work of our own salvation. Now all of us know the main details of the story.

But all I want to do this morning is in fact to focus on the story itself. It is a remarkable thing that the bulk of the Bible consists of story.

Of narrative. And it seems to me that if we take your cue from that. Then one of the primary gifts of a preacher.

Are to be the ability to tell a story. Now I don't see myself in that capacity. But I do hesitate to change the Gospel account here.

From a story into something else. It isn't an epistle. Or a treatise that we have here.

[2 : 29] It is a story. And it's told very simply. It's very unsophisticated. It isn't organized in any elaborate way.

It is told in a very straightforward manner. And I want to move through it rapidly. There are three great movements. There is first of all.

Verse 21 to verse 24. The crucifixion itself. And then 25 down to verse 32.

There is what I may for a moment call. The social reaction to Christ crucified. And then from verse 33 downwards.

There is the climax of the cross itself. The dereliction of Christ. First of all then. There is the crucifixion itself.

[3 : 31] And they crucified him. Now it's a remarkable thing. That statement. Because it's so brief. And it's so non-descriptive.

It is so lacking and harrowing. A physical detail. I'm sure that that's deliberate. God saw no purpose in detail description.

Of what crucifixion actually was. Now I wouldn't want to lay too much stress on that. Because of course in those days when Mark wrote. This was an all too familiar experience.

And so as readers knew. What the process involved. And yet the canon wasn't given.

Simply for those of the first century. God knew those words would come to us as well. Who have never seen the crucifixion.

[4 : 33] And yet God doesn't give us very much detail. We know that to a Roman. The cross was abhorrent.

It was reserved for slaves. And provincials. It could have been imposed. And flitted upon a Roman citizen. And we know too that.

To the Romans. It was the symbol of the most extreme torture. They had this word. Cruciatu.

Whence our English word excruciating. Now the Romans were no strangers to methods of torture. And yet to them.

This was literally. The most excruciating experience possible. There was nothing. They could imagine. More horrendous to sustain.

[5 : 31] More awful to contemplate. Than being crucified. It was the very limit. Of torture. And of course to the Jew. It was a symbol.

Of the curse. And the anathema of God. It was the great symbol. That this person was reprobate. This person was lost. This person was cut off.

This person was corbid. The cross was saying something about Jesus. To all those who saw it. It was saying.

That he was a social outcast. And a nobody. It was saying. That he was a reprobate. On the threshold. Of a lost eternity.

It was the great climax. Of that process. Of obscuring the glory of God's son. Which began with this incarnation. What Calvin called.

[6 : 30] The veil. What Luther called. The incognito. Of Christ. What modern scholars call. The hiddenness. Of God in Christ.

And here. The hiddenness is complete. Because the cross. Is the final. Impenetrable veil. Through which.

Beyond which. No one can see. Who or what he is. Behind which. The spectators. The disciples. His own mother. Cannot see. Who he is. Behind which. At last. Even he himself. Cannot see.

Who he is. Because. That cross. Is the. Last. And densest. And most. Opaque. Element.

[7 : 25] In this. Multiple. Veil. Under which. And behind which. The glory. Of the Savior. Is obscured. And yet. The power.

And the impact. Do not lie. The details. Because if they had. Then we'd have them. But we don't have them. We have this great.

Economical. Statement. And they crucified him. And yet. The surrounding context. Of this block. From 21.

Down to 24. Is itself. Is so intriguing. There are some marvelous details there. For example. There is. The role of Simon.

From Cyrene. The father. Of Alexander. And Rufus. We know. That these. Brethren. Were both.

[8 : 18] Members. Of the church. Of God. And Rome. And one might venture to say. That Simon's terrible experience. Was.

Blessed to himself. And to his family. But that's not the main concern. You see. As we. Have seen often. In this gospel. Though the focus. Is.

Is. On Christ himself. And the question is. What does this detail. Tell us. About Christ. Now it was standard procedure. For the victim.

To carry. His own cross. Or. At least. To carry. The cross. Beep. The horizontal. Member of the cross. In the praetorium.

For the Lord. Was eventually judged. There'd be. A pile of. As such. Pieces of timber. Lying ready in wait. And when sentence.

[9 : 13] Was pronounced. Then the prisoner. Was. Toss. To pick up. This. This. Piece of timber. This. Cross. His own cross.

He carried. His own cross. The Lord. Did that. And. Progressed along. The Lord. Bearing this instrument.

Of his own torture. But it's very evident. That. He was too weak. To carry. The burden. For long. That's a remarkable fact.

It's remarkable. Because. Most prisoners. Appear to have. Succeeded. In this. Macabre task. Carrying their own cross.

But. Jesus. Jesus. Whom. Some. People. Portray. As. A perfect physical specimen.

[10 : 12] He was too weak. He had been. Through too much. All the. Tension.

The apprehension. Before his arrest. Arrest. The trauma. Of the arrest. And the trial itself. And. All the maltreatment. The flogging.

The beating. The loss of blood. Through the crown of thorns. The hours of. Standing and waiting. But the point is.

He was simply. Physically. Unable. To carry his own cross. And part of the grandeur. Of that. You know. Is this. That.

These gospel. Narrators. Who told this great story. They felt. No compulsion. To. Portray. Some. Ideal hero.

[11:09] If this were a work. Of fiction. This would never have happened. This Christ. Would have walked. Tall. And erect. And courageous. And unflinching.

Along the Via Dolorosa. To Calvary. But that's not the way it was. We are this. Exhausted man. And I just want us to stand with him. For a moment.

This man. Who couldn't cope. This broken man. This spiritually strong. And yet physically.

Unable to cope. For himself. The flesh was willing. The spirit willing. But the flesh being we. And so someone else. Must carry this cross.

And then the second detail. They brought Jesus to the place. Called Golgotha. Which means. A place of the skull. We don't know why. It was called.

[12:07] The place of the skull. Was because of its physical shape. Or because of its physical execution. And there were probably some bones and skulls. Lying around. We just don't know.

But I find this whole question fascinating. If you'll be with me. The question is. Where was it? There are two candidates. For this particular location.

There is what's called. The church of the holy sepulchre. And there is what's known as. Gordon's Calvary. The garden tomb. Now.

There are many people. Who have been to Israel. And who have been to the garden tomb. The garden tomb. Is a lovely place. It's evocative.

It's quiet. It's largely unspoiled. It's peaceful. Overhead the blue sky. The bright sunlight.

[13:09] And there is a general layer. Of calm and reverence. The church of the holy sepulchre.

Is an abomination. It's thoroughly commercialized. It betrays in many ways.

All the worst of human nature. Religiously. Socially. Commercially. To walk up towards.

It's a dreadful experience. Utterly exhausting. Through crowds. Beggars. Young Arab boys.

Offering all kinds of. Wears for sale. There's filth. There's stench. There's heat. There's a gravel.

There's a amendment. This poor advanced samhgil. Through poet. With mintyl■■■. All kinds of hirve.

[14:04] It's ae ■aron. Han,idd■■■. of Christianized idolatry.

Most people who stand, who stood in both places, they say the garden tomb must be it, must be the place of Calvary. It feels right. General Gordon thought so because it is outside the current, a more modern city wall, whereas the Holy Sepulchre is very much inside the current city wall. But Gordon forgot that the wall had moved and that what's now inside was outside the wall not all that recently. And there is excellent external evidence and tradition to the effect that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the place where the Lord was crucified. Now I don't very often labor details, largely because I don't know much as far as these areas of the research go. But I erase it for this reason. I just want you to realize that the place where Christ was crucified was a horrible place. It wasn't a garden. I think of it this way.

I remember a great preacher saying once, I preached in Alexander White's pulpit and it did nothing to me. I preached in John Kennedy's pulpit and I felt the real presence of God. And people stand in the garden too. They feel something. You see it's holy. It's peaceful.

It is evocative. It is memorably and forgetably so evocative. And Christ could have died there, you see, calmly. He died there beautifully. But of course he didn't.

[16:14] And if that road up the Via Dolorosa is so horrible for us, what was it like for him?

Dying amid the noise and the chimmel and distractions and the sheer ugliness of this place of execution. Where there was nothing. Where creation itself had been spoiled. Where the sight was derelict.

Where there was nothing to remind him of God. Or nothing evocative. Nothing reassuring. Nothing beautiful. Nothing peaceful. There were no Franciscans. But there were these Pharisees. There were these crowds, you see, this awful, awful ugliness crucified in the place called Golgotha. A place which spoke through every fiber and pore of the Lord's being of sin, of ugliness, of the shambles of human existence. He must have found the long road up to Golgotha, a horrible, draining experience. He wanted to be alone and he couldn't be alone because of all the shrieking. He needed some symbolism, some beauty, some reminder of God. And there was nothing of that. There was only Golgotha. Skull, outside ugliness, soldiers, lots, crucifixion, execution squads, filthy, filthy, filthy, filthy language. Not in a garden tomb, but this place called Golgotha. And they

offered him wine mixed with myrrh. But he didn't take it.

Now this wine mixed with myrrh was a special potion. It was an anesthetic which was given by way of custom to all condemned prisoners. Because it deadened the senses and lessened the pain. It lowered the consciousness. And it is very significant that the Lord didn't take it. Because he didn't want to die anesthetized. And so he rejects the sedative. He rejects the anesthetic. And he goes to face death, fully alert, every nerve taut, every single sense, fully operative, utterly and totally alert. I wonder why so. Why was it important for him to face this death unanesthetized? It was partly because there was so much to do. He had to contend with the powers of darkness. And that needed total alertness.

[19 : 16] He had responsibilities to discharge to his mother. And then again he needed total alertness. Furthermore, even on the cross itself, the Lord had a ministry and I find that so remarkable.

The thief. He knew that he couldn't afford to be out of condition to be below the peak of his efficiency because at any moment someone might need him. Can you imagine?

Even on the cross itself, someone might need him. He would be useless if he were anesthetized. But of course, as it transpired, someone didn't need him.

This fellow sufferer said to him, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And maybe the Lord had said, look friend, I've enough of my own, pain enough of my own, problems, distractions of my own. Please don't trouble me. You can't expect me to help you now.

And yet that help is instantly forthcoming from a fully alert Savior. Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. And the message for us is really that we ourselves must be, as we saw on Wednesday evening, ready always. That's the great thing, you see.

[20 : 56] Ready always to give to those who ask of us a reason for the hope that is in us. Ready always. Ready to serve, you see, when our own lives are distracted, our own hearts are broken.

And we imagine, well surely now I can take a day off. Surely God give me a rest, but I can't serve in this condition. Yet you can recall if you think for a moment, people you know, that having to support those who bear burdens, that having to support those who bear burdens, that are not the same.

That's why your burden is never an excuse for not helping someone else with our burden.

The Lord remaining fully alert so as to be able to serve. And because also, as he must tell us, he must taste death.

Feel the approach of it. Feel the fear of it. Feel the advance of it. As his own life ebbs away. I can't put it better in the Bible itself. Sometimes you can't expound the Bible. But he tasted it.

[22 : 25] He tasted death. He tasted all its bitterness, all its ferocity, all its venom.

So that at the very limit he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And he understands. And he understands. I think this morning of acquaintances who are tasting it.

Who are feeling its advance. Who feel its remorseless progress. And to know that those around them don't understand.

And yet, God in Christ understands. In the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil for thou art with me.

So he's crucified, you see. But someone else carries his cross. He's crucified in the church of the Holy Sepulchre.

[23 : 32] Not in the garden tomb. He is crucified without an aesthetic. And then the second section, which I just mentioned briefly.

25 down to verse 32. I mention it because it encapsulates ancient man's attitude to Christ.

And modern man's attitude to Christ. Christ. In two marvelously divinely skillful ways. First of all, in the title, the accusation against Christ.

But also what has been called the threefold course of abuse. The title. The significance of the title is simply this.

It is written in the three great languages of civilization. In Latin, in Greek, in Hebrew. It's a detail which reminds us of what I may call the conspiracy of the enlightenment.

[24 : 45] Or the enlightenment against Christ. In Latin, the language of human politics and justice.

Greek, the language of culture. And Hebrew, the language of religion. They seldom acted in concert.

But when it came to hating and destroying the Christ of God. Then they find themselves in sudden, unprecedented and unrepeatable unanimity.

And yet, in a marvelous way, you see. History, God, the empty tomb of the resurrection. Stands the judgment on its head.

The Latin justice that condemns Christ is itself condemned and exposed as injustice. And I find that in our modern context a terrible, terrible thing.

[25 : 45] Because we all, you all, always presume that the right person is in the dark. That's our slightest presumption.

And the right person is on the bench. And for myself, the cross of Christ destroyed my faith in all human systems of justice.

Because here, the wrong man is in the dark. And the wrong man is on the bench. Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ. And this is human justice at its best.

That's a system. That system that underlies still, in its essence, our old Scottish system of law. It puts Christ in the dark. And by doing so, it puts itself in the dark.

And puts a huge question mark over every judicial sentence. Over all our penal procedures. And the culture that has no time for Christ.

[27 : 00] That never had the language we played to an Aristotle. Which had no time for Christ. Had no time for him then. Has no time for him now.

And the religion that bathed for his blood. And I find it so liberating. Because the common presumption today, you see, is this.

That it is modern sophistication that explains the modernization of Christ and his church. You imagine. Oh, 200 years ago, of course, everyone believed these things.

And in Edinburgh, the whole city, of course, you imagine, went to church. And you go back to this. Do you realize? Do you realize that 2,000 years ago, the world's politicians, the world's artists and poets and philosophers, the world's bishops and theologians, they thought Christ was a ridiculous figure.

They crucified. And I can't trust the world's justice. And I can't trust the world's culture. And I can't trust the world's religion.

[28 : 20] I've got to say that it is so difficult for the just man to be saved. And so difficult for the cultured man to be saved.

And so almost impossible for the religious man to be saved. And then there's the threefold chorus of abuse.

Those who passed by heard insults. And the Pharisees heard insults. And of course, also, those crucified with him, they also heaped insults on him.

And I just want to say, you cannot say, ah, but the common man, the common man, the common man, he knows the worth of Jesus Christ.

Because those who passed by joined the Latin and the Greek and the Hebrew in their condemnation. They hurled insults at him.

[29 : 24] Ah, but you see, those at the very bottom of the heap. Those who are socially outcast. The lower, lowest classes.

At the very, very base. The submerged mass, as General Booth called them. The submerged mass. Ah, that they know is worth. Those crucified with him, heaped insults on him.

There is no virtue, no insight in poverty itself. And in a way, you know, there's this marvelous parade of humanity in its every aspect before us here.

It's justice, it's politics, it's culture, it's learning, it's religion. It's common man, it's poverty, it's criminal, it's lowest, lowest, lowest classes.

And they're all in the same boat. They're all judging Christ. They're all judging themselves in that judgment. As being without discernment, without insight, with an appreciation of the grandeur of the glory of the Lord.

[30 : 29] They're all there, you see. So deliberately. In this piece of brilliantly unsophisticated literature. The whole human race passing before us.

And then the climax. And I won't say much about this except to point out that it is a climax. I want you to know that the humiliation of Christ wasn't a point, but a line.

There is the long, long road from Bethlehem to Caesarea Philippi. That long line of descent into the shadow of Calvary.

And there is the long, long road 200 miles south from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem. That's a line too as the Lord moves into the somber shadows of Gethsemane.

That's a line. And then you come to the cross. And you say, ah, but the cross is a point. The cross is a moment. The cross is just an incident here and there and definitive.

[31 : 42] But again, it's so magnificent, this you see. Verse 25. Verse 25. It was the third hour when they crucified. At the sixth hour, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.

The third to the sixth to the ninth. And that is the longest line of all. Longer than the road from Bethlehem to Caesarea.

Longer than the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem. This long, long line on the cross from the third to the ninth hour.

This point, moment, age of incredible density, accumulation of suffering.

The cross itself approaches the Lord going further and further and deeper and deeper. What I mean is, you see, the cry of deletion did not last for the whole of the sixth hour.

[32 : 56] It's a point at the end of the line. It is so difficult for us to mention six hours of sustained assault on every nerve in our bodies.

And every access point of sensitivity in our soul. You just imagine how many seconds there are in those hours.

And the Lord there, coming down at last to the point where he says, Eloi, Eloi, Eloi. When he cannot say, Abba.

He can only say, Eloi. This point where he loses all sense of the love of God. Loses all sense of his own sonship.

For his glory is failed, even from himself. Quailed for a moment. But a moment of infinite density. A moment of infinite extent.

[34 : 11] He is not aware who he is. A moment where it not only feels desolate, but is objectively under the anathema of God.

But God deals with them as sin deserved to be dealt with. Now, I have little biblical information on what that meant.

But he is outside. As surely as Golgotha was outside Jerusalem, so he becomes the great outsider. Outside of God.

God's banished one. God's reject becomes what one modern scholar called the judge judged in our place.

What Martin Luther called the greatest sinner that ever was. God's death.

[35 : 12] He is in the 22-year-old in the 23-year-old in the 24-year-old in the 24-year-old. God's not aware of God. His whole self-image contracted to the point. Whereas he thought of himself, he thought simply of himself as sin.

That's what he was in himself. That's how he thought God saw, that's how God dealt with them. Thine unknown suffering, point where being lawlessness anomia sin. What he is doesn't make sense.

And what's happening to him doesn't make sense. He cries and God doesn't hear and God doesn't answer. It is a moment of complete utter total bewilderment and chaos.

And I would venture to speculate a point where the psyche of Christ came within a hair spread of disintegration, of collapse, of chaos.

The forsaken one who knows that he was forsaken. Where he is nothing but the doomed, accursed one.

[36 : 47] And I just want to close on this because that's where Mark, I suspect, wants us to close it. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

He died to bring us to God. I am the way and the truth and the life.

No man comes to the Father but by me. This new and living way. May God grant that today, he crucified may become for you and me the way to God.

The way into the holiest of all. That has come with boldness to the throne of grace. Because we have a great high priest.

May God bless his word to us. Let us pray. Oh Lord, we ask that you would bless your word to us.

[37 : 56] This story of the crucifixion of our Savior, of your Son. On which you have so much to say.

And yet, on the curious points of which you have so little to say. Because you know that we couldn't follow where he went.

And couldn't understand. But Lord, help us to accept and believe what you have told us. And help us to avail ourselves of this way to you.
Which has been opened through his crucifixion. Hear us for his sake. Amen.