

Mark 15 records the crucifixion of Jesus, describing details such as the mockery of the Jews that were present, the three hours of darkness, and the tearing of the veil of the temple immediately after He died. Mark also mentions the impression that Jesus's death made on a Roman centurion, prompting the man to voice his belief that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

Verses 1-21: The chief priests, scribes and Jewish elders send Jesus to Pilate since the Roman government did not allow the Jews to execute criminals. Despite not finding any reason that Jesus should be put to death, the repeated accusations and insistence of the Jewish leaders compelled Pilate to have Jesus scourged and then crucified. The Roman soldiers who took custody of Jesus used the opportunity to beat and mock Him before taking Him to be crucified.

22 And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. 23 And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.

“And they bring him unto the place Golgotha [skull], which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull” – The name “Golgotha” is a loose transliteration of the Aramaic word for “skull” and Mark translates this for us. It’s unclear why this location was named “the place of a skull” but commentators suggest two possibilities: 1) the shape of the hill may have resembled a skull; 2) the hill had some association with skulls or death, perhaps because the Romans used the hill regularly for crucifixions.

“And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not” – According to an old tradition, respected women from Jerusalem would provide wine mingled with myrrh (giving it a narcotic effect) to prisoners about to be crucified in order to help them endure the excruciating pain of crucifixion. It is unlikely that the Roman soldiers would have offered anything to ease the pain of those being crucified. Jesus refused the drink, likely because He wanted His mind to stay sharp throughout the experience so that He could fulfill all the prophetic scriptures written about Him (**John 19:28** “*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst*”).

24 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

After nailing Jesus to the cross, the Roman soldiers divided His garments between themselves, using the method of casting lots to decide who got what. This was a common practice of the time, since the condemned would no longer need these things after their death. Psalm 22, a Messianic psalm that predicted elements of Christ’s crucifixion, predicted that they could cast lots for Jesus’ clothes (**Psa. 22:18** “*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture*”).

25 And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. 26 And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

“And it was the third hour, and they crucified him” – Mark uses the Jewish method of reckoning time, which counted the hours from sunrise (6:00 am). Thus the “third hour” would be 9:00 am. Critics have supposed that Mark contradicts John 19:14, where it is said that it was the sixth hour, but this is explained by: 1) John is using the Roman method that counts the hours from midnight, meaning that John’s “sixth hour” was 6:00 am; 2) In John 19:14, Jesus is still standing before Pilate and three hours could have easily transpired from that time until the time that Jesus arrives at the place of crucifixion.

“And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS” – The crime for which a man was being crucified was customarily written on a wooden board and nailed above the head of the accused. It was written in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek (John 19:20) so that all could read and served as a deterrent to others considering committing similar crimes. The accusation that Pilate wrote indicated that Jesus was being crucified because He was the King of the Jews, which displeased the chief priests. They complained, saying that the accusation should not read that Jesus was the king of the Jews but that He merely claimed to be the king of the Jews (John 19:19-22).

27 And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. 28 And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.

One commentator suggested that this may have been another of Pilate’s insults against the Jews. Not only was Rome crucifying the “king of the Jews,” but by crucifying Him between two thieves implied that a Jewish king was no better than a common criminal. However, Pilate did not realize that he was fulfilling scripture by doing this (Isa. 53:12).

29 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, 30 Save thyself, and come down from the cross.

“And they that passed by” – Crucifixions were typically done publicly, often near public roads so that all could see who passed by.

“railed [to speak evil of] on him, wagging their heads” – Since those who were crucified were typically criminals, spectators would often mock them as they passed by. The wagging of the head was a common gesture of contempt and derision.

“and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days” – This was a distortion/misunderstanding of what Jesus actually said (**John. 2:19-21** “*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body*”). They used this distortion of Jesus’ words as an opportunity to mock Him.

“Save thyself, and come down from the cross” – Apparently the idea was that if Jesus had the ability to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days then He ought to have the power to free Himself from a humiliating death on the cross. Since He didn’t, they believed that meant that He couldn’t and proved that Jesus was a fraud. They did not understand the true reason that Jesus was dying – as the sacrifice for our sins.

31 Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. 32 Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.

“Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes” – Verses 29-30 describe what was said by random people who either happened to be passing by or else they purposely went out to Golgotha to see the crucifixion. In either case, those people were familiar enough with Jesus and the hatred that the Jews had for Him to be able to mock Him with what they thought were His own words. Now the people who led the effort to destroy Jesus have their opportunity to mock Him and gloat over their apparent victory.

“He saved [to rescue; to keep safe and sound] others; himself he cannot save” – They are referring to the many healings and even raisings from the dead that Jesus performed. Some commentators suggest that the chief priests and scribes were not admitting that these miracles were genuine but were tricks to deceive the public. The mockery was that Jesus was able (either genuinely or through trickery) to save others from death (by raising them from the dead or healing their sicknesses) and yet He himself was now apparently powerless to prevent His own death. They did not understand that Jesus could have freed Himself at any time had He chosen to do so, either by His own power or by calling on His Father (**Matt. 26:53** “*Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?*”).

“Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe” – They now mock Jesus’ claim to be the Christ, saying that they would believe if He performed the miracle of coming down from the cross to prove it. Of course, they still would not have believed because faith does not work that way. In fact, as one commentator pointed out, they still did not believe when the greater miracle of Christ’s resurrection occurred. Proof never produces genuine faith, but genuine faith recognizes the proof when it sees it (**Heb. 11:3a** says “*Through faith we understand...*” NOT “*Through understanding we have faith*”).

“And they that were crucified with him reviled him” – The two thieves crucified on both sides of Jesus also mocked Him, although one did eventually repent (Luke 23:39-42).

33 And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

Mark uses the Jewish method of marking time (counting hours since sunrise), so this would be from 12:00 noon until 3:00 pm. Throughout scripture, darkness is a sign of the judgment of God. The most intense judgment of God was being poured out on His Son because of our sins.

34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Mark gives us the Aramaic version of Jesus’ cry, while Mathew gives it to us in Hebrew (Matt. 27:46). Psalm 22 predicted the crucifixion (including the casting of lots for His garments) and thus Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy by quoting Psalm 22:1. However, the cry of anguish seems to indicate the broken fellowship between Jesus and His Father as He became the target of the wrath that our sins deserved. **2 Cor. 5:21** “*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*”

35 And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. 36 And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.

“And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias” – Jews at that time believed that Elias (Elijah) would come and help those in dire circumstances if they called upon him. It’s not obvious if those who stood by honestly thought that Jesus called the name of Elias (Elijah) or if they pretended to misunderstand Him in order to give them another occasion to mock Him.

“And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink” – It’s hard to believe that this was an act of compassion. Perhaps it was intended to prolong Jesus’ life in order to satisfy their curiosity concerning Elias.

“saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down” – If they genuinely believed that Jesus was calling for Elias then perhaps they were curious to see whether Elias actually would come to help Jesus, which would prove that He was indeed a righteous man in their eyes. On the other hand, this may have been another mocking statement said with a sarcastic tone.

37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. 38 And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

“And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost [breathed his last breath]” – By this time a man being crucified typically was too weak and dehydrated from the loss of blood and hours in the hot sun to be able to cry out with a loud voice, showing that Jesus did not die because His body had become too weak. **John 10:17-18** “*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*” John tells us what Jesus said when He cried out (**John 19:30** “*When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*”) and then Luke tells us Jesus’ last words as He died (**Luke 23:46** “*And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost*”).

“And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” – The veil was a reminder of the separation between God and man (Heb. 9:1-8). Access to the presence of God was restricted to the high priest alone, who could only enter where the Ark of the Covenant was once a year on the Day of Atonement. By dying on the cross, Jesus opened up our way to God so that any of us can enter anytime we choose (**Heb. 4:16** “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*”).

39 And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

Centurions were Roman officers in charge of 100 soldiers. This centurion, who was in charge of the crucifixion, had likely seen many crucified men die, but none of them were like Jesus. The strength that Jesus exhibited by His loud cry at death was unheard of for a victim of crucifixion. The centurion also witnessed the earthquake that occurred as Jesus died (Matt. 27:51-54). Everything that the centurion saw convinced him that Jesus had to be the Son of God and church tradition says that this man did become a believer in Jesus Christ.