

Sunday School Lesson
 Mark 15:16-32
 by Lorin L. Cranford
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The Cross

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Have you ever watched someone die? It’s not a pleasant experience. As a pastor and as a son I been present at the death of several people over these many years of ministry. Sadness and grief are the common elements shared by virtually everyone experiencing the death of a loved one. As a student hospital chaplain working in the intensive and cardiac care units of a large metropolitan hospital in the late 1960s, I sat by the side of numerous family members at the death of loved ones.



People respond to death in different ways. As a hospital chaplain, I have sat by helplessly watching family members react in a stark terror that led to uncontrollable emotional outbursts of grief and anger. With little or no spiritual resources to fall back on, these individuals looked straight into the face of death and it freaked them out completely. I’ve watched others, who had a life time of service to Christ behind them, pass into the arms of Jesus. Family members with similar spiritual foundations quietly celebrated the home going of a saint of God. Grief and sorrow? Yes, very definitely. But overriding this was the full confidence of faith in Christ that assured them that their love one wasn’t really dead. Rather, he/she was beginning the next stage of life -- a life more wonderful and grand than any ever experienced on planet earth. In that came joy and thanksgiving to God for a life well lived and one now in the arms of God in Heaven.

What makes the difference between these two extremes? Quite simply, the cross of Christ. On the eve of Easter Sunday, we celebrate this death that makes us alive. But, in spite of knowing “the end of the story” in advance, we need to let Mark narrate to us the full brutal execution of Jesus. We must never lose sight of the horrible human price that Jesus paid when he voluntarily went to the cross to save us from the damnation of our sins.



I. Context

From the [previous studies](#) in the Gospel of Mark we will draw most of the background material, only supplementing it where needed for this particular study.

a. Historical

External History. Contemporary New Testament scholarship in general will conclude that the

second gospel was the first of the four canonical gospels to be written. Most likely, this took place sometime in the 60s of the first Christian century. Subsequently in the following decade, once copies of this gospel were made and distributed across the Christian world of the eastern Mediterranean Sea regions, the writers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke gained access to this document and used it in the composition of their stories of the life and ministry of Jesus. Although coming a decade or so later in the late 80s to mid 90s, the fourth gospel betrays no real signs of having had direct access to any of the three previously written gospels.

The study of the literary relationship of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is termed the [Synoptic Problem](#). What I have just described above has been the dominant viewpoint in synoptic gospel studies for the past three hundred years, and is labeled the [Two Source Hypothesis](#). It can be diagrammed as follows:



Although in contemporary American New Testament scholarship an alternative view -- Matthew being written first, Luke second, and Mark third -- is popular in some circles, the so-called "Markan priority" view above still remains dominant among American scholars, and much more so among New Testament scholars world-wide. It is the assumption that I have worked from for the past forty plus years of study.

To be sure, this doesn't answer directly questions of authorship, time and place of writing etc. Here much greater diversity of viewpoint will be found.

The comparison of external evidence with internal evidence leads me to the general conclusion of the following. The external evidence, i.e., the traditions among the Church Fathers during the first six hundred years of Christianity, suggests that the writer of the second gospel was [John Mark](#). This was the young man who began the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, but did not complete the work and returned back home to Cyprus. Being the nephew of Barnabas, the issue of whether or not to take [him](#) on the second missionary journey caused Paul and Barnabas to go their separate ways in ministry. But as the [later writings](#) of

Paul indicate the tension between Paul and Mark was eventually resolved so that ministry together became possible again.

Although I don't agree with some of his conclusions about the external evidence, John R. Donahue (*Harper's Bible Commentary*, Logos Systems) does summarize the issues well regarding Markan authorship:

Like the other Gospels, the text does not identify its author, but early church tradition (beginning with Papias, ca. a.d. 120; see Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15) attributed it to "Mark," a companion of Peter in Rome (1 Pet. 5:13), who is then identified with the "John Mark" of Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37-39, and the "Mark" of Philem. 24; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:1. This attribution is called into question by the apologetic desire to associate a nonapostolic Gospel with the apostle Peter, by the frequency of "Mark" as a name in the Roman Empire, and by the ancient tendency to attribute works to important figures from the past.

For the bulk of church history, principally on the authority of patristic writers (esp. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.1.2) and certain internal evidence (see below), the final composition of the Gospel was situated at Rome, sometime after the martyrdom of Peter during the persecution of Nero (a.d. 64). Recently, because of the stress in Mark on Galilee as the place of the first and expected revelation of Jesus, along with its strong Palestinian coloring, its audience has been located in Galilee or southern Syria (see Marxsen).

Internal evidence from the Gospel (esp. chap. 13) offers clues to its situation and community. Like similar apocalyptic literature, Mark 13 (called often the "apocalyptic discourse"), while in the form of predictions given in the past, cryptically depicts upheavals in the lives of the readers. The civil disturbances (13:7-8) and intensity of the persecution described in 13:9-13 may reflect both Nero's persecution (a.d. 64) and the Jewish war of a.d. 66-70 (see commentary below on chap. 13).

The large number of Latinisms (Gk. terms or phrases that reflect Lat., e.g., 5:9; 6:37; 7:4; 12:14, 42; 15:15-16, 19, 39) suggest a setting where both Latin and Greek were used. The teaching on divorce reflects Roman law (10:10-12) and the widow's offering is explained in terms of Roman coinage (12:42, lit. two coins [Gk. *lepta*] are made equivalent to the Roman *quadrans*, which equals 1/4 of a cent).

The community included large numbers of Jews. Familiarity with the Jewish Scriptures is presumed and explicit citations of and allusions to them are frequent. They are the authoritative revelation of God, and the core of Jesus' teaching is a summary from the OT (12:28-34). Yet, the



ot is quoted from Greek versions, rather than translated from Hebrew; Jewish customs are explained (7:3-4); Aramaic phrases are translated (e.g., 5:41; 7:34; 14:36; 15:34), and details of Palestinian geography are vague (6:45-7:37). The Gospel contains strong attacks on Jewish laws and institutions (7:1-23; 11:15-19), and implies a mission to the Gentiles (11:17; 13:10). Most likely the community comprises Jews and gentile converts living outside of Palestine, who are breaking away from traditional Jewish observances.

The community is also most likely of lower socioeconomic status. The language of the Gospel is not elegant, literary Greek, but the spoken Greek of ordinary people with occasional Semitic influence. The rich are suspect, as are those holding positions of power (10:23-25, 42). Ordinary items such as the "pallet" (2:4, 11) and the "basket" (6:43; 8:19) are those used by the poor. Though the available evidence precludes certainty, a Jewish-Christian community at Rome shortly after a.d. 70 would be an excellent candidate for the audience of the Gospel.

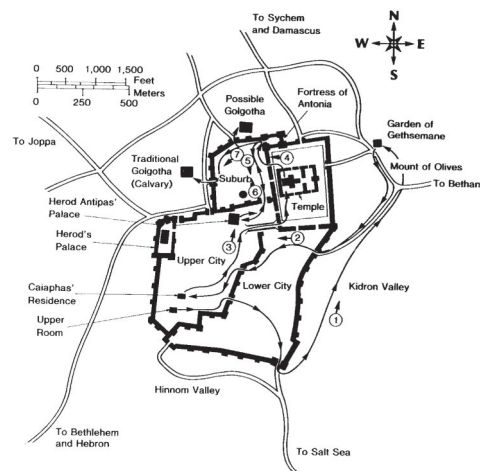
My argument would be to place the gospel prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70, rather than afterwards. The link of Mark to the apostle Peter and consequently a "Petrine" oriented gospel is valid in my estimation. Thus the gospel was well underway in its composition by the time of Peter's martyrdom in Rome in the mid-60s, and probably completed soon afterwards. Whether Mark was still in Rome or had left the city by the completion of the writing can't be determined.

Internal History. The internal time and place markers contained inside verses 16-32 are rather limited in number but fairly specific in their designations, in ancient terms.

The place markers center on two locations in Je-



rusalem. The court yard of the governor's palace (ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς, ὃ ἔστιν πραιτώριον; v. 16) and Golgotha (τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον, ὃ ἔστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος; v.



22). The location of the first reference is relatively clear. The Latin term 'praetorium' (πραιτώριον) simply designates the headquarters of the commanding officer inside a camp of Roman soldiers. Two possibilities of location -- and maybe a third -- exist for where this was in the old city: 1) Antonia's fortress on the northwest side of the temple, or 2) Herod's palace in the western part of the city. The first is the traditional site going back to the Crusades of the middle ages and is where the Roman soldiers were bunked during their stay in Jerusalem. Herod's palace is more likely since the Roman commander would stay in luxury at every opportunity, rather than bunk down where the troops were stationed near the temple. Pilate was a notorious lover of luxury.



Once the soldiers were finished brutalizing Jesus, they led him from Herod's palace to Golgotha. Mark translates the meaning of this Aramaic term in v. 22 as "the place of a skull" (Κρανίου Τόπος). Again the precise location of this is disputed. My former SWBTS colleague, James Brooks, (*New American Commentary*, Logos Systems) has a helpful summation of the issue:

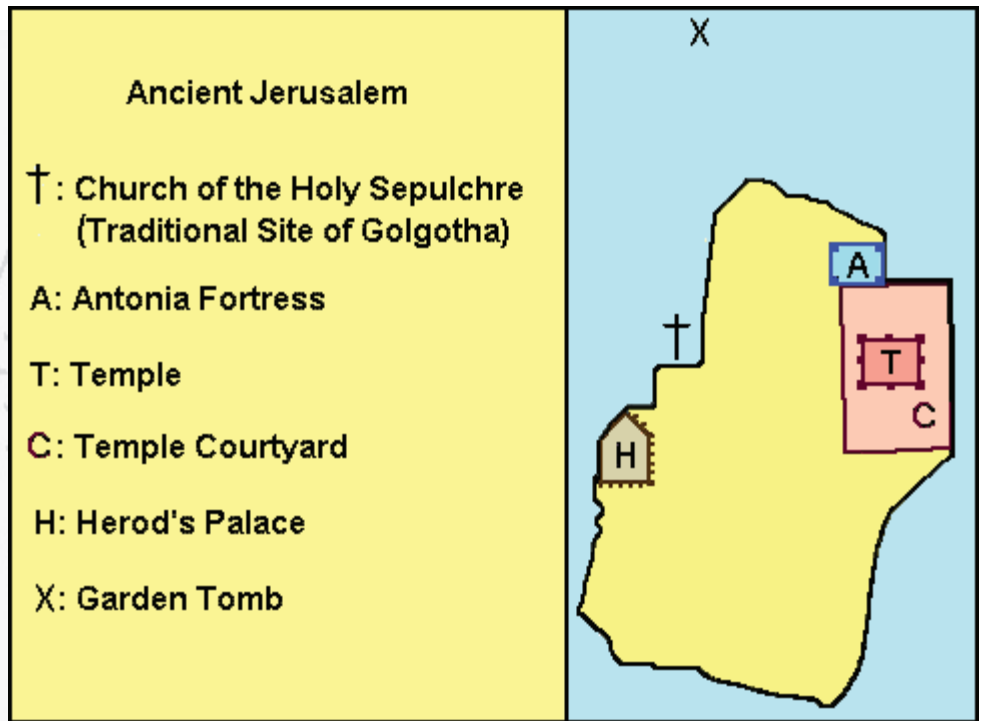
"Golgotha" is a Grecianized form of the

Aramaic word meaning *a skull*.¹⁹⁵

Neither Mark nor any other Gospel locates or describes the place. Inasmuch as both the Jews and Romans customarily executed outside cities but in public places, presumably the place was not far beyond the city wall and beside a road. Also Heb 13:12 says that Jesus “suffered outside the city gate,” and John 19:20 says that the place was “near the city.” Nowhere is it stated that Golgotha was a hill, but it may have gotten its name from being a low-lying hill in the shape of a skull. The name is not likely derived from skulls lying around because of Jewish insistence on quick burials even of enemies and criminals. Possibly

the name reflects a place of unnatural death. Compare the modern use of a skull and crossbones to indicate the danger of death especially from poison.

The traditional site of the crucifixion and the burial is the site that since about A.D. 326 has been occupied by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Its claim has been strengthened in recent years because archaeologists have proved that it was outside the second wall on the northwest side of the city in Jesus’ day. The actual site, however, cannot be determined because of the lack of data in the Gospels, the ramp the Romans built against the north wall during the siege of A.D. 70, the destructions of the city in A.D. 70 and A.D. 135, and the desecration of holy sites and the rebuilding as a pagan city after A.D. 135. The only other site with any serious claim is Gordon’s Calvary and the adjoining Garden Tomb, which are a little beyond the Damascus Gate in the present north wall. Gordon’s Calvary does somewhat resemble a skull in appearance, but that appearance probably is the result of medieval and even modern excavation. The Garden Tomb is Byzantine rather than ancient. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher has the better claim, but the place cannot be determined



with much confidence. Mark was far more concerned with the significance of the death of Jesus than with making sure his readers knew exactly where it took place.

The path between the praetorium and Golgotha is known today as the [Via Dolorosa](#). But this traditional “path of sorrows” leads from the Antonia Fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, not from Herod’s palace to the church, or to Gordon’s tomb. The *Via Dolorosa* became a popular trek for Christian pilgrims to make at Easter, beginning in the middle ages. But it had no historical significance at the time of Jesus’ death.

The single time reference is found in verse 25: “It was the third hour and they crucified him” (ἦν δὲ ὥρα τρίτη καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν). R.T. France (Mark, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Logos Systems) has a helpful sketching out of the Markan time frame on the day of crucifixion. Thus

Verse 1:	πρωῖ (= daybreak	Delivery to Pilate
Verse 25:	ὥρα τρίτη (3rd hr)	Crucifixion
Verse 33:	ὥρα ἕκτη (6th hr)	Darkness begins
Verse 34:	ὥρα ἐνάτη (9th hr)	Cry and death of Jesus
Verse 42:	ὀψίας γενομένης	Burial

the crucifixion begins about mid morning and will last until mid-afternoon when Jesus dies (9th hr). Jesus hung on the cross for approximately six hours. Most crucifixion victims took up to 72 hours to die, much longer than Jesus’ six hours. This indicates how deeply the soldiers had brutalized him before nailing him to the cross. His body was severely weakened from the beatings.

¹⁹⁵ Few words are more common in modern Christian vocabulary than “Calvary,” and few have less justification. The word does not appear in any Greek manuscript of the Gospels or in most modern English translations. It appears in the KJV and NKJV only in Luke 23:33, where for some unexplained reason the translators used an anglicized form of the Latin word *calvaria*, which appears regularly in the Vulgate, rather than the English word “skull” to translate the Greek word *kranion*. Elsewhere they properly employ “skull” to translate *kranion*.

b. Literary

Genre. The **broad literary form** is that of 'gospel.' As previously noted in [earlier studies](#), this document is written as a gospel, rather than as history or biography. This doesn't mean that the story ignores history, or even some traits of ancient biographical writing styles. It does mean, however, that the gospel writer is giving his readers an insider, theologically oriented interpretation of Jesus as he lived and carried out his ministry on earth. Neither modern demands of objective history or of standards of modern biography played any role in the composing of this document almost two thousand years ago. How much historical detail we're given in the story is governed solely by the writer's religious agenda. Often times our modern conditioning by history and biography concern leads us to wish for more details. But we must resist the temptation to "re-create" a more detailed framework that goes beyond what we're given in the text itself. The writer has put enough of the details on the table for us to grasp his spiritual point in the story. That's where our focus needs to be placed.

The **sub-genre** of our passage is identified as [Passion Narrative](#). For almost two centuries most New Testament scholars have seen behind Mark 14-16 a pre-existing document that covered the life of Jesus during his final week of ministry through the resurrection account. A lot of the details are uncertain because of limited amounts of available data. But, one thing is clear. When all four gospel writers describe this period of Jesus' life story, their texts are closer to one another both in narrative details and in structural organization of the narratives. Many are convinced, in part from an analysis of the *Missions Reden* ([Evangelistic Sermons](#)) recorded in the book of Acts, which covers the years 30 through 60 AD, that the first part of the Jesus story to take identifiable form was the story of the cross and of the resurrection. This part of the life story of Jesus was central to the gospel and was developed into a generally universal oral form that could be committed to memory by believers in the Christian movement. Eventually this material was recorded in written expression for circulation among the congregations. Probably this happened in different places at different times. When the gospel writers set out to produce their individual story of Jesus, the Passion Narrative material played a vital role in shaping this part of their own story of Jesus. Mark as the earliest written gospel made extensive use of it. Matthew

and Luke, with Mark in hand, were also aware of this material and probably were influenced by it -- at least the version available to them -- as they used Mark's account as the launch pad for their own narratives. Very likely, the fourth gospel went directly to this material, by passing the Markan gospel, as a major source for this part of the story of Jesus.

Such a scenario is built off careful analysis of limited material, and as such remains tentative, rather than established fact. But it does seem to best account for the available information.

Mark 15:16-32 contains two basic pericopes of narrative from the Passion Narrative material. Both of these pericopes are recorded by the other gospel writers. These parallel accounts will be treated in the exegesis of the passage below.

The tone of the narratives is harsh. Mark pulls back the curtains of brutal human treatment of others and lets us see how horrible Jesus was treated by the Roman authorities. Although he was heavily criticized for it, Mel Gibson effectively captured this aspect of the crucifixion of Jesus in his movie [The Passion of the Christ](#). Mark wants his readers to sense the full force of the human suffering of Jesus as he died for sinful humanity.



Literary Context. The setting for vv. 16-32 can be seen more clearly in the context of the outline of the [life of Christ](#) at Cranfordville. These events are a part of a series of actions that took place on crucifixion Friday. In [the listing of pericopes](#) for the gospel of Mark, this material covers #s 92-98 of the 104 units in the original writing of the gospel:

90. Trial before the Sanhedrin 15:1
91. Trial before Pilate 15:2-15
92. Mockery of the soldiers 15:16-20
93. Simon of Cyrene 15:21
94. Wine refused 15:22-23
95. Parting his garments 15:24
96. His accusation 15:25-26
97. Two thieves 15:27-28
98. Mockery 15:29-32
99. Jesus' Death 15:33-37
100. Temple veil torn 15:38
101. Centurion's declaration 15:39
102. Women watched 15:40-41
103. Jesus' Burial 15:42-47

The similarities and differences of the gospel accounts can be clearly seen in [a parallel listing](#) of each account of that Friday's events.

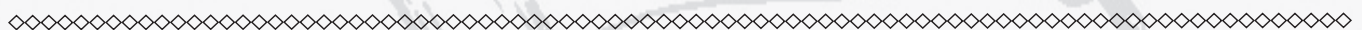
Matt 27:1-56	Mark 15:1-47	Luke 22:66-23:56	John 18:12-19:42
160. Trial before Sanhedrin 27:1-2	90. Trial before the Sanhedrin 15:1	150. Trial before the Sanhedrin 22:66-71	75. Trial before Annas (1) 18:12-14
161. Judas' death 27:3-10	91. Trial before Pilate 15:2-15	151. Trial before Pilate 23:1-5	76. Peter's denial (1) 18:15-18
162. Trial before Pilate 27:11-26	92. <i>Mockery of the soldiers 15:16-20</i>	152. Trial before Herod 23:6-12	77. Trial before Annas (2) 18:19-24
163. <i>Mockery of the soldiers 27:27-31</i>	93. <i>Simon of Cyrene 15:21</i>	153. Trial before Pilate 23:13-25	78. Peter's denial (2) 18:25-27
164. <i>Simon of Cyrene 27:32</i>	94. <i>Wine refused 15:22-23</i>	154. <i>Simon of Cyrene 23:26</i>	79. Trial before Pilate 18:28-38a
165. <i>Vinegar refused 27:33-34</i>	95. <i>Parting his garments 15:24</i>	155. Words to the women 23:27-31	80. Jesus sentenced to die 18:38b-19:16a
166. <i>Parting his garments 27:35</i>	96. <i>His accusation 15:25-26</i>	156. <i>Two thieves 23:32-33</i>	81. <i>Way to Golgotha 19:16b-17</i>
167. <i>His accusation 27:36-37</i>	97. <i>Two thieves 15:27-28</i>	157. <i>Parting his garments 23:34</i>	82. <i>Two thieves 19:18</i>
168. <i>Two thieves 27:38</i>	98. <i>Mockery 15:29-32</i>	158. <i>Mockery 23:35-57</i>	83. <i>His accusation 19:19-22</i>
169. <i>Mockery 27:39-44</i>	99. Jesus' Death 15:33-37	159. <i>His accusation 23:38</i>	84. <i>Parting his garments 19:23-24</i>
170. Jesus' Death 27:45-50	100. Temple veil torn 15:38	160. Repentant thief 23:39-43	85. Women watched 19:25
171. Temple veil torn 27:51	101. Centurion's declaration 15:39	161. Death 23:44-46	86. Jesus' word to Mary 19:26-27
172. Resurrection of saints 27:52-53	102. Women watched 15:40-41	162. Centurion's declaration 23:47	87. <i>Vinegar accepted 19:28-29</i>
173. Centurion's declaration 27:54	103. Jesus' Burial 15:42-47	163. People's response 23:48	88. Death 19:30
174. Women watched 27:55-56		164. Disciples and women watch 23:49	89. Jesus' side pierced 19:31-37
175. Burial 27:57-61		165. Burial 23:50-56	90. Burial 19:38-42

Very quickly one notices that Matthew follows Mark's narrative sequence exactly in units 163-169 that match Mark's #s 92-98. Luke uses the general sequence of Mark but inserts additional units. John includes only four of the seven Markan units but with a very different slant on them. The narrative details

inside each of these matching units of material will have each gospel writer's own distinct stamp and perspective. This provides us with a deeply rich and varied perspective that we would not otherwise have.

II. Message

Literary Structure. Verses 16-32 basically fall into two recognizable pericopes: 1) Preparation for execution, vv. 16-20, and Jesus' execution, vv. 21-32. This second pericope contains smaller units of material, as is reflected in the outlines listed above. We will organize our study around these two units of material, and give attention to the parallel gospel passages in the other writings. For an analysis based upon the Greek text, see the [Block](#) and [Semantic](#) diagrams, along with the [Summary of the Rhetorical Structure](#) contained in the larger internet version of the study.



a. Brutalizing Jesus, vv. 16-20

Greek NT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
16 Οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν πραιτώριον, καὶ συγκαλοῦσιν ὄλην τὴν σπεῖραν.	16 The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort.	16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called to-	16 The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's headquarters (called the Praetorium) and called

17 καὶ ἐνδιδύσκουσιν αὐτὸν πορφύραν καὶ περιτιθέασιν αὐτῷ πλέξαντες ἀκάνθινον στέφανον.
 18 καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν· χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων.
 19 καὶ ἔτυπτον αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν καλάμῳ καὶ ἐνέπτυσον αὐτῷ καὶ τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνουν αὐτῷ.
 20 καὶ ὅτε ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ, ἐξέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὴν πορφύραν καὶ ἐνέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἐξάγουσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα σταυρώσωσιν αὐτόν.

Notes:

The actions of the Roman soldiers come after Pilate has sentenced Jesus to death. Only Matthew records this segment from his Markan source.

Matt. 27:27-31

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Careful comparison of the two narratives reveals that although Matthew closely follows Mark he differs slightly in some of his narrative details.

With staccato action Mark describes a series

17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18 and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. 20 After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.

Mark 15:16-20

16 The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. 17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18 and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. 20 After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.

In rather similar fashion Matthew indicates

gether the whole cohort. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18 And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20 After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

of actions they did to Jesus:

- #1, clothed him in mock royalty;
- #2, put a crown of thorns on his head;
- #3, began mock salutes to him as king;
- #4 hit him on the head with a stick;
- #5, spit on him;
- #6, mocked worship of him.

When finished, they put his own clothes back on him (#7) and led him out to be crucified (#8).



Both gospel writers give us a harsh picture of physical torture of a helpless victim being prepared for crucifixion. The fourth gospel overlaps this somewhat in [John 19:1-3](#)

- 1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.
- 2 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe.
- 3 They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.

out the entire regiment. 17 They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. 18 Then they saluted him and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" 19 And they struck him on the head with a reed stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. 20 When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

that once the whole cohort of soldiers was assembled, they

- #1, *stripped him of his clothes,*
- #2, put a scarlet robe on him,
- #3, put a crown of thorns on his head,
- #4, *put a reed in his right hand,*
- #5, made mock salutes to him as king
- #6, spit on him,
- #7, struck him on the head.

When finished, they *stripped the robe off him (#8),* put his own clothes back on him (#9), and led him out to be crucified (#10).



The difference in the Johannine narrative is that this flogging of Jesus took place as a part of Pilate's interrogation of Jesus during his trial, rather than after Pilate's verdict had been given, as in the synoptic gospels.

Customary Roman interrogation of prisoners was to beat them into unconsciousness at the outset, bring them back to consciousness, and then begin asking them questions. The reasoning assumed that prisoners would then be more likely to give truthful answers. John reflects that typical Roman procedure. Matthew and Mark, however, reflect another Roman custom that allowed the soldiers to brutalize prisoners sentenced to crucifixion before the sentence was carried out. This provided the soldiers a way to vent their anger at the supposed "enemies of Rome" before taking them out to execute them. In either situation, Jesus became the victim of extreme brutality and torture. How can such be described? It is best pictured, rather than described!

The focus of their torture was predicated upon the charge of treason against Rome; he had proclaimed himself to be "King of the Jews" so the accusation went. This was treason against the Romans. The Emperor was their exclusive king -- at least in the eyes of the Roman conquerors.

What can we learn from this scene? First, we get a clear glimpse into the real nature of the Romans of the ancient world. In spite of the positive accomplishments of the Roman Empire, a brutally dark and evil side existed. This brutalization of Jesus by the soldiers is but one of many accounts in ancient lit-

erature of just how evil that dark side could become. Sinful, unregenerate human nature is capable of indescribable brutality to others. We see a picture of that here with Jesus as the victim.

Second, we must never, ever allow ourselves as a culture either as Christians and / or as Americans to sink so low as to brutalize people, such as these Romans did to Jesus. No human being under any circumstances should ever be subjected to such torture! For Christians to engage in such actions is unconscionable!

Third, Mark has wanted us readers to sense in horror the suffering that Jesus did on our behalf. The cross in modern America is all too often a beautiful piece of jewelry worn by individuals. That is romanticizing the crucifixion of Jesus into a fairy tale. Reality is the extreme opposite. He suffered unbelievably, just as the prophet Isaiah had prophesied centuries before ([Isa. 53:3-5](#)):

3 He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

4 Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

On this eve of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, may we pause again to reflect just what Jesus endured for us.

b. Killing Jesus, vv. 21-32

Greek NT

21 Καὶ ἀγγαρεύουσιν παράγοντά τινα Σίμωνα Κυρηναῖον ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ, τὸν πατέρα Ἀλε-

NASB

21 They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the

NRSV

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his

NLT

21 A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the country-

ξάνδρου καὶ Ρούφου, ἵνα ἄρῃ τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ.
22 Καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος.
23 καὶ ἐδίδουν αὐτῷ ἐσμυρνισμένον οἶνον· ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἔλαβεν.
24 Καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτὸν καὶ διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ βάλλοντες κλῆρον ἐπ’ αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρῃ.
25 ἦν δὲ ὥρα τρίτη καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν.
26 καὶ ἦν ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας αὐτοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένη· ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.
27 Καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστές, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ εὐωνύμων αὐτοῦ. *
29 Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινουῦντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες· οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις,
30 σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.
31 ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐμπαίζοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον· ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι.
32 ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν. καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν.

father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.
22 Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.
23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it.
24 And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.
25 It was the third hour when they crucified Him.
26 The inscription of the charge against Him read, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.”
27 They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.
28 [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with transgressors.”]
29 Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,
30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!”
31 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself.
32 “Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!” Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.
22 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).
23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it.
24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.
25 It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.
26 The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.”
27 And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.
29 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,
30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!”
31 In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.
32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

side just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus’ cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.)
22 And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means “Place of the Skull”).
23 They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it.
24 Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece.
25 It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.
26 A sign was fastened to the cross, announcing the charge against him. It read, “The King of the Jews.”
27 Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.
29 The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. “Ha! Look at you now!” they yelled at him. “You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days.
30 Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!”
31 The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. “He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself!
32 Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!” Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him.

Notes:

This scene is carefully narrated by all four gospel writers:

Matt. 27:32-44

32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." " 44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

Careful comparison of these accounts underscore an essential unity of depiction, but also some very distinctive tones and narrative details by each gospel writer. Again, Matthew most closely follows his Mar-

Mark 15:21-32

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." 27 And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Luke 23:26-43

26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. 28 But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." 31 For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." 39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you

John 19:17-27

So they took Jesus; 17 and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." 25 And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

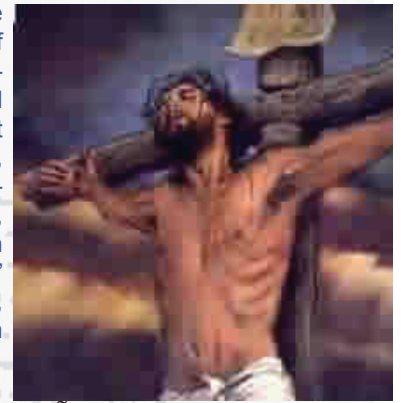
kan source. Each movement in this scene reveals some distinctives by each gospel writer. Mark identifies the man who was forced to carry Jesus' cross as [Simon of Cyrene](#) (Σίμων Κυρηναῖον), while Matthew only says a man from Cyrene. Luke includes all the Markan description except for Simon being the father of Alexander and Rufus. On the other hand, John omits this with an alternative tradition: "carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull,"

The [identification of Simon](#) remains vague. We know that he came from Cyrene, which was on the Mediterranean coast and was the capital city of the Roman province of Cyrenaica. This province was tucked in on the western side of Egypt. Today Cyrenaica is the eastern side of the modern country of Libya. With the name Simon, he was in all likelihood Jewish; his coming to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover points even more that direction. We know from Mark that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, two men evidently known to the readers of Mark's gospel. The synoptic gospel texts uniformly stress that Simon was forced (Mt - ἠγγάρευσαν; Mk - ἀγγαρεύουσιν; Lk. - ἐπιλαβόμενοι) to carry the cross; he did not volunteer to do, as later fictional tradition has tried to suggest. Without question the later Gnostic, and then Islamic, nonsense that Simon took Jesus' place on the cross has no existence in history. Many legends have surfaced over the subsequent centuries, but have no basis in historical occurrence.

The place of crucifixion is identified by Mark as "the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull)" (τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος). Matthew uses Mark's id tag, while Luke simply says it was a place called Κρανίον (Greek for skull or head), cf. 23:33. The influence of the fourth century Latin Vulgate translation on the English Bible is apparent from the Latin, "*Golgotha locum quod est interpretatum Calvariae locus.*" Here 'skull' is translated into the Latin equivalent *calvaria*, and becomes the basis for the English word Calvary, which is picked up in Lk. 23:33 by the English translations from Tyndale through the recent New King James Version. Most modern English translations, however, drop this somewhat misleading translation pattern. John (19:17b) follows basically the Markan id tagging of the site: "what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha." The exact location of this place has already been discussed under [Internal History](#) on page 2.

The offering of the "narcotic cocktail" wine mixed

not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."



with myrrh (ἐσμυρνισμένον οἶνον) is picked up only by Matthew who slightly alters the description to wine "mingled with gall" (οἶνον μετὰ χαλῆς). Often this has been taken as an act of mercy to deaden the pain that Jesus was going to experience; thus he refused it on spiritual grounds as the sacrificial Lamb dying for the sins of others. But the mixing of myrrh into wine had no narcotic effect, and was often done to create a more appealing aroma to wine. This made wine a "rich man's drink." Very likely the soldiers in offering this aromatic wine to Jesus were continuing to mock him as "King of the Jews." Luke clearly captures this sense in his depiction in 23:36-37, "The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine [ὄξις], and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!'"

Matthew closely picks up the gambling for Jesus' garments that Mark describes (15:24b): "divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take," but extends it a bit (27:35b-36): "they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him." Luke has the shortest depiction (23:34b): "And they cast lots to divide his clothing." But John has the most detailed description (19:23-25): "When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.'" This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did." He sees in this a prophetic fulfillment of Exod. 28:32 and Psalm 22:18. Dividing up Jesus' garments wasn't an unusual practice, for Roman soldiers normally divided up the belongings of executed victims. One side note that this action makes clear: Jesus was completely without any clothes as he hang on the cross. The artistic depictions of him with a small piece of cloth wrapped around his waist are not representing what actually happened. They represent modifications demanded

by the cultural sensitivities of later times.

Mark alone notes that Jesus was first placed on the cross about the “third hour” of the day (v. 25). In the dividing up of daylight hours into twelve segments, this meant mid-morning. Neither Matthew or Luke pick up on this. But John understood the time frame differently, and indicates that Jesus was taken out to be crucified at noon time (cf. 19:14): “Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; **and it was about noon**. He [Pilate] said to the Jews, ‘Here is your King!’ They cried out, ‘Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!’ Pilate asked them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but the emperor.’ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull...”

In v. 33 just beyond our passage, Mark will indicate that Jesus died about the ninth hour, which would have been mid-afternoon. Beginning at noon (6th hr, cf. v. 33) darkness covered the city of Jerusalem. Matthew and Luke only inject time references to the noon time darkness and the mid-afternoon death. Mark wanted his readers to understand that Jesus hung on the cross from mid-morning to mid-afternoon before death came. To be sure, this was a very short period of time for crucifixion victims to hang on the cross before dying. Grant Osborne (“Crucifixion,” *Baker’s Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Logos Systems) provides this helpful depiction:

The prisoner was commonly tied or sometimes nailed to the cross beam (with the nails through the wrists, since the bones in the hand could not take the weight). The beam was then raised and fixed to the upright pole. If the executioners wished a particularly slow, agonizing death, they might drive blocks or pins into the stake for a seat or a step to support the feet. Death came about through loss of blood circulation followed by coronary collapse. That could take days, so often the victim’s legs would be broken below the knees with a club, causing massive shock and eliminating any further possibility of easing the pressure on the bound or spiked wrists. Usually a body was left on the cross to rot, but in some instances was given to relatives or friends for burial.

Mark next mentions the legal accusation against Jesus that was nailed to the vertical beam just above Jesus’ head (v. 26): “The inscription of the charge against him read, ‘THE KING OF THE JEWS’” (καὶ ἦν ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς

αἰτίας αὐτοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένη: ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων). Matthew has a slightly different wording but same essential meaning of the accusation (27:37): “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Luke tones down the reference by just calling it an inscription (23:38): “There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’” John makes a much larger issue of the accusation plaque hung on the cross (19:19-22): “19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” 22 Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’” John calls attention to the fact that it was written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The public identification of the charge against a victim was common in Roman tradition. This posted charge was in Latin legal language called the *titulus*, the Greek equivalent that John uses is ὁ τίτλος. The English word ‘title’ comes from this. The synoptic gospel writers use non-legal terms to refer to the inscription: ἡ αἰτία - Matthew 27:37; ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας - Mark 15:26; ἐπιγραφή - Luke 23:38. But all four gospel writers make the point that from the Roman view Jesus was charged with treason against the state of Rome. Only Herod the Great, many years before, had been allowed by the Romans to use this very title, King of the Jews. For an individual to claim the title without Roman authorization was treason against Rome, which was a capital offense.

Mark then indicates that two thieves were executed with Jesus, one on each side of him: “And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left” (Καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστές, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ εὐωνύμων αὐτοῦ.). Matthew also calls them ‘thieves’ (λησταί), but Luke identifies them as “criminals” (κάκουργοι). John (19:18) only mentions that “There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.” Their identity remains masked. The two labels, λησταί and κάκουργοι, are broad terms more akin to the English words “rebels” and “criminals” and thus provide little indication of what had led to their execution. Some have speculated that they may have been linked to Barabbas who was also scheduled



to die, but no evidence exists to confirm this.

The final thrust of vv. 21-32 focus on the derision of Jesus by three groups of people: 1) the “passers-by” (v. 29-30); 2) the chief priests (vv. 31-32a); and the two thieves (v. 32b).



The individuals who merely passed by the crosses taunted Jesus with these words: “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” Matthew picks up Mark’s words and copies them almost exactly (27:40), but Luke only says, “And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him...” (23:35). He focuses blame on the leaders, rather than on the people generally. Somewhat surprisingly John mentions the taunts of neither the crowds nor the chief priests. He did, however, come down hard on these leaders when they pressed Pilate for Jesus (cf. 19:13-16).

The crowd’s taunts allude back to charges made earlier against Jesus, recorded in Mk. 14:58, “57 Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 58 ‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” 59 But even on this point their testimony did not agree.” The irony of these taunts is that such accusations had been dismissed by the Jewish leaders who tried Jesus at the outset. Angry crowds tend to totally ignore the truth, no matter how obvious it may be, especially if it stands in the way of the venting their anger.

The response of the chief priests is very similar (vv. 31-32a): “In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.”” Matthew (27:41-43) expands the Markan narrative: “41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42 “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” But Luke condenses it down with language more readily understood by his non-Jewish readers (23:35b): “but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’” At this point Luke also injects the mockery of the soldiers that is

not included by the other gospel writers (23:36): “36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ “

Mark then concludes with a short statement asserting the same attitude of the two thieves toward Jesus (15:32b): “Those who were crucified with him also taunted him” (καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν). As is typically the case, Matthew (27:44) picks up the Markan language and re-expresses it in his own way, but with the same meaning: “The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.” But Luke draws upon an additional tradition about one of the thieves and thus provides a different depiction (23:39-43): “39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ 42 Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ 43 He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ “ John makes no mention of the two men saying anything.

Mark moves from here to describe Jesus’ death in vv. 33-41.

Thus through Mark’s graphic language we are privileged to watch the tragic events of that infamous Friday. The other gospel writers provide us with similar but distinctive perspectives on these same events. Thus we profit greatly by having four viewpoints on what happened. In all of them we see Jesus enduring indescribable torture and humiliation. We see him in his full humanness, suffering horribly at the hands of both Jews and Romans. But before we strike out in anger toward those doing this to our Lord, we need remember the apostle Peter’s words



written many years later and with profound insight (1 Pet. 2:24):

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Thus on the eve of Easter celebration may we say with the apostle Paul (Gal. 6:14):

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Greek NT

16 Οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν πραιτώριον, καὶ συγκαλοῦσιν ὅλην τὴν σπεῖραν. 17 καὶ ἐνδιδύσκουσιν αὐτὸν πορφύραν καὶ περιτιθέασιν αὐτῷ πλέξαντες ἀκάνθινον στέφανον. 18 καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν· χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων. 19 καὶ ἔτυπτον αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν καλάμῳ καὶ ἐνέπτυσαν αὐτῷ καὶ τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνουν αὐτῷ. 20 καὶ ὅτε ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ, ἐξέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὴν πορφύραν καὶ ἐνέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἐξάγουσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα σταυρώσωσιν αὐτόν.

21 Καὶ ἀγγαρεύουσιν παράγοντά τινα Σίμωνα Κυρηναῖον ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ, τὸν πατέρα Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Ῥούφου, ἵνα ἄρῃ τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ. 22 Καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος. 23 καὶ ἐδίδουν αὐτῷ ἐσμυρνισμένον οἶνον· ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἔλαβεν. 24 Καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτόν καὶ διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ βάλλοντες κλῆρον ἐπ' αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρῃ. 25 ἦν δὲ ὥρα τρίτη καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν. 26 καὶ ἦν ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας αὐτοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένη· ὁ βασι-

NASB

16 The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. 17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18 and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. 20 After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.

21 They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. 22 Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. 24 And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. 25 It was the third hour when they crucified Him. 26 The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." 27 They crucified two robbers with

NRSV

16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18 And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20 After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27 And with him they crucified two ban-

NLT

16 The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's headquarters (called the Praetorium) and called out the entire regiment. 17 They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. 18 Then they saluted him and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" 19 And they struck him on the head with a reed stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. 20 When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

21 A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) 22 And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). 23 They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it. 24 Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.

λεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.
27 Καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστές, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ εὐωνύμων αὐτοῦ. *
29 Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινουῦντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις,
30 σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.
31 ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐμπαίζοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι.
32 ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν. καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν.

Him, one on His right and one on His left.
28 [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."] 29 Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,
30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"
31 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself.
32 "Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

26 A sign was fastened to the cross, announcing the charge against him. It read, "The King of the Jews."
27 Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.
29 The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days.
30 Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!"
31 The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself!
32 Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him.

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Greek NT Block Diagram

16 δὲ
1 Οἱ στρατιῶται ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν
ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς,
ὃ ἔστιν πραιτώριον,
καὶ
2 συγκαλοῦσιν ὅλην τὴν σπεῖραν.
17 καὶ
3 ἐνδιδύσκουσιν αὐτὸν πορφύραν
καὶ
4 περιτιθέασιν αὐτῷ
πλέξαντες ἀκάνθινον στέφανον·
18 καὶ
5 ἤρξαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν·
a χαῖρε,
βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων·
19 καὶ
6 ἔτυπον αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν
καλάμῳ
καὶ
7 ἐνέπτυν αὐτῷ
καὶ
8 τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα
προσεκύνουν αὐτῷ.
20 καὶ
9 ὅτε ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ,
ἐξέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὴν πορφύραν
καὶ
10 ἐνέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ.
Καὶ
11 ἐξάγουσιν αὐτὸν
ἵνα σταυρώσωσιν αὐτόν.
21 Καὶ
12 παράγοντά τινα
ἀγγαρεύουσιν...Σίμωνα
Κυρηναῖον
ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ,
τὸν πατέρα Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Ῥούφου,
ἵνα ἄρῃ τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ.
22 Καὶ
13 φέρουσιν αὐτὸν
ἐπὶ τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον,
ὃ ἔστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος.

23 καὶ
14 ἐδίδουν αὐτῷ ἐσμυρτισμένον οἶνον·

δὲ
ὃς οὐκ ἔλαβεν.

24 Καὶ
15 σταυροῦσιν αὐτὸν
καὶ
16 διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ
βάλλοντες κλῆρον
ἐπ' αὐτὰ
τίς τί ἄρη.

25 δὲ
17 ἦν ὥρα τρίτη
καὶ
18 ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν.

26 καὶ
19 ἦν ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας αὐτοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένη·
ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

27 Καὶ
20 σὺν αὐτῷ
σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστές,
ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν
καὶ
ἓνα ἐξ εὐωνύμων αὐτοῦ.

29 Καὶ
21 οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτόν
κινούμενοι τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν
καὶ
λέγοντες·

οὐὰ
ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν
καὶ
οἰκοδομῶν
ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις,

b
c 30 σῶσον σεαυτὸν
καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.

31

ὁμοίως
καὶ
ἐμπαίζοντες
πρὸς ἀλλήλους
μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων

22 οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς...ἔλεγον·

d
e
f

32

ἄλλους ἔσωσεν,
ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι·
ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω

νῦν
ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ,
ἵνα ἴδωμεν
καὶ
πιστεύσωμεν.

23

καὶ
οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι...ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν.
σὺν αὐτῷ

Semantic Diagram

		δὲ (v. 16)						
A--	1-----	1	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	Οἱ στρατιῶται
			καὶ					
	2-----	2	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ (v. 17)					
	1-----	3	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ					
B--	2-----	4	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ (v. 18)					
	3-----	5	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ (v. 19)					
I--	1-----	6	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ					
C--	2-----	7	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ					
	3-----	8	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ (v. 20)					
	1-----	9	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ					
D--	2-----	10	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			Καὶ					
	3-----	11	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			Καὶ (v. 21)					
	1-----	12	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			Καὶ (v. 22)					
A--	2-----	13	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ (v. 23)					
	3-----	14	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			Καὶ (v. 24)					
	1-----	15	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ					
B--	2-----	16	Pres	Dep	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			δὲ (v. 25)					
II--	1-----	17	Impf	---	Act	3	S	ὥρα
			καὶ					
	2-----	18	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	(Οἱ στρατιῶται)
			καὶ (v. 26)					
C--	3-----	19	Impf	---	Act	3	S	ἡ ἐπιγραφὴ
			Καὶ (v. 27 [28 not in mss])					
	4-----	20	Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	δύο ληστὰς
			Καὶ (v. 29)					
	1-----	21	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	οἱ παραπορευόμενοι
			ὁμοίως καὶ (v. 30-32a)					
D--	2-----	22	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς
			καὶ (v. 32b)					
	3-----	23	Impf	Act	Ind	3	P	οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι

Summary of the Rhetorical Structure

The thought flow in these verses revolves around two segments: 1) preparation for crucifixion and 2) the crucifixion of Jesus itself. The passage is made up of a series of short, punctual declarations mostly regarding the various actions of the Roman soldiers against Jesus (statements 1-16, 18; a total of 17 out of 23 statements). This gives the verses a distinctive pattern, rarely, if ever, found elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus says nothing in these verses; the only people whose voices are heard are his enemies. The soldiers salute him with mock greetings (# 5a). The crowds (#s21 b-c) and the chief priests (#s22 d-f) lash out at him in taunting sarcasm.

In the first segment, preparation for crucifixion (vv. 16-20), the focus is on the actions of the Roman soldiers and their brutalizing of Jesus. Jesus was courtyard of the governor's palace where the cohort of soldiers assembled to "have their fun" with this condemned prisoner before execution. With staccato action Mark describes a series of actions they did to Jesus: #3, clothed him in mock royalty; #4, put a crown of thorns on his head; #5, began mock salutes to him as king; #6 hit him on the head with a stick; #7, spit on him; #8, mocked worship of him. When finished they put his own clothes back on him and led him out to be crucified.

The second segment, the crucifixion itself (vv. 21-32), is made up of several movements. First, they compelled a Simon to carry the cross, since Jesus was physically unable to do so by this point. The procession then moves to Golgotha. They offered him "wine mixed with myrrh" to deaden the pain, but he refused it.

In the second movement, a simple but profound declaration (#15), Mark simply says, "They crucified him." As per the custom, they divided up his garments, since crucifixion victims were stripped naked in their execution. Mark then indicates that it was the "third hour" (a time calculation equalling mid-morning), and they crucified him. To complete this grizzly scene, he indicates that the charge against Jesus condemning him to death was that he was "the king of the Jews."

The third movement in the narrative focuses on the enemies watching this and bombasting Jesus verbally. Crowds of people walked by taunting him (#21). The chief priests ridiculed him (#22). Even the two thieves railed against him (#23).

Thus in highly pointed fashion Mark narrates for us the last hours of Jesus' earthly life. The scene is gruesome and disheartening. Just from the narration, we have no idea of the profound spiritual transactions taking place during all this, since this side is hidden from natural eyes. But Mark has repeatedly prepared his readers to anticipate an atoning, sacrificial death in Jerusalem. Now he carries us through the brutally human side of the events.

It is in the next scene, vv. 33-41, that we catch a glimpse into the spiritual side. Here Mark sketches out the painful, horrible death of Jesus on the cross.