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Sermon Brief
Text: Mark 15:16-32
Title: The Cross
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper. In Christian tradition this special observance focuses on the cross of Jesus Christ. The 'remembrance' of the cross by the supper is intended to lead us to reflect on just what our Savior did for us in his death. Christ's death on the cross is one of the cornerstones of Christian faith. Without Calvary there would be no Christianity. Without Jesus shed blood as the sacrificial Lamb of God we would have no forgiveness of sin before a holy God. We would still be spiritually death in our sins and guilt before the Heavenly Father.

But the cross, as critically important as it is, is not pretty. In fact, it is ugly and horrible. The Romans had devised this means of executing people in the ancient world, but considered it too inhumane for Roman citizens to be executed by crucifixion. Thus, it served the Romans as a means of brutalizing non-citizens with instilling stark terror in them when they watched people being crucified.

In our reflecting back on the cross may we recapture something of the harsh reality of that event. Then we will have a better understanding of just what Jesus did for us when He died for us on the cross. Listen to the words of Mark 15:16-32 as they describe this event:

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 bandits, one on his right and one on his left. 28¹ 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.²

¹Other ancient authorities add verse 28, *And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "And he was counted among the lawless."*

²15.16 Οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν πραιτώριον, καὶ συγκαλοῦσιν ὅλην τὴν σπεῖραν. 15.17 καὶ ἐνδιδύσκουσιν αὐτὸν πορφύραν καὶ περιτιθέασιν αὐτῷ πλέξαντες ἀκάνθινον στέφανον· 15.18 καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν, Χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων· 15.19 καὶ ἔτυπον αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν καλάμῳ καὶ ἐνέπτυσαν αὐτῷ καὶ τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνουν αὐτῷ. 15.20 καὶ ὅτε ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ, ἐξέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὴν πορφύραν καὶ ἐνέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐξάγουσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα σταυρώσωσιν αὐτόν.

15.21 Καὶ ἀγαρεῦουσιν παράγοντά τινα Σίμωνα Κυρηναῖον ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ, τὸν πατέρα Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Ρούφου, ἵνα ἄρῃ τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ. 15.22 καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος. 15.23 καὶ ἐδίδουν αὐτῷ ἐσμυρισμένον οἶνον· ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἔλαβεν. 15.24 καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτὸν καὶ διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ,

βάλλουτες κλῆρον ἐπ' αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρῃ.

15.25 ἦν δὲ ὥρα τρίτη καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν. 15.26 καὶ ἦν ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας αὐτοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένη, Ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. 15.27 Καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστὰς, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ εὐωνύμων αὐτοῦ. 15.29 Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινῶντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες, Οὐὰ ὃ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, 15.30 σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ. 15.31 ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐμπαίζοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλου μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον, Ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι· 15.32 ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν. καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν.

Mark provides a twofold picture. First he reminds us of how the soldiers brutalized Jesus before executing him in vv. 16-20. Matthew (27:27-31) and John (19:2-3) pick up on this and also include it in their narrative. Second, Mark then describes the execution of Jesus on the cross (vv. 21-32). The other three gospel writers also provide a depiction of this as well: Matthew (27:32-44); Luke 23:26-43); and John (19:17-27). Additionally all four writers describe Jesus' death in the pericope immediately following the execution narrative.³

Let's take a closer look at these two events described by Mark.

BODY

I. Brutalizing Jesus, vv. 16-20

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.

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

Mark 15:16-20

Matt. 27:27-31

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.

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 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).

In rather similar fashion to Mark, Matthew indicates 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).

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.

³Matt. 27:45-56; Mk. 15:33-41; Lk. 23:44-49; Jhn. 19:28-30.

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 literature 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.

As we prepare for the Supper, may we pause again to reflect just what Jesus endured for us.

II. Killing Jesus, vv. 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. 28⁴ 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.⁵

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This second narrative in Mark describes the execution of Jesus on the cross. Mark provides a fairly graphic depiction of this event, although he doesn't go into many of the grizzly details of how such an execution by crucifixion was done. His initial readership was all too familiar with these details and needed no reminder of just how brutal such a process was. Our world with its tendencies to 'romantize' Jesus' crucifixion by turning the cross into a beautiful piece of jewelry or necklace etc. has pretty much lost touch with the stark reality of death by crucifixion.

Note the points of Mark's depiction in comparison to the other gospel accounts.

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 Markan source. Each movement in this scene reveals some distinctives by each gospel writer.

Simon of Cyrene. 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 - ἠγγάρευσα; 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 with myrrh** (ἐσμυρισμένον 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](#)

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up and offering him sour wine [ὄξιος], 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.

Time of Crucifixion. 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 ἐωνύμων 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 as we prepare for the supper, 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.

CONCLUSION

The cross of Jesus. Our salvation! But Jesus’ horribly painful death. Calvary. Life for us, but death for our Lord. Golgotha. Cleansing and forgiveness for us. Sacrificial dying as the Lamb of God for Christ. Praise God for a divine love that reaches beyond human understanding: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

May we celebrate this wonderful, but horrible death through the Supper of the Lord.