

Crucifixion

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Bible Text: Mark 15:21-32
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Amen. Let's take our Bibles this morning and let's go to Mark 15 and you should have on your screen our series entitled "God's Unrelenting Love for His Children." We've already dealt with the denial which is one I added on early, and then Gethsemane, today will be crucifixion, next Sunday is death, on April 5 his burial, and then Easter Sunday and I'm praying we'll all be together and can rejoice in those great truths together, we'll have the resurrection. But this morning the crucifixion. We'll not actually get into where he departs and gives up his life but we will cover the text before we get there, alright?

Mark 15, beginning in verse 21 and going through verse 32.

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 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.

Alexander the Great was the king of the Macedon Empire. It was an ancient Greek kingdom. Alexander the Great never experienced one defeat. He spent his whole life as leader of this Greek Empire conquering other lands and before his death, he actually had conquered the known world. It was all his. Historians tell us that near his death he was planning his funeral and he had some rather unusual requests, one of which was in his

funeral procession when they put him in the coffin, he said, "I want my hands outside the coffin so the world will know I take nothing with me." Alexander the Great's point, "I gained the world and could do nothing at the end. I have nothing in my hands."

Cecil Rhodes was the Prime Minister of the British colony of South Africa, quite a politician and a leader and an adventurer and a conqueror, and he spent his life expanding the colony in South Africa and on the side making a fortune in diamonds. On Cecil Rhodes's deathbed, he said, "So little done, so much to do."

Isn't that true of all men who live for this life and live for this world? Aren't we, in one sense, all fakes? We think we can conquer and control and accumulate and possess and gain and like Alexander the Great our hands need to be outside our caskets at the funeral home because we're gonna take none of it with us. But what a sharp impacting contrast is our lives with our Lord's life. In John 17:4, our Lord said as he contemplated that he would soon die on the cross for his church, be buried and rise again, says this, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." Jesus says, "I go to My death and I don't lose anything. Through My death, I gained everything." When Jesus rose from the dead, he had conquered sin, hell, death and grave, and he had in one hand the title deed to planet earth and all that is, and in the other hand he had the title deed to men's souls. In his death, he gained it all. We think we can gain it all but we're fakes. When he lived and died, he did gain it all.

Now before we get to this text, a lot of things have already happened, of course. It's Friday morning. After the sun came up, of course, Jesus was arrested the night before, they'd been interrogating him and abusing him all night. As morning comes, the Jews bind Jesus and carry him to Pilate, the Roman Tetrarch of that region and, my, what a contentious relationship the Jews had under the Roman leader Pilate. His job was to keep everything in peace. That was big in the Roman Empire. Wherever you ruled in the Roman Empire and to Caesar, you better keep those peoples in peace and contentment and let everything be in harmony. Well, the Jews were a particularly difficult for Pilate. But they know, the Jews know they can't put anyone to death. This has to go through Rome.

So they're bringing Jesus to Pilate and therefore Pilate, they begin to accuse him and rail against him. Pilate then stops them and asks, "Are you the King of the Jews?" But at that time he had decided he would not speak again and the Bible says he gave them no further answer. And then Pilate said, "Well, okay, you know the custom. I deliver one of your Jewish brethren from prison every year during the Passover as a gesture of goodwill. Shall I deliver Jesus back to you? Shall I give him back to you?" And they said, "No, let's take Barabbas instead." And they start crying for Barabbas, a convicted murderer, and then they kept yelling, "But crucify Jesus! Crucify Jesus!"

They dressed him in purple to mock him because he claimed to be king of the Jews. They put a crown of thorns on his head to mock him. They spit in his face. They punched him with their fist. They beat him with a rod and they kept mockingly bowing in front of him saying, "Hail, king!" Then they lead him out to go to Calvary.

All of these events in this passage occur between 9 AM and 12 noon. I think one of the most interesting things about this as far as describing the actual crucifixion, none of the Gospel writers give us hardly any detail. There's very little. But I think that has a very distinct purpose. You see, Jesus was not coming to arouse our curiosity in the morbid facts of a crucifixion and the writers wrote not to arouse our curiosity but to assure our faith.

Crucifixion, we all know, was a horrifying death. It was a detestable and shameful event. The Romans said that no Roman could be crucified, it's too, it's too shameful, it's too, ah, ah, ah, vile of a death for any Roman to experience. Only the vilest criminals were crucified. But it is interesting that though the writers do not give hardly any detail of the actual crucifixion, they do give a lot of detail about all of those who participated in this event and I want us to look at those closely in just a moment.

Again, now we come to verse 22 in our text and the Bible says, "they brought Him to the place Golgotha." He is led down the Via Dolorosa, the road of sufferings it's called, and then they summon someone to carry his cross from him, Simon of Cyrene. Before I get there, though, one of the things Rome was trying to accomplish in, in requiring you to walk down the, the way of suffering with the cross on your back was because as you carried that cross, they in effect were saying that you were saying, "I'm guilty and Rome is just. I am guilty and Rome is just." But Christ was right the opposite. When he carried the cross, the proclamation was, "You're all guilty and I am just."

So here this one comes, Simon of Cyrene, and he's required to carry the cross of Jesus and Simon went to Jerusalem at that time to celebrate the Jewish Passover and there he finds the Passover Lamb but he didn't know it. Let's remind ourselves as we see Jesus walking down the Via Dolorosa and Simon of Cyrene carrying his cross, that the cross event was not something that just came up. The plan to put Christ on the cross by the heavenly Father was planned in eternity past. It was accepted and committed to by God the Son, Jesus Christ, in eternity past. It continued all throughout human history. There's a red river of redemption that flows through the pages of the Old Testament. As I've said many times, the cross is not an ambulance sent to the scene of an accident, it's the pathway that began in eternity and that all must find to find eternal life. The old song says, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there's no other way but this. I will never catch sight of the gates of light, if the way of the cross I miss."

Golgotha is the name of the hill where he's to be crucified. That's the Aramaic word. The Latin word is Calvary. We get our English word from that. It's a hill about one mile outside of the city gate. The text literally said he was taken out of the city. There's a real significance there because if you were spiritually unclean, then you had to be taken out of the city and Jesus is the Lamb who would take on all of our uncleanness. So he's taken away as an outcast.

In verse 23 they give him wine mixed with myrrh, the Bible says. It's actually a narcotic. This was not an act of mercy. This was to make the soldier's job easier as they laid him

down, his back already like hamburger meat, if you will, from the beating he's taken, and now they've gotta nail nails through his hand and drive nails through his feet, and they would give these criminals convicted of this execution a, a narcotic to make it easier on them, that they would not struggle violently as the nails were driven through hands and feet. Interestingly, though, the Bible text tells us here in verse 23 that Jesus didn't take it. He didn't drink it. I think it's because the full blow of suffering and death was to be his because he was dying and suffering for us in our place.

Look at verse 24, "And they crucified Him." They crucified him. Three words. Basically that's all it says, three words. Three words for the most enormously significant event in all time.

The Bible says the soldiers in verse 24 gambled for his clothes. This fulfilled Psalm 22:18, "And they divided My garments among them, for My clothing they cast lots."

In verse 25, the Bible says it's the third hour, that would correspond to our 9 AM. Then in verse 26, the Bible says there's a, a placard on the vertical beam of the cross above Jesus' head that says, "This is the King of the Jews." The Bible tells us it was written in Latin, it was written in Greek, and in Aramaic. Pilate had this done. The Roman governor had this done. You see, the religious leaders had just won a victory over Pilate. Again in their contention, they always were pushing stuff. A very contentious relationship and Pilate would push back and he liked to jab at each other and cut at each other, and this was Pilate's way to get back at the religious authorities to say, "This is your king. A humbled, weak, dying, shameful king. King of the Jews."

We go on to verse 32, the last part of the Gospel writer's elaborate a little bit more, but those two robbers crucified with him were also railing insults against him. Isaiah 53:12 says, "And He was numbered with transgressors," fulfilling that part of prophecy.

And then we come to verses 29 through, ah, 30, and the Bible says everyone's joining in. Now notice again how much emphasis is put on what other people are doing around the cross, but very little about Jesus and what he's enduring on the cross. So others are joining in and they use, use that word in verse 29, "Ha!" That's the way it's translated in the New American Standard. It's like, "A-ha! Look at you, ah, the one that said this and said that. The one that claimed this and claimed that. Look at you!" It's an exclamation of scorn and glee and condemnation. It's the sense that they, even the people, the common people, had victory over Jesus. Mind you that some of these claimed to worship him when he was feeding them, when he was healing their diseases, but now they just go along. The pack mentality. Join the crowd. Condemning Jesus.

Then the religious leaders in verses 31 and 32 says, "In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him," now notice, "among themselves." They didn't say this to others. They're talking just among themselves and saying, "He saved others, He cannot save Himself. Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" It's a lie. He came down from the cross, they wouldn't believe. They saw his miracles. They saw his power. And you know, as we look

at all of these people at the cross, these unbelievers, there's a category here that represents every single person who's ever lived. Either, either presently or in the past, you fit one of the categories of these who were at the cross.

So let's look at the five different groups, the five groups of participants who were at the cross on this day. First of all, let's notice there was a forced unbeliever, Simon of Cyrene. As I said before, here's Simon of Cyrene just comes to Jerusalem. He may not have known hardly anything about this Jesus. He may not have ever heard his name. He's from Africa. He, he wasn't from the regions Jesus had ministered to during his earthly ministry and all of a sudden he's in the wrong place at the wrong time, or in God's providence he was at the right place at the right time, and the Roman soldiers require him to carry Jesus' cross beam because he can't carry it himself. He was forced into facing Jesus Christ. It wasn't his choice, it just happened, and maybe that's where some of you are today. You're, you're an unbeliever and you're hearing about Jesus Christ and you've heard about Jesus Christ and you're hearing about him now, but up to this point it's, you, you've been a forced unbeliever. You don't really want to go to church, your wife nags you into going to church. You don't really want to go to church, mom and dad make you come to church. Or a friend's been pushing you so you're obligated to come, and maybe that's why you're sitting there in front of your television or computer screen this morning, somebody else asked you, encouraged you, or in the case of children, required you to be there and right now you're a forced unbeliever but now you're hearing of Christ and now your responsibility is greater. Simon of Cyrene was forced into being confronted with Jesus Christ.

But there's a glory in this, though. This is not the end of Simon's story. In Acts 11, many Cyrenians are stated as those who were becoming believers in Jesus Christ and in Romans 16:13 the Bible says, "Greet Rufus, outstanding in the Lord and his mother and mine." Rufus was Simon's son. So we have every confidence to believe that this one who was not looking to become a believer, who was not planning to give his life to Christ, but somebody, somebody made sure that he heard and he became a believer. And that's the way some of you are. God ordained the events in Simon's life but in some of your lives, God's ordaining your mom and dad, or a friend, or a spouse, or a work associate and you now see and hear of Jesus.

Secondly, not only a forced unbeliever, notice there are ignorant unbelievers represented by the soldiers. These are hardened men. These are calloused men. These are brutal men. They had no, no thought of Jesus, no heart for Jesus, no love for Jesus. He was just the next guy to be crucified and these guys did it with delight, but they were ignorant. They did not know who he was. They had not heard the preaching of the prophets. They did not have the Scriptures like the Jews had. Up to this point, they were ignorant. On this day, they did the vilest deed that's ever been done of all of human history. They, they exhibited the utter depth of human depravity of crucifying the Son of God, but they were ignorant. They had not been taught and I thought how tragic today so many even down here in the Bible Belt have been taught little and much of what they taught is wrong. But this morning you're hearing that there is one and his name is Jesus. He came in love, in unrelenting love of God for his children, and he came to bear a cross and pay for our sins,

and so you can pledge ignorance no more. You may be a forced unbeliever or an ignorant unbeliever but somebody made sure you heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ so you cannot say, "No man cared for my soul." Somebody cares for your soul.

"The Roman soldiers shook the dice,
As for the stake they vied.
Quite unaware that on the cross,
The world's Redeemer died.
But in the circus of our day,
We thoughtless act the clown.
While God is speeding up his work,
To ring time's curtain down.
The Roman soldiers shook the dice,
As for the stake they vied.
Are we as unconcerned as they,
That Christ for us has died?"

Dear Sir, Ma'am, young person, do you care he died for you? He gave his life to save you. You can pledge or plead ignorance no longer. You have a choice to make.

There's a glory here also, look at verse 39 of our text, "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" So as all likelihood, this man's become a true believer in Jesus Christ. He went from total, absolute, utter disdain for Jesus, had no thought of him, no love for him, he'd never heard of him, he's just a criminal, "I'm just gonna nail him to a cross like I did the others who were executed," but something happened and his heart was changed and this day, this morning, God's changing some of your hearts. You're beginning to sense, "I need Him. I need forgiveness. I need cleansing. I need hope. I need a new life." He gives it all and you need to come to Christ like this formerly ignorant soldier who before Jesus came to crucifixion knew nothing of him.

Then there's, thirdly, the knowledgeable unbeliever. The knowledgeable unbeliever represented by the robbers that were crucified with him. The last part of verse 32 tells us that they were both hurling insults at him. Their wicked hearts perceived his right, life rather as righteous and holy and therefore, in contrast, they saw themselves as condemned and unholy. And that's the way it also always is with Jesus. You can't take into your mind and contemplate in your heart the teaching of Christ without also seeing the contrast to your own condition before him, that you're unclean and he's clean. You're holy, he's holy and you're unholy. He's righteous, you're unrighteous. He's pure, you're impure. He's clean, you're unclean. And these robbers evidently had that knowledge as they're standing there and they're watching there, hanging there with him. They're watching him and they're seeing the way he suffered and they're seeing the countenance, and they're seeing he's just different. There's something about him that's just different and they know that he is, in some way, God's sent Savior for mankind.

Luke 23 tells us that one of the two robbers became a repentant and a believer on this day. He yelled to the other robber, friend up there, he said, "We're getting what we deserve. This man's done nothing wrong." How did that happen? The only way you can explain it is the Holy Spirit of God enabled them to grasp, to have a knowledge this is God's help, this is God's Savior. And after that one turned and said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus said, "How about I do a little better than that? Let's don't wait for the future kingdom. That's coming, it's certain, but how about today Me and you just go to paradise?" I'll tell you, that's, that's glory, that's glory, that's glory. A thief on the cross could do nothing, could do nothing, could do nothing but repent and believe and Jesus said, "That's good enough. Let's go to paradise today, Me and you."

I, did you know, I, I've been a preacher a long time so I've heard a lot of preacher stories but can you imagine what happened when Jesus showed up before the Father to present his blood on the, the holy mercy seat of heaven and the Father said, "Who You got with You?" And he said, "Here's my first one." "Well, what is, who is he and what's he done?" "He's just, he's just a filthy vile robber but I cleaned him up and brought him all the way home today." Today. And you can too. Christ will save you. Christ will forgive you. Christ will give you hope. Christ will give you love. Christ will give you peace. Christ will cleanse your sin just like he did this robber. This robber who had some knowledge, "This was the holy one, this is true, this man's right," and he came to Christ.

Fourthly, there were fickle unbelievers here. In our Bible Belt culture, do we not have a lot of this all around us? Look at verse 29, those who were passerbys, those who were passing by were hurling. Actually, the word means blaspheming. Hurling abuse at him, wagging their heads. They're just joining in the, the fray and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" These passing by hurling abuse at him, these unbelievers doubtlessly included so many of those in Judea and Galilee that saw his miracles, that received his healings, that ate the miraculous food he provided and they loved him for that, but now he's doing nothing to appease their fleshly wants and desires. Now he's hanging on a cross. This is spiritual work and they're not spiritual men.

That's the way so many are today, put on a circus in the church and they'll show up. Have a lot of fun at the church and they'll show up and that's not always wrong. Put on a Fourth of July picnic and we'll show up. And by the way, we're glad you show up and you're always loved, and you're always welcome, but here's what I'm saying: are you only interested when your fleshly carnal appetites are satisfied? Is there any part of you today that says, "I'll take Christ. I'll believe on Christ. I'll embrace Christ as both my Savior. I need His forgiveness but now my Lord, the One who tells me how I'm to live and how I'm to conduct my life." So many today are like this. Make the church worldly and I'm in.

Well, there's a glory here. In Acts 2, Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost and 3,000 of the common folks in this, in the city that day were converted. In later days, thousands more converted, doubtlessly some of the very same ones who hurled abuse at him when he was dying on the cross. He'll save you. Have you been a fickle unbeliever? "Oh, I'll come. I'll show up. I'll attend a church if it's fun. Put on a circus, put on a show and I'll

come." You're lost. You're an unbeliever. You need today to come to Christ, receive him as your Lord and Savior, trust in him and him alone to save you and to be the Master and Lord of your life.

Lastly, the last category of persons that you either presently are in or at one time were one of, that's the religious unbelievers represented, of course, by the religious leaders. Remember in verse 31 they're talking among themselves and say, "Well, if He can save Himself, if He can fix Himself from this problem, then we'll believe on Him." Liars. Here's the problem that religious people have and, by the way, I'm talking about religious Baptists, religious Methodists, religious Assembly of God, religious Pentecostals, religious Catholics and religious Presbyterians, and religious Episcopalians. Here's what, here's what happens: you own your religion, you're comfortable in your religion, you control your religion, it's what you want, it's what you've chosen, it's what maybe your forefathers have chosen and you don't want anybody to shake you out of what your comfortable with, and I'm telling you Jesus Christ came into this world to shake everything including your false hope in religion. A lot of people are unbelievers because they've inoculated themselves with a narcotic of becoming religious and they've never come to repent of sins and trust – listen – in Christ and Christ alone as their salvation. Religious unbelievers. "Well, if it'll do this, I'll join up. Well, if it's like this, I'll..." That's what the religious leaders are doing. No, just come to Christ and receive him like he is.

But the glory in Acts 6:7, "And the word of God kept spreading and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." Even these hardened, callous, religious hypocrites who helped nail Christ to the cross, I don't know which particular ones but they were some of the leaders, the priests who were becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. I don't know about you, but I'm really grateful that Jesus saves sinners, all kinds of sinners. Matter of fact, that's the only kind of people he saves is sinners. Maybe you've been a religious unbeliever, a pretender and today you need to come to know Jesus Christ.

I remember so clearly in the early days of God reforming our church to be more healthy at our understanding of the Gospel and our understanding of what repentance is and what conversion is, I remember in those days just a steady stream, it wasn't a flood but there was a steady stream of some of our most faithful churchgoers who would come and say, "Pastor, I believe six months ago I was converted. Pastor, I believe last year when you were preaching that series, I came to faith in Christ." And one by one by one by one we saw people go from being religious unbelievers to believers, and it's really the key to the strength of Grace Life Church today. It's the key to the strength of any church and that's a truly regenerate membership.

Are you an unbeliever today? You need to understand that, in a figure of speech and it is a true true biblical statement, your sin nailed Jesus to the cross. Was it for crimes that I had done, the songwriter said. Was it for crimes that I had done, he groaned upon the tree? Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree. Our sins were laid on him.

I remember reading about a pastor who was preaching on the crucifixion and he, um, well, just had it on his heart and mind. That's what I do. Every, every Saturday night I

take my notes, I go to bed, I go over them, I pray, I think about them. And that night he dreamed about the crucifixion and he saw himself there and he was some distance away and he's seeing his Savior dying on the cross and that preacher said, "In my dream I thought, 'No, no, no! This can't be! Stop! Don't do this!'" And he said, "I, I ran toward the cross and I grabbed that centurion and I yanked him around and when he turned around, that was my face. I had nailed him to the cross." Your sins is why he died. He came, he suffered, he bled and died for you as another statement, the crowning statement of God's unrelenting love for his children. His love is that great.