

“Witnesses to the Crucifixion”
Mark 15:27-41
(Preached at Trinity, September 2, 2015)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The scene of the crucifixion was one bustling with activity. We’ve witnessed the reaction of the many people as they gazed upon the crucified Christ.
 - A. Many people passed by with taunts and mockery – **See Verses 29-30**
 - B. The religious leaders with glee and sweet success also mocked Him.
See Verses 31-32
 - C. Luke tells us the military joined the mockery
Luke 23:36-37 – “And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.”
 - D. Even the criminals mocked Jesus. Even in the condemnation of our sin, we justify ourselves.
Luke 23:39 NAU - "One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"
2. But when the darkness fell the scene became much more subdued.
 - A. During these three hours we have no record of Jesus speaking a single word
 - B. The text tells us the crowd was standing there in the twilight
 - C. There is no indication that that chief priests, scribes, and elders were still watching.
3. Tonight, I want to direct your attention to these witnesses to the crucifixion. Some were greatly affected by what they saw that afternoon almost 2000 years ago. Others remained unaffected. As I’ve done in my previous sermons, I’ll draw from Mark as well as Matthew and Luke in order to witness the full account.
 - I. The dying thief on the cross – Mark records that Jesus was crucified between two thieves
Mark 15:27 NAU - "They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left."
 - A. Only in the Gospel of Luke do we find one of them repenting before Jesus
Luke 23:39-43 NAU - "One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" ⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

1. At first both thieves railed against Jesus
Matthew 27:44 NAU - " The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words."
 2. Finally, one of the thieves grew silent and ceased to speak against Jesus and repented
 3. His words reveal much
"Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."
 - a. He recognized his sin and owned his guilt and just condemnation
 - b. He recognized the excellence of Christ
 - c. He believed Jesus to be who He said He was and trusted Him for salvation
"Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"
 - d. He rebuked his partner in crime – He could no longer bear to hear blasphemy spoken against Christ
"But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God"
- B. We find by the words of Christ that his conversion was genuine
"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."
1. What could explain such a sudden and profound change of mind? Only the grace and mercy of God
 2. And we can see the surety of our presence with Christ upon death

II. The Centurion

Mark 15:39 NAU - "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!"

Matthew 27:54 NAU - " Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Luke 23:47 NAU - "Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent."

- A. The Centurion had placed there to guard the site of the crucifixion
1. He had witnessed the demeanor of Jesus in the face of the wicked taunts
Isaiah 53:7 NAU - "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth."
 2. He had heard Jesus' words of forgiveness
Luke 23:34 NAU - "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
 3. He had heard the confident declaration of Jesus to the thief
"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."
 4. He had witnessed the darkness and earthquake

- B. In all likelihood God used these things as well as the testimony of Christ to save him.
1. Luke records that he glorified God in what he witnessed and recognized the righteousness of Jesus
Luke 23:47 – “Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.”
 2. He trusted the testimony of Christ
“Truly this was the Son of God.”
- C. The centurion would have been a Roman – the Gentiles were already being brought in even as the Jews were rejecting Him
- III. Luke records a great many others were affected
Luke 23:48 NAU - "And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, *began* to return, beating their breasts."
- A. “Beating their breasts” speaks of great sorrow and anguish.
1. Was their sorrow over the realization that an innocent man had been put to death – were they smitten by the injustice and cruelty of their mocking?
 2. Was it because of the fearful of the signs of God’s mighty power – who shall resist His judgment
 3. They had come to Calvary to see a spectacle – a festive spirit prevailed
Now they returned to Jerusalem weeping with sorrow.
- B. Few went away that day unaffected by what they saw
1. Even if they were not converted they knew that something profound had happened
 2. This might have been the beginning of genuine conviction of sin
 3. This might explain the great responsiveness of the multitudes to the preaching of Peter
Acts 2:22-23 NAU - "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death."
Acts 2:37 NAU - "Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"
 4. This might explain the 3000 souls saved on the day of Pentecost
Acts 2:41 NAU - "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."
 5. We must never doubt the power of the cross of Christ
- IV. The women
Mark 15:40-41 NAU - "There were also *some* women looking on from a distance, among whom *were* Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and *there were* many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem."
Matthew 27:55-56 NAU - " Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. ⁵⁶ Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee."

- A. At first glance it might appear that these ladies were watching from a distance because they feared being identified with Jesus
1. This certainly seemed the case with the Apostles except John – they all forsook Jesus and fled
 2. John’s Gospel dispels any thought of any fear in these women
John 19:25-26 NAU - "But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"
- B. Some might try to diminish the role of women in the Kingdom – what a foolish idea
1. These women demonstrated great courage staying near Jesus until the end
 2. The text tells us they were very much a part of His ministry, traveling with Him and ministering to Him.
Mark 15:40-41 NAU - "There were also *some* women looking on from a distance, among whom *were* Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and *there were* many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem."
 3. Don’t forget it was the women who served Jesus even after His death
Mark 15:47-16:1 NAU - " Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joses were looking on *to see* where He was laid. ^{NAU} **Mark 16:1** When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him."
 4. The women demonstrated their love for Christ by serving Him – and perfect love casts out all fear
 5. They were among the chief witnesses to what took place at Calvary
- V. Joseph of Arimathea
- A. Upon the death of Jesus, who would be left to bury Him?
1. The disciples had fled
 2. John had departed to take Mary to his home – Although apparently he had returned to see the spear thrust into Jesus side – he would have had little time to prepare for the burial of Jesus.
- B. Joseph of Arimathea came forward
Mark 15:43 NAU - " Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus."
1. He was a wealthy man and owned the place of his own burial
 2. He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin
Luke 23:50-51 NAU - " And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man ⁵¹ (he had not consented to their plan and action), *a man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God"

3. Previously he had followed Jesus secretly
John 19:38 NAU - "After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret *one* for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body."
 The same is true of Nicodemus
John 19:39-40 NAU - " Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews."
4. Now he demonstrated great courage and boldness – he defied the Sanhedrin and now identified himself as a disciple of Christ
 He would be dismissed from the Sanhedrin and banned from the synagogue.
Matthew 10:33 NAU - "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

VI. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees

- A. Their unbelief continued to condemn them
 1. They feared losing their position – losing their hold upon the people
 2. They came to Pilate insisting that Jesus was an imposter and demanded a guard be placed at the tomb
Matthew 27:62-64 NAU - "Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, ⁶³ and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am to* rise again.' ⁶⁴
 "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."
 3. They unwittingly provided absolute testimony to the resurrection
- B. The wickedness of human unbelief will go unchanged unless God does a supernatural. In spite of the miracles they witnessed they were unaffected.

Conclusion:

There are really only two kinds of people in the world.

- There are those who continue in unbelief, intoxicated by their sin, and ruled by their own flesh. They have no room for Christ.
- Then there are those like the thief on the cross who see their own guilt and condemnation and the excellence of Christ. Like the Centurion they believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. Like the women, they spend their lives in service to Christ. Like Joseph of Arimathea they give extravagantly in spite of personal risk.

Which group are you a part of?