



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Jesus Seals the New Covenant **Study Scripture: Mark 15:6-15, 25-26, 33-39**

Lesson 2, June 8, 2019

Key Verse

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

Mark 15:39

INTRODUCTION

We are now looking at the unfolding of the greatest possible Love story in the world. We are also looking at this matter of choice. Everyone who has ever lived in the world over the years have always been called on to make choices. Many of them make choices without considering the realities of the world and they do not think of the effect their choices will have on them, on others, and in history.

We are also now looking as far as we can tell what really happened to Jesus from the perspective of Jesus as He looked down on the people around Him, for around the Cross were groups of individuals who reacted to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ in different ways.

Note therefore that all these groups have different motivations and had made different choices which were life altering and salvation altering.

We should pay special attention to these motivations and choices for we too are called on to make choices which are life altering for us and which will determine our eternal destiny. The problem for people of that time and also for us is that the interpretation of events occurring then had been quite erroneous and they were basing their decisions and choices on the wrong facts. Instead of depending on the truth of Scripture they had accepted the teachings of false teachers.

There were Roman soldiers who carried out the actual crucifixion, some revolutionaries and robbers that were crucified with Jesus, passersby going by the Cross remembering that Jesus had made great claims about himself but had now been caught and punished by the authorities, the chief priests and scribes who have been frightened by Jesus were now mocking Jesus, and the great crowd of the women that had been followers of Jesus. We might add to this list the man Simon of Cyrene who had carried the cross for Jesus, and possibly Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who might because of fear had from afar been watching to intervene after Jesus had died. We are not completely sure about this latter group for the Scriptures are silent on this.

But we must now understand, even though many of them at that time did not, that there was a drama of great and incredible significance occurring. The drama of the crucifixion unfolding before their eyes shrouded the higher drama of love that was being played out. There was much more going on there than met the eye and this something has a great deal to do with us.

Mark is now telling us about the story of humanity which began in the Garden of Eden and was now reaching its climax on the hill of Golgotha.

Genesis 3: 17-19 had told us about the curse that had come on the earth and “thorns’ that would come on the Earth. Now the Savior would have to wear a “crown of thorns”, even after the agony of sin for which He had not been guilty, without any pain relieving assistance from either the Father, Angels, disciples, sour wine, or anything else.

Jesus would have to bear the weight alone. His friends, the leadership of the nation, the priests of His Temple, the Jewish courts, the Roman courts, had all forsaken Him. Even the sun had refused to shine or warm Jesus as He was dying. Ultimately God the Father was silent and in lonely anguish Jesus cried, *“My God, God, why have you forsaken me?”*

But one writer reminds us:

“The Christ, in the mind of Israel, was supposed to rid the land of Roman crosses, not die on one of them. Jesus failed to live up to the expectations of his countrymen, and they find in him an outlet for their bitter frustrations. A crucified Christ was a contradiction in terms. (“BUT”, I will insert this “but”) If Jesus didn't die the way he died he wouldn't have died for the sins of humanity. The way of humanity is to retaliate- if only in one's heart, curse for curse, insult for insult. You send your suicide bombers to me; I send my tanks to you. I send my tanks to you; you send your suicide bombers to me. That's how evil stays in circulation. What does Jesus do? The apostle Peter comments:

“And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously”. (1 Peter 1:23).

The Romans and Jews hurl their abuse at him, but it does not return. Instead as He hangs on the cross, he absorbs their abuse into the purity of his being”.

Jesus therefore, as Scripture had predicted has to do what has to be done to seal the New Covenant. He would have to remove the curse from the Earth.

The hectic last day of the earthly life of Jesus is fast approaching its climax, crucifixion on the cross at Calvary. In the final hours before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, into that evening the

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four gospels fit the following components: the Passover meal; inauguration of Communion, the exposure of Judas; the action of Satan; the confrontation of Peter about his denial; the discussion among the apostles about who of them will be the greatest; the unparalleled act of washing their feet; the teaching of John 13 to 16, which includes the promise of the Holy Spirit and persecution; the prayer of Jesus in John 17, and some other warnings to the apostles.

While most in Israel including the disciples looked to the political and economic aspects of Messiah's rule, the New Covenant was essentially spiritual (Jer. 31:31-34) and the manner of its ratification was unpalatable to the disciples (Matt. 16:21-23) and Israel at large. Jesus nevertheless had on a number of occasions prophesied His arrest, physical abuse, crucifixion at the hands of Jews and Gentiles. On each of these occasions He also prophesied His resurrection.

The corrupt and carnal religious and political leadership of Israel had long plotted to murder Jesus who they saw as a threat to their privileged position, ie. economic, social and religious. Strategically they decided to do the dirty deed after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, fearing a riot, given Jesus' popularity with some and the restive atmosphere in Jerusalem at these feasts. As it turned out however, they did end up killing Jesus on the Feast day. This was exactly as the Scriptures had predicted.

Note, men may plot and scheme but God controls the agenda and timing of events and the wrath of men will praise God.

The current plot was to arrest Jesus, stage a fake trial and blackmail the Roman governor into passing the death sentence, crucifixion on Jesus. The Romans allowed some autonomy to the local authorities but reserved decisions on capital punishment to themselves.

Jesus was symbolically anointed for His burial earlier, (Mark 14:3-8; Matt. 26:6-12). Then a willing and culpable Judas yielded to Satan and plotted with Jesus' enemies to betray Him; meanwhile unbeknownst to them, they were carrying out the plan of God, which called for the spotless *Lamb of God* to be slain for the sins of the world. These evil men acted on their own interest and volition and are fully responsible for the dastardly deed.

As events moved toward Jesus' trial, abuse, and crucifixion, He recoiled from the physical and spiritual horror of being abandoned by the Father and in deep distress prayed to His Father. He felt all the fear that any person would have when facing execution (14:35, 36). He also knew His death was to be a sacrifice for many (10:45; 14:22-25).

The treacherous disciple, Judas arrived on queue to betray Jesus to accompanying Roman soldiers and Temple police. This he did with a kiss of friendship; the armed party then arrested Jesus and led Him away to trial. His disciples fled in all directions (Zech.13:7) for their safety, though Peter followed the arresting party at a distance. Jesus could have destroyed all those who had come to arrest Him, but He calmly and with a determined purpose went along, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled (Isa. 53:7).

To this point, Jesus' sufferings had been anticipatory and psychological. Now with His arrest He would experience increasing physical pain which would peak with crucifixion. As the faithful Servant of the Lord who came to do His Father's will, His sufferings continued to increase.

This travesty of justice, Jesus' so-called trials were both religious and civil as He faced those authorities in six sessions in the same twenty-four hour period, along with continuing physical abuse.

Here is a summary of Jesus' trials:

Religious trial before:

1. Annas – High Priest (John 18:12-14, 19-24)
2. Caiaphas - High Priest (Matt. 26:57-68; Mk 14:53-65; Lk 22:54, 63-65)
3. Sanhedrin – Ruling Council (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71)

Civil Trial before:

1. Pilate – Roman governor of Judea (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38)
2. Herod Antipas - Roman governor of Galilee (Luke 23:6-12)
3. Pilate - Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39—19:16

The other gospel accounts of Jesus' farcical trials reveal a rogues gallery of evil individuals driven by ambition, fear, jealousy, curiosity and expediency, Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, Barabbas and Pilate. The so-called witnesses for the prosecution contradicted each other and those presiding were completely befuddled by Jesus refusal to answer their questions or defend Himself; except to acknowledge that yes He is the Messiah, and to enlighten Pilate that the power of life and death did not rest with him Pilate.

The Jewish legal system on paper was well balanced and the objective justice. In the case of Jesus however there was not even a token attempt at Justice but a gross miscarriage. The whole intent of the trial was to somehow put a veneer of justice on murder. We are told that according to Jewish law at the time:

- **All criminal trials must begin and end in the daylight; this one was held at night.**
- **Criminal cases could not be tried during the Passover season but this one was held breaking all the rules.**
- **Only a *not guilty* verdict could be issued on the day of the trial; guilty verdicts had to wait one night to allow time for feelings of mercy to arise.**
- **Only decisions made in the official meeting place of the Sanhedrin were valid; this trial took place in the personal home of Caiaphas.**
 - Evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses separately examined and not having contact with each other; this testimony was engineered and contradictory.
- **Perjury was punishable by death; obviously, these false witnesses were not so punished.**
 - The trial always began by presenting evidence for the innocence of the accused, before any evidence of guilt was presented.

At the point of today's Text we reach the penultimate incident in Jesus' earthly life. Jesus is appearing before Pilate the Roman governor but the reality is that Pilate is before Jesus and he faces the ultimate choice of all human beings; what will you do with Jesus?

Luke 23:2 informs us of the charges brought by the Jewish leadership to Pilate against Jesus: "And

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they began to accuse Him, saying,

“We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is ^[a]Christ, a King.”

These last two were definitely capital offences in Roman law.

The Governor was fully convinced of Jesus' innocence but tried a number of ploys to avoid responsibility for making a decision on Jesus. The fact is, everyone must and does make a decision about Jesus, wittingly or not!

THE TEXT

Verses 1 – 5. Having appeared before “the high priest ... and ... all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes” (Mark 14:53), Jesus has been convicted of blasphemy (14:61- 64). The problem for the council was that blasphemy was not a crime by Roman law and the Governor would not authorize Jesus' execution on this ground.

... chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation ... we can be sure this issue was at the top of the agenda at this emergency, morning meeting.

The council needed to trump-up some other charge that carried the death penalty and soon; Roman courts convened in the morning. The charges they brought were certainly serious, (*“We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is ^[a]Christ, a King.”*).

...Are You the King of the Jews?... battered and bruised Jesus looked anything but a king and the question is sarcastic. Still, the question showed that the Jews had charged Jesus with claiming to be a king. Claiming to be a king was tantamount to treason against Caesar and was a capital offense.

Jesus admitted that He was the King of the Jews (Matt. 27:11) but He implied that He was a different kind of king than Pilate thought John wrote that Pilate discussed the nature of Jesus' kingship with Him further and concluded that Jesus was not guilty of treason (John 18:34-38).

Verse 6. *... released unto them one prisoner...* Rome wants peace in its provinces. To that end, Roman governors such as Pilate had established a practice at Passover of granting a pardon to one prisoner awaiting execution for crimes against Rome (18:39). The practice was totally political and intended to establish goodwill between Rome and the Jewish people during their most sacred annual feast.

Verse 7. *And there was one named Barabbas,* Barabbas was one of the popular Jewish freedom fighters whom the Romans had imprisoned for participating in an insurrection. Violent movements to overthrow Roman power occurred repeatedly in Judea of the first century AD.

Barabbas had also committed robbery, probably as part of his insurrection (John 18:40). Mark's use of the definite article suggests this revolt was very significant.

The contrast with Jesus could hardly be greater! For guilty Barabbas to be executed was understandable as far as Rome was concerned. (see also Matthew 27:16; Luke 23:19).

Verse 8. ... *the multitude*.. Some think this crowd was made up of Barabbas' friends waiting for this annual opportunity, while some were false witnesses and others involved in the night trials and others just there for the spectacle. There is no indication in the Text that they had come because they knew of Jesus' arrest or because they wanted to observe the outcome of His trial. They appear to have been there for reasons unrelated to Jesus.

To call on Pilate *to do as he had ever done unto them* was to request him to act on the custom of releasing a prisoner for Passover (Mark 15:6, Luke 23:17).

Verse 9. At this point, Pilate had already declared Jesus innocent (Luke 23:4, 13–16; John 19:12). Perhaps knowing that Jesus was popular with many who were visiting Jerusalem, Pilate offered to release Jesus according to custom. He of course was not about to do the Jewish leadership any favors. Pilate had shown little regard for Jewish religious sensibilities and they in turn would not hesitate to send negative reports of him to Caesar.

The governor's sarcasm in referring to Jesus as *King of the Jews* reflects Pilate's own questions of John 18:33, 37; Jesus' response affirmed His role as king but also affirmed that His "*kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36, 37). Pilate ignored that part and stuck with *King of the Jews*.

Pilate's use of that title for the abused man standing before him (Mark 14:65; Luke 23:11) seemed designed to needle those who brought Jesus to him. The council clearly despised Jesus, so calling Him their king was a way for Pilate to show his disregard for their nationalistic concerns.

Verse 10. ... *the chief priests had delivered him for envy*. Pilate recognized the chief priests' motives in arresting Jesus as being self-seeking rather than loyalty to Rome. He hoped to frustrate the chief priests by getting the people to request the release of someone Pilate viewed as innocent; while at the same time keeping a real criminal such as Barabbas off the street. He evidently believed that Jesus had the greater popular following and would be the people's choice.

Matthew wrote that Pilate gave the people the choice of Jesus or Barabbas (Matt. 27:17).

Verse 11. ... *the chief priests moved the people*... Many of the people in the crowd were residents of Jerusalem and many were pilgrims from far away. The chief priests were able to persuade them to ask for Barabbas' release. The people may have accepted the advice of their leaders because Barabbas had already tried to lead a rebellion, but Jesus had only hinted at an overthrow. Moreover it would have been very unusual for the crowd to side with Pilate and oppose their leaders.

Note that this man Barabbas was a hard-nosed, bloodthirsty, tough revolutionary, that would likely kill Jews that opposed him as well as the Roman soldiers and rulers. But obviously God's hand was silently guiding events behind the scenes. It was therefore not simply this crowd being confronted with choosing between Jesus, the son of his human father, who rules by force and makes his living by his wits; and Jesus, the son of God the Father, who rules by love, and is ready to sacrifice His own Son to save mankind.

But Barabbas the revolutionary would have known about Jesus and His way of doing things and

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bringing salvation. He would have known about the miracles of Jesus. He would have known that Jesus had opened eyes of the blind, made the deaf hear, made the lame walk as the Scriptures had said Messiah would do. But his idea of the Messiah was of someone that would set the people of Israel free from the hated bondage of Rome. But there was no hint of a change in his thought process. He would have been among those disappointed with Jesus.

So note motives and choice. What must one do to overthrow the oppressor? You choose the way you want to go in dealing with the iniquities of the world. The only thing we can advise is that you think of the consequences and make sure that whatever you do is led by the Holy Spirit. Remember that our ways are not always His ways.

The ugly mood of this crowd is often contrasted with that of the crowd who greeted Jesus enthusiastically at His entry into Jerusalem days before (Mark 11:8–10). Has that crowd changed its view of Jesus? Or is this a different segment of the populace, a group with sympathies for the chief priests? The Gospels sometimes depict the people as fickle (Luke 7:31–35) and other times as divided (John 7:43). Mark does not make clear which of these scenarios is correct. Indeed, the people can be both fickle *and* divided. Notably, a large segment of the former crowd were Galileans who were more supportive of Jesus.

The man the crowd wanted released was the very type of person the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of being. What irony!

“Almost 2,000 years earlier, however, an unfair exchange took place: Jesus for Barabbas. Barabbas was guilty, yet he went free; Jesus, though innocent, went to His death. Even more shocking was the death of Jesus in taking our sin-penalty upon himself. We can call it unfair—and it was. But Jesus experienced death voluntarily so we wouldn’t have to. And there’s a special word for that; it is grace.”

So again we see the motive and the choice made by this group. They had their expectations, and any loyalty they may have had to Jesus was replaced by anger and disappointment. He did not deliver what they wanted.

So the question for you is, Have you ever been disappointed in Jesus and in God? Have you ever expected Him to act in a certain way because of what you understood about Him and His life and His nature--BUT He did not do it?

Think about your motives and think about your choices!

Verse 12. Pilate now faced the clamor of the crowd that the Jewish rulers had assembled. Jesus' refusal to defend Himself, gave Pilate no grounds to free Him, even though he knew that Jesus was innocent, and that it was the enmity and jealousy of the priests that had brought Him to trial.

He was reluctant to do what the people asked (Matthew 27:19; Luke 23:22). Perhaps hoping to put them in a dilemma about the fate of another of their countrymen, Pilate asked what the people want done with *the King of the Jews*. The air by this was supercharged with a mixt and and it is ure of mockery, challenges to conscience, and high emotion.

Pilate should simply have released Jesus, but in the face of the outrageous behavior of the rulers and

the crowd, Pilate tried to get into a political bargaining. He offered to release Jesus.

Verses 13, 14. *An...Crucify him.* ... the response was not what Pilate expected. But it was just what the religious leaders urged. To be crucified is to be marked as an enemy of the Roman Empire. What Jesus told His disciples in advance is happening, (Mark 10:33-34).

...what evil has He done... John's Gospel parallels this statement of Pilate three times in [Mark 18:38; 19:4, 6](#). Pilate tried to gain sympathy for Jesus and release Him ([John 18:38; 19:6,12](#)), but this biased crowd would not have it!

Challenging the people to name Jesus' crime was an attempt to thwart the council's wishes and uphold the rule of law. But Pilate's reasonable and logical question was met with the raw emotion of hatred: an intensified call for Jesus' crucifixion. If there ever was a "rush to judgment," this was it; outright mob justice!

The mob ignored Pilate's request for reasonable reconsideration and continued chanting.

Verse 15. *And so Pilate, willing to content the people ...* Pilate waffling had boxed him into a corner. Should he fail to keep the peace, he could at minimum lose his position. Worse yet, the people's unrest may spread through the city, overwhelming the Roman security forces. Pilate would have liked to have a victory over the Jewish council, but his greater interest was keeping the peace. So with a "the end justifies the means" mentality, he handed Jesus over to a detachment of soldiers for crucifixion. *Barabbas*, on the other hand, went free.

So then, we see motive, the desires of the flesh, and the choices that follow. We see how Pilate behaved. We see from the other gospels of Jesus trying to confront Pilate with the truth that He represented, but for his own selfish reasons he would have none of that. His choice was to exclude himself from the New Covenant that Jesus would shortly seal.

The Romans had a reputation for upholding justice which oftentimes takes courage, a quality sadly lacking in Pilate.

...willing to content the people... for Pilate, civil order was more important than justice. These Jewish leaders had succeeded in intimidating Pilate ([John 19:12](#)).

Pilate had had problems in his relations with the Jewish people (Luke 13:1-2). He saw the present situation as an opportunity to gain popular support. This overrode his sense of justice and his wife's warning. He had been accused of many things to the authorities in Syria and Rome. He could not afford more charges. They knew this and used it!

...had scourged him... evidently Pilate flogged Jesus in the presence of the crowd hoping that that punishment would satisfy them (Isaiah 53:6, 12). John recorded that after the flogging Pilate tried again to persuade the people against crucifixion (John 19:1-7). Flogging was not a necessary preparation for crucifixion. Probably two soldiers stripped Jesus and tied His hands above Him to a post. Then they beat Him with a leather whip with

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pieces of bone and or metal embedded in the leather strips. Victims of Roman floggings seldom survived.

Mark 15:25, 26.

Jesus was severely abused in the intervening verses that are not part of our Lesson Text. Though there was no standard procedure for Roman crucifixion, it is not out of the ordinary that Jesus was severely beaten (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1) and stripped (Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34) before being nailed to His cross. Eventually, Jesus was brought to the place of crucifixion, which is outside the city walls (Hebrews 13:12).

The Roman soldiers were acting out their hatred for these troublesome Jews and they were ready to destroy the Jews and this King of the Jews. The event give the Roman soldiers a chance to laugh at these subject people and clearly and emphatically remind them that the Romans were in charge and nobody should mess with them, for if they did they would end up on the cross.

So **they** had their motive and they made their choice and excluded themselves from the New Covenant that Jesus would seal.

Verse 25. *And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.*

Jesus' crucifixion likely took place where roads converged just to the north of Jerusalem. The Romans made crucifixions as visible as possible to serve as a deterrent to insurrection; thus a crossroads was a logical place. *The third hour* is counted from sunrise, so Jesus' crucifixion begins at midmorning.

Verse 26. *The King of the Jews.* The same mocking words that Pilate used at Jesus' trial were affixed over Jesus' head. John 19:19–22 shows the full import of Pilate's action in this regard: it's one further snipe at the religious authorities whom Pilate believes have forced his hand.

But this pettiness obscures the fact that Pilate speaks and writes better than he knows: Jesus is indeed *The King of the Jews* (2 Samuel 7:12–16; Zechariah 9:9). But He is even more than that: He is the world's King (Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:1–9; Romans 15:7–12). Jesus' crucifiers are involved in something far greater than they realize (Luke 24:44–49; Acts 10:43; 2 Corinthians 1:20; etc.). He is enthroned as King in His crucifixion (Acts 2:36).

Mark 15:33-39

Our next segment of Lesson Text takes us forward in time by three hours. During that period the dying Jesus is mocked by the religious authorities, various onlookers, and by two criminals also suffering crucifixion. The passersby were blaspheming Jesus who is to die as a criminal even though He is innocent and their actions of wagging their heads to ridicule Jesus repeated the actions of David's enemies as recorded in Psalm 22:7.

The religious leaders have based their motives on maintaining political power because they had by that doing rejected Scripture which spoke about a kind of Messiah that was different from the one that they had envisaged. Their Messiah would be no Suffering Servant of Jehovah, no descendant from the stump or family of David that had fallen on hard times. They thus had rejected their Messiah and had excluded themselves from the New Covenant that Jesus would seal by His death.

Verse 33. *And, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*

The *darkness* that enveloped *the whole land* is further described in Luke 23:45 as “*the sun was darkened.*”

This cannot be a solar eclipse for two reasons. First, solar eclipses do not last anywhere close to three hours, which is the length of the time of the darkness. Second, the Crucifixion takes place in conjunction with Passover, which occurs at the time of a full moon; by contrast, a solar eclipse requires the opposite—a new moon.

Darkness is sometimes an image of God’s judgment (Joel 2:2, 31; Amos 8:9; Zephaniah 1:15). It is also an expression of despair (Psalms 88:12, 18; 143:3). Certainly all who witness this darkness are compelled to acknowledge that something extraordinary is occurring.

Verse 34. *Jesus cried with a loud voice...* Jesus cried out with the words of Psalm 22:1. The Psalm laments the suffering of a righteous person being mocked and tortured by enemies. The righteous one’s situation appears hopeless; God seems distant. These words from the beginning of the Psalm express the deep anguish of a person in such a situation. Jesus has now entered fully into that experience of rejection, mockery, torture, and seeming abandonment. But, Jesus stays on the Cross. The siren songs that Jesus should save Himself, though tempting, did not appeal to Him. He stayed, and endured all the pain poured out upon Him.

He knew that even if He came down from the cross they would not believe in Him. One writer speaks to us:

“If we pay attention to the higher drama, we’ll realize that we are part of it. The insecurity, anger, and hostility of the Roman soldiers, the two rebels, the passersby, and Jewish leaders are also in us. We too, hurled our abuse at Jesus. The sins of all of us buffeted Him. We hurl our abuse at Him, but it does not return.

Some today are similar to those at the scene of the crucifixion. They don't want Jesus to leave the cross and prove himself, of course; they want him to leave the first century, prove himself, and fight their battles for them. Like those at Golgotha, they assume that what they are asking for is impossible and they therefore dismissed Jesus.

If we pay attention to the higher drama, however, we know that Jesus will not prove himself in such a manner because that’s not what those who demand such proof really need. What they need-- what we all need-- is faith to believe that Jesus has already prevailed in the battle we needed him to fight, the battle against Satan, sin, and death; the battle he fought and won at the cross. We need to believe that Jesus died the death of a rebel in behalf of rebels—us, who rebelled against God.

But like many psalms of lament, Psalm 22 turns from anguish to expressions of hope. In verse 19 the psalmist cries out for God’s help, and in verse 22 begins a declaration that the psalmist will praise God for His sure and faithful deliverance of His people. Jesus’ words express anguish yet are deliberately not without hope. His earlier declarations that God would raise Him from the dead (Mark 8:31, 32; 9:9, 31; 10:33, 34; 14:28) remain true even though Mark chooses not to restate them in the moments of Jesus’ suffering.

Thus the hopeful ending notes of confidence from Psalm 22 remain in the background. But they offer the one who is familiar with that Psalm a hint: all is not as it seems while Jesus dies. God will

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be present to deliver the true King whom He has enthroned.

Verses 35, 36. *Behold, he calleth Elias.* Elijah had delivered several people in distress during his ministry. It is difficult to know if the bystanders did what they did because they sincerely misunderstood Jesus or if they were cruelly twisting His words to persecute Him further. We know however that some of them believed that Elijah would come before Messiah came. They would ignore the work and the position of John the Baptist. In either case they did wound Him deeper.

Perhaps one of the soldiers tried to give Jesus the sour wine (Gr. *oxos*) to prolong His life so the onlookers could see if Elijah would come and help Jesus. In Mark's account the soldier spoke (v. 36) and in Matthew's the people did (Matt. 27:49). Both evangelists were undoubtedly accurate. Psalm 69:21 is fulfilled.

Verse 37. ... *gave up the ghost...* Jesus' death comes at last, as He had so many times predicted.

... *cried with a loud voice* ... Jesus' loud cry indicates that this was not the last gasp of an exhausted man. Jesus' cry was a shout of victory. He announced, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Then He dismissed His spirit (Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46; John 19:30). Normally it took as long as two or three days for crucified people to die. Jesus' relatively short period of suffering on the cross amazed Pilate (v. 44).

Verse 38. *And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*

The veil of the temple is a curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:33). The latter may be entered only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest symbolically presented to God the blood of a sacrifice offered for the sin of all Israel (Leviticus 16; 23:26–32). Clearly the rending of this curtain demonstrates God's involvement in Jesus' death!

Some understand that the tearing shows that Jesus has offered the sacrifice that fulfills what the Temple's sacrifices pointed to. The implication is that the way is now open for all to enter God's presence freely (Hebrews 9:6–8; 10:19, 20).

Others look to Jesus' warnings that the Temple will be destroyed as a sign of judgment against the temple leadership who plotted Jesus' death (Mark 12:9–12; 13:2). Indeed, the temple will be destroyed in AD 70. Both understandings are consistent with New Testament teaching regarding fulfillment of God's plan.

Verse 39. A *centurion* holds a highly responsible position in the Roman army. Seeing all that has happened, this particular centurion recognizes that this is no ordinary crucifixion and no ordinary *man*. In Jewish usage, to be *the Son of God* often means to be God's king (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 2:7; 89:26–28). But on the lips of a Roman soldier, is this a confession of faith or no more than a cry of fear?

It's easy to get cynical and write it off as no more than fear on the part of a pagan Roman soldier, one who is worried more about his own skin than anything else. But we must pause to remember that it was of a centurion that Jesus declared,

“Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Matthew 8:10; compare

Luke 7:9). And, looking forward, it will be a centurion through whom the gospel will be opened to Gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:18).

CONCLUSION

The story of Jesus' death prompts us to ask ourselves important questions. One is, "Who is my king?" Am I ruled by selfish impulses, others' opinions, culture's conformity, the past's burdens? Or is the crucified Christ my King?

Are you following in the way of the King? In the end, the gospel calls all people to repentance and submission to the crucified and risen King, Jesus. Everyone needs His mercy, and no one is beyond the reach of it.

Remember that He stayed on the cross because of love for you. He stayed because He wanted to bring in and fulfill the New Covenant which will gather you to God the Father and enfold you into His Temple.

One writer tells us that Jesus finds His temptation on the Cross resistible because He finds you irresistible. He stayed on the Cross for you. Even you.

Never forget therefore that there is a higher drama going on. Something great is happening here. It is the story of love. Jesus sealed the New Covenant for you.

What will you do with Jesus?