

Gospel Gems from Mark



Chapter 15: Pilate and the crucifixion

Jesus had told his disciples that his mission was to serve by giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). In this chapter we see this final, saving act of service to us. May it always move us toward faith and heartfelt worship!



Gospel Gem #1: The trial before Pilate (15:1-20)

If the Sanhedrin had already declared Jesus worthy of death the evening before (14:63-64), then why did they meet again in the morning to deliver the same verdict?

Why didn't Jesus answer the charges brought against him by the Jews?

What did Pontius Pilate realize about the basis for the charges against Jesus? (v. 10)

What detail of Jesus' suffering is only lightly mentioned by Mark, but was in itself a terrible ordeal? (verse 15)

What was the purpose of the actions of the soldiers in verses 16-20?



Gospel Gem #2: The crucifixion (15:21-39)

According to John's Gospel, Jesus carried his own cross (John 19:17). What is the probable explanation for why Simon of Cyrene was forced to do so? What does the phrase "father of Alexander and Rufus" possibly indicate?

Why was Jesus offered wine mixed with myrrh, and why did he refuse to accept it?

What incredible irony is found in the words of the chief priests (verses 31-32)?

Mark only records one of the seven words from the cross. What does it signify? What did some in the crowd think Jesus said or meant?

What is the significance of the tearing of the temple curtain at the moment of Jesus' death?



Gospel Gem #3: the aftermath and burial (15:40-47)

What is noteworthy about what Mark says about who witnessed the crucifixion?

According to John 19:38, what was Joseph of Arimathea's connection to Jesus prior to this, and why does it make his action here more remarkable?

Why was Pilate to hear that Jesus was dead, if he had ordered him to be crucified?

Why do you think the Holy Spirit had these details of Jesus' burial recorded?

Bonus question (if time)

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Chapter 15: Pilate and the crucifixion - *answer page*

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Gospel Gem #1: The trial before Pilate (15:1-20)

If the Sanhedrin had already declared Jesus worthy of death the evening before (14:63-64), then why did they meet again in the morning to deliver the same verdict? ***Their gathering in the middle of the night was actually not a legal gathering according to their law. So they had to reconvene in the morning to deliver an "official" verdict.***

Why didn't Jesus answer the charges brought against him by the Jews? ***He had already testified to the truth of who he was, and he again told Pilate he was the King of the Jews, that is, the Messiah. Nothing more needed to be said--especially since it was not Jesus' goal to be acquitted and avoid the death sentence.***

What did Pontius Pilate realize about the basis for the charges against Jesus? (v. 10)

He realized that the Jewish leaders were merely jealous of Jesus' influence among the people as a religious teacher; he realized that Jesus was not a criminal or a threat to Roman power. "What crime has he committed?" was a question the enemies could not answer (v. 14)

What detail of Jesus' suffering is only lightly mentioned by Mark, but was in itself a terrible ordeal? (verse 15) ***A "flogging" by Roman soldiers with weighted or barbed whips was a brutal form of punishment and torture that many victims did not survive. Jesus' agony began well before the crucifixion itself. All this was to pay for our sins!***

What was the purpose of the actions of the soldiers in verses 16-20?

Since the verdict had already been delivered, what followed here was merely for the cruel "entertainment" of the Roman soldiers. But for us it also serves the purpose of reminding us who Jesus really is. He really was what he was being mocked as--the King of kings!



Gospel Gem #2: The crucifixion (15:21-39)

According to John's Gospel, Jesus carried his own cross (John 19:17). What is the probable explanation for why Simon of Cyrene was forced to do so? What does the phrase "father of Alexander and Rufus" possibly indicate? ***Most likely Jesus was (humanly) physically incapable of carrying the cross, at least at the speed the soldiers wanted, due to the flogging he had already endured. Mark's inclusion of Simon's sons names suggests that this family was personally known to his readers--Simon and/or his sons probably later became Christians!***

Why was Jesus offered wine mixed with myrrh, and why did he refuse to accept it? ***Some sources indicate that it was the practice of some of the women of Jerusalem to offer this drink to condemned criminals to deaden their pain as an act of mercy. For Jesus, of course, deadening the pain was not the goal. He had to face the full punishment for sin!***

What incredible irony is found in the words of the chief priests (verses 31-32)? ***First, the chief priests seem to admit that Jesus had saved others (probably a reference to his healing miracles). What hypocrisy to condemn someone who was able to bring help to others! Of course, these rulers were speaking a truth they did not recognize. By refusing to save himself, Jesus was bringing salvation to all sinners--even the ones who were standing there mocking him. The rulers said that if Jesus came down from the cross that they would agree that he was really the Christ. In fact, it was by suffering that Jesus was truly fulfilling his mission as Christ.***

Mark only records one of the seven words from the cross. What does it signify? What did some in the crowd think Jesus said or meant? ***"My God, why have you forsaken me?" is a quote of Psalm 22:1, which is a Psalm that prophesied the suffering Savior. These words remind us that Jesus' suffering went even beyond the physical, but included a special abandonment by God himself, the full penalty that sin ultimately deserved.***

Some thought that Jesus was calling Elijah--either misunderstanding Jesus' words or possibly referring to a tradition that Elijah would come down from heaven to rescue an innocent victim.

What is the significance of the tearing of the temple curtain at the moment of Jesus' death? ***This profound event was God's way of declaring that the way to his presence had been opened through the death of Jesus, that the sin that separated us from God had now been removed. Jesus, the perfect High Priest, has opened for us a new way to approach God on the basis of his death (cf. Hebrews 10:19-22).***

Gospel Gem #3: the aftermath and burial (15:40-47)



What is noteworthy about what Mark says about who witnessed the crucifixion? ***It was not Jesus' own disciples who are listed but rather these women who had traveled with Jesus. (St. John was one exception, cf. John 19:25-27).***

According to John 19:38, what was Joseph of Arimathea's connection to Jesus prior to this, and why does it make his action here more remarkable? *He had been a follower of Jesus but a secret one. His response to Jesus' death shows a new courage and conviction that Jesus really was his Savior.*

Why was Pilate to hear that Jesus was dead, if he had ordered him to be crucified?

Crucifixion was designed to be a slow and agonizing death. The condemned could sometimes survive for days. John tells us that the other two criminals had their legs broken to speed their death when the Jews requested that they not be hanging there during the Sabbath Day (John 19:31-32).

Why do you think the Holy Spirit had these details of Jesus' burial recorded?

All of it testifies to the reality of Jesus' physical death, which also therefore serves to underscore the reality of his resurrection.

Bonus question (if time)