

*Where we start . . .*

At one time or another, most people have felt that God just wasn't doing things the way that they should be done. (Yes, even Christians sometimes feel this!) When we have such moments, how do we tend to respond to God? What do we say? How do we act toward Him?

*What we read . . .*

We continue to listen and watch as Mark describes the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. As he describes the scene, he gives only scant attention to describe the actual crucifixion, but spends much time on the reactions of those who witnessed it. Let's pay attention to what Mark appears to be highlighting as we read Mark 15:16-32.

Jesus is (obviously) the central figure in the account. But who are the others Mark notices? How do they respond to or react to Jesus?

Take note of those, in particular, who respond to Jesus while He is hanging on the cross.

What do those passing by say? Why?

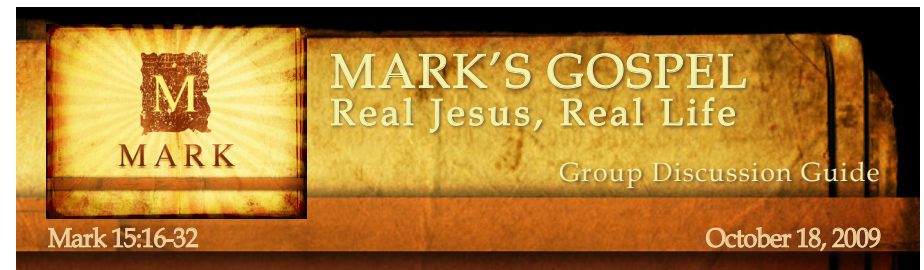
What is it that they seem to want from Jesus?

What do the priests say? Why?

What is it that they might want from Jesus?

*Why this matters . . .*

When we don't see what Jesus is doing as essential, we can end up dismissing Him or diminishing what He is doing (as those passing and the priests did). Although you probably have never been as blatant as those who Mark describes, where do you see yourself reacting to Jesus and His ministry in your life along similar lines? Why do you react that way?



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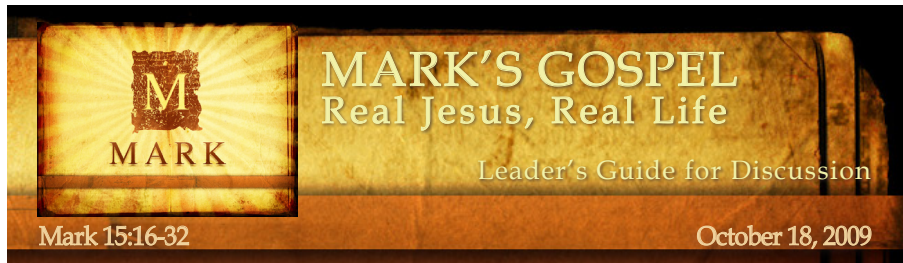
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*Diving in . . .*

Because of the familiarity we have with Jesus' death (even most "unchurched" people know something about Jesus' dying on the cross), we can end up only superficially reading about His suffering and death. This week and the next, we are going to delve into Mark's account of the death and try and give our attention to the things that Mark wants to highlight. Although the cross itself is critical and central, the details of the crucifixion are kept to a minimum. What Mark does focus on is the reactions and responses of those who were there. And it is by watching those who watched the crucifixion that we might draw some insight about how we, also, respond to this incredible act of grace and service and love.

*Discussing . . .*

Clearly, if Mark only wanted to report for us that Jesus was put to death by crucifixion by Roman soldiers as intended by the Jewish leaders, he would have written that. But as for the actual act, Mark tells us that in just a few words (Mark 15:24). Mark, however, spills a far greater amount of ink on the reactions of those who witnessed the crucifixion. This doesn't mean that those who reacted were more important than Jesus or that their reactions were more significant than Jesus' death. But it does mean that Mark intends for us to understand something of the death through what he tells us about those spectators. In one sense, rather than putting his literary camera directly on the cross (even though we catch glimpses of it from time to time), Mark focuses on the faces of those in the crowd--and in so doing helps us understand the cross through its reflection in their faces.

As you work through the passage, you see a variety of individuals and some varied responses. The soldiers mock and abuse Jesus; they ridicule Him and humiliate Him. Simon the Cyrene is "compelled" to respond; apparently he was a less-than-willing participant. We can only guess at what it must have been like for him to step under the sweat-covered, blood-drenched (from the flogging) cross and drag it to the execution place.

Although not personally identified, someone was responsible for the inscription hung from the cross. That placard announced the crime for which the accused was being executed. The words of the placard also tell us something about someone's perspective of the cross.

What we really want to do, however, is focus on the last two groups of people Mark mentions as being at the scene: those passing by and the

priests. Both groups mocked Jesus; they both dismissed who He claimed to be and denigrated what was happening in His dying. And that is tragic.

What do you make of the words of those passing by? A couple things are worth noting.

First, they misunderstood or misrepresented what Jesus had said. Although Jesus had talked about the destruction of the Temple, the particular claim they allege He made was never found on His lips. *It is easier to dismiss Jesus and make Him the brunt of our jests if we don't really listen to Him.*

These passersby also called to Jesus to "save yourself." What would prompt that? Did they understand and know that He had healed? Most likely. So what was the reason for the dismissive call to "save yourself?" Could it be that although they didn't like Him, they also didn't like to see Him up there suffering? *It is hard for us to even think about Jesus' suffering on the cross for us when we aren't sure what to make of Him.*

The priests, also, respond with contempt. There are a few things to see in their response.

First, they "mocked Him to one another" (15:31). Not knowing what to make of Him (but knowing that they didn't like Him), the priests readily ran to those who would only join them in their ridicule. *When we don't think highly of Jesus, we readily tolerate the demeaning remarks others make about Him.*

Similar to the others who passed by, the priests called for Jesus to save Himself. They apparently understood that, in some way, others were "saved" through Him; that is, they experienced health and wholeness in some way. But they couldn't understand (or didn't want to admit) that doing good to and for others might be costly. When we overlook Jesus' gracious ministry as a "giving of self" (and not merely a detached random act of kindness), we cannot make sense of His dying. *Only when we see Him as the one who came to "give His life" for others, can we make sense of the cross.*

Lastly, the priests insist that if only Jesus would do what they wanted Him to do then they would accept Him as who He claimed He was. How like us! We insist that we will trust Jesus to be Lord and Savior if only He will capitulate to doing things on our terms! If, in fact, He *did* capitulate to our whims and fancies, then all that would prove is that He *wasn't* the Lord and King. Dying is what He chose to do. *To insist that Jesus do what we want Him to do is to invite Him to abdicate His rightful role as Lord.*

As you think through these responses, try not to hold them all at arms distance. Although we do not parade in front of the cross the way these two groups did, hurling abuse, *the reasons* they responded the way they did (as evidenced in what they said) might still have some roots in our hearts. To see and respond to the cross rightly, in worship and awe, let's try to discover--and distance ourselves--from the kind of attitudes of heart and mind that tainted the souls of those who watched as the Savior died.