

READ Mark 15:1-5

Jesus's Final Week

Sunday: Acclaim (11:1-11)	Thursday: Anticipation (14:12-72)
Monday: Authority (11:12-19)	Friday: Atonement (15:1-47)
Tuesday: Argument (11:20-13:37)	Saturday: Absence
Wednesday: Appraisal (14:1-11)	Sunday: Awakening (16)

Our opening text for this morning probably comes out of left field considering where our studies in Mark's Gospel left off last week. Let's remember that we were smack dab in the middle of Argument Tuesday, and we had just seen Jesus brilliantly answer three tough questions that had left the questioners amazed, speechless, and even impressed. Things seemed to be going pretty good for Jesus, so how are we now reading that He has been detained, accused, and led away to Pilate?

Unfortunately, the calendar is undefeated and time simply will not allow us to thoroughly study through all of these last sections of Mark's Gospel, so let's do a quick recap before we get to today's finishing section:

- Tuesday concludes with a doozy as Jesus renders strong warnings against the scribes before heaping praise on the faithful generosity of a widow & predicting the end of the Jewish system.
- The following day, Wednesday, after this final rebuking speech, the chief priest and scribes have had enough, and they are needing to figure out exactly how to do more than simply discredit Jesus. No, now they have escalated to the point of wanting Him dead. They find their way in as the Apostle Judas comes to them and agrees to betray Jesus in exchange for money.
- On Thursday, Jesus does just as any good faithful Jewish man would do...He prepares to observe the Passover, and He does so with His disciples. He is anticipating everything that is about to take place, and we see a series of predictions and declarations from Jesus. He first predicts His betrayal. He then speaks to the significance of the meal they are eating as a memorial moving forward. He also speaks of the scattering of His disciples when everything goes down. From there they go to Gethsemane where He prays for strength to go through what is about to take place. This prayer was very timely for shortly thereafter He is betrayed, arrested, taken before the Sanhedrin, beaten, and eventually taken before Pilate the next morning.

This brings us to Friday. Pilate would normally be in Caesarea, but it was his custom to be in Jerusalem during this grandest of Jewish festivals, and this allows for the Jewish leaders to take Jesus before him for judgment. There are all sorts of accusation thrown at Jesus, but He remains quiet to the amazement of Pilate. This leads us into our text for today of **Mark 15:6-16:8** where Jesus finishes the work He was sent by the Father to come accomplish.

Mark 15:6-16:8

A. Pilate fails to negotiate for Jesus's release. (15:6-15)

1. **V.10** is of vital importance to this portion of the narrative because it shows us that Pilate is aware of the nefarious motivations of the chief priests toward Jesus. Therefore, he allows himself to be put into a position where he might be able to get out of this sticky situation. Mark tells us of Pilate's custom of releasing a prisoner back to the people during the festival of the Passover. Perhaps Pilate was aware of the story behind the Passover, and he sought to gain favor with the people by reenacting it in a sense. Whatever the case might be, here is Pilate trying to make things right in this manner, and the choice is quite simple, right?

2. Of course this was an easy choice! On one hand you have Jesus who is known throughout the land and as true man of God and the closest thing to a prophet that existed, and on the other you have a man named Barabbas who was in prison for the capital crime of Rome of leading a rebellion. Even worse is that these rebels, Barabbas included, had killed other people! The choice was a piece of cake! Except for the fact that the chief priest were not going to give up on their plan so quickly.
3. They go throughout the crowd and stir up the people to the point of them actually desiring for Barabbas to be released to them instead of Jesus. They cry out all the louder to Pilate that they desired for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate knew He had done no wrong, but the bloodthirst of the crowd was raging, and they would have nothing else but Jesus crucified. Again, keeping the peace was the greatest desire of Rome, so Pilate caved to the desires of the crowd and released Barabbas to them while Jesus is taken away to be flogged before He is eventually handed over to be crucified.

B. Jesus endures horrific abuse prior to the cross. (15:16-32)

1. What Jesus endures over the next few hours is nothing short of barbaric. The Romans had perfected the art of negative reinforcement through the crucifixion process. They were truly masters of behavior deferment through putting up examples of what happened if you crossed or went against the Roman authorities. Not only was there physical pain and anguish with the beatings of the stick and crown of thorns, but we also see mental pain and torture with what Jesus endured. They mocked Him with a purple robe, false homage, and spitting.
2. Just how brutal was the treatment that Jesus endured? It was to the degree that He wasn't even able to carry His own cross to the place of crucifixion. The pain and exhaustion must have been excruciating. Mark tells us that the Roman soldiers forced a man of Cyrene named Simon to carry His cross. Mark also includes a random detail that this man was the father of Alexander and Rufus. That to me is an indication that these men might have been well known by the disciples. Maybe Simon himself became a disciple based upon what he saw.
3. Nevertheless, Jesus arrives at Golgotha around 9am in our understanding of time. He is offered wine mixed with myrrh which would have helped somewhat with the pain, but He refused it. They lift Him up onto the cross and begin to divide up His clothes as a fulfillment of prophecy (**Psalm 22:18**). They also crucified Him between criminals which also fulfilled Scripture (**Isaiah 53:12**).
4. Yet the pain of this ordeal might only have been matched by the shame and embarrassment. There were many who passed by Jesus and yelled insults at Him. Some even recognized Him or knew of Him and mocked what He had previously spoken about the temple being destroyed and rebuilt in three days. The chief priest and scribes also mocked Him for saying He saved others but wasn't able to save Himself. They mocked His claims as the Messiah, and ridiculed along with the others Jesus as a Prophet, Savior, and King.

C. Jesus dies on the cross. (15:33-41)

1. At around noon, there is a great darkness that comes over the land for three hours. Perhaps the symbolism of this detail goes back to the Ten Plagues of Egypt where there was a plague of darkness before the event of the Passover. Maybe this was done simply to signify how dark of a day this was as the sinless Son of God was being killed. Whatever the intended symbolism, the message that something monumental was happening was confirmed as Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Elon, lemá sebachtháni?*", which is translated "*My God, My God, why have you abandoned Me?*"

2. There have been untold theories as to what Jesus meant when He spoke these words, but I believed the simplest understanding has to be the connection that is made to **Psalm 22**. This Psalm of David presents the king as a person who has been forsaken by God at the hands of evildoers, but David recognizes that it only looks like the evildoers have the upper hand. In reality, God is upholding those who are righteous and suffering unjustly! *"For He has not despised or abhorred the torment of the oppressed. He did not hide His face from him but listened when he cried to Him for help."* (**Psalm 22:24**) This seems to be the meaning behind Jesus's words. It might have looked like He was forsaken by God and punished as a bad person, but the reality is that He was doing the will of God in this moment, and God would shortly show that He was with Jesus through His resurrection. To everyone else it would seem like the Jewish leaders had won, but they had simply fulfilled God's pre-determined plan!
3. This approval and support of Jesus seems to be seen in the further proved through the tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom. Go back to **1:10** where the sky is also torn apart and remember that moment was a strong statement from God concerning His approval of Jesus as His Son. Here seems to be something similar. Jesus is making a strong statement of approval towards Jesus and against those who stood against Him. There is also symbolic importance concerning Jesus opening the way to God apart from those things pertaining to the Law of Moses.
4. Whatever the true meaning and purpose, everything that was taking place made a big impression on the centurion who observed all of this and come to the conclusion, *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"* Herein we see another example of those who shouldn't have known better having eyes that see and ears that hear compared to those who should have known better but had eyes that didn't see and ears that didn't hear. This centurion understood what it all meant, but the Jewish leaders who put Jesus in this place completely missed it all. Another instance of this is seen in **vv.40,41** where we see women who had supported Jesus throughout His ministry being here in this moment though a ways away. How incredible for them to be here when His own disciples had scattered just as He said they would back in **14:27**.

D. The body of Jesus is buried. (15:42-47)

1. Yet, with His death came an opportunity for one man to step out into the spotlight and show the love and appreciation he had for Jesus. Of course, we would never expect for this man to be of the Sanhedrin, but that is exactly who we find in Joseph of Arimathea. He was one who was looking forward to the kingdom of God, and it seems that he made the connection between that Kingdom and Jesus. He seems to have wanted to show Jesus respect, and he knew His body would soon be taken down based upon deceased bodies not being allowed to stay up over night according to Jewish customs.
2. This would have been completely against the norms of crucifixion. The norm was for the bodies to be discarded with little care or concern, but this wasn't so with Jesus. Joseph first steps up boldly to request the body of Jesus, and then he takes the body, wraps it in linen cloth, and then places it in a tomb that had been cut out of rock that had a large stone over the entrance.
3. Let's take note that Pilate is surprised that Jesus was already dead. This is important because it again shows just how brutal the treatment of Jesus had been. Crucifixion was designed to be a drug out process where the condemned would remain on the cross for some time as a real deterrent against bad behavior from those who might pass by. But with the brutal treatment of Jesus prior to the cross, we shouldn't be surprised with His quick expiration. Yet, it also gives us the confirmation from a non-biased angle that He truly was already dead. The Romans would never let a man come down from the cross alive.

E. The risen Jesus leaves the tomb empty & leaves His disciples afraid. (16:1-8)

1. Yet with all of this going on, we see Mary and Mary watching where He was laid so they could go buy burial spices at the close of the Sabbath in order to go anoint the body of Jesus very early in the morning on the first day of the week. People in the first century didn't have the embalming technology that we have today, so they had to help with the decaying process through the applying of various spices. However, when they reach the tomb...something doesn't seem quite right.
2. They had been wondering how exactly they were going to roll the rock out of the way to enter the tomb, but they arrived to see it had already been rolled away. They go on into the tomb to find a young man inside dressed in white and sitting on the right side of the tomb. Naturally, these women are in freak out mode, but they are told that the Jesus whom they are looking for, who was crucified, has actually risen from the dead. He was no longer in the tomb, but they could see where He had been laying. He instructs them to go tell His disciples and specifically Peter that He was going to make good on His prediction of raising and meeting them in Galilee (**14:28**). After this encounter, these women go out of the tomb and take off running because they were overwhelmed by trembling, astonishment, and being afraid.
3. Now, many of our Bible are going to give some sort of indication following **v.8** that something isn't exactly normal with **vv.9-20**. If you're curious about some of the deeper issues surrounding these verses then please consult today's bulletin, but for the moment let me suggest that Mark's Gospel ending at **v.8** doesn't wreck this Gospel account. I would say that it actually can make great sense for Mark to leave this account open-ended because it is left open on a subject that has been seen all throughout this Gospel...the issue of fear. Fear has been seen time and time again, and what we have noticed about fear is that it provides an opportunity for people to make decisions.
4. Earlier in the Gospel we found Jairus fearful for his daughter's well-being and it led him to reach out to Jesus. That same context tells us of the woman with issue of continuous bleeding who was scared for her life and even more scared after Jesus sensed she had touched Him. She could have shrunk away and hid, but instead she stood up and confessed it was her. The disciples also find themselves fearful, but often that fear caused them to make poor decisions. What about these women? What would their fear lead them to do? What about the Apostles to whom they were to go? What would their fear lead them to do? We'll get back to this in just a few moments, but let's first consider some application questions from this text.

Application Questions

A. Do we recognize the Barabbas-like position that we ourselves are in?

1. As was mentioned, the choice between releasing Jesus or Barabbas should have been a no-brainer. Jesus had an unblemished record, and Barabbas was literally a murderer...and yet we still found the rebel being pardoned at the cost of Jesus. Ya know...that kinda sounds familiar.
2. It should sound familiar because it is the text of **Isaiah 53!** In fact, our brains should have been setting off alarm bells all throughout this lesson with echoes of **Isaiah 53** being present throughout. Let's notice specifically what is said in **Isaiah 53:12**, *"There I will give him the many as a portion, and He will receive the might as spoil, because He willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet He for the sin of many and interceded for the rebels."* Jesus literally played out this verse in what happened in our text today. We had a murderous rebel who was set free by Jesus being taken to His death. How unjust and wrong!

3. However, when was the last time we recognized that we are actually in the place of Barabbas? When was the last time we thought upon the fact that we are the ones who deserve to have been up on that cross instead of Jesus? He was innocent! He did not deserve to die! Yet...He willingly submitted to a heinous death so that we might have the opportunity to be bought back by that innocent blood. Do I recognize that I am Barabbas? How should that impact the way that I live my life for Jesus?
- B. Are we willing to be like Jesus and even suffer as righteous people because of our commitment to God?**
1. Again, it is so clear from Isaiah 53 that Jesus suffered not because He deserved it but because He was committed to God's plan for man's redemption. While we might not have a part to play in that plan per se...are we still willing to endure suffering as righteous people unjustly because of our commitment to God? Jesus was tortured and murdered because the Jewish leaders were prideful and unwilling to see things for how they ought to be...don't we recognize that we are living among a large percentage of people who are the exact same way?
 2. This means that there is the real possibility that there will come a time when our commitment to God will go against the "wisdom" of men in their pride and rebellion. When such a thing happens...will we be willing to suffer even if we don't deserve to do so. If Jesus, who was God, was willing to do that then what should that mean about our willingness to do so? If we are truly devoted to discipleship that involves denying self, taking up our crosses, and following Jesus then we should be willing to follow Him in His example. But will we?

Main Point/Conclusion: *Who Jesus is and what He has done leads us to the point of decision. How will we respond?*

It is one thing for us to have a better knowledge of who Jesus is and what He has done, but that truly means nothing if we are not willing to respond properly to Him and what He has done. May we all be thoroughly impressed by the incredible Jesus to the point that we are willing to fight through fear and doubt in order to embrace real faith in Him so that we might live for Him and enjoy the unmatched blessings of being a part of His people and His kingdom.