

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 4-30-17

April 30 we will study Mark 15:1-41. All adult classes will meet together April 30 as the building is still undergoing repairs. Bud will be teaching the auditorium class this week. Discussion ideas are:

1. Why would Mark spend so much time focusing on people who were present at the crucifixion rather than on details of the crucifixion process itself?
2. What is the point of looking at 9 people or groups of people who were at the crucifixion? Isn't that taking the focus off Jesus?
3. What is your take on Simon of Cyrene? Is he a hero or an unwilling participant?
4. Why do the soldiers at the foot of the cross spend their time gambling?
5. When Mark describes the 2 robbers crucified alongside Jesus he does not tell about one of them coming to faith. Why would Mark leave that out?
  - a. At what point does a person become like one of the 2 robbers on the cross?
6. The people who are passing by hurl insults at Jesus. Why do they do that? What do they believe about Jesus and where did they get their belief?
7. What has to happen to make religious leaders like the chief priests and teachers of the law want to see a man crucified?
8. Why does the unnamed man offer Jesus wine vinegar?
9. Is it significant that the Roman Centurion's confession is in the past tense?
  - a. What do you make of the statement in 15:39, "when he saw how he died"?
  - b. If you have lucid moments before your death, what will you say to others standing nearby?
10. Why do the women attend the crucifixion? Why do they not anticipate resurrection?
11. How would you describe Joseph of Arimathea? Where did he find his courage?
12. What is the significance of the statement in Acts 6:7, "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."?

Sermon: *Were You There?*

Mark 15:1-41

If you describe a man's death there are many ways to do it. You might describe the physical details of his suffering. You might catalog the things he had to say in the waning moments of life. You might describe the attitude with which he faced death. Mark does little of any of those things. He leaves out many of the details that the other gospel writers include.

Mark's description of the physical suffering of Jesus is confined to four brief observations:

*Pilate had Jesus flogged.*

*They twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him.*

*Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him.*

And they crucified him.

Of the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross, Mark mentions only one:

“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”

Mark gives few insights about Jesus’ attitude during the trials and crucifixion. Basically he describes Jesus as either mute or giving such short answers he doesn’t even use a 2 syllable word:

The high priest asked:

“Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” . . . . Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.”

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” . . . . Jesus said, “I am.”

Pilate asked:

“Are you the king of the Jews?” . . . . Jesus replied, “Yes, it is as you say.”

“Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” . . .  
“But Jesus still made no reply . . . .”

Other than that Mark tells us two loud cries Jesus made:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.”

All the gospel writers exercise tremendous restraint in describing the crucifixion. None of them describe the driving of the nails or the agony that Jesus must have exhibited at that time. They simply state, “there they crucified him.” It would behoove us when we recall Jesus’ horrible death not to wallow in the gore of the cross. Mark skips over almost all of the first three hours on the cross to the ninth hour, when Jesus cries out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” But Mark does write 59 verses about the trial and crucifixion. What is he trying to get us to see that is unique from the other gospel writers? Mark describes in varying detail the reactions of nine different people who witnessed the crucifixion. Mark’s focus is not the view of the crowd looking at Jesus but the view from the cross itself, looking at the crowd. If you will let Mark tell you about the crucifixion and listen with new ears you will hear him saying something very personal to you about the crucifixion. You will hear him saying, “The cross is timeless. If Jesus were crucified in Ada, these same people would be gathered around the cross; the cast of characters would remain unchanged. The question is, ‘Which of the nine characters looks most like you?’”

You meet the first character on the way to the place of the skull when Jesus stumbles under the weight of the cross and Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the cross. Some have attempted to make a hero out of Simon. Personally I can't get past the word, "forced". That sounds to me like he was unwilling to help carry Jesus' cross, that his involvement was not heroic at all, but simply a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Is Simon of Cyrene the character at the cross most like you? Do you ever resent God changing your plans and insisting on your doing things His way? If we are completely honest we all must admit there are times when we go ahead and serve God but secretly wish we hadn't gotten roped into being on this committee, especially when the fish are biting, or the big game is on T.V., or the annual sale is going on at the same time you have to do that church stuff.

You meet the second group of characters at the foot of the cross as calloused soldiers gamble over Jesus' clothing. When money is involved, they ignore the cross. What were the soldiers doing? What is that word?

### G-A-M-B-L-I-N-G

That is what the lottery is. That is what casinos are. Here's what I think Christians who gamble don't understand - even if you have plenty of money and it's just a little frivolous fun with expendable money – gambling is poor stewardship of God's money. Let me ask you this, if you are affluent enough and self-disciplined enough to just gamble a little every once in a while, when you win at gambling do you keep the money you won from the poor and ignorant? Have you ever stood at the door of the casino and watched the poor go home even poorer than when they came? It's a conflict of interest to sing about the cross on Sunday and gamble on Monday.

The third group of characters at the cross is the two robbers who were crucified beside Jesus. As they hurl their insults at Jesus, little do they realize that they are simply being crucified *with* Jesus but Jesus is being crucified *for* them. There are always folks who have heard the story of the crucifixion and learned the details of just how it all happened but they never seem to accept personal responsibility for putting Jesus on that cross. I want you to think of one of your recent sins, perhaps the one that has most recently troubled you. Now imagine seeing your name and that sin on a sign hung around Jesus' neck while he is on the cross. That's why he died! Because of your sin. He died because of two robbers who are so pre-occupied with their own problems they don't understand that they put him on the cross. And so did you and I.

The fourth group of characters at the cross are folks who were just passing by. They have no personal involvement with Jesus. They are curiosity seekers. They've spent their share of time passing on rumors and gossip about things they heard Jesus said. They bring their misinformation with them as they hurl their insults at Jesus. Ever has it been true that there will be people who do not seek the truth about Jesus for themselves but rely on what others tell them about Jesus. When you look at the cross you don't want to look at it through anyone's eyes other than your own. Show me a person who just has to pass on gossip and rumors and I'll show you a person who was at the cross.

The fifth group of characters at the cross are the chief priests and teachers of the law. These are the guys who should know better. They've spent lots of hours reading their Bibles and are very

much in charge of what goes on in the synagogue and Temple. Their problem is that for them religion has become not a matter of glorifying God but a matter of getting power and position for themselves and hanging on to it at all costs. Show me a church split and I'll show you somebody who has his or her ego on the line and will protect it no matter what the cost to the unity of the body. Show me a person who has his or her ego all wrapped up in some position at church and I'll show you a person who was at the cross.

The sixth character at the cross is an unnamed man who realizes Jesus is at the very point of death and wants to prolong the agony to see what will happen next. So he runs and fills a sponge with wine vinegar, puts it on a stick, and offers it to Jesus to drink. He then makes the sarcastic comment, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down." He didn't listen very closely when Jesus cried out, "Eloi, Eloi" which means, "My God, my God." He hears what he wants to hear and winds up being the last person on this earth to speak to Jesus before he dies. There are two kinds of folks who come to church: those, like this nameless sponge filler, who hear what they want to hear and those who hear what God wants them to hear. Which kind are you?

The seventh character at the cross was a pagan who probably believed in many gods. He was a professional soldier and had drawn the unpleasant duty of crucifixion enforcement. Something about the way Jesus died gets this Centurion's attention. But have you ever noticed his confession is in the past tense? He said, "Surely this man was the Son of God." There is no hope in those words. There is no understanding that there may be help for him in the events of this day. His confession seems at best an intellectual observation. You do not see him shed a tear. You do not see him gently take the body down off the cross. You do not hear him telling his story in days to come. It is one thing to believe Jesus *was* the Son of God. It is quite another to believe He *is* the Son of God. If He *is* the Son of God, then He is Lord. His words are not options nor advice – they are commands.

The eighth group of characters at the cross is a group of women. You have to admire those women for doing what the men would not do – attend the crucifixion, even if they did it from a distance. The irony of these brave women is that they do not gather around the cross in hope but in hopelessness. They are the picture of hopeless commitment. They remind me of so many folks I have met at church over the years. They keep attending and being involved in good works but if you dig around a bit in their souls you will discover they have very little hope of ever going to Heaven. They want to but they have so focused on works salvation over the years that they have little hope left.