

Nailing Jesus to the Cross

Trinity CRC, March 26, 2023AM
Fifth Lent

Mark 15:21-32 (v.25)
Rev. Richard J. deLange

Mark 15:21-32

²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁸ [\[a\]](#) ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

People of God,

The investigative show 20/20 once interviewed a man who spent 10 years in prison for a murder he didn’t commit. The last three years were on death row. He describes death row as such a horrible place that most prisoners actually look forward to being executed. In fact, even though he was innocent, “Peter” would have preferred being unjustly put to death rather than staying in jail for years. Whatever comes after death, he thought, will have to be better than the misery of solitary confinement on death row. He was not alone in that thought.

From the outside, it’s hard to imagine how bad things had to be before he would say that. But I wonder if he would have traded places with Jesus on the cross. Jesus was also wrongly convicted. Soldiers nailed him to a cross! This Roman form of execution is among the most gruesome forms of torture and death ever devised by mankind.

I’m sure that if we were able to be present and watch the nails being driven through Jesus’ hands and feet, we would cringe. Maybe we’d cry as we heard screams of agony. We could have watched soldiers brutally crucify Jesus. We could have listened to people mock him. We sometimes sing, *Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

Does it ever do that for you? Do you ever stop and contemplate what our Lord did for you?

The Physical Pain of The Cross

First of all, there's just the sheer physical pain of crucifixion. Our Bible reading in Mark 15:25 tells us:

Mk 15:25 It was the third hour when they crucified him.

Depending on which translation of the Bible you read, some will say he was nailed to the cross and others say that he was crucified. Those are two ways of saying the same thing. We read extensive details about the betrayal and the trial of Jesus. Some crucifixions were done by tying people to the cross with ropes around their ankles and wrists, but Jesus received nails through his feet and hands. And we know this because the Bible tells us that Jesus shows the holes to the disciples after his resurrection.

“Crucifixion is widely regarded as the most horrible form of execution ever devised by man.” You may have heard things like this before but it's startlingly brutal. Writes author Max Lucado, “When a person is nailed to the cross, the nails come into contact with the median nerve that runs through the forearms and into the hands. This irritates this nerve and causes the body to undergo violent spasms, which result in the body being slammed into the upright wood of the cross.” And don't forget that Jesus' back is already beaten to a pulp and extremely painful all by itself. The open sores from the whip are now rubbing against the wood of the cross. And you have to push your sore back up and down the cross in order to breathe. The body sags “due to fatigue and weakness in the limbs. This collapsing of the body results in the chest muscles preventing the lungs from expanding. The only way the condemned man can breathe is for him to push against the nails in his feet as he pulled against the nails in his hands. This action raises him up and allows him to fill his lungs. This has to be repeated each time a breath is needed. Eventually the body gets so weak... that the victim is unable to lift his body and suffocates. Jesus Christ died a horrible death, a painful death, a death unspeakably cruel and vile, all because he loved you!” Such was the physical pain alone.

The Spiritual Pain of the Cross

We should never forget, however, that the cross has been described as the lightning rod of grace that short-circuits God's wrath to Christ so that only the light of His love remains for believers. While Jesus suffers great physical agony on the cross, something with greater cosmic significance is taking place.

Maybe you're new to the Christian faith. All of us are still learning. But if we only see Jesus being nailed to the cross to suffer physical torment, we've missed something. You always have to read the New Testament in the light of the Old. And OT symbols and stories find their fullest meaning when we read them with NT eyes. So, Jesus is nailed to the cross. But why?

Why? Because Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice to God for the payment of our sins. In the OT, on the Day of Atonement, the crowd gathers as the priest receives a goat. The goat is pure and unblemished. The priest lays his hands on the head of the goat. The crowd watches. The priest shouts out, "The sins of the people are upon you!" In this way, the innocent goat symbolically receives the sins of God's people. All their anger, their lustful thoughts, their greed and jealousy, their neglect of God, their adultery and their dishonesty is all placed on the goat. That's why they call it... a scapegoat.

That goat is then brought to the edge of the desert and released. It is banished from the people of God. Sent away with their sins on it. That's because sin must be purged from among the people. The goat is abandoned to die in the wilderness. Left alone. And the sins of the people die with it. But that OT goat is pointing toward an event that supersedes it in Jesus' life and death.

When Jesus is crucified, it's the same kind of thing as the scapegoat. Only it's not a goat. It's Jesus. It's not a desert. It's hell. It's not a symbol. It's God in heaven turning his back on his Son for the sake of our sin. And it's not forced on an unwilling recipient. It's Jesus' free chose to endure hell for us.

Hell is **not** the agony of the nails through your hands and feet, horrible as that is. Jesus suffers the worst kind of human punishment for criminals but also the just penalty for sinners. And he does that for us. On the cross Jesus endures rejection by his Father in heaven and experiences hell for us in that way. That's why we need to confess that we were there. Our sin nailed him to the cross. He paid the spiritual price for our sin.

The Cross For You

You think about that for a minute. I hope you'll think about it a lot more than a minute. Meditate on what Jesus did. Look to him in faith. Think about the purpose of the cross for you personally.

For one thing, Jesus is the priest who gives himself as the sacrifice for sinners—once and for all. There's no goat to bring to the desert. And there's no other priest to perform that act for us. The true deed is done. Jesus gave his life on cross. He gave his soul. He gave his all for you and me. He took our sin-debt, endured the curse of it to set us free.

There's a gospel songs by the Florida Boys that says
I'm not on an ego trip; I'm nothing on my own
I made mistakes, I often slip
Just common flesh and bones.
But I'll prove someday just why I say
I'm of a special kind
When he was on the cross
I was on his mind

The look of love was on his face
Thorns were on his head
The blood was on his scarlet robe
Stained a crimson red
Though his eyes were on the crowd that day
He looked ahead in time
Cause when he was on the cross
I was on his mind.

That song reminds us that the cross of Jesus is necessary for us as individual believers. Christ did not just die for a blob of humanity. He died with us in view. He died with the children of God in sight. Don't ever forget that. This is what Jesus did as our priest. He took our place. Don't ever take that for granted. It will make all the difference in your life.

The Result of the Cross for Us Still Today

How? you ask.

Let the story of Judy Bucknell help you understand. "Half of her life was fantasy, half was nightmare. Successful as a secretary, but a loser at love," writes Lucado. "Her diary was replete with entries such as [this]:

Where are the men with flowers and champagne and music? Where are the men who call and ask for a genuine, actual date? Where are the men who like to share more than my bed, my booze, my food... I would like to have in my life, once before I pass through my life, the kind of (intimate) relationship which is part of a loving relationship.

"She never did.

"Judy was not a prostitute. She was not on drugs or on welfare. She never went to jail. She was not a social outcast. She was respectable. She jogged. She hosted parties. She wore designer clothes and had an apartment that overlooked the bay. And she was very lonely. 'I see,' [she wrote], 'people together and I'm so jealous I want to throw up. What about me!?' Though surrounded by people, she was on an island. Though she had many acquaintances, she had few friends. Though she had many lovers (fifty-nine in fifty-six months, she said), yet she had no love.

"'Who is going to love Judy Bucknell?' her diary [reads]. 'I feel so old. Unloved. Unwanted. Abandoned. Used up. I want to cry and sleep forever.'

It's clear as Max Lucado ends the story, "Though her body died on June 9th from the wounds of a knife, her heart had died long before... from loneliness." (Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*, 44-45)

He adds, "Maybe you, like Judy Bucknell, have fooled everyone. No one knows that you are lonely. On the outside you are packaged perfectly. Your smile is quick. Your job is stable. Your clothes are sharp. Your waist is thin. Your

calendar is full. Your walk is brisk. Your talk impressive. But when you look in the mirror, you fool no one. When you are alone, the duplicity ceases and the pain surfaces." (p.46)

On the other hand, maybe you don't hide it well. You're not popular. You don't turn heads because of your good looks. You're just ordinary and so is everything about you. Let's face it, most of us do feel pretty ordinary.

Either way, dear friends, Jesus is the answer to that loneliness and to everything else we face. You must remind yourself every day that since you were on his mind when he was on the cross, Jesus loves you very much. He died to fill your heart with his love and his peace. He suffered to fill your life with his joy and his purpose.

As we prepare to come to the Lord's Supper, think about Isaiah's words concerning the effect of Jesus' suffering and death for us.

*Isa 53:12 ...For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

Because Jesus bore the anguish of the cross through the hammer and nails and because he suffered the torment of hell which separated him from God for our sins, we have in him a perfect priest who gives himself as the perfect sacrifice and the one to continues to intercede for us still today.

Isaiah reminds us, that Jesus our priest did not just make us right with God by being our scapegoat. It's a matter of continuing to help us in our present need. Jesus lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25) still today. As our priest, he is our intercessor and friend.

Never forget that. Never forget that Jesus gave up the glory of heaven and any popularity and earthy happiness in order to suffer and die for you. He took the hammer and nails of crucifixion and accepted abandonment by all those close to him on earth and rejection by his own Father in heaven.

For you and me.

We can find in him all we need when we are lonely or hurting as well as when life is just normal. Jesus is always our friend and our source of comfort and joy, peace and purpose. Never forget it. Never forget it.

Don't forget the meaning of what Jesus did for you. He reconciled us to God. We need to look to Jesus who on the cross became our sacrifice and our priest. And we need to see and trust that he now lives to intercede for us. He lives to help us in our life. He hears our prayers. He comforts and directs us. He is our friend and our Saviour. He never leaves us or forsakes us.

Be sure of that by faith. He had you on his mind when he was on the cross. And you still are on his mind today. Ask him to help you keep your mind focussed on him today and always.