



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Mark 15:21-47

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English Standard Version

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## *“The Death of Christ”*

**The 44th and Final Sermon in a series on The Gospel of Mark entitled  
*“The King and His Cross”***

### **Mark 15:21-47**

*“And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry His cross. <sup>22</sup> And they brought Him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). <sup>23</sup> And they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified Him and divided His garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. <sup>25</sup> And it was the third hour when they crucified Him. <sup>26</sup> And the inscription of the charge against Him read, “The King of the Jews.” <sup>27</sup> And with Him they crucified two robbers, one on His right and one on His left.*

[Some manuscripts insert verse 28: And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “He was numbered with the transgressors”]

*<sup>29</sup> And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” <sup>31</sup> So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked Him to one another, saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with Him also reviled Him.*

*<sup>33</sup> And when the sixth hour had come, there was **darkness** over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup> And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema*

*sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”<sup>35</sup> And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, He is calling Elijah.”<sup>36</sup> And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to Him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.”<sup>37</sup> And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last.<sup>38</sup> And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.<sup>39</sup> And when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”<sup>40</sup> There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.<sup>41</sup> When He was in Galilee, they followed Him and ministered to Him, and there were also many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.*

*<sup>42</sup> And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,<sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Pilate was surprised to hear that He should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether He was already dead.<sup>45</sup> And when he learned from the centurion that He was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.<sup>46</sup> And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking Him down, wrapped Him in the linen shroud and laid Him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.<sup>47</sup> Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where He was laid.”*

***The Word of the Lord  
Thanks be to God  
Let's pray ...***

*Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. Thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. We do not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from Your mouth and we especially need this Word for it deals with the salvation of our souls. It speaks of redemptive reality, a reality that affects our lives and demonstrates love, forgiveness, grace, mercy, truth, and justice. We know that Your Word searches out our hearts as it's powerful, effective, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It speaks words that we dare not ignore, so open our eyes and ears that we might hear Your word, believe it, and respond with great faith in a great Savior. Thank You, after a year of learning from John Mark, that we've heard and applied the truths presented to us in the earliest eyewitness account of the life of Christ. And so we pray, **speak one more time** through the Gospel of Mark this morning, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, **help us see Jesus**, for in His name we pray, amen and amen.*

**INTRODUCTION: *The True Story of the Little Mermaid*<sup>1</sup>**

In Hans Christian Anderson's tale of "The Little Mermaid" (which is NOT to be confused with the Disney version, the original story is dramatically different), a beautiful young mermaid has fallen in love with a human prince. The mermaid is a glorious singer beneath the sea, but she gives up her voice to be able to become human and love the prince. The deal is, if

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<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is adapted from *Story: Recapture the Mystery* by Steven James, pages 151-153. "The Little Mermaid" tale comes from *The Complete Hans Christian Anderson Fairy Tales*, pages 147-148.

she can woo him, then she can remain human and receive an eternal soul. But if he marries another woman, the little mermaid will turn into sea foam, the fate of all mermaids.

Well, despite her devotion to him, the prince's heart is enamored with a different woman, a princess whom he believes rescued him from a shipwreck. However, the little mermaid was really the one who had saved him. She wants desperately to tell him that she was his savior and that she loves him, but she has no voice above the sea, no words he can hear.

In the end, all three are sailing back to the prince's palace for his wedding to the other woman. The little mermaid is about to turn back into sea foam when her sisters swim to the water's surface and offer her a knife and a choice: if she will take the prince's life, she need not give up her own. The magic can be reversed; she can become a mermaid again **if only** she will **kill** the prince. **One of them must die** before daybreak.

Everyone else is asleep on the boat. Silently the little mermaid approaches the prince and finds him in the arms of the other woman. As Hans Christian Anderson writes ... *"The knife trembled in the hand of the little mermaid: then she flung it far away from her into the waves; the water turned red where it fell, and the drops that spurted up looked like blood. She cast one more lingering, half-fainting glance at the prince, and then threw herself from the ship into the sea, and thought her body was dissolving into foam. The sun rose above the waters, and his warm rays fell on the cold foam of the little mermaid."*

The prince knew nothing of her sacrifice, nothing of her love. He didn't know she'd rescued him, given up her beautiful voice to become like him, and then exchanged her life for his. All this went on while he pursued another woman. She sacrificed all for her prince because she loved him, yet he never returned her love.

Did you hear the Gospel in that story? When the Gospel is told like that ... I can understand it. Despite all the legal terms we use, like justification and penal substitutionary atonement, all valid and important, God's love didn't happen in a courtroom ... but on a cross where Jesus threw Himself from the ship and into the sea. The story we see in Scripture is a story of passion and sacrifice ... a gift given from a lover to His beloved; in one final act of sacrificial love, He offers His life so that she might live. In our passage today, we are in the middle of that act of sacrificial love, and we see people who, at least at this moment, **don't get it**. We also see a few people **who do** get it. And we have to understand that what we are witnessing here is **an exchange**, a life given out of unfathomable love, to save people. Some people understand ... and some don't. So, let's take a look, once more, at this sacrifice. And the first thing we see is ...

#### v. 21-32: **MOCKING HEARTS** <sup>2</sup>

*"And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry His cross. <sup>22</sup> And they brought Him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). <sup>23</sup> And they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh,*

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**2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from my eight of my sermons** (too many to list here) from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, all preached at Potomac Hills. **And the sermons**, "Mocking Jesus" 3/18/07; "The Death of Jesus" 3/25/07; "Women, Pagans, and Pharisees" 4/1/07, all by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*, Logos Bible Software 8.15 and "Father, into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit" by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, III, Chancellor, Reformed Theological Seminary, preached when Senior Minister at First Presbyterian Church (PCA), Jackson, MS, 11/20/11, [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org).

but He did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified Him and divided His garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. <sup>25</sup> And it was the third hour when they crucified Him. <sup>26</sup> And the inscription of the charge against Him read, “The King of the Jews.” <sup>27</sup> And with Him they crucified two robbers, one on His right and one on His left.

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<sup>29</sup> And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” <sup>31</sup> So also the chief priests with the scribes **mocked** Him to one another, saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with Him also reviled Him.

We’ve spent the last year in the Gospel of Mark, and we’ve come, finally, to the account of the crucifixion, and you’ll see there’s a theme that runs through it this account. That theme is the fact that Jesus is **mocked, insulted, jeered at, laughed at, humiliated, and shamed**. It runs all the way through.

In **verses 16–20**, the soldiers are **mocking** Him, **making fun** of Him, **spitting** on Him, **jeering** at Him. Then you go down to **verse 24**, and we see they **stripped** Him, one of the things that made crucifixion so horrible was the stripping of all dignity, and He’s stripped naked. He’s crucified naked. Then in **verse 26**, we have this ironic statement over Him, “*The King of the Jews*.” It’s something you put over a throne but not over a cross. Go down to **verses 29 and 30**, and you have the passersby **insulting** Him. Get to **verses 31 and 32**, and you have the religious leaders **mocking** Him. At the very end of **verse 32**, we see that even the thieves on the crosses next to Him are **reviling** Him. Mark wants us to see that Jesus not only **died** on the cross ... He was **shamed** ... and **humiliated**.

**Why?** In two ways, the **mocking reveals** our hearts. First, it reveals our **hostility** to His claims. What are they **making fun** of Him for? Are they **mocking** Him for the Sermon on the Mount? Probably not. Are they **making fun** of Him for being a wise teacher? I don’t think so. No, they’re **making fun** of Him for these claims that He was the King, that He was the Savior, and that He was going to replace the temple. Those are incredible claims, and that’s what they **hate**, and that’s what they’re **mocking**, and that’s why they’re so **derisive**. The **greatness** of those claims brings out the **hostility** in our hearts. We can’t stand the size of those claims. If He didn’t say those things, it would be different, but He said them.

If He said, “I’m a good teacher and I’m pointing the way to God,” they might say, “Well, maybe you are, maybe you aren’t, maybe it’s true, maybe it’s not.” But when He says, “I’m the unique Son of God and Son of Man. I’m the Savior of the world. I’m the King,” then it’s all or nothing. You can’t just like Him. You have to worship Him or despise Him, and we don’t like that. We want to keep our options open.

At one point in his book, **Confessions**, St. Augustine is trying to figure out why, when he was young, he broke into a pear orchard and stole pears. And he essentially said, “Why did I break into the pear orchard when I was young and steal pears, when (a) I wasn’t hungry, and (b) I didn’t like pears?” He was trying to figure out why he did it, and he realized it was because (c) somebody told him he couldn’t. He said he wouldn’t have had any interest in the pears except they were forbidden. So he realized that at the core of his heart, and, at the core of all of our hearts, there’s something that says through clenched teeth, “Nobody tells **me** how to live.” There

is something in our hearts that says, “I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul,” and when Jesus comes near, that comes out. The mockery shows that we’re hostile. We can’t stand the **greatness** of His claims, and we don’t like the all-or-nothing decision it demands we take. So the mockery shows us our hostility toward the **greatness** of His claims, but second, the mockery shows our blindness to **the weakness of His ways**, because Jesus is **great** in His claims, but He’s **weak** in His ways. He comes humbly. He comes without a horse, without an army, without power. He comes in **weakness**.

Look at it and you’ll see they’re saying, “You **couldn’t** be the King. You **couldn’t** be the Savior. **You’re too weak!** If you were the King, we **couldn’t** do this to You, and we **couldn’t** do that to You! If God was really with You, You’d be strong! He’d be protecting You. He wouldn’t let us do what we’re doing. You **couldn’t** be the Savior. You **couldn’t** be the King, because God **wouldn’t** show such **weakness**, and He wouldn’t take such suffering and pain.”

The **mockery** shows that **we can’t stand it** ... when anything **weak** comes into our life, when **suffering** comes into our life, we tend to get **very hard**. We tend to mock and jeer. When blow after blow comes into your life, when disappointment after disappointment comes into your life, you start to **mock** the idea of the love of God. “A loving God!” you say. “This is happening and that’s happening, a loving God **wouldn’t** do that.” What’s happening to you? You’re **mocking**. You’re getting **hardened**. You’re starting to **despise** and **deride** ... and you know why? Because you have an air of superiority.

Mockery always requires superiority. The only way you can get **hard** and **angry** and **cynical** toward God when bad things are happening to you is because you think that you know better than He does how your life ought to go. You know what **ought** to be happening, and He’s not getting it right. But you know what the mockery is showing us? It’s showing us that God does, in fact, work like this. If you insist God can’t be working in your life in **difficulty**, He can’t be working in your life through **weakness**, He wouldn’t let this or that happen ... If you keep that up, you’re going to miss the biggest things God’s doing.

Do you know what the real irony is here? Mark is an ironic writer, because these people are being ironic, **verse 31**, “*He saved others; He cannot save Himself.*”<sup>32</sup> *Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.*” You say You’re the King, but nobody’s obeying You. You say You’re the Savior, but You can’t even save Yourself. They’re saying, “God **couldn’t** be saving the world through somebody like You. God **couldn’t** be saving the world through **weakness**. God **couldn’t** be saving others on the cross.” They’re being ironic, but guess what?

He was saving others on the cross! And that’s the real irony.

Jesus refused to be helped **so we could be** helped by God.

Jesus refused to save Himself **so we could be** saved.

And when our hearts are mocking His claims, we’re denying that. Right now you may be looking at some bad stuff that’s happening in your life — I mean, nothing’s going according to plan right now — And many of us are saying the same thing, “If God was with me He wouldn’t let that happen. Could God really be working through this?” And without even realizing it, we become **mockers**. When that bad stuff comes, don’t you dare think that God couldn’t be working through it. The **mocking** of Jesus shows our hostility to **the greatness of His claims** and our blindness to the **weakness of His ways**. That shows what’s in our hearts, and it’s pretty

revealing. But then the scene shifts from the **mockers** to the mocked. The camera focuses in on the cross, and ...

#### v. 33-38: **DARKNESS DESCENDS**

Now, we've come to the actual moment of Jesus' death. All four of the gospels take pains to show us that all the events of Jesus' death happen in the dark. The betrayal, the denial, and the mistrial all happened at night, but now we get to the actual moment of His death, and a mysterious **darkness descends**, starting at **verse 33**, "*And when the sixth hour had come, there was **darkness** over the whole land until the ninth hour.*"<sup>34</sup> *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"*"<sup>35</sup> *And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, He is calling Elijah."*"<sup>36</sup> *And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to Him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down."*"<sup>37</sup> *And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last.*"<sup>38</sup> *And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

The sixth hour was noon. The ninth hour was 3:00 p.m. So from 12:00–3:00, it was absolutely dark. I said it's mysterious because a lot of people have tried to say, "Well, there might have been a natural cause. What about an eclipse?" ... Well, first of all, a solar eclipse does not create absolute **darkness** for more than a few minutes. It may take a while to happen, and it may take a while to un-happen, but the actual time of **darkness** is only a few minutes. Besides that, a solar eclipse can't happen at the time of the full moon, and Passover, when these events are taking place, is the time of a full moon.

This is **a supernatural darkness**, and therefore it means something. But what? It signifies something, but what? In the Bible, **physical darkness** usually represents **spiritual darkness**. In fact, when Jesus is arrested, not in Mark, but in Luke, this is what He says. **Luke 22:52-53**, "*Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against Him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?"*"<sup>53</sup> *When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me. **But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.***" Jesus is using the word **darkness** here as a metaphor for everything that's wrong with us, everything that's wrong with the world, everything that's wrong with the human race. **Physical darkness** is a metaphor in the Bible for **spiritual darkness**. What is that **spiritual darkness**?

Well, throughout most of the Bible, **supernatural darkness** stands for the **judgment of God**. And Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are telling us that Jesus is absorbing **the just judgment of God** against our sin on the cross. Now you may think, "that's a lot to deduct from **darkness**." Fair enough. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Amos, chapter 8**. I could go to many places. I could go to **Exodus 10, verses 22 and 23**, where what happened? When God was bringing **judgment** against the idolatry of Egypt, He sent a plague of **darkness** over the whole land. It was a symbol of His **judgment** on the pretensions of Pharaoh to be a god, the resistance of Pharaoh to His sovereignty, the idolatry of that land. It was **judgment**. It demonstrated God's power and that He'd rendered a guilty verdict on Pharaoh and those who were oppressing His people.

And throughout the Prophets you will hear them warning the people of God that God will bring **darkness** upon them because of their sin and one of those famous passages is found in the book of Amos. Look with me at **Amos 8:7-10**, "*The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:*

“Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.” In other words, He’s saying, “I know the evil deeds that My people have done. I know them. I’ve seen you do your evil deeds and I’m not going to forget them. They’re going to come back on you.” **Verse 8**, “*8 Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?*” Now the other gospels describe what happens at the crucifixion? An earthquake. **Verse 9**, “*9 And on that day,*” declares the Lord GOD, “***I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.*** <sup>10</sup> *I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.*” You see what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all saying? The day of **judgment** has come, but guess what? It hasn’t fallen on God’s people; it’s fallen on His only Son. The **darkness** prophesied against the people of God has come against His Son. The **darkness** is the picture of **the judgment of God** against sin. That **judgment** has been visited on His only begotten Son.

The New Testament Commentator, William Hendrickson, has these moving words to say about this, “*The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sin. The punishment though was borne by Jesus so that He, as our substitute, suffered most intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation, and forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior bore its horrors in our place.*” That’s what the **darkness** is all about. And Mark is bringing it to our attention because it happened ... but also because **it meant something**. It fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament and so Jesus absorbs **the just judgment of God** against our sin on the cross. Mark is telling us what the cross is for, what the cross does, what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

And then we read, **verse 34**, “*Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”*” What is happening here? On the one hand, the **darkness** comes down because Jesus is experiencing **the full range of human evil**. I mean everything human beings can throw at somebody, every bit of evil the world can throw, Jesus has gotten. He has been **rejected** by His people. He’s a man without a country. He has been **sacrificed** to political expediency by the Roman government. He’s a victim of **injustice**. He has been **abandoned** by His closest friends, who are trying to save their own skins. As we saw last week, there’s the relational **betrayal** of Peter. He has been **tortured**, and He’s being killed. That’s everything. But that’s not all He’s getting. He’s not just getting human evil. We said this was **supernatural darkness**. When Christ starts crying out, He doesn’t say, “My friends, my friends ...” He says, “**My God, my God ...**” He’s losing God.

What is this **darkness**? What is coming down on Him? Our **judgment** day is coming down on Him! The rod of God’s wrath has been stretched out, and now the plagues of Exodus and the horror of Amos are coming down on Him! His blood and water flow mingled down. He’s experiencing **supernatural darkness** coming down on Him. He’s getting our **judgment** falling down on Him.

Jesus Christ is getting our **judgment** day. As horrible as it is to have a spear in your side, as horrible as it is to die of suffocation, as horrible as it is to have been tortured and beaten ... The crown of thorns, nails through your hands and feet ... **Mark doesn’t say a thing about that**, because Jesus is experiencing **judgment** day ... the **judgment** day we deserve. And the irony here is just piling up.

Jesus was forsaken by God so **He would never forsake us**.

Jesus was the judge who took undeserved judgment on Himself so **we wouldn't face the judgment we so richly deserved**.

Jesus refused to live so **we could never die**.

And then, finally, the camera shifts once again from the dying back to the living. And this time it focuses in on ...

#### v. 39-47: **THE WATCHING WORLD**

<sup>39</sup> *And when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"* <sup>40</sup> *There were also women **looking** on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.* <sup>41</sup> *When He was in Galilee, they followed Him and ministered to Him, and there were also many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.*

<sup>42</sup> *And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,* <sup>43</sup> *Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself **looking** for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.* <sup>44</sup> *Pilate was surprised to hear that He should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether He was already dead.* <sup>45</sup> *And when he learned from the centurion that He was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.* <sup>46</sup> *And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking Him down, wrapped Him in the linen shroud and laid Him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.* <sup>47</sup> *Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses **saw** where He was laid."*

We're near the end. We've come to the burial of Jesus. Look at the three people, or maybe I should say the three classes of people, the death of Jesus brings together. You have the Roman centurion; he's a **pagan**. You have the **women** who stay with Jesus all through this time. Then you have Joseph of Arimathea, and he's a member of the Sanhedrin. He's a member of the ruling party; he's a **Pharisee**. Women, pagans, Pharisees: three groups of people who usually don't hang out together. Yet something has brought them together. What are we looking at? These three are all making positive responses to the death of Jesus.

When you go to the end of all four Gospels, when you get to the climactic events of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, let me just come right out and say it — All the male disciples vanish. They're scared. They're despondent. They're gone. When it comes to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the only followers of Jesus who are with Him through all of these events are women. Look at **verse 40**, of His followers, only women were there when He died. Women saw where He was buried, **verse 47**. And upon His resurrection, women were the ones who saw Him first. It's like the men disappear, and the women **dominate** the final part of the narrative.

It's extremely interesting, because in both Jewish and Roman culture, women's testimony had no legal status. Their evidence could never be brought into court. Their testimony wasn't valid. Because there was a universal understanding across all the cultures of the ancient world about women's **unreliability**. Yet in spite of that, at the most crucial moment **in the history of salvation**, God trusts a group of women **with the whole story**. They're the lifeline of the gospel. Nobody else knows what's going on. Only the women see, and only the women know, what God's up to. In fact, for decades, the only disciples who could actually say, "I witnessed it all — I saw the death, I saw the burial, I saw the resurrection" **were all women**.



The next group we don't expect comes in the form of Joseph of Arimathea, **verse 43**, "*Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, **took courage** and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*" Here's what we learn about Joseph. First of all, Joseph was prominent, *a respected member of the council*. We also know from Matthew that he was rich, which is kind of implied here anyway. In contrast to the women, Joseph is a consummate insider. Male, aristocrat, wealthy. He's in the inner ring. These other people are outsiders, and yet they're in the same passage together. They're responding to Jesus together.

First of all, do you see the phrase ***took courage***? Joseph is getting a courage he didn't have before. It says Joseph **took courage** and went to Pilate and asked for the body. It makes sense. It took courage to ask. The Romans had just tried Jesus and found Him guilty of treason. The Jewish Sanhedrin had found Him guilty of blasphemy. John tells us that Joseph was a disciple, **but secretly**, and so now, for the first time, he's willing to say publicly what he's been keeping in secret. And that's not all. It's not just that Joseph is gaining **courage**. He's also gaining **humility**. He's not just getting **stronger**; he's also getting **weaker**. Look at **verse 46**, "*And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking Him down, wrapped Him in the linen shroud and laid Him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock.*"

In the Ancient Near East, when a person died and was buried, they washed the body, wrapped it in linen, and anointed it with spices and perfumes. Because the sun was going down on the Sabbath, they couldn't do that. They weren't able to finish the job. That's the reason the women went back on Easter Sunday morning, in order to finish the job and put on the spices and perfume. It was a simple act of love. It was a final act of devotion to a loved one. But it was dirty, disgusting job. To take down a dead body, beaten and bloody, was an awful job.

And who was it that usually did it? In that society, who were the ones who always, **always** prepared the body? It was women. Men didn't do it. Women did, not prominent men, certainly not *a respected member of the council*. But here's Joseph, taking Jesus' body down and washing it and wrapping it. There's women there. Joseph is doing it, and there's women watching. Something's happened. If Joseph was the way he'd always been, like any other man in Judea at the time, he would have looked over and seen those women and said, "Hey, come do this. This isn't my job. You do it." But he doesn't do that. He's doing something **culturally inappropriate**. He's not standing on his dignity. Status isn't important. Power isn't important. Only Jesus is important.

Finally, we have the centurion. This is a Roman officer who had come up through the ranks. Incredibly hard, incredibly hardened, a centurion was somebody who'd seen death, had inflicted death to the degree you and I can't even imagine. He's a hard man. He's a brutal man. He's a man who lived in spiritual darkness, and yet something penetrated that darkness and after the crucifixion ... he becomes **the first person to confess Christ**.

I've been trying to figure out how this centurion was the first person to actually get it. It tells you, and I find it amazing. He heard Jesus cry and he saw how He died. Now, unless you're a doctor or a nurse, you don't get to see many people actually die. But this guy was different. This guy had seen many people die. This guy had seen people die under his own hand! He had seen death ... but **this one was different**. He saw something about Jesus' death that was unlike any other death. All I can say is the tenderness of Jesus' death must have pierced his hardness, and the beauty of Jesus' death must have pierced his **darkness**.

His confession, **verse 39**, “*Truly this man was the Son of God*” is momentous. Why? Because the first line in the first chapter of Mark refers to “*Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” There’s a striking contrast between the people around the cross. **The disciples** — who had been taught by Jesus repeatedly that this day would come — were completely confused and stymied. **The religious leaders** had looked at the very deepest wisdom of God and rejected it. But the women got it ... and they came to **watch Him**. Life, death, burial, and resurrection — they saw it all. Joseph of Arimathea got it ... and he came to **claim Him**. Washed, wrapped, buried, respected — he did it all. And the Centurion got it ... and he came to **proclaim Him**. A pagan, gentile, Roman, soldier – and now, believer. These are the ironies of Christ.

Jesus refused to be helped **so we could be** helped by God.

Jesus refused to save Himself **so we could be** saved.

Jesus was forsaken by God **so He would never forsake us**.

Jesus was the judge who took undeserved judgment on Himself **so we wouldn’t face the judgment we richly deserved**.

Jesus refused to live **so we could never die**.

And then He drew the outsiders and made them insiders.

He took women, social outsiders who were unreliable witnesses and entrusted them with **the truth**.

He took Joseph, a moral outsider who was a wealthy, respected, prominent aristocrat and made him a model of **humility**.

And took a Centurion, an ethnic outsider, a pagan gentile who specialized in death ... and gave him life.

You think He can do something with you too? John Mark would want you to know that’s the story of The King and His Cross.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I’ll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Thank You that You have given us a King, Your Son, our Savior. Father, forgive us, for, like the women, like Joseph, like the centurion, we are the outsiders ... and sometimes we doubt that You can make us an insider. Bring us to the cross and help us see Jesus. Help us to hear, and know, and believe, and obey the story of The King and His Cross. It is a story of amazing grace and we thank You for it. Thank You for the Gospel of Mark. Thank You for the glimpses he has given us of Jesus in His grace towards sinners like us. Give us, we pray, the faith to trust Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls. Teach us to respond with a greater trust in You, and in Your Word, and in this Gospel, to draw us ever closer to Your Son, our Savior, and help us all to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever and ever and ever, Amen and Amen.*

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**Galatians 2:20**

*“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*