



Mark 15:21–25

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.

Reflection

Jesus, bleeding, bloodied and almost unrecognisable, is led out of the Praetorium and towards the city gates by his tormentors. He's been severely flogged, mocked and beaten within an inch of his life. On his shoulders, its splinters pressing into open wounds from the lashes, is the crossbeam of a Roman cross – its vertical length awaiting him on Golgotha, appropriately named the 'place of the skull.' He's weak through the loss of blood and the shock of what his body is going through. Jesus manages

to carry the heavy wooden crossbeam to just outside the city gates before he can go any further. He staggers and falls to the ground to the amusement of the Roman soldiers; until they realise that no amount of kicking and cursing can get him to lift it again. They've done their job a little too well, but there's no chance that they'll carry the thing so they accost a random passerby, whose name will go down forever in history because of the events he's been drawn into. Simon, of Cyrene, is forced by the Romans to carry Jesus' cross the remainder of the distance out to Golgotha.

Imagine walking that road, carrying the implement of your own torture and death on your shoulders. Imagine the eyes of the crowds as you walk out to meet your fate. Imagine being Simon, drawn into the hor-

ror of these events, witnessing firsthand what the Romans had already done to Jesus; a simple traveller who for a moment has stepped into the shoes of a dead man walking as he carries his cross out of Jerusalem to the execution fields. They arrive. Jesus is mocked some more, the soldiers shoving some foul drink into his face. Wine might have been a mercy to dull the pain, but what they'd put in it made it undrinkable. And Jesus had no desire to dull the pain, what he was about to do he would do with his full senses intact.

Crucifixion. The two thousand years that have passed since this event have gone a long way to domesticating this horrendous word. We need to guard against this. Crucifixion was so offensive to the Romans that they refused to allow their own citi-

zens to be crucified, no matter what they had done. Cicero said,

‘It is a crime to put a Roman citizen in chains, it is an enormity to flog one, sheer murder to slay one; what, then, shall I say of crucifixion? It is impossible to find the word for such an abomination.’

For the Jews, crucifixion was even worse. Deuteronomy 21:22–23 pronounces God’s curse upon anyone who is hung on a tree. In verse 24 of our passage, Mark says simply,

24 And they crucified him.

They crucified him. You know, Jesus was a carpenter. He was in full-time ministry

for three years, but before that he was a carpenter for twenty years. Almost every day of his life he would have hammered nails into wood. Can you imagine every time that hammer fell what must have been going on in Jesus' mind? That the last hammer he would ever see would be the hammer that drove nails through his wrists into a wooden cross. Twenty years of daily reminders of his death to come? Mark 15:24, they crucified him. Nails hammered through the nerve centres in his wrists, through his ankles, naked, battered, bleeding on the splintered wooden cross. Crucifixion, it's where we get the word 'excruciating'. Because it was excruciating. Even the Romans who loved the blood of the Colosseum, were embarrassed about it, it was such an awful way to die. There's one account where a Roman citizen goes

on holidays, right after a crucifixion, and when he returns home, to his horror the victim is still alive. It was a slow, painful and excruciating death. Do you know that the gospels are some of the longest crucifixion accounts in ancient literature? It's because the ancients thought it was obscene, obscene comes from 'off scene', too horrendous to be written down. That's what they did to Jesus. Do you know that they usually crucified you only a foot or two off the ground? So that your tormentors could look into your eyes while you died. Jesus wasn't up high, he wasn't all that far above eye level; so that people could walk past and taunt him and laugh at him and spit on him. That's what they did to Jesus. Can you see him there? With his enemies surrounding him, the smug look of satisfaction in their eyes, the blood lust,

they're savouring his death, enjoying his pain, sneering at him, mocking him 'you saved others, save yourself'.

The one who hung the earth in its place hangs there. The one who fixed the heavens is fixed there. The one who made all things fast is made fast upon that cross. The Master is being insulted, God is being murdered, the King of the Jews is being killed by the Jews. Heartlessly, the Romans roll dice to divide up his clothes, prophecy after prophecy being fulfilled. Above his head, dripping with irony, the charge against Jesus is written in three languages, its truth condemning everyone complicit in this evil act,

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Think & Pray

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews, my King, your King, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords crowned with his crown of thorns and finally seated on his throne, dying in glory for the sins of the world. Cursed by God, hanging on a tree, drinking the bitter cup down to its dregs, God's curse is willingly embraced by him so that we might go free. This is the heart of the gospel, the climax and centrepiece of all human history unfolding before our eyes. Messiah, King and Suffering Servant fused into one, the fulfilment of all God's promises, the unthinkable climax of his saving plan, the death of his Son. For us.

Feel the enormity of what is going on in our passage today. Shake off the familiarity of

the cross just for a moment. Like Simon of Cyrene, for a few moments try to walk a mile in Jesus' shoes. He did this for us. He died like this for us. What does it mean to you that he died like this for you? What does it mean to you that he hung there for your sins? Is there something you need to say to him? To confess to him? Then do so now in prayer.