

## *Presentation 13*

### **Mark's Passion Story**

#### **Act Three: Mk 15.21-47**



The scene of Jesus' Crucifixion by Gerard David, 1481

Photo: © Michael Trainor, used with permission.

*Act Three: Mk 15.21-47—Jesus' Misunderstanding, Loneliness and Death*

*Mk 15.21-39*

- Simon of Cyrene compelled to help carry Jesus' cross. Simon is an African and the father of Alexander and Rufus, known to Mk's household.
- Every disciples carries the cross
- Jesus brought to a public place of execution, for utter humiliation
- Jesus offered wine with mrrh. Jesus is not drugged but goes to death embracing it.
- Jesus crucified and has his garment divided. Jesus is without clothing. He is naked and dies in this state, in an act of sexual humiliation.
- Psalm 22 in the background of the event, remembered by Mark.

Jerome Neyrey on death by crucifixion in the ancient world:

...death by crucifixion climaxed a process of bodily degradation. It was preceded by torture and mutilation; it was occasionally accompanied by the condemned being forced to witness the brutal deaths of their wives and children (see Plato, *Gorgias* 473B-C; *Republic* 361E). In particular, a man to be crucified might be put on the rack, be blinded by hot irons, have his hand amputated, and of course be scourged. In terms of a bodily grammar of honor and shame, his face and eyes were assaulted. He was involuntarily stripped naked, and thus shamed...his body was made ugly and repulsive by beatings, scourgings and mutilations. His torture and death, moreover, occurred in public, even as entertainment for the crowds, which only magnified the victim's shame and disgrace.

*Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*  
(Louisville, Ky: WJKP, 1998), 139-40.



Detail of the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grunewald (c1470-1528).

Public Doman.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthias\\_Gr%C3%BCnewald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthias_Gr%C3%BCnewald)

- Mark does not describe the graphic nature of crucifixion given the audience's familiarity with this method of execution.
- Mk slows down the narrative pace.
- V26: Theme of kingship continues, as Jesus is executed with criminals.
- Procession of deriders, all misunderstanding the nature of Jesus' ministry and death. Jesus is not about self-salvation.

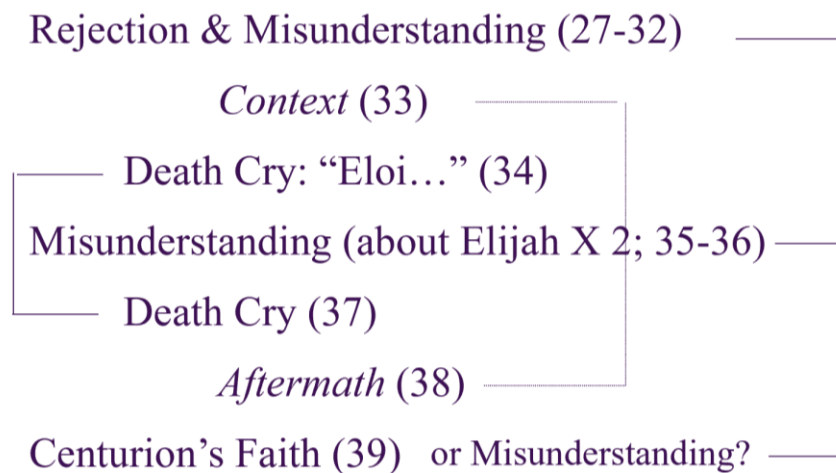
*Mark 15:33-39 (NRSV)* When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.<sup>34</sup> At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>35</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah."<sup>36</sup> And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."<sup>37</sup> Then Jesus gave 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> Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"



*Crucifixion, seen from the Cross*, by James Tissot, c. 1890, Brooklyn Museum  
Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10957854>

- Misunderstanding pervades the whole scene.
- V33: Context of darkness, cosmic weeping, drawing on Amos and Exodus.
- V34: Death cry of Jesus. Ps 22.2 prominent: ‘Eloi, Eloi...’ ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken / abandoned me?’ Jesus trusts God’s rescue or a sense of abandonment, speaking into Mark’s audience: the experience of loneliness and God’s silence.
- V35-36: Misunderstanding continues. ‘Eloi’ becomes ‘Elijah’. Bystanders desire to prolong Jesus’ agony to see if Elijah will return.
- V37: Second death cry, and Jesus ‘expires’. No glamour in Jesus’ death. Cries out for divine intimacy while surrounded by misunderstanding.
- V38: The aftermath: Temple’s Holy of Holies is now accessible through Jesus’ death. Communion with Jesus brings communion with God’s holiness.
- V39: The centurion’s statement, not of faith, but questioning Jesus’ sonship and intimacy with God, seeing how Jesus dies: ‘Truly this man was God’s son?’ The centurion, at this highpoint in Mark’s Gospel, reveals the ultimate act of misunderstanding. It is in conformity with the thematic pattern of this section of the Gospel, as seen below:

### The Thematic Pattern of Mk 15:27-39



#### *Mk 15.40-41*

- The women onlookers, Mary Magdalene and the mother of Jesus, faithfully observing and present, in contrast to Jesus’ male disciples

#### *Mk 15.42-47*

- Joseph of Arimathea approaches Pilate for the body of Jesus, purchases a linen cloth and lays Jesus in a rock-hewn tomb.
- V47: Mary Magdalene and the ‘mother of Joses’ (Jesus’ mother?) note also the place of Jesus’ burial.



*Deposition of Christ* by Agnolo Bronzino  
(1503-1572)

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#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- Have you been at a funeral or with someone who is grieving at the death of a loved one? What is your experience and is there any connection with the story of Jesus' death in Mark's Gospel?
- How is death perceived in our society?

#### IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT PRESENTATION

- Read Act Four of Mark's Passion Narrative: Mark 16.1-8.

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