

Sermon outline and notes:

© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

8/29/2010

## Mark 15:21-41          “The Cross of Calvary”

Intro. We come now to consider together the subject of the Cross of Calvary. Calvary is where Jesus died. All deaths are solemn events. But never was there a death of such importance as the death of Jesus at Calvary. Even creation was forced to recognize the significance of Calvary. Darkness fell upon the land for three hours in the midst of daytime. Furthermore, when Jesus died there was an earthquake, and miraculously, the thick, heavy veil of the temple was torn in two at the very moment of His death.

Six months before this fateful day, we are told that Jesus steadfastly set His face toward Jerusalem. He knew that He must die on the cross, and He was determined to fulfill His mission to save us from our sins. Actually, Jesus was determined to suffer and die on the cross even before the world began. The Bible describes Him as “the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). And then throughout the Old Testament we see many signs and prophecies pointing to the fact that someday, God would send a Savior who would shed His blood for the sins of His people. That Red River of Redemption flowed from Eden, where an animal was sacrificed to provide clothing for Adam and Eve, who had sinned. It continued into Abraham’s day, when he told his son Isaac, “My son, God will provide for Himself a lamb.” That Red River of Redemption flowed on through Egypt, when on that first Passover night, a lamb was slain and its blood applied to save the lives of the first-born children of Israel. We see the blood in the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle. Furthermore, several of the Old Testament prophets spoke of one who would suffer and die for sin.

And so now we arrive at the culmination of the plan of God in this regard, and let us reverently approach this subject together. Now as we think about the cross, let’s imagine that we are there at the cross. And let us consider first of all:

### I. THE PEOPLE AT THE CROSS

There were many people who were at the cross of Calvary. Many were there because they chose to, or because they had to. Many others would have been there because of the location of Calvary. The Romans crucified people along the busy roads. They wanted many people to witness the suffering and death of those crucified there as a bloody warning not to violate Roman law. So some would have been at Calvary because they were just passing by. Each of these groups of people illustrates people today. So consider with me some of the people who were there at the cross.

A. Simon Was There by Compulsion - V.21 says, “Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.” According to law, the one sentenced to crucifixion had to carry his own cross, or at least the cross beam, to the place of execution, and Jesus was no exception. He left Pilate’s hall bearing His cross (John 19:16-17) to the place of execution, about a mile away. But at some point along the way He could not continue due to sheer physical exhaustion. So the soldiers “drafted” Simon of Cyrene out of the crowd to carry the cross for Him. You see, Roman officers

had the privilege of “impressing” men for service. Simon had come from north Africa (Libya) for the Passover feast. There was a large colony of Jews there (Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1). After he was drafted, he probably thought he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Initially he didn’t carry the cross because he wanted to, but because he had to.

And so I want to know why you are here today? Are you like Simon; you are here by compulsion? Are you here because your parents or your wife pressured you into coming to church, or are you here because you love Jesus and you want to be here to worship Him? There are some children and young people here today who may be saying, “When I get old enough, I’m not going to church.”

Well let me ask you this. Did you take a bath because your parents made you, or because you wanted to? Now just because your parents made you do something shouldn’t mean that you are going to stop doing that when you get older. Can you imagine someone moving away from their parents and no longer take any baths! That would be very immature & foolish.

You ought to be thankful that you have someone who cares enough about you to make you take a bath, because you need it! You should thank God if you have parents who make you go to church, because you need to hear the Word of God! I believe that Simon became glad that he was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. We have good reason to believe that Simon must have stayed around and witnessed what happened at the cross. Either that day or soon thereafter, he must have trusted the Savior. At that time or later his two sons were led to the Lord. No doubt many of Mark’s Roman readers knew his sons Alexander and Rufus (Rom. 16:13).

There were others at the cross.

B. The Women Were There by Choice – In vv.40-41 we read, “There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,<sup>1</sup> who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.” We also know from John’s gospel that Mary, the mother of Jesus was there. We might well have supposed that when all the disciples but one had deserted our Lord and fled, the so-called weaker sex would not have dared to show themselves as His friends. But these women were there in good numbers. God sometimes chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. The faith of women sometimes stands upright when the faith of men fails and gives way. It is interesting to note, by the way, that the women were the last to leave the cross and the first to arrive at the tomb. They were the ones who were faithful to the very end. The church of Jesus Christ owes much to the sacrifice and devotion of believing women. There is a great work that women can do for God’s glory.

Are you like these women? Are you faithful to follow the Lord with complete devotion? Men, are we going to let women outdo us in devotion to the Lord? May we be as faithful to the Lord.

C. The Soldiers Were There by Commitment to Duty – In v.22 we read, “And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.” The antecedent to “they” is found in v.16, “Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium....” These were Roman soldiers, not the temple police. Normally four soldiers accompanied a man to his death by crucifixion (Jn. 19:23). So these soldiers were there at the cross just because they were doing their job.

---

<sup>1</sup> The mother of James & John (cf. Mt 27:56).

No doubt most or all of these men had become callused in the face of human suffering. They had driven spikes into the hands and feet of many victims before, and doing the same to Jesus didn't mean anything to them. In v.24 we read that the soldiers played a game, casting lots for the clothing of Jesus, even while He was suffering greatly. But they didn't care about Jesus. They were totally indifferent to Him.

I wonder how many people are like these soldiers. They can hear about the cross of Calvary, and yet they do not care; their hearts are not moved to repentance. R.G. Lee used to say that the cross of Christ moves many people no more than seeing a dead dog along the highway. As you hear about the cross of Jesus today, I hope you are not indifferent to His suffering.

Furthermore:

D. The Thieves Were There because of Crime – Jesus was not crucified alone. There were two others crucified with Him. In v.27 we read, “With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left.” They deserved to be there, but Jesus did not. The hymn writer sang, “Was it for crimes that I have done, He groaned upon the tree?” (At the Cross) The answer is “Yes.” As we shall discuss later, Christ did not die for His sins, but for our sins.

By the way, the fact that the innocent Son of God was placed between two guilty criminals also fulfilled prophecy. Mark tells us this in v.28, “So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’” This is a quotation from Isa. 53:12. It was foretold that He should be numbered with the transgressors, because He was made sin for us.

E. Many Bypassers Were There Due to Curiosity – In v.29 we read about “those who passed by.” Again, they crucified people along busy roads, and Jerusalem was flooded with pilgrims coming & going. Many stopped to see what was going on, just like people do today when an accident takes place along our highways.

At least 10% of our visitors are people who pass by the church & see the sign. I'm glad they stop in & visit. Are you here today out of curiosity?

F. The Leaders Were There by Contempt – In vv.31-32 we read, “Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.’” They were there to mock Jesus, and add to His suffering.

Some people go to a certain church just to make fun of the preacher and others in the church. They will cut up and make cute remarks to their friend sitting next to them. Believe it or not, that was my attitude when I first started attending a Baptist church. But it wasn't long before I realized that what that Baptist preacher was saying was something I needed in my life. Then, I became a Baptist preacher. Boy, did God turn the tables on me!

Now regardless of why you are here today, I want you to join me at the cross, and consider secondly this morning:

## II. THE PASSION OF THE CROSS

Of course, I'm referring to the suffering that Jesus endured, especially at the cross. For those who are here only by compulsion, or out of curiosity, or even if you are here to make fun, perhaps your attitude would change if you would only consider how much Jesus was willing to suffer for you. First of all,

A. He Bore the Pain of Crucifixion - No gospel writer records the details of the Crucifixion. Mark simply says in v.24, “they crucified Him...” Suffice it to say, crucifixion is one of the most horrible forms of death ever devised by man. It was the punishment reserved for the worst of criminals. It was so bad that no Roman citizen could be crucified. Furthermore, according to v.23, they offered Jesus wine mingled with myrrh, which was a drug to help deaden the awful ordeal of the cross. But He refused the cup of sympathy so that He might fully drink the cup of judgment against sin (Matt. 26:36-43).<sup>2</sup> So they proceeded to crucify Him. They bound His wrists to the cross beam and drove spikes into his hands or wrists, crushing bones, tearing tendons, and the blood would flow. Then they drove a spike through both feet with similar result. Can you imagine the pain that went racing through His body, shouting alarms of pain? And then for six hours He hung on the cross, experiencing great thirsts, difficulty breathing, and pressure on His joints and muscles.

Oh friend, contemplate how much Jesus was willing to suffer for you.

Not only did He bear the pain of crucifixion, but also:

B. He Bore the Shame of Crucifixion – He suffered shame in three ways:

1. They Stripped Him of His Garments – In v.24 we read, “They divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.” So either Jesus was crucified naked, or with nothing more than a loin cloth. The soldiers kept His garments<sup>3</sup> for themselves, dividing them by lots in fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:18.

Any why was this? The shame of nakedness was a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, and Jesus bore the shame of sin. Furthermore, it was so that we, who have no righteousness of our own, might be clothed in the perfect righteousness that Christ has wrought for us, and not stand naked before God on Judgment Day.

2. He Was Publicly Treated as a Criminal – Jesus was crucified between these two criminals, as if he, too, were a criminal. What a shame it was to be crucified!

Most of you are aware that about once/week they publish the names & offenses of everyone arrested or charged in Colonial Heights or other localities. Even though probably 98% are guilty, it’s unfortunate that they do that, because some may be exposed to the shame of having their name put in the paper even though they are not guilty. By the way, I can just see my name there because my new dog got out without a leash!

Well, far worse than having your name in the paper with some charge was to be crucified among some of the worst criminals. Yet Jesus bore that same for you and me.

3. They Mocked Him – Notice what many of the bypassers said, as reported in vv.29-30. They “blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!’” They were just repeating the charge against Him spoken at His trial. Perhaps they heard this from their leaders who were there at the cross. In vv.31-32 we have already seen the fact that the leaders mocked Him. You would think that they would leave Jesus alone by this point. Physical death and physical suffering was not enough for these godless men. So they mocked Him as Prophet (Mark 15:29), as Savior (v.31), and as King (v.32). Their mocking was the worst of all. The bypassers spoke *to*

---

<sup>2</sup> He also wanted His mind to be clear when He spoke from the cross.

<sup>3</sup> This included his headgear, sandals, belt, and outer garment. The seamless tunic, all of one piece, woven all the way from top to bottom, was also put into the lottery.

Jesus. The leaders only spoke *about* Him to each other. Even the robbers who were crucified with Him heaped insults on Him, according to v.32. Thankfully, one of the two later repented.

In the midst of it all Jesus remained silent. He offered not one word of rebuke. Peter puts it beautifully when he says, “who, while being reviled, did not revile in return...” (1 Peter 2:23).

Oh, what shame Jesus patiently endured for you. It just added to the depths of His suffering. How will you respond to such suffering?

We have reviewed for you the people at the cross, and the passion of the cross. But we will not understand what really happened that day unless we comprehend:

### III. THE PURPOSE OF THE CROSS

Why did Jesus suffer such pain and shame? Why did He not come down from the cross? So great a sacrifice only makes sense if it was made for a great reason. Surely He was more than a martyr. So consider with me some specific purposes of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. First of all, it was:

A. To Pay Sin’s Debt – From the very beginning God declared that death was the consequence of sin. He told Adam that if he disobeyed Him, he would surely die. God declared through the prophet Ezekiel, “The soul that sins shall die.” The Bible also says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). So the only way sin could be forgiven was for Jesus, the sinless Substitute, to die in our place. Now notice with me that:

1. He Suffered Spiritual Death - The pain and shame of the cross was not all that Jesus suffered. He also suffered spiritually. V.33 says, “Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.” A miraculous darkness came over the land at noon. It seemed that all Creation sympathized with the Creator as He suffered. This was indeed a miracle and not some natural phenomenon, such as a dark storm or an eclipse. It would not be possible to have an eclipse during full moon at Passover. I believe that it was during those dark hours that God placed the sin of the world upon Jesus. Jesus described hell as a place of outer darkness, and Jesus bore the darkness of hell on that cross. Imagine the agony He must have suffered!

The next evidence that Jesus suffered separation from God can be found in the words of v.34, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (See Psa. 122:1). They imply an amount of mental suffering, such as we are unable to conceive. He uttered His dying cry, under the heavy pressure of a world’s sin laid upon Him, and imputed to Him.

Furthermore:

2. He Suffered Physical Death – Yet notice that Jesus died differently from any of us. As a minister, I have seen people die on several occasions. By the time they die, their voice is weak, & they are hardly able to breathe. Yet in v.37 we read, “And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.” At that moment our sin was paid in full, for He died. Yet He did not die because His bodily organs ceased to function. Jesus willingly laid down His life for us (John 10:11, 15, 17-18). He was not a martyr; He was a willing sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Since Jesus paid our sin debt, we can indeed be forgiven! What wonderful news.

So Jesus suffered the full consequences of sin on our behalf. Another purpose of His sacrifice was:

B. To Provide Access to God – God wants to do more than forgive us. He wants to make us His children. He wants to have a relationship with us, and provide us with full access to Him. So notice what happened in v.38 when Jesus died, “Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The rending of the veil was evidently witnessed by many priests. Three o’clock was the time of the evening sacrifice and they were serving in the temple at that very moment. At any rate, we note later on that many of the priests came to a saving knowledge of Christ (Acts 6:7). That fact that the very moment when He died was the moment that the veil was rent in two is not accidental by any means. They are specifically stated together.

What did the miraculous tearing of the curtain mean? The veil was a barrier. It had separated man from God. But now, through His death, Jesus had opened for the whole world a “new and living way” (Heb. 10:12-22). It taught that Gentiles as well as Jews might now draw near to God with boldness, through Jesus the one High Priest, and that all barriers between man and God were forever thrown down. Furthermore, it taught the abolition and termination of the whole Jewish law of ceremonies. To attempt to revive the Jewish ceremonies in the Church of Christ, by returning to altars, sacrifices and a priesthood, is nothing better than closing up again the torn curtain and lighting a candle at noon.

So the purpose of the cross was in order that Jesus might save us from our sin, and grant us eternal life in the presence of God. At the time of the birth of Jesus it was announced that He would save His people from their sin. What the enemies said in the last of v.31 had more truth than they realized, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” He had indeed saved others. He saved many from incurable disease. He forgave the sins of the paralyzed man and proved it by causing him to walk again. Indeed, Jesus had saved others. And even now, as He was experiencing the agony of the cross, He could not save others and at the same time save Himself. He did not save Himself so that He could save you! It is not that He *could not* come down from the cross, but that He *would not*. What was it that bound Jesus to the cross and kept Him there? It was love for you! He died for you.

Conclusion: Let us leave this Scripture passage with a deep sense of the enormous debt which all believers owe to Christ. Through His condemnation we have acquittal—through His sufferings, peace & joy—through His shame, glory—through His death, life. No wonder the apostle Paul says, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15). Let us leave the passage with the deepest sense of Christ’s unutterable love to our souls. Surely the thought of this love should constrain us daily to live not unto ourselves but unto Christ. It should make us ready and willing to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to Him who lived and died for us (Romans 12:1).

The story is told that Steinberg, the artist, struck with the beauty of a gypsy girl, took her to his studio and frequently had her sit for him. At the time he was at his masterpiece, “Christ on the Cross.” The girl used to watch him work on this painting. One day she said to him, “He must have been a very wicked man to be nailed to a cross like that.” “No,” said the painter, “On the contrary, he was a very good man, the best man that ever lived. He died for others.” The little girl looked up at him and asked, “Did he die for you?” Steinberg was not a Christian at the time, but the gypsy girl’s question touched his heart and awakened his conscience and he became a believer in Him whose dying passion he had so well portrayed.<sup>4</sup>

I believe God wants to save someone from their sins today. You have heard & seen what Jesus did for you. I have told you why He suffered & died. Now you must respond in order to be

---

<sup>4</sup> Eugene A. Hessel in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #2763* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

saved. Repent of your sins. Put your faith in Jesus. Do you believe He's God's Son? One of the soldiers in our story came to believe in Him. The centurion had seen how Jesus had been conducting himself in the midst of all the wicked taunts and mockeries. He saw the prolonged darkness at midday. He heard that loud, strong cry just before He died. He felt the earthquake when He died (Mt. 27:51). And after hearing the Jewish leaders scoff at Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God, he said in v.39, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" Now reflect on the cross. Do you believe He died for your sins? If so, ask Him to save you, and come into your heart! He is your only hope of forgiveness, and gaining access to God's heaven. Do it today!

Sources: J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 6/10/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

I could insert a brief 1<sup>st</sup> point: The Place of the Cross (v.22).