



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

Chapter 15

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- After the Lord Jesus Christ was tried religiously at the residence of the high priest, He was led to Pilate, the Roman governor, who had the authority to put their verdict into effect, and who, at the persistence of the multitude, condemned Him to death on the cross



Introduction

Chapter Outline

- Jesus Faces Pilate 15:1-5
- Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15
- The Soldiers Mock Jesus 15:16-20
- The King on a Cross 15:21-32
- Jesus Dies on the Cross 15:33-41
- Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb 15:42-47



Jesus Faces Pilate 15:1-5

- As soon as it was daylight appeared the whole Sanhedrim united in consultation
- All the proceedings up until then had been irregular and illegal
- Now, for formality's sake, they tried Him again
- But there was another law which was also violated
- It was now Friday
- In capital cases, sentence of condemnation might not legally be pronounced on the day of the trial
- Yet our Lord was tried, condemned, and crucified on the same day



Jesus Faces Pilate 15:1-5

- It was necessary for the Jews to deliver Christ over to the Roman power; because the power of life and death had been taken from them since they became subject to the Romans
- *Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"*, Which either he had heard before that it was said about Him, and His followers; or was what the Jews now suggested to him as His crime, which they desired sentence of death might pass upon Him
- Jesus' answer was in the affirmative asserting that what Pilot said was true



Jesus Faces Pilate 15:1-5

- Our Lord answered nothing, because all that they had to say against Him was manifestly false or pointless, and unworthy of any reply
- St. Augustine says on this, "The Savior, who is the Wisdom of God, knew how to overcome by keeping silence."
- *Pilate asked Him again*, This time in the presence of the chief priests, who laid so many things to His charge
- The former question was put, when Jesus and Pilate were alone in the judgment hall, where the Jews would not enter for fear of being defiled



Jesus Faces Pilate 15:1-5

- These renewed accusations led to further questions from Pilate, but our Lord preserved a complete silence
- *Pilate marveled*, What should be the meaning of His silence, when He was so capable of defending Himself, and was so innocent, as Pilate himself was ready to believe
- The silence of the Lord Christ carried a strength, that captured the heart of Pilate, who wished to release Him, presenting the Jews with several opportunities to reconsider their position
- Yet, out of fear, he submitted to their request

Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15



- St. Mark omits here what took place next in the order of events, namely, the sending of our Lord by Pilate to Herod, Luke 23:5
- This practice of releasing to the people any prisoner they might think proper, was instituted in order to captivate the will of the people; which was most commonly done on the festival day, when the Jews were assembled from the different provinces to Jerusalem
- The fact that Barabbas was a rebel as well as robber is stated also by St. Luke, 23:19, but St. Mark alone records the fact that *his fellow rebels* were imprisoned with him

Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15



- Pilate appears to have thought of Barabbas, not doubting but that, by limiting their choice between him and Jesus, he would secure the liberation of our Lord
- But Pilate little knew the temper of the chief priests and scribes, and their bitter hostility to Christ
- The evangelist here describes the awful wickedness of the man they preferred to the Son of God
- How apparent the blindness and malice of this people

Taking the Place of Barabbas

15:6-15



- Pilate doubtless hoped that they would ask for Jesus
- He knew that the chief priests had delivered our Lord for envy
- And he knew also, at least by report, of the purity of Jesus and of the holy freedom with which He rebuked their vices
- So he thought, reasonably enough, that if the chief priests wished to destroy Him for envy, the people, who had experienced so many kindnesses from Him, would desire that He should live
- “Since envy put to death the Author of life, Jesus Christ, how watchful should all Christians be against every degree of that sin.” St. John Chrysostom

Taking the Place of Barabbas

15:6-15



- What was ironic about the demand for Pilate to release Barabbas instead of Jesus?
- The name bar Abbas in Aramaic means "son of the father"
- They preferred to have a robber/revolutionary and a murderer released to them instead of the peaceful and innocent Jesus
- Jesus was the true "Son of the Father" who was the Son of God while Barabbas was the son of a human father
- Pilate tried to put the matter in their own power
- But it was all in vain

Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15



- For the chief priests had resolved to press for His crucifixion
- Pilate puts the question before them with much reasoning and tact
- He speaks of our Lord as one whom "they called the King of the Jews."
- He appeals to their national pride and their national hopes
- Would they degrade themselves, and extinguish their hopes, by giving up to the most shameful of deaths, one who had established such claims upon their reverence and their love?

Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15



- Crucifixion is the most horrific form of capital punishment
- The Romans only used this form of execution for non-Roman citizens who were accused of dreadful crimes including treason against Rome (St. Peter was crucified but St. Paul, a Roman citizen, was beheaded)
- This final speech of Pilate presents a subtle combination of honesty and craft
- He says what he really thinks: that Jesus is innocent, and he makes sure that the people really mean to stand to what they have said

Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15



- The people were resolved to have His life
- Nothing else would satisfy
- The cry was kept up unbroken, *Away with this man, Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*
- In vain Pilate argued
- In vain he washed his hands openly before them all, Matthew 27:24 in token of his conviction of the perfect innocence of the Accused

Taking the Place of Barabbas

15:6-15



- Pilate was now quite sure what the people wished, and so, as an opportunist, he let them have their way
- He thought he must content the people, and therefore released Barabbas unto them
- He now hoped to move the multitude to pity by the terrible punishment of scourging, after which he trusted that the people would relent and change their mind
- Scourging was a vile punishment, inflicted on slaves

Taking the Place of Barabbas 15:6-15



- But it was also inflicted upon those who were condemned to death, even though freemen
- The religious authorities wanted Jesus to be treated as a common criminal and as one who was cursed by God by being "hung on a tree" who therefore could not possibly be the Messiah
- Having the Romans execute Jesus also protected them from the crowds of Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

15:16-20



- This was the principal court of the palace, where a large number of soldiers were always housed
- *called Praetorium*, Or judgment hall
- St. Cyril says that the purple cloak symbolized the kingdom of the whole world, which Christ was about to receive, and which He was to obtain by the shedding of his most precious blood
- It was designed in mockery of His claim to be a King, and it probably had a reference to His supposed rebellion against Caesar

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

15:16-20



- *a crown of thorns*, Formed probably of the thorny nâbk, which grows abundantly in Palestine by the banks of the Jordan
- This plant would be very suitable for the purpose, having flexible branches, with leaves very much resembling the ivy leaf in their color, and with many sharp thorns
- The pain arising from the pressure of these sharp thorns upon the head must have been excruciating
- The soldiers *began to salute Him* in bitter mockery of His claim to be a king

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

15:16-20



- The same reed, according to St. Matthew, 27:29-30, which they had first put into His right hand as a staff, to complete the mocking symbolism
- *spat on Him*, They did it again and again
- The word "worship" here denotes only the respect and honor shown to princes and kings
- It does not refer to any "religious" homage
- They regarded him as foolishly and madly claiming to be a king - not as claiming to be divine

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

15:16-20



- The silence of our blessed Lord during these unjustifiable and aggravated insults is very remarkable, and also the total absence of any legal grounds for His condemnation
- They led Him out of the judgment hall, and through the city to the usual place of crucifixion
- Assuming the palace of Pilate to have been near the gate of Jaffa, north-west of Mount Zion, and the place of crucifixion that now assigned to it, within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, - the distance would be about one-third of a mile



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- A pilgrim to the feast, *Simon a Cyrenian*, is forced to carry Jesus' cross when Jesus became too weak, Matthew 27:32-33; Luke 23:26; John 19:17
- St. Jerome thinks Alexander and Rufus were disciples of Christ, and on this account the name of their father is here expressed
- The place of execution was called "Place of the Skull," Golgotha in Hebrew/Aramaic claimed to be the burial place of Adam
- It was located outside the city walls according to the Law since nothing "unclean" like a dead body could remain with the holy city of Jerusalem, Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:35



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- *wine mingled with myrrh*, This was given to criminals, to lessen their torments
- Our Lord was pleased to taste the bitterness, but He would not permit the relief and He would not seek alleviation of the agonies of the crucifixion
- He would bear the full burden willingly
- Thus also were the scriptures fulfilled: *they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* Psalm 69:21



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- *when they crucified Him*, The evangelist states the fact without staying to dwell on the painful circumstances connected with the act of nailing Him to the cross; and passes on to the mention of other things
- His garments they divided into four parts; and each soldier, as there were four of them, took a part
- And upon His vesture, or seamless coat, because they would not rend it, they cast lots who should have it, and so fulfilled a prophecy in Psalm 22:18



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- St. Mark is the only evangelist who says it was the third hour
- The Gospels of Matthew and Luke only mention the darkness of a total eclipse that began at noon after Jesus had been on the cross for some time, as does Mark in 15:33
- St. John says it was the sixth, John 19:14
- The Jews divided their day into four parts, which they called hours
- It was, then, within the third hour that they crucified Him; and it was from the sixth to the ninth hour that He was actually upon His cross



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- In the case of remarkable prisoners the accusation was written on a white tablet, and carried before them as they went to the place of execution
- It was then placed over their heads when the cross was erected
- Despite the protests of the chief priests that the plaque should read "He said He was King of the Jews," Pilate ordered that the plaque was to read "The King of the Jews" in three languages: Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, John 19:19-22 that all classes of people might be able to read it



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- The ordinary Hebrew or Aramaic of the people, the official Latin of the Romans, and the Greek of the foreign population, John 19:20
- Some thinks that by putting up His cause, Pilate wished to revenge himself of the Jews, for their persistence and stubbornness in compelling him against his will, to condemn Jesus to death



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- We know from St. Luke 23:40 that one of these *robbers* was saved; while it would appear that the other died in his sins
- And thus Christ upon His cross, between these two men, and with the title of King over His head, presented a striking and awful picture of the final judgment
- Such is the view of St. Ambrose and of St. Augustine, who says, "This cross, if you mark it well, was a judgment-seat. For the Judge being placed in the midst, the one who believed was set free; the other who reviled him was condemned; and thus he signified what he will do with the quick and the dead. Some He will place on His right hand, and some on His left" St. Augustine



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- Some scholars see in the two robbers, a reference to the nations of the Jews and the Gentiles; one of them was condemned to death through the Mosaic Law, while the other, through the natural law
- The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified between them, to bind them together in Him, being a Cornerstone for the Church, offering His blood a price for unity in Him!
- This passage of Scripture in verse 28 is found in Isaiah 53:12



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- *passed by*, Calvary was probably near to one of the heavily used roads leading to the city; so that there would be a continual stream of people passing to and from more especially at this time, when Jerusalem was crowded with visitors
- And no doubt the words of the accusation against Him in its incorrect form would pass freely from mouth to mouth
- *save Yourself, and come down from the cross!* Suggesting that if He was what He had pretended to be, and could do what He gave out He could, He might easily free Himself from the cross, and make His escape



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- It was not possible for them to apprehend the secret of salvation, or to appreciate the work of God
- They considered the cross as His end; thus He became in their eyes a deceitful; if unable to save Himself, how could He make Himself a King?!
- Here was another fulfillment of prophecy, "All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" Psalm 22:7-8



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- The chief priests and the scribes are more bitter than the people
- In fact they had all along endeavored to rouse the bad passions of the people against our Lord
- And now they take advantage of His present degraded condition to renew the old charge that His miracles of healing had been done by Beelzebub
- *He saved others*, They cannot deny this fact
- But they now try to turn this fact against Him, by alleging that He who pretended to work miracles upon others, performed them, not by the finger of God, but by Beelzebub



The King on a Cross 15:21-32

- If they had been done by a Divine power, the same power would now be exercised for His deliverance
- If the Scribes and Pharisees did not believe in Christ when He rose from the dead, neither would they have believed in Him had He left the cross
- Though the scripture had foretold in many places that He was to suffer, Psalm 22:16, *They pierced My hands and My feet*
- However, the Jews cannot point out that the scripture foretold He should descend from the cross

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- The most mysterious period of the Passion was rapidly drawing near, when the Lord of life was about to yield up His spirit
- At this hour nature herself began to show her sympathy with Him Whom man rejected
- It is impossible to explain the origin of this darkness
- The Passover moon was then at the full, so that it could not have been an eclipse for when it is full moon the moon cannot intervene between the earth and the sun
- This darkness was doubtless produced by the immediate interference of God

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- St. Cyprian says, "The sun was constrained to withdraw his rays, and close his eyes, that he might not be compelled to look upon this crime of the Jews."
- To the same purpose St. John Chrysostom, "The creature could not bear the wrong done to its Creator. Therefore the sun withdrew his rays, that he might not behold the deeds of the wicked."
- *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* This is the only one of the "Seven Sayings from the Cross," which has been recorded by St Mark
- St. Mark here uses the Aramaic form; St. Matthew refers to the original Hebrew as it stands in Psalm 22:1

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- It is generally supposed that our blessed Lord, continually praying upon His cross, and offering Himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, recited the whole of the Psalm (22) of which these are the first words, that He might show Himself to be the very Being to whom the words refer; so that the Jewish scribes and people might examine and see the cause why He would not descend from the cross; namely, because this very psalm showed that it was appointed that He should suffer these things

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- They either only caught the first syllable, or misapprehended words, or, as some think, spoke in willful mockery, and declared He called not on Eli, God, but on Elijah, whose appearance was expected, Mark 9:11
- *sour wine*, Burning thirst is the most painful aggravation of death by crucifixion, and it was as He uttered the words, “*I thirst*,” John 19:28, that the soldier ran and filled a sponge with vinegar, or the sour wine-and-water called *posca*, the ordinary drink of the Roman soldiers

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- According to St Mark, the man himself cries "*Let be;*"
- According to St Matthew, the others cry out thus to him as he offers the drink
- According to St John, several filled the sponge with the sour wine
- Combining the statements, together we have a natural and accurate picture of the excitement caused by the loud cry

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- The three synoptic Evangelists all dwell upon the loudness of the cry, as it had been the triumphant note of a conqueror
- Usually the voice fails the dying, more especially when the natural forces have been weakened by long agony, as in the case of our Lord
- It seems that He cried out, just before He gave up His life, by that supernatural power which His Godhead supplied to Him
- And thus He showed that, although He had gone through all the pains which were sufficient in ordinary cases to produce death, yet that at length He did not die of necessity, but voluntarily, in accordance with what He had Himself said, John 10:18

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- There were two veils - one before the holy place, and the other before the holy of holies
- The veil of the holy of the holies was always kept closed; nor might any one enter it but the high priest, and that only once a year
- The veil which was rent at our Lord's death was that which was placed before the holy of holies
- These veils or curtains, according to Josephus, were each forty cubits in height and ten in breadth, of great substance, very massive, and richly embroidered with gold and purple

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- *the veil of the temple was torn*, It was not a natural event
- The veil signified that heaven was closed to all, until Christ by His death rent this veil in two, and laid open the way
- The way into God's Divine Presence in the heavenly Sanctuary that had been closed since the Fall of Adam is now opened and ready to receive the souls of the just
- It may also signify that the whole of the Jewish dispensation, with its rites and ceremonies, was now extended by Christ; and that from then on the middle wall of partition was broken down, so that now, not the Jews only, but the Gentiles also might draw near by the blood of Christ

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- It was the business of the centurion to watch all that took place, and to see that the sentence was executed
- He must have been standing close under the cross and observed that the whole demeanor of the dying Sufferer was so different from anything that he had ever witnessed before which led him utter this involuntary exclamation, *“Truly this Man was the Son of God!”*

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- As he heard the piercing cry, so startling, so unexpected, which escaped Him just before He yielded up His spirit; he could come to no other conclusion than this, that He was in very deed God's Son
- It has been supposed by some that this centurion was Longiuus, who was led by the miracles which accompanied the death of Christ, to acknowledge Him to be the Son of God, and to be a messenger of His resurrection, and was ultimately himself put to death for the sake of Christ in Cappadocia
- St. John Chrysostom repeated the same that he was at last crowned with martyrdom

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- There were three women mentioned by name: Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and a third, called by St. Matthew, 'mother of Zebedee's sons, was mentioned as Salome by St. Mark
- *Mary Magdalene*, out of whom seven demons were cast out, Luke 8:2, this is the first time she is mentioned by St. Mark
- *James the Less*, so called to distinguish him from the Apostle St. James, the son of Zebedee
- *Mary of Clopas*, John 19:25 and *Mary the mother of James the Less*, are the same person; she was the sister of the Blessed Virgin

Jesus Dies on the Cross

15:33-41



- The mother of our Lord had been there not *from afar* but near the cross of Jesus, John 19:26-27
- While the disciples refrained from following the crucified, even from afar, the women were following Him, and some of them got the honor of enjoying the Christ risen from the dead, before the disciples did
- Origen says, “By that, the gospel gave the woman back her dignity, and proclaimed her sanctity, after suffering a long history of bitter resentment on the part of the world.”

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- The body had to be taken down before sunset, as the crucifixion took place on Friday the 'preparation day', on which the Jews prepare for the Sabbath rest
- The Sabbath commenced on the Friday evening at six o'clock
- *Joseph of Arimathea*, A distinguished man, who probably held a high office among the Jews, as one of their great council, or a Jewish senator
- The word *prominent* here, is not a mere title of "office," but is given in reference to his personal character, as being a man of integrity and blameless life

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- *was himself waiting for the kingdom of God*, Waited for, or expected, the coming of the Messiah
- But this expression means more than an "indefinite" expectation that the Messiah "would" come, for all the Jews expected that
- It implies that he believed "Jesus" to be the Messiah, and that he had "waited" for Him to build up the kingdom of God; and this agrees with what John says John 19:38, that he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews
- But God called him to a public profession of attachment in a different manner, and gave this distinguished man grace to it

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- *taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus,* God had raised up this distinguished counselor and secret disciple for a special and most important occasion
- The disciples of Jesus had fled, and if they had not, they had no influence with Pilate
- A poor man would not have dared to approach Pilate for such a purpose as this
- Jesus' body would have been buried "that night" in the same grave with the two thieves

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- For it was a law of the Jews that the body of an executed man should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath
- Joseph dared to express sympathy for the Savior
- He went in boldly and begged the body of Jesus
- It needed no small measure of courage to do this
- Jesus had just been condemned, mocked, spit on, crucified
- To admit attachment for Him now was proof of sincere affection

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- St. John Chrysostom says, "The courage of Joseph is greatly to be admired, in that, for the love of Christ, he exposed himself to the danger of death."
- In addition, the Lord did not wish, His body to be wrapped by His disciples, lest there would be accusation, that they stole the body before burying it
- But He was wrapped by an honorable righteous man

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- Death, by crucifixion, was a slow lingering death and the two thieves, which were crucified with Christ, were not dead when He was
- Pilate, therefore, marveled at the request of Joseph, and required the evidence of the centurion to assure himself of the fact
- He was informed by the centurion of the fact that He was dead
- The centurion had charge of the soldiers who watched Him, and could therefore give correct information
- Pilate ordered that the body to be given to Joseph

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- It appears that Joseph himself, assisted probably by Nicodemus and others, actually took the body of our Lord down from the cross
- Wrapped Him up in the *fine linen*, as was the manner of the Jews
- He then conveyed the Body to a new Tomb, wherein as yet no man had ever been laid, and which he had carved out of the limestone rock in a garden he possessed by Golgotha, John 19:41
- Here now they laid the Holy Body in a niche in the rock, and rolled a stone of large size, Matthew 27:60 to the horizontal entrance

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

15:42-47



- Very likely *Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses* saw Joseph, and his men, take Jesus down from the cross, and they followed him, and observed where he laid Him
- So they were witnesses of His death, and of His burial, as they afterwards were of His resurrection from the dead



Discussion

- Why do they send Jesus to Pilate?
- Describe Pilate. What do you learn about him from this scene?
- What is the irony in Barabbas' name? How does that contrast with the identity of Jesus?
- What is the significance of the veil of the Temple? Why is its rending from top to bottom significant in view of the Jewish understanding of what the Temple stood for?



Discussion

- Why did they offer Jesus myrrh? Why did he refuse it?
- Describe Joseph of Arimathea. Why did he need to take courage?
- Mark says that the Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to Pilate “out of envy”. Why would Mark choose that word rather than a more typical one, such as *malice*?
- Why do you think Jesus quotes Psalm 22? When you read the psalm, what do you notice about the way it ends? What might the ending suggest to you?