

Day 85 (Tuesday 27th November)

Read Mark Chapter 15 verses 1 to 5

Jesus before Pilate

The Jewish authorities handed Jesus over to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. Normally residing at Caesarea, he used to come up to Jerusalem at Passover time when nationalistic feelings could be dangerously high. Possibly the Jewish authorities wanted a very public end to the trouble Jesus had caused them. The excuse they gave was that Jesus was a revolutionary claiming to be king and they said they weren't allowed to put anyone to death (John 18.31). When questioned, Jesus admitted people called Him a King, though His kingdom was not of this world (John 18.36). Amazingly for Pilate, Jesus made no defence. He could have had legions of angels come down to rescue Him (Matthew 26.53) but His whole purpose in coming to this world was to die for us.

Question to think about

1. Are we prepared for Jesus to sometimes reveal uncomfortable things about ourselves to us?
2. Christians have been described as 'in the world but not of the world'.
What could that phrase mean?
3. Jesus made no defence but we are told to "always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3.15).
What would we say if asked 'What hope for this world is there?'

A Prayer you may wish to say

Lord, You know everything about us. Help us to open up ourselves to Your light that reveals things we might rather hide. Forgive us and give us grace to change. Give us opportunities to talk about our hope in *You* and courage to take them. Amen

Day 86 (Wednesday 28th November)

Read Mark Chapter 15 verses 6 to 15

Pilate hands Jesus over to be Crucified

Knowing Jesus to be innocent, Pilate flagrantly ignored Roman law which required conviction for a crime before sentence. He put his own safety and popularity before doing what was right. The custom of releasing a prisoner for the festival crowd was no 'let out' for Pilate. The crowd chose Barabbas -who *was* a guilty rebel. 'Barabbas' significantly means 'son of a father' (ie could be anyone) as opposed to Jesus who is *The* Son of *The* Father. Jesus took the place that rightfully belonged to all of humanity. He died for our sins (1Corinthians 15.3). He had done no evil Himself. Prisoners were routinely flogged before crucifixion. The flogging alone could kill a man.

Questions to think about

1. Do we sometimes do what is popular instead of what is right?
2. What do *we* wish to do with the man called the King of the Jews?
3. How are we a Barabbas, a guilty rebel?

A Prayer you may want to say

"Man of Sorrows!" what a name, for the Son of God, who came, ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Day 87 (Thursday 29th November)**Read Mark Chapter 15 verses 16 to 20**

The Soldiers mock Jesus

Jesus is our King. The whole of the first half of Mark's Gospel built up to Peter's confession of the Messiah King. The response of fallen mankind is to mock Jesus and His followers. Jesus the King has come in love and humility to save us but is publicly ridiculed and humiliated. (The whole cohort was called out to watch.) The 'purple cloak' may well have been just an old faded rag that looked vaguely purple. All He receives are blows, spitting and pretend worship.

Questions to think about

1. What is our reaction when people use 'Christ' as a swear word or make a joke about Him?
2. How can we best show love to the people who do that?
3. How can we make sure there is nothing in our worship that is pretend?

A Prayer you may wish to say

My song is love unknown, my Saviour's love to me; love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.
King of Kings, give us your love for a world that spurns and scorns you.

Day 88 (Friday 30th November)**Read mark Chapter 15 verse 21 to 32**

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Condemned prisoners would normally have to carry their own cross (or cross beam) to their execution. Christ must have reached a point where He was physically unable to walk further. Simon of Cyrene, in town for the festival, was made to carry Christ's cross. Christ said "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8.34). Simon did just that. Christ's cross was really ours, the rebels against God, the Barabbas', the sons of a father. Simon's sons Alexander and Rufus were known in the church at Rome (where Mark was writing) -see Romans 16.13, and would later experience great persecution there. James and John had wanted to sit at Christ's side in glory (Mark 10.37). In contrast, two men were crucified as criminals beside Christ in shame.

Questions to think about

1. Simon's bearing Christ's cross must have had a big effect on his family. Alexander and Rufus' mother became a 'mother' to Paul (Romans 16.13). What might it have been about Simon afterwards that impressed them so much?
2. People scoffed that Christ couldn't save Himself. Why didn't He?
3. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2.20). In what ways does having Christ in it make a difference in my life?

A Prayer you may want to say

Lord thank you that You went through to the end on the cross in order to save us.

Help us to help each other, Lord, each other's cross to bear; let each his friendly aid afford, and feel another's care.

Day 89 (Saturday 1st December)**Read Mark Chapter 15 verses 33 to 41**

The Death of Jesus

There had been 3 days of darkness in Egypt before the first Passover (Exodus 11.22). In the darkness now, Christ as a man, cries out, feeling the separation that our sin puts between us and God. As now, some people don't understand and say all manner of things -like 'he's calling for Elijah'. Christ "breathed his last" (verse 39). He actively laid down His life: it was not taken away from Him. The Temple curtain which had symbolised the separation between the Holy God and sinful man, is now torn away -from the top. God Himself in Christ, our spotless (sinless) Passover sacrificial lamb had born away our sin that caused the separation. Wonderfully, it is a gentile Roman who is first to exclaim "Truly this man was God's Son!" The amazing news of sin removed and reconciliation with God is for all people -not just the Jews. Women had often been marginalised in those days. The followers of Christ recorded by Mark who stayed faithful at the end, were all women.

Questions to think about

1. How is Mark's Gospel "good news" (Mark 1.1)?
2. A Roman centurion was a hardened brutal man. Is there anyone beyond reach of the gospel?
3. If news is good, what should we do with it?

A Prayer you may wish to say

Lord, truly You are God's Son. Truly You died for me and I am now free from my sin. Truly I can come into God's very presence now in prayer.

Day 90 (Sunday 2nd December)**Read Mark Chapter 15 verses 42 to 47**

The Burial of Jesus

Mark goes to some pains to tell people that Jesus was definitely dead. When Pilate doubts it could have been so quick (Jesus having actively given up His life rather than having it taken from Him), the Centurion confirms it. And centurions knew their grisly business. Mark also records two witnesses, apart from Joseph of Arimathea, who saw where the body was laid. Joseph had everything to lose in what he did for Jesus: his position as a respected member of the council that had arrested Jesus and his safety in approaching Pilate for the body of a criminal.

Questions to think about

1. Why is Christ's death an important part of our Creed? (.....For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried....).
2. If Christ had not died, what would be the consequences for us?
3. Joseph was a very high-ranking member of the 'enemy' for Christ's followers. Is there anyone beyond reach of the gospel?

A Prayer you may wish to say

Lord, thank you that you died in my place, for my salvation. Thank you that my sins are forgiven and what separated me from You has been taken away. Thank you that because You faced death I do not have to. (Hallelujah!)

Day 91 (Monday 3rd December)

Read Mark Chapter 16 verses 1 to 8)

The Resurrection of Jesus

We come now to the final climax. Jesus did not just die. On the third day He rose from the dead! The women came early on the Sunday morning to do the job of anointing Christ's body that Joseph of Arimathea hadn't had time for before sunset on Friday. In their desire to come as soon as possible, they had overlooked the stone. One man could release it to roll down its incline and seal the tomb, but several would be required to push it back up. God had solved the problem for them however! Jesus had died for our sins, but with no sins of His own, death had no hold over Him. He was risen! An angel at the now open **empty** tomb said "don't be alarmed...he's been raised....and you will see Him in Galilee – just as He told you"! And not surprisingly, they were terrified.

Question to think about

1. If Christ rose from the dead, is He alive now?
2. If Christ has conquered death, do we, being with Him, need to fear it?
3. If Christ is alive now, can we meet with Him?

A prayer you may wish to say

My Lord and my God, my whole trust is in You.
Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me,
and that Thou bid'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Day 92 (Tuesday 4th December)

Read Mark Chapter 16 verses 9 to 20

Jesus appears to the disciples

After the Resurrection, Jesus appeared alive to numerous people at different times, in different places and in different ways. Paul mentions an appearance to more than 500 people at one time (1 Corinthians 15.6). When they told others about it, a common reaction was disbelief – though Christ upbraided those who had at first refused to believe the message. He told His disciples to tell the whole world the good news. Miraculous signs would accompany their message and those who did not believe would be condemned. Christ's work on Earth was accomplished. Our work on Earth had just started.

Questions to think about

1. What was the main piece of good news the disciples passed on? (verse 11)
2. We have not seen Jesus in the same way as the disciples. What *can* we tell people about?
3. What were the disciples to tell their listeners to do? (verse 16)

A Prayer you may wish to say

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay, close by me forever, and love me I pray.

Take me and use me to help bring Your good news of love, forgiveness, new life and power to our world that so desperately needs it. Amen

