Mark 15

Jesus underwent two trials -- a religious trial before the Sanhedrin (Jewish leaders) and then a civil trial before the Roman authorities (Pilate). **Why did the Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pontius Pilate for a civil trial (v. 1) when they had already condemned him?** The Jews did not have the legal right to execute their own criminals. Rome had revoked that right in 7 A.D. which was a big blow to the Jewish community because it meant they no longer had the basic right of Jewish self-government - to punish their own criminals - and it was the last straw that demonstrated that they were totally under the oppressive control of Rome.

Can you think of a time when the Jews disregarded this prohibition of the Romans and executed someone? (Acts 7:57-60).

**What was the Jews’ traditional method of execution?** Stoning. But the Sanhedrin wanted Jesus to be crucified which the Romans offered as their normal form of execution. **Why was that important to the Jews?**To the Jews, a crucified person was clearly cursed by God - Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13. The Sanhedrin wanted to make a statement. They wanted this "heretic" to be on display on a cross as a disincentive for anyone to follow after Him. They wanted Jesus to suffer the most horrific, shameful death for all the Jewish people to see.

**However, why was it also necessary that Jesus be crucified?** It was prophesied. There are as many as 60 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by the crucifixion (Isaiah 53).

**What was another reason why they didn’t take things into their own hands regarding Jesus?** Because they knew the Jewish people loved Jesus, and if they could get Pilate (a Roman) to pass judgment, sentence, and execute Jesus, they would be able to distance themselves from the political fallout. They could point their finger at Pilate and blame him and thus redirect the emotion of the crowd.

**What did Pilate ask Jesus (v. 2)?** He asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. If so, as a king, He was presumably dedicated to the overthrow of Caesar, and was thus guilty of treason, a crime punishable by death.

**How did Jesus respond to Pilate’s further questioning (v. 5)?** To Pilate’s utter amazement Jesus remained absolutely silent. **Why did Jesus not answer?** Jesus silence was prophesied (Isaiah 53:7).

He was convicted of blasphemy (14:64). **Why did the Jewish leaders bring Jesus before Pilate with the charge that He claimed to be the King of the Jews (v. 2; Matthew 27:11)?** The Jewish rulers knew that if they brought Jesus before Pilate on the blasphemous charge of claiming to be God, the Roman authorities would not have prosecuted Jesus for claiming to be God. Pilate would merely yawn. He would say, “We Romans have hundreds of gods. What is the harm with one more?” Pilate would have dismissed them. On the other hand, if Jesus claimed to be a king, that would be tantamount to treason against Caesar and was a capital offense. Pilate’s hand would be forced.

**How was Pilate between a rock and a hard place?** Pilate knew that Jesus was an innocent man; Luke 23:14 records him as saying, “I have found no fault in this Man.” Yet Pilate had a politically explosive situation on his hands. Will he do what was right by freeing an innocent man? Or will he do what was politically expedient -- please the Jews by executing a man brought before him for treason because He claimed to be a king and there could be no king except Caesar? Pilate was in a dangerous place; the crowd was ready to riot. If there was one thing that would get him into trouble with his Roman superiors, it was a riot.

**What did Pilate do to please the crowd and defuse the situation (v. 15)?** First, he handed Jesus over to be flogged and crucified. Secondly, he released Barabbas. It was customary for a prisoner to be released at the Passover Feast. Evidently this custom served to improve relations between the Roman ruler and his subjects. Barabbas was one of the popular Jewish freedom fighters whom the Romans had imprisoned for participating in an uprising against Rome. From the Roman perspective, he was a terrorist.

If anyone should be able to really say, "Jesus died for me,” it should be Barabbas. They literally swapped places on death row. Barabbas could look at the crucified Christ and say – “That should have been me. He took my place.”
Pilate’s act was a monstrous verdict of unrighteousness. And yet it was a parable of our redemption—the guiltless One delivered to die in order that the guilty might go free.1

Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday under ticker-tape parade conditions. Now, five days later, the people were shouting, “Crucify Him” (v. 13-14). Why did the crowd turn on Jesus? He didn’t live up to their misguided expectations. He didn’t overthrow the Roman oppression and set up an earthly political kingdom.

They mocked, bowed, and spit on Jesus. Then they beat Him and lead Him out to be crucified. A purple robe (and crown) was symbolic of what (v. 20)? Royalty. By dressing Him as such, they were mocking Him saying, “Since He claimed to be a king, let’s make Him look like a king!”

Why didn’t he take the offered wine (v. 23)? Jesus refused any drug that would numb the pain. He would face the agony of the cross with a clear mind and not be “medicated” in any way.

What was the significance of dividing His garments (v. 24)? This was in fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:18: “They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”

Note: Death by crucifixion was one of the cruelest forms of capital punishment ever devised. The Gospels don’t dwell on the physical suffering relating to the crucifixion. They consider the physical suffering to be secondary to His overwhelming spiritual anguish (14:36; 15:34).

How did the passersby react to seeing the crucified Christ (vv. 29-32)? With insults and mocking statements. Even the one criminal, who was crucified next to Him, mocked Him!

Timeline: Jesus was crucified at 9AM (v. 25). Darkness came over the whole land from 12AM to 3PM (v. 33). This was especially remarkable because at the time of a full moon – during which Passover was always held - a natural eclipse of the sun was impossible. So, you can’t explain away the darkness by using naturalistic phenomenon. This was an extraordinary miracle in the heavens. He apparently breathed His last shortly after 3 PM.

What was going on during the time of darkness (v. 33)? Jesus was drinking the Cup He had referred to in 10:38-39 which represented the outpouring of the Father’s wrath upon Him as a substitute for sinful humanity. No mortal mind can ever understand the agony He endured when His soul was made a sacrifice for sin.2

The father/son relationship that had existed for all eternity was shattered temporarily for three hours. The Father looked upon His Son with disgust and repulsion. Jesus was made/became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). God cannot tolerate the presence of sin. When the Father looked at the Son, all He saw were the sins of the world. Jesus became an enemy of God at that moment. And the Father turned His back on His Son which was the ultimate act of rejection. Jesus’ death was much more than a case of another martyr dying for another cause.

At some point right before He died, an awesome spiritual transaction took place. God the Father set upon Jesus all the guilt and wrath our sins deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the wrath of God toward us. It was as if God said “I am satisfied – the debt of the world caused by sin is paid for in full.”

What was the significance of Jesus’ “loud cry” (v. 37)? This was not simply the last gasp of an exhausted, demoralized or defeated man. Jesus’ cry was a shout of victory. He triumphantly announced: “It is finished!” (John 19:30). His death was an act of His will, not an involuntary collapse.4

What does the Crucifixion tell us about God? He loves us. He loved the world. He knew we were helpless and hopeless and He made a way where there was no way. He kept His promise of Genesis 3:15 to provide a Savior who would save us from our sins.

What was the original purpose of the veil/curtain of the temple (vv. 37-41)? It separated man from the presence of God. In the mind of the Jews, God lived in the Temple, specifically behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was located. The people were not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, i.e. they didn’t have direct access to God. The curtain was a big Stop sign! They needed a mediator/a go-between when dealing with God. Once a year the High Priest would serve as a mediator and would enter the Holy of Holies and
make sacrifices for the sins of the nation of Israel. Leviticus 16:34: "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

**What was the significance of the tearing of the temple curtain (v. 38)?** People now have free access to the presence of God. The High Priest is out of a job. He is no longer needed to serve as a go-between. Instead Jesus is seated at the right hand of God interceding for us as our great high priest. 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."

**What was the significance of the fact that the curtain was torn from top to bottom?** Only God could do that. It was too high for human hands to reach (as high as 60 feet). Man would have had to tear it from bottom to top. God was opening a way into His presence by the death of His Son. The message to the people now was, “Come on in!”

**What was the significance of certain women remaining near the cross (vv. 40-41) and (John 19:25-27)?** It deserves mention that the women shine brightly in the Gospel narratives. Considerations of personal safety drove the men into hiding. But the devotion of the women put love to Christ above their own welfare. They were last at the cross and first at the tomb.

**What do we know about Joseph of Arimathea? Who was he and how would you describe what he did (vv. 42-47)?** Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, though he was apparently silent when the Sanhedrin sentenced Jesus to death (Mark 15:1). He shrunk back then but was not ashamed to identify with Jesus now. Asking Pilate for Jesus’ body was a bold and courageous move that could easily jeopardize his religious standing as a Pharisee.

**How was Joseph’s generosity rewarded?** He got his tomb back 3 days later.

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2 Ibid. p. 1362
5 Ibid. p. 1363