

Sacrificed

SESSION 12

Mark 15:24-39

Memory Verse: Mark 15:39

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross.

When we find that an innocent person has been convicted of a crime they didn't commit, we react with shock and anger over how that mistake could have happened. The death of Jesus provides the most poignant example of such a miscarriage of justice in human history. Anyone who looked at Jesus could have assumed that He was a criminal. But at least one person—Pilate, the man who sentenced Jesus to death—knew the truth.

Of course, Mark understood the real story when he wrote his Gospel. He knew who Jesus was, and He knew why Jesus died. As you dig into Mark 15:24-39, try to put yourself in the sandals of each person in the story. Try to imagine what they thought about Jesus—and how that compares to what people think about Him today. Most importantly, remember that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.



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Have you ever ordered at a drive through speaker, only to discover when you arrived at the window that the person in the car ahead of you had paid your bill? It's an awkward feeling, accepting food for which you didn't pay. The first reaction of many people is to pay for the car behind them. Grace has a way of making us more apt to give, not more apt to take from others. (PSG, p. 109)

What are some other ways you have seen grace extended in our society?

Why do you think some people have an awkward feeling about receiving grace?

Why does it cause some people to pay it forward?



Understand the Context (Mark 14:53–15:47)

As Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples, events began moving quickly toward His crucifixion. Mark, whose family may have owned the room where Jesus and His followers shared their final meal together, gave readers insight into both Jesus's announcement of a betrayer (14:17-21) and His institution of the Lord's Supper (14:22-26).

From there, Jesus continued teaching His disciples as they made their way to the Mount of Olives. Once they arrived, He invited them to pray with Him in the garden of Gethsemane. Along the way, Peter vowed to stand with Jesus through any persecution, but Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before morning (14:27-31).

Since Peter was likely a primary source for Mark's Gospel, this is a stunning inclusion that points to the reliability of the message. If Peter had wanted to create a myth about the Jesus narrative, he certainly would have painted himself in a much better light. Instead, he held nothing back and included the denial in his testimony to Mark. The same is true in regard to Mark's description of the disciples falling asleep in Gethsemane (14:32-42).

As he moved his narrative toward the crucifixion, Mark recorded Jesus's arrest and His unethical trial before the Sanhedrin. Despite the leaders' barrage of questions, Jesus remained silent until asked about His identity. He affirmed His rightful role as Messiah, leading the Sanhedrin to determine that He was worthy of death (14:53-65). Meanwhile, Peter denied Jesus just as the Lord had predicted (14:66-72).

Since the Jews had no authority to carry out an execution, they had to surrender Jesus to the authority of the Romans, particularly Pontius Pilate. A relatively weak leader, Pilate gave in to the pressure of the Jews and condemned Jesus to die by crucifixion despite the lack of evidence—and the obvious jealousy of the leaders (15:1-20). This is what Jesus had been predicting and teaching His followers consistently ever since they began their journey toward Jerusalem (Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34).

After being beaten and humiliated, Jesus was led outside the city and was crucified. Hanging between two criminals, Jesus remained in control of His situation until the end. He died only when He voluntarily gave up His spirit (15:21-37). Mark underscored the supernatural nature of Jesus's death by mentioning the darkness that covered the land and the tearing of the veil in the temple (15:33,38-39).

Because the Sabbath was approaching, Jesus's followers had to quickly prepare His body for burial as best as they could (15:42-46). Some women paid attention to where His body was laid so they could finish the job later. But, despite what they saw on Friday night, they were not prepared for what they found as the sun rose on Sunday morning.

As you read Mark 15:24-39, identify the different people and groups who were present at the crucifixion and their reactions to Jesus.



INTRODUCE: As adults arrive, talk about times when they experienced undeserved kindness. Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 109 of the PSG.

ASK:

What are some other ways you have seen grace exercised in our society? Why do you think some people have an awkward feeling about receiving grace? What motivates some people to pay it forward? (PSG, p. 109)

SUMMARIZE:

Share that today's lesson focuses on God's greatest demonstration of grace: Jesus's crucifixion. Use Understand the Context (PSG, p. 110) to review the progression of events that occurred once Jesus was arrested. Highlight the irony of the religious leaders' failure to adhere to their own standards for a trial. Encourage adults to consider reasons why they were so insistent upon moving forward with Jesus's trial.

TRANSITION:

From a human perspective, Jesus's trial and condemnation was unjust and could be considered a tragedy. But it also holds out the greatest hope we could ever experience. He was sacrificed for our sins.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

As adults arrive, play the song "The Wonderful Cross" by Chris Tomlin and invite the group to meditate on the lyrics. As they listen, lead them to think about what the cross means in their daily lives and what it means to take up their cross daily to follow Jesus. Encourage them to keep the cross at the forefront of their minds as they study today's verses. Also, use the song as a closing prayer. Urge the group to continue focusing on the cross during the week.

Crucified (Mark 15:24-27)

24 Then they crucified him and divided his clothes, casting lots for them to decide what each would get. **25** Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified him. **26** The inscription of the charge written against him was: **The King of the Jews.** **27** They crucified two criminals with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Context: Prior to the crucifixion, Jesus was condemned by the chief priests and elders, who sent Him to the Romans. The crowd chose to free Barabbas (Mark 15:6-15), so Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers, who beat him and then proceeded with the crucifixion. The Romans required condemned prisoners to carry their own crossbeam to the place of crucifixion. Jesus carried his cross through what is called the *Via Dolorosa*, “the way of suffering.”

(v. 24) They crucified him: Mark stated that Jesus was **crucified**, but this simple statement carried a great deal of weight. Crucifixion was a slow and painful death. Once prisoners were condemned, they were stripped and laid on the ground. Their arms were nailed to a crossbeam. The crossbeam was then raised and joined to a vertical post already in the ground.

In the upright position, the condemned person’s feet were nailed to the post. There was a small wooden peg on the post that allowed victims to support their body weight. The victim usually died from asphyxiation caused by exhaustion, which could take days. Often, the soldiers would break their legs to speed up the death process. Jesus’s legs were not broken, which fulfilled prophecy that no bone on His body would be broken.

(v. 24) Casting lots: It was customary for soldiers who were carrying out crucifixions to claim the clothes of those being executed. They would cast lots—similar to rolling dice—to see who would get which piece of clothing. In this particular context, the soldiers were not just doing a job. They were also fulfilling prophecy. (See Ps. 22:18.)

(v. 25) Nine in the morning: This would have been Friday morning. Jesus was hung on the cross after a night of trials and torture. He would suffer on the cross for the next six hours.

(v. 26) Inscription of the charge: It was Roman custom to list the charges and the name of the guilty party on a placard and post it to the cross. It is noteworthy that all four Gospels mention the sign. Despite their slight differences in wording, though, they all agree that the charge against Jesus was his claiming to be **The King of the Jews**. Intended as an insult, the sign actually revealed truth about who Jesus is and why He came.

(v. 27) Two criminals: Jesus was placed between two other condemned men. They were likely insurrectionists, like Barabbas. If this is the case, Jesus literally took the place of Barabbas on the third cross.

Key Cross Reference

Hanging on a tree

Aside from the physical torture involved in crucifixion, Jews also considered this form of execution to be a spiritual curse. In the law, God had proclaimed that anyone hung on a tree was under a curse (Deut. 21:22-23). So, Jesus’s death also carried a social and religious stigma. The religious leaders would have seen this as an appropriate end to a “sinner” like Jesus, but it actually illustrated the curse of humanity He was carrying for us.

For more on the curse of crucifixion, read and reflect on the following passages: Acts 5:29-32; Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 2:21-24.

Key Background

What happened to verse 28?

Most of the oldest manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel do not contain verse 28: “And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors” (KJV). For that reason, some translations—including the CSB, NIV, and ESV—omit this verse. Because Mark wrote primarily to Gentiles, he typically didn’t call out the fulfillment of specific Old Testament prophecies in Jesus’s life. So, many scholars think this verse was inserted later, perhaps borrowing from Luke 22:37 which quotes Isaiah 53:12.

EXPLORE Mark 15:24-27



APPLICATION POINT: People can know with confidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 15:24-27. Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Mark*), **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Mark Time Line*) and Understand the Context (PSG, p. 110) to set the context for the events that led up to Jesus’s crucifixion.

EXAMINE: Direct adults to work in groups of two or three to identify significant details in verses 24-27. Encourage them to use the information on pages 111-112 of the PSG to supplement their discussion. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to report on their conversations. Discuss why these details are important.

EXPLAIN: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Chart: Messianic Prophecies in Mark*). Point out that many of the things we read about Jesus’s trials and death fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Highlight “Lots cast for His clothes” and “Died with criminals” on the pack item. Remind the group that fulfilled prophecy was another way Mark validated Jesus’s claim to be the Messiah.

ASK: **What was the charge that led to Jesus’s death? How was that charge also a declaration of the truth?** (PSG, p. 112) Use information from the PSG to share the purpose of the sign on Jesus’s cross, why the religious leaders didn’t like it, and how it revealed more than Pilate ever imagined.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Cross-Reference

Place adults into three groups and give each group one of the following passages to read and discuss: Psalm 22:16-18; John 19:19-22; Isaiah 53:10-12. (NOTE: For smaller Bible studies, a single person can be a group. For larger Bible studies, multiple groups can work on the same passage.) Direct the groups to read their assigned passage and to discuss how it relates to Mark 15:24-27. After a few minutes, allow the groups to report. Highlight how the fulfillment of prophecy affirms Jesus as Messiah and how Pilate was speaking truth through the sign even though he did not realize it.

Mocked (Mark 15:29-32)

29 Those who passed by were yelling insults at him, shaking their heads, and saying, “Ha! The one who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, **30** save yourself by coming down from the cross!” **31** In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others, but he cannot save himself! **32** Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe.” Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

(v. 29) Passed by: Some in the crowd, such as religious leaders and genuine mourners, would be at the cross for the duration. However, Romans typically crucified people on major roadways, so those who **passed by** would get a strong message about what happened to those who challenged the Empire’s authority. In addition, since it was Passover season, more people would have been entering and leaving Jerusalem than normal.

(v. 29) Yelling insults at him: As one might expect, executions in a high-traffic area exposed the criminals to ridicule and scorn. Jesus was no exception. Those who passed Him shouted **insults at him**.

The Greek word translated “insults” is actually the verb of “blasphemy.” Mark had used the noun form earlier in his Gospel to describe the religious leaders’ accusations against Jesus. Since many of them were also at the cross (v. 31), the ones who had called Jesus a blasphemer were guilty of blasphemy themselves. Likewise, the one accused of blasphemy became the target of others’ blasphemy.

(v. 29) Shaking their heads: Shaking (or wagging) one’s head was another common gesture of mockery and contempt. (See Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:16.) Apparently, many onlookers remembered when Jesus said that He would **destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days**. They challenged Him to come down from the cross to demonstrate His power. While Mark did not note a specific prophecy, their actions do fulfill what was predicted about the Messiah in Psalm 22:6-8 and Psalm 109:21-25.

Key Doctrine

Salvation

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. (See Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5-6.)

(v. 31) Chief priests . . . scribes: The religious leaders had waited a long time for this moment, and they made sure they had their say. Their hatred toward Jesus had

sparked their desire to see Him die; and, while the Romans carried out Jesus’s crucifixion, they were the ones who initiated His execution.

Their insults and mockery suggested that they had won a great victory. And, in their minds, they likely believed that was true. In reality, as the spiritual leaders of the nation, they should have recognized Jesus for who He was and understood His purpose for dying on the cross. Instead, they joined the crowd in insulting the Messiah they claimed to be seeking.

Again, Mark noted the irony in their scornful words. As they derided Jesus for not saving Himself, they did not realize that He was making salvation possible for everyone in the world.

Key Concept

Save yourself!

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus assured His disciples that legions of angels were at His disposal if He truly wanted to save Himself (Matt. 26:52-54). In the same way, He absolutely could have come down from the cross—though it’s doubtful even that would have convinced His enemies to believe in Him. Yet, Jesus stayed on the cross, suffered, and died. He knew that coming down would neither save Himself or the human race. Some scholars note that the taunts of the crowd were actually an extension of Satan’s temptations, encouraging Jesus to take an “easier” way toward providing salvation. To fulfill His mission, He had to stay on the cross.

(v. 32) Those who were crucified with him taunted him: Mark commented in passing that the criminals dying with Jesus added to the insults from the crowd. Matthew (27:44) adds a similar note in his Gospel. However, Luke provides more detail, revealing that one of the criminals defended Jesus and received the promise of eternal life.

EXPLORE Mark 15:29-32



APPLICATION POINT: People can be assured that Jesus has the power to save.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 15:29-32.

REVIEW: Lead the group to look at the leaders' accusation in Mark 14:58. Discuss how Jesus's teaching would have threatened them. *The leaders didn't understand that Jesus was talking about His death and resurrection, so they used it as an insult.*

ASK: **What does the fact that Jesus stayed on the cross demonstrate about Him?** (PSG, p. 114)

EXPLAIN: Emphasize that Jesus could have responded in a way that would have removed any doubt about who He was and why He came. *But if He had given in to the temptation to defend Himself, He would not have fulfilled God's plan.*

PRAY: Encourage the group to silently consider how people mock and insult Jesus today. Challenge them to think about how they insult Jesus and diminish His sacrifice through their own words and actions. Allow them a few minutes to pray, asking God to forgive them and to help them live in a way that honors Him.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Pray

As you highlight the verbal abuse Jesus experienced in Mark 15:29-32, take a moment for each adult to offer a brief prayer thanking Him for accepting the mocking and insults. Encourage the group to also include one thing about Jesus that is worthy of praise. Close the prayers, acknowledging that while the group cannot change the insults of the past, you are grateful for the opportunity to speak words of honor and praise to Him today.

Dead (Mark 15:33-39)

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34** And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lemá’ ‘sabachtháni?” which is translated, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” **35** When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “See, he’s calling for Elijah.” **36** Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a stick, offered him a drink, and said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.” **37** Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. **39** When the centurion, who was standing opposite him, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

(v. 33) Darkness came over the whole land: Three hours into Jesus’s crucifixion, noon became darker than midnight. This **darkness** was not some natural event, like the sandstorms that were common in that area. It also could not have been a solar eclipse since Passover always occurs during a full moon. The darkness can only be explained as a supernatural act of God—a direct statement from Him to the people.

The darkness lasted for three hours and should have caused the Jews to reflect on the first Passover in Egypt. In the final plague before that Passover, darkness covered Egypt for three days. This was followed by the death of Egypt’s firstborn children. Here, God’s firstborn was giving His life on the cross and everyone should embrace Him as Messiah and Savior.

(v. 34) Cried out: After six hours on the cross, Jesus raised His voice, quoting Psalm 22:1 in Aramaic or Hebrew (or, as some commentators suggest, a combination of the two). Regardless, Mark translated it for His Gentile audience.

The tone of Psalm 22 starts out as a cry of abandonment, but it ends in victory. The same was true with Jesus on the cross. This was more than just a cry emphasizing the righteousness of His suffering. It also expressed the agony of the separation that sin forced between Jesus and His Father.

As Jesus “became sin” for the human race (2 Cor. 5:21), He no longer enjoyed the intimate fellowship with the Father. He endured being forsaken by God so that humans could be accepted by God.

(v. 35) Calling for Elijah: It was a popular Jewish belief that **Elijah** would come to the aid of righteous sufferers during times of great distress. The drink offered to Jesus (v. 36) was not so much an act of mercy as an attempt to prolong His life to see if Elijah would truly come and deliver Him from the cross.

(v. 37) Breathed his last: With most crucifixions, the condemned would spend days on the cross before

falling into a coma and dying. However, Jesus demonstrated complete control over His life and death. He was fully conscious when He cried out for the last time, indicating that He alone determined the timing of His death. Other Gospel writers recorded that Jesus surrendered His spirit, indicating that He knew when His mission was finished (Luke 23:46; John 19:30).

(v. 38) Curtain of the temple: At the moment Jesus died, priests would have been serving in the temple. Those ministering would have seen the large, heavy **curtain** separating the holy place from the holy of holies rip **from top to bottom**. No human could have torn the curtain by hand because of its thickness. In addition, reaching the top and tearing down would have drawn attention. Ripping from top to the bottom emphasized that this was an act of God. It also signified that sacrifices at the temple were no longer necessary. Jesus had just become the ultimate sacrifice and offered direct access to the Father again.

(v. 39) Centurion: The Roman **centurion** would have been the soldier in charge of the execution squad. He likely would have been standing near Jesus and would have provided the witness that He really was dead. Of course, he also was a witness to all of the unusual events surrounding His death. His declaration that Jesus truly was the **Son of God** contrasted sharply with those who had mocked and denied Jesus.

Bible Skill

Dig deeper into the New Testament’s inclusion of an Old Testament quotation.

Read through Psalm 22 several times. Identify the parts alluded to in the crucifixion account in Mark 15:24-39. How does reading those verses in the context of the entire psalm help you better understand what Jesus experienced on the cross?



APPLICATION POINT: People's sins are forgiven because Jesus died on the cross.

- READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Mark 15:33-39, emphasizing that Jesus was in complete control of His last moments.
- LIST:** On the board, invite the group to build a timeline of what went on while Jesus was on the cross. Encourage them to read pages 114-116 of the PSG to learn more about these events. Highlight the darkness and the curtain being torn.
- ASK:** **How did these two events symbolize Jesus's work on the cross?**
- REVIEW:** Lead the group to examine the memory verse, Mark 15:39. Talk about why the centurion believed Jesus was God's Son. Note that this was another instance of Mark revealing God's inclusion of Gentiles in His plan of salvation.
- ASK:** **How did Jesus show grace to those who witnessed His death? How does He show grace to us today?**
- EXPLAIN:** Review the Plan of Salvation on the inside cover of the PSG. Affirm that you will be available to talk with anyone who wants to know more about Jesus's sacrifice and His offer of salvation.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson

To supplement the discussion on Mark 15:33-39, secure an old curtain or large piece of fabric. Allow volunteers to take turns tearing the fabric from top to bottom. (Depending on the fabric, it could take a team effort, or you may need to make a cut at the top to get started.) Discuss the significance of the veil being torn from top to bottom in the temple. *Before Jesus, only the High Priest was allowed to enter God's presence in the holy of holies once per year. Now, anyone can enter God's presence through a relationship with Jesus Christ.*

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 117 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *People can know with confidence that Jesus is the Messiah.*
 - *People can be assured that Jesus has the power to save.*
 - *People's sins are forgiven because Jesus died on the cross.*
- DISCUSS:** Lead the group to talk about the first question set under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 117). Point out the Key Doctrine of "Salvation" on page 116 of the PSG. Invite a volunteer to read Acts 4:12 and discuss why Jesus is the only way to have a relationship with God the Father. Remind the group that Jesus wants each person to accept Him as Savior and Messiah.
- SHARE:** *If you haven't made that decision, we can talk more. If you have made that decision, ask God to help you identify others with whom you can share the good news of Jesus.*
- PRAY:** Encourage adults to pray as individuals for a few moments, thanking Jesus for going to the cross for them. Close in prayer, asking God to help each person to embrace the power of the cross and to live in a way that points others toward Him.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by reflecting on the grace you have received through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Contact the group through email or text, reminding them that salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

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