

Mark 15:22-39

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I. Outline

- A. The crucifixion: A summary (22-24)
 - 1. Jesus brought to Golgotha: Γολγοθᾶν (22)
 - 2. Jesus offered wine (23)
 - 3. Jesus crucified and garments divided (24)
- B. The crucifixion: A detailed account (25-39)
 - 1. Third hour events (25 - 32)
 - i. inscription description: ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (26)
 - ii. two bandits
 - iii. people passing by deride Jesus (29)
 - iv. chief priests and scribes insult Jesus (30-32)
 - 2. Sixth hour event – darkness (33)
 - 3. Ninth hour events (34-38)
 - i. Jesus cries out: ἐλωι ἐλωι λεμα σαβαχθανι; (34)
 - ii. bystanders respond (35-36)
 - iii. Jesus cries out and dies (37)
 - iv. temple curtain splits (38)
- C. Centurion's confession: ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν. (39)

II. Exegetical Issues

A. Boundaries, Placement, Function of the Passage in its Context

1. This passage is introduced by a description of where Jesus is brought for his crucifixion. The first word *καὶ* is used in eight sequential verses ranging from v. 17 to v. 24. The opening verse of this passage is the sixth of the eight usages of *καὶ* in this manner. This verse marks the beginning of a short description of the crucifixion (vv. 22-24). The section before, starting at Mk 15:1, is the story of Jesus' interactions with Pilate, the elders, scribes, and the soldiers. The previous verse (21) describes how Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus' cross. The ending of this passage is a confession by a centurion observer who states that Jesus is truly the son of God (ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν.). The verses that follow begin the description of Mary Magdalene and the other women as well Jesus' burial. There is a clear shift in focus from the crucifixion scene to the post-crucifixion descriptions.

2. This passage is a continuation of a set of stories leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. The passage is located in the second to last chapter of the gospel according to Mark and is located in between the pre-crucifixion and post-crucifixion accounts. The pre-crucifixion accounts include the morning consultation of the chief priests with the elders and scribes (15:1), Jesus' interactions with Pilate (15:2-15:5), the release of Barabbas (15:6-15), the soldiers mock him (15:16-20), and Simon of Cyrene forced to carry the cross (15:21). The post-crucifixion stories include the description of the women looking on (15:40-41), Jesus' body granted to Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus' burial (15:42-47).

3. This passage functions to describe the crucifixion of Jesus and to reveal his identity. The passage provides the connection point with Mk 1:1 where the introduction describes the document as the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ

ευαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Θεοῦ). The allusions throughout the passage, which culminate in the centurion's confession, fulfill this purpose.

B. Textual Problems

1. 15:23: Some mss insert *πιειν* after *εστιν* (A C² (D) Θ 0250 f^{1.13} 33 *lat sy^{p,h} sa^{mss}*). The text does not include *πιειν* (*ⲛ B C* L Δ Ψ 700. 2427. pc n sy^s sa^{mss} bo*). The addition of *πιειν* more closely matches the parallel passage in Matt 27:34 (ἐδωκαν αὐτῷ *πιειν* οἶνον μετὰ χολῆς μεμιημένον). It is most likely that the copyists altered this to agree with the Matthean reading. The addition also may point to an interpreter's change to the text in order to specifically refer to Jesus not drinking the wine. The writer of Mark, in Mk 14:25, wrote that Jesus would never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when he would drink it new in the kingdom of God. Does the insertion of a drinking reference connect these two references? If so, how does this change the interpretation of the offering of wine flavored with myrrh?

2. 15:28: The text does not have this verse (*ⲛ A B C D Ψ 2427 pc k sy^s sa bo^{pt}*). Other mss include a verse which reads *καὶ ἐπλῶθη ἡ γραφή ἡ λεγούσα καὶ μετὰ ἀνομῶν ἐλογίσθη*. The earliest witnesses of Alexandrian and the Western types of text lack this verse. The writer could have added the sentence from Lk 22:37. There is no obvious reason as to why this verse would be deleted by the copyist. In addition, Mark rarely quotes the Old Testament (Metzger, 99). How would an Old Testament reference change the dynamic of this passage? Would the Old Testament reference change the reader's view of Jesus in light of the other evidence presented by the author? In light of this example, why would Mark shy away from other Old Testament references in his gospel?

3. 15:34: Some mss include the replacing of *εγκατελιπες με* by changing the order *με εγκατελιπες*. The apparatus shows that the first corrector made this change to the text in these mss (C (K) Θ f^{1.13} 33 *it vg^{mss}*) with the *-λειπ-* supported in others (A *al*). Other mss replace *εγκατελιπες με* with *ωνειδισας με* (D c (i) k). The text includes *εγκατελιπες με* (*ⲛ B Ψ 059 pc vg*) with the *-λειπ-* supported in others ((L 083. 565. 892. 2427 *pc*); Ptol^{fr} Ju Eus). The reading using, *ωνειδισας με*, reading "why hast thou reproached [or, taunted], me?" may have been used in avoid referring to God forsaking Jesus on the cross (Metzger, 100). How would the change from forsaking to reproaching impact the interpretation of this quote? How would the author reconcile the Old Testament reference with this change? Is this change consistent with Mark's portrayal of Jesus through his gospel? If not, then does this take away from Mark's case for Jesus as the Son of God (Mk 1:1)?

C. Issues of Interpretation

1. 15:23 *ἑσμυρνισμένον οἶνον* is the first offer of wine to Jesus in this passage. The mixture with myrrh was a custom of the Jews to give those who were condemned to death by crucifixion to produce insensibility. Why didn't Jesus drink the wine mixed with myrrh? Matt 27:34 describes Jesus as tasting the wine but not drinking it. Assuming that Mark was written first, why did Matthew add the description of Jesus tasting the wine but not drinking it? Myrrh formed part of the gifts brought by the wise men from the east, who came to worship the infant Jesus in Matt. 2:11. Does the reference to myrrh connect to this worship of Jesus as king? If so, then the two references are not in expected circumstances for a king (infant, hanging on a cross). How do these selections of king references contribute to Mark's portrayal of Jesus? What impact do the stories have?

- 2.** 15:27 δύο ληστές, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ ἐνωπύμων αὐτοῦ. The reference to the right is used as imagery relating to prestige or power, especially in terms of royal figures. A king's right hand is emblematic of power as evidenced in the Ps 138:10 in the LXX and Is 45:1 (Bauer, 217). Does this reference point back to the request of John and James in Mk 10:37 to sit at the right hand and left of Jesus? If so, then what does this reveal about being at the right and left in glory? Is this the glory that John and James were requesting? What does this show about the kingdom of God according to Mark? Bandits were considered revolutionaries, insurrectionists, and guerrillas. Jesus in Mk 14:48 asked the question, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit?" Is there a contrast set up between bandits and rulers? Is Mark clear as to which role Jesus is playing and how does add to the veiled identity of Jesus?
- 3.** 15:29 Mark describes people passing by and blaspheming him (Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν). Who was passing by? Does this passing by relate to Jesus' going ahead of or passing by the disciples on the lake in Mk 6:48 or to Galilee in Mk 16:7? Jesus was charged with blaspheming. Is this a possible interchange of Jesus and the ones now blaspheming and passing by?
- 4.** 15:32 The chief priests and the scribes state, "the Christ the king of Israel now come down from the cross so that we might see and we might believe (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν.). What is the relationship between seeing and believing? Why do the chief priests and scribes use both the terms Christ and king? How does this request and potential response (as marked by the subjunctive) contrast with Jesus' commands, mostly to unclean spirits, to remain quiet about his identity and abilities?
- 5.** 15:39 The centurion is the one who makes the confession of Jesus as the son of God (ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν). Why is a Gentile centurion selected as the person to reveal the identity of Jesus, especially in light of the actors in this passage? The actors include the soldiers who led Jesus to Golgotha, the two bandits, individuals passing by, chief priests, scribes, other bystanders, and finally the centurion. Where are the disciples in this story? Jesus says to the disciples in Mk 14:27, "You will all become deserters". The disciples are described as fleeing him in Mk 14:50. Do the disciples, according to Mark's Gospel, ever understand the identity of Jesus as the Son of God? If not, then what does this reveal about the process of 'seeing and believing' in Jesus?

D. Use of Other Texts/Traditions

- 1.** 5:27 Myrrh is cited as a principal ingredient in the holy anointing oil in Ex. 30:23 (Bauer, 934). It was also used as a perfume (Esther 2:12; Ps. 45:8; Prov. 7:17). How do these uses of myrrh in the Old Testament contribute to Mark's description of Jesus in this story? Do these references help explain why Jesus did not accept the wine mixed with myrrh?
- 2.** 5:33 The environment shifts significantly when darkness comes over the entire land at the sixth hour (σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν). Darkness is viewed as chaos in Gen 1:2 where "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters". It is viewed as nonexistence in 2 Cor 4:6 where it states, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Does the reference to darkness in Mark relate to these two

passages in terms of the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God? Overall, is darkness required before light or revelation is given? The darkening of the sun was used in the description of the death of Alexander (Bauer, 932). Is Mark drawing upon a tradition of the darkening of the sun when the death of a leader occurs? Or is this reference, instead, refer to the opposite? Philo wrote about the darkness of the place of punishment far removed from the heavenly kingdom (Bauer, 932).

E. Relation to Other NT Texts

1. The Gospel according to Matthew's version includes additional details of the events that occurred after Jesus died. Some examples include the earth shaking, the rocks splitting, tombs opening with many bodies of the saints raised. What does this difference reveal in the goals of the writings of Gospel according to Matthew and the Gospel according to Mark? Assuming that Mark was written first, why was the story updated to include these details? Furthermore, the centurion responds to seeing the earthquake in Matthew as opposed to only standing opposite Jesus in Mark. Why was the story updated to include this detail?

F. Historical Issues

1. The prophet Elijah is referenced multiple times in this passage. What are the specific customs and beliefs of the people regarding Elijah? Jesus responded to the disciples question about Elijah coming first in Mk 9:11 when he said, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him". How would the soldiers and the centurion viewed these customs?

III. Significance for Theology and Preaching

1. The disciples' desertion of Jesus leaves a diverse group of individuals as candidates to identify Jesus as the Son of God (relating to Mk 1:1). What does the disciples' desertion Jesus reveal about seeing and believing, especially for those who seem to be on the 'inside'? What does the centurion's confession mean for Gentile readers, both at the time of Mark's Gospel and today?
2. Jesus is portrayed as a king and a bandit. How can a reader of Mark reconcile these two pictures? What role does humility play in these roles?
3. Do the two different endings in Matthew 27 and Mark 15 disturb the lessons of the passage and, more importantly, the gospels or does it enhance the lessons?

IV. Discussion Questions

1. What is the function of myrrh and wine in this passage and how do they contribute to Mark's description of Jesus?
2. What does the darkness covering the whole land reveal about Jesus and how does this relate to the other leader references in the passage? How does this relate to other revelation references in the New Testament?
3. What is the significance (or is there any) of the shift from Jesus being the blasphemer and passing to others blaspheming him and passing?