

The Park Church
Adult Study Group
“Understanding Holy Week”
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March 1 – April 4, 2009

Good Friday

The designation “good” comes either from “God’s Friday” or “Good Friday,” because something very good happened on this terrible day.

Calling it “Good” directs our presupposition about the meaning of the day to the redemption of the world, presumably through Jesus “Atoning Death” on the cross.

We learn this message in childhood and it is reinforced in our liturgies, music, and ritual. Whether people believe in the “truth” of this claim, most agree that substitutionary atonement is what it means. The idea of substitutionary atonement was developed by St. Anselm in a book written in 1007. It’s based in a legal framework.

It can also be seen as “...the domination system’s “no” to Jesus (and God), as the defeat of the powers that rule this world by disclosing their moral bankruptcy, as revelation of the path of transformation, and as disclosure of the depth of God’s love for us.” Mark does not support the idea of substitutionary atonement at all.

Because most people knew the story of Jesus as a composite of all the gospels, “it requires significant effort to hear how Mark tells the story without the filters provided by other books of the NT and later Christian theology.”

Paul wrote his letters before the gospels were written, and they contain “a number of interpretations of the significance of Jesus’ death.” But there are “no uninterpreted” accounts of the death of Jesus in the NT.”

Mark’s Precise Timing

From 6 to 9 AM

Mark 15: 1-21

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ He answered him, ‘You say so.’ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, ‘Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.’ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief

priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Pilate's question: "Are YOU the King of the Jews?" (with contempt?)

"YOU say so." (by your actions?)

Barabbas and Jesus.

Both are revolutionaries, defying imperial authority, but the first advocated violent revolution and the second advocated non-violence. By 66-70 AD when the book was written many had already "chosen" the way of Barabbas and the Roman Empire had responded with force.

From 9 AM to Noon

Mark 15: 22-32

Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Crucifixion was a form of Roman imperial terrorism, typically used for those such as runaway slaves or rebel insurgents who subverted Roman law and order – disturbing the "Pax Romana." It was gruesome, terrifying, and typically crucifixion took place low to the ground – the body was left to be consumed by scavenger dogs. Nothing was left for burial.

"Jesus is executed as a rebel against Rome between two other rebels against Rome." In Mark he is even taunted by the two others who were being crucified with him.

Noon to 3 PM

Mark 15: 33

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

Probably not an eclipse or supernatural darkness, but symbolic darkness.

Reports of significant events on Earth are typically accompanied by signs in the sky. A comet signified the death of Julius Caesar. So also with darkness: across cultures, darkness in an archetypal image is associated with suffering, mourning, and judgment.

“The cosmos itself joins in mourning what is happening, even as the darkness symbolized judgment upon the rulers responsible for crucifying “the Lord of glory,” to use language from Paul.

From 3 to 6 PM

Mark 15: 34-41

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Jesus cry' from the cross is a quotation from Psalm 22.

That the curtain that separated the holiest part of the temple sanctuary is torn in two has two possible meanings in Mark. It is a judgment upon the temple and its authorities, and it is an affirmation that the execution of Jesus means that access to the presence of God is now open.

Then, an imperial centurion is the first to call Jesus “God’s son”. Remember that Caesar was known as the “Son of God.”

The presence of the women reminds us that the men have fled, and is the beginning of demonstrating the significance of women during Good Friday and Easter. “It seems clear that Jesus and earliest Christianity gave to women an identity and status that they did not experience within the conventional wisdom of the time.”

6 PM to the Burial of Jesus

Mark 15: 42-47

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then

rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.

That Jesus was buried is “a remarkable departure from customary procedure since, as mentioned earlier, the body of a crucified individual was not given an honorable burial.”

Jesus’ Death as Sacrifice

The understanding of Jesus dying for the “sin” of the world is absent from Mark. Rather he sacrificed his life for his “passion”: the Realm of God.

“... as a ransom for many” – *lutron* is a means of liberation from bondage. Jesus has given a path for his followers to imitate: so it shall be “among you.”

Mark’s Use of the Jewish Bible

It is not appropriate to understand the Christian story as the fulfillment of prophecies made long before in the OT’s prophetic statements. Rather, “the Jewish Bible was the sacred scripture of early Christians, and many of them know it well... Thus, as they told the story of Jesus, they used language from the Jewish Bible to do so.”

The point: The use of passages from the Jewish Bible in the telling of the story of Jesus and what such use suggests about the interpretive framework of the narrator.

‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ is from Psalm 22: (Which contains much of the crucifixion material used to interpret Jesus death.) Suffering and anguished abandonment in the first half of Psalm 22 becomes in the second half a prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance and vindication. So according to Mark, he and his community saw the death of Jesus as “the suffering and death of one who was righteous, condemned by the powers of this world, and who would be vindicated by God.”

Was Jesus Death necessary or inevitable?

To God: it was not necessary but useful.

It was politically inevitable.

“Good Friday is the result of the collision between the passion of Jesus and the (normal) domination systems of his time.”

Jesus was guilty of nonviolent resistance to imperial Roman oppression and local Jewish collaboration.

The material for this class comes from:

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, [The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem.](#) HarperOne. ISBN978-0-06-087260-1