

The Personal Impact of Spiritual Crucifixion

Mark 15:21-33

While many churches and Christians today are focusing on Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, riding on a donkey in the royal manner of a king, surrounded by exultant crowds, we are focusing elsewhere this morning. As we follow the course of Mark's gospel week after week, we have already entered Jerusalem with Jesus. We have joined the crowd in their jubilant expectation that the true King has finally come. We have shared their astonishment at His passionate, authoritative reclamation of the Temple precincts as His Father's house, as a place of prayer for all the nations. We listened and learned as He faced down the scribes and priests and elders of the people. We reached deeply into our own hearts in humility and surrender as He pointed out the depth of worship offered by a single widow woman who, in giving two pennies, all she had, gained the praise of the One she praised.

We sat with Jesus on the Mount of Olives as He set out the timeline for the certain destruction of the city and the Temple, announcing heaven's own intention to make not the temple and traditions the center of worship, but Christ Himself as the focus of worship and the Church as the dwelling place of God on earth.

We dined at the Last Supper, as Jesus inaugurated the new covenant with His disciples. We cringed when Judas made his way to the leaders bent on betraying Jesus. We affirmed our devotion with the disciples, then fell asleep with them in the Garden while Jesus prayed. And when the soldiers came to arrest Him, we fled with the best and the worst of them, more willing to run away in nakedness and shame than stand fast with Him for whom we had just declared our uncompromising loyalty.

We watched from afar with Peter and bore the brunt of his denials right alongside him, as Jesus stood alone before his accusers. We stood with broken hearts as Jesus, like a Lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep before its shearers is silent, gave Himself to the eternal plan of God for the salvation of sinners and the redemption of the world. We were in the crowd, and heard the words come from our lips with the same selfish, arrogant, ignorant pride, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" We, too, would rather have Barabbas, one like us but less than us in our estimation than one like us but infinitely greater than us by all estimations. We lined the streets of Jerusalem and watched as the soldiers led Jesus, beaten to within an inch of His life, bloody and weak and alone, crowned with thorns and dressed in simplicity and humility—we watched as they led Him out to crucify Him.

We have come together with Jesus, the disciples, with Mark and the ancient Roman Christians to whom he writes this gospel, we come with them and with the millions of others who have followed Jesus in the way from that day to this, we come to the cross. We come to the Place of the Skull outside the city of Jerusalem at the third hour of the day. We come to the place where criminals are executed. We come to that place, to that moment when the world went mad on an infinite scale, when creation crucified its Creator.

"Crucify Him!" they demanded. Jesus crucified they received.

We have greatly romanticized crucifixion over the last two thousand years. Perhaps, for a moment, it is in our best interest that we draw back the curtain on crucifixion, strip it of its nobility and see it for what it is and always was.

Crucifixion is and was a form of torture and execution in the ancient world. It was not noble or easy or desirable. It was a long, slow, painful death where humiliation and pain and trauma were magnified for the delight of the crucifiers. Crucifixion involved fixing a person to a wooden post or tree using ropes or nails. While we very often think of the Romans as the originators of crucifixion, they probably learned it from Carthaginians. Crucifixion was practiced in the ancient world by the Assyrians, the people of India, the Scythians, the Taurians, the Thracians, the Celts, the Germans, the Britons, the Numidians, the Carthaginians, and the Greeks and Macedonians who evidently learned the practice from the Persians.

Roman crucifixion was typically carried out in stages.

1. The victim was tortured by various means.
2. The victim carried his or her cross-bar (*patibulum*) to the place of crucifixion.
3. The victim was fastened by ropes or nails to the crossbeam.
4. The crossbeam and victim were then raised to the wooden post or tree and fastened to it.

The victim was usually nailed just high enough off the ground so they could not stand or support themselves, resulting in a long, slow, torturous death by asphyxiation, or dehydration, or blood loss, or severe trauma and internal bleeding, or just plain overwhelming shock and despair. There is nothing romantic about crucifixion.

Precrucifixion torture usually involved flogging, and could also include burning, racking, mutilation, and abuse of the victim's family. An ancient Greek writer, Plato describes the general practice in precrucifixion tortures: "[A man] is racked, mutilated, has his eyes burned out, and after having had all sorts of great injuries inflicted on him, and having seen his wife and children suffer the like, is at last impaled (i.e., crucified) or tarred and burned alive". In another text, Plato writes: "The just man who is thought to be unjust will be scourged, racked, bound—will have his eyes burnt out; and, at last after suffering every kind of evil, he will be impaled (i.e., crucified)."

The goal of crucifixion was not to make heroes or saviors but death, humiliation, subjugation, oppression, pain, fear, compliance. Victims were forced to carry their own crossbeam to the place of execution. They were almost always executed without clothing, probably to make them more susceptible to blows and to increase their shame.

Mark writes,

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. Mark 15:24 (ESV)

They . . . crucified . . . Him. That phrase should break your heart. That reality should drive you to your knees in wonder, and awe, and worship. They crucified Him, but He gave Himself to them and to death in order to fulfil God's plan to rescue you from eternal punishment on account of

sin. They crucified Him but He died for you!

Romans 5:6-11 (ESV) *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

The underlying truth of Christ's death on the cross is this: God reconciles sinners to Himself through the death of His Son in our place on our behalf on the cross. Jesus Christ, through His sinless life and innocent, voluntary death on the cross lives the life humanity was created to live before God. He suffers the death our sin and rebellion deserve. And He does so, He is crucified, to both satisfy God's righteous justice and to remove God's righteous wrath. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, God reconciles sinners to Himself, He brings you and me back into fellowship with Him. He forgives, removes the sentence of death, and extends eternal life, through faith in Jesus and acceptance of His death on your behalf.

But, we have to go step further this morning. We have to ask not only what is the personal impact of Jesus' physical crucifixion, which we've just described. We have to ask, "**What is the personal impact of our own spiritual crucifixion when we come to faith in Jesus?"**

The New Testament witness is clear. Once a person comes to faith in Christ; once a person accepts by faith that Jesus is the Son of God and died on the cross in their place for the sake of their sin guilt; once a person believes that God has given His Son as the sole means by which a person can be restored to a right relationship with God; once a person finds new life in Christ as a result of being born again through faith in Christ, that person who believes faces a cross of their own.

Listen to what Jesus said,

Mark 8:34-35 (ESV) *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."*

Luke 14:27 (ESV) *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

Paul follows through on what Jesus taught. Here are his words,

Romans 6:1-6 (ESV) *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that*

grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Galatians 2:20 (ESV) *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 5:24 (ESV) *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

And his words of discipleship to the Colossians are even more pointed:

Colossians 3:5 (ESV) *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

When Paul writes, “put to death,” he means “crucify.” Crucify what is earthly, earth-bound, having the character of this corrupt, sinful world. He means do what is necessary to bring the end of wickedness and sin in your life. He means participate with the plan of God in such a way, in faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit, that your life takes on more and more every day in every way the likeness of Jesus.

What will be the personal impact of this spiritual crucifixion? We have a few clues in the gospel of Mark and his account of the crucifixion of Jesus.

First, you will experience the consequences of publicly identifying with Jesus.

Mark 15:21-27 (ESV) *And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.*

Simon was probably just minding his own business, in town for the Passover. But God, in His gracious providence imposed His sovereign will in Simon’s life, and in spite of the sheer number of possibilities present in that moment, the soldiers chose Simon to carry Jesus’ cross. And there would be eternal consequences for their choice.

We know nothing more of Simon than what is mentioned here. But look at what is mentioned here. We are given his name. We are given the names of his sons. Think for minute. Why would Mark give an audience of Roman Christians reading this account three decades after the events

happen the names of Simon and his sons? Perhaps because the Christians to whom Mark writes his gospel know these men? In Romans 16:13, as Paul closes that letter and greets the various families and Christians he knows in Rome, he mentions someone named Rufus.

Romans 16:13 (ESV) *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.*

Is this Rufus the son of Simon the Cyrene? We cannot know for sure, but, if so, then Simon's encounter with Jesus on the day He was crucified changed not only his life but the life of his sons forever. Being personally identified with the crucifixion of Jesus will have some eternal consequences in the lives of people around you.

Second, the personal impact of spiritual crucifixion, being personally identified with Christ by actively putting to death the remains of sin in your life, will involve a changed relationship to shame.

And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means 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 garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.

When they crucified Jesus they took from Him every earthly possession. They crucified Him naked, impoverished, and alone. The point of their efforts was shame.

Throughout the events directly part of His crucifixion, the whipping, the crown of thorns and the purple robe, the beating from the soldiers, being spat upon, being paraded through the streets, having someone else carry His cross, the ridicule and the insults, and this final act of nailing Him naked to the cross were all meant to shame Jesus.

How odd, the effort to shame someone who had no reason to be ashamed. What is this shame that Jesus bore, in His body, on the cross? If it was not His shame, then whose was it? The shame Jesus carried on the cross was yours.

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden, to Genesis chapter 3. The last verse of Genesis 2 tells us that Adam and Eve, in the Garden, were both naked and not ashamed. But something happened. Genesis 3 tells us what happened. Adam and Eve sinned. They broke God's Law. They forfeited their personal purity and holiness before God. Genesis 3:7 tells the story:

Genesis 3:7 (ESV) Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

They sinned and they knew they were naked so they tried to cover up their mistake by themselves. They tried to hide from each other and when they heard God walking in the Garden they tried to hide from Him. Shame accompanies guilt. For all the rest of Scripture history, the public exposure of nakedness is indicative of shame. Public exposure is a reminder of personal

sinfulness.

When the soldiers stripped Jesus and nailed Him naked to the cross, they physically completed His likeness to the rest of us. They imposed our shame, the shame of our nakedness, the shame of our sin, the shame of our guilt before God, on Him.

Our sin cost Christ everything, even His dignity. He took not only our sin to the cross, but our shame as well. Let me remind you of the inspired words of the author of Hebrews:

Hebrews 13:11-13 (ESV) *For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.*

“Let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured.” Hear that word “reproach”? That’s another word for shame. The Holy Spirit calls the disciple to voluntarily cast out from the affections of the world and bear with Jesus the shame the world attempted to impose on Him. It is the call of God to each of us to take up our cross and die on it, to die to the shame the world will heap on us for trusting God and following Christ and obeying the Spirit and the Word.

What is the personal impact of spiritual crucifixion? What effect will a follower of Jesus experience in putting to death their old life and living new life in Christ? First, they can expect their lives to have an unexpected impact on others on account of their identification with the crucified Christ. They will also have to expect a new relationship to shame, a willingness to bear shame for Christ in the same Spirit in which He bore our shame for us. If we live to avoid shame by hiding our love for Christ from the world, then we are no more like Christ than those who attempt to shame us.

There are several more clues to the personal impact of spiritual crucifixion in this passage but I want to mention only one more. It is this: death by crucifixion takes a long time. Death is not accomplished in an instant. Crucifixion must be endured.

One thought here. It took six hours from the first blow of the hammer on the first nail to Jesus’ final exhale. When all was done He cried, “It is finished,” and committed Himself and His spirit to the Father. This is a great mercy in the midst of great sorrow. Friends, take note. The death of the self and the flesh, the sinful nature, will take some time. It will not happen in an instant. Christ has called us not to take up our cross for an instant but for a lifetime, for as long as it takes until it is finished, for every moment until our last. We do not set down our cross and take up heaven. We die on our cross and are taken up by heaven.

If you truly follow Jesus, you will follow Him to the cross, and you will realize the longer you follow Him that the life of faith is life not merely at the cross but on the cross. I mean for you to understand that an act of faith in Christ does not mean instant health and wealth but instead

presents a long, slow, sometimes painful but always certain death to self.

The world calls for us to come down from our cross just as they called for Christ to come down from His. If we do, then we all lose, they and us. The world cries out in scoffing and rejection attempting to shame the believer from boldness of faith and assurance of hope. But let us fulfill the Scripture as the Master did:

Hebrews 12:1-5 (ESV) *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*