

• *Jesus so physically weakened*

As Jesus is led out of Pilate's court, the Roman officials force a man passing by to help Jesus carry His cross¹. It was a Roman habit to get the man to be crucified to carry his own cross, but Jesus at this point was evidently so physically weak that someone else was forced to do the work.

1 15:21

1. A man forced to carry Jesus' cross

So we meet (1) **a man forced to carry a cross**. Simon the father of Alexander and Rufus, was apparently well-known to the readers of Mark's Gospel. Since Mark is reckoned to have been produced in Rome, and since Romans 16:13 mentions a Rufus in Rome and mentions his mother also, it seems we have mention here of a well-known Christian family who later lived in Rome. Simon's being forced to help Jesus carry His cross is a good illustration of Mark 8:34. It happened very suddenly to him. He was '*coming in from the country*' when suddenly the Romans grabbed him and demanded he carry Jesus' cross. It could be for us that events will suddenly demand that we carry a load we would never imagine we would carry. Jesus has said earlier that the way to follow Him is to carry a cross – that is to willingly accept the painful chastenings that God lays upon us. The event here is quite literal – but it illustrates Jesus' point. Simon's carrying a cross for Jesus brought him worldwide honour and fame. His cross-bearing brought him honour. I don't suppose he enjoyed it at the time but it brought him the high privilege of relieving Jesus of some suffering at the time of His crucifixion.

2. Great personal cost

• *Shame, embarrassment, ridicule & scorn*

We read also (2) of **the great cost of the cross for Jesus**. He was taken to Golgotha ('Skull-Place') outside the city¹. Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh to dull His senses² but Jesus wanted to be wide awake on the cross. He did not want to be bearing the sins of the world while He was asleep or drugged. There was great shame and embarrassment for Jesus. They took His clothes away and gambled over who should have them³. At the third hour (9 am) He was crucified⁴. Again their mockery of Jesus as '*king of the Jews*' was true without their knowing it⁵. Jesus hung upon the cross in the company of criminals⁶ and faced extreme ridicule and scorn⁷.

1 15:22
2 15:23
3 15:24
4 15:25
5 15:26
6 15:27
7 15:28–32

3. The terrible climax

Next we come to (3) **the climax of the sacrifice of Jesus**. It seems that everything that has happened so far is still only preparation for the high-point of the cross, the three hours of darkness. The darkness stands for total abandonment. It was a sign of the end of the Old Testament era and the beginning of the new covenant. It is one of the themes of the Old Testament. In a special day of the Lord '*the sun will be darkened*'¹.

1 see Amos 8:9; Isaiah 13:10

The very universe frowns on Jesus, as the Father abandons Him and withdraws fellowship from Him². For three hours the suffering is intense. There is something in the cross that even Jesus did not expect. He was asking a **question** at this time³. His exact words in Aramaic are recorded. Mark wants us to know very exactly what Jesus said⁴. Some were still wondering whether there would be a last-minute miracle⁵ but Jesus surrendered His life to the Father⁶.

2 15:33
3 15:34
4 15:34
5 15:35–36
6 15:37

4. The results of the cross

Next we come to (4) **the results of the cross**. Two things happened immediately. The holy of holies was opened up by the veil being torn from top to bottom¹. It was God's way of saying a higher level of

1 15:38

fellowship would now be open to God's people by the blood of His Son.

• *The holy of holies opened up*

• *Soldier comes to faith*

Also, a Roman soldier immediately came to faith in Jesus as the Son of God^{□1}. It was an amazing testimony. Before this time God had declared Jesus to be His Son^{□2} and the disciples had eventually come to see the same thing^{□3}, but this Gentile soldier gets there in one step through seeing Jesus on the cross! It is a great encouragement. The cross was a despised and a cruel instrument of execution. It was a great stumbling block in the way of faith in Jesus. How could the Son of God die in such a way? But although many were blind and could not see who Jesus was, this pagan soldier came to instant faith. It is a sign of the power of the cross. When the cross of Jesus is upheld some will come to faith despite the disgrace and shame of the cross.

□1 15:39
□2 Mark 1:11; 9:7
□3 8:29

5. Witnesses of the cross

• *The women*

At the end of the chapter Mark lets us know of some of (5) **the witnesses of the cross**. Although the disciples of Jesus all abandoned him, the women among Jesus' disciples were watching what was happening from some distance away^{□1}. They were important witnesses because they would know exactly what happened to the body of Jesus. Mark's story is preparing for the amazing thing that will happen on Easter Sunday.

□1 15:40-41

• *Joseph of Arimthea*

On the Friday evening Joseph of Arimthea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus^{□1}. Jesus had some supporters in surprising places. Who would have guessed that there would be a prominent member of the Sanhedrin who was looking in faith for the predicted coming kingdom of God^{□2}, and who would be drawn by God to be a sympathizer and supporter of Jesus?

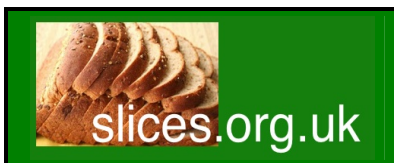
□1 15:42-43
□2 15:43

• *The tomb*

Pilate was surprised to find that Jesus had already died but gave permission for the body to be taken down^{□1}. Joseph had Jesus buried and the women who were among Jesus' disciples took notice of the place^{□2}. It was an important incident since it meant they knew exactly the tomb where Jesus was buried. When Easter Sunday came there could be no confusion. Those who are open to God would never be able to doubt the fact that Jesus came alive from the dead. In God's purpose some of Jesus' own friends were witnesses of the very place where He was buried. And a wealthy and powerful man, a member of Israel's parliament, would be able to testify that he had personally attended to Jesus' burial. There could hardly be any greater testimony to the fact that Jesus was dead and buried before He was raised.

□1 15:44-45
□2 15:46-47

• *Burial witnessed*



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