

**Remnant Life Church**  
April 2, 2017  
**The Paradox of the Cross**  
**Easter – Part 1**  
Mark 15:21-32

- **READ – Mark 15:21-32**
  
- Background of the Gospel of Mark
  - He was not one of the 12 but was a devoted follower of Jesus
  - Born in Cyrene the same place as Simon (we just read)
  - Converted under the ministry of Peter (**I Peter 5:13**)
  - Scholars believe this to be the same man who traveled with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (**Acts 12:25**)
    - Also called John Mark
    - He went back home before the journey was completed (**Acts 15:38**)
    - Paul got very angry with him for not finishing the task and refused to take him again (**Acts 15:38**)
  - One way he came to be with them in the first place was that Barnabas was his cousin (**Col 4:10**)
    - Also helps to explain why Barnabas fought with Paul over reinstating Mark for the third missionary journey
    - This is why Paul and Barnabas did not travel together again
  - Mark wrote his gospel with a great amount of influence and most likely dictation from Peter
  - As most likely the very first gospel written he relied on Peter as an eye-witness to the ministry of Jesus
  - Mark wrote this to be read primarily by the Gentiles unlike Matthew (Jewish converts living in Palestine) and Luke (generally to Christians both Jew and Gentile)
  - We come to this conclusion by the...
    - Omission of a family line of Jesus
    - Nearly non-existent references to the Old Testament
    - Explanations of Jewish customs
    - A higher focus on the ministry activities of Jesus proving His divinity
  - To understand these things helps to bring a better understanding to what Mark wrote regarding Jesus
  
- I want to talk this morning about paradox
  - Def – a statement that is usually contradictory to common sense but is still true
  - Example – actors crave the limelight and the attention of people but aggressively guard and protect their privacy

- Jesus' ministry was a paradox in many ways but the truth of His life was very evident
- I want us to consider today the incredible paradox of the cross

### 1. The paradox of strength out of weakness

- a. The fact is everyone present at the crucifixion that day missed this paradox
- b. Jesus' physical weakness would have been all they would have seen and remembered
- c. Staggering under the weight of the cross until Simon of Cyrene is pulled from the crowd (more on him later)
- d. Having already been beaten almost to the point of death the cross beam is laid across Jesus' open back to carry the cross for as much as 2 hours as he walked
  - i. In order to intimidate as many people as possible those on the way to be crucified would have been waked the longest possible route, not the shortest, so more people could witness the punishment
  - ii. Not distance but the time required to cover the distance that was so hard for the person to endure
- e. The first great paradox is the one who carried the sins of the world had to have someone else help Him carry the weight of the cross
- f. Most artists renderings depict Jesus going to His death with a look of serenity and inner strength often with a light from heaven illuminating His face
- g. But Mark paints a very different picture
- h. Notice the contrast from the heroes of the ancient stories
  - i. Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey
  - ii. The stories of Achilles, Hercules, even the philosopher Socrates bravely drinking the poison of his death sentence with many of his students gathered around him
  - iii. The death of many of the martyrs of the early church held great strength – Polycarp of Smyrna (a disciple of the Apostle John; possible author of Hebrews) stood at the wooden post of his execution, not tied to it, as the flames consumed him
  - iv. Jesus struggled through the path to the cross
- i. But it was a willing weakness!
  - i. How do we know this?
  - ii. He was offered a drink laced with a narcotic to numb the person a little bit and dull the pain but He refused
  - iii. The drink of wine mixed with myrrh
    1. The paradox within the paradox – one of the first things offered to Jesus at His birth was a gift of Myrrh
    2. The last thing offered was the drink mixed with myrrh
    3. The primary use of Myrrh in biblical times was as an embalming agent, a symbol from the very beginning of the purpose of Jesus' life

- iv. He was willing to endure all of the pain and suffering and not sleep through the cross as His disciples had slept through Gethsemane
    - 1. It was in the Garden that He committed Himself to the cup His Father had put before Him not the cup of man
    - 2. Because the full measure of His body, His mind, and His spirit was going to be required of Him.
2. The paradox of glory out of shame
- a. The true indignity of the cross was the total breaking of the man hanging there
  - b. When a man was crucified he was stripped naked of all his clothes to hang in shame as well as agony
  - c. This is how the soldiers came to have His garments to gamble for their possession
  - d. We then recognize the second paradox
    - i. His shame before all those who came to watch became our covering
    - ii. His nakedness on the cross covered the shame of our sin with His blood before the eyes of God
    - iii. The One exposed who bore our unrighteousness gave His righteousness, His covering, to us
  - e. Now lest we think that God had somehow lost control during this time recognize the series of 3's (3 being the number of the unity of the trinity) that permeate the passion story; call it God's fingerprint...
    - i. 3 disciples who followed Jesus into the garden for 3 sessions of prayer
    - ii. Peter denied Jesus 3 times after fleeing the Garden
    - iii. Mark records Jesus' 3 predictions of His crucifixion
    - iv. The 3 religious trials before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin
    - v. The 3 political trials before Pilate, Herod, and then back to Pilate again
    - vi. The 3 crosses on the hill
    - vii. Crucified the third hour
    - viii. Rose again 3 days later
  - f. God's plan, God's design, and God's presence was underlying through it all!
  - g. In the shame Jesus was put through was His glory for all
3. The paradox of testimony out of mockery
- a. It begins with Pilate
    - i. The law required that the crime of the ones being crucified be displayed so those watching would have their warning of the penalty for breaking the law
    - ii. Mark's identity of the men on either side of Jesus was that of "robbers"
    - iii. The more literal translation however would have been "insurrectionists"
    - iv. The three together accused of the same crime
    - v. But Pilate wants the last shot and so above Jesus' cross alone he hurls the final sarcastic insult, "King of the Jews"
      - 1. Pilate's intent in this last insult held two specific purposes

- a. The first was as payback for what Jesus had said to him earlier ([John 19:11](#))
      - b. It was a message to the Jews – we are in power!
    - vi. Yet the paradox of what Pilate did was to write the very first sermon about Jesus and published in three languages so no one would miss it
    - vii. Only 4 words but it proclaimed the absolute truth of who Jesus was as He hung there, “King of the Jews”
  - b. There is also a second paradox of mockery that comes from the crowd
    - i. The mob yelled out to Him in [Mark 15:29](#) – *So, you who are going to destroy the temple and raise it up again in three days...*
    - ii. Jesus had said earlier in [John 2:19](#) - *“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”*
      - 1. Here resides a quadruple paradox
        - a. By their unbelief they are denying the very place, the very event, where God and man are to come together – paradox 1
        - b. They desire to destroy the temple of Jesus’ body – paradox 2
        - c. God Himself will raise Jesus up again – paradox 3
        - d. They will understand none of what has taken place even though they see it with their own eyes – paradox 4
    - iii. But the truth of it all is evident
      - 1. The temple of Jesus’ body was destroyed and returned, raised up three days later
      - 2. And 40 years later that temple they held to and mocked Jesus over was leveled by the Roman General Titus in 70 AD and not one stone remained on top of another
    - iv. All that they mocked Him over happened just as He said and became a testimony to the power and greatness of God through His Son Jesus!
4. The paradox of loyalty out of abandonment
  - a. Who was with Jesus at the time of His crucifixion?
    - i. The Bible tells us only one disciple, John, was there with Mary and some of the other women
    - ii. Where were the other 10?
    - iii. The Bible does not tell us where they scattered to but the power of the cross still compelled them to give their lives to telling others about Jesus
    - iv. All but the apostle John gave their lives in a martyr’s death
      - 1. Could that have been a reward for John’s willingness, at great risk, to be there at the end?
    - v. They all abandoned Him but their loyalty to His life and message consumed the rest of their days

- b. One who was there, but should not have been, was Simon of Cyrene who was forced to be present to help carry the cross
  - i. Simon had made a long trip to Jerusalem for the Passover
  - ii. He came from Cyrene which today is known as Shahat, Libya
  - iii. A distance of over 980 miles – by foot or, at best, on the back of a horse or donkey
  - iv. It would have taken him weeks to make the trip and it would not have been easy
  - v. By being forced to help Jesus, get covered with this man's blood, he was now ceremonially unclean and could not have participated in the Passover rituals
    - 1. At best he could celebrate Passover after a months' time (Num 9:10-11)
    - 2. At worst he could be banished from Jerusalem and sent home (Lev 18:25)
  - vi. Turning right instead of left, getting there 5 minutes later than He did, stopping to get something to eat would have greatly impacted Simon and been a determining factor as to whether he did or did not fulfill the entire reason he had made the long journey
- c. The disciples could have been here but chose not to be. Simon did not want to be but was forced to help Jesus.

5. Leads to the fifth and final paradox –

- a. Even though Jesus was about to bear the sins of Simon of Cyrene and all of mankind in His body He needed Simon to help Him carry the cross.
  - b. The paradox is God doesn't need us but He wants us, allows us to participate with Him
  - c. Jesus can feed 25,000 people, with food left over, but He needs the loaves and fishes of a little boy
  - d. Jesus can present Himself as King but needs the foal of a donkey to announce His presence in the city
  - e. Jesus can pay for the sins of every person born before and every person yet to come but needed the back and arms of a stranger to carry the physical burden.
- The death of Jesus on the cross was a paradox from beginning to end
    - In those final hours I wonder if the disciples, perhaps by now having gathered together again, begin to realize what they had missed maybe watching from afar away in safety
    - Realizing that a stranger helped Jesus in His moment of greatest physical weakness because none of them were there
  - Where will you be when Jesus calls, invites you to participate?

- Are you willing to do whatever it takes to share the love of Jesus, the message of the cross with someone God brings across your path?
- Will you tell others, very simply, what He did for you or, like the disciples, will you find a reason to run away?
  
- It is the paradox of the cross that...
  - Our strength came from His weakness
  - Our healing came from His wounds
  - Our life came from His death

Elizabeth Clephane – Scottish hymnwriter of the mid 1800’s who wrote several songs that became great hymns of the church – one of those was Beneath the Cross of Jesus - the first verse says this...

*“Beneath the cross of Jesus I long to take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noontide heat and the burdens of the day.”*

Even here the paradox is retold – the agony, shame, and death of the cross is for each of us a home within the wilderness and a rest upon the way.

What will your response be when Jesus calls?