

Sunday 17th March 2024 – Middlewich

9:15am & 11am Communion

Mark 15:33-47

Introduction:

Over the last few weeks, since the beginning of Lent, we have been looking at Jesus death on the cross. This was Jesus purpose in coming to earth (Read – **Philippians 2:5-8**). It wasn't easy, it hurt – it ripped the Godhead apart!

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me (Mark 15:34)

But he did it, because we needed him to (Read - **John 3:14-16**). We need the cross – without it we are lost, separated from God and destined to perish!

This week - Look at how three different groups of people respond to Jesus death on the cross and linking them to three people in this weeks reading ...

1. The Romans:

The Roman soldiers respond to Jesus with mockery and laughter. Pilate, the Roman leader, knows Jesus is a good man, that he's done nothing wrong ... but to claim to be a King – that's a bit of nonsense! So the soldiers 'mock' him ... See Mark 15:18 – 'Hail King of the Jews'

In John's account (John 19) they dress him up in a purple robe and a crown of thorns as they mock him. Then Pilate puts the sign on the cross ... *The King of The Jews (Mark 15:26)*

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles ...*

But there is one soldier who takes a different view, the centurion who is responsible for the crucifixion ...

Mark 15:39 – *When he saw how he died he said; 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'*

Many today think that Jesus and the story of the cross is foolishness, a religious fairy tale for weak people. Maybe you do? But when they are able to see the truth

of God's love, demonstrated by Jesus on the cross – then like the Centurion they are able to say ... *this is the Son of God!*

2. Religious Leaders:

The religious leaders of the Jews; chief priests, elders and teachers of the law (Sanhedrin) had accused Jesus of blasphemy. They condemned him as 'worthy of death' ... and then forced Pilate's hand in order to achieve this. Then as Jesus is dying on the cross they stand around insulting and mocking him ...

Mark 15:32 ... *Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.*

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles ...*

But there is one member of the Jewish ruling council who takes a different perspective ... Joseph of Arimathea.

Mark 15:43 – *Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body.*

Many people today are really looking for a 'Messiah' god! Someone who will heal on demand, bring success and prosperity on demand. For them a God who comes and suffers is simply not good enough. But we need to receive Jesus on his terms ... to take hold of the Jesus who died upon the cross ... and, as Joseph did, make his death part of our lives.

3. The Disciples:

Sadly Jesus' disciples don't come out of the account of Jesus' death very well either:

- Judas betrayed him – for money.
- Peter denied him – out of fear.
- Then they all deserted him ...

Mark 14:50 ... *Then everyone deserted him and fled.*

They could not cope with the potential pain and suffering of being associated with Jesus as he is put on trial and eventually crucified ...

Mark 8:34 ... *If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me*

But again there are some who don't run away – the women followers – including Mary Magdalene. They stay with him ...

Mark 15:40 ... *Some women were watching at a distance ... Mary Magdalene*

Mark 15:47 ... *Mary Magdalene ... saw where he was laid*

Many Christians shy away from being seen to be a follower of Jesus. The embarrassment, ridicule, even persecution is too much for us – so we keep quiet. But like Mary, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be seen to stand with Jesus by the cross ... to acknowledge publically our faith in the crucified Son of God.

1 Corinthians 1:24 ... *but to those who God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Jesus Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Conclusion:

So how are you planning to respond to the cross of Jesus Christ this Easter?

- To laugh it off as irrelevant foolishness – or to see the Son of God dying there for you?
- To mock it as falling short of your ideals for God – or to embrace the God who died for you?
- To simply avoid it completely, to play safe and turn away – or stand and be publically counted as a follower of the crucified Jesus?

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **John 3:14-16***