Community Group Discussion Guide

November 22, 2026
Mark 15:16-39 | The Crucifixion

MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: When have you experienced something horrible—job loss, health diagnosis, relationship ending—that actually led to an unexpected blessing?*

DISCUSS

Jesus lived a perfect life in every way. Yet the religious leaders of His day had Him arrested and then put Him through a bogus trial. Many witnesses were brought in to give false testimony about Him, but the trial's verdict had been decided before it even began: Jesus was found guilty and sentenced to death. The trial had not been a fair one by any measure, but God's redemptive plan was not going to be stopped by anyone. In fact, God would work even these egregious offenses for the good of all who trust in Jesus. The greatest human agony led to the greatest gift any of us could ever receive. As evidenced by Jesus' suffering and crucifixion in Mark 15:16-39, the cross of Christ is the centerpiece of the Christian faith.

⇒ *Without the cross, why is there no forgiveness for sin?*

1. Mark 15:16-32: Jesus endured suffering as part of God's plan of salvation for humanity.

Mark 15:16-22: *16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. 21 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. 22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).*

After His arrest, Jesus was dragged before several groups to be questioned and humiliated. First, He was taken before the Sanhedrin. Then He was delivered over to Pilate, who turned Him over to Roman soldiers who subjected Jesus to public humiliation. After leading Him into the palace, the soldiers gathered the whole company around Him. They struck Him, spat on Him, and mocked Him openly. Every action was meant to strip Him of dignity and present Him as a counterfeit king who was powerless and insignificant. They viewed Jesus as nothing more than a failed revolutionary whose claims deserved to be laughed at. They dressed Him in a purple robe, pressed a crown of thorns onto His head, and knelt down before Him with mocking words, "Hail, King of the Jews!" The soldiers did not realize they were bowing before the One who was responsible for the creation of the very thorns and woven materials with which they mocked Him.

⇒ *Discuss this statement: In their mockery, the soldiers unintentionally spoke the truth about Jesus' identity. He is the King, though not the kind they expected.*

According to the law, the guilty victim had to carry the implement of his own demise, or at least the crossbeam, to the place of execution. This was all designed to enhance the public spectacle. Jesus, in a weakened state, was unable to carry it all the way to the execution site. Simon of Cyrene was pulled

out of the crowd and forced to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha. The Aramaic word for *Golgotha* means "*place of the skull*." *Calvary* is the Latin translation of Golgotha and it means a bare skull. The place may have looked like a skull or there were many skulls there from previous crucifixions.

⇒ *Why must we always remember that none of this was outside of God's plan or Jesus' control?*

Mark 15:23-27: *[23] And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. [24] And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. [25] And it was the third hour when they crucified him. [26] And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." [27] And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.*

Mark noted that Jesus was offered "wine mixed with myrrh," but He did not drink it. According to tradition, wine with myrrh often was given to people condemned to die to dull the pain and to make it easier to nail them to the cross. Yet, as another cruelty, the mixture also intensified thirst. Jesus refused to drink it in deference to His vow of abstinence from wine at the Last Supper (Mark 14:25-26).

⇒ *Jesus remained fully conscious as He accepted His suffering. How did Jesus' refusal to drink also show His commitment to experience the full cup of God's wrath for us?*

It was the accepted right of the executioner's squad to claim the minor possessions of the victim. In fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, the soldiers cast lots, the equivalent of throwing dice, to see who would get Jesus' clothes. It was also customary for the person being executed to wear a message engraved on a board indicating the crime he had committed. Jesus' sign read "The King of the Jews" since He claimed to be the king of the Jews—an act of treason. Jesus was crucified between two criminals. This placement was probably intended to disgrace Jesus even further, but it actually served to fulfill Isaiah 53:12: He was counted among the rebels.

⇒ *What does it reveal about God's sovereignty that multiple Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled in all that Jesus suffered?*

Mark 15:29-32: *[29] And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, [30] save yourself, and come down from the cross!" [31] So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. [32] Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.*

Typically, the Romans crucified people in public places to warn others not to challenge the Roman government. The site of Jesus' crucifixion was by a major, public thoroughfare that led into the city. The mockery that began with the soldiers now spread to everyone present. As people passed by Jesus, they continued to mock Him. Again He was accused of saying He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (John 2:19).

Even Jesus' miracles were fuel for the crowd's mockery, as He had saved others, but here He was, dying and seemingly unable to save Himself. They could hardly see how God could be with someone so abandoned and tormented on a cross. By their reasoning, if He were a Savior, He ought to be able to save Himself. Even those crucified beside Jesus added their voices to the ridicule. It seemed that all had turned against Him.

⇒ *What kept Jesus on the cross when He could have saved Himself (see John 10:17-18)?*

Every moment Jesus remained on the cross was an act of obedience to the Father and of love toward sinners. What appeared to be weakness was the clearest display of His strength. He did not use His power to avoid the cross. He used it to remain on the cross. Jesus did not save Himself because He was saving others. Because He stayed, salvation was secured. Jesus stood in the place of sinners, bearing the penalty our sin deserves to offer us forgiveness (Isaiah 53:5). The cross was not accidental. It was necessary and essential to accomplish the work of reconciliation.

⇒ *Discuss this statement: True power is not shown by escaping suffering but by fulfilling God's will even when it leads to suffering.*

2. Mark 15:33-39: Jesus died to reconcile us to God and to give us direct access to Him.

Mark 15:33-36: *33 And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 35 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." 36 And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."*

After Jesus was crucified, Mark recorded that darkness came over the land from noon until three in the afternoon. This was not a natural occurrence. Throughout Scripture, darkness is often associated with judgment (Amos 5:18-20; Joel 2:1-2; Zephaniah 1:14-15). The prophets spoke of the day of the Lord as a time when God would act against sin in justice (Isaiah 13:9; Obadiah 15). In this moment, that imagery became reality.

⇒ *How might the theme of darkness help us understand what God was doing through Jesus on the cross?*

Jesus cried out in Aramaic from the cross, quoting the opening phrase of Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This psalm of David begins with anguish and ends with confidence in God's deliverance. Jesus drew on a passage of Scripture that would have been familiar to those who heard Him.

While Jesus was experiencing the fullness of God's wrath against sin on the cross, He certainly appeared abandoned by God, but the psalm, which foretells details of the crucifixion, ends with a declaration of praise because the Lord heard the psalmist's—and Jesus'—prayer. David closed the psalm with a vision of the nations turning to the Lord. Even in this moment of anguish, Jesus was still speaking within the framework of Scripture and the plan of God. Some bystanders thought He was calling on Elijah to deliver Him from the cross. Elijah was considered to be a forerunner of the Messiah and a deliverer of those who were lost causes.

Jesus was not detached from what was happening. He was not numb to the suffering. He cried out. He prayed. Even during the most intense moment of suffering, He turned to the Father. The cry itself was an expression of faith. Though He felt the weight of God's wrath, He did not turn away from His Father. This cry revealed the full reality of His humanity. Jesus truly entered into anguish, bearing the full weight and pain of death in a way that was real and personal.

⇒ *Discuss this statement: While the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son was not broken, Jesus truly experienced the relational weight of abandonment as He stood in the place of sinners.*

The cross was the place where God dealt with sin in a final and decisive way. Jesus hung in the place of sinners, bearing the judgment that sin deserves. The darkness served as a reminder that sin is serious. Sin is not a minor failure or a small mistake; it is rebellion against the holy God. Sin brings separation and judgment. Yet here is the heart of the gospel: the judgment that rightly belongs to sinners fell on Christ instead (2 Corinthians 5:21).

⇒ *Why did true reconciliation with God require a costly sacrifice?*

Mark 15:37-39: *37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

The victims of crucifixion usually had no strength left and often suffered complete exhaustion before dying.
The fact that Jesus uttered a loud cry indicates He did not die the ordinary death of one who was crucified. His loud cry was a shout of victory. In John 19:30, Jesus' words are recorded: It is finished. Jesus used an accounting term meaning "paid in full." The debt of sin has been completely cancelled. Jesus willingly completed His mission of salvation for the world by enduring injustice, abuse, crucifixion, and death. Jesus' death is not a tragic failure but the glorious fulfillment of the destiny God assigned Him as the Messiah.

⇒ *How did the Old Testament sacrificial system point forward to this moment?*

In Jesus, that greater sacrifice was finally given. His death was sufficient, final, and effective. It did not need to be repeated. It accomplished what all previous sacrifices could only anticipate. Through Jesus's death on the cross, sin was dealt with completely. The weight of judgment was carried on our behalf, the cost was paid, and the way for reconciliation was secured.

At the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The curtain separated the most holy place from the rest of the temple, marking off the place where God's presence uniquely rested (Exodus 26:31-34). The veil stood as a constant reminder that sin created a barrier between God and humanity and access to Him was restricted (Isaiah 59:2).

Under the old covenant, only the high priest could enter that inner place, and then only once a year after sacrifice. The curtain itself testified that the way into God's presence had not yet been opened. It was a visible reminder that sin still alienated the holy God and His people. When Jesus died, that barrier was torn in two. The old sacrificial system had been fulfilled. With His own holy and atoning blood, Jesus entered not an earthly sanctuary but heaven itself to offer His sacrifice once for all. The curtain was torn because Christ removed what separated us from God.

The direction of the tear also was important. The veil was torn from top to bottom, showing that it was not something initiated by people. God Himself opened the way. What sin had separated; God made a way to restore. Through the death of Jesus, access to God is no longer tied to a place, a system, or a

repeated set of sacrifices. Because of Him, believers can now approach God with confidence (Hebrews 10:19-22).

⇒ *How did the tearing of the veil change everything about our relationship with God?*
⇒ *What are some ways you benefit from direct access to God through Jesus?*

In the midst of all that was taking place, one voice stood out. A Roman centurion, watching the crucifixion and the way Jesus died, declared, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" The religious leaders, who should have recognized Jesus, rejected Him. Yet this Gentile outsider recognized what others had refused to see. The Man they had just crucified was no ordinary man.

⇒ *How was the centurion's response strikingly different from that of the others?*

The confession by the centurion signals that Gentiles will also be included in the salvation offered by Jesus' death. If such a one could believe that Jesus is the Son of God only by witnessing how He died, then anyone can believe. In this we see a reversal. Those who were closest to the promises and expectations of the Messiah rejected Him, while a Gentile responded with recognition and confession. This does not mean that God had abandoned His people, but it does point to something larger.

Through the death of Jesus, the way was being opened for all people, not just one nation. The recognition of the centurion anticipated what would become clear in the gospel message: the good news of Jesus Christ extends beyond Israel to the nations. As the apostle Paul wrote, the blood of Jesus brought near all who were far off from God, allowing both Jew and Gentile to worship God together (Ephesians 2:11-22).

The cross became the place where barriers are removed. The cross revealed who Jesus was, and it reveals who truly belongs to Him, not by ethnicity or background but by faith. Those who see and believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are brought into the same relationship with God.

⇒ *Why does the cross demand a response? Why does it not allow for neutrality?*
⇒ *How have you responded to the crucifixion of Jesus and what impact has it made in your life?*

Because of what Jesus has done, reconciliation with God is now possible for all who trust in Him. Forgiveness is offered, relationship is restored, and access to the Father is opened. This truth is the foundation of salvation and the foundation of the Christian life. It shapes how we approach God, how we understand who we are, and how we live each day. The question is not just about what happened at the cross but how we will respond to it. Will we turn away, or will we, like the centurion, see and confess the truth about Jesus?

TRANSFORM
Jesus' suffering included humiliation, torture, mockery, and death. He endured it all for us. His mission of salvation was fulfilled through His sacrifice and resurrection to reconcile us to the Father and give us direct access to Him. Jesus willingly accepted the excruciating death, enduring the punishment and mockery that He did not deserve, so that we might be saved through His sacrifice.

1. HEAD: Several people were involved in the crucifixion of Jesus, from powerful Roman governors and Jewish religious leaders to the everyday people who stood at the foot of the cross. Notably absent in

Mark's Gospel were the disciples, though the women who followed Jesus stood at a distance to witness His suffering (Mark 15:40-41).

⇒ *What common responses to Jesus' crucifixion might we encounter today?*

2. HEART: We may never understand the full extent of Jesus' suffering and agony on the cross. While we might focus on the actions of the Romans or the Jews in His death, we should consider our own sins that demanded a sacrifice. Out of His love for us, Jesus paid the price that we could not so we could be reconciled to God.

⇒ *Why should Jesus' suffering on the cross lead us toward repentance of sin and obedience to God?*

3. HANDS: In Mark's Gospel, Jesus exemplified the perfect Servant. He told His disciples that He came to serve rather than to be served and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). The Son of God was humiliated, beaten, and killed so that anyone who repents and puts their faith in Him can receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

⇒ *How will you follow Jesus' example and take up your cross this week, willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and others?*

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The Gospel Project® for Adults
Leader Guide, Unit 28, Session 1
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