

1. Review: Suffering Son of God

- Mark's Gospel is a narrative of *Christ crucified*, or the "suffering Son of God".
- He is the first (if Marcan Priority is right) to forge a narrative that makes sense of the early Christian claim in 1 Cor. 15.3-4:
 - that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures
 - that he was buried
 - that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.
- Problem in writing a narrative about this is that the idea of a crucified Messiah was a *scandal*. Why?

2. Crucifixion: Background

- It is still easy to underestimate the horrors of crucifixion in the ancient world, especially the *shame* of crucifixion. Without some sense of this, it is difficult to appreciate the scale of Mark's task, or how his Gospel first sounded.

Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly weals on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross. (Seneca, Epistle 101 to Lucilius; Martin Hengel's translation, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (ET; London: SCM, 1977): 31-2)

But the executioner, the veiling of the head and the very word 'cross' should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but liability to them, the expectation, indeed the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man. (Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* 16; ET from Hengel, *Crucifixion*: 42).

Crucifixion is an ideal expression of the anomalous frightful. In accordance with ancient evidence about types of death and the destinies of those killed violently, it is terrifying, ghastly, and laden with uncertainty. It is a violent and abrupt end of mortal life, and it

remained this volatile problem for the ancient audience of the Gospels. The tenacity of this problem for early Christianity is not to be underestimated. (Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark* (ATLA Monograph Series, 47; Lanham, Maryland; London: Scarecrow, 2002): 10

- In the light of this, how can Mark write a plausible, compelling Passion Narrative?

3. The Darkness of Mark's Passion Narrative

- One key strategy is not to downplay the horrors of crucifixion, so the account appears with everything a first century reader would expect to hear about crucifixion:
 - The silence of the victim – the only words Jesus' speaks after 14.49 are the words of despair on the cross (15.34)
 - Jesus dies alone – only several named women witness it "afar off".
 - Nakedness (15.24)
 - Mockery and insults (14.65, 15.29, 31)
 - A public spectacle (15.29 etc.)
- Yet Mark wishes to convey the message that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) not in spite of this but because of this. This requires several key strategies:

4. Jesus' innocence

- If Jesus is the Christ who is dying for the sins of others (1 Cor. 15.3, etc.), it is essential that Mark depicts Jesus as innocent, and his conviction as a travesty of justice.
 - At Jesus' trial before the High Priest (14.53-65), there are false witnesses and they cannot agree.
 - Jesus is condemned for announcing who (Mark thinks) he is: the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed, who as Son of Man will come with the power and glory. i.e. he is crucified as the Son of God, again connecting identity and destiny.
- Pontius Pilate is depicted as finding no cause worthy of death in Jesus. 15.14: "What

evil has he done?"

5. Use of dramatic irony

- Mark's narrative is thick with dramatic irony – the implied readers know what the actors in the drama do not know, and the actors' mockeries have a special poignancy.

Mark 15.17- 20: **"And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. 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."**

Mark 15.26: **"And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.'**

Mark 15.39: **'Truly this man was the Son of God!'**

Mark 15.31: **'He saved others; he cannot save himself.'**

6. Scripturalization

Mark 14.21: 'For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed'

Mark 14.49: 'Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. *But let the scriptures be fulfilled* (cf. also Mark 14.27).

Psalm 22.1: 'My God, my God'

Mark 15.34: 'My God, my God'

Psalm 22.7: 'All who see me mock me.....they shake their heads'

Mark 15.31: 'The chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him ...'

15.29: 'Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads'

Psalm 22.18: 'They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots'

Mark 15.24: 'They . . . divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide which each should take.'

- Current scene: a major debate between whether the Passion Narratives in the Gospels are “prophecy historicized” or “history remembered” – John Dominic Crossan
- The difficulty with the debate is that it tends to *polarise* the positions. The truth is that it is not an either / or but a both / and.
- The key: **interaction** between history & scripture. The earliest Christians attempted to find scriptural explanations, fulfilments and means of expressing history. The history led them to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures helped them creatively to interpret the history.
- We know that history & scripture were interacting in our earliest available evidence: 1 Cor. 15.3-4: “For *what I received I passed on to you as of first importance*: that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*”.
 - “My God, my God” (Mark 15.34) illustrates the interaction well: Mark paints a plausible historical picture – the account makes sense as an account of this terrifying torture, yet the language used is scriptural (Psalm 22.1).
- What was the context for this process? Liturgy & worship?
 - The account is framed by an explicitly liturgical pericope, Last Supper, Mark 14.
 - Note the 3 hour timings throughout, and the curiosity of a night trial. Vestiges of a night time early Christian vigil?

7. Mark’s Empty Tomb Narrative

- Most scholars see the ending of Mark as Mark 16.8.
- Mark 16.9-20 incorporate early scribal attempts to “finish” Mark’s story, drawing in elements from the other Gospels.
- Could Mark’s original ending have been lost? This older view recently resurrected by Clayton Croy.
- For most contemporary scholars, 16.8 represents a stark and mysterious ending, appropriate to such an enigmatic, mysterious Gospel

Mark Goodacre
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