

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 15: 15-24

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. Today, we will continue to read Mark 15, verses 15 to 24.

Jesus underwent three trials within the Jewish religious system and was condemned to death. The evidence for this condemnation was His claim to be the Son of God, the Christ. Then Jesus was taken to the Roman court, where He underwent three more trials. Yet, no guilt could be found in Him. In Matthew 27:24, Pilate even washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." This precisely proves that Jesus is the Son of God, destined to be the Passover Lamb; in Him, no flaw could be found. Therefore, He was qualified to bear the sins of all and fulfill God's plan of redemption. On one hand, this was God's predetermined will; on the other hand, it was the willing obedience of Jesus Christ to the will of God. He surrendered Himself, handing Himself over to the hands of the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities, exposing the ugly truth about religion and politics: one used ideology to advance its own interests, while the other sought to maintain its interests by pleasing the crowd. The combination of religious and political interests led to the condemnation of Jesus.

Verse 15: "So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified."

The Jewish council sentenced Jesus to death, but they lacked the authority to execute Him, so Jesus was handed over to the Roman court. Pilate, the governor, seeking to please the Jews, released the guilty Barabbas but had the innocent Jesus scourged. At that time, Roman whips were made of leather straps embedded with pieces of metal and nails. Each lash tore into the flesh, causing deep, bloody

wounds, inflicting excruciating pain. Jesus was left battered and bruised from the relentless beating. Isaiah 53:5b states, "And by His stripes we are healed." While it appeared to be the result of Jewish religious persecution and Roman political compromise, in reality, it was Jesus willingly sacrificing Himself. Through His wounds, those who believe in Him receive healing. Every saved saint receives grace freely, yet it is not cheap. God is just and does not overlook sin. He placed our sins on Jesus and exacted punishment on Him. The whip that should have fallen on us fell on Jesus, and through His wounds, we are healed.

Dear brothers and sisters, next Sunday when you receive the bread and the cup, please remember especially the wounds inflicted on Jesus. Every sin we commit has a price to pay, but it's not us who pay it, it's Jesus who pays it for us. Through His wounds, we are healed. After receiving healing, we should be thankful on the one hand, and on the other hand, we should not fall into sickness again. After Pilate had Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Verses 16-18: "Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"

Before being crucified, Jesus endured the scourging, a physical punishment that left Him covered in wounds and bloodied. Then came the emotional and mental torment: the soldiers dressed Jesus in a purple robe, the color of royalty. With mocking intent, they draped Him in this imperial garment and fashioned a crown out of thorns to place upon His head. Thorns, a symbol of the curse upon humanity, now pierced Jesus's brow, and blood trickled down His cheeks. The entire garrison of soldiers was assembled before Him, mocking Him as their king, congratulating Him in a sarcastic tone, "Hail, King of the Jews!" This was a portrayal of a king, battered and bruised, clad in purple and crowned with thorns, a mockery of the charges brought against Jesus in the Roman court for claiming to be the King of the Jews.

Verse 19: "Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him."

"They struck Him on the head with a reed": The head of a king is honored, yet they used a reed to strike His head in mockery. Furthermore, "they spat on Him": The face is a symbol of dignity, yet they spat on His face, stripping Him of His dignity and honor. Then, in a pretense of reverence, they bowed their knees to worship Him, mocking and ridiculing Jesus. Though Jesus possessed the image of God and was equal with God, He endured insults and mockery at the hands of men.

Verse 20: "And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him."

Jesus endured the scourging, the mockery, and the ridicule. After the soldiers had their fill of amusement, they removed the purple robe from Jesus, dressed Him again in His own clothes, and led Him out to be crucified. Crucifixion was a cruel form of torture, prevalent in Roman history during the time of Jesus. Nailed to a cross, a person's limbs were stretched out on the wooden frame, resembling the posture of a slaughtered lamb. This fulfilled the symbolism of Jesus as the Passover Lamb. At the appointed time and place chosen by God, Jesus was to be slain, completing the redemption of humanity.

Verse 21: "Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross."

The path from the Antonia Fortress, where Jesus was sentenced, to Golgotha, where He was crucified, is known as the Via Dolorosa, or the Way of Suffering. In the tradition, there are three different versions of the Via Dolorosa. If you were to visit Jerusalem today, you would see the shortest version, which stretches from the Antonia Fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, measuring approximately 500

meters and marked by 14 stations. During that time, it was customary for the condemned to carry their own cross along the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha, where they would be crucified. After enduring a night of torment and having just been brutally scourged, Jesus, weakened and wounded, was unable to complete the journey alone. The Roman soldiers, even in their cruelty, could not bear to witness His struggle.

Just at that moment, there was a Cyrenian man named Simon, who had come from the country, passing by that place, perhaps just out to see the commotion with others. He was then conscripted to carry Jesus' cross. Initially unwilling, Simon was intimidated and forced to bear the cross for Jesus. It is uncertain whether Simon had encountered Jesus before this moment, but by reluctantly carrying the cross, he and his family embarked on a blessed path. Mark specifically notes that he is the father of Alexander and Rufus. At that time, Mark was in Rome. Evidently, Alexander and Rufus were saints in the Roman church, known to many. Hence, Simon is introduced as the father of Alexander and Rufus. Paul also mentions in Romans 16:13, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Clearly, Rufus was also a coworker with Paul, and their relationship was very close, so Paul adds the note, "his mother and mine," indicating their intimacy. It is evident that Simon and his family became faithful servants of the Lord, devoted Christians, though initially coerced to carry the cross, their entire family was blessed. Dear brothers and sisters, many times we too are compelled, unwillingly carrying our crosses, yet those crosses become blessings in disguise, aiding our growth in faith and maturity in life.

Verse 22: "And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull."

"Golgotha" is translated from Aramaic, which directly means "skull." In English, "Calvary" is derived from Latin, and it also means "skull." Originally, Golgotha was a hill that resembled a human skull, and it was where Jesus was crucified.

Verse 23: "Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it."

The crucifixion was a torturous ordeal that inflicted immense physical pain on the body. Therefore, before the execution, the condemned were offered wine mixed with myrrh. Myrrh had a numbing effect and could alleviate the sensation of pain. However, when Jesus tasted it, He refused to drink. Jesus willingly endured every agony without anesthesia or mitigation, for He was determined to accomplish redemption and address humanity's sin problem. Thus, He chose to experience every bitterness of sin without numbing, without cushioning, bearing it all intact.

Just as Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." Jesus tasted the bitterness of sin fully and willingly for you and me. He refused to drink wine mingled with myrrh, showing that His embrace of the cross was without coercion or complaint. He wholeheartedly embraced the cross, experiencing every form of pain it brought. He poured Himself out completely, enduring all kinds of suffering so that through His cross, we might receive grace, forgiveness, and blessing. Jesus set the best example for us to bear the cross: His heart harbored no bitterness, no resentment, no self-pity. He even prayed for and blessed His enemies, as He taught in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:39-41: "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." This is the cross of Jesus Christ.

If we are honest, we have to admit that we simply cannot do it. It's precisely because we cannot do it that Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." The true cross is not one we bear; rather, it's Christ who bears it for us. Because now the one who lives is not me, but Christ lives in me. We simply do not have the ability to bear the cross. We must be able to put aside our old selves, so that the life of Christ can live through us. Only then can we walk the path of the cross.

Verse 24: "And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take."

After Jesus Christ was sentenced, He was whipped, mocked, and ridiculed. He, who bore the cross himself and endured torture, was unable to complete the journey along the Via Dolorosa. The Roman soldiers compelled Simon to help Jesus carry the cross. However, Simon and his family were blessed because he carried the cross for Jesus. Upon arriving at Golgotha, Jesus was to be crucified. The only humane act in the cruelty of crucifixion was giving the condemned a drink of wine mixed with myrrh, which had a numbing effect to alleviate the pain. Yet Jesus refused to drink it, choosing to experience all the bitterness first hand so that He could sympathize with us in all things, fully understanding the various sorrows of human life.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we all recognize the grace we have received freely, which came at a great cost to Jesus Christ: He tasted every debt of sin for us so that we could be accepted by our Heavenly Father, becoming His children, and able to worship together in the church, which is the household of God, and serve together. May we not underestimate this grace, but be willing to approach church life with a grateful heart, placing ourselves in service alongside fellow believers, serving God and serving others together.

Let us pray: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, as we reflect on Your suffering, we deeply understand that it was our sins, our rebellion, that compelled You to pay such a great price to redeem us. Grant us a heart of gratitude, that after enjoying Your grace, we may willingly offer ourselves fully. Because You poured out Yourself without reservation, enabling us to love You and Your church wholeheartedly. Bless the church where I belong, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ.