

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

Mark 15: 38-47

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you; this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord! It's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue reading Mark chapter 15, verses 38 to 47.

At 9 o'clock in the morning on the day of Passover, Jesus was crucified. During the first three hours, from 9 a.m. to noon, Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, and insulted. During this time, Jesus spoke three sentences, all for the sake of men. The first was a prayer to God to forgive those who harmed Him. The second was forgiveness for the repentant thief, promising him paradise. The third was entrusting His mother Mary to the disciple John. The next three hours, from noon to 3 p.m., God laid the sins of all upon Jesus and harshly judged Him, causing darkness to cover the land. During this time, Jesus spoke four sentences, all concerning the execution of God's redemption plan. The first, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The second, "I thirst." The third, "It is finished." The fourth, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." After saying this, Jesus breathed His last.

Verse 38: "Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

The curtain separating the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was torn in two from top to bottom. This act carries profound spiritual significance, which we discussed yesterday and won't repeat. Today, we'll focus on the impact of this event. The temple was the place where priests served, but the priesthood system of Jesus' time was corrupted by the Annas family's monopoly. Yet, among the priests, there were still some who sincerely served God. When they saw the curtain torn from top to bottom, it was evident that this was not done by human hands but by God, precisely at the time of Jesus' death. Matthew 27:51 adds more details, mentioning an earthquake and rocks splitting. These priests began to wonder if Jesus truly was the awaited Messiah.

After Pentecost, the disciples boldly stepped out and began preaching in Jerusalem, causing the word of God to flourish. Acts 6:7 tells us that even many priests became obedient to the faith. Perhaps the seed of the Gospel had already been sown in the hearts of these priests through the vision produced at the moment of Jesus' death. The Bible repeatedly tells us that the spread of the Gospel begins with the Jews and then extends to the Gentiles. The tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom was also to reach some of these priests. Mark then mentions how Jesus' death also impacted the Gentiles.

Verse 39: "So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God!'"

The centurion who stood opposite Him was a Roman officer, a Gentile, likely responsible for executing Jesus' death sentence. The Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus were probably under his command, and he was present throughout the crucifixion. He observed Jesus' reactions during the six hours on the cross. During the first three hours, he saw people mocking and ridiculing Jesus, yet Jesus prayed for them. He witnessed Jesus, in great agony, still promising paradise to the repentant thief and arranging for His mother's care. The beauty and transcendence of Jesus' humanity must have left a profound impression on him. During the latter three hours, he might not have understood that it was God judging Jesus, but he saw the changes in nature, the earthquake, and the splitting rocks. His heart began to recognize the extraordinary nature of this person, leading him to involuntarily declare, "Truly this Man was the Son of God."

Jesus being the Son of God was precisely why the Jews condemned Him. They accused Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God, yet this centurion, through his own observation, came to the conclusion that Jesus truly was the Son of God. Jesus didn't need to come down from the cross to prove His identity, as the Jews challenged Him to. Through His obedience to the Father's will, remaining on the cross unto death, this testimony of obedience unto death allowed this Gentile centurion to recognize that Jesus truly was the Son of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, modern success theology is very active in some churches. They believe that God's children should live successful, prosperous, powerful, wealthy lives to attract people to the church. However, the Gospel of God is quite the opposite. What moves people most is not our testimonies of worldly success but allowing people to see the death of the Lord in us, that is, the cross of Christ at work in us, helping us obey God's will even in various difficult situations, living peacefully and joyfully, and reaching out to those in need. Just as this Gentile centurion, witnessing Jesus' death on the cross, this process of suffering precisely testified that this Man was truly the Son of God.

Verses 40-41: "There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem."

Mark then shifts his focus to some sisters who followed and served Jesus. These sisters, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, followed Him all the way to Jerusalem and remained by His side at Golgotha. While Jesus' twelve disciples scattered and fled, only John stayed by the cross at Golgotha. These sisters were braver than the brothers and more faithful than the disciples; they accompanied Jesus throughout.

Mark specifically mentions three sisters for remembrance. The first is Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. Although her understanding of the truth might not have been deep, she truly loved the Lord. Her love was so steadfast that on the morning of Jesus' resurrection, she insisted on staying at the tomb, compelling Jesus to reveal Himself to her before His ascension. The second is Mary, the mother of James and Joses; James and Joses were Jesus' brothers according to the flesh, and this woman was Jesus' mother Mary. After Jesus' birth, Mary brought Him to Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecy of Simeon in Luke 2:34-35, which foretold both the future of the child and that Mary's heart would be pierced. Now Simeon's prophecy was fulfilled; Mary's heart was truly pierced, as if by a sword. The third is Salome, the mother of James and John, and

the sister of Jesus' mother Mary. Besides these three sisters, there were many other women who followed Jesus all the way to the foot of the cross.

These sisters loved the Lord, followed Him, and served Him, accompanying Him all the way to Golgotha. When Jesus was on earth, most of the financial support came from these sisters. In today's churches, it's often the brothers who take the lead, but it's mostly the sisters who love the Lord, serve, and are willing to give. The ratio of sisters to brothers in churches is often two to one, so we can even say that sisters are the backbone of church life, and without them, the church would have a hard time functioning. If sisters are willing to offer themselves, church life will thrive. Sisters also have a characteristic of easily forming groups. Here, there's a group of sisters who accompany each other, following Jesus all the way, while brothers often stand alone, just like at the foot of the cross, where only John was there. Therefore, with more sisters, church life becomes sweeter and easier to coordinate.

Dear brothers and sisters, let's cherish the sisters in the church and provide opportunities for them to serve in the church, helping them grow spiritually. When the role of sisters develops in the church, the church will surely prosper, and church life will be healthy.

Verse 42: "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,"

Jesus was crucified on the day of Passover, which happened to be a Friday. He breathed His last at 3 p.m., which was the time of the evening sacrifice, and this was also the Preparation Day for the Sabbath, the day when the Passover lamb was prepared. The following day was the Sabbath, and according to Jewish customs, a day begins at sunset and ends at the next sunset. Hence, the Sabbath began at 6 p.m. on Friday. In Jewish tradition, there were many things prohibited on the Sabbath, so everything had to be completed by 6 p.m.

Verse 43: "Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus."

Arimathea was a small town about thirty kilometers northwest of Jerusalem. Joseph was from Arimathea, and his name suggests he was an honorable member of the Jewish council, one of the seventy-one members. He was a devout Jew who eagerly awaited the kingdom of God. Matthew 27:57 also describes him as a rich man and a disciple of Jesus. John 19:38 adds that he was a disciple secretly, for fear of the Jews, implying that during the Jewish council's vote to convict Jesus, Joseph likely voted against it. He must have been attentive to Jesus' crucifixion process and witnessed Jesus' death. Therefore, before sunset, he boldly approached Pilate to request Jesus' body. Normally, those crucified were left to rot, becoming food for birds and beasts, but Joseph, who had been following Jesus secretly, was moved by Jesus' love displayed on the cross and courageously went to Pilate to request Jesus' body for burial.

Verse 44: "Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time."

Crucifixion was usually a slow process, designed to prolong the suffering of the criminals. Typically, it took one or two days for them to die. Therefore, Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly. John 19:31-33 adds some details. Since the next day was the Sabbath, the bodies should not remain on the cross, so the Jews came to Pilate before sunset to ask him to break the legs of the crucified men. Breaking their legs would cause their weight to rest entirely on the nails in their hands, leading to quick suffocation due to chest compression. The soldiers broke the legs of two thieves but found Jesus already dead, fulfilling Exodus 12:46, which stipulated that none of the Passover lamb's bones should be broken. This fulfilled the prophecy; Jesus was indeed the Passover Lamb prepared by God.

Pilate then called the centurion to inquire about Jesus' death, and this centurion was likely the one who witnessed Jesus' death and declared Him to be the Son of God. Legend has it that this centurion's name was LONGINUS, and he believed in the Lord from that day on. He provided Luke with much firsthand information, which is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Later, he became the bishop of Cappadocia and ultimately martyred for the Lord.

Verse 45: "So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph."

The centurion confirmed that Jesus was indeed dead, so Pilate granted Jesus' body to Joseph. While verse 43 states that Joseph came to request Jesus' body, verse 45 indicates that Pilate gave the body to Joseph. Here, the Chinese Union Version translation is more accurate than the English version, as the English version uses "body" in both instances, whereas the original Greek uses two different words. "Body" typically refers to a living person, while "corpse" is used for the deceased. Joseph came to request Jesus' body with the hope of resurrection, but Pilate gave him the corpse because he did not understand resurrection. Mark very accurately used two different Greek words.

Verse 46: "Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb."

Joseph bought fine linen to wrap Jesus' body. John 19:39-40 mentions another man, Nicodemus, who brought a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes. They followed Jewish burial customs, wrapping Jesus' body in linen with spices. In Mark 14:3-9, we read about Mary of Bethany, who, on the first Sunday evening of Passion Week, seized the opportunity to break an alabaster flask of very costly spikenard and anointed Jesus while He was dining. Jesus called it a beautiful deed because Mary understood His impending death and seized the opportunity to anoint Him while He was still alive, expressing her love for Him without reservation. Inspired by the

love displayed on the cross, Joseph and Nicodemus courageously emerged from secrecy to bury Jesus. They also anointed Jesus' dead body with myrrh and aloes, which was a lesser act than Mary's. The women who followed Jesus were also truly loving Him. On Jesus' resurrection morning, they came with spices to anoint Jesus' body, but He had already risen, and they missed the opportunity to anoint Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, when you love the Lord and want to express your love for Him, seize the opportunity. Don't hesitate when you feel moved; otherwise, you may miss the chance. Joseph carved a tomb out of a rock, which was originally intended for himself. This tomb was near Golgotha. He placed Jesus' body in this new tomb and rolled a large stone against the entrance, fulfilling Isaiah 53:9: "And they made His grave with the wicked — but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth." It was intended that Jesus be buried with the wicked, the two thieves crucified alongside Him. However, God moved Joseph to request Jesus' body, surpassing human intentions. Thus, Jesus was buried with the rich, namely Joseph of Arimathea. We see that not one word of God fails.

Verse 47: "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid."

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, had been following Jesus all along. They witnessed Joseph's request to take Jesus' body and saw him place it in a new tomb. They noted the location and intended to return after the Sabbath to anoint Jesus' body.

Dear brothers and sisters, this passage tells us that Jesus' suffering on the cross has a very positive and profound significance. When the curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom, it planted the seed of the Gospel in the hearts of those priests who truly served God. Even the Roman centurion overseeing the crucifixion could not help but acknowledge, "Truly this man was the Son of God." Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who initially followed Jesus secretly, bravely stepped forward to bury Jesus. Indeed, the cross may seem foolish to men, but it is the power of God.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for the great salvation revealed on the cross and help us to appreciate the value of the cross once again. May Your love inspire us to seize opportunities and boldly stand up as witnesses for You. May the church where I belong become a place that exalts the cross. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.