

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME THREE

STUDY SIXTEEN

Pre-Crucifixion Torture

Mark 15:15–25

*A cross was the worst possible form of death ever devised by
depraved humanity.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It's difficult to see people in pain. But sometimes we must. A husband who stands by his wife as she goes through a hard delivery loves her much more deeply. A father who listens to his son share his experiences as a wounded war survivor better understands his son's sacrifice and admires his courage. Some places we visit, some moments we remember, some truths we hear—although painful—can change our perspective toward people and toward life.

We enter a deep, dark valley when we walk with Christ through His agony at Calvary. We see crosses today in all forms—a silver pendant on a person's neck, a decoration on a wall, a stained-glass window at a church that radiates a warm glow.

The cross that Jesus carried, though, was never a thing of beauty. It was a bloodstained piece of timber used as an instrument of torture, designed to inflict the most excruciating pain as a person died a slow and agonizing death. To die on a cross was to die in shame in full view of a scornful public.

And yet Jesus asks us to take up a cross and follow Him. He does not mean a pendant or ornament, nor does He mean our ordinary hardships. He means the shame we might be enduring, some affliction or hardship, a cross that we bear. We long to discover how to bear our cross with Jesus and to know Him more deeply through what Paul called “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Philippians 3:10 NASB).

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll ponder Mark's brief narration of the passion of the remarkable Servant of God and let the Holy Spirit teach us something to *remove*, something to *remember*, and something to *realize* as we join our Savior on His journey to the cross.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Pre-Crucifixion Torture

Mark 15:15–25



PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
May your gracious Spirit lead me forward
on a firm footing. (Psalm 143:10)*

In your own words, ask God to teach you to bend your will to His will—just as Jesus relinquished His will to the Father’s plan.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The cross was Jesus’ magnificent obsession, His mission. Many times, He had foretold His suffering to His disciples—“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected . . . and be killed” (Mark 8:31 NASB; see also 9:31; 10:33–34, 38). But their minds couldn’t absorb the horror of what He was saying. They let His words slip by until the reality of them hit them in the face. When soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter tried fighting back. Jesus stopped him, saying, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?” (John 18:11).

Jesus, however, was not a powerless victim. Earlier, He declared,

“No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again.” (10:18)

The Son of God laid down His life according to the Father’s plan to defeat sin, death, and Satan. As you follow Jesus to His cross, remember that the reason for His suffering is your redemption. Jesus “endured the cross, disregarding its shame,” to save you from an eternity of suffering (Hebrews 12:2). Praise Him! For “by his wounds you are healed” (1 Peter 2:24).



Observation: Jesus’ Pre-Crucifixion Torture

Begin your journey with Jesus by reading [Mark 15:15–25](#), observing carefully the scenes as Mark describes them and imagining yourself as a witness to the darkest of all days.¹

Pre-Crucifixion Torture

Mark 15:15–25

Physical Abuse: Scourging—Mark 15:15

In matter-of-fact terms, Mark stated Pilate's sentence of death: "after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified" (Mark 15:15 NASB). Notice that Pilate never pronounced Jesus guilty of any crime. What does the absence of a guilty verdict say about Pilate? About Jesus? What was the purpose of having Jesus scourged before crucifixion?

How quickly we move over the word, scourged, though it isn't a familiar word for you or me. You or I have never seen a scourging, and hopefully we never will. Such would never be allowed in what we call our "civilized society."

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Extreme Humiliation: Mockery and Brutality—Mark 15:16–20

According to Mark 15:16–20, what took place following the scourging? What detail did Matthew add in [Matthew 27:28](#)? What was the reason for humiliating Jesus this way?

Easy to forget that He is naked to be scourged. He is naked while mocked, and He is naked hanging on the cross. Artists always cover Him with a sense of modesty. Such modesty was never granted crucifixion victims. They were the scum of humanity in the eyes of the Romans. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Public Exposure: Struggling to Golgotha—Mark 15:20–25

Enter the scene in Mark 15:20–25. Describe the suffering of Jesus on the way to Golgotha. What did Mark say about Simon of Cyrene? Record your observations of Jesus' crucifixion. What time did they crucify Him?

Pre-Crucifixion Torture

Mark 15:15–25

Perhaps along the road leading into the busy city of Jerusalem, people would stop and see victims of crucifixion. What did Simon think standing there? What did he tell his sons? Did he later join the band of followers in the early church, having turned his life over to the Savior? I rather think so.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Scourged, Mocked, and Crucified

Interpretation helps us obtain background material that can explain terms and customs. Feel free to consult your Bible-study resources, such as Pastor Chuck’s commentary [Insights on Mark](#) or [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). Using these tools gives you access to important information on the meaning of the scourging, mocking, and crucifying that Jesus experienced.

Find some additional information on Pilate’s attempts to spare Jesus from crucifixion in [John 19:1–16](#). What did Pilate fear? What was the real reason for Jesus’ death sentence?

Pilate ordered Jesus to be scourged with a lead-tipped whip. Explore the article “[Scourge](#)” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at [biblegateway.com](#). How does the description of scourging deepen your understanding of the physical abuse that Jesus endured? How do you think Mark’s original readers felt reading this passage, knowing the brutality of scourging?

Along with the other responses, a person would begin to shiver and shake, causing his teeth literally to rattle as his body was gripped by uncontrolled spasms. Pause and try to imagine. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Then they brought Jesus, bleeding and stumbling and trembling in pain, into the barracks courtyard. Hundreds of soldiers stopped their morning routines to watch this sadistic sport at the expense of a Jew who claimed to be king. Holding a mock coronation, they draped a robe over Jesus, crowned Him with thorns, and hit Him, shouting, “Hail! King of the Jews!” (Mark 15:18). It seemed as if each soldier tried to top the other’s sick joke and get a bigger cheer from the bloodthirsty spectators. Yet, Jesus bore it all with silent, patient dignity.

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What purpose does Jesus' humiliation, along with His suffering and death, have in His redeeming humankind from sin?

The soldiers then forced Jesus to carry the horizontal beam of His cross through the crowded streets of Jerusalem to the site of His execution. Today, the route is called the *Via Dolorosa*, the “way of suffering.” Read more about what Jesus experienced on the way to Calvary in [Constable's Notes](#) or in Pastor Chuck's commentary, [Insights on Mark](#).

Who was Simon of Cyrene? What is the significance of his bearing Jesus' cross? What must have come to his mind when he witnessed Jesus' crucifixion? What comes to your mind?

Held in the gloved hands of one of the soldiers of the detail were the spikes—long, rugged, iron spikes—ready for the hands and the feet of the next victim. Crude and brutal, the soldier with mallet in hand would then drive the spikes into Jesus' flesh. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Carrying the Cross

Seven centuries before Mark's depiction of Jesus' death, Isaiah prophesied how the Father would bruise the Suffering Servant to make His life an offering for sin ([Isaiah 52:13–14; 53:1–5; Mark 15:15–20](#)). What similar themes emerge from both passages? What picture do these passages and [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) paint of God's immense love and abundant mercy?

You realize that you and I deserve the suffering. We are the sinners. Jesus' robes for mine; His death in my place. That is why the substitutionary death of Christ is one of the crucial tenets of the faith. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Compare Jesus' carrying His cross and Simon of Cyrene's bearing His cross in our passage with [Matthew 16:24](#); [Mark 8:34–38](#); and [Luke 9:23](#). What can believers learn about “bearing our cross” from Jesus being scourged, mocked, and stripped to do the Father's will?



Application: Why Must I Know All of This?

Reflecting on Mark's depiction of Jesus' suffering, Pastor Chuck offers three reasons these truths can help you grow spiritually.

The first reason is *to remove every unrealistic idea about the cross*. Christ's crucifixion was raw and humiliating. If you've suffered abuse or trauma, He truly understands your pain. He has endured the worst trauma imaginable. How has the Holy Spirit drawn you closer to Christ through the realistic portrayal of His agony?

That is why when we chose to place a cross in our sanctuary of worship, we chose wood—simple raw wood that has weathered hundreds of years. It hangs there without special effects. It is meant to make you aware of the rugged, brutal method of death [Christ's crucifixion] was. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The second reason is *to remember all Christ suffered on our behalf*. He suffered . . . for you. In what way did this passage open your eyes to the depths of God's love for you and make you remember the significance of Jesus' sacrifice?

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The third reason is *to realize more clearly what Jesus meant regarding our “taking up our cross.”* What cross are you currently carrying? How has the Holy Spirit been challenging you to deny yourself? Where can you find strength to stand firm against a culture that heralds instant gratification and self-exaltation?

The sum of our sins was accounted for at the cross, and Jesus bore them all. Take a moment to be quiet, to pause, to take it all in, and to say a prayer of gratitude from the depths of your soul.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Son, who endured so much for me to have an intimate relationship with You. Deepen my love for You so that every day I can live for You. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](https://www.insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible)” at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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