**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Sermon

*The Good News According to Mark,*

*An Apostle of Jesus Christ*

 *365 Day Disciple ~ Mark 15:44 & following*

*Believers are Chang Agents*

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

September 30th In the Year of Our Lord 2018

(Unless otherwise noted, CSB17 - Christian Standard Bible 2017 quoted)

**The Reality of The Cross**

Say what you want. Believe what you may. Many in the world doubt in their mind, but the Cross took place. I have preached over and over that there was a B.C., and we are in the A.D. Then there is the on-going effort to erase the thought of the Cross with the implementation of B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era). I realize that most people do not wake in the morning and look at the date and think, “We are 2018 years and 9 months and 30 days since the incarnation of God.” I know the calendar has an error and is off 4 to 6 years, but we are talking round numbers here and about the idea that our calendar is based on the one event in world history that not only made it possible for people lives to change in this life but in the next eternal life too. Now, the B.C.E.-C.E. crowd is striving to have people the-world-over erase the thought of, the knowledge of, the incarnation of God as The Christ and The Cross along with the Empty Tomb, the Resurrection accounts and the Ascension. And yes, the Second Coming must be eliminated from all human thought.

 The fallen secular world dominated by the Ruler of this world (Satan) does not want competition in the hearts and minds of people.

 However, outside of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, we have secular witnesses to the life of Jesus and His crucifixion.

**Phlegon (80-140AD)**In a manner similar to Thallus, Julius Africanus also mentions a historian named Phlegon who wrote a chronicle of history around 140AD. In this history, Phlegon also mentions the darkness surrounding the crucifixion in an effort to explain it:

"Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth to the ninth hour." (Africanus, Chronography, 18:1)

Phlegon is also mentioned by Origen (an early church theologian and scholar, born in Alexandria):

[**https://www.debate.org/forums/Religion/topic/59904/**](https://www.debate.org/forums/Religion/topic/59904/)

**Also see** [**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegon\_of\_Tralles**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegon_of_Tralles)

The [Roman historian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_historiography) and [senator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_senate) [**Tacitus**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus) referred to [Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus), [his execution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus) by [Pontius Pilate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate), and the existence of [early Christians in Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_centers_of_Christianity#Rome) in one page of his final work, [*Annals*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annals_%28Tacitus%29) (written *ca.* AD 116), [book 15, chapter 44](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_%28Tacitus%29/Book_15#44).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus_on_Christ#cite_note-1)

[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus\_on\_Christ**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus_on_Christ)

**There is also the Roman ruler named Pliny who writes a letter to Rome seeking instruction on how to deal with Christians. 111-113 A.D.**

**Something Happened to the Witnesses Of Jesus**

**Then there are the apostles** **and disciples** and their writings. In these groups, we see people that were energized beyond human understanding. They had a greater love for God than the world. Yes, they struggled, but they were on an eternal journey. We see Stephen, James, Paul, Peter, John, the women at the Cross and others ‘stay the course’ to the end of their lives. They fought through every adversity their culture could throw at them, not shrinking from their calling. These people saw something. They witnessed something. They had a change in their hearts that they could not deny. They went forward pursuing the kingdom of God that is not of this world. Jesus told Pilate, and many, that His kingdom was not of this world.

**Spiritual Transformation**

 When people realize, adopt as their own, come to the actualization that there is a greater power at work in them than there is in the world then that transformation makes them a world-changer. **But wait.** The spiritual reality is that they have not adopted as their own. They have been adopted by God. God’s spiritual transformation change in them was due to their surrender to God’s Holy Spirit conviction and then the power of God’s Holy Spirit became functional, active and alive in them. This pushed them beyond human accomplishments. They had been adopted as daughters and sons of God. Once a person surrenders to God’s Holy Spirit conviction then they become predestined to live-out God’s plan for their lives. However, due to the fallen nature that still persists, Believers can deviate from God’s plan and fall short of God’s intent for their lives. What was predestined for them by God still calls for people to willingly participate. King David is our visible example of a person who had a heart after God but, at times, did not follow God’s plan for his life. We are all King David.

 In our time, a good example can be a person who surrenders their life, their time, their body and their resources to be on an athletic team. They go to practice and run the plays the coach gives them. Then they get in a game, and they decide to run their own play. My experience is that these self-determined plays do not work. God sees a much bigger picture for our lives. He sees our lives intersecting with others today and in years to come.

 In God’s all-knowingness, He sees our lives in total. God saw where Paul was going before he got there.

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. **(Acts 9:15)**

God knew Paul would eventually witness the Gospel to the Roman rulers and to Caesar’s household. (Philippians 4:22)

**Rom 8:29** For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

**Eph 1:11** In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will,

**Joh 1:12** But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name,

**Rom 8:30** And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

**Gal 3:26** for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

**Gal 4:5** to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

**Rom 8:15** You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"

**Phi 2:13** For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.

 **Rom 8:14** For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons.

**Change Agents**

 Jesus was and is a ***change agent*** of world events and people’s hearts. His disciples were ***change agents***. They were not static.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were **change agents**. They were used by God to take Jesus’ body from the Cross and place Him in the Tomb. This had to be done for there to be an empty tomb and for there to be a stone that was rolled away. This account of the stone that was rolled away has been told and re-told in every generation of man since the event took place, at least in western culture, and now, also, due to modern technology all over the world.

However, Wycliffe Translators report that ¼ %/.25 % of the world’s population has not read the Bible. There are many people groups still to reach. <https://www.wycliffe.org/unreached>

**God Chose to Work Through You**

Having the Bible is a life changer, and we are called by God to spread the Good News around the world. God decided to work through us to spread the Gospel. However, God has gone before us and revealed Himself through His creation, through what He has made (Romans 1:18FF). Therefore, so-called unreached people groups have been prepared by God to receive His Word through missionaries.

The deliverance of God’s Word, the Bible, is a calling to Believers to have God work through them. Man functions best when God works through them to improve the lives of other people. We Believers, then, are instruments of God’s grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, joy, kindness and gentleness. We then are blessed and have God’s peace running through us.

I went to seminary at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The floor of the main building has a mosaic map of the world with the saying: ‘The Sun Never Goes Down On A Southwesterner’, because they are all over the world witnessing the Gospel. Therefore, the sun is always shinning on one of them.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) is God’s business at work in the hearts and minds of the Saints.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

 19 "Go therefore **and make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

 **(Matthew 28:18-20 NAU)**

This Commission keeps people focused on their neighbor and their needs. If you are concerned about your neighbor’s spiritual well-being then you spend less time focusing on yourself. Obviously, God wants us to have a balance, but there is an emphasis on witnessing to others the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God’s Word, The Bible.

**The Stage for Joseph and Nicodemus**

**Mark 15:33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.**

**Luke 23:44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three,**

**Amos 8:9 And in that day this is the declaration of the Lord God I will make the sun go down at noon; I will darken the land in the daytime.**

 Therefore, when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked Pilate for Jesus’ body, there was a darkness over the land that had started at noon. It is reasonable to assume that Pilate had observed the rare darkness at mid-day and was amenable to the two Jewish religious leaders request. He wanted to get this event behind him. Pilate had found no guilt in Jesus and had his own face-to-face meeting with Jesus, who told him that His kingdom was not of this world. From a human perspective, Pilate may have been contemplating what he ‘opened up’ in the spiritual nature. Remember, the Romans were not atheists; they believed in gods and spirits. No doubt, Pilate, even though he was a ruthless Roman ruler, was emotionally and spiritually impacted by the events of the day and Jesus’ responses to Him. The last time Pilate is quoted before Joseph and Nicodemus request Jesus’ body is when he washes his hands (Matthew 27:24). "I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!"

 So, at a mid-day darkness, Joseph and Nicodemus come to Pilate and receive permission to take Jesus’ body from the Cross. We have detailed descriptions of how Jesus was crucified with His hands and feet/ankles nailed to the Cross. However, it is worthy to consider the process of taking Jesus’ tortured body from the Cross. Removing the hands and feet from the nails and taking off the crown of thorns was no easy task. Consideration needs to be given to the two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, who had no doubt witnessed Jesus’ ministry for over three years. Being the religious leaders they were, it is reasonable to assume that they were aware of Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 and Psalm 16:10. It is understandable that they believed they were handling the lifeless body of the Messiah who had come to die on a Cross for the sins of the world, and that The Messiah would resurrect in a few days regardless of the grave or tomb they placed His body.

 Under the cover of a mid-day darkness, Joseph and Nicodemus struggled with their own human emotions to carry-out their task. Considering the spiritual journey they had taken to get to that point in history is astonishing. They had to deny their own peer group’s view of Jesus, who had called for the crucifixion of Jesus. No doubt, they had sat in meeting after meeting with the Temple leadership and heard all of their seething-hateful-hearts demanding for the death of Jesus. They had to sneak around at night, in the shadows, to make a determined effort to learn who Jesus really was.

 Today, people who are part of the secular crowd also have to sneak around or their professional careers are threatened, especially, if they are a part of the media, entertainment or academic establishment. Can you see the most popular names in network news appearing at Jesus’ Cross to take down His body and prepare Him for burial? Their careers would be over. This is the context in which Joseph and Nicodemus were. Despite their cultural circumstances, they came to the Cross of Jesus.

**Pilate’s Surprise**

 The Romans were skilled and very experienced at executing people via crucifixion. Even though under Pilate and Herod’s authority, Jesus was scourged and tortured before He went to the Cross. The Romans anticipated it would take a day or more for Jesus to die. It is known that it could take three days or more for a person to die on a cross depending on the condition and age of an individual and the environment along with the exact method. In Jesus’ case, even though Scripture accounted that He breathed His last breath and gave-up His Spirit, the emergence of the Sabbath caused the executioners to hasten death to those being crucified that day by breaking legs and sword piercing (John 19: 30-34). Remember that Pilate was being sensitive to the religious demands of the Jews and, keeping with the laws of the Sabbath, kept the Temple Leadership satisfied. They did not break Jesus’ legs, because the soldier saw Jesus was already dead. However, one of the soldiers did pierce Jesus’ side with a sword. For what? For good measure to make sure He had expired? However, this was also a prophetic act as chronicled in Zechariah 12:10. The Roman soldier hadn’t any idea that he was fulfilling prophecy.

**Mark 15:44** Pilate was surprised that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion,

 he asked him whether he had already died.

 45 When he found out from the centurion,

he gave the corpse to Joseph.

 46 After he bought some linen cloth,

Joseph took him down and wrapped him in the linen.

 Then he laid him in a tomb cut out of the rock

and rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb.

 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching where he was laid.

**Corresponding account in John 19:38-42**

38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea,

who was a disciple of Jesus—

but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—

asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus's body.

 Pilate gave him permission;

 so he came and took his body away.

39 Nicodemus (who had previously come to him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes.

40 They took Jesus's body

and wrapped it in linen cloths with the fragrant spices,

according to the burial custom of the Jews.

41 There was a garden in the place where he was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden;

no one had yet been placed in it.

42 They placed Jesus there

 because of the Jewish day of preparation

 and since the tomb was nearby.

This took place before the Sabbath started, meaning before the sun set, generally around 6:00 PM, Friday evening.

**Why We Worship on Sunday**

 Many do not know the reason Christian churches meet on the first day of the week, being Sunday. We are free to meet on any day of the week (Romans 14:5-6). The Romans had set the day of the sun as part of their adoption of the Greek Hellenistic astrology (Sol or Helios). Thus, this is the day Jesus rose from the grave. Ever since, the followers of Jesus have gathered to worship God. During the worship on Sunday, there is a recognition of Jesus’ resurrection by Believers participating in the Lord’s Supper. There are prayers, the reading of Scripture, Songs and personal testimony. We have a Roman (Pliny) witness outside the Bible.

 They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food.

Pliny the Younger was governor of Pontus/Bithynia from 111-113 AD. We have a whole set of exchanges of his letters with the emperor Trajan on a variety of administrative political matters. These two letters are the most famous, in which P. encounters Christianity for the first time.

<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html>

 It is sad, but there are groups that make it a test of fellowship and greatly question a person’s bonified Christian credentials if they do not meet on the traditional Jewish Sabbath or on Sunday. I see that Jesus came to die on the Cross for our sins regardless of the hour or day of the week a person worships the Lord. The Law or rules of a religion cannot justify you to God. What does God desire from You?

**The More Important Issue “Salvation”**

**Paul writes to the Believers in Rome describing salvation**

**Romans 10:8-21**

The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the message of faith that we proclaim:

 9 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

 10 One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

 11 For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,

 12 since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him.

 13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

 14 How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?

 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

 16 But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message?

 17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.

 18 But I ask, "Did they not hear?" Yes, they did: Their voice has gone out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world.

 19 But I ask, "Did Israel not understand?" First, Moses said, I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that lacks understanding.

 20 And Isaiah says boldly, I was found by those who were not looking for me; I revealed myself to those who were not asking for me.

 21 But to Israel he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and defiant people.

**Romans 14:5-6**

5 One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.

 6 Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God.

Galatians 4:8-11

8 But in the past, since you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods.

 9 But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elements? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again?

 10 You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years.

 11 I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.

 **Instead of following religious rules about days and hours to worship, the Lord desires our humble spirits and hearts. When you read the Bible and the Law is used as an example in contrast to what God wants; substitute denominational religious rules for the Law. You will then see, and the light should come on, that man-made religious organizations have created their own Law to control people. Jesus came to set us free. Jesus did not come to show that the Law was insufficient in order to create more rules and regulations.**

**Psalm 51:15-17**

15 Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

 16 You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it; you are not pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God.

**Psalms 51:16-17**

16 You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it; you are not pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God.

**1 Samuel 15:22** Then Samuel said: Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.

**Isaiah 1:11** "What are all your sacrifices to me?" asks the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I have no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats.

**Hos 6:6** For I desire faithful love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

**Jesus Had Prepared His Disciples**

Jesus had already given His followers insight into passing through the door of death when Lazarus died. People were upset that Jesus was not there and believed that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying. Even the Jews mocked Jesus.

**John 11:36-37**

6 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

 37 But some of them said, "Couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"

Many people today are mad at God because their loved one died. Preventing death is not the goal of the Cross. Jesus was all about death on the Cross. This is to be expected.

So, how did the Jews respond to Jesus resurrecting Lazarus?

John 12:9-11

9 Then a large crowd of the Jews learned he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, the one he had raised from the dead.

 10 But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also,

 11 because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus.

**Jesus did not come to be crucified on The Cross to keep us from dying. Jesus defeated the effects of the Cross in order for us to see that He will resurrect us from the grave.**