

Mark 15:16-46

The printing press is often considered to be the second most important invention ever

- I hate that don't you? The second most important invention ever
- You just want to know what is considered to be the most important invention ever
- The printing press is often considered to be the second most important invention ever
- Oh! You thought I was going to tell you the most important invention ever?
- After the invention of reading and writing which I think is really the wrong way round
- After all the writing has to come first or there would be nothing to read
- So after the invention of writing and reading – the most important invention ever
- The printing press is often considered to be the second most important invention ever

I have an American friend who lives on the Texas/Oklahoma border

- Though I think he is originally from California
- In any event he told me that any really significant invention was developed in USA
- As far as I know the first mechanical device that we would call a printing press
- Was assembled in Germany by Johann Gutenberg in 1440
- And not long after Thomas Caxton brought the printing press to England

If you have a computer and are connected to the internet you will know you can waste time

- Of course, I never waste time on the computer or the internet
- I just have a little, well-earned and deserved recreational time
- Reading football news and other matters of urgent interest
- Being a Plymouth Argyle fan, I am sometimes interested to visit the fans' websites
- These sites contain message boards where everyone can write what they think
- When Plymouth Argyle lost a home game some people were prophesying doom
- But I wrote, and being me it was very wise, though not everyone saw its wisdom
- The team lost today because the team performance was less than the individual parts

If you like music, then maybe you have a stereo system or even an hi-fi

- As a youngster, it was always a dream of mine to have a good stereo system
- And before I finally bought my new one (I think it's new even though it's 20 years)
- I asked a friend of mine who is an expert on things that plug in – electrical goods
- For some advice – I thought he would give me a few brief pointers
- Instead he gave me a seven page report
- It meant that I knew more about it than the people in the shop
- But one of the things that I learned from buying the stereo system
- Was the golden rule – make sure that you can hear each instrument clearly
- And then you can appreciate the music all the more as the sum of the parts

I need to introduce you to a friend of mine, with an unusual name, 'Herman Newt'

- You might guess that he is either an American or German politician
- But actually he is neither – Herman Newt is really 'hermeneut'
- Actually this is not a popular word in England but it is a light-hearted introduction
- To say – every Christian needs to be a 'hermeneut' (hermeneutist) to do hermeneutics
- That is to interpret the meaning of the scriptures – to do that we have to read
- But then, we have to interpret what we read
- And as believers we must then apply what we read in our daily living

Before the invention of the printing press and the translation of the Bible from Latin

- Into the languages of the common people, providentially at much the same time
- The authority in the church rested with the Pope and *magisterium*
- They told the people what to believe, how to live and what to think
- The great claim of Protestantism was authority in the church rested with scripture
- That is the Word of God and not with the papal authorities
- Most evangelical Christians will say 'amen' to that
- But in the 500 years of Protestantism, things have changed
- There are those within the Protestant world who want to vest the final authority
- In church tradition, in human reason, Christian experience or even life's experience
- But even in the orthodox evangelical world there is another danger
- the 'revered Bible teacher' – just name your Bible teacher
- there's a great choice from history – Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Spurgeon
- or there are more contemporary choices, well-known and less well-known

The preacher's task is not exclusively to teach the Bible

- but to plant one foot in the world of the pages of scripture
- and the other foot in the world that we live in today and to take the train
- briefly, preaching is truth through personality, applied by the anointing of the Spirit
- so that the people hear the wonders of God declared in their own language

So then, because of the wonders of the printing press, we can have our own Bibles

- this is a privilege we almost take for granted – perhaps we do take for granted
- and now we must turn to the passage at hand, Mark 15:16-46
- you remember my comment about Plymouth Argyle
- the team lost today because the team performance was less than the individual parts
- I don't have *Sky TV* but I believe that sometimes on satellite or cable TV
- You can, if you wish, spend the game watching one particular player
- In doing so, you will see one aspect of the game, perhaps a very important aspect
- But it is not the complete picture
- A faithful biblical interpretation of a scripture passage must be part of the big picture
- With your stereo, or even more modern music players that are available today
- It is possible to isolate one particular musician
- In doing so, you will hear one aspect of the music, perhaps a very important aspect
- But it is not the complete picture

I hear a lot of people saying that preaching is a dying form of communication

- If that means that there is no future in the florid preaching of the Victorians
- Or the extended topical talks of the last century then I agree
- People tell me that what we need is more dialogue ... and I agree
- But not dialogue between preacher and congregation
- But a public dialogue between the preacher and the Biblical text
- And then perhaps a private dialogue between the congregation and the Bible text
- That is the preacher must set a standard of hermeneutics
- That ensures that the authority in today's church comes not from the preacher
- But from the whole people of God engaging with the authoritative Word of God
- You don't believe it because the person stood here says it – but because God says it

At first sight, it is easy to conclude that the passage we are considering today

- Is about the theme, Jesus was crucified and buried – better still
- in the words of the Apostles' Creed, Jesus was crucified, died and was buried
- but to follow that theme is to follow just one player in the game
- one instrument in the music, when what we need is a fuller picture
- so, while I take as three points, Jesus was crucified, died and was buried
- I take the even greater theme of Mark's gospel – 'who is Jesus?'
- For it is only the great theme, 'who is Jesus?'
- That gives the real meaning to the passages on his crucifixion, death and burial
- Jesus was crucified, died and was buried

I JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers.

(Mark 15:16)

Although the New Testament was written in Greek "Praetorium" is a Latin loan word

- Here it is the Roman governor's official residence

Last summer we were able to go to London for a few days

- For me the best thing for London tourists to do is to go to the Tower of London
- And we were able to visit the Tower and see the crown jewels
- As we took a conducted tour with a lively Yeoman Warder (or Beefeater as we say)
- It was hard to take in that my favourite place in London
- Had been a place of such barbarity and cruelty – torture, murders, execution
- But the splendour of the Tower and the crown jewels are side-by-side with this history
- Here in the Praetorium we are invited to witness an incredible scene

There are many people who say, Jesus was a good man, Jesus was an incredible teacher

- But is that all there is to Jesus?
- Is this the way to treat a good man, an incredible teacher?
- This is not a lynching by a mob but actions sanctioned by the authorities of the day
- Both religious authorities (the Sanhedrin) and civil authorities (the Roman governor)
- The Roman soldiers who gave allegiance to the Emperor
- Must have realised that Jesus was being crucified because of his claims to kingship
- A kingdom not of this world – a kingdom that they did not understand
- They might not have understood his kingdom but they had ideas about kingship
- They put a purple robe upon him – more than likely a worn out military cloak
- They twisted a crown of thorns from the kind of prickly plant commonly found
- Then they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!'
- An undoubted parody of 'Hail, Emperor Caesar!'
- They struck him on the head with a staff and kept spitting on him
- Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him
- Then they forced Jesus to hold the staff as a mock sceptre
- Though Mark offers no comment – the dignified way in which Jesus behaves
- Gives a clue as to his own identity – for there is no evidence of his retaliation

After they had mocked him, they took the purple robe from him

- And put his own clothes on him - Mark seems to take great interest in these garments
- The humble clothes that Jesus wore were emblematic not only of his incarnation
- But also of his great power to heal
- Mark recorded that a woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years
- Needed only to touch the hem of his garment to be healed (Mark 5:27-31)
- In the story that we call 'The Transfiguration' his clothes dazzled with whiteness
- Anticipating his future glorification as God's Son
- The soldiers amused themselves with their tatty, regal robe
- Unaware that Jesus expressed great power in humility

Men condemned to die by crucifixion were normally required to carry the crosspiece

- Jesus, weak as he was from the scourging, could not do so
- And so a passer-by, Simon from Cyrene, was compelled to do so
- It seems that Simon's children, Alexander and Rufus, were known to Mark's readers
- Which suggests the possibility that Simon himself became a disciple

The name of the place of crucifixion, Golgotha, is very much like the Aramaic word for skull

- The KJV sometimes uses the Latinised translation 'Calvary' from *calva* ('skull')
- The significant thing about this place is that it was outside the city wall (cf. Jn. 19:20)
- Wine mixed with myrrh was offered to deaden the pain of suffering
- Yet Jesus refused it – it is hard to know why anyone would refuse this relief
- Jesus had made vowed at the Last Supper not to drink the fruit of the vine
- Until he drank it new in the kingdom of God
- In refusing the drink, Jesus chose to experience suffering with all his senses intact

One of Plymouth Argyle's former managers was England goalkeeper Peter Shilton

- On one occasion Argyle had scored an important goal just before half-time
- A time reckoned to be a particular advantageous time to score
- The interviewer lighting on this said to Mr Shilton, 'you scored at a good time'
- To which he replied, 'Any time's a good time to score'

The four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

- Give accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus but they are certainly not biographies
- Rather, though they contain some biographical information
- They are accounts of his death with what you might call extended prologues
- That being the case, this time of year is a very good time to read a gospel
- Though, to be fair, any time of year is a good time to read a gospel

Mark mentions the place that Jesus was crucified because he is interested in historical detail

- Other New Testament writers will interpret the significance of this
- He mentions that Jesus refused any drug to deaden the pain
- Because he wants to show that Jesus did not stop short at any suffering
- That would enable him to show the depth of his love
- For the very people who were rejecting him
- Mark's account of the crucifixion of Jesus is bleak but not sensational
- It is unsentimental and provokes no hatred for the perpetrators

If Jesus really is the King of the Jews, the Messiah, the promised Saviour

- Then this, and none other, is the crucial event in world history
- Yet Mark records it like this, 'And they crucified him' (Mark 15:24)
- The great Roman statesman Cicero described crucifixion as
- 'the cruellest and most hideous punishment possible'
- Mark, therefore, shows the most incredible restraint
- The word we might use for incredible pain is 'excruciating'
- A word derived from the Latin (*ex cruciatus* – 'out of the cross')
- At the cross, Jesus' clothes were once again removed and he was nailed to the cross
- The soldiers proceeded to pass their time by casting lots for them (cf. Ps. 22:18)

In November, Michael went to London to see England play at Wembley

- But as we were able to travel up the night before we spent the day in the city
- In the morning we went to the Imperial War Museum
- And in the afternoon, among other things, we went to the National Gallery
- One of the great exhibits is a painting by Frenchman, Paul Delaroche
- 'The Execution of Lady Jane Grey'
- Jane became queen after the death of her cousin, Edward VI in 1553
- As a Protestant, Jane was crowned queen to keep Catholic influence at bay
- The plan didn't work for Edward's half-sister Mary had a stronger claim to the throne
- And Mary, a Roman Catholic, also had popular support and soon replaced Jane
- The 17 year old, Lady Jane Grey was beheaded at Tower Green on 12 February 1554
- Not for anything that she had done but simply for who she was

It was customary to put a sign on the cross of the condemned criminal stating the crime

- The written notice of the charge against Jesus read, 'The King of the Jews'
- For Romans this was treason, for Jews this was blasphemy
- John's gospel records that the superscription was written in Hebrew, Greek, Latin
- 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' (John 19:20)
- and that the Jewish leaders objected to what Pilate had written
- but Pilate would not withdraw

We recently had a week's holiday and travelled 19 miles from our home to Donderry

- my ancestors migrated 25 miles eastwards from Boconnoc to Devonport
- over a period of 450 years and one of their stopping places was St Martin's, Looe
- having never had opportunity to visit the church building we decided to do so
- the church was locked and the key was unavailable from the office
- because the person who normally worked there was not very well
- as it was a sunny morning, we had a quick look for any headstones saying 'Haley'
- we didn't find any but we found a variety of epitaphs
- I can't claim to be an authority on epitaphs but it seems to me only good people die
- Well, that's the only conclusion that you could gain from their epitaph

One of the great things that Bible does is to wrestle with problems

- Not with meaningless questions such as how many angels can dance on a pinhead
- But questions such as why am I here? Why is there suffering and evil in the world?
- Why do people die? Is there any existence after death?

People who have no time for the Bible still ought to wrestle with these problems

- Though in my experience they come up either was fanciful, baseless answers
- Or just avoid the questions at all, perhaps even to the point of meaninglessness
- The superscription on the cross was a kind of epitaph for Jesus
- ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’ – his very identity was his so-called crime
- and for that very reason he was crucified between two criminals (insurrectionists)
- the Bible teaches that death entered into the world because of human sin
- the foundation stones of human sin are pride, unbelief and disobedience
- and yet our epitaphs never mention these – or any other sins

Here we touch the very essence of the Christian gospel

- we, human beings, are, by our very nature sinful and mortal
- yet Jesus, by the unique circumstances of his birth
- was human and yet by his very nature sinless and immortal
- Jesus did not have to die as a consequence of his own sins and yet he suffered death
- So that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone (Heb. 2:9)

The passers by ‘hurled insults at him’ – the word Mark uses is our word ‘blaspheme’

- I have spent most of my life in the south of England
- So my years in Inverness were a change
- In Scotland, there is less of a tradition of celebrating the Christian festivals
- Especially the ones that fall on weekdays, such as Christmas Day and Good Friday
- Knowing that the Christians in Inverness erected a cross in the shopping centre
- I decided that I would join them for part of their vigil between noon and 3.00 pm
- Inverness city centre is a pedestrianised shopping centre and is normally pretty busy
- My memories were of a similar event in the Cornish village of St Agnes
- When Christians held a similar Good Friday vigil in the village centre
- An event characterised by a reverent hush that you might have heard a pin drop
- The event in Inverness started relatively well
- But not long into the vigil a man about 20 yards away set up a barbecued chicken stall
- And began to announce his wares with a megaphone to all who would listen
- Just to balance things out, on the other side, perhaps a little closer
- A one-man band, with mouth-organ, guitar, cymbals and drums, started up
- In a sense the noise was deafening – barbecued chickens on one side
- The Urban Spacemen on the other side – and I thought to myself, ‘this is horrible’
- But it was more like Calvary than the hush of St Agnes
- For there seems to have been little reverent hush at the foot of the cross
- The gospel reader must decide, who is the real blasphemer, Jesus or the spectators?

Ironically, it seems some of those mocking unconsciously admitted Jesus could save others

- But they taunt him by saying that he cannot save himself
- They pretend that if he comes down from the cross they will see and believe
- Yet the believer realises that it is by his not coming down from the cross
- That it is possible to see and believe
- Were he to save himself, he could not save others
- For he had to die, in order to set others free from death

II DIED

By noting the time Mark moves us further into his narrative

- At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour
- Matthew, Mark and Luke record this darkness but do not say what caused it
- Maybe it was a cloud of black dust caused by a Sirocco wind – we don't know
- Nevertheless, Mark understood the darkness as God's supernatural act
- And associated with his judgment
- After three hours of daytime darkness, Jesus cried out in a loud voice
- My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- To be forsaken by God is to taste the very essence of hell
- In English we make the J in Elijah a hard sound but in Aramaic ay-lee-yaw
- And therefore not so different from the el-o-ee , el-o-ee (My God, My God)
- A final heartless act was for Jesus to be offered a sponge of wine vinegar on a stick
- The possible motive to prolong his agony by a few minutes to see if Elijah appeared
- But with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last
- A cry that John's gospel tells us were the words, 'It is finished'

The Easter hymn, 'Man of Sorrows', with its rather weak couplet

Lifted up was he to die
'It is finished', was his cry.

Has disguised for many generations of Christians, the force of this triumphant cry of Jesus

- 'It is finished!' (no better rendered by Stainer in his oratorio, 'The Crucifixion')
- is described by Mark as a loud cry – you are left wondering what is finished?
- If Jesus' main work were the work of teaching there were still people to teach
- If it were feeding the hungry there will still plenty to feed
- If it were healing the sick there would be a lot more work to do
- It is clear that Jesus' work was finished by his self-giving even to death on the cross
- The cry of dereliction from the cross was because Jesus became the sin-bearer
- For God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The summary or synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke

- All record that the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom
- This curtain was the one that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place
- The Most Holy Place being called 'Holy of Holies' in the older Bible translations
- The fact that it was torn from top to bottom implies a supernatural act (Heb. 9, 10)
- In the Old Testament, the ritual year had its high point on the Day of Atonement
- On this day, Aaron and his priestly successors, took the blood of the sacrificial animal
- Into the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the sins of the people
- Atonement literally means 'cover' but the idea of becoming 'at one' is helpful
- The blood of sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat (NIV atonement cover)
- And this sacrifice pointed forward to the eternal and perfect sacrifice in Christ
- In his dying upon the cross, all that the temple ritual anticipated is fulfilled
- For Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God
- And the sinner may be covered by the blood of Christ
- And acquitted of charges that would otherwise lead to judgment

An important theme in the atonement has also been the idea of Christ as ransom or redeemer

- This includes the notion that one pays the price for others
- There is always a danger in pushing these pictures too far
- To our ears 'ransom' means the price paid to kidnappers
- But this would force us into the dead-end of wondering to whom the ransom was paid
- But here ransom carries a sense of compensation – the cost of putting wrong right

Suppose that you were offered a great gift – one million pounds perhaps

- What would you do first?
- Someone said, the first thing I would do is count it
- Suppose then that to receive the gift you had simply to open your hands
- And then into your hands you could receive the money, the diamond, the pearl
- When you evaluated the gift in your hand – how much did you contribute?
- Absolutely nothing – the gift came by grace
- And the open hand was the open hand of faith
- Most of us at one time or another have received a nice present, even an expensive one
- The cost to us was nothing but that does not mean that there was no cost
- So it is for the believer in terms of salvation
- There is nothing that we can do to put ourselves right with God
- There is nothing that we can do to meet the demands of God's justice
- But Jesus Christ has done it all upon the cross, it is the perfect life offered completely

A while ago I had the opportunity to visit my old school

- I walked out of the gate in July 1969 and had never returned
- But having to park nearby for an appointment I decided to wander in
- And I bumped into the headteacher who was all too pleased to show me around
- I visited three of the four classrooms in which I had lessons
- They were recognisable but they had no blackboards
- When I was at school the blackboard was just about the most important thing
- Teachers had been trained to teach us by a method often called chalk and talk
- Every Friday afternoon at quarter to four, one of my classmates
- Had to take a bucket of water and a wet cloth and wipe down the blackboard
- Throughout the week, rubbing it with a board duster had only spread the chalk dust
- But on Friday afternoon the whole board was wiped clean for a new start
- This is what Jesus does, through his blood shed upon the cross
- No sin need stand against our name in life or in death and certainly not as an epitaph

As Jesus died those standing at the cross who heard his cry and saw how he died

- Made their own responses
- The Roman centurion was deeply impressed – he had never seen anything like this
- Some women also watched from a distance
- The narrative describes the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus
- But we never move far from the main theme – who is Jesus?
- While Pilate, the High Priest and many others did only things that were self-serving
- Jesus took the road that would mean giving his own life for the sake of the gospel
- As Jesus said, the one who tries to save his life will lose it
- The one who gives up his or her life will gain it – and this will bring life to others

III WAS BURIED

In my experience, very little attention is given to the burial of Jesus

- One of the important reasons for recording his burial is to confirm that Jesus died
- Mark notes that it was the day before the Sabbath
- And as the Sabbath began with sundown rather than with midnight or sunrise
- It was necessary to act quickly
- Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish ruling council
- But someone who was waiting for the kingdom of God went *boldly* to Pilate
- And asked for Jesus' body – we should not miss that this identified him with Jesus
- Carrying with it the possible punishment of death as a fellow-conspirator
- The centurion certified that Jesus was already dead
- And Pilate released the body for a decent burial
- Suggesting he did not believe that Jesus had been guilty of any crime
- According to the burial customs of the time, Joseph wrapped the body in linen
- And placed it in a tomb cut out of rock and sealed the tomb with a stone
- Mark records that two of the women mentioned earlier witnessed the burial
- These two women could reliably identify the tomb on Sunday morning

And so Mark brings his account of the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus to a close

- But the underlying question concerns the great theme, who is Jesus?
- The cross reveals that God's love and power can win those
- One might never have dreamed would respond
- From the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin) who betrayed him
- Came Joseph of Arimathea – one who was waiting for the kingdom of God
- From the Roman authorities, who condemned and executed him
- Came the centurion – Truly this man was the Son of God
- From the insurrectionists, the two thieves who were executed with him
- Luke tells us one's petition, 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom'

The great Methodist preacher of the last century, Will Sangster

- In his little book, *They met at Calvary*
- Reminds us 'I was there too' – not in the crowd physically
- But certainly in the crowd metaphorically
- Facing the same choices as the people in the crowd
- And having to answer the question, 'Who is Jesus?'
- And wrestle with what his crucifixion, death and burial mean to me
- And whether I will hope in Jesus Christ his death and resurrection