

April 20, 2025

## OUR SAVIOR: MARK 15:33-39; 16:1-8

### FACILITATOR 2

**Introductory Activity Option 1** (Adapted from ETB Leader Guide page 77)

**Discuss:** Ask the group to name some things that people go into debt to buy. (homes, automobiles, boats, etc.)

**Explain:** Sometimes people go into debt to purchase necessary things like homes or cars. Other times debt just seems to find people. One instance of this is medical debt. The cost of treatments for some health conditions can be very expensive and families will do what it takes to care for loved ones. After the treatment is finished, these families receive medical bills that outstrip their ability to pay. Sometimes medical debt can be too much to bear. To help elevate this problem sometimes churches step in. Churches like Trinity Moravian Church in North Carolina, Northview Church in Indiana, and Alter Fellowship in Tennessee have purchased millions of dollars of medical debt from hospitals and insurance companies. They in turn forgive the debt of thousands of households. Mercy and grace are abundantly displayed through such actions.

**Ask:** How would you feel if someone stepped in to pay off your debt whatever kind it may be?

**Transition:** In Scripture, our sin problem is often related in economic terms. It seems that God understands that this concept will resonate with people. Paul tells us that what we earn from our sinful actions is death (Romans 6:23). Jesus uses the concept of debt forgiveness to explain why the sinful woman loved Him so deeply (Luke 7:36-50). In the Lord's Prayer sin is explicitly referred to as a debt (Matthew 6:12). Colossians 2:14 mostly clearly expresses the eraser of our sin debt by Christ. Paul writes, "14 He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross." Today, we are going to look at the work of Christ on the cross and the events of the first Easter morning that made our debt forgiveness possible. Let's begin with Mark 15:33.

### FACILITATOR 1

#### 1. MOCKED (MARK 15:33-36)

**Read or have someone read** Mark 15:33-36

**Explain:** Today we are stepping away from our study of First Peter to focus on the events of the first Easter weekend. However, we can look to First Peter to gain some practical insights from this passage. First Peter is a letter written to Christians in Asia Minor who are suffering persecution. The persecution they are suffering is akin to social ostracism or slander.

#### Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETB Comm)
- *New American Commentary: Mark* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Mark* (Exalting)

They also face mocking comments and actions of the unbelievers in their lives. Consistently the Apostle Peter encourages the readers of his letter to look to Jesus as their example in suffering. In Mark, we get a picture of Christ's physical suffering as well as the mockery He endured in the process.

## FACILITATOR 2

**Ask:** How do you feel or how do you respond when someone makes fun of you? (Allow time for answers.)

**Explain:** In our passage, we see that the King of Creation did not respond to the mocking He received. Peter presents Jesus' refusal to respond as an example to follow when he later wrote of Jesus. In First Peter 2:2 he writes, "<sup>23</sup>when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly," In chapter 3 verses 8-9, he instructs the believers and writes, "<sup>8</sup>Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, <sup>9</sup>not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

## FACILITATOR 1

The mocking of Jesus began in the events recorded in the verses prior to our passage. Mark 15:16-20 reveals that the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus. Verse 29-32 tells us that the crowds, religious officials, and even the two criminals being executed with Him mocked Jesus. (c.f. ETB Comm, 81) But as we shall see Jesus returned their insults with a blessing. After a long night of trials, Jesus was hung on the cross at 9 in the morning (Mark 15:25). The sneers and mocking took place while He hung there dying. Three hours into the ordeal the Father responded. However, He did not respond by punishing the people or even by sending angels to rescue the sinless Son. Instead, He responded by sending darkness on the land. This darkness lasted for three hours. Scholars and skeptics have tried to explain this darkness through natural phenomena. However, those explanations are lacking. The Explore the Bible Leader Guide explains: "Passover occurs during a full moon, making a solar eclipse impossible. A dust storm or heavy rain clouds are also unlikely. While God certainly controls all natural elements and could use any of them in a unique or supernatural manner to achieve His purposes, this darkness more likely signaled impending judgment, not unlike the plague of darkness on Egypt (Ex. 10:21-22). It is best to interpret this darkness as a supernatural event." (ETB LG, 90) Brocks also explains that darkness relates to judgment (c.f. NAC, 260). We understand that judgment was being poured on the Son for the sins of the world. Again, Peter helps us. In First Peter 2:18 he writes, "<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit." After three hours of suffering, Jesus cried out.

### Notes:

"'Darkness' is often a symbol of evil, and the 'darkness' here could be an indication of the apparent triumph of evil. More likely it is a sign of coming judgment (Amos 8:9-10; possibly Isa 60:2; Jer 15:9). It recalls the darkness that preceded the judgment upon Egypt (Exod 10:21-22)." (NAC, 260)

The Seven Saying of from the Cross  
Luke 23:34—forgiveness  
Luke 23:43—Salvation  
John 19:26—Relationship  
Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34—Abandonment  
John 19:28—Distress  
John 19:30—Triumph  
Luke 23:46—Reunion  
(Exalting, 353)

**Reread:** Mark 15:34 (<sup>34</sup> And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?” which is translated, “**My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**”

We know from the other Gospels that this was not the only utterance of Christ from the Cross. Each, but Mark chose to include only this one. In the statement Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1. While the Psalm does end on a triumphal note and by citing the first verse Jesus was referencing the entire Psalm, Akin asserts that at this moment after six hours on the cross and three hours in the judgmental darkness of the Father Jesus was feeling the full weight of sin. “It was the cry of the Son of God, who was now experiencing something He had never known in all of eternity: separation from and forsakenness by God.” (Exalting, 354). The holy, sinless, righteous God of the universe hung on the cross and felt not only the weight and burden of sinfulness but also the reality of God’s judgment on mankind’s sin. In his book *King’s Cross*, Tim Keller writes that the question asked by Jesus “wasn’t a rhetorical question. And the answer [to why] is: For you, for me, for us. *Jesus was forsaken by God so that we would never have to be.* The judgment that should have fallen on us fell instead on Jesus.” (Exalting, 354)

**Summarize Transition:** In response to Jesus’ cry of anguish, the mocking continued. It was widely believed by Jews of that day that Elijah would come and rescue those in need. Some Jews around the cross mistakenly thought Jesus was calling on the prophet to rescue Him. In a derisive act to prolong Jesus’ life and see if Elijah would actually show up someone gave him wine vinegar to drink. “The mockers would be disappointed. Jesus’ purpose was to die as the atoning sacrifice for sin.” (ETB Comm, 83) Let’s see what happened next. Look at Mark 15:37-39.

## 2. KILLED (MARK 15:37-39)

**Read (or have someone read)** Mark 15:37-39

**Explain:** In this passage, we see several things come to a conclusion. First, we see the conclusion of Christ’s earthly life. After six hours on the cross, Jesus finally reaches the end of this life. Mark does not tell us what He said when He cried out. We can be sure that it was not a cry of defeat or despair. This cry was likely the one recorded in John 19:30. John tells us that Jesus said “It is finished” just prior to His death. The first thing we should note here is that Christ determined *when* it was finished. Later in chapter 15, Pilate is going to express surprise that Jesus had died so quickly (vv. 44-45). (c.f. ETB Comm, 84) While it surprised Pilate it should not have surprised those who had listened closely to Christ’s words.

**Read** John 10:17-18 (<sup>17</sup> This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Notes:

TEACHERS NOTE: This was different “from the ‘wine mixed with myrrh’ (Mark 15:23) which would have dulled Jesus’ pain. He refused that.” (ETB Comm, 83)

**Explain:** Jesus *gave* His life. The hour of His death was not decided by men and was not regulated by the executioner's schedule. We should also note that Jesus *died* on the cross. He did not faint and wake up later. Christ died on the cross. Not only do we see that Christ's earthly life came to an end we also see the end of a religious system.

Reread Mark 15:38 (Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.)

**Explain:** We should stop and consider this remarkable statement. For centuries the temple (the Tabernacle and three iterations of a stone temple) had been the center of worship for the Jewish community. At the center of the temple, as designed by God, stood the Holy of Holies. It was the most holy place not only in the temple or even in Israel but in the entire world. It was a place set aside by God in which His presence would manifest. It was a place separated from the world by a curtain (Exod 26:31–35; 27:21; 30:6; 2 Chr 3:14). The only person who could enter the sacred space was the High Priest of Israel. And he could only enter once a year to make atonement for the sins of the nation. In effect, God was off limits to the people. The curtain was a physical barrier that represented the spiritual barrier of sin that separated a holy God from a sinful people. With Christ's death, the barrier separating man and God was removed.

## **FACILITATOR 2**

**Discuss:** Why was it important for God to show the people that the barrier was removed?

**Explain:** Remember the mocking crowds at the cross and the dismissive crowds that called for Jesus' death (Mark 15:6-15)? These people needed another sign to show them what Christ was doing. The torn curtain was a tangible object lesson for the people.

**Ask:** From what direction was the curtain torn? (It was torn from top to bottom.)

**Explain:** Just as Christ gave His life and destroyed the spiritual barrier separating God and man. God the Father took the initiative to tear down the physical barrier that separated man from God. The writer of Hebrews helps us understand the ramifications of Jesus' death and the symbolic act of the Father.

**Read** Hebrews 10:19-22 (<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—<sup>20</sup>he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)—<sup>21</sup>and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.)

**Explain:** The death of Christ put an end to the system that God had established centuries earlier. That sacrificial system had been a temporary fix, a patch, to help mankind relate to God until His true plan came to fruition in Christ. The plan for Jesus was God's plan from before the beginning. First Peter 1:20 tells us that. Peter writes ( He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you.)

### **FACILITATOR 1**

So in this passage, we see the end of Christ's earthly life and the end of Israel's sacrificial system. We also see the conclusion of a major theme in the book of Mark.

**Reread** Mark 15:39 (When the centurion, who was standing opposite him, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!")

**Explain:** Mark began his Gospel with a declaration that Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 1:1). To this point in his narrative only God the Father (1:11; 9:7) and demons (3:11; 5:7) had declared the Sonship of Christ. Here at the conclusion of Mark's narrative, we have the same declaration coming from a Gentile, pagan man. The extent of the centurion's true understanding of the statement is unknown, but Mark's intention is a little easier to understand. The reality of Jesus' nature is visible to the world. It is not a spiritual secret to those who seek the truth. Moreover, the centurion's statement alludes to a fuller understanding of the curtain's rending in the previous verse. The death of Christ had enabled the removal of the curtain and the removal of the curtain symbolizes universal access to God. Paul reminds us in Ephesians "that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh (Eph 2:11) "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (2:13)

### **FACILITATOR 2**

**Summarize and Transition:** In these three short verses, we see a great ending. We see the end of Christ's life, the end of the sacrificial system, and the end of separation from the Father for all peoples. However, the death of Christ was not just an ending. It was a great beginning. Let's look at that now.

## **3. RESURRECTED (MARK 16:1-8)**

**Read or have someone read** Mark 16:1-8

**Explain:** After Jesus died on the cross Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus requested His body (John 19:38-42). The suddenness of events and the approaching Sabbath did not allow for advanced planning or elaborate arrangements. With the shortened timeline they did the best they could to prepare the body and placed it in a nearby tomb. For those who had witnessed the events of the past few days the ministry of Jesus had come to an end and their hopes and dreams had died with Him. Joseph and Nicodemus buried a man they secretly followed. The disciples had all scattered on the night of His arrest. The women were faithful to the end. They

"The temple had two curtains (cf. Heb 9:3), one in front of the holy place (Exod 26:37; Num 3:26) and one in front of the holy of holies (Exod 26:31-35; 27:21; 30:6; 2 Chr 3:14)..." (NAC, 262)

watched Christ die on the cross and two of them watched Him be entombed. But now it was all finished and on Sunday morning, as soon as they could, they went to minister to Jesus one last time. But it was not the end. In this passage, we see two beginnings: The Beginning of a New Life and the Beginning of a New Lifestyle.

**The Beginning of a New Life:** Upon arriving at the tomb the women encounter the unexpected. Instead of finding a sealed tomb holding a dead body, they found the stone rolled away and an angel waiting on them. Verse 6 reveals a delineation in history.

**Reread** verse 6 (<sup>6</sup> “Don’t be alarmed,” he told them. “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him.”)

**Explain:** In the middle of that verse are two short statements. They “refer to both sides of the Easter event.” (Exalting, 360) First, we have the sadness of Friday—“was crucified.” Then we have the glory of Sunday morning—“He has risen.” This weekend was a turning point in the history of mankind. It enabled new life. Life was **taken back** by the sinless, victorious Savior. But that is not the only new life made possible by the events of this weekend. With the life of Christ comes the possibility of a **new life in Christ**. I Peter chapter 1:3b-4 reminds us of this. The Apostle writes, “Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” The empty tomb makes possible salvation and the new life it provides. However, the empty tomb demands a response. Will a person accept the reality of their sinfulness and receive the promised inheritance? Christ did the work. We have to respond to His work. Not only do we see a *New Life* in Mark’s concluding passages, but we also see a *New Lifestyle*.

**Reread** Mark 16:7 (But go, tell his disciples and Peter, “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.”)

**Explain:** The women went to the tomb to minister to Jesus. This was a continuation of what they had done during His life. Luke 8:1-3 tells us that the women helped financially support Jesus’s ministry. They also traveled with Him and the disciples. On the way to the tomb, they discussed the heavy stone blocking the entrance. They would not let earthly obstacles stand in their way. They would do what needed to be done to honor the Lord. However, when they got to the empty tomb, their ministry changed. Instead of ministering to Jesus, they would minister for Him. The angel gave them their instructions—go tell. They were to tell the disciples about the resurrection. In doing so, they would communicate the forgiveness of Christ for their abandonment and specifically for Peter’s betrayal. The new lifestyle they were given was to be a missionary lifestyle, a Kingdom-advancing lifestyle, and a gospel-spreading lifestyle. The other gospels tell us that they did tell the disciples and the book of Acts reveals that the followers of Christ did not let any earthly obstacles stand in the way of their new Kingdom-advancing lifestyle.

**Summarize and Transition:** On this day everything changed for these women and the other followers of Jesus. It also makes possible a change for every person since then. New life is possible, and a new purpose-filled

Notes:

James Edwards asserts “The verbs in verse 6 refer to both sides of the Easter event.” (Exalting, 360)

James Edwards reminds us “the announcement of the gospel is literally, the *gospel*, good news, and the place from which the gospel is first preached is the empty tomb that both received and gave up the Crucified One.... At this moment and in this place the women are witnessing ‘the kingdom of God come with power.’” (Exalting, 360-361)

“There is no need to anoint a dead body that is no longer there. It is time to start proclaiming the good news of a risen Lord and Savior who has left the tomb!” (Exalting, 361)

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lifestyle is possible. But we have to decide what we are going to do with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

## CONCLUDE

Take a moment and encourage group members to consider what they feel about the Easter events and if they have ever asked the Lord to forgive them for their sins. Then ask the group to consider if they are putting into practice the command to go tell. Like Jesus, they will probably be mocked at some point. But the reality of Christ's death and the implications it holds for all people who can now enter boldly into God's presence are too significant for us to let that stop us.