

The Death that Redeems (Part 2)

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 15:33-39/ August 25, 2024

Introduction:

This morning, we come to the final moments of the crucifixion where Mark quickly moves through five events with deep mines full to treasure and significance. We will dive right into the passage this morning to have time to examine each event. When combined, the four gospels record seven statements of Jesus on the cross. One to the criminal on the cross next to Him, another to the apostle John, two for everyone around Him, and three statements directed to the Father. However, Mark only records one statement Jesus said to the Father to focus in on one primary truth,

The Son of God was Forsaken and Slain for Us

Let's remember the scene up to this point. At the third hour, 9:00am, Jesus was led to be crucified and Simon was compelled to carry His cross after Jesus became too weak. While He was fully enduring the physical pain of crucifixion, people are mocking him as they pass by, some are playing a game with His clothes, the scribes are calling on Him to prove His power, and even the criminals next to Him revile Him. In verse 33, the story dramatically shifts. Look at verse 33, "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." The sixth hour would be noon. In the middle of the day, darkness covers the whole land for three hours. Now, contrary to skeptical beliefs, this could not have been a solar eclipse because the Passover was during a full moon season. This is an unnatural cosmic event to signify something is taking place. Mark gives a clue by using a Greek word for darkness often used to refer to spiritual darkness as well as physical darkness. So, what is happening here? Listen to the Old Testament prophets describe the day of the Lord's judgement and wrath. Amos 8:9 says, "'And on that day,' declares the Lord God, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.'" Zephaniah 1:14-15 says, "The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness." Darkness for the prophets symbolized the coming day of divine wrath and judgement for sin. It also may be connected to the Exodus. During the plagues of Egypt, darkness covered the land for three days prior to the lamb's blood saving the firstborn of Israel from being killed in God's final plague of judgment. Here, darkness covers the land for 3 hours before "the firstborn of all creation," God the Son, has God's judgement for sin fully poured out on Him. John MacArthur rightly says, "The darkness is not the absence of God, it is the presence of God...It is infinite wrath moved by infinite justice, releasing infinite punishment on the infinite Son who could absorb all the tortures of eternities of hell and do it in three hours" (John MacArthur, "God Visits Calvary"). The truth is we cannot begin to fathom the depths of suffering Christ endured in these 3 hours, and all Mark can do is draw our attention to the fact that darkness was over the land. This darkness, then, gives way to the only saying Mark records from Jesus while on the cross. Look at verses 34, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" After 3 hours of enduring the wrath of God, the Son of God cries out the most gut-wrenching cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We should note that is the first time in Mark's gospel that Jesus does not refer to God as Father. In this moment there is no comfort from the Father, only wrath. And we know the answer to Jesus' question of why. It is for us. He was forsaken so we would never be forsaken. Church, these 3 hours mark the moment our ransom was paid. This is when the righteous, perfect, Son of God, experienced the full weight of our sin and the divine fury of God against it. Notice what happens next in verses 35-37, "And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'Behold, he is calling Elijah.' And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last." It was commonly believed that Elijah was taken into heaven in bodily form without dying, according to 2 Kings 2:11. Because of this, many also believed he would come down to rescue the righteous in times of trouble.

They are essentially saying, "If Jesus is truly righteous, Elijah will be sent to come deliver Him." After all, as Deuteronomy 21 shows, a man hanging on a tree is cursed by God due to his unrighteousness. The drink they give to Jesus is clearly intended to keep him alive long enough to see if He would be helped, but the description of it is telling. First, Mark uses the same word for "reed" he used to describe what the soldiers beat Jesus with in verse 19. Second, the sour wine is an allusion to Psalm 69:19-21, which speaks of the shame and dishonor of the righteous servant whose foes give him sour wine to drink for his thirst. This event emphasizes the forsakenness of Jesus as the Father doesn't come to His rescue and prove His innocence. As He "uttered a loud cry and breathed his last," we should see the righteous one condemned for our unrighteousness. The cross has done its work, and our King is dead. Yet, we are not left to wonder long about what this all meant. Look at verses 38-39, "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" Two actions are recorded to draw our attention to the significance of Christ's death. James Edwards captures this well, "Jesus' death," he says, "is not a terminus but the cause of two exceptional events: the tearing of the temple curtain (v. 38) and the confession of the centurion (v. 39). These two events signify that the death of the suffering Son of God is not a tragic end but an event of divine fulfillment and revelation" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 477). The tearing of the temple curtain is a sign that God's wrath has been appeased and His promise from Genesis 3:15 fulfilled. Scholars are mixed on which curtain in the temple was torn. Some say it is the outer curtain that separated the court of Israel because it was visible to everyone. This would mean its tearing symbolized the equal access of all peoples to worship God. Others believe it is the inner curtain that separated the Holy of Holies. This would symbolize Jesus removing the barrier between God and man, granting direct access to God. We can't be certain which one Mark intends. Perhaps that is intentional because both are torn down when the entire temple was removed from God's redemptive purposes. As Hebrews 10:19-22 tells us, "we [now] have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh," and we can now, "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Oh family, this moment should cause your hearts to sing! Jesus' death didn't signal the end of His life but the beginning of yours. The curtain tearing from top to bottom could only be done by God. At this moment the payment for sins was made, the way to God was opened, and the great serpent's head is crushed. This cry is a moment of power because "On the cross where Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied." Following this moment of divine fulfillment is a revelation by the most unlikely bystander. The amazing confession of a centurion in verse 39 is the peak of this gospel as it is contrasted with every other response to the crucifixion of Jesus so far. Prior to this, each response has been filled with mockery, reviling, and disbelief. This response is filled with faith and awe. Each response before this took place while Jesus was alive on the cross, but this response comes after He dies revealing we only understand the truth through Christ's death. Consider this confession with me. It starts with a word that should be familiar to us, "Truly." 12 times before this, Jesus used the phrase "Truly, I say to you" to bring attention to a declaration of what is true. Mark has the centurion using it now to bring our attention to the truth. Do you remember what the mockery of Jesus has been centered on? His power, authority, and kingship. The title "son of god" had kingly connotations in the historic context. Ancient kings gave themselves this title to emphasize their power and authority, equating it with the gods. Yet, for Jesus, this title goes beyond only kingly connotations and proclaims Him as the one true Son of God. Further, this is the first time it is declared by a human in Mark's gospel. The Father declared this twice, demons have declared this, but no person has until now. And note that it isn't a disciple or relative, but the centurion leading the crucifixion who makes this confession. He would have been the commander of 100 men, trusted and loyal to Caesar. This is a treasonous confession! And it is the truth Mark wants us to see. As the centurion stands facing the crucified King, his eyes are open to see the Son of God in His glory. What causes this confession?

Look at verse 39 again, “and when the centurion...saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” What stood out about the way Jesus breathed His last breath? Verse 37, “Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.” There it is! Prior to His last breath, Jesus Christ dies in total control and the centurion realizes this. Did you see the control of the Jesus? He still has enough strength to let out a loud cry. This is more amazing than we may realize. What typically took the life of someone crucified was suffocation. Their feet and their wrists were nailed or strapped to the cross. As they were suspended upright, gravity pulls their body down toward the ground. To breathe they would have to push up, take a breath, and come back down again. Think about the amount of strength it took just to get one breath. Eventually this would become too difficult, and they would suffocate. Do you see the power of Christ on display? Not only does He have the strength to get a breath, but He has also enough to utter a loud cry before His last breath. Listen to what the other gospels reveal also took place in these moments. In Matthew 27:51, we are told “the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” Luke 23:46 reveals Jesus cries out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" before breathing His last breath. Then, in John 19:30 we see that Jesus also cries out “It is Finished” then, “bowed his head and gave up his spirit." What a moment this must have been for the centurion! There is darkness for 3 hours followed by Jesus crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” The earth shakes, rocks split, and you hear the loud cries of Jesus, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" and "It is Finished." Then the man on the cross immediately dies. This centurion had undoubtedly seen many crucifixions before, but he has never seen anyone exercise this kind of control. So, he confesses, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." No one else could have this kind of control. Note how his confession comes in response to the the way Jesus died. In this, we are shown how faith has to come through a true understanding of the atonement made by God the Son. This confession is our proclamation. It brings together the truth of the Son of God satisfying the wrath of God owed for sin and the act of faith that trusts in His death to atone for our sins. So, pause for a moment and ask yourself if you see and believe that the Son of God was forsaken and slain for you. If not, look at the cross through the same eyes as this centurion. See the Son of God in full control as He gives His life as a ransom. Confess your sin against God and believe that Christ’s work on the cross will cover all of your past, present, and future sin. If that is what you have seen and believed, let it make one take away from these moments on the cross that much sweeter, as we discover how,

Christ’s Experience Reveals the Depths of God’s Love, Mercy, and Grace

As you hear the cry of Jesus, deny out any thought that God is somehow unjust to subject Jesus to this. Doing that means we don’t understand the nature of God or the truth about sin. Sin is an affront to a holy, righteous, and good God. Church, mankind has consistently rejected the goodness and holiness of God. We have rebelled against Him and set up countless idols to worship, including ourselves. His holiness demands justice. He would be unjust if He didn’t punish sin. He also wouldn’t be true to His promises if He didn’t punish our sin. The crucifixion of Jesus is God’s love, mercy, and grace to justify us while justly responding to our sin. The Son of God was given for us, so we could be made right with God and never be condemned for our sin. Christ’s experience of being forsaken for us, fully satisfied the wrath of God and helps us to know that God’s love, mercy, and grace will never run out. Look at Romans 8:31-34, where the apostle Paul says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Family, because God did not spare His own Son, we can know He will graciously give us all good things. No charge can ever be brought against those who are His. We can never be condemned because God has justified us through Christ’s death. This is why we can sing words like, "His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished." We know that it is finished, and Paul says more than that we know Christ is still interceding for us because He was raised and is at the right hand of God.

Therefore, Romans 8:35-39 is marvelously true for us, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rejoice family! Whether we are persecuted, experience various kinds of difficulty, or even slaughtered, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. You are held securely in His love and He will lavish kindness on you for all of eternity. How can any sorrow in this life outweigh those blessings? How can any sinful pleasure ever compete with that? It can’t, and the more we see the beauties of the gospel, the more that love outweighs anything this life has to offer.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of response, consider all these things. Then ask what God is calling you to believe, desire, or do today. Maybe it is to believe the Son of God was forsaken for you and confess your sin today. Maybe it is to see this as proof of God’s unending love, mercy, and grace towards you. Whatever it is, respond as the Lord leads. You are welcome to come and kneel before Him in humility, sit and reflect, or stand and sing. If needed, we also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you who will be worshipping on the front rows or at the bottom of the stairs in the back with lanyards on. Would you pray with me as we respond to God’s astounding love, mercy, and grace?