

The Death of Jesus: Mark 15:33-39
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Jesus' Cry from the Cross (vv. 33-37)

From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, there was darkness over the whole land. This was from noon to 3pm. For three long hours, as Jesus hung on the cross, there was a supernatural darkness that came over the land. This was not merely an eclipse or a wind storm that clouded the light of the sun. This was a miraculous, terrifying darkness.

This darkness, which came in the midst of the Passover festivities, was reminiscent of the darkness that came at the time of the first Passover. The ninth plague was the plague of darkness. There was darkness "over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt," as it says in Exodus 10:21. "And there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days." The darkness was a symbol of God's judgment. It was God's curse upon His enemies.

There's also a prophecy in Amos 8:9 that darkness will come again as a sign of God's judgment. "'And on that day,'" declares the Lord God, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."

What we're seeing in these three hours as Jesus hangs on the cross is the judgment of God coming down upon His own Son. The darkness falls as a symbol of divine wrath, divine condemnation, judgment, cursing. The curse of God falls upon Jesus. Think of it. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, who has forever stood in the brilliance of the Father's approval and pleasure, He is now covered in the darkness of the Father's wrath.

And all this . . . for us! Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" And 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God put Jesus, the sinless One, on the cross, and cursed Him on the cross, and caused the darkness to fall over Him, so that we don't have to be cursed, so that we can live in the light, so that we can be redeemed, so that we can be counted righteous and thus accepted by God. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! He became a curse for us, so that we can be redeemed.

In the agony of this moment, in the emotional anguish of being torn from His Father, being cursed by His Father, crushed by His Father, Jesus cries out this lament. He has been utterly abandoned by all, most painfully, by His beloved Father. He says, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These are words from Psalm 22:1, a

psalm which is in the background of a few other things that are happening as Jesus dies. This psalm speaks of being “scorned by mankind and despised by the people” (v. 6). It speaks of mocking. “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads” (v. 7). It even quotes the mockers as saying, “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” Psalm 22 also describes being encircled by “a company of evildoers,” just like Jesus was crucified in the midst of criminals. There’s also the prophecy about the garments being divided—“they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

It’s from this same Psalm that Jesus quotes in making His lament to the Father. He has been forsaken by God, and it grieves Him most deeply to feel this forsakenness.

It is not a cry of utter despair, though. Jesus knows the plan. He is enduring this for the joy set before Him. He knows what is to come. He still refers to the Father as *my God, my God*. And that Psalm which Jesus quotes from, although it begins with lament, it ends with praise and thanksgiving. “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.” Jesus cries out with a loud voice this lamentation from Psalm 22:1, but it is not without hope. He has not lost His confidence in His Father. He has not lost His joy in their glorious plan of redemption.

There’s application here for us in terms of our own prayers, especially as we think of praying in the midst of suffering. It is certainly OK (it is biblical!) to pray prayers of lament. When you are hurting, when you are depressed, when tragedy strikes, when you feel alone and abandoned, cry out to God like this. Cry out to Him in your pain. He desires that, and you need that. It is appropriate and healthy and good for you to make your lament to Him. But even as you tell Him your troubles and express your pain and plead for help, cry out to Him as “*my God, my God*.” And remember that He *is* on the throne. He *is* in control, even if it feels to you like He has abandoned you.

God abandoned Jesus on the cross so that the redeemed will never be abandoned. So when your life takes one of those turns and tragedy strikes in some way, or if you just feel like the life has been sucked out of you through the ongoing difficulties of life, whatever it may be, I hope you can look up and see the cross and see your struggle in view of the cross, and pray to the Father in light of the cross. There is hope. You are not abandoned. Jesus was abandoned for you. Trust in Him. Hope in Him.

Another way to view these three hours of darkness on the cross is to see this as a picture of what hell is. Jesus, here, is

experiencing hell for us. Jesus is under the curse of God, abandoned by God, without any comfort from God. That's what hell is. And that's what many individuals will suffer for all eternity. Those who do not repent of their sins and trust in Jesus, those whose sins are not covered by the blood of Jesus, will themselves suffer the penalty for their sin. Jesus, being the infinite, eternal Son of God, was able to atone for the sins of all His people in a finite amount of time. Being infinite, He was able to bear the infinite weight of our sin in a limited period of time. But for finite creatures, as we are, the penalty is endless.

So this picture of Jesus on the cross should bring fear to any who are not sure of their salvation in Christ. Because if you are not trusting in Jesus, if you are not united to Christ, then your sins are not forgiven. And that means that the agony Jesus experienced on that cross is the agony you will experience forever and ever in hell. You will be cut off from the Father. You will be smothered under the darkness of His just wrath. You will be utterly abandoned and alone and without any comfort whatsoever. Be fearful of that. And let that fear bring you to your knees in repentance. May the fear of hell cause you to see your need for Jesus.

If you are rebelling against God, thinking that you'll be happier on your own, you are deceived. That path will lead to everlasting torment. Turn, and trust in Jesus, and you'll find a happiness that you never thought was possible. And that happiness will increase and increase and increase forever and ever.

In verses 36-37 some of the bystanders misunderstand what Jesus is saying. This is probably to be understood as a continuation of the mocking that has been going on throughout Jesus' suffering. They make fun of Him by saying that He is calling Elijah, and they give Him a sponge with sour wine, maybe with the hope that it would prolong His suffering on the cross.

His death is truly amazing. Just as amazing as His life and ministry was, the way in which He died was also completely unique and miraculous. This was not the typical way in which someone would die on a cross. Crucifixion was death by exhaustion. It was death by asphyxiation. Life would slip away gradually and slowly. But Jesus cries out in verse 34 *with a loud voice*. And then He utters another *loud cry* in verse 37. It is with this cry that He breathes His last. That is remarkable. The typical victim of crucifixion would not be able to utter a loud cry moments before dying. There wouldn't be the breath for it. There wouldn't be the strength for it.

This shows us again that Jesus is in complete control of this. He is not a victim. He is not at the mercy of those who want Him dead. He has not been overpowered. Rather, He is laying

down is own life. As He says in John 10:17-18, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

And as we read earlier from John 19, in verse 30 it says that Jesus "gave up his spirit."

In the way that Jesus dies, it is evident that He is a unique man. He is, indeed, the *God-Man*.

Even the centurion recognized there was something very unique about this man hanging on the cross.

The Centurion's Confession (v. 39)

This is a very unexpected word from this soldier. This man would have been a commander of a hundred men. He had seen war and death. He had seen flogging and crucifixion. He was familiar with these things. This was his life's work. In many ways this would have been a routine day on the job for him. But in many other ways it was completely unique. There was something he could sense about Jesus. There was something very different about Him. There was something different about the way that He reacted to accusations. There was something different about the way He received His lashes during the scourging. There was something different about the way He hung there on the cross, not yelling out curses, but showing love to others right to the very end. And then there was something very unique about the way He died. He called out in a loud voice. He did not fade away slowly. He cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" And then at the very end He uttered another loud cry. The centurion knew that this was not the way it normally happened. He had been an up close and personal eye-witness to many, many crucifixions, but he had never seen anything like this. There was also the darkness and the temple veil and the earthquake that Matthew records—all of these bizarre things were happening.

But for him to come to this conclusion is nothing short of miraculous. What we see happening here in the life of this centurion is a miracle of God. It's Mark's joy to record this for us, and it's the Spirit's desire that we be impacted by this. The centurion—in many ways the least likely person to have this spiritual insight—he's the one who sees and believes.

Just a few verses earlier the chief priests and scribes mocked Jesus by saying, "come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." But even if Jesus had come down from the cross, they would not have believed. The Jewish religious leaders, the ones who should have seen and believed, mocked Jesus

instead. But this centurion, who, humanly-speaking, should have continued mocking Jesus . . . he believed.

This is the miracle of how God works. God works in mysterious ways. He is not predictable. We cannot put Him in a box. We cannot presume to know how He is going to work or whom He is going to save. This is an amazing evidence of that. All the people in the story who “should” have believed, have mocked Him. And the one guy we would have thought for sure *should* be mocking Jesus, he’s the guy who stands gazing at Jesus dead on the cross, and he authentically sees Jesus for who He is and believes in Him. That is a miracle of God. This is a picture of God supernaturally granting faith to a hardened, unbelieving sinner.

This should be a great encouragement to us in evangelism and missions. I think Mark certainly intends it in that way. I believe the Holy Spirit inspired this to be recorded for us with that goal in mind. In Mark 13:10, when Jesus was talking about the end of the age, He said, “And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.” And He also alluded to a world-wide proclamation of the gospel in 14:9 when Mary anointed Him in Bethany. He said, “And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” So it’s already been mentioned in these ways that the Good News will go to the nations, to the Gentiles.

And now, immediately following Jesus’ death, a Gentile believes. And not just any Gentile—a Roman soldier! What an amazing God we serve! He can change the hardest of hearts. He can save the most unlikely individuals. He is mighty to save. Don’t ever think that you can know the mind of God in these matters. Don’t ever try to pick out the folks who will probably believe and the folks who probably won’t. So-and-so will probably believe because he’s kind and honest and hard-working. But that guy probably won’t ever believe, because he just doesn’t look like the church-going type. How absurd. I’m so glad that’s not the way God thinks.

God saves whomever He wishes, and He does it all for His own glory. And it brings Him great glory and great pleasure to save people like this centurion. And He’s still doing it. Just look around this room. We’re just a bunch of folks who were hard-hearted, unbelieving sinners until God opened our eyes to see the significance of Jesus on the cross. God opened the eyes of our hearts to see that Jesus is truly the Son of God. He is our Savior. He is our treasure.

In conclusion, making another application to prayer, I hope that each one here will pray with the attitude of this centurion. I hope that each of us will truly see and believe. Maybe you’re here

this evening, and you find it hard to believe. You find it hard to see what the centurion saw. You find it hard to come to a firm conclusion that Jesus really is the Son of God who came to give his life as a ransom for many. Maybe you have never said a true prayer in your life. Sure, you've called out for help from time to time. Or you've yelled at God when things didn't go the way you wanted them to. But maybe you have never really prayed an honest, heartfelt, prayer of faith like the centurion's confession. I hope today will be that day for you when you look to Jesus on the cross and say in faith, "Truly this man is the Son of God!"