

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*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!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

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Mark 15:33-47

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Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 15.

Today we are looking at the third and final section of Mark’s account of the crucifixion. He has been walking painfully slowly through this story because he means for us to see and feel every detail. Our eyes are inclined to look away from the cross, aren’t they? Last week was hard. It was hard to press in and to study every affliction that Jesus suffered for us. It was a hard reminder, but it was a reminder we needed, amen? We’ve been considering the suffering of Christ but today we come to the deepest waters. Today, Mark has brought our attention to the death of Christ.

Look with me now at Mark 15 beginning at verse 33. Hear now from God’s holy, inspired, living and active word:

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 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?” ³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” ³⁶ 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.” ³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ 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!”

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid. (Mark 15:33-47 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, Mark has spent a great deal of time leading up to this moment. He has forced us to look at the grizzly details of the suffering of Christ, and those details were horrific. He suffered betrayal, injustice, rejection, denial, abuse and humiliation. But now in our text we catch a glimpse of Jesus in his final moments, naked and nailed to a cross.

The Roman soldier who had a front row seat for the crucifixion was struck by this event. He had witnessed countless crucifixions but here, in the death of Christ, he was led to exclaim the most significant and profound statement in the Gospel of Mark:

“Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39b ESV)

This Gentile soldier saw something profound that day. This morning, we will turn our attention once again to the cross of Christ and we will ask the question:

What Do We See in The Death of Christ?

The first thing see is:

1. The Holiness and Wrath of God

Our text tells us that a great darkness fell over the land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. The sixth hour is noon. So, from noon to three there was a darkness that fell over the whole land. The darkness here is a sign of the judgement of God. It is the clear fulfillment of the prophecy that is found in the book of Amos:

“And on that day,” declares the Lord God,
“**I will make the sun go down at noon**
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on every waist
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son
and the end of it like a bitter day. (Amos 8:9-10 ESV)

This “day of the Lord” that Amos prophesied about was a coming day of judgement, and on the cross, Jesus is taking that judgement upon himself. Over the last two weeks we’ve spent a great deal of time considering the physical and emotional suffering of Christ, but on the cross we see the culmination of his spiritual suffering. The Apostle Paul wrote:

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” (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

Jesus became a curse for us. Now, I want to be very careful here to distinguish between Jesus’ human nature and his divine nature. Remember, Jesus was both truly God and truly man. Here, we see Jesus as pertaining to his human nature feeling complete and utter separation from God. The sins of the world have been laid on Christ and those sins condemn him and leave him in a state of God-forsakenness which leads him to cry out:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34b ESV)

Commentator William Lane says here:

The cry of dereliction expressed the unfathomable pain of real abandonment by the Father. The sinless Son of God died the sinner’s death and experienced the bitterness of desolation.¹

It’s hard for us to wrap our minds around this, but let’s endeavor to try. I want you to think back to the worst thing that you have ever done. I want you to try to remember how you felt when the guilt finally set in. I can still remember that sickness in my stomach. All of the shame and the

¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 573.

grief and the disbelief washed over me, and I felt so unworthy and so far from God. On the cross, Jesus took ALL of our sin upon himself. The very worst of all of us was credited to his account. I want you to REALLY think about that this morning. Jesus bore in his flesh God's judgement against pedophilia. He felt in his soul the guilt of every affair and every betrayal. He bore the wrath of God against the holocaust, and the wrath of God against the abortion industry, and the wrath of God against sex trafficking. Every single sin was laid on him and, in his flesh, he felt the complete and utter rejection of the Father. As the Apostle John wrote:

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2 ESV)

We have read Isaiah 53 a thousand times in this church, but hear it again this morning with fresh ears:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for **our transgressions**;
he was crushed for **our iniquities**;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6 ESV)

Amen.

This leads to the second thing we see in the death of Christ:

2. Wounds by which we are healed

The prophet Isaiah told us that God would save His people by sending a Suffering Servant. This servant would die in the stead of God's people. He would be their substitute. Isaiah prophesied of the Suffering Servant:

As many were astonished at you—

**his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—**

¹⁵so shall he sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand (Isaiah 52:14-15 ESV)

Isaiah tells us that this servant – this one who will die as our substitute – will be lifted up, but his appearance will be so marred that he will look subhuman. “Behold the man upon the cross, my sin upon his shoulders.” Jesus IS the Suffering Servant! On the cross, he is paying the death that we owe to God. He is our substitute. In fact, we cannot begin to understand the death of Jesus apart from the doctrine of substitution. J.C. Ryle puts it this way:

To suppose, as some dare to do, that Jesus was nothing more than a man or that His death was only a great example of self-sacrifice, makes this dying cry of His utterly unintelligible. It makes Him appear less patient and calm in a dying hour than many a martyr, or even than some heathen philosophers... He uttered his dying cry, under the heavy pressure of a world’s sin laid upon Him, and imputed to Him.²

Ryle says here that Jesus’ cry of God-forsakenness only makes sense if we recognize the reality of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. He didn’t simply die as an example. He died as OUR SUBSTITUTE. The death that we owed to God was paid by God’s own Son. This, by the way, is exactly what Jesus said he would do earlier in Mark’s gospel. Do you remember that? He said:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, **and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” (Mark 10:45 ESV)

Mark is carefully and brilliantly bringing these themes into focus as we come to the end of his gospel. Think, for example, of the story of Barabbas that we read last Sunday. Pilate gave the crowd an opportunity to release Jesus, but the crowd chose to release Barabbas instead. Barabbas was a rebel and a murderer. The name Barabbas actually means: “Son of the father.”

Do you see the irony there? The true Son of the Father was convicted to die so that the rebellious son could go free. It is no stretch to recognize here an illustration of the gospel. This is the

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository thoughts on Mark* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 347.

language that we find all throughout the New Testament. Paul, in his letter to the church in Corinth, wrote:

For our sake **he made him to be sin** who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

Jesus took upon his human nature all of the sin of the world. The Bible tells us that he literally became cursed for us. And in his flesh, he paid the death that we deserve to pay because of our sins. So now, when we repent of our sin and put our trust in his saving work on our behalf, all of our sin is laid on Him and all of His righteousness is laid on us. By his wounds, we are healed. This leads to the next thing that we see. In the death of Christ we see:

3. A way for us to go home

There were two curtains in the Jewish temple. The first was used to separate the main sanctuary of the temple from the women and the Gentiles, and the second was used to separate the area of the temple known as the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was the place where God's presence dwelt, and it was only to be entered once a year on the Day of Atonement by the high priest.

Now, interestingly, Mark doesn't specify which of these two curtains was torn because that detail is irrelevant to his point. Both of these curtains stood as monuments to the fundamental separation that exists between God and man. But when Jesus breathed his last, the curtain – the symbol of our separation from God – was torn from top to bottom.

Do you understand what that means? Mark means for us to see here that the way has finally been made for us to have every-day, uninterrupted access to our Heavenly Father! The schism that existed was a result of our sin, but at the cross, Jesus dealt with that sin once and for all. He removed it from us as far as the East is from the West. He threw it into the depths of the sea. Pick your metaphor – it's gone!

My sin, o the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord o my soul!³

This is why the author of Hebrews could say:

Let us then **with confidence draw near** to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16 ESV)

Draw near! With confidence! Come to him, all you who are weary and heavy laden! Come you sinners who are poor and needy! The curtain is torn! The separation is no more!

And this all leads back to the very beginning of Mark's Gospel. If Jesus were merely a man than he could never lead us home. But Mark has been clear from the start that Jesus is more than a man. Right in verse 1 Mark states:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1 ESV)

Then in verse 10 God the Father affirms Jesus' identity:

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:10-11 ESV)

Mark's not trying to keep a secret in his gospel, is he? He gives us his thesis in verse 1. But, throughout the rest of Mark's Gospel, no one else is able to discern who Jesus truly is. Until now. At the cross, we are finally helped to see the true identity of our Saviour.

Think about this: The Roman soldier standing at the foot of the cross did not have an understanding of the Old Testament prophecies. He didn't have the advantage of a Jewish upbringing. What did he have? He had a front row seat for the crucifixion. And for some reason, as this soldier looked intently at the cross and watched Jesus die, he saw in Jesus what no one had yet been able to see. This Roman soldier – this Gentile – proclaimed:

"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39b ESV)

³ Horation Spafford, *It Is Well With My Soul*, 1873.

And this is WONDERFULLY GOOD NEWS! If Jesus were just another man – if he were merely a teacher or a prophet – then we would all be dead in our sins. Let me use a crass analogy: Suppose my neighbour killed me. Amanda takes the man to court to answer for his wrongdoing and the judge finds him guilty. The judge then takes the neighbour’s cat and kills the cat as a punishment. Has justice been served? No! How could a cat compensate for the life of a human being? There is no comparison between the value of a cat and the value of a person.

In the same way, how could the death of a man ever atone for our sin against God? If a cat is no substitute for a person, then surely a person is no substitute for a Holy God. No, the ONLY one who could reconcile sinful man to a Holy God is God Himself. And that’s who Jesus is. Truly God. Truly man. He is the only one in the universe who could make amends for our sin and, on the cross, that is exactly what He did. The scoffers mocked Him saying:

He saved others; he cannot save himself. (Mark 15:31b ESV)

They had no idea how wrong they were. As the Apostle Paul later wrote:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18 ESV)

It is the power of God, and it is the way home. Thanks be to God!

How Should I Respond?

Jesus Christ endured betrayal, injustice, rejection, denial, abuse and humiliation for us. He became a curse so that he could be our substitute and so that we could be brought into right relationship with God. We’ve spent three weeks looking intently at that cross. How should we respond to what we’ve seen? First:

1. Get serious about sin because God is seriously holy

If you have truly considered the cross, then you must recognize the wickedness of sin. Do you

know how many times the Old Testament describes God as having WRATH against our sin? Over 580 times!⁴ We want to dismiss and distort that reality because we're uncomfortable with the idea of a wrathful God, but this is what the text says, Old Testament and New. The Apostle Paul writes:

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him **from the wrath of God.** (Romans 5:9 ESV)

God is fundamentally, in His very nature, wrathful against sin. Have you been taking sin lightly? Have you been turning a blind eye to areas of your life that you know stand in direct opposition to the life God has called you to live? Are you living a two-faced life? Jesus said:

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell,⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' (Mark 9:43-48 ESV)

That carries a little more weight now that we have considered the cross, doesn't it? Jesus had to die on the cross for that sin you're indulging in. Jesus was deadly serious about sin, because Jesus knew exactly what our sin would cost.

When we look at the cross, the first thing we learn is that God hates sin. The second thing we learn is that God is perfectly holy and perfectly just. This is the point that the Apostle Paul makes in Romans 3:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a **propitiation** by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance **he had passed over former sins.**²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, **so that he might be just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:23-26 ESV) (A/V – Please leave this verse up until I am done referencing it. I want people to be able to read along with me)

Propitiation is a very specific word that means an offering which satisfies an outstanding debt.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross: 3rd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 149.

The Apostle Paul here answers an incredibly important question: Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus had to die because God had passed over former sins. David was forgiven, even after he murdered Uriah. Moses and Abraham were forgiven, even after their repeated lies. If you have repented of your sin, then YOU are forgiven, even after all of the rotten things that you've done and said and thought. How can that be? Is God unjust?

Think about that: Could you worship a God who simply ignored all the injustice in the world? Could you worship a God who let the perpetrators of the holocaust into heaven? If an earthly judge decided to grant pardon to a guilty wife-abuser, simply because he was in a good mood then we would have that judge fired! So, is God like that? Does he simply turn a blind eye to our sin?

No. Paul says that God *passed over* former sins, but *now* those sins are being fully and finally punished on the cross "so that God might be just and the justifier." By punishing sin on the cross, God has shown that He is just.

But He shows us even more than that, doesn't He? Thank God there's more! If He were only just then we would have paid for our own sins but not only is He just – He is the JUSTIFIER!

That's the third thing we learn when we look at the cross: God is love! He is merciful and gracious and kind! So, as we conclude this extended time of considering the cross, I would exhort you to:

2. Marvel at God's grace for sinners

Every time we consider the cross, we need to remind ourselves that we should be the ones hanging there. Jesus never sinned, but we did. He never disobeyed God, but we do. We deserve death, but God LOVES us so much that He paid that death for us!

This is what the Apostle Paul is saying in Romans 8:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and

death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, **he condemned sin in the flesh**, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (Romans 8:1-4a ESV) **(Please leave this verse up as well! Thanks!)**

If you understand these four verses, you understand the heart of the heart of our faith. If you are in Christ Jesus – if you have repented of your sin and placed your trust in him – then there is no condemnation for you! You should be guilty, but you are declared innocent. Why? Because Jesus has obeyed the law perfectly. You couldn't do it. You fell short time after time. But Jesus obeyed it perfectly. And then, the text says, "God condemned sin in the flesh." In whose flesh? Not yours. Not mine. God condemned sin in Jesus' flesh! Jesus bore the Father's just and righteous wrath against our sin so that we wouldn't have to.

Has any king in the history of humanity done that? Has a king ever come down from his throne in order to suffer the death sentence for a guilty rebel? That's what Jesus did! While we were busy plotting a way to overthrow his rule and to become the gods of our own lives – while we racking up more and more guilt for ourselves – He was putting His plan in motion to die the death penalty for us. He took off His robe of righteousness and he placed it on your shoulders, and he picked up your cross and carried it to Golgotha.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8 ESV)

We can so easily fall into the trap of emptying the words that we use of their meaning. We say so often: "He suffered in my place." He sure did, but do you know what that means? The wrath of God poured out, the scourging, the mocking, the beating, the abandonment, the crucifixion – is that what you're thinking about when you use those words? He took it all upon Himself. For YOU! In LOVE! To SET YOU FREE! Do you see that? Do you feel that? Because if you do, it will change you. It will change the way you live, the way you love and the way you worship.

Let us be a people who are serious about sin. Let us be a people who are serious about the holiness of God. But most of all, let us be a people who never stop marveling at the grace of God! To that end, would you sing these words with me?

Behold the man upon the cross
My sin upon his shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished⁵ (A/V)

Amen. Let's pray together.

⁵ Stuart Townend, *How Deep The Father's Love For Us*.