

# Truly this Man Was the Son of God

Mark 15:16-47

Justin Deeter – November 19, 2017



The sufferings of the cross both repels us and attract us. On the one hand, the thought of reflecting on the humiliating pain of Jesus sits heavy on our hearts. Every time I read through one of the Gospels, the crucifixion grips me and I often feel as if they are too grueling to read. At the cross, I'm brought face to face with my own sin, and the horrific price that needed to be paid for my own wretchedness. Yet, at the same time the cross attracts us, doesn't it? Because though the sufferings of Christ wounds our heart, it also binds us up again. There at the cross we see the love of God for sinners like us. The cross testifies as the irrefutable proof of God's love for us. Because of the revelation of God's love at the cross, we can't help but read the account of the crucifixion of Christ in joy mingled with sorrow.

Yet, as we prepare for the celebration of Thanksgiving this week ahead, I can't think of a better way to stimulate our hearts to thanksgiving. For what more could make us grateful than the the redemption God has given us through Jesus. As we meditate upon the cross of Christ this morning, may our hearts swell in gratitude. For as Christ suffers, he suffers for us.

As we study Mark 15:16-47, we will see both the cost of our forgiveness and the love of God for us. We will see the king made glorious through his suffering. As the blood of Christ flows upon the cross, he atones for our sins and establishes his kingdom. In our time together, we will examine the crucifixion in four parts: (1) the suffering, (2) the judgement, (3) the confession, (4) the tomb.

# 1. The Suffering (v. 16-32)

After Pilate delivered Jesus over to be crucified, the suffering continues and the mocking intensifies. Jesus, already beat up from the midnight trial instigated by the Sanhedrin, was seized by the Roman soldiers. First, they scourged him. Scourging was nicknamed “the halfway death,” as the soldiers stripped Jesus naked, tied him to a post, and whipped him with the flagellum, which was a leather whip with fragments of bone and glass to rip the flesh from the bone. After the scourging, they mocked him for his sentence as “the king of the Jews,” which Pilate knew would get under the skin of the religious leaders. So they took Jesus and threw a purple cloak on him—purple as the color of royalty—and twisted together a crown out of thorns and shoved it upon his head. Then the scoffing began as the soldiers paraded in front of Jesus saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” As they laughed at him and spit on him, they took a rod and pummeled his face beyond recognition.

Before Jesus even makes it to the cross, his wounds had disfigured him beyond all recognition, in accordance with the prophecy from Isaiah, “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”<sup>1</sup> Had we been there, gazing upon the mutilated Jesus, we would have diverted our eyes and hid our faces.

After the soldiers had their fun, they took Jesus out to be crucified. Crucifixion was one of the worst inventions of humanity, designed by the Romans for the worst of criminals. This gruesome torture was intended to be slow and publicly humiliating death. They hammered nails into the nerve centers on the wrists and ankles which inflicted excruciating pain. Every breath sent sharp pain throughout the body. Jesus was suspended by his arms, so the only way to breathe was to push his legs downward upon the nails, sliding his back against the grain of wood. All that effort resulted in a short breath gargled in blood. Crucifixion killed you by slowly suffocating you. The Romans reserved this death for the worst of their enemies as a public warning not to rebel against the powers of the Roman Empire. The stench of rotting corpses suspended on

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:2-3

crosses outside the city reminded any passerby the cost of rebelling against Rome.

Mark gives us very little details about the crucifixion, because everyone in the Roman Empire knew the horrors of the execution. They were as common back then as funeral processions are today. Jesus was so weak after his beatings, that he did not have the strength to carry his cross outside the city. He had lost a lot of blood and his back was lacerated from the scourging. He was unable to carry the splintery wooden cross, weighing upward to 100 pounds. In order to help Jesus, the Romans compelled a man named Simon of Cyrene, to carry his cross. Once they arrived at Golgotha outside of Jerusalem, they nailed Jesus to the cross and began to cast lots for his clothing. The charge scribbled across the top of the cross read "The King of the Jews." Jesus hung with two robbers, one placed on his right and the other on his left. As the crowd walked by, the mocking began: "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" The chief priests and scribes, rejoicing that their plan to murder Jesus worked, joined in the mocking: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe him." Mark tells us that even the two robbers crucified alongside Jesus joined in the ridicule.

While the scoffers shouted to humiliate Jesus, the irony of course, is that their mockery speaks the truth. The phony pageantry of cloaking Jesus with a purple garment and making him a crown of thorns, conceals the fact that Jesus actually is the true King. The tongue-in-cheek sign above the cross, "King of the Jews," actually declares the truth. The crowd insulted Jesus with his prediction to rebuild the temple in three days, but he actually will rebuild it when he rises from the grave in three days. The chief priests and scribes who conspired to murder Jesus, belittles Jesus for his failure to save himself, though they do not realize that as he hangs upon the cross he's providing salvation for all who would believe. At the cross of Christ, the assembly of scoffers speak truth.

The sufferings of Christ remind us of the wretchedness of our own sin and the love of Jesus for us. The king of the universe humiliated himself to the point of death, in order to save you and me from condemnation. The king established his kingdom by shedding his blood for you and me. The cross shows the depths of evil in our own hearts, but the cross also shows the extravagant love of God for us. The physical suffering of Christ and the humiliation of the mockers displays the horrors of human sin, but also the patient love of God towers us. Because, Jesus not only suffered for us, he was also judged for us.

## 2. The Judgement (33-38)

Mark doesn't want us to just know the *how* of the cross but also the *why*. It's not enough to simply know what happened at Jesus' death but also why he suffered as he did. As the New Testament teaches us, Jesus dies in the place of sinners and takes on the condemnation that we deserve. When the hour of Jesus' death drew near, events occurred that teach us about the significance of Christ's death. Mark gives us three important details that occurred during the crucifixion of Christ. These aren't just three random details, but Mark includes them because they help us understand why Jesus endures the sufferings of the cross.

### *The Darkness*

They arrived at Golgotha and began Christ's crucifixion at the third hour, meaning 9 AM. Mark tells us that at the sixth hour (noon) darkness covered the whole land until the ninth hour (3 PM). For three straight hours over the city of Jerusalem was filled with darkness. Just when the sun ought to be at its brightest, the land was covered in darkness. Perhaps this event was an eclipse, but the length and duration of the darkness indicates that this was a supernatural event. The key detail of the darkness at the crucifixion is included in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The detail is significant because darkness had always been a visible sign of God's judgment.

In Exodus, the Lord had brought darkness upon the land of the Egyptians as a sign of his judgment. Now, the Lord brought darkness upon the crucifixion to indicate his condemnation of the sins of the world that were placed upon Christ. At the cross, Jesus became the sin bearer. "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, as the passover lamb, took on the condemnation and judgment of God. Upon the cross, Jesus was judged in our place. God took the condemnation meant for us and placed it upon his Son. We know the darkness at the crucifixion signifies this because of the next detail Mark gives us, Jesus' cry.

## The Cry

As the ninth hour dawned, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" This is Aramaic for "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As Jesus takes on the judgment for our sin, he feels the alienation and separation from his Father. He recites the first line of Psalm 22, which captures his sorrow and anguish upon the cross.

*"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" (Psalm 22:6–8, ESV)*

The psalm goes on to say,

*"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." (Psalm 22:14–18, ESV)*

However, the lament turns to praise of expectant triumphant victory,

*"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." (Psalm 22:27–28, ESV)*

As Jesus cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He expresses his anguish and his abandonment as he bears the crushing weight of

his Father's judgment, but he also hopes in expectation that his death will not be his end! Through his sufferings, his kingship will be established over the nations. The Romans thought they were killing the king of the Jews when in fact they were actually enthroning him through his crucifixion.

The crowd, hearing Jesus cry attempted to extend Jesus' life by offering him a sponge with sour wine. However, Jesus death had come. Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. As he took his final breath, Mark gives us a third and important detail—the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

### *The Curtain*

In the inner most part of the temple was the holy of holies. This sacred inner chamber was sealed off by a thick curtain, and only the high priest could enter into this sacred place once a year to make atonement for the sins of the nation. The curtain represented the chasm of separation between a holy God and sinful humanity. However, at Jesus' death the curtain was torn—from top to bottom! By the death of Christ, humanity can have access to God. The chasm of sin, judgment, and condemnation that separated from God has now been filled. Those who come to God through Jesus Christ now have access into the very presence of God.

This is why the cross of Christ is so significant. The sufferings and judgment Christ endured, he did so for you and me. In great love for us, God sent his own Son to die in our place. Though Christ was perfect, blameless, and righteous, he became our passover lamb. He was slaughtered so that we could live. He was judged so that we be forgiven. He was slain so that we could have access to God. Indeed, the only way to the Father is through the Son. The King of the cosmos died for us, and by faith and trust in him we can have eternal life.

Do you believe this about Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus has died for you, that he's eager to extend forgiveness to you even now? Do you believe that through Christ you can have access to the Father and a relationship with your creator?

You see, there was something dignified about Jesus' death as cruel and bloody as it was. The death of this righteous man at the hands of brutes and scoffers moved one particular man, which leads to a startling confession.

## 3. The Confession (39)

After watching and participating in all that took place, a Roman Centurion makes a startling confession. After Jesus had breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" The cold hearted executioner had watched more crucifixions than he could count, yet there was something about Jesus that moved him deeply. Jesus was a righteous man who suffered with great courage. After watching all that had taken place, he concluded that Jesus truly was the Son of God! Here Mark's aim in the writing of this Gospel comes full circle. From the very first verse, in Mark 1:1, Mark opened, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

If you've been with us throughout any part of this series in the Gospel of Mark, then I pray that the Spirit has convinced you of the deity of Christ as God's own son. Jesus was no ordinary man. We've seen him preach with power, heal with compassion, serve with selflessness, confront with courage, and die with dignity. This is why we've spent the last year as a congregation studying this Gospel. We study Mark because it's God's word and because it's profitable for the building up of Christ's church. However, the aim has been to captivate your heart with Jesus, so that you might confess him as the Son of God. He is the son of God who has come into the world to give his life as a ransom for sinners like you and me.

After all that we've witnessed Jesus did through the testimony of this Gospel, there is only one fitting response—to confess him as Lord and God. Indeed, salvation only comes into our lives when we put our faith in Jesus.

The Scripture says,

*"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Romans 10:9–10, ESV)*

Elsewhere it says,

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9, ESV)*

What do you believe about Jesus? Indeed, there is no more important question to answer. I pray that by the Spirit's power your eyes have been opened to believe that he is truly the Son of God. If you do not know Jesus as your savior and Lord, I pray that you would confess him today and put your faith in him!

## 4. The Tomb (42-47)

Upon Jesus' death, we see arrangements are made for his burial. The women looked on from the distance, these same women who would be the first to testify of his coming resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin, who had been a secret follower of Christ. A seeker, he had been sympathetic to Jesus' ministry and his teaching on the kingdom. With great courage, Joseph goes before Pilate to make arrangements for Jesus' burial before the Sabbath began. In effect, Joseph is coming out publicly as a follower of Jesus. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly on the cross (usually death by crucifixion took much longer). Joseph took the body of Christ and wrapped him in a linen shroud and placed him in a tomb cut out of the rock. A stone was rolled in front of the tomb to seal it.

On that Good Friday, the day upon which Jesus died, every ounce of hope seemed to be lost. The disciples who had abandoned Jesus were filled with guilt and disappointment. The women who followed Jesus were filled with grief over the death of Jesus. The Messiah and Savior of the world had come, and he was murdered. Jesus' followers went through great despair at his death.

Many of you can relate to the anguish of the disciples. We've all have tasted the bitter fruit of death. We've felt the sorrow of standing over the casket of someone we love and only having our tears for food as the sharp sting of death quivers down our spine. The empty hollowness of death aches like an abscessed tooth—constant and unrelenting in its ache.

If Jesus' story ended with a corpse in a tomb, there would be no power in the cross and no hope in death! Praise be to God that Jesus would not stay dead,

that he would not let death have the victory! Resurrection day is coming, and when Sunday dawns the stone will roll back and Jesus will emerge from the tomb in resurrected glory! For Christ has overcome the victory and gives us hope in the face of death and the promise of its certain defeat!

Yet, I'm getting ahead of myself—that's a sermon for next week! But for now we must remember, that the sufferings of Christ accomplish their purpose only because Jesus is risen!

# Final Thoughts

As we've dwelt upon the cross of Christ, I pray that you can say along with that Centurion, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" The sufferings of Christ speak to the intensity of wrath God has towards our sin. Upon the cross Jesus was judged in our place, taking on the penalty for our sin as our substitute. Through Christ we now have access by his blood into the very presence of God! We receive forgiveness of our sins by confessing Christ as our savior and Lord. Though Jesus died and his body was placed in the tomb, the coming resurrection of Christ ensures the power of the cross and solidifies our hope even in the face of death! This morning see the costliness of your atonement, the love of God for you, and the forgiveness God purchased in the blood of Christ.

*Guilty, vile and helpless, we;*

*Spotless Lamb of God was He;*

*"Full atonement!" Can it be?*

*Hallelujah! What a Savior!*