

Mark 15:33-41 — The Death Of Jesus

November 8, 2020

Last week, I told you this is a special time at CrossWinds. We are studying the most important events in the history of the world. I know a number of you thought this past week's election was the most important event in world history. Sorry to disappoint you, but that is not true. The most important events in world history are the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That is what we are studying. Those events changed everything.

Last week, we studied the crucifixion of Jesus. This morning, we are studying the death of Jesus. While the focus of our study is Mark 15:33-41, I will read from Mark 15:22-41 to set the context for this morning's study. Take out your Bible or your smartphone and follow along in your copy of God's Word as I read this passage.

And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "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." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 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?" 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. 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!" 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. 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. Mark 15:22–41 (ESV)

Last week, when we looked at Jesus' crucifixion, the question we built that study around was, "How did God the Father restrain himself?" As parents, we are incredibly protective of our children. If anyone tried to hurt our children that would release our fury. We would do anything to protect the children we love. The love we have for our children is nothing compared to the love God the Father had for his son. When Jesus was wrongfully slapped, struck, and scourged, what kept God the Father restrained? When the nails were pounded into the wrists of the son God the Father loves, what kept him from responding with justified anger that would put all of Jesus' abusers on a one-way trip to hell?

What restrained Jesus? He could have torn himself off the cross at any time. He could have destroyed those who were mocking him, insulting him, and abusing him at any time. What kept Jesus on the cross? What was it that led him to embrace that abuse?

Last week, we found the answer. It was love. God the Father and God the Son love you and me so much that in eternity past God the Father planned to send his son who would become one of us so he could die for us, so he could endure the penalty of sin for us. God passionately loves you.

Today, in our busy world where people feel like numbers and just another piece of the data set, in our world where people feel lonely, forgotten and like they don't matter, if you know Jesus, that is not true. Know that Jesus loves you

so much he died to save you. He took the punishment and suffering we deserved. God the Father could have stopped the cross. God the Son could have come off the cross, but he didn't because he loves you. He loves you so much he died for you. Today, if you feel lonely, insignificant and forgotten, know you may be forgotten and unloved in this world but you are not forgotten and unloved by Jesus. That is why we gather each weekend to worship. We don't gather to earn God's favor. We gather to celebrate that because of Jesus and his love for us we have God's favor.

This morning, as we continue our study in the book of Mark and move from the crucifixion of Jesus to the death of Jesus, we move from seeing how much God loves us to seeing the kind of people God loves that Jesus came to save. They are people that are far from God. The key point of this morning is that Jesus came to save people that are far from God. That is why we celebrate Jesus. This morning's study breaks apart under three headings: 1. Jesus died on the cross; 2. The centurion came to faith when Jesus died on the cross; 3. The women that followed Jesus stayed faithful to him even when he hung on the cross.

Jesus took the wrath for our sin when he died on the cross.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. Mark 15:33 (ESV)

These verses begin by talking about the sixth hour. What time is that? The Jewish day began at sunrise. That is roughly 6 a.m. our time. They didn't have clocks and watches like we do so they were not interested in counting seconds and minutes. The best people did was estimate the day in hours. The sixth hour

was six hours after sunrise which was roughly at 6 a.m. The point Mark is making for us is that the sun was at its highest point in the sky. It was hot, and it was bright.

Before we look at what happened at high noon, let's briefly use the other Gospels to give us a window into what happened between 9 a.m. and noon. Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9 a.m. It was now three hours later. The other Gospels tell us Jesus spoke three times between 9 a.m. and noon.

Luke 23:34 tells us Jesus audibly prayed for the people crucifying him. You may remember his words. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." After Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of the soldiers crucifying him, we find one of the criminals hanging next to Jesus sought forgiveness from him, and he found it. In Luke 23:43, after the murdering thief who hung next to him sought forgiveness, Jesus gave it to him. Jesus said to him, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." The third thing Jesus said while on the cross before noon is found in John 19:26-27. There he entrusted the care of his mother to the apostle John when he said to John, "Behold your mother." And to Mary, "Behold your son."

At this point, it was high noon, the brightest part of the day. At that moment, the lights went out and it became completely dark as if it was night. That darkness covered the land until the ninth hour of the day, which is 3 p.m.

What happened? What was the darkness that came over the land for three hours? Did Satan show up to torment Jesus? Some people think it was an

eclipse. That is not possible. Passover always occurred during a full moon. You cannot have an eclipse during a full moon.

It says darkness came over the whole land. The Greek word could mean the entire Earth. Nobody knows if darkness covered the entire Earth or just the land of Israel. Nobody had cell phones so they could check the Facebook feed from a friend on the other side of the world.

What was this sudden, thick, pitch black darkness that showed up for three hours at high noon? I will tell you what it was. At first, you may not believe me so I will take a few moments to prove it to you. Maybe you have never heard this before.

The three hours of darkness was God showing up on the scene. Some of you think that doesn't make sense. How could God show up in darkness? Let me go to the Scriptures to show it to you.

God is spoken of as light.

In the Old Testament, God is frequently spoke of as light.

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Psalm 84:11 (ESV)

Light refers to God's holiness and righteousness. We read about the Shekinah glory of God which was the light of God's presence. When God manifested himself to Moses on the mountain, he was blazing light.

God is spoken of as darkness.

As we move our fingers through the Old Testament, we find God's presence is not exclusively spoken of as light. Sometimes it is spoken of as darkness, pitch black darkness. God's presence is spoken of as darkness

multiple times. We see that in Genesis 15:12-15. We see this multiples times in Exodus and also in the book of Isaiah where God's presence is associated with darkness.

The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Exodus 20:21 (ESV)

In the Old Testament, there is a theme called the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord refers to the time when God shows up and brings judgment upon his people. If we go to some of the Old Testament passages that speak of the Day of the Lord, the time where God shows up to carry out his wrath, we find that when God shows up to carry out his just wrath against sin, he shows up in darkness, not in light. For example, look at a brief passage in the book of Joel.

The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. Joel 2:10 (ESV)

Especially relevant for our passage in Mark is what Amos spoke about will happen on the Day of the Lord when God shows up in judgment to carry out his wrath.

"And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight." Amos 8:9 (ESV)

Does that sound familiar? Does anyone see the connection between this passage in Amos and our passage in Mark?

Let me summarize. The Old Testament prophets do not just speak of God showing up in light to display his glory and holiness, they also speak of God showing up in darkness when he carries out his wrath against sin. God's darkness symbolizes the presence of God's wrath. Darkness is God's presence in judgment.

This is why hell, which is the ultimate place where God carries out his divine wrath against sin, is described in the Gospel of Matthew as a place of utter darkness and unrelenting blackness.

And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:30 (ESV)

The darkness of God's presence is God showing up to carry out his wrath, his judgment against sin. As Jesus hung on the cross from noon until 3 p.m. that day, God the Father was present in his wrath and he poured on his son for three hours all of the wrath we deserve for our sin.

You could say hell came to Earth that day. For three hours, God the Father's divine wrath against all our sin came to Golgotha as God unleashed the full extent of his everlasting punishment for all of our sin on his own son.

Just as God is the true power behind the darkness and punishment of hell, God was the true power behind the darkness of that day as Jesus hung on Calvary. God the Father literally unleashed hell on his own son.

Some of you may remember Jesus sweating drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. He sweat blood because he was incredibly stressed about the suffering that was in front of him. The suffering that brought him such stress was not the scourging of his back. It was not the mocking, slapping and pounding of the crown of thorns into his head. It was not the pounding of the nails into his hands and the agony of hanging on the cross. What caused him to sweat drops of blood was anticipation of these three hours when he would drink the cup of God's wrath that we deserve for our sin and when all of the hell we deserve for all of time was unleashed on Jesus in a compressed period of only three hours.

In three hours Jesus suffered an eternity of hell for all the people in human history who would be saved. Jesus did this to drain away every last drop of God's wrath against our sin that we justly deserved. On the cross, he absorbed an eternity of hell that each of us deserve into himself. These three hours of darkness contained infinitely more suffering and any of the physical agonies of Jesus' death on the cross could contain.

I know some of you are wondering how this works. How is it possible for Jesus to absorb in three hours of time what we would justly deserve to experience for an eternity? Here is how it was possible. Jesus is an infinite being, an eternal being. We are created beings. Only Jesus had the capacity to absorb all of God's wrath against our sin in concentrated form while we could only absorb it over an eternity in diluted form.

So understand the darkness that came on the land for the three hours as Jesus hung on the cross was not the absence of God's presence. It was not Satan. It was God the Father showing up to display his just wrath against our sin.

In those three hours, Jesus was made sin for us. In those three hours, he suffered for us. By 3 p.m., it was done. Jesus had absorbed and endured all of the wrath for sin that we deserved, which is why the darkness of God's wrathful presence finally lifted.

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?](#)" Mark 15:34 (ESV)

This is the fourth thing Jesus said from the cross. It is the first thing Jesus said after the three hours of darkness were over.

What was Jesus talking about? What does this mean to have Jesus cry out to God the Father and feel forsaken? When Jesus suffered for our sin, he became our sin. God the Father cannot look on sin so for the first time in all eternity God the Father turned his back on his own son. As Jesus hung on the cross in those three hours of blackness, as he suffered God's wrath, he was all alone. Now that the wrath was over, I believe Jesus was crying out to God the Father for comfort. Jesus' heart was broken after enduring such suffering. At this point, God the Father and God the Son were not yet restored. Jesus was utterly alone and heartbroken for it.

We had a sampling of that feeling this past winter during the COVID lockdown. Loneliness and isolation is extremely painful. We were built for community.

A thousand years before this, God spoke prophetically through David, and David even told us the very words Jesus would speak on the cross as he cried out in agony and loneliness as he was separated from his father.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... Psalm 22:1 (ESV)

This is a great reminder that none of what was happening to Jesus was happening by chance. Everything that happened to Jesus as he died for our sin on the cross was prophetically spoken about by God hundreds and thousands of years before. What was happening to Jesus was not God's plan out of control. It was God's plan in complete control.

While we are on the topic of Jesus' isolation and loneliness as he suffered God the Father's wrath against sin, we should realize that what Jesus suffered on the cross gives us a preview of hell. Hell is the full fury of God's wrath being

poured out. Hell is utter darkness. Hell is not a place you go to group with your friends for a party, but it is utter isolation, loneliness, and separation from comfort, just as Jesus experienced as he hung on the cross.

Something else we should notice is it tells us that when Jesus spoke, he cried out with a loud voice. After losing a massive amount of blood, suffering the anguish of the scourging and hanging by nails in his hands and his feet, he was still strong. After enduring an eternity of God the Father's wrath that we deserve all in only three hours, Jesus was still strong. Jesus could still breath. He could still cry out in a loud voice. Most crucifixion victims could barely talk as they weakened and prepared to die. They died of asphyxiation because they couldn't breath. That wasn't Jesus. He was still strong. He could still cry out in a loud voice.

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." Mark 15:35 (ESV)

The words Eloi, Eloi in Aramaic sound like Elijah. Some people who heard Jesus say the word Eloi misunderstood Jesus and thought he was calling for help from Elijah.

Why did they think Elijah might help him? Why did they think Jesus was calling to Elijah? In the Old Testament, Elijah did not die. The Bible tells us a chariot of fire took him directly home to heaven. The Jews had a tradition that developed over time. They believed that since Elijah did not die, he occasionally returned to Earth to help people in their times of need or to rescue people in a crisis, sort of like a Marvel comic book action hero. None of that is true, but that

was a Jewish tradition. They thought Jesus was desperate for help so he was calling out to Elijah for help so Elijah would come and save him like a superhero.

If that Jewish tradition is not true, there is a biblical tradition that may have informed them. Malachi 4:5-6 says that when the Messiah came, Elijah would pave the way. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah before the Jews. Perhaps they figured now was the time for Elijah to come and pave the way for Jesus as the Messiah by rescuing him off the cross. Either way you slice it, they were mocking Jesus and twisting his words. Jesus was not calling for Elijah. He said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus was experiencing utter loneliness.

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." Mark 15:36 (ESV)

What was happening with this drink? Why did they offer it to Jesus? What was this sour wine? Who gave this drink to Jesus? Let's answer these questions. We don't know who gave this drink to Jesus. It may have been a soldier. Likely it was a bystander. It was a confused bystander because they thought Jesus was crying out to Elijah, asking for help. If we go to the Gospel of John, it has more details explaining what happened in this moment.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:28-30 (ESV)

The reason they give Jesus this drink was because he asked for a drink. He said he was thirsty. The reason he asked for a drink was to fulfill the Scriptures. Last week, we saw that before Jesus went to the cross, he refused a drink. Here he asked for a drink. He asked for a drink before he died so he could

fulfill the Scriptures. This is confusing. All we know is his refusal of a drink before the cross was to fulfill the Scriptures and his asking for a drink while he hung on the cross was to fulfill Scripture.

To unravel this mystery, we need to find what piece of Scripture he fulfilled. The answer is Psalm 69:21.

They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.
Psalm 69:21 (ESV)

Jesus asked for a drink while he hung on the cross because Scripture said he would thirst, ask for a drink and be given sour wine to drink. Everything was happening just the way God the Father had planned.

Let me let you in on a problem that has perplexed me for years. While the offering of sour wine to drink because he thirsted as he hung on the cross is easy to identify, what about the line that says they offered Jesus poison for food? I don't remember that taking place in Jesus' final hours.

I did a little research on the Hebrew word used for poison in this verse. This is the only time it is translated into English as the word poison. Nine other times it is translated into English using the word gall or bitterness. That should ring a bell for those of you who were here last week.

Last week, we saw that before Jesus went to the cross they offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh, which is a bitter herb. Matthew says it was wine mixed with gall, which is bitter. Last week, I made the case that the wine they offered Jesus before the cross, since it was mixed with a bitter and poisonous substance, was intended to make Jesus sick, to make Jesus nauseous on the cross, and he turned it down.

Here in Psalm 69:21, in prophecy, we find support for that claim. The wine they offered Jesus before the cross was mixed with gall. It was bitter. It was poisonous. The wine they offered Jesus on the cross was not poisonous. It was sour wine, cheap wine.

So when Jesus refused bitter, poisonous wine before the cross and when Jesus asked for and accepted the sour wine while on the cross, both were fulfilling the Scriptures exactly the way God the Father inspired the Old Testament prophets to tell us Jesus' death would unfold.

This is another reminder that the most horrifying time in the history of the world, when it seemed like evil was reigning and evil was winning, a time far worse than any of the political deceptions we see today, God was completely in control. Everything was still happening according to his good plan. He was taking the great evil done against Jesus as they nailed an innocent man to the cross, and he was turning it into the greatest good ever done by Jesus, his dying for our sin. God is still working the same way for each of his children. There is no evil done against us that is out of God's control. God's good plan involves taking the evil done against his people and using it to give us a greater opportunity to magnify the name of Jesus in this world.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. Mark 15:37 (ESV)

Why did Jesus utter a loud cry before he died? Earlier, we learned crucifixion victims were slowly asphyxiated so they died in silence as they became weaker and could not breathe. Not Jesus. He still had plenty of strength. He chose when to die. He was not forced to die. Nothing had power over Jesus.

Nothing, not even crucifixion and the unrestricted wrath of God the Father could take the life of Jesus. Look how Jesus spoke about this in the Gospel of John.

"...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." John 10:17b-18 (ESV)

This is very important for us to know that death did not win a victory over Jesus. Jesus could have stayed on the cross as long as he wanted. Jesus chose when he would die. Jesus chose to give up his life. Nobody and nothing took Jesus' life from him. The Gospel of John gives us a few more details on how Jesus' death unfolded.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30 (ESV)

What did Jesus say as his final words when he died on the cross? The Gospel of John tells us. It is the simple sentence in English, "It is finished." In Greek, it is just one word. The word *tetelestai*. *Tetelestai* doesn't just mean, "It is finished." It was traditionally stamped on notices of debt or on bills once they were paid. It means, "Paid in full." Before Jesus chose to die he declared that the debt of our sin was now paid in full by his suffering. He had drained the cup of his father's wrath against our sin dry. The first part of the work Jesus came to do, which was suffer for our sin, was complete. The debt of our sin to God was stamped with a big red word across the front inked in the blood of Jesus, *tetelestai*. The debt of our sin is now paid in full.

From that moment on, the sacrificial system was obsolete. For all those who turn and trust in Jesus to forgive their sin, just like the thief on the cross

hanging next to Jesus did that day, they are saved. The debt of their sin is gone because Jesus paid the price.

My friends, that is incredibly good news. The good news of being completely saved from our sin was offered to the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus on that day Jesus died, and it is still offered to us today. This is why we go out of our way at CrossWinds to reach people with Jesus. Folks, Jesus paid in full for all of our sin. It is available to all who will turn and trust him.

Let's return to the Gospel of Mark. After Jesus died, we learn three events immediately transpired.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Mark 15:38 (ESV)

There were about a dozen curtains in the temple. The most important curtain was the thickest. It was the curtain that separated the holy of holies in the temple, the place where God dwelled, from the place of the priests. Only one priest once a year could enter the holy of holies and come into God's presence. When he came into the holy of holies in God's presence, he needed to bring blood to cover his own sin and to atone for the sin of the people. This once-a-year brief connection between God and a priest symbolized that nobody could come into God's presence because of their sin. Sin had cut people off from God's presence.

The moment Jesus declared he had paid in full for all our sin, the new covenant was ratified, at 3 p.m. in April of 30 A.D. the temple was made obsolete. God tore the curtain that separated him from people in half from top to bottom because now there was no more need of animal sacrifices for sin. Jesus

sacrificed himself for us. There is no more need of priests to mediate for us to God. Jesus is the priest that makes it possible to come into God's very presence. Jesus' blood paid for our sin so when God the Father looks at a Christian, he sees the blood of Jesus having covered and paid for all of our sin. At that moment, in 30 A.D., the entire temple and Old Testament system was made obsolete. The destruction of the temple as a building took place in 70 A.D. by the Romans, but Jesus made it obsolete in 30 A.D. by his death.

Matthew tells us about the second miraculous thing that happened at Jesus' death. There was a massive earthquake, and I mean massive.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. Matthew 27:51 (ESV)

When Jesus died, the earthquake that happened was so severe, it split rocks. If rocks were splitting, I expect a lot of other buildings around town were tumbling. I did some research into earthquakes in the Bible and their connection to God's wrath. Look what Psalm 18 says happens on Earth when God gets angry.

Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Psalm 18:7 (ESV)

There are massive earthquakes when God gets angry. Do you think God the Father's heart broke the moment his son died? I am sure it did. How would you feel the moment your son or your daughter died? You would be beside yourself. That is the way God the Father feels. That is why the earth quakes and rocks split.

Matthew tells us a third supernatural event took place the moment Jesus died.

The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Matthew 27:52–53 (ESV)

This was not one person temporarily raised like Lazarus. This was many people suddenly and unexplainably raised to life just like Lazarus came from the tomb. It turns out the earthquake was a good thing. It broke open the rocks that sealed the graves so the dead people who were now living people could get out of their graves! Can you imagine dead people that you buried and dead people that were buried a hundred years before walking around Jerusalem ordering a pita sandwich and a goat-milk latte? I am sure they were famished. The last time some of them had something to eat was a hundred years before.

So when Jesus died, God the Father was not absent. He was present. He was present in the darkness as he poured out his wrath for our sin on his own son. He was present when he tore the veil of the holy of holies in half from top to bottom, declaring the way into his presence was now open to all who would approach him through Jesus and the payment for sin he made. God was there in the earthquake. He was there when many saints came busting out of their graves and back to life just as Lazarus came out of his grave.

Now that we have seen what happened in Jesus' death, let's see how God was at work to save lives in Jesus' death.

The confession of the centurion shows us Jesus was already at work saving lives.

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 15:39 (ESV)

We don't know the name of this centurion. Later, church tradition identified his name as Longiness. We don't know if it is true. His name isn't in the Bible.

While his name isn't in the Bible, the conclusion he came to about Jesus after being a firsthand witness to the death of Jesus is in the Bible.

A centurion is a commander of a hundred Roman soldiers. He was a career soldier. He was a clear thinker. He was a leader known for his clear thinking and good decisions. That is why he held that important leadership position.

While this centurion oversaw the final execution of Jesus, he was also likely involved in everything that had transpired with Jesus. He was likely in charge of some of the Roman soldiers that participated in Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane. He was likely overseeing the Roman soldiers that were present when Jesus was interrogated by the Jewish Sanhedrin when Jesus claimed to be the very Son of God. As a result of his claim, the Sanhedrin struck, slapped and punched Jesus. This centurion likely witnessed all of that suffering and how Jesus didn't have a word of hatred or filth out of his mouth as he suffered unjustly. The centurion likely saw the politically manipulative trial Jesus endured before Pilate. He saw Jesus beaten and spit upon by the 600 Roman soldiers who pounded a crown of thorns into his head with bamboo. Yet, as Jesus endured all this suffering, he spoke nothing evil or hurtful to those who were tormenting him. Isaiah says that like a lamb before its shearers is silent, Jesus did not open his mouth. This centurion watched the nails being driven into Jesus' wrists and feet. He heard Jesus pray for the soldiers that were nailing him to that wood, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do." He saw Jesus offer forgiveness and the promise to be in heaven to the thief that was dying next

to him. The centurion saw the three hours of darkness come over the land as Jesus suffered for our sin. The centurion saw Jesus die and the massive earthquake that followed. He saw people dead for more than a hundred years coming to life and walking out of their graves.

This centurion was no dummy. He came to the right conclusion. He said, "Truly this man was the Son of God." Supernatural occurrences do not happen like that at your average crucifixion. People being wrongfully tortured to death are not silent with not a swear word being uttered from their lips.

Let's pause for a moment and look at how God was at work.

Last week, we looked at the Jewish thief and murderer dying on the cross next to Jesus. He began the day mocking Jesus, but when he turned to Jesus and sought forgiveness, he found it. He was saved. That day when he died, he went directly home to heaven. The first person Jesus saved as he died was the Jewish murderer and revolutionary that hung on the cross next to him. The second person Jesus saved was Roman soldier in charge of executing him. That soldier may have started out thinking Jesus was a crazy fool, but after watching how Jesus suffered and died and the supernatural things that accompanied his death, he was changed. The centurion believed in Jesus. He trusted in Jesus. The head Roman executioner who killed Jesus turned to Jesus and was saved. If we go to the Gospel of Matthew we find the Roman centurion wasn't the only soldier that trusted in Jesus that day.

When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:54 (ESV)

The rest of the execution squad that killed Jesus, trusted in Jesus and changed their minds about Jesus. They believed that he was indeed who he claimed to be, the very Son of God.

At the moment of Jesus' death, we see Jesus achieving the purpose why he came. Jesus came to save great sinners, and that is exactly what he was doing. The first great sinner he saved was the Jewish thief and murderer who hung on the cross next to him. The second great sinner he saved was the Roman soldier in charge of killing him. More than that, the other Romans soldiers who pounded the nails into Jesus wrists and feet also believed. Jesus came to save people far from God, and that is exactly what he was doing in his death.

Let's briefly look at the women.

The women who followed Jesus remained faithful to Jesus.

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. 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. Mark 15:40–41 (ESV)

Here we see a small group of women still following Jesus even after Jesus died. These women had been following, helping and serving Jesus since Galilee. They were following him for more than two years at this point. So much for the courageous men. Where were the courageous disciples? We know the apostle John was at the foot of the cross, but it appears the rest of the apostles ran away at the sight of the cross. Not these women. They were disillusioned. They were confused, but they were still there.

Mark gives us the names of some of the women in this group.

Mary Magdalene: She later became the first eyewitness of Jesus after his resurrection.

Mark the mother of James: She was a mother of one of the apostles named James the less.

Salome: She was the wife of Zebedee, the mother of the other James and of John the apostle.

These were great ladies. These ladies were so faithful. There are only two groups of people the Bible says ministered to Jesus --- angels and these women. These women were faithful to Jesus all the way to the end when the rest scattered; they were earthly angels.

Jesus rewarded some of them and their faithfulness to him by being the first ones to see him resurrected and alive on Sunday morning.

Conclusion

Mark began his Gospel in Mark 1:1 by telling us this Gospel is the story of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. So far in this Gospel, the demons have recognized Jesus as the Son of God. God the Father at Jesus' baptism recognized Jesus as the Son of God. No human being had recognized Jesus as the Son of God. It is when we are almost to the end of the book that we meet the first human being to recognize Jesus' true identity as the Son of God --- the Roman soldier who was in charge of executing Jesus. He was the first one to understand Jesus' true identity and be saved by Jesus. He was a man many of us would consider to be terribly far from God, but he was saved. He will be in heaven. We will meet him..

The point is that Jesus came to save people far from God. He saved the murderer dying on the cross next to him. He saved the executioner and the rest of the soldiers in charge of killing him. Jesus came to save people far from God, people just like you and me.

I don't know how far from God you have wandered in this life. I don't know what terrible and wicked things you have done with your life. You need to know that Jesus died on the cross to save you. He drained away every last drop of God's wrath when he died on the cross for you. Will you turn and trust in Jesus today? Will you see Jesus just like the Roman centurion did, as the true Son of God? Life has told me it is often those who are farthest from Jesus that are most open to hearing the good news about Jesus. Is that you? If Jesus can save the murderer next to him and the executioner in charge of killing him, he can save you no matter what you have done. Jesus came to save people far from God.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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