

## **“The Death of Jesus” (An Exposition of Mark 15:33-39)<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Introduction***

Last Sunday we looked at Mark 15:16-32, and what it teaches us about the cross of Christ, how *all who saw Him mocked Him* (Psalm 22:7), and how the sinless Son of God was **“numbered with the transgressors”** (Isaiah 53:12), being crucified between two robbers.

Here in this passage from Mark’s Gospel we see *the death of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Here we see our Lord Jesus giving His life **“as a ransom for many,”** even as He said back in Mark 10:45. This was ultimately why He came in the first place! Here we see Christ accomplishing our redemption, our salvation from sin!

### ***Darkness Over the Land***

The very *first* thing that we see in our text is that *darkness came over the entire land*. In v.33 Mark writes,

**“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.”**

The **“sixth hour”** was *high noon*. Needless to say, this darkness came at a rather unexpected and even astonishing time of day. This was a miraculous act of God, and it is certainly no mere coincidence that it took place just before Jesus breathed His last.

*What was the significance of this darkness?* Some might say that it was as if no one were worthy to actually behold Christ’s final sufferings. There may be some truth to that idea, but it is far more likely that this was *a sign of judgment*.

*The Scriptures often speak of darkness (as well as clouds) as a sign of judgment.* Commentators point to such passages as Joel 2:31, which speaks of **‘the sun being turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes’**; and Amos 8:9, which speaks of the LORD **‘making the sun go down at noon,’** and **‘darkening the earth in broad daylight.’**

Likewise in the New Testament the book of Jude speaks of false teachers as those **“for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever”** (Jude 13). Revelation 6:12 speaks of the sun becoming **“black as sackcloth”** on the day of wrath.

This darkness over the land during Christ’s crucifixion brings to mind what occurred just before the very first Passover. The 9th plague to befall the Egyptians, the plague *right before the death of the firstborn* (the tenth & final plague), was *darkness over the land of Egypt*. Exodus 10:21 describes it as **“a darkness to be felt.”**

That darkness lasted for *three days* (Exodus 10:22), while this darkness that came upon the land during Christ’s crucifixion lasted for *three hours*.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

Just as darkness enveloped Egypt before the death of the firstborn, even so darkness enveloped the land before the death of God's only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is no coincidence that Jesus was crucified during *Passover*, as He was the true Passover Lamb. The Apostle Paul goes so far as to say that **“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed”** (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The darkness over the land during broad daylight when Christ was on the cross was surely a manifestation or outward display of what was going on there on the cross. For on the cross our Lord Jesus was enduring the full wrath of God that *we* deserve for our sins. That is why William Hendriksen writes,

“Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead.”<sup>2</sup>

The utter darkness of God's judgment and wrath is what each of *us* deserves for our sin and rebellion against a holy God. But if you are in Christ by faith, see again here in these verses that our Lord Jesus Christ endured the full wrath of God in your place!

What comfort! What peace of conscience, heart, and mind! What unspeakable joy belongs only to those who are in Christ Jesus, who no longer have to fear death, judgment, and hell, because He bore our sins on the cross, and endured all of those things in our place!

### ***Christ's Cry of Abandonment***

The second thing that we see here in our passage is Christ's cry from the cross. In v.34 Mark writes,

**“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?””**

The bystanders misunderstood Christ's words, and thought that He was calling out to Elijah (v.35), as if Elijah were going to come take Jesus down from the cross (v.36). Perhaps they thought that if Jesus were *really* the Messiah, then surely Elijah would save him, as an earthly king & deliverer (which many no doubt wrongly thought the Messiah would be) could not deliver His people if he died. Little did they understand that *Jesus Christ delivered and saved His people by dying!*

And the words of Jesus there were a quotation from Psalm 22:1, where David writes, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** These words were penned by King David approximately 1,000 years before the time of Christ! And Jesus here shows us that He is the fulfillment of what David prophesied about there by the Holy Spirit. In that very same Psalm David even writes, **“they have pierced my hands and feet”** (v.16)! And he wrote that hundreds of years before the practice of crucifixion had even been invented!

The Savior's cry of abandonment shows what was involved in Christ suffering the wrath of God for our sins – *enduring judgment and separation from God in our place!* Our sins cut us off from God (Isaiah 59:2). And just as one of the things that makes heaven *heaven* is *being with the Lord forever* (1 Thess. 4:17), so also part of what makes Hell *Hell* is suffering **“the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”** (2 Thessalonians 1:9, Italics added).

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2 Mark (New Testament Commentary), p.660

## *The Temple Curtain Torn in Two*

Lastly, we see the curtain of the temple torn in two (v.38). And when does this take place? At the precise moment when our Lord Jesus Christ gave out one last cry and **“breathed His last”** (v.37). Mark does *not* tell us what Jesus said when He cried out at His death, but Luke 22:46 says that He called out with a loud voice, **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”**

And when Jesus died the curtain in the temple was **“torn in two, from top to bottom”** (v.38). This may seem like a strange detail to our modern ears, but this too is a significant and meaningful detail. This curtain was first spoken of in Exodus 26:31–33, which says,

**“And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.”**

The veil or curtain separated the **“Holy Place”** from **“the Most Holy.”** The Most Holy Place was where the ark of testimony was kept, and only the high priest could enter behind that curtain, once a year, on the day of atonement.

Hebrews 9:7-9 says,

**“but into the second [i.e. the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies] only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper”**

Notice what the writer of the book of Hebrews says about this Old Testament arrangement – this was the Holy Spirit’s way of indicating (teaching!) that **“that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age)”** (v.8-9).

Until that curtain was torn, and was no longer standing, the way into the holy places was inaccessible. But now with the death of Christ, it has been removed, and the way to God has been fully and finally opened to those who are in Christ by faith!

This is why the writer of Hebrews goes on to say in Hebrews 10:19–23,

**“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”**

Notice what he says there – that our Lord Jesus opened up **“the new and living way”** for us (v.20). And how did He do that? It was **“through the curtain, that is, through his flesh”** (v.20).

The curtain being torn was a picture of the body of Christ the Savior being torn and broken! His *flesh* was the true *curtain*, just like His *body* was the true *temple* (John 2:21).

And so what is the takeaway (so to speak) of all of this, according to the writer of the book of Hebrews? Because Christ has opened up the new and living way to eternal life through the curtain of His flesh, and because in Christ we **“have a great high priest over the house of God”** (v.21), we should then **“draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”** (v.22).

In Christ and in him alone, sinners can **“draw near”** to God! And only in Christ we can do so **“with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”** *Why?* Because in Jesus Christ, by faith in Him, our hearts are **“sprinkled clean from an evil conscience”** and **“our bodies washed with pure water.”** (That is most certainly a reference to *baptism*, both its *significance* as well as its *mode*!)

The writer of Hebrews also tells us that because of what Christ has done for us in His death on the cross, we should not only **“draw near”** (v.22), but we should also **“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful”** (v.23). That confession of our hope was often something tied explicitly to *baptism* (mentioned in the previous verse – v.22).

## ***Conclusion***

Speaking of a **“confession of hope,”** look at the great confession made by the centurion who witnessed Christ’s death up close – when He saw the manner in which our Lord Jesus breathed His last, he said, **“Truly this man was the Son of God!”** (v.39).

The very thing that Mark’s Gospel set out to prove and demonstrate, that Jesus Christ is **“the Son of God”** (Mark 1:1) is confessed here by a Roman Centurion (a Gentile, no less!). Somehow he knew that the death of Jesus was no ordinary death! The darkness over the whole land even underscored this fact, didn’t it?

He knew somehow that ultimately no one took the life of Jesus from Him, but that this **“innocent”** man (Luke 23:47) laid down His life of His own accord!

Do *you* believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? (Is that *your* confession?) Do *you* believe that He died for sinners, and that He died for you and your sins? Then *draw near* to God through Him, and hold fast the confession of your hope that is in Jesus! And, as Hebrews 10:24-25 goes on to say,

**“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”**

Praise God for His glorious grace, that through His Son Jesus Christ He has opened up the way for sinners to made right with Him!