

The Crucified, Dead and Buried King

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[0 : 0 0] Well as you can see we're almost at the end of our series in the Gospel of Mark and we've seen how Mark wants to introduce us to Jesus to show us why Jesus died and also what it means to follow him and today we come to the crucifixion, the death and the burial of Jesus. Now at the time crucifixion was reserved for the most horrendous of criminals because the pain of crucifixion was so intense. In fact our English word excruciating comes from two Latin words ex cruciatus meaning out of the cross. So the very definition of the worst pain comes from crucifixion and so crucifixion was then and I guess still is the ultimate in human pain and suffering and yet the crucifixion and the death of Jesus is actually the climax of the Gospel of Mark and so today we're going to consider the actual moment of Jesus' death because we won't understand Jesus, why he died or even

Christianity if we don't understand his death and see what is happening at the cross and we'll see why it's so crucial in our Bible reading from Mark chapter 15. So what we're going to do this afternoon is move from the historical fact of the death of Jesus through to its theological meaning and then on to its practical application for our lives and so we're going to answer three questions essentially this afternoon from the text. First, how did it happen? The death of Jesus, the historical facts, second, what does it mean? The theological meaning and then third, why does it matter? The practical application for our lives. So first of all, how did it happen? The historical fact. Well, Mark records the facts of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial and you notice how he names people, locations, timings, they're all meticulously recorded, specific details and what was said and the reason is is because Mark is recording history for us. He's giving us a true record of the life of Jesus. So the story, we pick it up after Jesus had been condemned to crucifixion, we saw that last week, he's flogged and mocked and then now he's led to a place called Golgotha with a man from Cyrene called Simon who is carrying his cross.

Now all the time Jesus, remember, is not a victim of circumstance here, he is deliberately and willingly moving towards his death. So much so that the details of the death of Jesus were predicted hundreds of years earlier and so throughout the Old Testament we know that Jesus would be falsely accused, he would refuse to speak up in his own defense, Isaiah tells us that, chapter 53. In the Old Testament, the Messiah, Jesus, would be mocked, he'd be brutally beaten, that's happening here. His killers would decide who'd get his clothes by gambling for them, that's happening here. Jesus would be executed with criminals, that was predicted, prophesied, it's happening here and Jesus would be buried in a tomb given by a rich man. Isaiah 53 tells us that is so and that is exactly what happens here at the end of chapter 15. In fact some 29 such prophecies were fulfilled in the final 24 hours of the life of

Jesus and then his death. And so when we read how Jesus suffered and died on a cross it was predicted long before and the reason it was predicted is because the very mission of Jesus was that he came to die. And yet the account of his actual death is short and sharp. I wonder if you noticed this in verse 24. We read, and they crucified him. Then verse 25, it was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

And now there's a deep irony to the mocking Jesus receives as he hangs on the cross and we saw this irony last week when we looked at the earlier verses in chapter 15. But read with me from verse 29 to 32.

[4 : 1 6] Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, So you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days. Verse 30, come down from the cross and save yourself.

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down

now from the cross that we may see and believe.

Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. Now when Jesus was challenged to come down from the cross and save himself, he could have. But Jesus didn't come down from the cross to save himself.

Jesus stayed on the cross to save others. So the means of Jesus saving people like you and me was that he did not save himself. And that's what we're going to think about next in our second point.

But before that, it's actually just worth emphasizing that Jesus lived and died in human history. Because some people still today will claim or think that Jesus is somehow a fictional character and all that we're talking about when we read the Bible about his life and death is all just some kind of myth or folklore.

[5 : 42] And yet there is plenty written evidence for the existence of Jesus just over 2,000 years ago. Simon Gathercall, who was a New Testament theologian at the University of Cambridge, he wrote an excellent article that ended up in the Guardian newspaper a couple of years ago at Easter time.

And his article was, what is the historical evidence that Jesus Christ lived and died? Listen to what he said. The historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth is both long established and widespread. Within a few decades of his supposed lifetime, he is mentioned by Jewish and Roman historians, as well as by dozens of Christian writings. Compare that, for example, with King Arthur, who supposedly lived around AD 500.

The major historical source for events of that time does not even mention Arthur, and he is first referred to 300 or 400 years after he is supposed to have lived.

The evidence for Jesus is not limited to later folklore, as are accounts of Arthur. And then Gathercall in his article goes on, and he highlights how non-Christian authors just kept mentioning Jesus.

[6 : 56] Authors like the Jewish historian Josephus. He wrote a history of Judaism around AD 93, and in it he makes reference to Jesus, the so-called Christ.

And about 20 years later, after Josephus, there were the Roman politicians, Pliny and Tacitus. And they held some of the highest offices of state at the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

And Tacitus reports of Jesus being executed, while Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect in charge of Judea, and when Tiberius was emperor. And then Pliny, he contributes the information that when he was governor in northern Turkey, Christians worshipped Christ as a god.

And so all that these historians, who aren't Christian historians, all that they were saying at the time, Jewish and Roman, fit with the time frame of the Gospels that we're reading this afternoon.

So none of these men were Christians, and yet none of them ever even discussed the existence of Jesus. It was taken as a given that Jesus lived.

[8 : 05] And so Gathercall says there was never any debate in the ancient world about whether Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure. He says we know of no one in the ancient world who questioned whether Jesus lived.

So the historical documents produced by Jews, produced by Romans, produced by Christians, with their many references to Jesus, leave us in no doubt that Jesus lived and died.

And so if we don't need to be in any doubt about the existence of Jesus, the question for us is, well, why did Jesus die? What is the significance of his death, and what does it mean for us?

Well, Mark's Gospel is one of the earliest accounts of the life of Jesus. And yet Mark gives us very few of the gory details of Jesus' death.

And it's because whilst he is recording history for his readers, it's true, he wants us to focus not just on what happened, but the deeper meaning behind the events that did happen.

[9 : 09] And so that leads us to our second question, what does it mean? So first of all, how did it happen? Secondly, what does it mean? So why did Jesus die? Mark draws our attention to three details that help explain what the death of Jesus means.

The three details are the darkness, the cry, and the curtain. So let's look at those, the darkness, the cry, and the curtain. First of all, the darkness. Verse 33.

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. So why is there darkness for three hours in the middle of the day?

Well, this can't be explained naturally, like it was some kind of solar eclipse or something. No, this was supernatural darkness. But what does it mean?

Well, it has a theological meaning, because the darkness was a sign of God's anger and God's judgment. So throughout the Bible, darkness symbolizes the wrath of God.

[10:13] And so if you think back to the Exodus in Egypt early on in the Bible story, the plague of darkness came over the land for three days before the Passover.

And it was only those who were protected by the blood of the sacrificed lamb around their door frames in their homes who were saved from God's judgment.

And here we have Jesus on the cross, and there is darkness before the sacrifice of Jesus, who is the ultimate Passover lamb, who is dying to save people from God's judgment.

And so the darkness, as Jesus dies on the cross, symbolizes the anger and the judgment of God. But the question is, well, why is God angry?

Well, God is angry at evil and sin. And that's why God must judge it. And so the darkness tells us that Jesus is being condemned, not just by man, Jesus is actually being condemned by God.

[11:18] That's why he cries out in the darkness. So there's the darkness. That's the first detail. The second detail is the cry. Jesus cried out loudly from the cross.

Verse 34. And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

So Jesus cried out because God's anger at sin and his judgment on sin fell upon Jesus.

And so while Jesus clearly suffered physical agony at the cross, he also experienced the agony of being forsaken by God. And so this is his cry of dereliction.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And his cry echoes the words of Psalm 22. That's why we sang that Psalm earlier, where David speaks of his experience of being God forsaken before being vindicated.

[12:25] And that's why Jesus cries out using these words on the cross because Jesus wasn't abandoning his trust in God and yet he was experiencing the agony of being banished from God's presence as he bore the weight of sin on himself.

Now, of course, Jesus was innocent. So it wasn't his sin that he was being punished for at the cross. It was our sin.

That's why he experienced this God forsakenness. So as Jesus went to the cross, he was the ultimate high priest for his people because Jesus didn't bring a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Jesus himself was the sacrifice on the cross. He was the substitutionary sacrifice in place of sinners like you and me.

And so Jesus suffered the hell of God forsakenness so that those who put their faith in him need never have to so that we can be saved from it.

[13:37] And that's why Jesus' death on the cross depicts really the horrifying consequences of our sin. The cross tells us how serious our sin is.

Now, I guess we tend to think that in reality, our sin isn't actually that bad. And yet our sin is not just the things we do or the things we fail to do. Our sin is the attitude of our heart towards the God who made us.

And yet our turning away from God resulted in God turning away from his son as he hung on the cross.

And so our sin is serious because it separates us from God and deserves his condemnation. We're the ones who deserve to be forsaken by God.

And yet the cross tells us that Jesus is the one who was forsaken by God. Because all of God's righteous anger, his just anger against sin fell on Jesus.

[14:43] Jesus was forsaken by God on the cross so that you and I would never be forsaken by him. And that's what the tearing of the curtain is all about.

And that's the third detail. There's the darkness, then there's the cry, and there's the curtain, verse 38. So after Jesus breathed his last, we're told the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

And so the very moment Jesus died, attention shifts in the narrative from the cross to the curtain at the temple. Because the curtain being ripped open helps explain what the death of Jesus means.

Now, there were two curtains in the temple, an outer curtain, one between the court and the holy place, and then an inner curtain between the holy place and the most holy place.

And Mark doesn't specify which curtain he's talking about here. But the significance of the action is the same. Because the curtain in the temple wasn't some kind of thin, flimsy veil, like a cheap pair

of curtains.

[15:47] No, this was a tall, thick, heavy curtain, almost like a wall. And it was there because it separated sinful people from the presence of a holy, perfect, righteous, pure God.

It was really like a great big no-entry sign. Do not go through. Do not pass. And nobody was allowed to enter into this holy place through the curtain.

Only one man could go, the high priest, and only on one day of the year, the day of atonement, and only with an animal sacrifice. So he could sacrifice it for the sin of the people.

And so the curtain was this sign saying loudly and clearly that it is impossible for sinful human beings to be in God's presence.

And yet when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And it was indicating, by the rip, top to bottom, it was indicating that this is God's doing.

[16:54] God is opening up the way back for sinful people to come to him. So Jesus' death had created the way into the presence of God.

And so that big no-entry sign, it's as if it had been taken down, the doors had been flung open, and now there was a welcome, come on in sign there.

Because God had removed the barrier that separates sinners from himself to invite us in. And so now the way is open for anyone to go in.

For all who believe in Jesus, there is access to God. And that's why the temple, with its curtain, and the need for sacrifice, has all been abolished in Jesus.

That's why we don't have a temple anymore. Because we can be accepted by God through the death of Jesus in our place when we put our faith in him. I don't know if you remember what happened on the 9th of November, 1989.

[17:53] There are some people here who are old enough to remember what happened then, and some who aren't. But it was the start of the Berlin Wall being torn down. That great symbol of the Cold War between East and West, broken down.

And so when the curtain in the temple was torn into from top to bottom, it was indicating that Jesus died to take away the barrier that separates us from God. The barrier of our sin.

And so now, through Jesus' death, we can be accepted by God. And so at the cross, the darkness tells us that God is angry with our sin and that he must judge it.

The cry tells us that Jesus was forsaken, so we need never be. And the curtain tells us that Jesus' death removes our sin, so we have access to God.

And so can you see why Jesus had to die? And can you see why Jesus' death is really our only hope? It is the hope for all humanity.

[18:58] It is what saves us from the just and righteous anger of God at our sin. It is only the cross of Jesus. And not only did Jesus have to die for us, but we've seen from Mark's gospel that Jesus was glad to die for us.

And so it's only when we grasp this that our lives will be transformed. Transformed now in this life, but transformed forever. And that's why we call the day that Jesus died Good Friday, because it is good news for the world.

It is good news for us. And we only get Christianity when we get what was going on at the cross.

And so that's the second thing. What does it mean? There's a theological meaning to all of the events.

So first, how did it happen? Second, what does it mean? And then thirdly, why does it matter? Well, the death of Jesus matters because it demands a personal response from us.

And so I'd like us to close by looking at two personal responses in the text, in this passage. And it's interesting because both of these responses come after Jesus has died.

[20:05] And so there's an application for you if you're here this afternoon and you're an unbeliever. In other words, you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. There's a specific application for you here. But there's also an application for you if you would call yourself a Christian and you're a believer.

So there's the response of the centurion. He responds with belief. And then there's the response of Joseph of Arimathea. And he responds with boldness.

So belief and then boldness. First of all, belief. Look at the centurion's reaction to the death of Jesus, verse 39. And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the son of God.

So immediately after Jesus dies, the Roman centurion confesses with his lips, surely this man was the son of God.

Now this is momentous because at the very beginning of Mark's gospel, Mark said to us that Jesus is the son of God. And now here at the end of the gospel, the first person to confess that Jesus is the son of God is this Roman centurion.

[21 : 15] A guy who had no background in anything to do with why the Messiah Jesus came and died. And yet he confesses Jesus to be God.

Now this is a brutal man who'd inflicted death many times. He was even part of the execution squad for the crucifixion of Jesus. And yet as he stood there watching Jesus die, he realized, and he'd seen many deaths before, that this was no ordinary death and this was no ordinary man.

This was the extraordinary death of the son of God. And so as Jesus hung dead on the cross, condemned and rejected, in weakness and in shame, the centurion confesses, he is the son of God.

And that's the response Mark wants all of his readers to make to Jesus. He wants us all to believe that Jesus is the son of God. And so if you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, now is a good time for you to believe.

Believe that Jesus is the son of God who came to die for you. Now perhaps you think your sin isn't really a problem. Maybe you think that you're a good person and you've lived a good life, you've been fairly irregular at church and therefore things between God and you are okay.

[22 : 40] God is cool with you because you're a decent guy or girl. And of course, you're not claiming you're perfect. Nobody's perfect. But you think, well, if God's going to accept anyone, I can think of a whole load of people who are far worse than I am.

Surely he's got to accept me. And yet there's no room for self-righteousness when it comes to God. Because in our hearts, none of us have worshipped God as we should.

None of us have loved God as we should. None of us have obeyed God as we should. And deep down, we know that this is true. We're not as bad as we could be, but actually we're not what we should be.

We've rebelled against God and we know it. And that is a problem because we have failed to treat God as God. We've rebelled against him. We've rejected his rightful rule over our lives.

That's why your sin is serious. That's why Jesus had to die for it. But maybe on the other hand, maybe you think it's not that you're good or too good for God.

[23 : 48] Perhaps you think you're too bad for God to accept you. Maybe you think there's no way God could ever forgive me. There's no way God could ever accept me because of the things I've done.

Jonathan, you don't know my past life. You don't know how bad things have been. And yet the death of Jesus tells us that the way back to God is open for everyone.

So when the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, who's the first person who walks right through and has access to God? It's the Roman centurion.

He killed people for a living. So the most unlikely person to believe confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. And so his confession indicates that there's forgiveness for everybody.

There's a way back to God for everybody, no matter what they've done. And so it doesn't matter who you are and it doesn't matter what you have done. Through the death of his Son, God will forgive people like the centurion, clearly, and also people like you and me.

[24 : 57] Jesus died to save sinners. That includes every single one of us. And so whether we reckon we're good or we're bad, we needed Jesus to die for us.

And that's why we must repent of our sin, turn away from it, and believe in Jesus in order to be saved. Because if we don't believe in Jesus and go to him with our sin, then we will suffer for our sin ourselves forever in hell, in that God-forsaken place.

And so the fact that Jesus had to die for me absolutely shatters my pride. The fact that Jesus was glad to die for me releases me from my fear.

Because it's not about me and what I do, it's about him and what he's done. And so in the death of Jesus, God forgives my sin and welcomes me to himself. And that is good news, isn't it?

For all of us. So there's belief. And then the other response, the other application here is boldness. Did you notice how Joseph of Arimathea responds with boldness?

[26 : 06] So just as the centurion shows the right response if you're an unbeliever, so Joseph of Arimathea shows us the response, or our response, if we are a believer.

Look at verse 43. Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

So Jesus was dead. The day was nearly over. So if Jesus was going to be buried, it had to happen quickly. And then Joseph of Arimathea steps forward. In fact, he's the only one who does step forward because the disciples had deserted Jesus and the women are standing at a distance watching.

But Joseph was prepared to nail his colors to the mast. We're told he was a member of the council, that is the Sanhedrin. In fact, Mark tells us he's a prominent member.

And we're also told that he was waiting for the kingdom of God. So he was a believer. John confirms this to us in his account of Jesus' burial, where we read about Joseph.

[27 : 11] Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. And yet here, Joseph is the only one who is bold enough to associate himself with Jesus.

Perhaps he realized that he could no longer be a secret disciple of Jesus. While everyone else was against Jesus or who had abandoned Jesus, Joseph was ready to stand with Jesus.

And this was a costly response because when he asks Pilate for Jesus' body, he had no idea what Pilate's response would be. Joseph was risking everything, his job, his reputation.

He was putting his neck on the line. And yet he had the courage and the determination to be counted as an open disciple of Jesus, whatever it cost.

Because by taking the dead body of Jesus and placing it in his own tomb, what he was doing was making a public and a personal commitment to Jesus.

[28 : 17] Because tombs are for your family, aren't they? The only people who go in your tomb are your dead family members. And so Joseph was saying, I identify with this man Jesus.

I'm close to him. So it was a bold, costly, public, personal response to Jesus. And so as we watch on, we should see Joseph's boldness and we should ask ourselves, well, what is my response to Jesus if I profess to be a believer and follower of him?

Am I prepared to stand up and be counted as a follower of Jesus? Yet it will be costly and it will involve risk if I publicly associate with him.

And yet can I really claim to be a disciple if I don't? You know, maybe there are still people for you, people in your family, people in your workplace, colleagues, neighbours, even friends who don't know that you're a Christian.

You've kept it secret, perhaps too embarrassed to say something, maybe too afraid of what might happen or the sick that you'll get. And yet if we call ourselves a follower of Jesus, well, let's pray for boldness to associate ourselves with the crucified, dead and risen king.

[29 : 40] Let's make sure that we don't privatise our faith in Jesus. Because if Jesus lived the perfect life for you and for me, and if Jesus died the death that you and I deserve to die, and if Jesus rose to life again and offers you eternal life, then how can we not live for Jesus and speak for Jesus in this world, in public life?

Now as Christmas approaches, we've got a great opportunity to invite people to our carol services on the 11th of December and the 18th of December. What a great time, not only to associate with Jesus, amongst those who don't know Jesus, but what a great way to encourage people to see why they need Jesus too.

Because we've got no idea how people will respond to the good news of Jesus. Just look at the centurion, probably the last person you would ever think who would come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

And yet he did. And so what is your response to the amazing love of God displayed for us through the death of his son Jesus on the cross?

What's your response? Is it time to believe? If so, believe. Is it time to be bold? If so, be bold.

[31 : 03] Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold. Be bold.