

“The Death of Jesus”

February 26, 2017

Mark 15:33-41

I. Introduction

The murder of Jesus Christ was the most horrendous act of evil ever committed in all of human history. Peter put it this way in [Acts 3:13-15](#): “You handed him, i.e. Jesus, over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life . . .”

Despite the humiliation, torture, and death to which wicked men had subjected Jesus, the ring leaders were not instantly consumed by divine wrath. Unknown to them, the murder of Jesus was necessary in God’s eternal plan of redemption. Joseph’s statement to his brothers in [Genesis 50:20](#) could also be Jesus’ statement, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” Turn to [1 Peter 1:18-21](#). Jesus’ death was not a tragic failure but the glorious fulfillment of the destiny God assigned Him as the Messiah.

Mark’s picture of Jesus’ suffering on the cross is grim but avoids sensationalism. Although it provides no graphic description of Jesus’ physical agony, the reader still senses the power of God in this story. Mark’s account doesn’t even rouse hatred for the perpetrators. Something more profound was happening than just another gruesome execution and Mark focuses on the theological significance of Jesus’ death. In today’s Scripture, we see Jesus’ final hours followed by His death.

II. Jesus’ Final Hours

[Verses 33-38](#) describe the highpoint of salvation history, the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ for the world. As we just read in [1 Peter 1:18-21](#), Jesus’ sacrificial work of redemption was planned by God in eternity past and it will be celebrated in heaven throughout eternity future—turn to [Revelation 5:6-14](#). It was there on Golgotha, or Calvary, that the long-awaited and acceptable Lamb of God died to satisfy divine righteousness by paying sin’s penalty in full for all who would believe in Him.

The Jewish way of keeping time began counting hours from sunrise which was about 6 AM, so when “the sixth hour came,” it was noon and Jesus had already been on the cross for three hours ([Mark 15:25](#)). The Gospels record three statements Jesus made during that first 3-hour period; they each demonstrated compassion and mercy. The first is found in [Luke 23:34](#) where Jesus demonstrated His compassion and mercy for His tormentors as He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” One of the two crucified thieves who had been mocking Jesus, after

hearing Jesus' words and watching Jesus' actions, said in [Luke 23:42](#), "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus' 2nd statement was in response to this man's faith, in [verse 43](#) we read, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Jesus' 3rd statement was when He took care of His widowed mother. Looking down from the cross, [John 19:26-27](#) says, "Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." Back in Mark we read:

"At the sixth hour, i.e. at noon, a miraculous darkness came over the whole land and lasted until the ninth hour, i.e. 3 PM." This was a miracle and not some natural phenomenon, such as a sand storm or an eclipse. Since Passover was always celebrated at full moon, it is impossible to have an eclipse. By means of this darkness, without a doubt, God was saying something to the people.

The darkness may have reminded the Jews about the first Passover. The ninth plague in Egypt, as recorded in [Exodus 10:22-11:9](#), was 3 days of darkness followed by the last plague, the death of the firstborn and the institution of Passover. The darkness at Calvary was also an announcement that God's Firstborn and Beloved Son, the Lamb of God, was giving His life for the sins of the world. The darkness didn't represent the absence of God but His holy, terrifying presence as He came in judgment—[Isaiah 53:5](#) says, "But he, i.e. Jesus, was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Mark wrote that "at the ninth hour, i.e. at 3 PM, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?'—which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" What Jesus had foreseen in the Garden had become reality. For three long hours, the sin of the world had so filled Him that He became sin for us. At that moment in wrath and judgment, Jesus Christ was forsaken by God the Father. With intense agony, the Son of God experienced something He had never experienced before, the abandonment of His Father. The loving communion He had eternally known with the Father was gone. Unlike what happened at the conclusion of the temptations Jesus experienced in the wilderness and in the garden of Gethsemane, this time the Father didn't send angels to minister to His Son ([Mark 1:13](#); [Luke 22:43](#))—there was no relief for Jesus on the cross. This is a picture of hell: the full fury of God's wrath is ever present but the comfort of His love and compassion are totally gone. On the cross, Jesus Christ endured the full reality of hell's torments, including the abandonment of the Father.

Jesus' human tormentors were still there, "they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.'" Rather than misunderstanding Jesus, they were actually mocking Him. [Malachi 4:5-6](#) predicted that Elijah, or a

prophet like him, would come as the forerunner to the Messiah. So by accusing Jesus of calling for Elijah, the mocking bystanders were merely taunting Him, challenging Him that if He really were the Messiah, then Elijah would appear to rescue Him.

John 19:28 adds that then Jesus said, “I am thirsty,” at which “one man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick and offered it to Jesus to drink.” At first glance this would seem to be an act of mercy, but it was just part of the ridicule and scorn of the crowd as the man said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.” The moist drink would only serve to extend Jesus’ life on the cross—making more time for Elijah to come!

After enduring all the physical tortures of the day ending with the cross and the torments of divine judgment, Jesus demonstrated that He was still mentally alert and physically strong when He gave “a loud cry.” His life didn’t gradually slip away due to exhaustion, as John 10:18 says, He would willingly lay it down. John 19:30 reports that, after being offered the drink of wine vinegar, He shouted, “It is finished.” The work of redemption had been accomplished and His suffering was complete. Then, Luke 23:46 says, “Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” Jesus was a willing sacrifice for the sins of the world.

III. Following Jesus’ Death

A. A Miracle Mark then recorded three things that occurred following Jesus’ death, the first was a miracle: there was an earthquake and “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The massive curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was several inches thick. It served as a continual reminder of the sinner’s separation from God’s holy presence. On that Friday afternoon, at the very time the priests in the temple were sacrificing lambs for Passover and others were in the temple at the hour of prayer, God demonstrated that the work of atonement symbolized by animal deaths had been finished by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The barrier to God had been permanently removed. At that moment, the old covenant was replaced with the new covenant ratified in Jesus’ blood. Access to God’s presence was now open through the completed work of Christ—turn to Hebrews 10:12-22. Through His death, Jesus had purchased not only freedom from the Law, but freedom from the entire sacrificial system as well as well.

B. The Centurion’s Confession The second event that Mark recorded was the centurion’s confession. The centurion had been placed in charge of Jesus’ crucifixion. He may have been involved with the arrest in the garden and with the various phases of Jesus’ trial, but because he was the leader of the execution squad, he undoubtedly participated in Jesus’ brutal flogging. He would

have been involved with the mockery with the crown of thorns and the purple robe that followed. At the site of the execution, it was his squad that nailed Jesus' hands and feet to the cross, cast lots for His clothing, and joined in the mocking and taunts along with the crowd.

For 6 hours, the squad had watched over Jesus and the two thieves. Because he “stood there in front of Jesus,” the centurion must have heard all the words spoken by Jesus. He had seen how Jesus responded in mercy to the scorn and derision of His enemies and to the plea of the thief. He heard Jesus triumphant shout, “It is finished.” Jesus was unlike anyone else who had been crucified and so the centurion said, “Surely this man was the Son of God.” Luke 23:47 adds that “the centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’”

C. The Sorrowing Women Mark closed his account of Jesus' death with the sorrowing women. John recorded in John 19:25-27 that some of the women, along with the apostle John, initially gathered at the foot of the cross. Perhaps, sorrowing at the sight of Jesus' suffering, they had moved back and now “were watching from a distance.” They loved Jesus deeply and believed in Him sincerely, yet they were baffled, discouraged, and devastated by the scene of His death. But in their love, they stayed there until the very end.

The women represented Jesus' faithful followers who did not forsake their Lord even at His death. Their loyalty would be rewarded three days later. On Sunday morning, they would be the first to learn of His glorious resurrection. But on this Friday afternoon, I suspect that they found themselves in shock, heartbroken, and bewildered. This was not the ending they had anticipated. So they watched, what they thought was the end, in sorrow.

IV. Conclusion

As we come to the conclusion this morning, there is one thing that needs to be set straight: the cross didn't kill Jesus. If He *had* died because of the trauma He had experienced, there would have been no last statements and definitely no shouting just before He died. People died of suffocation on the cross—lack of air. But once He was on the cross and had taken our sins and suffered the wrath of God, Jesus willingly gave up His spirit because, as He shouted, “It is finished.”

In Mark 14:36, just before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Jesus knew what was going to happen, so why did He do this? What does John 3:16 say? “For God so loved the world . . .” Jesus died on the cross because of love for you and me.

Turn to 1 John 4:7-12. This is God's challenge to His children—to Christians: love one another. This isn't the love we all talked about on Valentine's Day. The love here is agape love,

sacrificial love. In other words, God's Word is calling all of us to love one another sacrificially just as Jesus loves each one of us.

Jesus went to the cross not because He was afraid of making God angry, but, as [Hebrews 12:2](#) says, “~~For the joy set before him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.~~” Jesus went to the cross because He loved God and wanted to do what God wanted done. He knew that regardless of the pain and the suffering in the process, God's will was best and the end result would be joy for all who believe, including the thief on a cross and the Roman centurion. [Romans 8:28](#) says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Through obedience, Jesus would bring joy to God and then would experience joy Himself as He experienced the good result through God's will. We, too, need to do God's will—not because we are afraid of getting God angry, but because we love Him. We want to bring Him joy which in the end will bring us joy as we hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 5:21](#)).

To learn to love God with an everlasting love and to know God's will, one needs to spend time in God's Word—the Bible. Take time frequently—daily if possible—to read God's Word and to think about what you have read. The more you read and the more you contemplate what you have read, the more you will learn to love God and know His will and to love “your neighbor as yourself” ([Mark 12:31](#)).