

“JESUS: CRUCIFIED, DEAD, AND BURIED.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: Mark 15:33-47

Prayer:

Father, make Jesus and His Word personal to us this morning. By the very present power of your Holy Spirit, who inspired this Holy Bible, inspire our understanding. Grant to us, please, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know you better and so that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which you have called us, and the riches of the glorious inheritance that we share with all the saints. We ask this in your name and for your glory, Amen.

Introduction.

Last year on Palm Sunday I preached from Mark 11, the triumphal entry text. Since then I have preached 21 more sermons from Mark's Gospel and today we are up to Good Friday. 21 sermons on the last five days of Jesus' life. Clearly this was the most important week in history and our text records the most important day in history.

Jesus was born to die. Jesus came to earth to take on human flesh to be the ransom for our sins, so He could bear the eternal wrath of the Father for the sins of the world.

When we last considered Mark 15 Jesus, who had been denied and deserted by His own disciples, was being crucified by the Romans, taunted by the crowds, mocked by the Jewish religious leaders, and reviled by the criminals. Jesus was utterly alone in His torment and pain.

Jesus' suffering began around nine in the morning but at noon there was a dramatic shift. A profound darkness engulfed the land for three hours.

Mark 15:33-36, Crucified.

Darkness

Most movies of the crucifixion depict what happened in terms of a great storm. But none of the Gospels mention anything about a storm or thunder or lightening. The text says only that there was darkness over the whole land. Ominous darkness intensified by ominous silence.

Some people speculate it was a solar eclipse but full solar eclipses last only a few minutes and even then the darkness isn't total. Furthermore the Passover always took place on a full moon. No, this is a supernatural darkness.

The greatest example of this kind of darkness happened in Egypt in Exodus 10, the ninth plague was a darkness so great it was felt. Have you ever felt darkness?

People who live near the polar regions talk about the power of long seasons of darkness.

When the famous British explorer Ernest Shackleton became shipwrecked in Antarctica for a year and a half, his biographer wrote that of all the challenges they faced, starvation, drowning, months of sub-zero temperatures, the worst thing was the darkness. On the earth there is no desolation like two months of no sun.

Darkness like this has profound effects on men's minds. It's a disorienting kind of darkness, a darkness in which you can become lost and isolated and fall into hopelessness and despair

This was the darkness of God's judgment, a kind of darkness Amos and Isaiah spoke of:

Amos 8:9-10 "And on that day," declares the Lord God,
"I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.
10 I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; ...
I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

Isaiah 13:9-10 Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.
10 For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

It's worth a moment's reflection to consider that the plague of utter darkness came before the final plague, the plague of the death of the first born. Before the only Son of God died, there was a great darkness over the whole land.

This darkness was for the exceeding sinfulness of the action of the Jews killing their Messiah and their king. And this darkness was for the exceeding sinfulness of all sin in the eyes of God, that we tremble at the judgment that awaits all who remain in their sin.

Make sure that the darkness of those three hours is the only darkness you endure, and not the darkness of eternity.

Jesus cried with a loud voice.

That this darkness was the darkness of God's absence was confirmed by the cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."

Pastor Barry preached on this fourth word from the cross two weeks ago and made a profound point, the only way to fully comprehend this darkness and the kind of God-forsakenness Jesus experience, would be to go to hell itself.

In other words, human words cannot begin to fathom the depth of meaning in these words. Our human minds cannot conceive of the amount of suffering they reflect.

We believe it but we cannot explain it or comprehend it.

This was the most severe part of Jesus' suffering, worse than the nails, worse than the mocking, worse than the desertion of His closest friends, the utter silence and abandonment of God for sins He did not commit, for punishment He did not deserve.

Hell is the price to pay for sin and this was Jesus' hell, the silence and separation of God.

By the way, "Why have you forsaken me?" is not just a rhetorical question, it has a very clear and specific answer. Do you know the answer? Why did God forsake His Son? For you and for me. Jesus endured the worst darkness, the severest judgment so that you and I would not.

Mark 15:37-41, Dead.

Curtain.

The second great sign of the cosmic and spiritual significance of this day, after the darkness, was the tearing of the curtain. Both signs were both meant to arrest the attention of all who saw them. The darkness would get the attention of the pagans, of all the Romans. The curtain would get the attention of the Jews, of the high priests and the Sanhedrin.

The curtain in the temple separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. The holy of holies was the holiest place, the place where God's shekinah glory rested on the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant and beneath the outstretched wings of the seraphim.

This curtain separated the people of God from the presence of God. Only the holiest man, the high priest, could enter there and only once a year on the holiest day of the year, the day of Atonement and only with a blood sacrifice to make atonement for sins.

The whole temple structure was designed to keep people separate from the holy presence of God. The curtain was no flimsy sheet, but a heavy, thick curtain that no one could see through.

At the moment Jesus breathed His last and died, the curtain was torn in two. Not from bottom to top as one would normally expect, from top to bottom, this wasn't the work of man, but the work of God.

That moment marked the end of the Old Covenant, the end of the old sacrificial system, the end of the old way of making atonement for sin.

The new high priest was also the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The way of access into the presence of God is now and forever through the blood of Jesus. The barrier is gone, the dividing wall is torn down.

Hebrews 6:19-20 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever.

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

The tearing of the veil opened heaven to all who come in the name of Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles. The veil between God and man is removed.

By mid-afternoon on that first Good Friday the salvation of the world had been accomplished, the ransom was paid, the wrath of God satisfied. What was foreordained before the foundations of the earth was now done, "It is finished."

Centurion.

It's been too long now for any of you to remember my first sermon on the first verse of the Gospel of Mark, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

The centurion is the first person in Mark's Gospel to confess Jesus is God's Son. No one got it until this Roman centurion standing guard and presiding over the death of Jesus confessed, "Surely this man was the Son of God."

A Roman centurion who's pay was with coins bearing the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus"; who knew the title "son of god" as only belonging to the Caesar he took an oath to serve, a hardened soldier who had seen plenty of death and

inflicted it more times and in more horrible ways than we could imagine, a pagan who believes in a whole pantheon of gods, seeing for the first time in human history a God who suffers for others, this man has eyes to see this suffering man is God.

Why has this hardened Roman centurion, used to death, even the cause of many people's death, why was he able to see? What penetrated the curtain of darkness over his mind and heart?

Of all the deaths he had seen this one was absolutely unique. He heard what Jesus said and he saw how He died and this was unlike any other. A dying man's voice is always weak and feeble, but Jesus cried out in a loud voice.

Most crucified people would linger on a cross for many hours, even a day or more. But Jesus didn't succumb to His wounds, Jesus gave up His life for our sins. His life wasn't taken from Him, He gave it. No, this was no common man and this was no common death.

“Surely this man was the Son of God.”

Something in the words and death of Jesus must penetrate our darkness in order for us to believe in our hearts and confess with our lips, “Jesus is Lord, the Son of the living God.”

Have you heard the voice of Jesus cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” and have you heard the answer, “My God, my God, you died for me”?

Mark 15:42-47, Buried.

Sometime after three on Friday afternoon a man named Joseph of Arimathea, appeared from the shadows. We are told that what he did was courageous. He was a wealthy man, a prominent person, of high standing in the Sanhedrin. Yet he stepped forward to be identified with this crucified criminal. We are told by Luke he had not consented to the Sanhedrin's decision and action.

He was rich which means he would be more inclined to protect himself and his business interests from being associated with this Jesus. The rich are not ones to take these kinds of risks. They try to keep their religion in a neat separate box.

If he had been quiet about Jesus before he seems now ready to be bold and public. He uses his wealth and position in the service of Christ, he puts them to the use for which God gave them to him in the first place. You don't see this very often.

Glory to God that He has secret saints in places where we least expect to find them. Those who glorify Him in quiet, humble, unnoticed ways. Like in Uruapan, Mexico.

If Joseph became bold while Christ was dead, how much more should we be bold when Christ is alive in heaven and interceding for us? Take the risk of being identified with Jesus.

Application and Conclusion.

It is possible to be forsaken by God and yet loved by God. If in your darkest hour you feel forsaken, abandoned, ignored, remember Jesus and do as He did. Continue to cry out to God and say, “My God, my God.” That is a statement of deep emotion and of confident confession. Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him (Job 13:15), yet will I call on Him, yet will I say He is my God.

Though forsaken, Jesus was then and always, “My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

Do not give in to despair. Despair is suffering without hope, but that is never the Christian. We grieve as those with hope, we suffer, but as those with hope; we are afflicted and brought down, but not as those without hope.

We are not cast off forever, we are not denied grace forever.

Isaiah 50:10 Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant?
Let him who walks in darkness and has no light
trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

Psalms 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

Prayer:

Today we sing Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. We rejoice both in what you suffered for us and we rejoice in the victory you gained for us. In the light of both, help us to endure our hardships in a way that glorifies the Father and accomplishes great good for us and those around us. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, deepen our love, embolden our courage, fill us with your Spirit that we may imitate Christ, in whose name alone we pray. Amen.