

## **Mark: Calvary**

**Mark 15:33-41**

**By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)**

*April 9, 2006*

We come once again to Mark's Gospel, and we're in chapter 15, beginning this evening to read at verse 33, and we'll be reading through to the end of the chapter. Before we do so, let's once again come before God in prayer.

*O Lord our God, we humble ourselves in Your presence. We are to remind ourselves that we are unworthy even of the least of Your mercies. We come now to read the Scriptures together, words written by men but words of God. We thank You, Lord, for the Bible. We thank You for its infallible, inerrant record. We bless You that everything that we need to know in order to salvation is written down in this book. Oh, cause us to love Your word, and to love it more and more. Help us now to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest for the sake of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Hear now the word of God:

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, 'Behold, He is calling for Elijah.' Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down" And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!' There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

When evening had already come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a

prominent member of the Council, a man who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.

Amen. And may God once again add His blessing to the reading of His word.

The symbol of Christianity is not a fish. It's not a hammer; it's not a carpenter's chisel; but it's a cross, an instrument of torture and execution. Some who are executed this way took up to three days to die. And here as we view tonight in the Bible this account of the death of our Lord, it is a dark and mysterious place. Here atonement is won. Here propitiation is made. Here, on this cross, Christ is forsaken utterly by His Father in heaven, and He is heard to utter those words, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" — "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Whatever those words actually mean, Joel Nederhood has said that the question that Jesus asks from the cross is unanswered because the subject is too sacred for our ears. We couldn't comprehend it.

And Jesus now has been hanging on this cross for three hours, from nine in the morning until mid-day. The crowds who had taunted Him and shouted their insults and mocked Him have disappeared now — just one more body dying on a cross, and their curiosity has been satisfied.

And several things now occur, the first of which is that there is darkness at mid-day. At Jesus' birth there was brightness at midnight, and at Jesus' death there is darkness at mid-day. It is as though the sun is ashamed to look on Him, refusing to give its warmth to the Son of Man, hiding its face from Jesus.

The darkness is meant to remind us of perhaps several things: the darkness of the chaos before the creation of the sun in those early moments of accounts of creation in Genesis 1; and, more particularly, the ninth plague of Egypt (before that final plague where the angel of death passes over Egypt and slays the firstborn in the homes of those Egyptians). And in the ninth plague, there is a darkness that befalls the land of Egypt, you remember, for three days. Another Passover is about to take place, you understand. Christ our Passover is being slain for us, and the darkness precedes it.

And perhaps even more poignantly, the words in the closing chapters of Amos, when Amos says, "In that day I will make the sun to go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight." And Amos perhaps is referring to the Day of

Judgment itself at the end of the age, but I can't help but think that devout Jews, and you and I tonight, as we now look back on the other side of Calvary to these words in Amos and see not a little of a prediction of some momentous, earth-shattering, event that causes the light of the sun to go out at mid-day.

Was this an eclipse? No. Not for three hours. God did this. The hand of God did this. It was a miracle, as though God placed His hand over the sun and said 'You will not shine on My Son.' God did that to signal the exodus that is taking place, to signal that the angel of death is abroad visiting the sins of God's people and bringing now judgment to bear; passing over His people and landing, as it were, on the Passover Lamb, whose blood is now shed and trickling down His face and hands and feet, and dropping to the ground below. Christ our Passover is slain for us.

Alas, and did my Savior bleed?  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?

"Well might the sun in darkness hide  
And shut its glories in,  
And God, the mighty Maker died  
For His own creatures' sin.

But then in the second place, not only the darkness at mid-day, but the cry of dereliction that comes from the cross. There has been silence and darkness for three hours. And now, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the words of the Twenty-second Psalm, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some thought because the Aramaic sounds — "Eloi, Eloi" sounds like "Elijah" — and there was, of course, the expectancy (and still is, amongst the Jews) of the closing verses of the Book of Malachi, that Elijah would come back — the empty seat at Passover.

Some thought that perhaps He was calling for Elijah, and they take a sour drink of something resembling vinegar - not to give Him relief, you understand, but to awaken Him that He might feel the pain all the more. And He takes it - not the soporific drink offered Him before His execution which He did not drink.

There's nothing to guide us here into what these words mean. Nothing in our own experience comes even remotely close to this, these levels at which we can try now to unravel perhaps some of the mysteries of what Jesus means and intends by these words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

He is the God-man. He is a Son in an eternal sense. There never was a time when the Son was not. He has this altogether unique relationship to His Father in heaven. He is equal with Him as far as essence is concerned: as much God as the Father is God, as much God as the Holy Spirit is God; and yet, distinct from

the Father, and distinct from the Holy Spirit; that within this one God there is this differentiation — the Father begets the Son, and the Son is begotten of the Father — and there is a consciousness on the part of Jesus the incarnate Son that He has a divine consciousness. He bears this unique relationship to His Father in heaven.

He is human, too. He became human. He took human flesh and blood and a human soul, and throughout His life He is conscious not only that He is human, but conscious also that He is divine. He could say things like, “I and My Father are one.” He could say things like, “Before Abraham was, I am.” And in citing Psalm 22, using the words, “My God, My God...” not “My Father, My Father,” He seems to be saying that He has been robbed now of the consciousness of His divine nature, His native sonship; that He can no longer appeal to that unique relationship that He bore in fellowship and communion with His Father. He cannot say now, “Abba.” And it suggests that at last the veil of sin — imputed sin, our sin — has caused the light of the countenance of His Father's smile upon Him to be obliterated. It's not that He doubted His Father's love; it's that He is not aware of it. He's not conscious of it. He's not conscious that His Father is there to help Him. He is not assured of a victorious outcome to this event.

We need to be careful as we tread on holy ground, because this does not mean that the Father wasn't there helping Him, supplying the Spirit in mysterious and imponderable and unfathomable ways to support Him in this overwhelming flood. It is by the Spirit that He offered Himself without spot to God.

But Jesus does not draw...He does not seem to draw any help from it. In His consciousness, He seems to be unaware of it, as clouds have descended in His soul and obscured the light of His Father's face.

And we push it a little further, because this is more than just an expression of the way Jesus feels. There is a deliberateness in the citing of Psalm 22. There is reality here. He is experiencing the abandonment of God in the crux of His soul. Not only is He suffering in His body, He is suffering in His soul.

As Calvin points out, if Christ had only died a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. Unless His soul shared in the punishment He would have been the Redeemer of bodies alone. There is mystery here - impenetrable mystery. In the divine human Jesus there is only a consciousness now of abandonment, as though He has been cast out; as though in His soul He is outside of the embrace of covenant love and reassurance. He's in the place of weeping and of gnashing of teeth. He's under the anathema of the covenant. He is descending into hell, at least in Calvin's sense of it, that He is experiencing the unmitigated wrath of God...not just the wrath of God, not just the wrath of God that Paul speaks of in Romans 1...that's a mitigated wrath. We will never experience the kind of wrath that Jesus is experiencing here. This is total. This is all that there is to the wrath of God. He is in the place of the wicked damned, and His Father isn't there to

wipe away the tears — even as His Father longed to do so.

Only *substitution* is a big enough word to begin to unravel what is happening here. He has “become sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be reckoned the righteousness of God in Him.”

Mark doesn't tell us the three other things that were said by Jesus: now in quick succession: the words “I thirst”; the words “It is finished”; and those beautiful, beautiful words “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

But then there is something else. As in — it's almost a euphemism, isn't it? — “...and He breathed His last.” That body slumped upon that cross, unable any longer to lift itself up to draw air into those lungs, He breathes His last, not in some passive subjection to unrelenting fate, but an act of obedience on the part of Jesus. He gives up His life; He breathes His last, and offers Himself on that cross, and dies. He is dead. He is dead.

And there is the sound of fabric tearing in the temple on the holy mount in Jerusalem, as Passover, with thousands of worshipers in attendance.... There were two curtains in the temple. There was one before the Court of Israel, sometimes called the Holy Place, and there was one for the Holy of Holies itself. The Holy of Holies was thirty feet square, ten yards square, and into it the high priest would enter once at year at this time during Passover. I suppose we would all like to know which curtain it was, and Mark doesn't tell us. We have no help here from the language that Mark uses for *curtain*, because the same word was used for both of them.

There is an argument in favor of the outer curtain, because the outer curtain was the curtain that separated everybody from the Holy Place where the great furniture and paraphernalia of the temple was situated. And perhaps it was that curtain — visible, of course, to all the people in that outer court with that great altar. And now at three o'clock this temple rends apart, and for the first time in their lives they can see into the Holy Place, and they can see now the Table of Showbread, and the lampstand and the altar of incense, and the other curtain in the distance, against the room's back wall, that guarded the way into the most holy place of all. And horrified priests standing frozen like statues at this extraordinary event...and that gloomy temple now lit by light for the first time.

Or perhaps it was the other curtain, the inner curtain — the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, where God Himself and the Shekinah glory itself was manifested. And only the high priest could go in...twice on that one day...once for himself, once on behalf of the people, with the blood of sacrifice of Passover lambs.

It seems to be that curtain, that inner curtain, that the Book of Hebrews seems to dwell on the most as the most significant. I rather think it is that one, but you may

have a different opinion. Whichever curtain it is, one thing is absolutely certain. It spells an end, you see, to the ceremonial law; it spells an end to all of the ritual of sacrifice; it spells an end to all those bloody sacrifices offered again and again and again; the end of separation between Jew and Gentile. That middle wall of partition has been abolished.

Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain.  
But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,  
Takes all our sins away;  
A sacrifice of nobler name  
And richer blood than they.  
My faith would lay her hand  
On that dear head of Thine,  
While like a penitent I stand  
And there confess my sin.

And then something else. At the foot of the cross there stands a Roman soldier, a centurion, utterly amazed by what he has seen for the last six hours. He's standing, Mark says, right in front of Jesus. What would we have expected a Roman response to be? Yet another religious loony, yet another Jewish maniac who acquired a following for a season and then gets his comeuppance? Many thought that.

He would have been in charge of a group of soldiers, you understand, who had been given the task of executing these three men, including Jesus. He stands at the foot of the cross, and he says, "Surely this was the Son of God."

We must be careful, I suppose, not to be carried away by these words, because for a Roman soldier the term "Son of God" would have had a different meaning from its meaning amongst the Jews. Perhaps for a Roman soldier it meant no more than that the gods shone upon this man; and yet, perhaps the death of Jesus touched him in an extraordinary fashion.

He had been in Jerusalem, you see, and probably been there for some time and had heard all kinds of stories about Jesus, and perhaps had even heard Him on occasions, and even watched Him. His men would have reported to him what had happened in the preceding hours — how, you remember, they had stripped Him of His garments, and they had put a purple robe on Him and a crown of thorns pressed down upon His head, and a reed in His hand. And they mocked Him, and some went up and spat in His face. And how they had marched Him, carrying that beam, through the streets of the Via Dolorosa towards Calvary; how they had conscripted a man to help Him carry that beam. And then he'd been there when they had removed Jesus' clothing, and they nailed Him with hammers

and nails, His hands and feet, to that cross, and as He hung there naked before the world. And he says now, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Waves of sound had cascaded all around the cross. He'd heard them - some of his own men joining in the taunts of Jesus to come down...the Jewish authorities, the priests mocking Him. And he couldn't take his eyes off this man — dead now, hanging there on the cross — transfixed by what he had seen and heard, and saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Do you know what this man had heard from the lips of this one crucified on the cross? Do you know what the centurion had heard? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He heard some of the sweetest things being said — to take care of His mother, and, finally, after hours of silence, this incredible cry of dereliction - not in anger, but in faith, as He cites the words of a psalm.

But it was the way He died, Mark seems to say to us; it was the way He died. It was how He died; it was the fact that when the centurion who was standing right in front of Him saw the way He breathed His last — as though Jesus took hold of death and pronounced His victory and triumph over it, and breathed His last as an act of willful obedience on His part. He'd never seen that before. Surely this was the Son of God.

He'd never seen Christ raise the dead; he hadn't been there when Jesus had preached that extraordinary sermon on the mount; he hadn't seen Jesus walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee; he hadn't seen those multitudes being fed with a few loaves and fishes being multiplied over and over and over; all he had seen was this bloodied corpse, and the way that He had died.

Surely this was the Son of God. Surely this was the Son of God. It's as though the centurion was saying that in all the splendors of Rome, and all the glory that he had witnessed in Roman emperors on great days of celebration and victory, and all of the pomp of Rome, in all the travels that he had engaged in as a career soldier (it's said you could ride a horse for six months and still be within the Roman Empire)...but he had never seen anything like this. Surely this was the Son of God.

"When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride."

And because of the hour, and because it is a high day and the Sabbath is beginning, there is a man (actually there are two, but Mark only mentions one here), Joseph of Arimathea, in an act of extraordinary courage — and Mark seems to want us to see the act of courage that it was, because he "summoned up his courage" to ask Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus, to bury Him...to bury

Him.

He is on the Lord's side, do you see? That's what Mark wants us to see. This man, Joseph of Arimathea, in this moment of absolute darkness, with all the hopes and dreams that had been placed in Jesus of Nazareth, and He's dead now...and Joseph says 'I'm on the Lord's side. I don't care what happens; I don't care what the consequences may be.' He summons up the courage, and he goes to Pontius Pilate and he asks for His body, and He's buried.

And Mark is giving you...through all the little clues, saying 'Come back next week...' because he's saying there are women there, and they note the place where He was laid. They're not going to go to the wrong tomb. They note the place where He was laid.

I wonder tonight if all of you, every single one of you can say from the depths of your soul, "Surely this was the Son of God. He died for me. He died for my sin and my guilt, and my shame."

Let's pray.

*Father, we stand all amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene. We thank You, Lord, for this extraordinary act of love on Your behalf: that You would give Your own Son; that You would abandon Your own Son; that You would pour all of that wrath upon Your own Son for us. Help us to take it in. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction.

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

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