

Gospel of Mark - Christmas: Jesus Dies

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[0 : 00] So, page 1023. So, from verse 33, At the sixth hour, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabaxanai, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When some of those standing near heard this, they said, Listen, he's calling Elijah.

One man ran and filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. Now, mate, leave me alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down, he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry, and saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was the Son of God.

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and the younger of Joseph and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs.

[1 : 13] Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. So Christmas is all about Jesus being born, right?

Well, look at verse 37. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Here we find Jesus not in the cradle, but dead on the cross. Well, you say, where's the story about Jesus being born in a stable, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger?

Let's do that story. We like that story. Please, can we do the Christmas story? Well, you may have noticed that Mark's Gospel doesn't include anything about Jesus' birth.

There's no mention of angels appearing to Mary and Joseph. There's no account of the shepherds and the magi who brought gifts. We read nothing about the escape from King Herod, who had ordered the killing of all the baby boys.

[2 : 40] Mark has nothing to say about the birth of Jesus. Instead, he jumps straight to the last three years of his life. In fact, he dedicates almost a third of his book to the death of Jesus.

Why does he do that? Does Mark not like Christmas? Was he a bit of a Christmas scrooge, a bar humbug? I'm not going to write anything about the Christmas story.

No, Mark wants us to see that the reason Jesus was born was to die. For Mark, the centre of the story is not the cradle, but the cross.

You see, the crucifixion, the death of Jesus, is the climax of the Christmas story. Without the death of Jesus, there is no Christmas story.

So as we come to see the death of Jesus, we're going to look at three things that will help us to celebrate Christmas better.

[3 : 50] Instead of the light coming into the world, we're going to see darkness over the land. And instead of finding a baby wrapped in cloths, we're going to see the tearing of a curtain.

And instead of shepherds coming to worship, we find the confession of a soldier. So three things, darkness, the curtain, and the soldier.

First of all, the darkness. As Jesus was dying, something extraordinary happened. Verse 33. At the sixth hour, that's twelve midday, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.

That's three in the afternoon. So for three hours, when the sun was at its highest, and when the sun was at its brightest, the whole land went completely dark, pitch black.

One moment bright shining sun, the next complete and utter darkness. Why? What did it all mean?

[5 : 14] Well, we don't have to think very hard to associate darkness with evil and disorder. Do you remember the creation story?

This is what it says at the very beginning of our Bible. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the face of the surface of the deep. The earth, in its unformed shape, was covered in darkness. Literally, it's telling us the earth was in chaos and disorder. And then God spoke into that darkness. And he said, Let there be light. And there was light. By God's power, the darkness was dispelled. And in its place, creation came about. And we see harmony. We see beauty. We see creation in all its perfection. And that's a picture of what we see happening at the cross. [6 : 27] Because again, at this moment, as Jesus dies, for three hours, darkness descends again, look at verse 33, over the whole land.

Evil and disorder seem to rule. We have witnessed the false charges. We've seen the unjust trial, the beating and the mocking. The guilty Barabbas is released. And now the innocent Jesus dies. And as we look in on this event, as the darkness comes down, it's as if darkness has won. Satan and the evil powers of darkness seem to have defeated and destroyed God's King. The light that came into the world has been extinguished. Chaos and disorder rule. But look what happens on the cross. At the ninth hour, the darkness is lifted.

[7 : 43] The light returns. The sun begins to shine. You see, just as God spoke into the darkness of the disorder and created light, so at the cross, Jesus dispels the darkness of evil and disorder.

To all looking on, this seems the end of a life. But at the cross, Jesus shows his mighty power. He shows his victory as he defeats Satan and the powers of darkness. Through his death, the Bible tells us that he overcomes the chaos and disorder. Through his death, he defeats Satan and evil and disorder. and in its place and into people's lives who trust him, he brings about harmony and beauty. Literally, it tells us that he brings about a new creation into the life of each person.

And he brings about a new creation that is to come. Jesus dispels evil and disorder. [9 : 04] But that's not the only darkness. As Jesus dies on the cross, something else terrible happens. Verse 34.

At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabbatani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why have you left me? Why have you rejected and abandoned me? The Father who had said, you are my Son whom I love.

Now, at the moment of his greatest need, the Father turns his back on the Son he loves. and Jesus is left alone on the cross, isolated and shut out.

Why? What did it mean? Well, listen to the prophet Amos. Here, the prophet is speaking of God's coming judgment.

[10 : 16] And this is what he says. You can see it on the screen. In that day, declares the Lord, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

Centuries before Christ came, Amos spoke of God's coming judgment and these are the kinds of words he uses to describe what that judgment would be like.

He is describing a day when God will judge the sin in this world and the rebellion against him. It's a picture of God's judgment against people like you and me.

And now, as Jesus dies on the cross, the darkness falls in broad daylight. At noon, there is complete and utter darkness and Jesus cries out from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus is absorbing the darkness of God's anger and judgment. Jesus is taking my sin and your sin on himself and as a result, he is shut out from God.

[11 : 32] He has been abandoned by God and rejected. One author has helpfully put it like this. He describes it, he says, at the ninth hour, when the darkness lifts.

We'd expect that God's judgment will have fallen on the people who are killing his son. But when the light returns, only one person has experienced God's wrath, his own son.

Jesus suffers the anger and judgment of God for us, so as the darkness falls, Jesus is saying, I am the one who has come to absorb the darkness for you.

You see, we think of the Christmas story, we think of the lights, we think of the angels coming in the brightness to announce the story. Well, at the cross, the light of God shines in its most brilliant and awesome way.

and here the light comes down and Jesus dispels the darkness of evil and disorder and he absorbs the darkness of anger and judgment.

[12:58] This is what we are celebrating at Christmas. Second, there's the curtain.

for those watching Jesus die, well, they can see nothing good in the death of this man. Verse 35, when some of those standing near heard this, when they had heard Jesus cry out, Eloi, Eloi, they thought, oh, listen, he's calling Elijah.

They didn't quite hear what he said. Elijah, you remember, was the great prophet from the past who they thought, well, if he cried out to him, he might come and rescue him. Verse 36, so one man ran and he filled a sponge with wine vinegar, that would be something to try and waken Jesus up a little bit, and he put it on a stick and he offered it to Jesus to drink.

Now, let's leave him alone, let's see if Elijah comes down to take him down, he said. But Elijah doesn't come.

Jesus must die. There is no rescue for Jesus. Verse 37, and with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

[14:25] The creator of the universe dies. He's and as he dies, to everybody who's looking at him, they see it all as useless and pointless, a complete waste of time.

But only a few hundred yards away, something supernatural happened as Jesus breathed his last. Look at verse 38, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Why? What did that mean? Well, two things. First, this curtain in the temple was a constant reminder to people that they were separated from God because of their sin.

You remember back to the story in creation, to the garden of Eden? Do you remember what happened to Adam and Eve when they rebelled against God? They were literally shut out of God's presence.

They were banished from the garden of Eden. And two angels with flashing swords were put at the gate to stop them getting back into the garden.

[15:48] And it acted as a huge sign that said to them, no entry, stay away. And so throughout time, the temple curtain was a reminder of all of that.

You see, at the centre of this great temple was a building, not unlike, if you could imagine, this building here, or this hall that we're in. It was called the most holy place.

It was beautifully decorated with colours and images that reflected the garden of Eden. And together this holy place represented God's presence.

It was somehow to take people back in their memories and their thoughts to the perfection of the garden of Eden where God lived with his people. But at the entrance to this most holy place was this large big curtain.

So if you could imagine a big curtain stretching all the way across this room. It was a huge curtain, an inch thick, solid material, 30 feet long by 30 feet high.

[17:04] And decorated all across this curtain were images of angels. The symbolism again was crystal clear, reminding them of the angels that guarded the way back into Eden.

No entry. It read like a big sign to the people, keep out, stay away, you're separated from God. Sinful people can't meet with a perfect and a pure God.

Darkness can't come into the light. You see the consequences of rebelling against God means we can no longer live with him and enjoy him.

In fact, to meet with God as we are means we would die. His purity is so great, his light so brilliant it would consume us.

And there is nothing that we can do about that. God is to God but look what happens when Jesus dies.

[18:12] Verse 38 the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This is something supernatural.

No human being could rip open this curtain. It was too big, it was too thick, it would take days to get some kind of cutting implement to try and tear this curtain.

But all of a sudden it is torn from top to bottom, ripped apart. This is an act of God. This is an act that is coming down from heaven, from top to bottom and it all happens just as Jesus dies.

And we've got to remember that as we see Jesus die. He is taking the place of you and me. Remember what he cried out?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? On the cross he's taking my sin and your sin. And as a result of becoming like us, he is shut out from God's presence.

[19 : 20] He is, if you like, put beyond the curtain. Jesus was the only one who was pure enough, the only one who was good enough to live with God.

He was the only one who could enjoy that intimate and perfect relationship with the Father. But now as Jesus dies, as Jesus takes our place, he is the one separated from God for us.

And his cry of agony from the cross reflects the torment of hell itself. Jesus is plunged into the darkness.

But wonderfully, incredibly, as Jesus dies, the curtain is torn open. The symbolism is crystal clear. As Jesus has been shut out by the Father, so the way is now opened up for us. The sign that read, keep out, stay away, is now ripped apart so that we can enter in.

[20 : 37] Remember back to the beginning of Mark's Gospel when Jesus was baptised? This is what we read. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open.

Heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. Literally, the presence of God coming down.

And that's the same image that we have here with the curtain. It's the same words that Mark is using. He is saying the curtain is torn open. Heaven is being ripped apart.

The entrance into the presence of God for all eternity is made available. God is coming down to you. Where once we were separated, we are now welcomed.

Where once we stood in fear, we can now come without fear and enjoy God and live with him in all his purity. at Christmas we so often think of Emmanuel, God with us.

[21 : 53] At the cross, Emmanuel, God with us becomes a reality. The Spirit of God comes to us to dwell amongst his people.

God is with us now. He is present in the lives of those who love him and trust him and heaven itself is torn open so that we can live with the Father forever.

This is what we are celebrating at Christmas. and then third we have the soldier.

Many people witnessed the death of Jesus. Over the weeks we've been looking at the soldiers who beat him, the crowds who insulted him, the religious leaders who mocked him and then the women, verse 41, who had cared for him.

But as Jesus dies on the cross, there is only one who has been changed by Jesus and that's the soldier, verse 39.

[23 : 08] And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the son of God.

Here's this great commander, the one who's in charge of all the soldiers. He's the one who's in charge of this execution.

He's been there many times up to this hill. He's witnessed many other people die these terrible deaths. But for this time it's different.

he has heard the cry of Jesus, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He has seen how Jesus died as the darkness fell for three hours over the whole land and as he stands in front of this bloodied, beaten and dead body, as he gazes at this body in front of him, stretched out on the cross for all to see.

[24 : 15] He says, surely this man was the Son of God. His confession is a statement of belief.

He has come to see amongst all the crowds who shout and roar and mock him, he sees who Jesus really is. Do you remember how Mark's gospel opens up?

The very first verse of Mark's gospel, it says this, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark has been telling us the whole way through his story that Jesus, the Son of God, the God man, is the good news. Jesus is the good news.

He is the Son of God, but for him the good news reaches its climax, not in the cradle, but on the cross. This is where we see Jesus in all his glory, in all his magnificence, in all his beauty.

[25 : 31] So this Christmas, my encouragement to us all is this, is to come like this soldier, and not to look into the cradle, but to stand as this soldier did in front of the cross.

Look at that bloodied, beaten, and dead body. Look at him with his arms stretched out. And as we do, see the darkness that has been dispelled.
see the evil that has been defeated. See Satan destroyed. And see the curtain torn in two. See heaven being ripped apart, and his people being welcomed in.
Stand before the cross. And like the shepherds and the magi who came to worship the Jesus who was born, stand at the cross.
and worship the Son of God who was born, but died. This is what we are celebrating at Christmas.
[26 : 46] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.