

Mark 15:1–39

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- [0 : 00] With Jesus full-grown, prepared for ministry in the middle of his life, Mark doesn't have time for the birth narratives. And it also begins with a sense of pace, as we have seen throughout this fall.
- There is a pushing of movement in Mark, 41 times using the word immediately, as if the writer is intent on pulling you, the reader, along.
- Mark's gospel, a great read for people in a hurry. But then we come to chapter 15, and the pace seems to slow, and in fact, we come to the last 24 hours of Jesus' life, the writer is suddenly unhurried.
- He's insistent that we are present at every scene, and he enables you, the reader, to listen in. On each conversation, the literary framework even changes.
- He places all the events now between two evenings. It's as if he is one of those friends you know who asks you, hurry up, get dressed, we've got to go.
- [1 : 30] And you're in such a rush, and not knowing what for, until finally they sit you down. Well, this afternoon, Mark has sat us down.
- This is what he was in a hurry to get to. And now here, he settles in to a life given over to death in the course of two evenings.
- Look at the literary framework back in chapter 14, verse 17. And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. You've arrived at what is known as the Last Supper.
- And following our own text, verse 42 of chapter 15, And when evening had come. He's now moving into his burial.
- And it's almost as if Mark is allowing the light of the movement between one evening to the next to carry you in an unhurried way through the death of Christ.
- [2 : 44] Chapter 15, verse 1, you actually arrive, and he shows you that as soon as it was morning. In our own text, verse 25, he wants you to know that he was crucified at the third hour, as if you are slowly working your way now toward what would be nine o'clock in the morning.
- Later, in verse 33, he wants you to know it's the sixth hour, or high noon. And he travels, as you travel with him, you move from the firelight in the chief priest's quarters to the sunrise in 15.1 to the crucifixion at nine.
- And now noon, when it ought to be as bright as the day would be. And he tells you that at this moment, darkness covers the whole land.
- And it is the ninth hour that he gives his final cry and expires. He has slowed us down the death of Christ between evenings.
- When one reads these last chapters of Mark over and over again, as I have done this week, one thing stands out about the reality of Jesus' death, and it's this.
- [4 : 10] The utter humiliation of it all. The indignities endured. The spiteful words that were expressed.

The unnecessary, visceral hatred that was given to him. In all of this, Mark has something for us to learn about the significance of his death.

The humiliation of Christ's death is framed in no fewer than 15 encounters enclosed between the evenings.

I hope you have your Bible open. And I hope you're able to follow along as I just narrate these encounters, because they fall like waves upon the soul, impressing upon the hearer the humiliation of it all.

Take a look at your text. Back in chapter 14, 32-42, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the failure of the disciples to watch and pray with Jesus in what was the hour of his greatest need.

[5 : 38] He moves from there to chapter 14, verse 44, and the betrayal of Judas, which is made all the worse by this kiss, this feigning love and sign of respect.

Followed by this, then, the indignity of the arrest by an armed crowd under the cover of darkness.

And Jesus' own words in 14, 46 are meant to call attention to their cowardice, for he had been with them day by day in the temple.

And they had never arrested him there. The indignity of this kind of arrest. In 14, verse 50, we have the fearful flight of all twelve, leaving him in hopes of self-preservation.

In chapter 14, 53-63, we see the false witness and testimony that comes at the house of the high priest. And what then must have been something we couldn't imagine being experienced by those who are being given over to death.

[7 : 07] A blinding of his eyes, either by a bag on his head or a wrap around his eyes. And the beating of his face and the calling out to him in darkness, who did it?

Prophecy to us. You know who hit you? What is his name? Call it out if you're able. And then, the evening light has now given way to darkness and then sunrise.

And there's Peter just before the dawn cursing almost as if he was to say, God, damn me if I am not telling you the truth.

I do not know this man. His trusted friend. The son comes up.

He's hauled over to Pilate. And we have Mark recording in chapter 15, verses 1-5, this stupefied amazement of Pilate at Jesus' complete lack of effort of bringing any argument at all that might preserve his own life.

[8 : 28] What an idiot he appears to be. In 15, 6-15, then it cascades to the venomous cries of crucify him from the crowds.

And then in verses 16-20, it's followed by the physical and emotional abuse that's levied against him no longer by the religious leaders, but by the Roman authorities and their soldiers who have brought him, notice, back in private into the palace.

And there, they begin to mock him, to spit on him, to feign worship to him, to fall before him, to hail him.

hell no. And then, if that isn't enough, when they parade him out in public, they put on a face of care and concern for him, compelling a passerby to take his cross for him, and to offer him something to drink as if they might somehow deaden the pain under which he is presently walking.

The compassionate, false care in public after what they had done to him in private.

[10 : 05] and he sees it all. Jesus experiences it all. what do we say about the shame of nakedness and the casting of lots for your clothing?

15-24. Or the derision and the self-righteous judgment that was pronounced on him by the passers-by who are wagging their heads as if to say, you get what you deserve, you had this coming, it didn't have to be this way.

The joining in the same by the religious leaders 15-31 the reviling voice of the convicted criminals who warranted death and were hanging beside him 15-31 and then the gamesmanship and the sporting play that the passer-bys had with him after he cried out in a voice that was on the edge of life and death they want to offer him more wine so that they can play with him a bit longer.

If we can just prop him up and keep him alive a little bit who knows what we'll see next perhaps Elijah himself would even come to rescue him. And then to the reader the most humiliating act of all concerning his death comes from his own lips.

It's the declaration of someone who knows they have been abandoned by God. My God my God why hast thou forsaken me?

[12:16] What an irony. Two times in the gospel once at his baptism the heavens themselves were torn open and the voice of God descended to the land of humans and said this is my son.

son. Then that great pinnacle moment at the transfiguration Jesus with his trusted few going up into the presence and the pantheon of God and being covered in the midst of the cloud and again this reaffirming voice that speaks of his own servants behold this is my son and now his own voice in the midst of the darkness trying to penetrate back through my God my God why have you forsaken me?

The humiliation of it all and what are we to do with it? I think Mark has written in a way to help three different kinds of people I'm sure he helps those who are biblically literate some of you here would be helped by the way he's crafted his language and rooted it in Hebrew text but not all not many of us are familiar with the connections of Mark's narrative and how they would be heard from the lens of the Hebrew words so he'll give help in a second way not to those who are familiar with ancient text but he gives help to those who need something immediate from the present context something that would be the news of the day and he does that not from

Hebrew text but from Herod's temple and then finally the narrator's voice will insert the significant words of the centurion for if you're not helped by Hebrew text and you're not helped by Herod's temple perhaps you'll be helped by this man on the street who ends by giving him a title of honor well what is the appeal that Mark makes that would help you understand the death of Christ from Hebrew text interestingly three times in this narrative sequence he makes an appeal to one psalm and if you're not familiar with the Hebrew scriptures you'd never pick it up and most of us wouldn't but some of you might be familiar with it take a look at Mark's words in verse 24 where he says that there is a dividing of his garments among them casting lots for them that's actually rooted in psalm 22 verse 18 by the time you get to verse 29 it says those passed by derided him wagging their heads and saying save yourself that also comes right from psalm 22 but verse 7 and then the linchpin of them all

Jesus his own words my God my God why have you forsaken me in verse 34 are the opening line of psalm 22 in other words when Mark is helping his readers understand the death of Christ who was Jesus and does he still matter he appeals to some and says on the basis of his death in conformity to David's pattern you might be helped so let's take a look psalm 22 just to show you that the connection is there and it's interesting that he opens with a quote from psalm 22 verse 18 in other words he opens in the middle of the psalm and nowhere in the death sequence of Christ in Mark 15 does he quote or allude to anything past verse 18 he works his way back from verse 18 to the beginning but in verse 18 we read in this psalm of David that dogs encompassed him verse 16 that evil doers encircled him that he saw himself as his hands and feet had been pierced although he could count all his bones that he was being stared at gloated over and that his garments were divided among them and for my clothing they cast lots that's an ancient word from the anointed king who was to be

[17 : 46] God's deliverer of his people David take a look back at psalm 22 and verse 7 where here he is describing himself as something almost now less than a man and indeed think of those humiliations that Christ endured we don't treat men like this even those who are condemned to the death penalty he says in verse 7 I'm like a worm I'm scorned I'm despised I'm mocked they make mouths at me they wag their heads and then he puts their voice he trusts in the Lord let him deliver him let him rescue him for he delights in him this is the sentiment that David had as God's anointed king that the deliverance he was working was completely rejected the sufferings of the

Christ and then the pattern of course goes all the way back to verse 1 of psalm 22 where he opens with my God my God why have you forsaken me Jesus uses these words to identify his death with David's pattern so that we might begin to understand that the kingdom of God comes through a savior who is not unfamiliar with sufferings sufferings even unto death death that God would redeem people into relationship with him through one who underwent death like this and indeed by this time you ought to be wondering well what is what else is in psalm 22 and interestingly it's the latter half of the psalm that begins to give way probably into next week's text on the resurrection but David went on from that state and in his prayer of unbelievable humiliation cries in verse 4 19 that

God would not be far off that he would come quickly verse 20 that he would deliver his soul that he would save him that he would rescue him and then verse 22 in the confident assertion that God will answer David writes I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation I will praise you in other words I will come out of this death to give salvation to those who trust in you he says in verse 24 that God heard him when he cried to him he says in verse 29 that the prosperous of the earth will come to worship him worship the one who went down to dust even the one who could not keep himself alive verse 31 they shall all proclaim his righteousness to a people yet that he has done it what are you to make of the humiliations of Christ well according to

Mark you are meant to connect them to the promises and the prophecies put forward by David in Psalm 22 and to understand that the Christ the anointed the one who would bring you into a relationship with God while victorious over death will himself have suffered a most humiliating death Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 22 and interestingly the writer to the Hebrews picks up on this in Hebrews 4 or 5 where he says that in the last hours of Jesus' life he offered up to God loud cries and groanings prayers to be delivered and the writer to the Hebrews says and he was heard having learned obedience through his sufferings God hears him and will raise him that you and I might have life in him well I don't know we've been asking now all these weeks who was

Jesus and does he still matter for those of you who are familiar with Hebrew text or biblical text that ought to be enough to bring you to the cross and to begin following the one who fulfills this word I'm sure it won't be enough for all fortunately Mark is aware that many of us haven't read the Hebrew Bible to make all those connections let alone be able to pull the one psalm so he says fine you don't want to look at ancient text let's look at the present context let me take you to Herod's temple verse 38 of Mark 15 and he says and the curtain this is at the time of his death in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom what an editorial comment now remember Mark wrote at a period of time where as his gospel is being circulated hundreds of people were still alive thousands even who would have been familiar with the events so if he's just somehow grabbing this editorial comment for his own purposes he would have been shown to be a fraud they would have said that's ridiculous the curtain was never torn but the fact that he places it in here is an indication that it really happened that when

[23 : 57] Christ died the curtain in Herod's temple was torn in two now what does this mean well this would have been the news on the street the temple was the fulfillment of words that began all the way back in exodus 26 where there was the construction of a tabernacle and at that time there was to be a curtain that separated the people from the place where God atones for sin where the mercy seat was where the sacrificial blood of the animals was to be continually spilt this curtain hung on gold clasps it was woven fine of fabric purple and blue it was embroidered with cherubim these creatures that would have been glorious to look at these winged creatures signifying that that was the holiest of holy places in all the world that was the one place where God had blood sacrifice to turn away his wrath from the sins of his people herod long long after

Solomon's temple and the second temple builds a temple for the Jews of Jesus's day to worship and it is this curtain that is torn literally the same word that was offered back in chapter one when it says the heavens themselves were torn open and God descends in a voice to say this is my son we don't have any great sign in the heavens at the close of Mark's gospel no the news on the street was clear when Christ died the curtain in the temple was torn which is a symbol that the separation that existed between people and God and the necessity for further blood sacrifice was now complete in other words that this death was the death of all deaths so that your death might not have hold on you in his life this is what Mark is wanting those who are not so familiar with

Hebrew text to take hold of believe on the basis of Herod's temple and what happened what an incredible incredible sign that the barrier was taken away that a new way was established between sinful humanity and holy God that Jesus blood was the perfect sacrifice of all sacrifices and that just as the heavens opened that we might begin to recognize his coming so the curtain is torn that we might recognize the fulfillment the end of the sacrificial system who was Jesus he was the one who in his death did away with any barrier between your sin and God's righteous judgment and that forgiveness is offered to all who will place their trust in his righteousness life on the basis of the temple well you say

I don't like symbols like that and I don't want all the suffering of the Hebrew text just just give me a man on the street well okay Mark says verse 39 and when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last he said truly this man was the son of God here is a title of honor we'll make sense of it in a minute but notice the text says that when he saw that in this way he breathed his last well how did he breathe his last well according to the text in verse 37 he uttered a loud cry and breathed his last in other words this centurion had seen hundreds and hundreds of people die by crucifixion and when you die by crucifixion you die by asphyxiation you cannot any longer breathe you suffocate not so with Jesus his death he raises himself up on the cross and rather than dying by asphyxiation dies with this incredibly loud cry which is humanly impossible and we know from other writers that his cry was it is finished this victorious triumphant interpretive word on his death and when the Roman centurion saw that in this way he died he knew at least this this death is unlike any other death

I've ever seen that might be all that he means by saying truly this man was the son of God now I know much has been made in Christian circles over the centuries that here we have a centurion who has full blown understanding into the sacrificial death of Christ and this is his testimony and witness that may be so but we do not know it doesn't mean that he was he knew he was God and he knew all of that the way you might know it if you'd been raised in a church and everything or that it was a direct correlation to mark 1-1 where we're going to read the gospel of Jesus Christ the son of God as if the whole thing makes absolute perfect sense perhaps but you need to bring some balance to this thought in the church that has run for so long namely the title son of God in its plural form sons of

[30 : 09] God does not always refer to God in a deified state that in the old testament you find it in Job to refer to angels or messengers that in its singular sense you find it in 2 Samuel to refer to David or even Israel that in Jesus' own ministry he appeals to the phrase son of God from the reference in a psalm to indicate why they shouldn't crucify him or stone him at that time for blasphemy as if he had made himself out to be God he said wait a minute you can't stone me for making myself to be God out to be God because I've used the phrase son of God doesn't the psalmist write that we're all sons of God well if that's the case then how in the world we'd ever expect a Roman centurion to have put the whole theological thing together in a moment's notice is a bit beyond me but this we do know that this word this title given by this man is truly significant he is saying nothing less than this something supernatural that I do not understand is being played out or waged out beyond the veil in the land where the gods dwell and that this man's death is somehow connected to something larger than any of us could understand that's what he's saying the title of honor the death of Jesus something supernatural is being played out on the stage of human history

Herod's temple something that symbolized the separation of all humanity from the living God has now been taken away Hebrew text this man's death is the fulfillment of that which was patterned in the first Messiah David and it indicates that his sufferings are that which bring life to others who trust in his name and so we come to you and me who was Jesus and does he still matter we've seen this title of honor Herod's temple the Hebrew text we've heard from the man on the street he gave us the news from around town he asked us to peer into prophecies long ago written down he gave us words that we might read he gave us a voice that would signify he gave us a symbol that would tell us separation is no longer here and so

I ask you as evening falls who do you say he was will you be like Peter in his early strong days I don't need you Jesus let's get that clear you need me and I'll be there for you will we be like Judas in his betrayal days I don't want you although I will happily feign a love for you will you be like the religious leaders who hold text in their own interpretive hands I will not bow to you or like Pilate I am amazed at the stupidity

I see in you or the crowds I would crucify you and use your name in vain as an indication that I can throw you aside like your name is what I use when I'm cut off in traffic or the passer by I will mock you and those who follow you I will lend my voice to words that spite you if you were to walk the streets today I would spit on you I will live my life in opposition to you or are you willing to say

I will come to you and embrace this most terrible event between the evenings that the darkness of your own night would be the light of my own life and I will gladly follow you his death between the evenings Mark has been in such a hurry to get you here he'd have you stay a while our heavenly father we thank you for your word we ask that as we give ourselves to the consideration of it you would make men and women in this auditorium born again that we might love you and cherish you in the cross and in your son in whose name we pray amen why don't we stand and together lend our voices in praise to his work oh to see the dawn of the darkest day

[37 : 07] Christ on the road to calvary tried by sinful men torn and beaten then nailed to a cross of wood!

this is power of the cross Christ became sin for us took the blame for the wrath we stand
forgiven at the cross at the cross oh to see the pain written on your face bearing the arms