

# Mark 15:33-39

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Chapter 1, verse 1, Mark has emphasized Jesus as the Son of God above all the other categories and titles that he has had given to, or not given to him, but declared over him or affirmed throughout Mark's gospel account.

And this title, the Son of God, refers to two things, really. The kingly rule over all things by God's Messiah, by Jesus. But also it's a fulfillment of the suffering servant vision that is in Isaiah's prophecy.

The suffering servant appears four times, and it is a picture of this person who will suffer vicariously for his people. The suffering servant will deliver God's people from their enemies, but also deliver God's people from the just wrath of God.

So these two things, the kingship of Jesus, or the kingly rule of Jesus, and the suffering servant, they go hand in hand. So Mark wants us to know that when Jesus is confessed, the Son of God, or in this case, when he is confessed to be the Messiah, Mark wants us to know that Jesus is the Son of God, the suffering servant, who is king.

And not king over a region, but king over all. And yet the interesting thing about Mark is that time and time again throughout the gospel account, nobody gets this.

[ 1 : 3 3 ] Son of God is declared right from the beginning of chapter one, where Jesus is getting baptized and the heavens are torn open and God declares, behold my Son.

Jesus is, he is called the Son of God by demons that he is casting out. He goes on to the Mount of Transfiguration. And again, a cloud that represents God, but God himself, he declares, behold my Son, listen to him.

And time and again, people don't quite grasp what this Son of God title really is. The closest we get seems to be Peter in chapter eight of Mark's account, where Peter, he affirms that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

He is the Son of God. But then when Jesus begins to share about how this, that his destiny is headed for the cross and that he'll suffer, what does Peter do? He says, listen, you're out of your mind.

You don't know what you're talking about. And Jesus rebukes Peter for it. The high priests accuse Jesus of blasphemy for affirming that he is the Son of God.

[ 2 : 4 7 ] Nobody seems to understand this title. So we have finally reached the climactic moments of Jesus' life before he dies.

And only now will we see somebody fully grasp this understanding of who Jesus is as the Son of God. In today's text, Jesus will die.

He will give up his spirit in a great and loud anguishing cry. And with this death, only until Jesus dies, will we see the fullness of this title, the Son of God, come to pass.

And we'll see how specifically this title, the Son of God, in a very wonderful, real, very relevant way for us today, will address three of the most deepest and significant needs that you and I face.

And really, it's the crying heart of our culture and all people the world over. And to help us understand this, we're going to look at three details found in this passage.

[ 3 : 54 ] The first is the darkness. We'll see that right off the bat. A darkness comes over the daytime. The second thing we're going to explore is the curtain. It says the curtain was torn from top to bottom.

And the final bit that we're going to focus on is the centurion right at the end in verse 39. So we'll jump right into it. If you have a Bible, turn with me, follow along with me.

There's a stack of Bibles at the back at that table. Don't worry about interrupting. Get up and grab one at any time and follow along. So we'll look just at verse 33 here.

And when the sixth hour had come, that's about 9 a.m., there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It's a rather peculiar detail that the darkness should envelop the noon hour when Jesus died. It seems like Mark throws random, random details into the narrative.

[ 5 : 02 ] And unless we investigate or ask the question, what's going on here, they seem very random. But what we are seeing here is Mark constantly, and this is throughout Mark's gospel, he is constantly alluding to and pointing backwards to parts of the history of Israel, parts of the Old Testament that Jesus will fulfill in his death.

So, you know, I was doing research and studying for this this week, and a lot of commentators are bending over backwards trying to explain this darkness at noon.

Maybe it was an eclipse, maybe there's clouds that covered the sun. They're trying to explain this in a sense from a very rationalistic point of view, and I appreciate that.

But Mark here isn't so concerned with explaining kind of why this happened or how it happened, whether it be by eclipse or cloud cover or whatever it may be.

Mark is concerned with connecting Jesus to the fulfillment of the Old Testament. And in this darkness over the land in the daytime, something that should not have happened or happened very rarely, whatever it may be, Mark is pointing back to two key texts in the Old Testament.

[ 6 : 25 ] The first one is from Amos. We're going to be, I'm not going to ask you just to write through your Bible. If you want to, please do. And if you want some of these scripture verses, I can give it to you after.

I'd be happy to. But we're going to be back and forth a whole bunch this morning. So the first allusion to the Old Testament is from the prophet Amos, chapter 8. And just before we read the passage, Amos is a prophetic book in the Old Testament, and it details the judgment of God upon the evil committed by the enemies of God, but also by God's people themselves.

But God is just, and he is a judge, and he doesn't, he is not going to forever overlook the evils committed by anybody, be they his people or not.

So in Amos, chapter 8, it reads this, starting in verse 9. And on that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

Verse 10 says, I will turn your feasts into mourning, all your songs into lamentation. I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head. I will make it like the morning for an only sun, and the end of it like a bitter day.

[ 7 : 44 ] So much of that, those two verses, are found throughout our short section in verses 33 to 39. I will make the sun go down at noon, darken the earth in broad daylight.

The bit about feasts turning into mourning, remember this is happening at the Passover. This is like the high point of the Hebrew calendar. And right at the end, I will make it like mourning for an only sun, and the end of it like a bitter day.

Judgment is coming upon Israel, God's people. In a very real way, in a very real way, everything that God has prophesied has come to pass.

Jesus was never a plan B. He was always a plan A. So it was always God's will for Jesus to die upon the cross, and to suffer everything that he is suffering.

But notice that sinful, evil people that should have turned their face towards God have been the very means by which God, Jesus, is strung up on a cross.

[ 8 : 53 ] They have, like the prophets and servants of old, have disregarded God's servant. And what have they done?

They have condemned and persecuted God's anointed. And we are seeing this now. There's great judgment on the people. And this darkness is just that.

God is judging the land because of the evil that was committed to Jesus. Jesus. It's a very real picture of judgment here, and it's captured in Amos chapter 8.

Now we could spend some time unpacking that, but I want to actually focus a bit more attention on the second Old Testament illusion. And I'd argue that, at least for this, it's maybe a bit more significant.

And that comes from, the second illusion comes from the Exodus. The Exodus comes up time and time again in the New Testament. If it's been a while since you've gone through the Exodus, give it a shot this week because we see allusions all through the New Testament, and we see it here.

[ 9 : 56 ] So if you remember, the Exodus was when God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery. They cried out to God 400 years in bondage, and God delivers them from slavery, and he forms them into a people.

And he makes a covenant with them on Mount Sinai. And this relationship that existed from Abraham, in a sense, it gets codified.

It is solidified at Mount Sinai. But if you remember, during the deliverance, there was judgment upon Egypt. Time and again, Pharaoh would not let God's people go.

So God would send a plague, and it would afflict Pharaoh. Pharaoh would say, sure, go, please, please. And then his heart would harden, and then each plague would get progressively heavier and worse and worse and worse.

And if you remember, and bonus points, I'm not going to ask anybody to say it out loud, but if anybody knows what the ninth plague was, it was darkness that covered the land.

[ 11 : 02 ] And the darkness that covered the land preceded the tenth plague, obviously. It's the ninth plague. And what was the tenth plague? It was the death of the firstborn. And what we have here is a reimagining, in Mark's Gospel, a reimagining of a new Exodus.

That God is doing a new thing that's very ancient and old. And he's pointing back to his deliverance being the same as the deliverance that he won for his people Israel from Egypt.

So the darkness that we see, what's interesting too is that it's happening over Passover. The darkness that we see is preceding the death of the firstborn.

And Israel was delivered from the death of the firstborn. Why? Because a lamb, God commanded Moses to tell the people to slay a lamb, to take the blood and to mark it on their doorway so that death would pass over.

But now, now it is not a lamb that was slain so that death could pass over and the people of God would be delivered from slavery, in this case to sin.

[ 12 : 08 ] But it was God's own son. So where the Exodus was regional and specific to mortal people, this new Exodus, this greater Exodus, is for all people.

And it includes God's own son, Jesus Christ, fully man and fully God. The new and greater, the ultimate lamb who was slain for the sins of the world.

And here, this darkness, it's like it's tipping us off. It's alluding to. It's saying, remember the Exodus? Something is happening like it, only way greater.

And this is what we see. The ninth plague is darkness. And it precedes the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn. And we see it here, right in our text.

By the Son of God shedding his blood, the blood of the Lamb who was slain, a new, a greater Passover deliverance was happening. A Passover that would release many from slavery to sin and death.

[ 13 : 15 ] A Passover that would lead to the formation of a new and more expansive people of God. This is, it's remarkable that God delivers Israel from Egyptian slavery, brings them to Mount Sinai, and in a sense makes a covenant with them.

And like I mentioned, like solidifies his relationship with Israel. And this is exactly what will happen. And we'll see this, it's picked up in Acts chapter 2 especially.

By the way, a little plug for the fall. We're going to get into Acts, a sermon series come September. So I don't know, I mean by the pace we're going, maybe we'll hit that Acts chapter 2 in like October or November.

But we'll see that in Acts chapter 2 that we're going to see God again make a covenant with people that previously were under bondage to sin.

So Jesus here is the Passover lamb of all Passover lambs, the ultimate Passover lamb. A Passover here that Jesus is inaugurating would provide entry into an eternal family.

[ 14 : 24 ] And this is really what the beauty of the Exodus was. I mean, sure it was the deliverance of sin, or deliverance from slavery from Egypt, but really the beauty of the Exodus was God forming a people, forming a family.

It's a beautiful, beautiful picture of what has happened. And this is what God is doing here with Jesus. Does this not, in a sense, address a universal existential need in human beings?

Is it not that the human condition desires to belong and to have a place in a family? We see the great tragedy of when that doesn't happen.

When there is a lack of belonging, a lack of a place, you don't have a place in a family. And it's a problem. That's why, in a sense, divorce is such a sad thing to have happened to a family.

Because it tears the fabric of a family apart. And yet, all of us desire to belong. I mean, we live in a time where inclusion is, it seems like it's the buzzword.

[ 15 : 37 ] To exclude somebody is to kill somebody. Not actually, but in a sense, to exclude them, it means that you're denying something that they desire more than anything else.

And there's something real about that desire. Now, it's been elevated to an ultimate end, and that's problematic. But it's still, in a sense, it communicates the heart of people that desire to be connected forever.

And this is what God offers, and this is the hope that the gospel brings. Because, my first year at the downtown church, I was the youth leader.

And we had a young guy who, his parents were Southern Baptist missionaries. And they were Southern Baptists. Like, they were from Memphis, Tennessee.

They, Chris, the dad, he was a chaplain at Ottawa U. And he was, I mean, I talked to him a couple weeks ago. He's a lovely guy. His son, sorry, previously to them coming to Ottawa, they were in Brazil for like a decade.

[ 16 : 47 ] And when they were in Brazil, they adopted a young Brazilian kid who was otherwise destined for street life. And Michael grew up, and he's, by that time, you know, he's, I mean, he doesn't know Portuguese.

Like, he's very, very American. Because that's a family he was adopted into. And we were talking about adoption because the scriptures speak of adoption in a very wonderful way.

That we are adopted by God into his family. And I said, Michael, tell me. And I didn't prep him for this. He was like 13 or 14 at the time. I didn't prep him. I said, Michael, you're adopted by your parents.

Is there anything that you're going to do to Chris or Melody where they're going to say, you know what, that's it. Like, we're pulling the plug on this adoption thing. And right away, he's just like, are you crazy?

Of course not. They're my parents. Like, there's belonging there. And it's a beautiful thing that nobody could rob Michael of. This belonging, a part of his adopted family.

[ 17 : 52 ] And this is exactly what is happening here. That God, through Jesus, is making a way for us, by faith, to be included into God's family. He is answering a deep, deep, deep longing of the human being to belong.

But it's not just that God invites us into a family and we have a place in the family and we belong. But he also, he addresses another issue that we have is this desire to be connected to the transcendent.

To be connected to God in some kind of way. To have a taste of eternity. To not just live in the here and now. And turn with me now to verses 37 and 38.

And we're going to take a look at the curtain and explore what the curtain has to tell us. Verse 37 and 38 read, Without exploring the significance of the temple, the Old Testament allusions, once again we have a seemingly random detail in the narrative.

And what's interesting is that we've left the temple behind in the narrative. Chapter 12 was the last time we really saw Jesus speak of the temple. He was in the midst of the temple. And he condemned what the temple had become because of the neglect of the religious leaders.

[ 19 : 20 ] And we haven't really heard from the temple at all. And now just a random, again another random detail, pokes its head into the narrative. And this is specific to the curtain that separated the rest of the temple from the most holy place.

So what is happening here? Again, we're going to take a look in the Old Testament. I will be fairly brief. Two spots. And there's a lot of spots. But I'm going to focus on two spots.

Genesis chapter 3 reads this in verses 24 and following. Actually we'll just read verses 24. A little background first. Adam and Eve, if you remember, they're in the garden.

They sin. God curses them and kicks them out of the garden. It's horrible. That's like the nutshell of nutshells of Genesis chapter 3. But what happens in verse 24, God ensures that Adam and Eve will never again enter the garden.

And it reads here in verse 24 of Genesis chapter 3. God drove out the man. And at the east of the garden of Eden, he placed a cherubim.

[ 20 : 30 ] That's like a warrior angel. A cherubim. And a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. It's significant.

Eden was the place where God's presence was. Where man enjoyed God's presence. So he is expelled never to enjoy God's presence again.

And this imagery, this warrior angel cherubim imagery, it gets picked up again. When God is giving examples of construction for the tabernacle and later the temple.

But here is a passage detailing construction of the tabernacle. Specifically, the curtain that separates the temple from the most holy place.

And it reads this in Exodus 36, 35. He made the veil, this is the craftsman, He made the veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.

[ 21 : 34 ] With cherubim skillfully worked into it. He made it. This is just a detail of the temple curtain. And what did God want on the temple curtain embroidered in?

A cherubim, a warrior angel with a sword. It's very interesting imagery. The Bible is full of it. And again, we have the cherubim, which now we can kind of piece two and two together.

It's this picture that represents man's eternal separation from the presence of God. So the curtain in the temple is more than just a part of the tapestry, so to speak.

It represents forever that mankind is not allowed back into God's presence. But it also shows us that we were made for God's presence.

That we were made to know and enjoy the transcendent God. To connect with Him. To go deeper into the spiritual journey and feel connected with something or someone bigger and greater than now.

[ 22 : 43 ] Someone that is eternal. So it's very interesting that in our day, if you check out the various podcasts where it's just long form discussion.

Oftentimes there's a conversation around psychedelics. And for folks that grew up in the 60s and 70s, you might be familiar with this. More than us folk that were born in the 80s or beyond.

But it seems like psychedelics are making a comeback in a big way. And at the heart of this is this desire, in a sense, to have a spiritual experience.

To go beyond the here and the now. To touch something that we can't see in the material world. To connect with the eternal. And it's so remarkable that we can explain God away.

We can enjoy the material world and rationality. All very good things. And say that what we see is what we have. And yet there's this yearning in the human heart to connect with something beyond the here and now.

[ 23 : 53 ] The movies that do the best in the theaters are not the indie films that win Oscars for best whatever. It is these wild production superhero movies or these grand fantasy adventures.

And of course the production is fantastic and it's exciting and it's an experience. But all of these are otherworldly stories. That are not based in this world we live in.

But open our mind to this idea that there might be this expansive universe. Or these crazy mythical characters. And again there seems to me that there's this longing for something greater and eternal and bigger and spiritual.

I have friends who have cousins who lost a brother in a really bad accident. And it was very tragic.

They decided to go to a medium to converse with him. These are people that are not religious at all. They don't really have a faith so to speak. But it couldn't sit well with them.

[ 25 : 01 ] That here and now the imminent, what we see is all that there was. They had to seek something more. They had to connect with their brother who was gone to the next life.

Whatever that next life could be. This great need, it is undeniable, it would seem. That we would get to know this transcendent God or this force.

Whatever it would be. The Bible calls it God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And this curtain, in a sense, is proof that we, no matter how hard we try, can only know God on his terms.

And his terms are purity. His terms are perfection and complete integrity. And that's something that we can't achieve.

This is why the curtain was torn when Jesus died. I'll read it again, verses 37 to 38. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

[ 26 : 07 ] And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The curtain's torn when Jesus dies. The son of God comes and he sacrifices himself.

And the curtain, this random detail in the narrative, is that the curtain is torn. But not that it's just torn. It's torn from top to bottom.

It's a very high curtain. It's as if God himself, from the very top, from heaven, a hand on each side, ripped it apart. As if to say, this whole business now of you not connecting with me, it's done.

God has made a way through Jesus to meet one of our deepest needs, to connect with the transcendent, in this case, God, and to know him in an intimate way.

So through the death of Christ, we have a new family of deep belonging. We have a place. We are formed into a new people.

[ 27 : 06 ] And we also have an invitation to enjoy the presence of God. There's a third thing that I wanted to draw our attention to. And I think this is an absolutely beautiful picture of the grace of God.

And it's with the centurion. So verse 39, if you want to follow along with me, it says this. And when the centurion who stood facing Jesus saw that he died in this way, sorry, saw that in this way he breathed his last, the centurion said, truly, this man was the Son of God.

The centurion was very likely the captain of the death squad that escorted Jesus from the place of his scourging to Golgotha. He was a hardened man.

He would have participated in the humiliation of Jesus, very likely. He would have been very accustomed to seeing death, maybe countless crucifixions.

Who knows? He was a Roman, which meant that he had a devotion, a divine devotion to Caesar as a God-man, but also probably to a number of other household gods as well.

[ 28 : 25 ] He in every respect was an outsider, an enemy to both God and to God's people. And yet, this confession that the centurion makes is the first one that we see in Mark's account that understands Jesus in his fullness as the Son of God, as the King who was slain for his people, the suffering servant who died on behalf of his people, and it is in this way that the centurion confesses Christ.

It's incredible. There is no person that could be more of an outsider than the centurion. Nobody. There's nobody that Jesus interacted with from Pilate to the religious leaders to the random people in the Galilee or the people saying, Hosanna, Hosanna, as he entered Jerusalem.

Nobody could be farther from God in a very real way, in a most comprehensive way, than the centurion. And with Jesus' last breath, the fullness of this term, this title, Son of God, is on full display.

That only when we see Jesus upon the cross, only in his passion and death, is he fully revealed as the Son of God. And God is revealing himself to this centurion.

I mean, for a Roman to believe that a God would be worthy of praise for dying for people is hogwash.

[ 30 : 00 ] It is antithetical to Roman spirituality, if you want to call it that. And yet his eyes are opened. Not to Peter. Peter, Peter's not the first one.

It's given to this revelation of who Jesus is in his fullness. It is the centurion. It's an incredible picture. And in a sense, it's a great hope for all of us.

That no matter what we have gone through, or matter how far we are away, or a great hope for family members who do not know the Lord, that they are not that far off compared to the centurion.

It's also a beautiful picture of how the Son of God and the Gospel turns foes to friends. How does God deal with his enemies? Dies for them.

And what's remarkable is that, I mean, Rome was an enemy to the church. But it was only 300 years, which, I mean, it's a long time, but it's not a long time in history.

[ 31 : 02 ] Rome becomes a Christian nation. And there's junk with that. I get it. But the Rome that crucified Jesus becomes a country, a city, state, whatever you want to say, that embraces Jesus.

Jesus turns enemies into friends. And that friendship is extended to you and I. And I'm telling you, if there's ever a message that was so important today, with all of the polarization, all of the mic drop moments of, you know, owning whatever side that you seemingly hate your enemies, how does Jesus respond?

He lays down his life, and he makes his foes his friends. The Son of God came to make enemies friends.

It's a beautiful thing. Friends, this is the Gospel of Christ. It really, truly is. Jesus is the Son of God. And only in this Gospel is there a real movement from estrangement to family, from isolation to belonging and communion, from enemies to friends.

In the one act of Christ dying on the cross, the Son of God reconciles, redeems, restores, and repairs. The example, more than Peter, I mean, the disciples, more than James, more than John, apart from Jesus himself, the example that's held up for us to emulate is the centurion.

[ 32 : 39 ] So I'll say this in closing. Friends, let us look upon the Lamb who was slain. Let us look upon Jesus Christ and confess him and say, truly this is the Son of God.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the way you fulfill Scripture and how Jesus isn't just a mere fulfillment, but he is the culmination of all of Scripture.

Lord, we thank you that he through his death has formed a new people, the church. Lord, that we can belong and have a place that we can enjoy your presence and we can be reconciled also with those that are our enemies.

Lord, help us to have a real heart like the centurion to behold who you are. Lord, we ask that by your Holy Spirit that you would daily reveal more and more of who your Son is to us.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.