

Mark 15:16-39

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[0 : 00] Well, if you could open a Bible and join me on page 853, that's where we will be spending our time.

Page 853. And as you know, the story of Scripture has been our script, but the story of the Chronicles of Narnia has been our muse for the last month.

And three weeks ago, we heard God singing creation into being. His voice was powerful as it was beautiful. And he saw everything that he made and said, behold, very good.

And then two weeks ago, we caught word of this horrible curse that had entered into God's good creation. Humans, unfortunately, had become traitors. And they found themselves in a cursed world where it is always winter but never Christmas.

And then last week, we were given a vision of hope, of light coming into the darkness, of God on the move, of a child that would be born. And we realized that maybe spring might come after all.

[1 : 07] And this week, now, we come to the climax of the story. In Narnia, the climax is a death. An unlikely and unexpected and horrible and tragic yet life-giving death.

In Narnia, the white witch is about to take the life of one of her most recent subjects, Edmund. He was a son of Adam who had a weakness for Turkish delight. But he had become a traitor, not through his might, but through his desire.

And the white witch raises her arm with a knife in hand, about to strike the fatal blow, when she's suddenly interrupted by the great lion, Aslan. And he takes her aside, and he proposes to her a deal that she cannot deny.

To free Edmund, Aslan offers his own life in Edmund's place. The white witch eagerly accepts this deal, thinking that Aslan must be a fool.

Does he not know that this will mean her ultimate victory forever? But what she doesn't know, as the story goes on, is that his death ultimately will break the power of death, and it will lift the terrible curse on Narnia.

[2 : 24] And this is symbolized in the story by the breaking of the stone table, which Will just talked about. After Aslan's death, the sacrificial altar of the stone table is no longer needed, so it's broken in two, like the tearing of the temple curtain.

And there's this question that is asked by Susan, where she says, What does this mean? And Aslan responds this way, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. He says, It means that though the witch knew the deep magic, there is a magic deeper still, which she did not know.

Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back in the stillness and darkness before time dawned, she would have read there a deeper incantation. She would have known, and here's the key part, that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the table would crack, and death itself would start working backward.

I love the way that Mark chronicles this in his description of Jesus' life. Throughout Jesus' life, death looms large. It takes up some 40% of Mark's story of Jesus is just devoted to his death.

[3 : 45] And from the very beginning, he depicts Jesus as a man who is heading towards death. And so his ministry is cast as not something that is separate from his death, but rather something that echoes his death at every moment.

Everything in his ministry, from his casting out of demons, to his healing of the sick, to his stilling of the storm, to his forgiving of sins, is a display of the power that he has over all the forces of darkness and death in the world.

A power that will ultimately be displayed in his death on the cross. And so we see in Jesus' ministry, death starts working backward.

We are told in Mark chapter 10 that even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

And so Mark, in the way that he depicts Jesus, is he depicts Jesus as somebody who comes into a world living under the shadow of death, but he comes as someone who is going to give his life in death, deal with death, to serve and to serve the one who has power over death, and to free those who are bound by the fear of death.

[5 : 01] And the marvelous way about the way that Mark tells the story is that the second that Jesus dies, he breathes his last breath. He hangs lifeless on the cross.

Mark invites us to stand with a centurion, a Roman soldier at the foot of the cross, facing the body of Jesus, and realize that we are standing at the very pivot point, the center of salvation history, when death is starting to be reversed.

And I think this is why Mark, in his telling of the passion narrative, in the way he tells the whole gospel, he waits until after Jesus dies to describe the very first time a human being ever says that Jesus is the Son of God.

At the cross, Mark wants us to know that we are meeting the eternal Son of God. At the very beginning of his book, he said Jesus is the Son of God.

And then in Jesus' baptism, in his transfiguration, we hear a voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved Son. And when Jesus encounters people that are possessed by demons, the demons tremble before the Son of God.

[6 : 08] But nowhere does a normal human being confess that Jesus is the Son of God until he dies. No human being sees what heaven and hell see until Jesus dies.

And the point for Mark is that there is something about Jesus' death that reveals who he truly is. There's something about his death that shows that this is God at work.

There's something about his death that shows this is no ordinary human power, all the pomp and circumstance of a king. No, this is the power of love and mercy being poured out unto death, freeing those who are under the slavery of death.

So in verses 37, we read, And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 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.

[7 : 20] It's amazing. Amidst a crowd of mocking voices, there is one mocking voices, there is one dissenting voice that day. And put yourself in the shoes of the centurion, standing before the cross.

It's a scene that he would have seen hundreds, if not a thousand times in his life. He was a Roman soldier. He knew the drill. He knew it was part of his job. He knew it was his duty to serve Caesar and his governors, get rid of the criminals, silence the insurrectionists, and make an example of the false messiahs.

But there's something this time that was different for this soldier. The sky was dark in the middle of the day for about three hours. It was like the ninth plague in Egypt before the death of the firstborn. A terrible sign of God's judgment upon the land. And out of the darkness, a man cries out, not to his mother standing by, not to guards for mercy, not to friends and family, but he cries out to his God. As a righteous man who believes he's suffering unjustly, he cries out to God and says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then he cries out again in a loud voice, and he breathes his last.

[8 : 40] And the centurion standing there, he's seen people crucified before. This has been his job for many years, and he knows that people who are crucified normally suffocate to death.

They lose strength in their arms and legs, and they can no longer hold themselves up. Their lungs fill with fluid, and so by the time they come to their last breath, they do not even have strength anymore to speak.

They're just gasping quietly with no energy left to cry. But something was different with this man. He did not gasp.

He did not lack strength. He was not giving up in defeat. His cry was loud. It was piercing. It was an act of defiance, an act of submission, an act of love.

It's as if he did not need to be there, but he had chosen to be there. It was as if he had come on a mission, and his mission was to be there. It's as if he had wrestled with the one he was crying out to, Abba, Father, remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will be done.

[9 : 47] It was as if his cry pierced the soul of the centurion like a battle cry, like a victory had been won. And you can just imagine the centurion sitting there in the silence of death.

How can this be? How is this death different than all the others I've seen? Why is his voice still thundering in my soul like a voice I've never heard before?

Who is this man whose body lies lifeless in front of me? Who did I crucify today? A traitor?

No. A criminal? Certainly not. A Messiah? I don't know. A king? Well, he's not like a king I've ever seen before.

A son? Well, he did cry out to God. That was the only thing he said. A son of God? I mean, his voice did have authority like no one I've ever heard before, full of love and mercy.

[10 : 52] Did I just hear the voice of God? Am I staring into the face of God? The only thing he can think of saying? The only thing that at the foot of the cross he believes he must say.

truly this man was the son of God. There's something about his death that reveals who he truly is. And amidst a crowd of mocking voices there was one dissenting voice that day. And I guess one of the invitations of the gospel for us is to be a joyful, humble, dissenting voice at the foot of the cross. Thanks. Kiddos, we've got about one minute left. So finish up one minute and then I look forward to looking at what you've created. Let me finish with a story.

One evening I was reading Chronicles of Narnia, the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe with my son and daughter for the first time. This was about a year ago. And it was the scene where Aslan sacrifices himself instead of Edmund.

[12 : 08] And the way C.S. Lewis details the scene, he details it like the witch and her crew were not merely content to kill Aslan and get rid of him.

They wanted to mock him and gloat over him and show him to be a fool. And so they dance around him. They bind him with cords. They muzzle his mouth. They tie him to the sacrificial altar.

And all the forces of evil conspire to kill the king. And when he dies, they rush away as if they've won a definitive victory. And C.S. Lewis just pauses and ends the chapter.

And it was a shocking moment for my five-year-old son. He didn't see Aslan dying. He didn't see that coming. So we sat in silence for a few moments until eventually my son broke the silence and he said, Daddy, why did Aslan have to die?

He said, what do you think? He said, wait, Daddy, is Aslan like Jesus? Yes, Jeremy, he is. And then there was a long pregnant pause.

[13 : 13] And he said, Daddy, then that means I'm like Edmund. Yes, Jeremy, you are. We all are. We are saved because he did not save himself.

Oh, perfect redemption. The purchase of blood to every believer, the promise of God. And every offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus, pardon receives.

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