

Brought to the Light

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[0 : 0 0] Well, would you please turn with me in your Bibles back to that passage that we've read in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 15. We're going to work through a fair part of this chapter tonight, so there's not any one specific verse to look at, just to consider some of the people that are recorded for us around the death of Jesus.

Let's bow our heads in prayer, though, before we begin. Heavenly Father, as we come to this great passage of Scripture, that we've already spent time in this morning, we pray, Father, for your blessing and wisdom to be given to us.

May the Holy Spirit himself be at work here tonight. We pray that hearts will be opened, that you would enable particularly those who have not yet come to know you as a Savior, who have not yet come to know Jesus and find delight in him alone. We pray, Father, that you would open their hearts tonight, that you would be a good God and merciful in all of your ways.

And so help us, Lord, to look towards Christ Jesus for all of our salvation and our hope. And may we know the truth of God and the blessing of God alive in our hearts.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. So Mark, as he records for us the events of Golgotha and the crucifixion of Jesus, he gives us quite a lot of information about not only the events that have happened themselves, but some of the, what we could call, eyewitnesses to these events.

[1 : 3 3] It's like the other gospel writers, Mark is relying on sources, and he wants us to be able to have confidence in these sources. So when he tells us, for example, about Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus, he identifies Simon by saying he is the father of Rufus and Alexander.

And so presumably those reading this in the early church would be able to go and find Rufus and Alexander or Simon himself, but they would know who this was because of who he has said he is.

And so that lends us that confidence that Mark's intention is not to record a made-up tale or an imaginary story. He wants us to have confidence that this is history.

This is not only is it theological truth, as we were thinking a bit about this morning, but it's also historical truth, that these things really happened, and we can have some confidence in them as well.

I want this evening to look just at four of these people that he mentions around the cross and see what role they actually play in the events of the cross.

[2 : 4 6] The main thing, of course, is to see Jesus, because that's the point of all of the Gospels. The Gospels want us to see Christ, and therefore tonight what I hope we can do is maybe see Christ through the eyes of these other characters, and that we will be inspired to have faith and to trust in him because of what we read and discover.

Firstly, then, there are two robbers who are crucified with Jesus, one on his left, one on his right.

So Jesus is on a cross in the center. He is therefore presumably the main event. These two other people who are crucified with him are not as important.

They don't get inscriptions written above their heads saying what their crimes were, or certainly none that are recorded for us, just that they were robbers. We tend to remember the significance of them from another Gospel, which tells us about the interaction between one of the two who came to faith.

And that journey for them was in these last few hours as Jesus died on the cross with them.

[4 : 12] And there's that wonderful truth that's given to one of these men. Today, you will be with me in paradise. But Mark shares no such details. What he tells us is that Jesus was crucified as king of the Jews between a pair of thieves, who in one throwaway phrase, actually, Mark says, those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

This tells us a lot about the cross. One of the things I mentioned this morning was that the Father was present in all of this. that God's purposes are being worked out and fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus.

And the way in which Jesus is crucified between these two thieves is evidence of that.

It shows us the contempt that Pilate had for the Jews.

The way Pilate sticks up this sign it tells us that Pilate despised the Jewish people. There's no reverence in Pilate's sign.

[5 : 36] When Pilate says, this is the king of the Jews, he's really mocking, pouring scorn on the Jewish hope. And that's part of what was necessary in the crucifixion of Jesus.

That as he died, he was to be subjected to scorn. That's part of the cup that he has to drink. It's part of the experience that he has to endure at the cross dying in our place.

Because we deserve scorn. We deserve mockery. And we should remember that the cross is a place not where Jesus deserves these things but where we deserve them.

And so as we think about the cross we should think about what our own sinful shame deserves. The shame of our sin deserves public derision.

We are by nature rebels against a holy God who has made us and given us enormous gifts and great blessings and good things.

[6 : 55] And we have turned and we have spat in his face in our rebellion. We have chosen to say I will live as a sinner away from you. I don't need to follow you.

I don't need your ways. I don't need your laws and your direction for life. I will do my own thing. And increasingly in our day and generation that is becoming ever more prevalent.

Radical expressions of individualism. that we're seeing today are just an ongoing rebellion against God's pattern for human life.

And those who rebel against such a gracious God deserve shame. They deserve public humiliation. persecution. And so Pilate's attempt to humiliate the Jews tells us a little of what we deserve and a lot about what Christ has done for us.

Jesus is not as well that the actual crucifixion itself among these two thieves places Jesus among common criminals.

[8 : 19] And again this is part of the Father's purpose being worked out in full. It's not a coincidence. If you see in verse 28 missing in some of the earliest manuscripts so it's only footnoted in our ESVs.

But verse 28 it tells us this little phrase that this was done to fulfill scripture. The fulfillment of scripture is absolutely everywhere around the cross.

It's there as the soldiers cast lots for the garments of Jesus and it's there as he is crucified on the central cross between two common criminals.

You go back to the prophecies of Isaiah and you see there that Jesus was numbered in his death with the transgressors.

When Jesus goes to die for his people even that is not something that takes place in a magnificent hall. It's not something that takes place in a place of glory and triumph.

[9 : 29] It's a place of shame and derision. It's a place of scorning and mocking that belongs to common criminals. And there our Lord was rejected and died for his people.

God the Father was in all of this. These things happen by divine appointment. They are no mere accident and they're to tell us and to confirm to us what Jesus did at the cross.

He takes upon himself the derision that our sin deserves. He goes to die like a common criminal because that is what we deserve.

He becomes sin for us and is therefore experiencing the humiliation that the defeat of sin at the hands of God's wrath deserves.

It is an awful place. It is not a pleasant place because it is a place where sin gets what it deserved.

[10 : 43] The awful reality of course is that this points us towards the reality of sin itself in our lives if we find ourselves without Christ. If we find ourselves without Jesus then one day a day of judgment will come.

A day when our sin will catch up with us and there we would experience the lostness and the shame and the derision of going into a lost eternity away from God and the comfort and the peace and the hope of the new heavens and the new earth.

It is a place the Bible describes as the second death. It is an awful terrifying scene but some of that was poured out at Golgotha because at Golgotha Jesus tasted that rejection for us and carried away our sin.

But there is hope entangled in all of this as well because that day you remember there was supposed to have been a third insurrectionist a third robber a third murderer put to death by the Romans made an object of that derision and that's this man Barabbas and the great likelihood is it's not drawing an unfair conclusion to say this the cross on which Jesus dies is Barabbas cross he is the leader of the insurrection he is the one who belongs on that central cross that day and so as we think about the fact that Jesus is crucified among two robbers let us remember that Jesus takes the place of someone spared that Jesus on that day literally took the place of someone spared that Barabbas receives a second chance now it's interesting we don't know anything about him we can't say who else he is we don't know of any recording of anything more about him in the Bible or in contemporary secular records

I'm not sure Josephus I don't think mentions him he's one of the most famous authors on this event from outside of scripture but you have to wonder don't you what did Barabbas make of the second chance was he inspired by it to turn his life around did he go and find some miraculous good thing to do with the rest of his days did he devote himself to charity or did he squander the grace that was shown him that day did he continue in his path of sin and rejection of the authorities perhaps committing himself to that life of crime and finding himself ultimately defeated and futile Jesus took someone else's cross the just in the place of the unjust the innocent in the place of the guilty this is our king this is the one who today we have celebrated dying in our place and remembered that and the question for us therefore tonight is a simple one did he die for you did he take your place and the rejection you deserve the second group are the crowd and the priests and the scribes it's a crowd made up of probably local people

[14 : 29] Jerusalem at this point it's a very busy city it's full of people who've come to Jerusalem for the feast for the Passover and so the numbers in the city are greatly inflated it would probably be stretching things a little bit to say that this crowd are literally the same people who a week earlier have been acclaiming Jesus as the son of David the one who is blessed in the name of the Lord who comes to set his people free waving palm branches on their clothes before him as he entered the city on a donkey but nevertheless they represent the people of Israel and the world and they have an interesting thing to say to us Mark tells us what their cry is come down from the cross you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days save yourself and come down from the cross this tells us again a few things about people and what is happening at the cross one of the things it tells us is for certain that without the regenerating work of God and his grace in our lives we will not get what is going on here we might understand the facts and so we might be able to read a passage like this and say

Jesus was crucified we might be able to say it was an unjust death we might be able to repeat the theology and say well you know somehow God was dealing with sin in this and that's how sin is forgiven but actually at a deeper level there will be no embrace or understanding of this the people are like that unless God has begun a work of regeneration in us the things of God God's way of doing things God's word and his wisdom will often wash over us completely and so tonight I want to encourage you in this way that God is not tonight wanting you to be ignorant he shows you an example of a group of people who are perhaps aligned the same way you are perhaps impressed at the things Jesus is claimed to have done you who said you would destroy the temple and raise it up again in three days but who missed the point of his death you might say to yourself

Jesus is someone who is worth listening to someone who is worth following he's got wise things to say about how we should love one another he's got wise things to say about how we should forgive one another he's got wise things to say about how we should live sacrificially and show kindness to people in need you might say there's lots of good things about Jesus but when it comes down to the crunch when it comes to his death your response is well if you really want to impress me do something different and in fact what's going on here is people unwittingly I think are joining in the chorus of Satan and the fallen angels themselves because right back at the beginning of Mark's gospel somebody has said something similar to Jesus previously the devil has come to Jesus to tempt him and one of the temptations that was put before Jesus was to say simply this there is a quick way out the devil took him to a pinnacle of a high mountain and showed him all the nations of the earth and said to him all of this can be yours if you would just bow before me for a moment pay homage to me show your loyalty to my authority and Jesus of course rejects the temptation he dismisses

Satan's claims and locks himself in to the mission that's before him and this is the great temptation that's always before Jesus that somehow the glory can be achieved without having to do the hard difficult thing of the cross we'll believe in you if you'll show us the spectacle of coming down from the cross we'll believe you if you do something truly miraculous at this moment and that is don't die but rather choose to live and these words are echoing in the ears of Jesus as the darkness descends over him and the father's face is turned away there's an easy way out of this you can have our allegiance if just you would do the opposite to what you have agreed from all eternity to do if only you would avoid the shame and the derision of the cross then we would trust you and we would love you and maybe that's the kind of bargains you want to make with Jesus yourself today it's often is isn't it so often the way we treat

God we say well you give me something that I want some spectacle that I want to see some wonderful thing that's just going to be enough to convince me on my terms and then I will give you my allegiance and yet tonight what we're reminded of here is that Jesus demands our allegiance because of what he has done because he has already taken our sin upon himself and then gone to the cross and died in our place and risen again on the third day the victory is already his and we foolishly sometimes think that we can offer some alternative route the crowd you see they want the opposite of what God wants their hearts are not aligned to God's way and they long for something different but you know their jeers also tell us something of hope because at the cross and in the agony of the cross and in the agony of experiencing the rejection of the father the agony that finds its culmination in that verse we were considering this morning my

[21 : 00] God my God why have you forsaken me Jesus chose not to listen to the jeers of the crowd he chose not to listen to the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees he chose rather obedience to the mission that he had from the father and that tonight is where our salvation ultimately lies that Jesus did what was necessary for your salvation and mine that at the cross the blood price of salvation of forgiveness of atonement of propitiation the covering of our sin it was done in completeness by

Jesus and he chose to do it he chose at that moment not to unleash the legions of angels who are standing by perplexed that the son of God is about to go through all of this he chose not to abandon the mission that the father has given him and find an easy way out he chose to suffer and die in the place of his people this is my king this is the one who did this for me and tonight I would ask you would you want him to have done it for you do you want this gospel do you want this good news that Jesus laid down his life for his people there was also then the centurion and the centurion is here a Roman officer probably Italian probably Roman in fact from the city of Rome itself and Mark is it's interesting actually to read this because

Mark is writing probably in dependence on Peter's own eyewitness events of these events and Peter is probably ministering in Rome itself at this point and so Mark is writing chiefly I think for a Roman audience and so it's interesting that he highlights at the cross this Roman centurion and these Gentile Christians hear about a Gentile convert at the cross what Mark tells us simply is this that the Roman centurion believed the reason the reason we can say that is because the Roman centurion expresses a statement that nature does not reveal when the centurion says truly this was the son of God that's telling us something about his heart he is confessing the lordship of

Jesus he's probably a centurion who has been involved earlier in the day in the mocking of Jesus when he was handed over to the Roman garrison in the praetorium he's probably actually been there for part of the trial he's been standing close by Pontius Pilate all day and he's heard the trial of Jesus he's heard the allegations that were made against him he's heard the false allegations like Pilate he's recognized probably that there is falsehood and lies been spun by the chief priests who out of envy want rid of Jesus but what really convinces him in the end is not the unjustness of what he has seen in the trial it is the manner of his death he's a Roman who thinks the gods are untouchable a Roman who thinks that the gods are divine beings who live miles above us and we can have no interaction with them and they cannot be affected by the things that happen to us or the things that happen among us and yet here is someone who is accused of taking on himself the title of

God the divine title of being the son of God and yet he dies for his people he dies in such an awful way he at the end of it is convinced this is the son of God these are not natural words for that man to have expressed they're far outside his experience and so we have to ask what what's persuaded him what's changed his mind what's he recognized and he recognizes!

[25 : 51] simply Jesus that Jesus at the cross does something messianic that Jesus at the cross does something that matters something that demands his attention that demands his allegiance that demands things in his life not be the same again and he confesses truly this was the son of God and so in Mark's gospel we have a story at the cross itself of someone who came to faith seeing first hand Jesus death and tonight I would ask you can that be true of you and can it simply be true of you that someone would die for you and you seen them would say this is my saviour this is my

God this is the one whom I will trust this is the one to whom I will owe my allegiance in whom my faith will be placed is he for you is this Jesus for you there is one final group just to note in passing and again it comes back to this idea about the veracity of Mark's account if you wanted to write an account of something amazing you would not rely on the testimony of woman let alone Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the less these are not the people that you would put in there as your star witnesses to what happens next but there they are at the cross these poor neglected women from

Galilee who stay at the cross until the very last and they see Joseph of Arimathea come and take down and take down the body of Jesus from the cross and they see him wrap the body of Jesus in a linen shroud and take it a short distance away to the garden tomb and they see the stone rolled against it presumably they see other things as well the seal of Pontius Pilate put upon the stone they see the Roman guard and they go away from that place vowing to come back after the Sabbath to properly prepare the body of Jesus for burial and their intentions we can read in that their love their devotion to Jesus their confidence in his personhood that he was their friend their Lord whom they've ministered to and cared for already previously and now they want to do for him in death what they've done for him in life and what's remarkable is that

Mark chooses and again we can't say that this is Mark's doing it's God's doing so God chooses to rely on the witness of these worthless witnesses!

Women whose testimony can be refuted by the testimony of a man they can be overruled easily and what they claim and yet they are the ones who remember where the body of Jesus has been laid they are the ones who go early in the morning on the first day of the week and they are the ones who see the evidence of the resurrection they see the victory of Jesus over death itself and they go away and testify to this they tell the disciples and the disciples tell the world and so I want to encourage you tonight because these are some of the most I think interesting people at the cross people who feel themselves really worthless people who don't think of themselves as being the best communicators of the gospel the best witnesses for Christ they feel like perhaps they're not the most eloquent of speakers for the gospel they think themselves just truly as these poor women who have nothing to offer except perhaps they can embalm the body of

[30 : 46] Jesus in its grave and we are here tonight because they went and told Peter he is risen Peter who has denied Jesus and who has then restored I wonder tonight who will you go and tell who will you go and tell that you have seen the risen Lord that you have experienced yourself the resurrection of Jesus that there's good news to pass on to those who are seeking hope and salvation in this world let's pray our father in heaven we thank you that the cross happened we thank you for the integrity of the records that we can rely on that tell us about the death and resurrection of Jesus these are words that are written to assure us of the historical accuracy of these things and so on that simple foundation we can build so much for our own insight and understanding and I pray Lord tonight that that would truly be the case for people here that they would be able to see the relevance of Jesus that they would be able to see why it matters that

Jesus died on the cross for sinners and that in all of this we would be reminded of the grace that is to be found there that there people can come to a place where they can say truly this was the son of God they can find salvation and hope in that place of great darkness because the light of Jesus shines there and brings to light the hope of mankind we thank you for the woman who bore witness to the burial of Jesus perhaps in dismay but who a few hours later were transformed with the news of the resurrection the words of the angel he is not here he is risen embolden us in the same way strengthen us for your service and we ask this in Jesus name amen!

we're going to sing in conclusion in Psalm 126 this is the Sing Psalms version page 171 when Zion's fortunes God restored it was a dream come true our mouths were then with laughter filled our tongues with songs in you the nation said the Lord has done great things for Israel the Lord did mighty things for us and joy our hearts knew well restore our fortunes gracious Lord like streams and desert soil a joyful harvest will reward the weeping sower's toil that man who bearing seed to sow goes out with tears of grief will come again with songs of joy bearing his harvest chief I think that last verse maybe sums up the experience of the woman at the cross they went to the tomb with sorrow and sadness and yet they came back full of joy would that be true of us this night as well so let's stand and sing to

God's praise when Zion's fortunes God restored when Zion's fortunes God restored they both have been come to our hearts were there with laughter filled our tongues with!

songs anew the nation said the Lord has done great things for Israel the Lord did mighty his miles and joy our hearts new!

[35 : 24] Restore the fortune, gracious Lord, like streams in deserts fall.

Under the harvest will reward, the weakest storm is torn.

The man who bare him, seek to sow, calls out the tears of grief.

Will come again with songs of joy in his harvest sheep.

Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and always. Amen. I think there was one thing I forgot to intimate, that the session which had opened last night for the communion has now closed with the benediction as well.

[36 : 38] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.