

# Communion Sermon

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn with me in your Bibles back to Mark's Gospel, Mark 15.! We'll read again at verse 33.

When the sixth hour had come, that's about midday, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Well, let's bow in prayer. Heavenly Father, we are conscious this morning, Lord, that we do come to one of the most solemn and indeed weighty verses of Scripture.

It is, Lord, a mystery to us, the depths of which Christ experienced the forsakenness of God at the cross.

And so we pray, Father, that you would help us today to tread carefully in these verses. That you would give us something today of an understanding of the love and the obedience that took the Messiah to this place.

[ 1 : 36 ] And that we would be able to find comfort there. To know that our sin has been dealt with decisively, conclusively, forever.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. The story of the gospel that Mark sets out to tell, you can read it at the beginning of Mark's gospel.

He begins with these words, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is a story about this person, God the Son, Jesus, who is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity who is enfleshed and dwelt among us.

And at the core of it, there is one of, I think, perhaps possibly the most perplexing moment in the whole of human history.

That Jesus, who Mark has been at great pains to point out to us and to establish, is indeed the Son of God, utterly sinless.

[ 2 : 50 ] That he utters these remarkable words. That he takes on his lips the opening verse of Psalm 22. Words that he would have known since he was probably a child.

And that he cries out at this moment, acknowledging that there is more going on in the darkness of the cross than does immediately meet the eye.

You know, at the heart of this, there is the work of the atonement. The work of God setting us at peace with himself. And we therefore need to be sure of what is taking place here and what lies behind us.

There's two simple points that I want to think about today. The first of these is simply to recognize the facts. We have to just establish in our minds the facts of what is taking place at this moment. And then alongside that, we also need to think about the reasons for this. And what is actually going on here? Why does Jesus suffer and cry out like this?

[ 4 : 06 ] The first of these things is to consider the facts. The first fact is to recognize just who this is. This is Jesus Christ.

And as Marcus told us at the beginning of his gospel, this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And there's a lot of things that we can kind of derive from that, that we can take from that and understand with some certainty.

The one who says this is the sinless one. And that's quite a remarkable statement for us to think about because nobody else in the whole of human history has been sinless.

But the context here is really clear. Mark makes it very abundantly clear, in fact, that part of what's going on here is Pilate recognizes the guiltlessness of Jesus.

The whole context is one of false accusation. The chief priests and the scribes and the Jewish rulers have concocted charges against Jesus.

[ 5 : 12 ] Charges of blasphemy. Charges of insurrection and rebellion against the legal authority of the Roman emperor. Charges that are mounted up and that they bring in false witnesses to testify to.

They bring out a whole series of allegations against him. And yet Pilate is the one who has said, there's no truth in any of this.

They're words that are echoed, in fact, by the centurion. Truly, this was the Son of God. It's recognizing the special character and the uniqueness of Jesus.

And that uniqueness principally extends into his sinlessness. And so we can therefore be sure that the Bible's assertion that he was entirely without guilt, that he is entirely free under the law, that he has complied with the requirements of the law, is surely true.

Because nobody could isolate and identify an allegation of sin that would stick.

[ 6 : 30 ] Were one of us in that position, we can all put our hands up and say, truly, that would not be the case with me. Were I to be tried before any form of authority and my life to be examined, people wouldn't have to concoct false charges against me.

There are plenty things that are true and which condemn me. And I'm sure that today every one of us can say the same thing.

So Christ, the one who cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, is sinless. Which deepens the perplexity of what we're seeing.

Then there's also the fact that he is the Son of God. Again, the identity of Jesus as the Son of God has been the point of Mark's Gospel.

Mark wants us to understand that this person who is the focus of this proclamation of good news is none other than God the Son. And Mark is interested in the way he goes about this.

[ 7 : 43 ] If you read through Mark's Gospel, you can find numerous places where Mark is establishing the identity of Jesus. And he builds up to the same conclusion that John presents much more clearly in his introduction.

That the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. That the Word was the one who was with God from all eternity and who came and dwelt among us. And for Mark, the way he establishes that is showing the authority of Jesus as a preacher.

He does it in showing the miracles of Jesus and how that underscores that authority. How Jesus, on one occasion, says, in fact, what is easier to say to somebody, your sins are forgiven or take up your bed and walk.

And the people around him are astonished by this. Who can forgive sins but God? And Jesus has said to the man, your sins are forgiven. And then to show that he has the authority, he then says to the man, now you crippled man who cannot walk, take up your bed and go your way.

And the crowds are astonished. You've got a situation another time where the disciples are with Jesus in the boat going across the Sea of Galilee. And a ferocious storm has swept up. And the disciples are panicked.

[ 8 : 52 ] They're fearing for their lives. They can't bail the water out of the boat fast enough. And so they waken Jesus in a panic and say, Lord, don't you care that we're perishing here? And Jesus, with just one softly spoken gentle word, commands the wind and the waves to cease.

And instantly there is calm. And the disciples are left with the question, who else can do this but God? Jesus is, in fact, divine.

He has that authority. He has that demeanor about him. And then you come to the cross. And you see that this figure who has spoken of God directly as his father, and that's one of the things that the scribes and the Pharisees found so offensive, was that he would claim this particular relationship with God to call him father, a relationship that he shares now with his disciples and followers like us.

We can enter into that. But for them it's such a blasphemous thought that this, the Son of God, is now at the cross.

And here at the cross, God the Son somehow becomes an outcast from his father.

[ 10 : 24 ] So much so that, in fact, the fatherhood of God is no longer visible to him. Where instead of father, he says for the first time, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

In the darkness of the cross, the experience of Jesus is one where that relationship with the Father seems to have disappeared, vanished into the darkness, and we are left with something else.

Which leads us, in fact, to another conclusion about what's actually going on here, the facts of this. And this is not merely a moment of great injustice.

I think plenty of people, when they think about the story of Jesus, they would recognize the great injustice of it. There are plenty of people would recognize and say, well, Jesus was wrongly condemned. It was a sham of a trial.

Clearly, as Pilate recognizes, there's envy and bitterness that leads the Jewish authorities to this place where they would say, crucify him, do away with him, we don't want him. But there is more going on.

[ 11 : 46 ] As the disciples note, particularly Peter, for example, on the day of Pentecost notes, although human hands are instrumental in driving the nails into his body, although human voices have called for his rejection and for the crucifixion to come, although he is rejected by both the civil magistrates and the religious authorities, although he's rejected by Jew and Gentile, rejected by the whole of humanity, really, yet still, behind all of this, the Father is in direct control.

And we see that because of the way Jesus cries. There is a certainty that the Father is involved in this.

The forsakenness that Jesus is experiencing is not merely the forsakenness of human comfort. He experiences, for the first time, in the totality of his existence as the eternal Son of God.

He experiences forsakenness. He experiences an abandonment that is alien to his experience.

And so the facts, in a way, speak for themselves. Not the mere facts of the form of his death and the brutality of it and the shame of that place.

[ 13 : 27 ] And it was all of these things. We'll come to that tonight. But the fact of what is going on here, the central cross of Golgotha is occupied by the sinless one.

the sinless Son of God who is here because this is the culmination of his self-emptying to the point where the Father pours out upon him the wrath that sin deserves.

the settled, established judgment of your sin and mine.

And that's because we have to see the reasons for all that is taking place in this. The first of that is to recognize that this is the outworking of the covenant of redemption.

The covenant of redemption. And by that, I would say that the Trinity is therefore at work in this moment. The Father is here.

[ 14 : 45 ] And as Calvin points out, I think it's a wonderful reminder to us, we should not insinuate hostility in these events. It's a useful reminder to us because the Father here does not stop loving the Son.

The Father's love does not stop. but rather in the Father's eyes, this moment is in fact the pinnacle of the love of a triune God.

We know that because much earlier on in the Gospels, Jesus aligns himself with this destiny. It's at the baptism of Jesus where John even recognized, John the Baptist recognizes and says, you don't need to be baptized.

You have no sin that needs to be dealt with. You have no sin that needs to be recognized and washed away. You have no need of cleansing. In fact, I need cleansing from you. And John is obliged to baptize Jesus at his command.

And so Jesus at that moment aligns himself with his people. He's putting himself in the position where he is saying the fate of my people and the punishment that they deserve for sin, their need of cleansing, I will take upon myself.

[ 16 : 06 ] And as he comes out of the water, you have that wonderful image of the Trinity being present. Here is the Son coming out of the water, the Spirit of God descending on him like a dove, and the voice of the Father saying, this is my beloved Son.

It leads us to that conclusion, in fact, that what Jesus is doing at the cross is that moment where in the Father's purposes, his love for his Son is never going to be greater.

Because here, the Son is obedient to something that was transacted long before this world was created. That before the foundation of the world, the Father and the Son have entered into a covenant together where they have agreed that the Son will come and bear the sins of his people, that the love of God for his people will be revealed and worked out and manifested in its fullness because the Son will take upon himself their guilt, their sin, that which has kept them apart from God, that which has led us away from God and left us alienated from God, that the Son comes and takes all of that alienation upon himself and carries our guilt.

and you see that, the way that the Son comes to this moment. You see it in the Garden of Gethsemane. You see it as Jesus wrestles with the reality of the cup that is now before him as he begins to see more clearly perhaps than at any point previously in his life what is going to be involved here and he concedes and says, Father, not my will but yours be done. That recognition of the Father's will being enacted is Jesus keeping his side of the bargain. That God the Son agrees to complete what was agreed actually many, many, many years and millennia and aeons before.

[18:10] That he would come and bear the sin of his people. And in this, the Father then delivers this verdict on the Son condemns him.

And somehow the Spirit is also at work because in the experience of Jesus despair does not set in. We should remember that, that Jesus as he goes to the cross he is not left in a position where his faith fails.

this is not a cry of offense against God. This is not the cry even of an atheist who has come and curses God's existence.

This is the words of David from Psalm 22 that are words that are filled with faith because Psalm 22 is a psalm that is full of the expectation of some future deliverance that are taken on the lips of Jesus.

And so when he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He's not abandoned his confidence in the purposes of God. He hasn't abandoned his confidence in the reality of God's faithful outworking of his sovereign covenant towards his people.

[19:34] And so the faith of Jesus is very clearly on display. But the experience is different.

And that's where we learn as Christians, in fact, in our experience, when we go through times of suffering, we are learning, in fact, not merely something that will deepen our own faith and our dependence on God, but we are learning something of the experience of our Savior.

That that's actually where our faith really is deepened and strengthened. That when we go through times of suffering and where we are perplexed and where we are confused by these experiences, we come to a place of settled confidence in our Father.

And we remember just why that is so. Because although there may be nothing in Jesus' experience here that suggests the Father's love, all of the comforts are stripped away, the disciples are gone, they've abandoned him, the women are far off, when he needed God the most, there was no answer for him.

In fact, there's this very clear sense that Jesus comes perhaps even to this place of utter realization of what it is to become sin and be abandoned by God.

[20:56] yet there is nothing to suggest that Jesus forgot his role. There is nothing here to suggest that Jesus forgot his people.

There is nothing here to suggest that Jesus forgot us. That in the darkness we can say that the words that were cried out are not words of interrogation of God.

They are words rather of astonishment at what God's hand is doing upon him. And so today we come to the Lord's table and we're coming with this eternal security now worked out for us.

And it's an eternal security that found its beginning in the ages before the foundation of the world.

That the Father and the Son have already agreed to do this and the Son now has completed the task that was agreed before the foundation of the world and so therefore now we can have this absolute certainty about, for example, the Lamb's book of life.

That that today is where our assurance is rooted. That our assurance today is now resolved in the obedience of Jesus at the cross. And today we might be sitting here coming to the Lord's table and thinking I am so unworthy.

[22:21] There may even be some of you sitting upstairs today who are not going to come down because you are a believer but you feel unworthy. Well stop. Because Jesus has done it all.

Jesus is the worthy one. And that's the whole point of our faith. It's not for us ever to get to a point where we can say well now I'm worthy enough to come. Now I'm worthy enough to take the step in obedience of Jesus.

No, the whole point is to recognize Jesus has done what he said with the Father before the foundation of the world that he would do. He has come and he's borne our sin.

He's experienced the forsakenness that sin deserves. He's experienced the horror of hell. And that's how the Apostles' Creed puts it.

That it wasn't at his death that he descended into hell but that at the cross he experienced the hellishness of sin's curse poured out in its fullness upon him.

[ 23 : 26 ] And today therefore we have no business saying to ourselves that we're not yet good enough to come to the Lord's table. The Lord's table is for those who recognize Jesus is the one who was.

Jesus is the one who has satisfied God's requirements that sin be punished. And he is therefore worthy. It leads us into a daily security in knowing that.

It leads us into that place of daily having that comfort of knowing Christ has done it for me and therefore I am safe now. There's another reason as well though.

There is in fact in this fully not only the eternal consequences of the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son but there is now also the consequences of the covenant with Abraham.

This two-fold outworking of the purposes of God. So there's this eternal perspective to it that the Father and the Son have entered into before the foundation of the world and then after the world is created and after Adam has sinned we begin to see the outworking of God's purposes and that is worked out in the promise given to Adam that there would be a redeemer the seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent it's clear in the promises given to Abraham that he would have an offspring a seed the promises given to David that one day one of his descendants would sit forever upon his throne the fullness of that covenant is now also being worked out in full and so Jesus goes to the cross as a sacrifice for sin.

[ 25 : 15 ] The Father here is offering up his Son as a sacrifice for sin. I mentioned last night that where Abraham when he was tested by God was called out upon to stop to halt the sacrifice of Isaac now no such halt is announced.

God the Father offers his Son. And what's actually going on here is that sin is now being covered. Part of the whole framework of the dealing with sin in the Old Testament was that sin needed a covering. You find it in a very interesting way in the Garden of Eden as Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden and God has told them that the seed of the woman will one day bruise the head of the serpent.

And then God does something very strange. God covers Adam and Eve with new garments that are made of animal skins.

Animals there have been sacrificed. Blood has been shed. Bodies have been broken so that sin would be covered. And that narrative in fact continues right the way through the Old Testament through the entire sacrificial system that where sin needs to be covered over where sin needs to be dealt with there has to be brokenness of a body the shedding of blood.

[ 26 : 41 ] And so the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament are all there teaching the children of Israel confirming rather to them that this is how sin needs to be dealt with. And now Christ is made sin in the darkness of the cross leading up to this cry of dereliction and the cry of forsakenness.

What's leading up to that is the reality of Christ finally and fully being made sin for his people. The debt of the debt of sin is cast against him and he carries it.

And in that moment as the sacrifice he satisfies divine justice experiencing the grief and the sorrow of hell itself. Experiencing the forsakenness the abandonment of God and the lostness of hell all to cancel our debt of sin.

We should be clear that what's not happening here is that Christ is wrestling us away from an angry God. He's not getting in the way of a God who hates people.

What he's doing is he is acting out the love of God for sinners by dealing with the reality of divine wrath. The fullness of God's hatred of sin becomes his experience.

[ 28 : 34 ] And just as with a hyssop rod or a hyssop brush the high priest on the day of atonement would have gone into the holy of holies in the temple or the tabernacle and there sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice over the mercy seat, there is a barrier emerges.

The Ark of the Covenant is the box that contains the law and the covenant. It contains the box of manna that was recorded from the time in the wilderness. It contains Aaron's rod that had budded. Symbols of God's people provided for by God. God's and over this there is the mercy seat where God sits enthroned. It's interesting that where the blood lands is between the presence of God seated above the mercy seat and the people of God represented within the Ark of the Covenant underneath.

the shelter of the blood over the mercy seat shields the people under it from God's wrath. And that is what Jesus is enacting at the cross.

He is paying that final sacrifice to satisfy the just and righteous requirements of God's anger towards sin. And why is he doing it?

[ 29 : 48 ] Because God loved us. He already loved us. But his sin needs still to be dealt with.

Our sin rather still needs to be dealt with. And so for us as Christians today we have this comfort that we are justified because God has kept the requirements of the covenant.

He's kept the requirements. So God's punishment for sin has now been meted out. I mean the covenant has consequences. A covenant is a legal framework that has consequences for breaking it.

God's and the reality is we're not able to be true worshippers of God in our own strength. We could never keep the terms of this covenant. But what God has done in Christ is he has found a way for that to take place.

The stipulations of the covenant are now fully met. The price is fully paid. And we as the beneficiaries of Christ's covenant keeping for us are now welcomed into the fullness of the experience of the love of God.

[ 31 : 18 ] We're welcome into heaven because of this. Because of what he has done. There is one last point I want to make as well.

One last reason for this. And it is to explain the totality of this. The simple truth I suppose is this. That not everyone agrees with what I've said today.

Some people think that the death of Jesus is solidarity with us. That the death of Jesus is not substitutionary.

It is one where he stands alongside us and enters into our experience. But that somehow something on our part is still needed.

do you that for most Christians, purgatory awaits.

[ 32 : 41 ] There's some extra work that you have to do to make up for the sins that you have committed that needs to be cleansed and washed away. And we need to remember that there is actually another cry after Eloi, Eloi, Labah, Samachdani.

And the second cry is the one that comes after Jesus has drunk the sour wine that was offered to him. It's a moment at the cross where he's liberated, he's free to cry out. And he wants his disciples to have no doubt about what's in the loud cry that Mark mentions and which is spelled out for us more fully in the other Gospels.

The loud cry that comes after Eloi, Eloi, Labah, Samachdani is not a cry that says, well, now you go on and you have to finish this off yourselves. It is a statement that says, no, it is finished.

So the last point that we need to recognize is that there is a finality to the death of Jesus. There is a finality here that says, no, the full price has been paid in its totality.

There is nothing more to pay. There is nothing more left for your justification.

[ 33 : 58 ] There is nothing more left for your sanctification. He has done it. It's finished. And it's all because of his experience of forsakenness.

It's because he was forsaken, we can say we will never, ever, ever, ever, ever taste of any of that at all.

There will be no experience, therefore, of real forsakenness in the life of the Christian. God will not abandon us even to a temporary hellish experience.

He will be faithful and he will be true and he will complete in us the fullness of our salvation.

And when we die, we will go to be with him. And I think that's part of why the experience of the Lord's table is one that belongs on the Sabbath day.

[ 35 : 05 ] You can't separate out the death of Jesus on the one hand from the resurrection of Jesus on another. The death of Jesus fully unlocks for believers the hope of the resurrection.

And so today, that's how we will rise from the Lord's table reflecting on the fullness of the resurrection of Jesus and the hope of that life that is given to us. Because he has experienced the fullness of the forsakenness of God for you and for me.

and we rest in that finished work. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we bow before you today and we thank you for the cross.

we thank you for the one who went to the cross in our place. And we thank you that he went there with all of this incredible purpose.

Something, Lord, from before the foundation of the world, something from the depths of that mysterious time where the Trinity exists and agrees a purpose and a plan to be worked out in the fullness of time.

[ 36 : 17 ] We thank you for what Christ has done for that temporal expression of the covenant that the covenant made with Abraham has been worked out in its fullness. The stipulations of that covenant are met and we are now secure.

And we thank you for what that means for the endless ages of eternity before us. That you have a people who will be forever yours and you will be forever our God.

And so give us, Lord, that perspective on what Christ has done today that we may know him and be blessed in him. And we ask this for his namesake. Amen.

We are going to come in just a moment to sit at the Lord's table. I know in our tradition it's normal that most people are already literally seated in the right places. But figuratively we would still come. As I was saying last night there is an obedience of our whole bodies in coming to the Lord's table. We use not only our lips to praise God but sometimes we use our feet and we do that by coming to the Lord's table.

[ 37 : 28 ] So some of you might still be sitting upstairs maybe want to come down and take your place at the Lord's table as well. And so in just a moment we'll sing Psalm 118 as we do that. But the question then ought to always be asked who and how should we come?

And the answer to that is found in in this passage that we call our warrant in how we take the Lord's supper that we read in 1 Corinthians 11 For I received from the Lord what I also deliver to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

And so this is really telling us who the Lord's supper is for and how we should come. It is for those who would remember the sufficiency of Jesus.

At no point there is the Lord's table presented as for those who are righteous. There is a concern that you would come having not acknowledged your sin but the problem with not acknowledging your sin is that you're saying I don't need Jesus to cover this.

[ 38 : 54 ] I don't need the covering of Christ for my sin. And that is a terrible way to come to the Lord's table. It's a blasphemous way in fact to come because you're denying the need for Jesus.

The Lord's table is rather for those who need Christ. And those who come to sit at the Lord's table are those who come saying we need the sacrifice of Jesus.

Perhaps even saying more than that saying I need the obedience of Jesus to the Father's eternal covenant. What you're really saying is I can't position myself before God and say now I'm ready to be saved.

I cast myself upon the sufficiency of what the Father and the Son have agreed about my salvation from before the foundation of the world. It's a bold assertion.

It's an assertion of faith and obedience that we would come because we trust in Christ and we lean wholly and fully upon him.

[ 40 : 02 ] and so let's rise to the Lord's table singing these words from Psalm 118. from verse 15.

In dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health the Lord's right hand doth ever valiantly. The right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is on high the right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever valiantly.

I shall not die but live and shall the works of God discover. the Lord has made chastised sore but not to death given over. That certainty of being not given over to death arises out of the person of Jesus who was given over to death for us but who rose to life.

So let's sing to God's praise in these verses. Amen. Amen. Play for things of the righteous Play for things The Lord's Son of God The Lord's Son of God

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Thank you.