

At The Cross

Mark 15:21-47

Have you ever been on a journey?

Have you felt like you have been travelling for a long time and end of the road is in sight?

When we read the gospels the accounts of Jesus life they seem like a description of a journey.

All of the gospels in their early chapters point to where the life and ministry of Jesus are heading.

His closest followers are hoping that the road is leading to Jesus taking the throne of Israel, but all along the LORD knows that the journey of His life is leading to the cross.

That is where we turn our attention on this Good Friday.

[Turn with me in your bibles to **Mark 15:21-47**. In these verses God's word leads us to the cross. The scriptures give us the gift of being able to stand at the cross in our mind's eye. As we go there together there are some important things to remind ourselves of. The first thing we see here is that...]

Point #1 – The road to the cross is the way of discipleship.

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus must follow His example of selfless surrender for the sake of obeying God the Father.

Our text begins with Jesus carrying His cross through the streets of Jerusalem.

He has been betrayed, arrested, abandoned with one of His closest disciples emphatically denying even knowing Him, He has been beaten with Roman whips, had a crown of thorns pressed into His head, and has been reluctantly condemned to die by the governor Pilate at the insistence of crowd.

Crucifixion was intended by the Romans to be an extremely public affair so that every observer would learn to fear their authority and be obedient to their will.

Part of the public nature of the event is the condemned person carrying the instrument of their own death through the streets to the place of execution.

Jesus is walking that road in **verses 21-22** of Mark 15.

While most commentators point out that Jesus is likely only carrying the cross piece of the cross, it still probably weighed around 100lbs.

Given His sleepless night and the significant blood loss that He endured as a result of being beaten it is understandable that He would collapse under the weight of the beam.

This is a clear reminder of the genuine nature of Jesus' humanity, but there is more going on here.

We can look to a number of examples in the gospels where Jesus is supernaturally sustained far beyond the limits of His humanity, but not here.

God allows the Lord to collapse under the weight of the lumber and in so doing introduces us to a man named Simon.

The last thing in a world anyone, let alone a first century Jew, would want to do is carry the cross of a condemned man.

Even if Simon came to believe in Christ as the Messiah (I happen to think that he did), he certainly is not volunteering for this task right here. The NIV captures the meaning for us when it says, ‘they forced him to carry the cross’.

When Simon hoists the beam to his shoulder he undoubtedly has his hands, his cheek, and his clothes stained with Christ’s blood.

His muscles bore the weight of the beam as he dragged it through the hilly terrain with no alternative but to persevere until they reached their destination.

Is this not exactly what Christ calls His people to spiritually speaking?

He clearly says, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”**

[We live in the age of social media. I’ve observed that people often present a very different picture of themselves than what is really true in their life. Technology has made that easier than ever before. The Bible never does that! Jesus never tries to sugar coat what it means to be His follower.]

Since the cross is clearly an instrument of death, it seems very clear that by “taking up our cross” he means to be dying to ourselves.

When we arise every morning we must, in the power of the Holy Spirit, resolve to put aside our selfish desires, and instead strive after obedience to the Lord.

Now it is very important to point out here that Simon adds nothing to the atoning work of Jesus.

He does not die for our sins, only the Saviour can do that.

It is the same for us. Our dying to ourselves does not atone for a single sin.

It merely reveals that we belong to Jesus, that we are covered by His blood, and that we desire His heart of obedience.

[If we want to truly know what it means to be a Christian then we must look to the cross because that is the way of discipleship. In addition to Simon we see some others at the cross of Christ. In **verses 23-32** we see the soldiers, two others that are crucified, people who happen to be passing by, and some religious leaders. As we come to the foot of the cross and listen to these people we learn a second lesson at the cross. We learn that...]

Point #2 – At the cross Jesus endured great shame.

No one in all creation is worthy of more praise than our Saviour and yet here at the place of His crucifixion he bears extreme humiliation for the sake of accomplishing the work set before Him.

Mark tells us of the awful scene listen (verses 23-32).

While the focus of these verses is clearly the insults being heaped on Jesus we are again reminded of the fact that this is happening according to God's sovereign will.

Jesus is offered 'wine with myrrh' which is intended as means to deaden the pain of what is about to happen.

But He doesn't take it! He intends to sober minded through the agony to come.

It also says the soldiers 'cast lots' (similar to rolling dice) to decide who would get His clothes.

This is exactly what Psalm 22:18 prophesies regarding the Messiah.

God has planned it all. Jesus willfully endures this.

Certainly being stripped of His clothing is meant to expose His body to the weather, but it also robbed Him of His dignity.

He is counted among criminals here as one is crucified on His left and another on His right.

The sign above His head is intended to mock Him. How can this man be "The King of the Jews"? No one has seen Him sit on a throne. He has no riches, no army, and any Jew who knew there bible would consider Him cursed by God.

People passing by insult Him believing that if He were Who He claimed to be He would save Himself.

Even those crucified beside Him joined in with words of contempt for our Saviour.

Of course there is great irony here it was is said.

Jesus is in fact the King of the Jews, much more than that He is the King of universe.

Notice here that the "chief priests and teachers of the law" admit that "He saved others."

Many times the religious leaders were eye witnesses to Jesus' power to perform unparalleled miracles.

They know of His power, but they wrongly conclude that He cannot save Himself.

They say, "Come down so that we might see and believe" I doubt they are sincere in saying that, but even if they were what good would such a faith be?

Because if Jesus comes down we would be left to ourselves in our sins.

Listen, Jesus possesses the power to put an end to the cross.

Just hours before this He reminds His disciples that He could call "12 legions of angels" to His rescue.

How long do you think it would take to get His clothes back?

How many insults would be cast in His direction with the armies of heaven visibly at His command?

What does that tell us about the great shame that we behold at the foot of the cross?

It tells us that Jesus is willfully enduring it!

[Have you ever been laughed at, made fun of, or publically embarrassed? Let me ask you, if you could go back and stop it would you? When I think of moments like that I think it would have been nice to avoid them.]

Jesus is different though. He could have stopped it but He doesn't.

[Instead of the praise that He deserves, He bears shame upon the cross. There is more to see here because the human element to Jesus suffering is only a picture of the spiritual reality of the cross. Our Lord is doing much more than bearing what people are doing to Him. He is taking upon Himself a spiritual burden that is truly beyond comprehension. Why does He willfully endure such shame? He does it to display the glory of God's love because...]

Point #3 – Upon the cross Jesus endures the punishment for our sin.

Christ doesn't deserve an ounce of the suffering that He endures at Golgotha, instead He is taking what we deserve upon Himself.

Look at what we are told in verse 33.

The sixth hour is noon time. Typically this is when there is the maximum amount of sunlight for the day and we are told here that "darkness" covers the land.

Some people try to offer a natural explanation for this and say this is cloud cover, or dust storm, or even an eclipse.

None of those things would create a scene worth making note of like this.

This is an act of God.

It is the darkness of the fearsome judgment of God.

In these hours of darkness Jesus takes sin upon Himself (2Co 5:21, 1Pe 2:24).

As horrifying as every physical aspect of Christ's crucifixion is, the spiritual reality here is more so.

We need to understand that to appreciate the cry of **Verse 34**.

He is experiencing something here that is completely foreign to His nature and so He is crying out in absolute agony.

Jesus takes upon Himself the sins of all His people the scale of which is impossible to even imagine.

[What if every sin we committed was like a one ounce weight that was put into a backpack on our back? How heavy do you think that backpack would be? Not one of us would be able to lift our own weight of sin let alone the weight of all of it put together.]

That is what Jesus is doing as darkness falls upon the Land.
He is experiencing the full weight of sin's penalty.

Verses 35-37 further highlight the completeness of Jesus' work on the cross.

I learned from more than one commentary this week that people in Jesus' time believed that Elijah would return to rescue a righteous person in suffering.

Those standing nearby hear the cry of verse 34 as a righteous plea for rescue and in response offer Jesus some "wine vinegar" which was used to relieve thirst and restoring alertness.

The idea is to give Jesus some alertness and see if He is rescued from the cross.

There is no rescue. Instead Jesus uses what strength He has to cry out one last time. John tells us that the Lord cried out with the words, "It is finished."

He endures to the end, atoning fully for every sin of the redeemed from the greatest to the smallest.

[As we think about being at the cross this morning we should grieve over our Lord, but we should also have hearts full of great assurance. If you have trusted Christ you can be sure that every sinful act in your life that keeps you separated from God has been fully atoned for. Here is something else Mark wants us to know...]

Point #4 – At the cross worship is dramatically changed.

The great sufficiency of Jesus' atoning sacrifice removes the barrier between sinful people and God's supreme holiness.

We see the impossible accomplished in verse 38.

The curtain of the temple being referred to here is likely the curtain that hung over the entrance to what is called the Holy of Holies.

Both when the Tabernacle (tent) is built in the book of Exodus and when the Temple is built in 1 Kings we see that the building is divided up into sections.

Each section of the building came with more restrictions as to who could be there and no one except the High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies and he could only go in once a year.

The reason the Tabernacle/Temple are referred to as Holy is because God revealed His glory there in a special way.

That is amazing! That God would make His presence known in such a powerful way, but because every section of the Temple became more and more restrictive it served as a reminder that God is Holy and people are not.

There were physical barriers between the presence of God and people the poignant of which is the curtain over the most holy place.

When Jesus dies all that changes the curtain is torn in two from top to bottom and the way to God is opened.

An unlikely person tells us how it is possible for Jesus to accomplish this for us (Verse 39).

“The centurion” is the one in charge of those who crucified the Lord.

This man would have executed many people over the course of his service to Rome, but none like Jesus.

Seeing creation itself affected by the death of Christ leads this soldier to declare, “Surely (truly) this man was the Son of God.”

Whatever this man may have meant by this statement he gets it exactly right.

Jesus is God’s Son and that is why His sacrifice upon the cross accomplishes all that it does.

In His humanity He is able to stand in our place and He is able to apply His divinity to the sufficiency of this sacrifice without corrupting or changing His infinite perfections in any way.

Because of that worship is completely changed.

We do not come to God through priests and sacrifices, we are no longer remain on the outer courts separated from the Lord, no we come by faith in the precious blood of our Lord and Saviour.

[Woman at the well John 4.]

One of the great tragedies of our time is the neglect of the Bible, in particularly the Old Testament.

Take time brothers and sisters to look at all the ceremony and sacrifice and separation that is prescribed there.

You will quickly see why it is foolishness to think you can earn your way to God.

That is not the point of all that is prescribed in the Old Testament Law.

The point of the law is to show us the God is holy and we are not.

The point of the law is to show us our great need of grace, our great need of a Saviour!

We have such a Saviour at the cross brothers and sisters.

The moment we put our faith in Him the way to life giving worship is forever opened to us.

[There is much to behold at the cross. When we look to the cross we see the way of discipleship, we see the shame that Christ endures, we standing in our place taking our punishment, and we see our worship dramatically changed. There is one more thing that we need to see as we look at the cross. For those who witnessed Jesus’ death they saw what seemed to be the end, but these last few verses show us that though...]

Point #5 – The cross seems like the end, but it is really a new beginning.

Jesus' enemies think they have won and His friends/followers thought His life and ministry had come to an end, instead the LORD has made a way to make all things new.

Standing at the cross are some of Jesus' most faithful followers (verses 40-41).

The only thing these women are able to do is watch.

If they could have rescued Jesus from the cross they likely would have, but they have no such power.

Having served so faithfully it must have been heart wrenching beyond words to stand at the cross but here they are looking on to the end.

As they watch this is what happens (verses 42-46).

A man named Joseph, a man of some wealth and privilege, goes to the governor and asks for Jesus' body.

Pilate is surprised to hear that Jesus is already dead likely because shortly before this the religious leaders had asked to speed things along because the Sabbath is approaching and crucifixion normally meant a slow death.

Even though Pilate was reluctant to sentence Jesus to death, once the order is given it must be carried out.

One of my commentaries pointed out of the hundreds of thousands of crucifixions the Romans carried out there is a single record of anyone surviving.

That is definitely the case here.

Pilate asks for the confirmation from the centurion and having witnessed a soldier put a spear into Jesus (probably under His rib cage and into His lung and perhaps His heart) he knows beyond a shadow of doubt that the cross had done its job well.

At the news Pilate gives the body to Joseph and Joseph takes the body, hastily prepares it according to Jewish custom and places it in "a tomb cut out of rock".

Finally as the sun is about to set and the Sabbath day begins a massive stone is rolled in front of the entrance.

One the stone is in place it would have taken several strong individuals to remove it.

All of this to emphasize that Jesus' body is completely sealed.

It is a picture of finality.

Jesus' life is over and this seems like the end of the story.

But it is not the end and **verse 47** invites us to see that there is more to come.

In order for the women to see where Jesus' body is laid, they must have been watching what has been happening.

They follow Joseph to the tomb and watch the stone get rolled in front of the entrance.

Why do this? They do this because they want to know where to come back to after the Sabbath is over.

Now that Jesus' body is in a tomb cut out of rock they know His body isn't going anywhere and they plan to come back.

It is a hint that there is more to come, only it isn't what these women are expecting.

They are expecting to come back and find Jesus' lifeless body, but instead they will discover that Jesus' body will be gone because He will be raised to life at dawn of that third day.

He will be raised to life because He has won the victory and the curse of sin and death will no longer reign over His people.

There is much for us to see at the cross.

It shows us the way of discipleship and at first glance that may seem like something bad.

It may seem like something we would rather not do.

But when we see all that Jesus does here, when we see that He willfully endures its shame, that at the cross He takes our punishment, that His death has changed worship, and when we see that Christ's death is not the end, but rather it is really the way that leads to life, when we can see all of that then we will understand that there is no better place to be than **at the cross**.