

Mark 15:33-39

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Mark chapter 15. We're going to be focusing on verses 33 through 39.

Let's ask the Lord to help us as we get ready to read His Word once more. Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your Word, and we pray that You would be with us now as we read it.

That You would help us to understand it, and that Your Spirit would apply it to our lives. And please be with me. Help me to proclaim Your Gospel as clearly and as boldly as I should be able to do, Lord.

We ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen. Beginning with verse 33. At the sixth hour, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? When some of those standing near heard this, they said, Listen, He's calling Elijah.

[1 : 08] One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down, He said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood in front of Jesus heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was the Son of God.

Thus far, the words of our Lord. Have you ever noticed our uncanny ability to sort of miss the point?

Miss the point of what's going on around us? Miss the point of a conversation that you're having with someone? Maybe it happens with your spouse. Your wife is trying to communicate to you something that has taken place in her day.

And, you know, the telly's got football on. And it just sort of passes over, and you kind of miss what she's saying. Or maybe it's a conversation with your children.

[2 : 09] You're trying to communicate to your children something that they need to understand, something that they need to know, and they just do not have a clue what you're talking about at the end. And you realize it. We do it all the time.

We have this uncanny ability to miss the point. I was a theater major in college. I wasn't very good. But I was a theater major in college, and the director used to like to tell this story about John Wayne when he was playing the centurion that you hear about in this passage, where he had the line, Surely this man was the Son of God.

And so the director comes up to him, and he says, Can you say this text with just a little bit, I mean, can you say your line with just a little bit more awe? John Wayne thought he could do that. And so when it came time for him to deliver his line, he piped up and he said, Oh, surely this man was the Son of God.

John Wayne completely missed the point. And my friends, we're coming to a passage today. We're studying a passage where we stand in grave danger of missing the point.

You see people standing around the cross, at the foot of the cross, completely missing what is taking place. But we're in the same danger as they were. We can come to this passage, and we can just assume that this is some sort of ethical example, some sort of thing to make us want to strive a little bit better.

[3 : 29] And if we look at this passage through those lenses, then we'll completely miss the point. If we come to this passage, and we see it as just some sort of vicarious repentance, where we see it as Jesus just sort of repenting on our behalf, well, if that's how you understand this passage, then you're going to come to this text and completely miss what's taking place.

You can come to this text and assume that Jesus is just another man, and this is just another example of some horrific injustice in this world. And if that's the perspective that you take when you look at this text, then you're going to completely miss what's going on.

But perhaps a little bit closer to home, if you come to this text out of the cold familiarity of your heart, because you've heard it time and time again, then you're going to miss something of the awe and wonder and glory of a God who would send His Son to die for sinners like you and me.

And so that's the first thing we see in this passage, is Jesus misunderstood by sinners. Jesus misunderstood by sinners. We see that in verses 34 through 36. And verse 34 says, And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, Listen, He's calling Elijah. One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus. Now, leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down, he said.

[5 : 08] These people standing at the foot of the cross are misunderstanding what's taking place. Have you ever noticed how you can come to perfectly legitimate conclusions that are completely wrong?

You're given a little bit of information, and you sort of process it, and you come to these perfectly legitimate conclusions based on what you know, and you can be completely wrong. If I were to tell you that while I was in seminary, I spent two weeks sleeping on the couch, knowing my recliner, I was sleeping in my recliner for two weeks, probably the first thing that pops in your head is, What did he do to Blair, my wife?

You're kind of wondering, What was this guy doing to deserve two weeks on the recliner? That seems like a reasonable conclusion based on what I've told you, but what if I told you that while I was sleeping in the recliner, Blair was sleeping on the couch?

Well, then you begin to think sort of, Well, maybe they were hosting someone. Someone was sharing, you know, they had given their bed to someone else, or maybe there was a leak upstairs, or something had happened. But the truth of the matter is, is that we were having, we had one of our sons, I believe it was Noah, our middle child, wouldn't sleep for about more than 30 minutes at a time, and so after a while, we decided that if we were going to get any sleep, we had to sleep downstairs, where he could sort of work out this problem for himself, and eventually we were able to return back upstairs.

But the point is, the point is, is that we can look at, we can take information, limited information, and we can come to perfectly legitimate conclusions that are completely wrong.

[6 : 41] And I think that that's what's kind of taking place here at the foot of the cross. These people are standing by, and they're not understanding what's taking place. They begin to look for Elijah, which seems sort of strange, doesn't it?

I mean, have you ever read that and go, why did they start looking for Elijah? See, Jesus cries out in verse 34, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And then the people standing around go, he's calling Elijah. Let's see if Elijah comes and takes him down. It seems sort of strange, sort of out of place, doesn't it? Well, we have to sort of backtrack a little bit to understand what's going on here.

What's taking place here at the cross has been prophesied perfectly in Psalm 22. It says, My God, my God, verse 1, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Verses 7 through 8, All who see me mock me, they hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue him.

[7 : 49] Let him deliver him, since he delights in him. Verses 12 through 18, Many strong bulls surround me, strong bulls of Bashan encircle me, roaring lions tearing their prey, open their mouths wide against me.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax. It has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

You lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me. A band of evil men has encircled me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I count all my bones.

People stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and cast lots for my clothing. What had been foretold in Psalm 22 is taking place here at the cross.

And the people standing around don't seem to sort of put this together. They don't understand that this is meant to be happening. And so they start looking for Elijah. They start looking for Elijah to come. Jesus is being scorned and ridiculed.

[8 : 55] His garments are being cast. They're casting lots to divide His garments. All of these things are taking place, and yet they start looking for Elijah. Why is that? Well, it makes a little bit of sense when you consider what's going on earlier in Mark's Gospel.

In Mark 9-13, this is after the transfiguration, it says, chapter 9, 9-13, as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what rising from the dead meant. And they asked Him, why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first? Jesus replied, to be sure, Elijah does come first and restores all things.

Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to Him everything they wish, just as it is written about Him. So Jesus is doing a couple things in this passage.

He's connecting His life, His ministry, His work here on earth, with the prophecies of the Old Testament. But He's also saying that, you're right, Elijah does have to come first as it was prophesied.

[10 : 05] And that was fulfilled in John the Baptist. And He says, but they did to Him as they pleased. You remember, they executed John the Baptist, his head on a silver platter. So what I think it seems to be here is that the people standing around the cross seem to take it to mean that Jesus is just another man.

Just another man looking for Elijah to come. Just another man waiting for the Messiah. Just another man who is looking for Elijah to come so that the Messiah might come and that everything might be restored to Israel.

The cross of Christ seemed to shout to the watching world that this man is not the Christ. That this man is not the Son of God. That's what the cross seemed to shout to the watching world.

Surely the Messiah would not be suffering the things that Jesus was. And you remember what the cross did to the disciples? It crushed their hopes.

Didn't it? The shepherd was struck. And the sheep were scattered. And then you find them later in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus. And Jesus appears to them after His resurrection.

[11 : 23] And He's talking with them. And they say, they're talking about Jesus. They don't realize that it's Him. And they say, but we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

Jesus be the Christ. Hung on a cross. Suffering. Cursed is the man, as Deuteronomy says, that is hung upon a tree. The cross seemed to shout to the watching world that Jesus was not who He said He was.

And yet it was for that very purpose that He came. It was for the very purpose of living a perfect life and dying on the cross. But He came. My brothers and sisters, how easy is it for our hard hearts to misunderstand the cross of Jesus Christ?

To misunderstand Jesus and His work. The cross seemed to say that Jesus was not who He said He was. It seemed to all fall apart at this point. And yet it was exactly what the Word of God said was going to take place.

The cross can confuse sinful hearts, can't it? Circumstances can be confusing in that way sometimes in life, can't it?

[12 : 43] You sort of look at the world around you and you sort of can be tempted. I know that you would never do this, but you can be tempted to think that the Word of God is not true. You can be tempted to think that that the promises of God aren't true when cancer strikes, when the world seems to spin out of control, when you lose your job, when you lose a child, when your marriage seems to be on its last rope.

You can begin to think that, you know, what happened to all the promises of Christianity? Why is there such injustice in this world? It's hard for us to sort of remember that suffering precedes glory in this life.

We can be tempted to doubt the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can be fooled by providence, fooled by the circumstances around us. 1 Peter says in chapter 1, verses 3 through 6, Praise be to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

So He's talking about the fruits of the gospel that you get to glory, all these glorious things that you hope for. And then He says in verse 6, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief and all kinds of trials.

[14 : 21] He's talking about the promise of heaven, the glory that is ours, but yet now and the here and now there is suffering, there are trials that we have to face. Suffering precedes glory.

And one thing that's important when we're considering the cross is that you have to realize that Christ's suffering more importantly preceded any glory that we have the hope in partaking of.

If Christ had not suffered, then there would be no glory, there would be no blessed hope, there would be no reason to look forward in the midst of trials, in the midst of suffering.

If Christ had not suffered, then there would be no glory for us. We have to be careful not to be confused by providence, not to be fooled by the circumstances around us.

The cross seemed to shout to the watching world, this man is not who he said he was. But it was for that very purpose that he became flesh and that he walked, that he set his face towards Jerusalem to die on that cross.

[15 : 30] So we see Jesus misunderstood by sinners, but we also see Jesus forsaken for sinners. We see that in verses 33 through 34 and then again in verse 37. At the sixth hour, darkness came over, the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then again in verse 37, with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Jesus, is there suffering? And you know, as a Christian, it's one of the most comforting things, one of the most comforting truths that we know is that Jesus has suffered with us.

That he knows what it's like to suffer in this life. He knows what it's like to be homeless. He knows what it's like to be exhausted. He knows what it's like to be hungry, to be thirsty, to be betrayed.

He knows what it's like to suffer. He's been tested and tempted in every way and yet without sin. It's one of the most comforting truths as a Christian that we can have is that Jesus has suffered with us.

[16 : 42] We're considering a peace, a time where Jesus suffered without us. Where Jesus suffered so that we wouldn't have to. Because my friends, if you are resting and trusting in Jesus Christ, then you will never, ever, have to taste the weight of God's judgment and wrath upon you because of your sin.

Because Jesus Christ bore it for you. Jesus Christ suffers with us, but here He is suffering without us. It's Jesus Christ forsaken for sinners. He who knew no sin was made sin that in Him we might be the righteousness of God.

Or as Martin Luther said, Jesus Christ, though He was sinless, was made the greatest sinner of all. What He's saying is that Jesus, though He was perfect in every way, bore the sins of His church on the cross.

All the sins of His people. It's noon. And in verse 33 tells you that, so it's the middle of the day, and verse 33 tells you that darkness descended on the entire land.

And what's interesting is that this is just one of those many miracles that's taking place in this text. Darkness descends upon the land for three hours. Now the first thing that probably will pop in your head is that it's just an eclipse.

[18 : 05] But eclipses, well first of all, because of the time when this took place, the sun was in the wrong position for it to be an eclipse. And secondly, when has an eclipse ever lasted for three hours? What's happening here is, it's a miracle.

Now what this darkness symbolizes, it's kind of hard to know. There are lots of theories about what this symbolizes. It could be judgment upon Israel for betraying the Messiah.

Judgment on the world for crucifying the Messiah. It could be that it's related to Amos 8. I'll let you go check that later. You can look at that and compare this text with Amos 8.

Or it could be symbolic of the darkness before God created light in the darkness, the darkness before creation. It could be symbolic of the new creation in Christ that we receive from this work.

It could be darkness connected to the plagues of Egypt. It's hard to be certain. But however we understand this, we have to stop and realize that something ominous is taking place as the light of the world is being snuffed out as a wick on the cross.

[19 : 20] The light of the world is being snuffed out and darkness descends on the world.

And after three hours of darkness a cry goes forth, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus is cut off. The agony of the cross seems as if Jesus is unable to call to him his father at this point.

Throughout the gospels you see him again and again. It's my father. It is my food to do the work of my father. He refers to him as my father, my father. And then here on the cross he cries out not nearly as intimately, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

You see, at the cross it's as if the God who is of pure eyes than to look upon sin as Habakkuk says refused to look upon his son.

It's as if he turned his back upon him and cries out, why have you forsaken me? You see, this cry of dereliction, this my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[20 : 43] He tells us that there's something much more taking place than simple Roman crucifixion. He was suffering wounds far greater than the Romans could afflict upon him.

You see, the greatest pain that Jesus felt on the cross, it was not nails being driven into his arms, his hands and his feet. Now, the great pain and agony of the cross was bearing the pride of your heart before the God who is of purer eyes than to look upon sin.

The great agony of the cross is not the asphyxiation that he faced as he couldn't breathe hanging upon the cross. No, it's the agony of the cross is for that lustful glance that you had earlier today or yesterday.

The great pain of the cross is not the ridicule or the suffering that he faced there at the hands of the Romans. It's because of that little white lie that you told just to save face or to help your business.

Something was taking place that the Romans could not do to people. Jesus is crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken him?

[22 : 04] He could have come down from that cross. Have you ever thought about that? He could have come down from that cross. His nails couldn't hold him. What was holding him there was your sin.

It was your sin. It was my sin that was holding him there on that cross until it was accomplished. And in verse 37, Jesus gives up his spirit.

With a loud cry, he breathed his last. Jesus came to give life, and that abundantly. And to do it, he had to taste death on your behalf.

See, Jesus' death is yet another extraordinary aspect of the cross because Roman crucifixion was meant to be really slow.

God is to be drawn out. Jesus gives up his spirit much sooner than you would have expected. You remember, they're sort of amazed that he's already dead.

[23 : 17] It's just one of the many things that are taking place surprising. That's surprising around the cross. These miraculous things, the curtain of the temple is torn in two. Other gospel accounts tell us that there are earthquakes, and then here Jesus dies quicker than expected.

It's probably because of the spiritual agony that he was facing, that he went ahead and died sooner than others. No one took his life from him. Jesus laid it down for his sheep.

And we have to remember that the cross gives us a glimpse into how utterly sinful sin really is, how odious sin is before a holy God.

The agony that Jesus was suffering because of you and me. But the cross also tells us something.

It doesn't just tell us about the sinfulness of sin, of how odious sin is before a holy God. It tells us something about the love of God for sinners like you and me.

[24 : 30] How far this God would go to save your soul. How far this God would go to ransom hearts. That Christ would pursue you through the cross.

That he would be obedient unto death, even death on a cross. That you might have life in him. And maybe you're here today and you haven't embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And if that's where you are, then you stand in danger of bearing the agony that Jesus faced on the cross. Not just for a short period of time, but for day after day after day through all eternity.

But do not embrace Christ because you want to flee the wrath that is to come or because you want it easier or better. Flee to Christ because he is so wonderful.

that he would pursue you in such a way, that he would give up so much, that he would leave glory, that he would become homeless, that he would become subjected to the ways of this world, that he would suffer and die, though he was perfect, though in him was life, he had to taste death.

[25 : 53] He did that for you. And I can think of no better reason to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ than when you see that he is the fairest of fair.

But maybe you're here and you've been a Christian for a really long time and you've sort of gotten lazy and you've sort of gotten comfortable with your sin.

You'd rather justify your sin, explain away your sin, than mortify it. You'd rather look at the world around you and go, well, I'm a pretty nice guy and at least I'm not doing this or that.

We need to remember that the cross tells us something about the sinfulness of sin. And the next time we're tempted to gossip, sneak a look on the internet of something you shouldn't be seeing.

To hurt a friend or a neighbor, we need to stop and remember the cross of Christ and remember what sin cost him, what our sin cost him, and ask God to help us to mortify that sin, to put it to death.

[27 : 23] Why was Jesus forsaken? That he might give forgiveness to sinners. And that's what we see in our final point, Jesus' forgiveness for sinners. We see that in verses 38 through 39.

Forgiveness for sinners. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the son of God.

It's Jesus Christ forgiveness for sinners. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And that's good news. If you're a Christian here today, it's not because you're more spiritually attuned than the rest of the world.

If you're a Christian, it's not because you're a better person or you come from a better family, though God may have used those things. If you're a Christian, it's because God had mercy upon your soul, because God reached into that chest and ripped out that heart of stone and gave you a heart of flesh that beats for him.

If you're a Christian, it's because God had mercy upon your soul, because Christ took every last one of your sins to the cross and said, it is finished. As sinners, we stand in need of grace and forgiveness.

[28 : 35] As we were talking about in the children's sermon, in the Old Testament, there was the tabernacle and the temple, and there was this big curtain that separated the mercy seat and the Ark of the Covenant from everybody else, and only the high priest could go in once a year and make atonement on the day of atonement.

When Christ breathed his last, the curtain tore from top to bottom, symbolizing the access that we have been given into God's presence through Jesus Christ.

Christ. And in the midst of these events, in verse 39, the centurion says, when he sees how Jesus died, surely this man was the Son of God.

Now, whether this was the mark of the conversion of the centurion, we can't really know what he means. I would think so, because it's included here, and it's really important. It's a really important statement in the Gospel of Mark.

And it's particularly important when you consider what has taken place in the rest of the Gospel. You sort of, in Mark, you kind of have this question posed again and again, who is this man?

[29 : 55] Who is this man? And there at the foot of the cross, a centurion cries out, surely this man was the Son of God. You see, the blood of bulls and goats can't save sinners.

Mere men cannot save themselves. Mere men cannot save others. It took the sinless Son of God becoming flesh to ransom sinners like you and me.

And my friends, that is the very basis of our hope before holy God. that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We began this study by considering ways in which this passage, we can come to this passage and sort of miss the point.

I think there's one final way that we can sort of come to this passage, we can study it, we can look at it, and we can just walk away and completely miss the point. and that is if we walk away from this text and we're not changed by it.

If our hearts are not warmed to worship this God, this God who is of purer eyes than to look upon sin. And yet he sent his Son to sinners to say, this is my blood which was shed for you.

[31 : 20] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.