

We can be Accepted

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Preacher: Terry McCutcheon

[0 : 00] A special welcome to you today if you're a visitor with us. But we're going to turn now on our Bibles for our reading today, which you will find in Mark chapter 15, which you'll find on page 853 of the Pew Bible.

We've been focusing our attention these past three weeks on verses 33 to 39, and we come to our last of three sermons on these verses. And I'll just read from verse 33.

Mark chapter 15, 33 through 39. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he's calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine. Put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let's see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way Jesus died and breathed his last, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

[1 : 27] Just a moment of prayer to ask God's help. Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. Father, we thank you that it speaks to every human being through every generation. First and foremost about you. About your great plan of salvation.

And also about our own sinful condition. Father, we're in holy ground here in these verses. The God, the Son, dying on the cross. And we pray that in this time together, Lord, you would teach us, maybe even for the first time, you would teach us the message of the cross.

So please be with us and speak to us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we come to our last sermon today looking at these verses in Mark's gospel.

We began to ponder these verses three weeks ago. And as we pondered, we posed a question. How do you view the cross? What is the message of the cross of Jesus Christ to you?

[2 : 36] Is it a message of great tragedy? Or is it one of great triumph? And certainly a message of great tragedy would be the view of a lot of folks.

And not just folks in the street. But folks that are church attenders and have been for many years. They just don't see any meaning to the death of Jesus. In fact, it all just seems rather pointless to them.

Edward Lobb once told me that he was greeting folks at the church door one Sunday morning after preaching. And an older lady said to him, You know, I've often thought about that boy Jesus and his death on the cross.

And I've always thought to myself, What a waste of such a promise in life. If only he could have lived till he was 50 or 60. Just think of all the good he could have done with the power that he had.

What a tragedy. One of our missionaries also told me of a story of a Japanese woman reading through the gospel for the first time. Not knowing anything of the story beforehand.

[3 : 38] And when she came to the part of the story that we have before us this afternoon, the crucifixion. When she came to the crucifixion, she was heartbroken. She was so devastated that she couldn't read on.

She was so disturbed that life for Jesus had ended this way. It seemed such a tragedy. Such a tragedy to her that the Jesus that she had been discovering in the gospel should bow out like this.

Such a tragedy. And now as we come to the 15th chapter of Mark and to the verses that we've just read, one could be forgiven for thinking this way about the cross, that it's a great tragedy.

These verses bring to the end the last week of Jesus' life. Mark devotes six chapters to this last week of Jesus' life. More than a third of his gospel. And this was a week that had begun amid scenes of great triumph.

Back in Mark chapter 11, which is entitled The Triumphal Entry in Our Bibles. After three years of public ministry, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for what will be the last week of his life.

[4 : 49] And he arrives amid scenes of triumph. People had spread their cloaks on the ground before Jesus. Others had spread leafy branches on the road. There was people going ahead and people coming behind.

And they were all shouting at Jesus. And this is what they were shouting. Hosanna! Praise! Hosanna! Save! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna! Praise in the highest! Scenes of great triumph. As the crowds believed that in the person of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God would finally be ushered in.

And they were shouting Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! And praise to God! But less than a week later, crowds are shouting again at Jesus. But this time it's not Hosanna!

Praise! No! This time it's crucify him! Crucify him! Chapter 15 verse 10, Pilate perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priest had delivered Jesus up.

[5 : 52] But the chief priest stood up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, Then what shall I do with the man you call the king of the Jews?

And they cried out again, Crucify him! And Pilate said to them, Why? What evil has he done? But they shouted all the more, Crucify him!

So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas. And having scourged Jesus, having had him flogged, he delivered him to be crucified.

And so as we come to our verses this afternoon, it seems that the hopes of a people, the hopes of a nation, that Jesus was the one to usher in the kingdom of God. It seems that those hopes have been dealt a death blow, along with Jesus.

What seems so promising, has ended in great tragedy. Now I suppose on one level the cross is a great tragedy. The apostle Paul, preaching in Acts chapter 3, said this, But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and you asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the offer of life.

[7 : 04] So on one level, it is a great tragedy. But Mark, Mark wants us to see that the message of the cross is not one of great tragedy, but one of great triumph.

There are a lot of things going on in these verses, but we've looked at three dramatic things in particular that are happening, that help us chart a course through these verses. There is the darkness.

There is the first cry of Jesus. Then there is the second cry of Jesus, and the curtain temple being torn in two from top to bottom. Focusing on these particulars will, I hope, make plain for us the message of the cross, that Mark is keen for us to see and understand.

God is angry, represented by the darkness. Jesus has abandoned the meaning of Jesus' third cry. And thirdly, we can be accepted, or we can have access, the second cry of Jesus, and the curtain temple being torn in two.

Three weeks ago, we considered verse 33, God is angry, represented by the darkness. And we thought a little of, you know, what caused the darkness.

[8 : 15] But then we agreed that the most important question here, I suppose, is not what caused the darkness. The most important question here is, what does the darkness mean?

Does it mean anything? Well, yes, it certainly does. No Jew would be confused as to what the darkness meant. Especially darkness in the middle of the day. It meant that God was present in his anger, and in his judgment.

And the Old Testament is full of this, but I'll give you one verse in particular. Amos chapter 8, verse 9. And on that day, the day of God's judgment, and on that day, declares the Lord, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth, and broad daylight.

So in these three hours of untimely, unforgettable, and eerie darkness, God's anger, and judgment, are being poured out.

But where is God's anger, and judgment being poured out? Well, secondly, last week, we looked at, Jesus is abandoned. Represented by Jesus' first cry, in verses 34 to 36.

[9 : 24] God is angry, but it's Jesus who's abandoned, as God's wrath is poured out upon him. That's what Mark wants us to understand, in these verses. In fact, that's what Jesus wants us to understand.

That's why he cries out, as he does these, agonizing, awful words of Psalm 22. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now, why was Jesus asking that question?

Didn't he know? Did the cross come as a, a shock to Jesus? How did I end up here? No, Jesus totally understood, what would happen in Jerusalem, and the fate that awaited him there.

But he cries out these words, from Psalm 22, so that we will understand, what is happening. Jesus quotes from, Psalm 22, Psalm 22, that was written, some 1000 years earlier.

And if you had to compare, Psalm 22, with Mark chapter 15, you would see, that Mark 15, is a fulfillment, of Psalm 22. Psalm 22, describes the Lord's anointed king, who is being scorned, mocked, and despised, by all who see him.

[10 : 33] But worse than all of this, he feels he has been abandoned, by God himself. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far, from saving me, from the words, of my groaning?

Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer. And by night, I find no rest. That's what Mark wants us to understand, is happening on the cross.

The darkness represents, God the Father's anger. And the cry represents, the Son of God's abandonment. As God's anger for sin, is poured out upon him. But why, would God's punishment for sin, be poured out on Jesus?

Why would that happen, you may ask? Jesus didn't do, anything to deserve, the punishment of men. That was the, Pontius Pilate's conclusion. He perceived, that it was out of envy, that the chief priest, had brought Jesus to him.

His assessment was, that Jesus was innocent, of any crime. Saying in response, to the crowd, verse 14 of chapter 15. Why? What evil has he done?

[11 : 40] That's what shocked, the Japanese woman, as she read through Mark. How could Jesus, be delivered up to die, a criminal's death? He hadn't done, anything wrong. And if man could find, no fault in Jesus, then neither could God.

Remember back, in Mark chapter 1, and the baptism of Jesus. As soon as Jesus, came up out of the waters, the heavens were torn open. The spirit of God, descended on him like a dove.

And God the Father's, voice bellowed out, from heaven. You are my beloved son. With you, I am well pleased. No, Jesus wasn't abandoned, abandoned for his sin.

He had none. Remember the hymn, that we sang last week? Yes, finished, the Messiah dies. Cut off for sins, but not his own. That's what Jesus, understood his death, to be about.

Do you remember the words, in Mark chapter 10, verse 45? For the Son of Man, came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life, as a ransom, for many.

[12 : 45] Jesus knew, that his death, and the judgment, and anger of God, that he would face, at his death, was on the behalf, of others. He knew, God's anger, and wrath for sin, would be poured out, upon him on the cross.

That's the only thing, that makes, any sense, of why he was so troubled, in the garden of Gethsemane. Not because, of what he knew, he would experience, at the hands of men, of which there was much. But no, he was troubled, so much, because he knew, what he would experience, at the hands of God, for human sin.

That's why he prayed, that this cup, the cup of God's wrath, may be removed from him. He was asking, is there no other way? No other way, for sin to be paid for? No other way, for human beings, to be forgiven?

The answer was no. No other way. No other way, for sin to be dealt with, and God's anger, to be dealt with. The only way, to deal with the anger, of the father, was through the abandonment, and the anguish, of the son.

Well that's great Terry, you might be sitting, saying to yourself, but what does all of that, mean for me? Does it mean anything, for me? Well yes, it certainly does. And Mark tells us, in a very vivid way.

[14 : 04] So our verses for today, verses 37, to 39, God is angry, Jesus is abandoned, but we, can be accepted by God, or, we can have, access, to God.

Jesus cries out, again in verse 37, but this time, it's not a, not a cry of abandonment, or agony. This time, it is a cry of achievement, verse 37, and Jesus uttered, a loud cry, and breathed his last.

Now Mark doesn't tell us, or record for us, what the last words, of Jesus were, but John, in his gospel does. John tells us, that the last words, were this, it is finished, it is finished.

The Greek word, is tetalestai, not that I've been studying Greek, I'll leave that to the more cleverer guys, in the church. But I remember it, from Christianity Explode, and tetalestai means, it is finished, it is paid in full, it is accomplished.

Well what is it, that is finished? What is it, that has been accomplished? Well Mark tells us, in verse 38, and the curtain of the temple, was torn in two, from top, to bottom.

[15 : 22] Now Mike, why would Mark tell us, about a curtain in the temple? Why would he take our eyes, off Jesus, and bring us, right back into the city, of Jerusalem? Why would Mark, take our eyes, off the cross, and take us to the curtain?

Well why would Mark, do that? Well friends, the answer to that question, is this, it is tied up, in what that curtain, represented. The curtain, was 60 foot high, 30 foot wide, and it was about, seven inches thick, and it separated, the holiest place, in the temple, from the rest, of the world.

It separated, the place, where God himself, dwelt. That curtain said, danger, do not enter, this far, and no further, even to the Israelites, God's chosen people.

It was a barrier, that sought to remind everyone, that we are separated, from God, because of our sin. The prophet Isaiah writes, but your iniquities, have made a separation, between you, and your gods.

And friends, this has been man's plight, since the very first sin, entered the world, when man rebelled. This goes right back, to Genesis chapter 3, when man was cast out, of the garden by God, separated from him, and God placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword, that turned every way, to guard the way, to the tree of life, and to bar man's access.

[16 : 55] And friends, that's what that curtain, represented. Because actually, the cherubim, and the flaming sword, were embroidered, on that curtain. That's what it represented.

This far, and no further. Danger, no entry, no access to God. Why? Because sin, separates us from God. But Mark tells us, that this is no longer the case.

Because in the death of Jesus, the curtain has been torn in two, from top to bottom, from heaven to earth. And the way to God, is no longer barred.

There is now access to God, and acceptance with God. We can enter in. That's what the writer, of the book of Hebrews understands. Listen what he writes.

Therefore brothers, since we have confidence, to enter the holy places, by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way, that he opened up for us, through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.

[17 : 59] That's what the death of Jesus means. It means that, through his abandonment by God, we can have access, and acceptance with God.

Because of the anguish he faced, we can now have access. Jesus Christ, on the cross, became our substitute. Just as in a game of football.

In a game of football, someone takes your place. But unlike in a game of football, if you've had a, a yellow card or something, when the person comes on, they can't take your punishment. But the son of God, is a different substitute.

He not only takes our place, he also takes, our punishment. The apostle Paul, writes in Galatians, Christ redeemed us, from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us.

And again in 2 Corinthians 5 and 21, for our sake, God made him, that is Jesus, to be sin, who had no sin, so that in him, we might become, the righteousness of God.

[19 : 07] A friend once told me, that in order for something, to become clean, something else, has to become dirty. You wash your dirty face, in the morning, and the water in the sink, is clean.

But when you wash your face, the water becomes dirty, and your face is now clean. There has been a transfer, that has taken place. Well friends, very simply, that's the gospel.

That's what's happening, on the cross. Jesus Christ, becomes dirty, with our sin, so that we, who are dirty, might by trusting him, become clean.

God's anger for sin, is poured out in Jesus. His perfect son. He is abandoned, so that sinners like us, might have access to God, and be accepted by him.

What Mark is saying, I suppose, is summed up, in the words of a song, that Gary Brotherston wrote. With the cross in mind, Brotherston writes, when I think of all, you've done for me, how you bled, and died there, on that cursed tree.

[20 : 11] When I think of all, that you went through, so that I, for the first time, might come close to you. You see friends, the cross brings, not just forgiveness, to the sinner, but also for the first time, allows us to come close to God.

It brings, not just forgiveness, but also fellowship. As the apostle Peter writes, for Christ also suffered, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Mark is saying, that in the great tragedy, of Jesus' death, is also the great triumph, of Jesus' death, winning, securing forgiveness from God, and fellowship with God, for all those, that he came to save.

That's the message of the cross. And who is it that gets it? The chief priests? No. The disciples? No.

No, it's a, it's a pagan soldier. Verse 39. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way, he breathed his last, he said, truly, this man was, the son of God.

[21 : 33] There in the darkness, it's a pagan soldier, who sees, for the first time, who Jesus is, why Jesus died.

So here we have it, friends. The message of the cross, as preached to us by, by Mark. God is angry. But it's Jesus, who's been abandoned.

And because of Christ's, abandonment, we now can have access. We can be accepted by God. We've began every week by asking, how you viewed the cross?

Did you see it as a tragedy? Or do you see it as a triumph? Mark wants us to see that, yes, on one level, the cross is a tragedy. But then the great tragedy of the cross, is also the great triumph, of the cross.

But do you know what I think, would be the, the biggest tragedy of all? I think the biggest tragedy of all, would be this. That after hearing this message, for the, the past three weeks, you do nothing with it.

[22 : 42] It doesn't become a message, for you personally. You don't trust, the Lord Jesus Christ, abandonment, to deal with God's anger. And therefore, you can never be forgiven.

Children, you can never have fellowship with God. Friend, I think that would be, the greatest tragedy of all. But if you do respond, no matter how bad your life has been, no matter where you've been, what you've done, what your background is, the cross of Jesus Christ, can be a great triumph for you.

At the cross of Jesus, even though I be, the worst of all the sinners, there is hope for me. Judged, condemned, and guilty, I am lost indeed.

But the cross of Jesus, meets, my deepest need. That's the great message. That's the great triumph, of the cross. Let us pray together.

Father, at the cross of Jesus, pardon is complete, love and justice mingle, truth and mercy meet.

[24 : 00] Though my sins condemn me, Jesus died instead. There is full forgiveness, and the blood he shed. Father, we thank you for such a wonderful gospel as this.

In Jesus' name, Amen.