

God is Angry

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[0 : 00] We're going to begin the day by reading a passage for today, which you will find in Mark chapter 15. Mark chapter 15, which you'll find in page 852 of the Church Bible. 852.

Over these next three weeks or so, we're going to be considering verses 33 to 39. But let me just read a wee bit further back than that.

So let's pick it up, verse 15 of chapter 15. Let us hear then the Word of God. So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas.

And having scourged Jesus, having had Jesus flogged, he delivered him to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is the governor's headquarters.

And they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak. And twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him.

[1 : 09] Hail, King of the Jews! And they were striking his hair with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him.

And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Ruthus, to carry his cross.

And they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull. And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him.

And the inscription of the charge against him read, the King of the Jews. And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and another on his left.

[2 : 11] And those who passed by derided him. They abused him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.

And so also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, He saved others, yet he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.

And those who were crucified with him also reviled him. 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 is 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 us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 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 he breathed his last, the centurion said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

[3 : 36] Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that every page of the Bible has been breathed out, has been inspired by you.

And so, Father, we come to you as the one who has given this word, the one who can make us understand this word. And we ask, Lord, for your help today as we study your word together.

Lord, some of us have become Christians maybe years ago. Maybe, Lord, it just seems old, old hat to us and our hearts are growing cold.

But, Lord, we pray, Lord, that you would breathe fire into this cold heart of ours so that some feeble, pale reflection of your purest love divine would be in our lives.

So, Father, we come to you asking that you would speak to us as we open the pages of your word together. Father, we pray for our friend up there as well, just as a paramedic's deal with him, Lord. [4 : 36] We just pray that they would be able to bring comfort and help to him, Lord. And so, help us, Lord, just to tune in to the preaching here. Faces forward and speak to you as we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. The message of the cross. How do you view the cross? What is the message of the cross of Jesus Christ to you?

Is it a message of great tragedy? Or is it a message of great triumph? Certainly, a message of great tragedy would be the view of a lot of folks.

Not just folks in the street, but folks that are church attenders. They 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 morning after preaching. And an older lady, shaking his hand, said to him, You know, she said, I've often thought about that boy Jesus and his death on the cross.

[5 : 38] And I've often thought, what a waste of such a promising life. All the power that that boy had to heal and do amazing things. If only he could have lived until he was maybe 50 or 60 years old.

Think of all the good he could have done. It's an absolute tragedy. Now, I don't know if that conversation happened at this church door. It may well have been. Because someone comes to services at the Tron and may have done so for years, there's no guarantee that they understand the message of the cross.

John Taylor, one of our missionaries, was a missionary in Japan for 34 years, told me the story of a Japanese woman who was reading through the gospel for the first time, not knowing anything of the story beforehand.

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 at what she read in Mark 15, 33 to 39, that she could not read on.

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

[6 : 54] Such a tragedy. Now as we come to the 15th chapter of Mark, and to the verses that we have before us this afternoon, one could be forgiven for thinking that way, that the cross of Jesus Christ is a tragedy.

These verses bring to an end the last week of Jesus' life. Mark devotes six chapters to the 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. Jesus had come to Jerusalem after three years of public ministry. And he arrived in Jerusalem for what would be the last week of his life. And he arrives amid scenes of triumph.

People had spread their cloaks in the roads before Jesus. Others had spread leafy branches in the roads. There was people going before and people going behind. And they were all shouting. 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 the Father David.

[8 : 09] Hosanna in the highest! Scenes of great triumph. As the crowds believed that in the person of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God would be ushered in.

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

No. No, this time it's crucify him. Crucify him. Verse 10 of chapter 15. Pilate perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered Jesus up.

But the chief priests stirred 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, Crucify him! And Pilate said to them, Why? What evil has he done? But they shouted all the more, Crucify him!

[9 : 09] So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas. And having scourged, having flogged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

And so as we come to our verses this afternoon, it seems that the hopes of a nation, the hopes of a people, 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 of Jesus Christ is a great tragedy. The apostle Peter preaching back in Acts chapter 3 says, 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.

So on one level, it is a great tragedy. But Mark, Mark the evangelist, Mark the preacher, remember, wants us to see that the message of the cross is not one of great tragedy, but one of great triumph. I hope that as we go through these verses together, we will see that this is Mark's interpretation of the events, not Terry McCutcheon's, it's the apostle Mark's. And that the message of the cross that Mark intended to convey to us was a message of great triumph.

[10:28] So over these next three weeks, we're going to spend some time unpacking verses 33 to 39 of chapter 15. There are a lot of things going on in these verses, but three dramatic things in particular that are happening that will help us chart a course through these verses.

There is the darkness. Then there is the first cry of Jesus. Then the second cry of Jesus and the curtain temple being torn in two from top to bottom.

Focusing on these particulars will in turn, I hope, make plain for us the message of the cross that Mark is keen for us to see and to understand.

Firstly, there is verse 33. God is angry, represented by the darkness. Secondly, verses 34 to 36. Jesus had abandoned the meaning of Jesus' first cry.

And then thirdly, verses 37 to 39. We can be accepted or we can have access to God, represented by the second cry of Jesus and the temple curtain being torn in two.

[11:37] Well, firstly then, under our consideration today, verse 33. God is angry, as represented by the darkness. In the lead up to our verses, Mark has shown us all that Jesus has suffered at the hands of men.

He has been betrayed by Judas, one of his disciples. He has been arrested. All of his closest friends have ran away and left him. He's been tried in a kangaroo court by the chief priests and the whole council, the whole religious establishment, where people have borne false testimony against him.

He's been condemned to death by them for telling the truth. He has been punched, kicked, spat upon and mocked. He's been rejected by his own people who have called for him to be executed. He's been handed over to the Romans who have had him flogged. Roman soldiers have had their fun too, mocking him, putting a purple robe over him. A crown of thorns has been woven together and pushed onto Jesus' head.

The Roman soldiers have kneeled mockingly in front of him, hailing him as the king of the Jews. They have also struck him on the head and spat upon him also. He's been nailed hand and foot to the cross.

[12:56] But the mocking, the taunting and the abuse, it continues. It's relentless. It's relentless from the chief priests, from the passers-by, from the scribes.

And even the criminals who have been crucified with him have also reviled and abused him. Verse 25 tells us that it was the third hour when they crucified him.

And so as we come to verse 33 and to the sixth hour, Jesus has already hung on the cross for three hours. And Mark now turns as it were. Mark turns saying, Yes, yes, man has done all of this to Jesus.

But now, but now it's God's turn. Verse 33. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

The Jewish clock ran a wee bit different from ours. Six a.m. was the first hour. So Jesus has hung on the cross from nine a.m. verse 25 until twelve noon, the sixth hour, verse 33.

[14:04] Twelve noon, as it's often called, high noon. Some of those cowboy forms, high noon. Twelve noon is the time when the sun would be at its highest point in the sky. But it's at this time when the sun would be at its highest point in the sky.

It's at this time that Mark tells us there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. That for the three hours between twelve noon and three in the afternoon, there was darkness over the whole land.

And this darkness was intense. It was unforgettable. Unforgettable. You can feel the eeriness, can't you? One minute the sun is shining its light and then the next minute darkness.

People stopping in their tracks as the darkness covers the whole land. There was maybe the sound of wee birds singing in trees. But then darkness.

This untimely, eerie darkness has put an end to all that. All is quiet. All is eerie. All is dark. But what caused the darkness?

[15:12] Was it a solar eclipse? We had one of those earlier this year. But even a solar eclipse can't last for three hours. It lasts a few minutes. It tops. And scientists will tell us that a solar eclipse was impossible.

Remember, the evening before was the Passover. That was the festival, the Passover. And the Passover was signified by a full moon being in the sky. An eclipse the next day then is impossible as the moon and the sun are at opposite sides of the earth.

So it could not have been a solar eclipse. Well, what caused the darkness? Well, whatever it was that caused the darkness, Mark wants us to see that it wasn't normal. It was supernatural.

It was ordained by God. The most important question here, I suppose, is not what caused the darkness. No. 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. Darkness, especially in the middle of the day, was a sign of God's presence and His judgment and His anger.

[16:23] All of this talk of anger, God's anger, may be unsettling you. May be thinking to yourself, this wee guy is all hellfire and brimstone and this is Wednesday, it's not even Sunday.

Now, just a word about the anger of God as I know some of us, in fact, probably lots of us here will have been on the receiving end of someone's anger at one point or another in life. And in many cases, it is and can still be a harrowing experience when we think about it.

But let me say firstly, the Lord's anger is not like ours. He doesn't have mood swings. He doesn't fly off the handle for the least wee thing. All of God's emotions are rooted in His holy nature and are always expressed sinlessly.

They flow from His perfection the way He has perfectly ordained them. For instance, the Lord's anger is rooted in His divine justice. His justice is pure, it is right, and it is holy.

Therefore, His anger is perfectly righteous and predictable. It's never capricious, never changeable, never fickle, and never malicious.

[17:37] So then, in His anger, God never sins. The darkness represented God's anger. No Jew would be confused as to what the darkness meant.

Darkness, especially in the middle of the day, was a sign of God's presence and His anger and His judgment. The Old Testament is full of this. Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 30, they will growl over it on that day like the growling of the sea.

And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress and the light is darkened by its clouds. Isaiah 60, for behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples.

But the Lord will arise upon you and glory will be seen upon you. Joel chapter 2, the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

From Zephaniah, the great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast. The sound of the day of the Lord is bitter. The mighty man cries aloud there.

[18:48] A day of wrath is that day. A day of distress and anguish. A day of ruin and devastation. A day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and thick darkness.

And probably most vividly and most descriptively from the book of Amos, verse 9 of chapter 8. And on that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

No Jew would be confused as to what this darkness meant. They knew that it meant God's presence and His judgment and His anger. And remember, this was at the time of the Passover.

Their minds would have been drawn back to the first Passover when God had delivered the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. Remember the curses and the plagues that God had set upon the Egyptians.

Remember the plagues culminating in the death of the firstborn son in every household. Well, what was the plague? What was the curse before the death of the firstborn son?

[19 : 56] It was the ninth plague. The curse of darkness. Exodus 10 and 22. So Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days.

The darkness signified the curse of God. At the Exodus, a plague of darkness spread over all the land before the Passover lamb was slain. Now here in Mark chapter 15, before the death of the ultimate Passover lamb, there again is darkness over the whole land.

God's judgment and anger are being poured out in a midday night. 33 years earlier, there had been brightness and music at midnight when Jesus was born.

But now, but now there is no brightness. Now there is no music. Now there is no joy. Now there is only darkness. Darkness and silence at noontide as the Son of God dies.

Darkness is a sign of mourning. We quoted earlier from Amos who prophesied that there would be darkness at that time, the day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment, saying, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

[21 : 17] But Amos goes on in verse 10. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentations. I will bring sackcloth in every waist and baldness in every head.

I will make it like the mourning for an only son. You see, friends, the cross is draped in the mourning sackcloth of darkness. darkness at Calvary was an announcement that God's firstborn son, God's beloved son, the Lamb of God, was giving his life for the sins of the world and God's anger is poured out upon him.

But the darkness at Calvary is also an announcement, an announcement to the world that God's judgment is coming. It's coming and all men had better be prepared.

And friends, the only way that we can be prepared for facing the judgment of God is to take our place, to take our stand where God's judgment has already fallen.

Have you done this? Are you taking your stand at the cross of Jesus? Have you put your trust in the cross of Jesus? Today would be a good day.

[22 : 39] Let us pray together. Oh, Father, we pray that you would teach us, Lord, its meaning, that cross uplifted high on which the man of sorrows was condemned to bleed and to die.

Please teach us, Lord, that even if no other had sinned but us alone, yet still your blood, Lord Jesus, yours only, must atone.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.