

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

Crucified, Dead and Buried

March 14th, 2021

Mark 15:21-47

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning Redeemer! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 15.

The line in the Creed that we will be studying today brings us to the theological centre of the Christian faith. Today we confess that the Lord Jesus Christ:

was crucified dead and buried

Of course, everything that we have confessed thus far has been essential. And every line that we have confessed is necessarily intertwined with this line. The cross makes no sense if God is not the Almighty Father and Creator of heaven and earth. The cross wouldn't be effective if Jesus were not truly God and truly man. Every line in the Creed matters. Of course!

But this line represents the crescendo! The entire Old Testament prepares us to see and understand the crucifixion, death and burial of the Son of God. The great preacher J.C. Ryle rightly said:

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most important fact in Christianity.¹

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 349.

This sentiment is not unique to J.C. Ryle. The Apostle Paul likewise declared the centrality of the cross. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 1, he summarized his preaching ministry, saying:

but **we preach Christ crucified**, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24 ESV)

Is that your motto, Christian? Is it the motto of your church? The Bible has a great deal to say about many things, but there is one message that must ring out from this pulpit over all the rest. We must preach Christ crucified! If I stray from this – if the message of the cross is not consistently proclaimed from this pulpit – then you have my full permission to lovingly but firmly press my nose back into this text. The note of the cross must ring true in the songs and the prayers and the sermons of the church.

Christ crucified. For some of you, this doctrine will resound in your heart with power, and wisdom and glory! It will sound like LIFE to your ears, and it will be applied like medicine to your weary souls.

But for others of you, this doctrine will be a stumbling block and folly. The cross will appear archaic and barbaric. You will find yourself feeling more offended by the holiness of God than you are by the depravity of the human heart. You will find yourself longing for a god who will make light of your sin. And you will find yourself frustrated because the cross displays clearly that the God of the Bible will do no such thing. As Stephen Charnock writes:

An infinite abhorrence of sin, and an infinite love to the world march hand in hand together.²

Today, as we look to the cross, we are going to be reminded that God HATES our sin with an unrelenting passion. And we are going to be reminded that God LOVES His people with an incomprehensible love. Reflecting on the cross, John Calvin once said:

in the cross of Christ, as in a magnificent theatre, the inestimable goodness of God is displayed before the whole world. In all the creatures, indeed, both high and low, the glory of God shines, **but nowhere has it shone more brightly than in the cross.**³

² Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 472.

³ John Calvin as quoted by Micheal Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 127.

We preach Christ, and him crucified! Why? Because the goodness of God breaks through with power and GLORY at the cross! By God's grace, and with the help of His Spirit, let's witness the glory of God as it shines through the Son who was crucified, dead and buried. You should have your Bibles open now to Mark 15. We are going to begin our reading this morning in verse 21. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.²⁴ And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him.²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."²⁷ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!"³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself.³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah."³⁶ 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."³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.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!"

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead.⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.⁴⁶ And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the

entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid. (Mark 15:21-47 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, admittedly, we are covering a lot of ground today. As a result, we are going to be selective. There are Old Testament allusions that we won't have time to unpack and historical details that we will skim past. This passage brings us through the event of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial and, with the time that we have this morning, I will attempt to unpack the significance of all three of these aspects of Jesus' atoning work for us.

Crucified, Dead and Buried

Last week, as we reflected on how Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, we spent a great deal of time considering the breadth and the depth of the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf. In our text this morning, we pick up after Jesus has already received a beating, a scourging, and a crown of thorns. The physical suffering that Jesus endured left him unable to carry his cross to the place of his crucifixion. So, the soldiers grabbed a random stranger from the crowd – Simon of Cyrene – to bear Jesus' cross for him and to bring it to the site of the crucifixion.

Once there, the soldiers stripped Jesus of his clothes and crucified him naked. The sign above his head read "The King of the Jews". Those who were crucified with him reviled him. The witnesses who were present derided him. The priests and the scribes mocked him, saying:

He saved others; he cannot save himself. (Mark 15:31b ESV)

They, of course, did not realize the irony of their words. It was Jesus' mission of redemption that caused him to remain on that cross. He could have called for a legion of angels to vindicate him in that moment, but he knew that his cross would be the means of salvation for his people. And so, the Son of God hung naked upon the cross while the world laughed.

This is the portrait that Mark paints for us of the scene of the crucifixion. In Jesus' final hours before his death, he suffered unimaginable physical agony and unrelenting ridicule by the ones that he came to save.

But why? Why did Jesus have to die this way? Why the crucifixion? Couldn't he have born our sins by dying of a heart attack? Why was this bloody, humiliating scene at the cross necessary? The crucifixion was necessary because:

1. In his crucifixion, he bore our curse

In John chapter 3, right before the most well-known verse of the Bible in verse 16, Jesus makes a curious Old Testament reference. He says:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15 ESV)

I want to take a quick moment to help you to understand that reference because, according to Jesus, we won't understand how "God so loved the world" unless we understand how that bronze serpent pointed forward to Christ.

After God had delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, fed them with manna from heaven, provided for them with water from a stone and even caused quail to fall from the sky, they grumbled against Him. "We want to go back to Egypt! Why did you bring us here to starve? At least when we were slaves, we ate well!"

This grumbling was terrible sin. The Israelites were responding to God's grace and kindness with complaint and ingratitude. Eventually, God's justice was poured out and He sent venomous serpents into the camp. People died. People repented. People cried out for mercy. And God, hearing their cry, gave Moses some curious instructions. He commanded Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and to set it up high on a post in the camp where everyone could see it. For some mysterious reason, when they looked upon the serpent, they were healed.

This is a strange story, isn't it? And it poses some questions. Why a serpent? Why wouldn't God have Moses fashion an image of the ark, or of one of the other sacred items from the tabernacle? In fact, why would He have Moses fashion any image at all? Couldn't that lead to idolatry? The story of the bronze serpent lifted high on a pole would be very difficult to understand were it not for what Jesus says in John 3:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, **so must the Son of Man be lifted up**,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15 ESV)

God delivered the Israelites from the curse for their sin by commanding them to behold the curse – the serpent – on a pole. Jesus is saying in John 3, “That story was preparing you to see and understand what I am going to do for you.” The Apostle Paul connected the dots when he wrote:

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by **becoming a curse for us**—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

So, why was the bloody cross necessary? Because the cross was the place where the curse of our sin would most clearly and prominently be displayed. Our sin did not simply bring death into the world – it also brought the curse. And Jesus came to deliver us from both. Crucifixion was more than just a method for murder – it was a means of humiliation. Ben Myers notes:

To be crucified was to be cast out of the human community, rejected by God and the world. It was literally a fate worse than death.⁴

In the crucifixion, Jesus didn't simply die for our curse – he BECAME the curse. As Martin Luther writes:

Christ was made sin itself; Christ was made the curse itself. When a sinner gets wise to himself he does not only feel miserable, he feels like misery personified; he does not only feel like a sinner, he feels like sin itself.⁵

The perfect, sinless Son of God hung on the cross naked, bloody, disfigured, rejected, despised, and humiliated. Behold the curse that you I ushered into this world with our sin.

⁴ Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 68.

⁵ Martin Luther as cited in <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=luth&b=48&c=3> Accessed March 10, 2021.

We are all tempted to take our sin lightly. We are all tempted to make little of the rebellion that surfaces in our lives on a daily basis. It's just a little gossip. It's just a quick peak. It's just a little venting. It's just a few drinks. It's just a show. It's just a white lie. It's not that bad. No-one will ever know. This isn't hurting anyone.

But it IS hurting someone. Your little sin. My little sin. The little sin of the person sitting next to you. Every little sin was laid on the perfect, sinless, Son of God and in his flesh, he bore our "little" sin. And, as it turns out, in God's eyes, sin is not a little thing. Sin is a TERRIBLE thing – a RUINOUS thing! Sin brings death and curse, and it had a firm grip on each and every one of our souls. But God so loved the world that He set a costly plan in motion to set us free. Paul writes:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, **nailing it to the cross.** (Colossians 2:13-14 ESV)

Praise be to God, in the crucifixion, Jesus became our curse and bore our sin! And now:

2. In his death, he settled our debt

To understand this act of redemption, we need to go back to the very beginning of the story. When we look back at the Garden of Eden, we see pure, innocent bliss. We see a husband and wife who love and enjoy one another; a perfect garden brimming with life; humanity living in perfect, uninterrupted relationship with God. But we also see one rule with a clear consequence:

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**" (Genesis 2:15-17 ESV)

That was the rule on day one, and that rule has not changed. In Romans 6, we read:

For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a ESV)

You will never understand the death of Christ until you know and tremble before this terrible truth: You are a sinner, and you deserve death.

That is the consistent message of the Bible. Every single person in this room has sinned against our holy God. Like Adam and Eve who disobeyed Him in the garden, we have all chosen to go our own way. We live on the planet that He made, and we breathe the oxygen that He provides, and in Him we live and move and have our being. And yet, just like Adam and Eve in the garden and just like the Israelites in the wilderness, we are an ungrateful, rebellious people.

Though we are surrounded by His generosity, we complain. We have more possessions than 99% of any people who have ever existed, and yet we covet. And we lust. And we lie. And while we're not as bad as we could be, each and every one of us is less than what He has called us to be. We are sinners, and the penalty for sin is death.

That should be the sad end of our story.

But then we look to this text. We see Jesus, the only sinless man who ever lived, suffering under the curse of our sin. We see the second person of the Trinity – truly God and truly man – dying a death that he does not owe. We hear the only person who deserves perfect, uninterrupted fellowship with God crying out:

“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34b ESV)

Commentator James Edwards notes:

Rejected and scorned by Israel, sacrificed as a political pawn by Rome, denied and abandoned by his own followers, Jesus is wholly forsaken and exposed to the horror of humanity's sin. Its horror is so total that in his dying breath he senses his separation from God.⁶

The penalty for sin is death, but Jesus never sinned. So, whose penalty was he paying? That is one of the most important questions you could ever ask. The Apostle Paul answers that question for us in Romans 3. He explains:

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 476.

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:23-26 ESV)

God, in His mercy, has passed over our sins. However, that sin didn't disappear when He passed over it. The curse of that sin; the consequences of that sin; the hurt of that sin still remained. The wrong still needed to be righted. The debt still needed to be paid. God is holy and just. He can't simply turn a blind eye to sin. Something needed to be done. And so Jesus – the Godman – came to settle our debt. He lived the life that we couldn't live and then he soaked up the curse of our sin in his body and he absorbed God's holy wrath against that sin in his soul and then he died the death that we owed in our place. Propitiation is a big word that essentially means an offering that settles a debt. Here, Paul teaches us that Jesus' death on the cross paid the debt for all those who have faith – all those who look to Jesus like the Israelites looked up at that bronze serpent.

Jesus was the only one who could truly satisfy our debt. Being truly man, born of the virgin Mary, he was able to stand as our human substitute. Being truly God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, he was able to satisfy the infinite debt that we had incurred. As J.C. Ryle explains:

In the instant that our Lord drew his last breath, the work of atonement for a world's sin was accomplished. The ransom for sinners was at length paid.⁷

And there should be no doubt as to whether or not God accepted this offering because, as Jesus cried out and breathed his last breath, we read:

the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38 ESV)

If you remember from previous weeks, we talked about how the ark of God represented God's presence and how that ark was stored in the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was the innermost room in the temple. It was a room that could only be entered once a year by the high priest and only after a series of sacrifices had been offered to make atonement for his sins and the sins of his

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 344.

people. That room – the Holy of Holies – was closed off by a curtain. The curtain was a visible reminder of the separation that sin had created between the Holy God and his people.

But when Jesus bore our sin and died on that cross, a new path was forged across that great chasm! The veil was torn because the presence of God was now available to all of God's people. In Jesus' death, he made a way for us to come back to our Heavenly Father:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22 ESV)

Amen! In his death, he settled our debt. And lastly:

3. In his burial, he identified with his people

We don't often consider Jesus' burial when we think about the events of Good Friday, but we should. The burial is theologically significant. Jesus suffered as we suffer, and he died as we die, and then he was buried as we are buried. Upon his death, Jesus' soul departed from his body and then his body was laid in a tomb. In this way, Jesus fully exposed himself to the human experience. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa explained:

The birth makes the death necessary. He who had decided to share our humanity had to experience all that belongs to our nature. Now human life is encompassed within two limits, and if he had passed through one and not the other, he would only have fulfilled half of his purpose. ... Our whole nature had to be brought back from death. Thus, he stooped down to our dead body and stretched out a hand, as it were, to one who lay prostrate. He approached so near death as to come into contact with it.⁸

When Jesus' body was laid to rest in that tomb, he identified with every believer who had ever died before him and who would ever die after him. He came into the world through the womb, he died, and then his body was buried. He was truly man.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa as quoted by Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 75.

Jesus' lifeless, broken and battered body was lifted off of the cross and was wrapped in a linen shroud. It was then placed in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea before a large stone was rolled across the entrance. And there his lifeless body rested in the dark for three days. The body of Jesus experienced that which our bodies will experience in burial. This may seem like a trivial point to emphasize but it has long been a source of comfort for believers. J.C. Ryle, for example, notes:

One thing, however, ought to comfort believers, and that is the thought, that the grave is "the place where the Lord once lay."⁹

The thought of our loved ones' bodies wasting away beneath the earth leads us to despair. There is a feeling of finality that comes with burial. As the earth closes over our loved one, the voice of doubt whispers to us, "Death has won. There is no coming back from this."

But that voice is a lie! The burial of Jesus' body didn't mark the end of his story, and neither will the burial of our bodies be the end of ours! Jesus identified with us in his burial so that we could identify with him in his resurrection. As the Apostle Paul explained:

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:22-23 ESV)

We are going to unpack that further in the weeks to come, but for now let's suffice it to recognize and take comfort in the truth that he identified with us in his burial. Jesus – the second Person of the Trinity – left his heavenly home to enter into the womb of the virgin Mary. He lived and suffered in this broken, sin-scarred world. He became a curse for us as he bore our sin on the cross. He settled our debt as he surrendered himself to death. And his dead body was wrapped and laid to rest in a tomb where it remained for three days.

Behold your King! He is not what the world expected. This story of suffering and death is a stumbling block and folly to the world. But to those who have eyes to see – to those who see their sin and who recognize their separation from the holy God – it is wisdom and power and glory! You don't understand Christianity if you don't understand the cross. You don't know Jesus unless

⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 352.

you recognize him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Martyn Lloyd Jones once said:

The message is not to look at 'Jesus' (as they call him), as the great moral exemplar, the great teacher; it is, look at a gibbet, at a man with a crown of thorns upon his brow and an agonized expression on his face, crying out 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' - a man dying in apparent weakness, his body taken down and buried in a grave with a stone rolled over it. That is what you are called to look at - Jesus Christ and him crucified!¹⁰

Conclusion

And that is where I want to conclude this morning. I am inviting you to look with eyes of faith to the cross of Christ – the place where God's hatred of sin and His love for His people blazes forth like the sun! As Moses held up the bronze serpent in the camp, this morning I am holding up the sinless Saviour who was pierced for our transgression and who was crushed for our iniquity. Those who looked up at the bronze serpent were saved. Those who looked to other means perished. The same is true for each of us in this room. We have all sinned and we are all under the same curse. We will all stand before the Perfect judge and His verdict has already been revealed. We are guilty. And the penalty for our sin is death. Those who look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross will live! Those who place their trust in any other means will die.

Why won't you look? Why won't you live? Why should you perish when eternal life has been set before you so generously? The debt is paid! The way is made! Hear now our great God's invitation:

Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:22 ESV)

Look! Live!

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

¹⁰ Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 138.