

Intro to Mark 15:33-41

Sunday, April 9, 2017
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When we think about the universal symbol for Christianity, we think about the cross. It's quite strange, really. When you consider that crucifixion was an instrument of torture and execution to demonstrate the power of Rome over their enemies, it isn't hard to think of what contemporary parallels might be. For instance, we could think of an electric chair, or skull and crossbones, as being symbols for a religion. That would be quite morbid. And yet early Christians chose the cross as their symbol because they recognized that, according to God's plan for the salvation of human beings, the cross was the centerpiece.

So, when we come to this passage in Mark 15, we are not only coming to that portion of the narrative that describes the events of Jesus' execution, we are coming to the very center of God's heart for His sinful, wayward people. When we think of the cross or speak of the cross, we must think not of the gruesomeness of it all or the shame, we must think of what great length God went to in order to rescue His people. God's grace truly does reach out to everyone in the cross of Christ.

Context

Mark's Gospel has presented Jesus under an ethos of suffering. He is the suffering Servant of God whose followers will surely suffer as He did. This portion of Mark 15, then, serves as a climax to the entire book. Mark begins by saying, "The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." While Jesus suffers the misunderstanding of His followers all throughout the narrative, we are reminded of this great truth in a climactic moment as the Roman Centurion, once far off from God as an alien and stranger, confesses this great truth: that Jesus is the Son of God. It only happens as Jesus suffers and dies on the cross, but this too is for the glory of God the Father.

Read and Reflect *(Use this section to write down any thoughts you had on the sermon. Make sure to note any questions you had about something in the passage or in the sermon.)*

Read Mark 15:33-41

“At the Ninth Hour”

I. The Tearing of the Curtain

- What is the curtain?

- Why was it torn?

II. The Testimony of the Centurion

- What he saw.

- What he said.

III. What does it all mean?

*We have open access to God through Christ

*God’s grace reaches out to everyone

Discuss

- 1) Based on our study in the Gospel of Mark and what you know from other passages in the Bible, why did Jesus have to die?

- 2) Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Now that Christ has died, we have access to God through faith in Him. How does the writer of Hebrews say we should live in response to this? (Try to be as thorough in unpacking these verses as you can. Consider all of the “let us” statements.)

- 3) How does having an assurance of faith (meaning we don’t constantly have to worry that we are not saved because Jesus’ death has secured our salvation) enable us to live out our obedience to God more freely and joyfully?

- 4) As Pastor Don noted, the Centurion’s testimony was straight forward. He said what he knew to be true of Jesus based on what he had overheard and what he had seen with his own eyes when Jesus died. His testimony was focused on Jesus. How should that affect the way we share our testimonies? What role does our own life story play in sharing a testimony about Jesus?

- 5) Mark presents some unlikely “heroes of the faith” in chapter 15: the Roman Centurion and the women who followed Jesus. The Roman would have been despised for his profession. The women were looked down upon in society in general (for example, they were not trusted to give testimony in a law court). What does their providential inclusion in the crucifixion story teach us about God’s grace?