

Mark 15:33-41

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Date: 07 June 2026

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[0:00] Open your Bibles again to Mark chapter 15. We're continuing our series on the crucifixion in Mark. Last week we looked at the moment of the crucifixion.

Next week we're going to look at the burial of Jesus. But today we're going to look at his actual death. So would you please turn your focus to Mark chapter 15, verses 33 to 41.

Over the past 2,000 years, it has been estimated that there have been about 66 billion human deaths in this world. And think of the whole variety of contexts of all those deaths.

Deaths in hospitals and hospices. Deaths on the battlefield and the trenches. Deaths in prisons, on roadsides, in houses. Tragic deaths.

Heroic deaths. Deserved deaths. Executions. The electric chair, the gallows, lethal injection. Even thousands of crucifixions in the past two millennia.

[1:02] 66 billion deaths. But one thing unites them all. They are all, ultimately, just deaths. Life coming to an end.

And they may leave behind memories or grief or a legacy. But still, they are all life just coming to an end. No mistake about it.

And to deal with the grief, we try our hardest to move on. And as the centuries go by, the world does just keep moving on. But I say one thing unites them all.

But really, we should say, all except one. One death of the 66 billion is not actually just a death. One, unlike any other. One with a meaning and significance and impact on you and me, unlike any other. A death the world cannot just move on from.

[2:06] And it is the death we are witnessing here in Mark today. But if you were there on the roadside, as Jesus hung on that cross, you could be very tempted to think, this is like every other death.

In the middle of two criminals, you could be mistaken to think, his death is just like theirs. And just like the thousands of other crucifixions of the past. And just like the other 66 billion.

And in fact, that mistake is being made here in Mark. We saw last week the passers-by and the priests thought this was a death like any other. In fact, a forgettable, laughable death.

And the bystanders in our passage today make a mistake. They hear Jesus crying to God, but they mishear him. They think he's calling Elijah. It is possible to mistake what's going on here in the death of Christ.

And to think it is a death like any other. But to do so would be the greatest mistake of your life. In fact, you might be here today, and you know this person called Jesus died.

[3:19] You know it involved a cross. And you know Christians care about it. But to you, it may just be a death. Something you can just move on from.

Well, Mark has written these words today to make it very clear without mistake that this is a death unlike any other. And you must not move on from it.

Because in this passage here, we see God's perspective of what is happening on the cross. Two supernatural, divine events appear in this passage.

The darkness that falls upon the land. And the tearing of the curtain at the moment of Jesus' death. And in these two divine events, we see God's perspective on the cross.

Not what it means to me. Not what it means to the onlookers. But what it means to God. And we can make mistakes, but God cannot. And so God is doing something in creation.

[4:25] Supernaturally shaping these events to clear up the mistakes. And to show us why this is a death unlike any other. Why we must not be mistaken about this.

And why the world, why you, cannot just move on from this death. But rather, this is the most glorious moment of history. And this death will transform your life.

It will transform your eternity. And so last week we focused on the dynamic between the passers-by and Christ. Well now, I want us to turn our eyes up to heaven.

And see the dynamic between God and Christ. And see what God says about the cross. And so I just want to focus on two things today. The darkness and the curtain.

And we will see what God says about this death. And so the first thing is this, the darkness. Let's look at the darkness. Jesus has been hanging on the cross for about three hours now.

[5 : 32] And look back to verse 25. It was the third hour, 9 a.m., when they crucified him. And now in verse 33, we're in the sixth hour. Twelve o'clock, midday.

Just outside Jerusalem. Three hours of Jesus hanging in the hot sun. His flesh pulling on those nails. And blood dripping onto the dry dust.

But as the clock strikes 12, what is the one thing you would expect at midday in the Middle East? Sun. Hot sun, high in the sky.

For what happens here, the clock strikes 12. And verse 33, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

Now, this is not talking about a solar eclipse. This is not talking about just being overcast. No, this is talking about a sudden, supernatural pitch blackness across the land for three hours.

[6 : 37] We're about to approach midday soon. It would be like right now, the sun turns off like a light switch. Your eyes dilate. And London is submerged into a winter night until 3 p.m.

Well, that's Jerusalem here. As Jesus hangs there, God shuts off the sun's rays. And this cross and this land is plunged into darkness.

No warmth in your skin. No light in your eyes. And without electricity, there really was darkness over the whole land. And whenever God acts in creation like this, he does so to communicate something to us.

It is like a cosmic sign telling us something about what is going on in this moment. And darkness in the Bible has a very significant meaning.

Darkness represents two things. Firstly, darkness represents evil, sin. The Bible speaks of our sinful actions as being deeds of darkness.

[7 : 49] And in sin, we walk in darkness with darkened minds and belonging to the kingdom of darkness. Darkness means sin and evil.

And we even use that imagery, don't we? When a great evil happens in our country, think of the Southport attacks. When that happens, we say, today is a very dark day.

We know something evil is present. Well, in this darkness, God is indicating in the heavens itself, there is an intense presence of evil and sin in this moment.

And as well as that, darkness means another thing. Darkness represents God's anger, his wrath, his judgment.

Think of the Exodus, when there was darkness over Egypt as it faces the plagues of judgment. And think of how Jesus describes hell.

[8 : 52] He calls it the outer darkness. Darkness. Which makes sense because light, light is to do with comfort and joy, isn't it?

What lifts your spirit? It's a warm summer's day. Light is life and comfort and joy. And in particular, light is God's goodness.

Think of the benediction we hear every Sunday. God's favor shines upon us. And so darkness is the complete opposite. It is the shutting off of joy and happiness and comfort.

And instead, it's the presence of God's wrath. So in this supernatural darkness over this cross, God is revealing to the world something is present at Golgotha.

God's holy anger is intensely present in this moment. And these two meanings, sin and wrath, they always go together.

[9 : 59] Like two magnets stuck together. Because the darkness of sin always brings the darkness of God's anger. Where there is human evil, there is divine wrath.

You cannot separate the two. And so you may not realize it. But this very same darkness has been lurking in this world for a while.

Ever since Adam ate that fruit, though the sun still shone, this darkness has filled the earth. This darkness was over Adam and Eve.

It was over Cain and Abel. It was over the nations as they grew and spread across this planet. And it's everywhere today. This darkness is over this country right now.

It's over this city. It's over homes and in bedrooms. It hangs over those parades. It sits over the mosques. It's there over phones and laptops, cafes and boardrooms.

[11:09] The darkness is everywhere. The wrath of God looms over all ungodliness in this world. Where there is sin, there is God's wrath.

And it is an unbearable weight hanging over a world turned from God. It is an infinite debt that none of us can repay.

A guilt none of us can erase. But the scary thing is, we don't see it. We go about living our lives thinking everything is as bright as day.

No God, no darkness, no consequences. And we go about our lives thinking everything is fine. We make the mistake thinking it's not there, but a darkness looms.

And in this moment, as Jesus hangs on the cross, God knows that we don't see the darkness. And so he shuts off the sun to show us this darkness really does exist.

[12:12] And the darkness is intensely present in this moment at this cross. It is like God is saying, I need to shut off the light from a star just to show you what this cross really means.

And so though the sky is black, this moment is actually blazing hot with the fury of God. Yet this darkness is hanging over the purest of all people.

A man who has no sin. A man for whom evil has never even crossed his mind. The man in whom God is well pleased.

The man who is filled with light and joy. Yet the darkness of sin and wrath hangs above him of all people.

Why? Well, God is showing us what this moment really means. Why this is a death unlike any other. It is because as Jesus hangs on that cross, it is not his own darkness that he bears.

[13:26] But he bears the darkness of sinners. There is the darkness of sin in the air because on this cross, this man is becoming sin for us.

The pure Lord of glory is being treated as a sinner. He is bearing the darkness of sin in his body on that tree.

And God is striking him with the fury of his wrath upon sin. But it is not his own sin. No, that sin is coming from somewhere.

Someone else. But whose? Whose sin is he bearing? Brothers and sisters, it is yours.

And it is mine. It is like if we could all open up our spiritual bank accounts and see every thought and word and action that we have ever done, all written with the ink of darkness.

[14:32] Every sin. Every outburst. Every click. Every kiss. Every lie. Everything from our grumbling this morning down to the unspeakable things we don't even dare to think about.

All of that in our account. It is like as the clock strikes 12 in Jerusalem, the lights go out and your account is drained and emptied and funneled all into Christ's account.

All the darkness of our life landing on him. You can't even imagine the horrors and the filth being put to his holy name.

Yet in this moment, God is declaring in the darkness, this man is bearing your sin. And Jesus continues to hang there because he knows we are not able to bear it.

And the only way to save sin is to save you. It is to take the darkness off us. And place the unbearable weight of our debt onto his shoulders.

[15:45] Which means not only the darkness of sin, but the darkness of God's wrath is falling upon this man. In this moment, as he hangs there, the full sting of sin's curse is piercing him right now.

So if in the mockery, Christ was tasting hell for us, well, this is him consuming every last drop. Which is why he speaks those haunting words in verse 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?

As the darkness comes to an end, we finally hear Jesus speak. And we get an insight into how he feels right now. And what does he say?

It's a quote from Psalm 22. He cries to God, why have you forsaken me? This is what it feels like to bear the darkness of our sin and the darkness of God's wrath.

[17:02] Forsaken. Cut off. Shut off. Now, we need to be careful with these words here. We mustn't be mistaken.

Look at verse 35. Jesus says, Eloi, in Aramaic, which means, my God. But people mistakenly think he says, Eli, meaning Elijah.

And like these people, I don't want us to be mistaken about what Jesus is saying here. We must not make the mistake of thinking, this is the Trinity breaking.

This is not the Trinity breaking. That is impossible. And we must not make the mistake of thinking, this is a cry of unbelief. No, Jesus cries, my God.

God is still his God. No, what is going on here is that Jesus, in his human soul, he is experiencing the full weight of this darkness.

[18:09] God is shutting off the light of his goodness and comfort and grace, shutting all of that off from Jesus so that Jesus only feels the weight of darkness in his soul.

He feels utterly forsaken. It is a cry unlike any other. Even in our darkest moments, we always have some light of God's goodness.

His mercy is always there. Even at our lowest, it's never as dark as it possibly could be. There is always some light.

God constantly shows you his goodness. And in Christ's life, he would have known it the most. The perfect son in perfect communion with the Father, knowing that joy and happiness and delight of God.

Yet now, in this cry and in this darkness, all of that is shut off. No light. No joy. And instead, Jesus only feels in his soul the dread-filled torment of God's holy anger upon sin.

[19:30] If you could send a microphone down into hell right now and record the screams, it would haunt us forever, wouldn't it? We would know, I never want to go through that.

Well, in a sense, we have a recording here. Darkness covers the land because as Jesus bears our sins, this is God unleashing all the furies of hell onto this one man and he can't help but cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It is a pain hard to put down in words, which is why Mark needs to write down the Aramaic as well, Jesus' mother tongue that he would have used. Eloi, Eloi, Lema sabachthani.

If your first language is in English, sometimes you can feel emotions so strong that when you cry out, English won't do, will it? You must go back to your mother tongue.

Well, that is Jesus. And so we must not be mistaken about what's going on here. God is telling us for those in Christ, Jesus went through hell for us.

[20:49] He is crying out here for your sake. This is the cry of bearing our punishment. This is the cry of your forgiveness. Feeling the weight of all that we have done, all those words, those thoughts, the things that we wish we never did, our sinless Savior cries out because he is bearing all of it on that cross.

It is a death unlike any other. We die as one sinner. This man dies carrying the sins of billions. And so we must make no mistake of how severe sin is.

We may not see this darkness, but God is showing us what it deserves. This agony is what the world will face if it remains in darkness. It is not a small thing to be far from God.

It is not a trivial thing to have this darkness over you. No, look at what the Son of God had to go through. And so Christian, whatever sin you may be persisting in, the sin that we are ignoring right now, it needs to stop.

Don't make this cry mean nothing. And if you are not a Christian here today, God is telling you something you must not be mistaken about.

[22:14] There is a darkness. And this is what it deserves, but the question is, will the darkness remain on you or will it land on Christ? Because your life doesn't have to remain in darkness.

This darkness may be everywhere, but it isn't over everyone. because I want us to now look at the other supernatural events here. I want us to look at the curtain and to why this death is unlike any other and why it changes everything about the darkness in this world.

So let's look at the curtain, the curtain. After the darkness passes and Jesus cries out, we come to the moment of his death, verse 35.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. Just a few words. After that agony, after that cry, he took his final breath and Jesus died.

And again, you might be tempted to think this moment is like the 66 billion other final moments. But as soon as he stops breathing and his head sinks down, as soon as that happened, God does something.

[23:33] Verse 38. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Now this curtain is the temple curtain that divided the most holy place from the rest of the world.

So behind the curtain in the most holy place is where the Ark of the Covenant was, where God's presence most intently dwelt, intensely dwelt. And the curtain was there to shut the world off from God because he's too holy.

It was to keep the darkness out. It is a giant keep out sign saying, your sin is too much. Your guilt is too severe.

You cannot walk onto holy ground carrying that filth. You cannot come to God. You do not deserve life. You do not deserve joy. You deserve darkness. But what happens as soon as Jesus dies? The curtain is torn in two. The barrier between God and man is split open. And notice, it happens from top to bottom.

[24 : 48] This was not humans cutting up. This is God tearing down. God is showing us something. God is showing us the death of Christ is like no other.

His death causes something. It achieves something. This death and only in this death, this is how you and I are brought back to God. For those in Christ, as that curtain tore, that is God declaring to you in the most glorious way, your debt is wiped out.

your sins are paid for. Your darkness has ended. The wrath of God is no longer over you because it has once and for all fallen on the Son of God.

Therefore, your sins are once and for all forgiven. Your account is emptied onto Christ and it stays that way. the curtain is torn and you are forever, you are forever brought back to your God.

God. But even as Christians, we can so easily be mistaken about this, can't we? Because our hearts still accuse us, don't they?

[26 : 11] Our sins still plague us and we imagine this darkness still looms over us. The memories of our past still haunt us and the guilt is hard to escape.

We think of what we did last week, last night and we think God is angry. God hates me. What can I do to make this up to him?

And when we think that, we mistake what has happened on the cross. That sin, that very sin that you are thinking about right now, that has already fallen onto Christ and on the cross as that curtain tore, that is God declaring to you that Christ has made an end of your sin.

And if all God's anger fell onto Christ, is there any left for you? None. And if all the darkness fell onto Christ, when you die, will you ever face the outer darkness?

Impossible. And if Jesus was forsaken for us, will God ever forsake you? Never. And so God holds nothing against you, Christian, because he held it all against Christ.

[27 : 30] And the curtain cannot be sewn back together. Jesus cannot be uncrucified. No, you are forgiven. When Christ's breath ended, your sin ended with him.

And if you are in Christ, there is nothing, nothing left for you to do. Jesus has done it all. And your soul can find rest here in this moment.

Jesus has saved you. But if you are here today and you aren't trusting in Christ, I need to tell you, there is still darkness looming over you.

you could say the curtain remains up for you. An unbearable weight still hangs above you and you won't be able to carry it. But there is someone who can.

Christ can bear it all. But you must recognize that this man and this death is like no other. I want you to see the right way to respond to this death.

[28 : 38] Look at 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.

A soldier who was far from God but he recognized that this was a death like no other. He saw how Jesus died, he saw the signs God gave and he knew this was no ordinary man and this was no ordinary death.

He knew this was the death of the son of God. And this is how we need to respond if this death is to be of any relevance to us. It is one thing to say a man died but it is another to say and that man is the son of God.

And so I urge you today I urge you, you must recognize that too. Do not mistake this death. death. You cannot leave here this morning and just move on from this death because you cannot bear the darkness on your own.

You cannot pay this debt which is why without Christ you will have to bear it forever. And so I urge you let Christ bear it.

[29 : 59] It is the only way. Let your sins be taken on the cross. and how recognize that this is a death like no other. Recognize this man is the son of God, the savior of sinners and he will become your savior because for those in Christ this is your savior.

Your darkness has fallen on this man. Your sin has been taken away. Jesus has carried it all. The curtain has been torn in two.

This death is like no other. Truly this man was the son of God. Let's pray.