

It Is Finished

Mark 15:1-39

Pastor Bryan Clark

What if I asked you to consider the past week: Of all the events that have happened anywhere in the world this last week, which of those events would you say is most important, most significant? Then imagine that I widen that out for the last 30 days. Think of everything that happened in the world in the last 30 days. What event would you consider to be the most significant event? Then let's imagine that I widen that out to the last school year. Of everything that's happened anywhere in the world, what event would you consider to be the most significant event? And we could keep widening this out until I was asking the question: Of all the events that have ever taken place in the history of mankind, what one event would you consider to be the most significant event?

I would suggest to you it is the event that we discuss from Mark chapter 15: the crucifixion of God in the flesh. As we move into Mark 15, it's good to remind ourselves of what is happening here. We have been at this now for eight months. We've walked our way through the Gospel of Mark and wrestled with this question: Who is Jesus? As we go into chapter 15, it's very important to remember this is God in the flesh. This is One who was perfect in every way. He was perfect in His goodness. He was perfect in His kindness. He was perfect in His love, perfect in His compassion, perfect in His wisdom—perfect in every way.

This is the One who made the lame to walk, who made the blind to see, who made the deaf to hear, who raised the dead to life, who set the captives free. This is the One who touched the untouchables; the One who loved the unlovable. Now if we didn't know the story, wouldn't we conclude at this point that there would not be anyone more loved or more popular than One who was so perfect in every way? Yet, the horrible reality is this is the One that they will nail to a cross and execute.

I think we have a tendency to think that if I am a really good Christian, if I live like Jesus did, that everyone will love me and respect me—that if I am like Jesus in the marketplace, people will love and respect me. If I am like Jesus in my school, people will love me and respect me.

But the reality is Jesus was perfect in every way, and they hated Him and they nailed Him to a cross. We pick up the story in Mark chapter 15, verse 1. We'll make it through verse 39 and then continue from there next week.

Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "It is as you say." The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed. (Mark 15:1-5, *NASB)

Last week, back in chapter 14, we talked about what in essence could be called the religious trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin religious leaders. Their charge against Jesus was blasphemy; therefore they believed Jesus was worthy of death. So now they bind Jesus and they're going from southwest Jerusalem through town to northwest Jerusalem, from the palace of Caiphas the high priest to the palace of Herod, where Pilot would have his

headquarters. But they also understand that the charge of blasphemy would be of no interest to Pilot. They had to come up with a political charge that would force Pilot to take action. So the charge is that Jesus is claiming to be King of the Jews. That would be guilty of high treason; they have no king but Caesar. That is the charge, and Pilot asks Jesus directly, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And Jesus clearly identifies that yes, He is.

Whenever you are studying a biblical narrative, it’s very important to notice the dialogue. And it’s most important to notice the dialogue that comes out of the mouths of the main characters. If your Bible happens to be a red-letter edition, which means the words of Jesus are in red, it becomes very evident when you just visually look at the text. There are only two statements that come out of the mouth of Jesus in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Mark. One is this statement that affirms, “Yes, I am the King of the Jews.” The second statement is the horrific statement dealing with the moment in time when Jesus takes on the sin of the world. In essence that defines the focus of this chapter. It is about Jesus as the King. It is about Jesus as the Savior.

In the first century if a person appeared before someone like Pilot, the charges would be filed. And then that person would have an opportunity to make his own case, to defend himself, or in essence to talk his way out of it. So that’s what Pilot is looking for here. That is what he’s asking about. He is wanting Jesus to hear these charges and to defend Himself.

Yet, what is Jesus going to say? The charge is that He’s claiming to be King of the Jews, and that is true. So Jesus remains silent, and that of course amazes Pilot—he doesn’t quite know what to do with that.

Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. Answering again, Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify Him!” But Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify Him!” Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. (vs. 6-15)

It’s very important to understand at this point in the story, Pilot is on very thin ice politically. Pilot was a representative of the Roman government, but it had numerous clashes with the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. The religious leaders had filed formal charges against Pilot on several occasions, and Rome was tired of it. Pilot was convinced if it happened again he would probably lose his post. So he’s in a very delicate position politically. That is probably why he had developed this custom that once a year during the Feast of the Passover he would release for them one prisoner of their choice. It probably was an attempt to somehow endear himself more to the Jewish people—something that would of course never happen.

So he offers them Jesus. He offers them the King of the Jews and Mark tells us why: because Pilot knew Jesus was guilty of nothing. The only reason the religious leaders wanted Him executed was because they were jealous. It was because of envy; it was because Jesus was more

popular than they were. And Pilot really wants nothing to do with that kind of an execution. So he's wanting to release Jesus back to them and be done with it.

But the chief priests stir up the crowd to ask for Barabbas instead. Barabbas was a murderer that was probably a zealous Jew who, in an attempt to take over some area of Jerusalem, committed murder and was now in prison. I think it would also be fair to read between the lines of the text that the cross Jesus hung on was the cross that was intended for Barabbas. And rather than hang that day on the cross, he is released.

Now try to imagine the emotions of Barabbas. Crucifixion was a horrible death. He got up that morning knowing that this was his day to die. In the first century they did not have years and years of appeals and a process. You were convicted and you died. He got up that morning knowing this was his day to suffer a horrific fate and be executed. Yet literally in a matter of hours, the twist of events is such that he is released and he is set free. And instead of Barabbas hanging on a cross that day, an innocent man would die in his place.

Of course, it isn't hard to realize that Barabbas is a picture of you and me. The reality is we are guilty and we are deserving of that cross. We are deserving of that eternal punishment. Yet, at the end of the day, God offers us freedom—paradise. And in exchange Jesus died on the cross in our place.

Pilot still doesn't want to crucify Jesus. He asks the question, "Why? What evil has He done?" The crowd doesn't even respond to that; they just get louder. And Pilot is aware at that point that he cannot afford to go against these religious leaders. The text all but says that: "wishing to satisfy the crowd," he has Jesus scourged and then he will have Him crucified.

I mentioned last week that the New Testament writers do not dwell on the physical suffering of the scourging and the cross, because that isn't the focal point. We tend to make it that. But it certainly is not the focal point of the Gospel writers. Yet, it's also true that first century readers would have clearly understood what a scourging was, while we today don't necessarily have that information. So I do want to read you a brief description of the scourging, in order to better understand the paragraph to come.

The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles... Finally the skin on the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue.

- C. Truman Davis, "The Crucifixion of Jesus. The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View," *Arizona Medicine* 22, no. 3 [March 1965]: 185 as quoted in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 8*, ed. by Frank Gaebelstein (1984) p. 775.

The reality is that many people died in the scourging; they didn't even make it to the cross. It was an absolutely horrific torture. Now, you would think if anyone had even the slightest degree of humanity, seeing someone as an unrecognizable mass of torn-up flesh, they would have at least enough sympathy to just move on to the cross. Yet that is not what we read in the next paragraph.

The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and

after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. (vs. 16-20)

You need to process this a little bit. Jesus would have been just this mass of torn-up bleeding flesh. And yet, rather than having even the slightest degree of compassion and just moving on with the process, they feel it necessary to use Jesus as a form of entertainment, as a form of sport. They take off on this theme of “King of the Jews” and they put a purple robe on Him, symbolic of royalty. And they weave this crown of thorns of some sort and they cram it down on His head. They take this stick and pretend it to be a scepter, and they beat Him and they spit on Him. Basically they mock Him. They kneel before Him and hail Him as the King.

That would be horrific for anyone to endure. But stop and think about this for a minute. This Jesus, who is subjecting Himself to that, is the God of the universe. This is the God who spoke the universe into place in Genesis 1. This is the God who parted the Red Sea. This is the God who toppled the walls of Jericho. This is the God who with His spoken voice wiped out entire armies. This is the God of whom Paul says in Philippians one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. This is the God of Revelation who is the ultimate victor. This is the God of the universe who not only subjected Himself to leave the glories of heaven to become a man, but subjected Himself to this point.

The next time you feel like you are really suffering for taking a stand for Jesus; the next time at school some of your classmates make fun of you a little bit; the next time in the marketplace somebody gives you a hard time for acting with integrity and representing Jesus; the next time in your neighborhood it becomes a little bit difficult to take a stand, you might want to remember this moment when God in the flesh endured this level of mockery and torture for you.

I know oftentimes we have this picture of Jesus going through the streets carrying the cross, with the purple robe on and the crown of thorns. But that’s really not accurate. What He actually carried was just the crossbeam. The text is clear that the robe came off and probably the crown of thorns came off when He began His journey to the cross. As much as this was kind of a form of entertainment and fun and games for them, when it came time now to move on to the crucifixion, that was serious business. Playtime was over and they were down to business. These things were stripped away and they headed for Golgotha. Mark says:

They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross [to bear that crossbeam]. (v. 21)

Most scholars believe that these two men, Alexander and Rufus, were players in the New Testament church, and Mark includes this to give some level of identification of who their father was.

Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. It was the third hour when they crucified Him. The inscription of the charge against Him read, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.” (vs. 22-26)

Again, it's interesting to note that Mark does not labor over the physical suffering of the cross. As a matter of fact, he summarizes it in simply a statement: "And they crucified Him." But it's also true, again, that the first readers would have been much more familiar with what that meant than we are. So I do want to read you a description, actually a medical description, of the suffering of the cross. Again, it helps us understand the paragraphs to follow.

Simon is ordered to place the patibulum [crossbeam] on the ground, and Jesus is quickly thrown backwards with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives the heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum [crossbeam] is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes [vertical beam]...

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The Victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails and the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward...Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen...

Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart...

It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level—the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues—the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air...

The body of Jesus is now in extremis, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues... His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally He can allow His body to die.

- C. Truman Davis, "The Crucifixion of Jesus. The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View," *Arizona Medicine* 22, no. 3 March 1965]: 186-87 as quoted in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* Vol. 8, ed. by Frank Gaebelin (1984) pp. 779-80.

Now obviously that is a horrific death. You would think, again, anyone with an ounce of compassion would see the horror of that death and respect that, and certainly at least the religious leaders would appreciate that for what it is. However, once again, that is not the case.

They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with transgressors.” Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!” Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him. (vs. 26-32)

As if it isn't enough to suffer the agony of the cross, there is this constant barrage of mocking and challenging Him to come down off the cross. The religious leaders even say that if Jesus were to come off the cross that they would see that and believe. And yet we know that's not true, because over and over and over again Jesus has done miracle after miracle after miracle under their nose and they absolutely refuse to believe.

There on the cross Jesus hangs. It would be my opinion that this next paragraph, verses 33 through 39, is the focus of the chapter and is extremely important to understand. It begins by talking about “the sixth hour.” This is going by the Jewish calendar. The day started at 6:00 in the morning. The third hour, which was when He was nailed to the cross, was 9:00, so the sixth hour would be noon.

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” which is translated, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, “Behold, He is calling for Elijah.” Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.” And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (vs. 33-39)

Jesus is nailed to the cross at 9:00 in the morning. At 12:00 suddenly everything goes dark. And from 12:00 to 3:00 there is darkness all across the land. Last week we talked about the agony of the cup—that Jesus caught just a glimpse of it in the garden, yet it was so horrific that just getting a glimpse of it nearly killed Him. We talked about the fact that we tend to focus on the physical suffering, but the suffering of the cross went well beyond that. As a matter of fact, it's very important to remember that we were not condemned just to die physically. We were condemned to suffer a spiritual death for all eternity because of our sin. That is the condemnation that Jesus had to take upon Himself at the cross.

I believe it's during these three hours, from 12:00 to 3:00, that an eternity worth of suffering was pulled together in this incredibly intense moment of time, when Jesus would endure our eternity of hell on the cross. It was a suffering so intense, so beyond our ability to even process. The only thing we can even begin to process or understand is this remarkable cry of Jesus at the end of that three hours, when he cries out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” We understand that for all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have been One. For all eternity future they will always be One. But for this one moment in all eternity, when Jesus became sin for us, there was in some way a separation between God the Father and God

the Son. And it was so absolutely horrific that Jesus cried out in this desperate statement of “Why?”

When you track what’s happened, Jesus went through the physical suffering like a champion. But it was at this sin-bearing moment that He cried out from the agony of His heart, “Why? Why have You forsaken Me?” The text says at that moment He let out a cry that Mark doesn’t record, but the Gospel of John does. It is the Greek word *tetelestai*. It means “It is finished.” It’s actually a banking term that means “paid in full.” For three hours Jesus endured the most intense, horrific hell on the cross. But at the end of those three hours, He pronounced, “The work is done. It is finished.”

That is very important to understand. There are those who believe that from the cross Jesus went down into hell. But He didn’t. The work was *finished*—there was nothing left to do. As a matter of fact, Jesus Himself on the cross said to the thief, “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” He went from the cross to paradise. There are also many religions today that are seeking to convince people there’s some sort of religious ritual that you must do in order to complete your salvation. But that is absolutely contrary to what Jesus clearly stated on the cross. He *did not* say, “We’re *almost* done here.” He stated in absolute terms, “It is finished. The work has been done.”

Mark tells us at that moment the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. You have to understand that in the temple there was what was called the Holy Place. It was a place where the priest would come in and they would make their preparations for the sacrifice or whatever. But then there was a chamber beyond that which was called the Holy of Holies. It was separated by this massive veil. The only person that could enter the Holy of Holies was the high priest and only once a year—on the Day of Atonement. The Jewish people were so fearful of the Holy of Holies, the very place where God’s presence dwelt, that when the high priest would go in they would tie a rope to his ankle. If God struck him dead, they couldn’t go in to get him so they would just pull him out.

This Holy of Holies represented the very dwelling place of God Himself. The veil was sixty feet high by thirty feet wide, four inches thick. It wasn’t a shower curtain. It was a wall. Historians recorded it took 300 priests just to manipulate it. Now that may be exaggerated, but the reality is this was a huge wall. It was not possible for anything or anybody to tear this—except the hand of God.

And at that moment when the price for sin had been paid, Jesus had perfectly fulfilled everything the temple represented. At that point, the temple was no longer necessary. The tearing of the veil must have absolutely horrified the priest who would have been in there at 3:00 preparing for the evening sacrifices. Suddenly it is torn open and there is the Holy of Holies.

It is the symbolism that because of Jesus’ death on the cross, God would no longer dwell in a temple made by men, but would now dwell within the hearts of those people who trusted Him as Savior. It meant that now God would usher in a New Covenant that would be the complete fulfillment of everything the Old Covenant and the temple represented. Now, rather than having to go through a priest to access God, the veil was torn and sinners through Jesus Christ could enter into the very presence of God and be accepted. That was the significance of the tearing of the veil.

These events—Jesus’ cry, the darkness over the land, everything else that transpired—caused the Roman soldier, who would have been a hard, seasoned, calloused man to conclude, *We have just crucified God Himself.* In essence that is what he said: “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

In the history of mankind there has never been a more significant event than that day 2,000 years ago when God in the flesh was nailed to a cross to become sin for us—when He took our eternal hell for us on that cross, that we, like Barabbas, may be set free. Instead of punishment on the cross, we are offered paradise with Him forever. It was an event so horrific, so beyond our ability to even imagine. In some way we can’t even describe, there was this moment of separation between God the Father and God the Son, as the price for our sin was paid. But at the end of the day, the debt was paid in full. It is finished.

I don’t care who you are; I don’t care how bad your life has been, there is not one more religious ritual you need to do. There is not one other thing you can do, other than just believe by faith that Jesus on that day died for your sin. And He offers you salvation and paradise with Him forever if you simply are willing to receive it.

That day 2,000 years ago was the most horrible, wonderful day in the history of all mankind, because it was the day when love and justice came together in perfect eternal harmony. It was the most horrific, wonderful day when God’s grace freely flowed, so that you might have paradise rather than punishment forever.

Our Father, we are thankful that in a way we cannot even comprehend, Jesus left the glories of heaven, not just to become a man, but a Man that would subject Himself to the most horrific torture and mockery by the very people He created—the very people He would offer salvation to if they chose to receive it. Lord, in some way on that cross, Jesus endured our hell to the degree that there was some separation between God the Father and God the Son. And then Jesus uttered those final words, “It is finished.”

Lord, in our flesh we so often want to do something to save ourselves. But help us to understand the work has been done. It is finished. We simply must humble ourselves and receive Your salvation by faith. Lord, we celebrate the wondrous grace poured out on the cross, that gives us paradise rather than punishment forever. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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May 7/8, 2005

Study Questions

The Good News About Jesus According to Mark

It Is Finished

Mark 15:1-39

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Talk about what it would be like for someone to be perfect at home, in the marketplace, etc. Would people love this person or hate this person? Explain your answer.
2. People in our culture seem highly tolerant of every possible religious belief except Christianity. Why is that?

What is it about true Christianity that causes such a reaction in people?

Bible Study

1. Read Mark 15:1-15. Why did the crowd choose to crucify Jesus and release Barabbas?
Why would anyone choose to free a convicted murderer and execute a perfect man?
2. Make a list of words that would have described the emotions of Barabbas finding out he was to be released the same day he expected to be executed.
3. Since Barabbas represents each of us, when was the last time that list of words described you as you thought about your salvation?

4. Read Mark 15:16-32. Why do you think Jesus' claim to be King produced such a violent mockery from both the soldiers and the crowd?

What might we learn from this as it relates to why people today react so strongly to the truth of the Gospel?

How hard is it to surrender to the authority of Jesus?

5. Read Mark 15:33-47. From 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. darkness covered the land. Why? What was transpiring during those three hours?

What is meant by Jesus' cry in verse 34?

Why would the Father forsake the Son in His hour of need?

6. Read John 19:30. Jesus' final cry was, "It is finished!" What did Jesus mean by that statement?

What are the ramifications for the basis of salvation today?

7. What is the significance of the veil being torn in two from top to bottom at the moment of salvation?

Compare Hebrews 10:19-22.

Application

1. As a group list ten things that are true of you today because Jesus died for your sins on the cross.
2. As a group list ten things that *would* be true of you if Jesus *had not* died for your sins on the cross.
3. Identify one truth that impressed you most deeply from your study of Mark 14-15?