

The Lords Supper

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[0 : 00] We turn this morning this afternoon now to March chapter 15 and to those verses that we read together a little earlier on.

I don't know if you've ever visited the Holy Land or been to Jerusalem many years ago now. In fact, while on our honeymoon, my wife Alison and myself took a whistle-stop tour of some of the more familiar sites.

It was a fascinating and eye-opening experience. And of course, today in our modern world, you don't actually have to physically go there.

You can take a virtual tour. You can go online. You can see for yourself the various sites of archaeological and spiritual significance there.

You can see the Mount of Olives, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. You can take a tour. You can see the sites and you can never leave your own living room.

[1 : 08] Well, this afternoon what I want us to do is to take a brief tour, as it were. We're not going to leave the building, don't worry.

But instead, follow the narrative of Mark's Gospel as he guides us through the events of that first Good Friday.

And helps us to see and to witness for ourselves what happened there some 2,000 years ago. Because you see, the Bible's claim is that the events surrounding the death of this man, Jesus Christ, are not simply a matter of historical interest.

They are absolutely foundational to our understanding of human purpose and destiny. And they are absolutely essential to our understanding of the Christian Gospel and the Christian faith.

Paul told the Corinthians, I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He told the Galatians that God forbid that he should boast in anything else except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 27] When we read the Gospels, we discover that their focus is upon the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself left us with a meal to remember him and to remember his cross and his death there.

So come with me into Mark 15 and let us see what we hear and see there. And the first thing I want you to notice here, I want you to look at the place where they crucified him.

Verse 22, they brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull. It was the Jewish and Roman custom to execute victims and criminals outside the limits of the city.

And so Jesus is brought outside the wall of the city to this place Golgotha, means skull, in Latin, calvary locus.

[3 : 33] That's how we get the English word calvary. And these words are a reminder to us that Jesus crucifixion took place at a certain point in human history.

Jesus bore real sins in his body upon that cross. And there have been lots of attempts to locate the location, various suggestions and hypotheses have been put forward.

Most scholars believe today that the spot is where the church of the Holy Sepulchre stands in Jerusalem. It's a, I visited there, it's a pretty disappointing experience, a location full of the hustle and bustle of religious tourism and commerce.

It's a pretty garish, ugly kind of place. But in Jesus' day it was far more ugly than that.

It was a brutal place, made all the more ugly by the lawlessness and the darkness of human sin. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a horrific event.

[4 : 47] It was not on a green hill far away. It was not in some romanticised Victorian idol. It was in a place of skulls and scaffold, of decaying corpses and rotting flesh that Jesus dealt with and faced the sin of the world.

Braulghatha was a place of death, it was a place of uncleanness. And friends, this is where Jesus died. This is where they nailed him to a cross.

Jesus dies for unclean sinners in an unclean place. And at this place, at this time, in this body, our Creator God deals decisively with the abject horror of our sin.

We must not forget that the cross of Jesus Christ is a scandalous thing. Father, watching his son be crucified, exacting from him the wages of human sin.

It's something hateful and wretched and ugly. Look at the place where they crucified him this morning.

[6 : 17] But also see the drug that he refused in verse 23. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

Why does Mark record that for us? The wine and the myrrh were a kind of anesthetic. It was a primitive narcotic given to alleviate and deaden the severe pain of crucifixion.

It was a drug given to dull the senses, to make things just a little more bearable. But when Jesus has offered this drink, this drug, he declines it.

Here is a cup that our Lord refuses to drink, that he rejects. Now, why was that? It was because at this point, Jesus had to be in full possession of all his faculties and senses.

He was not to die as one under the influence of a drug or an anesthetic. He was not to die as one who was doped up and immune from pain.

[7 : 16] He was to die as a fully conscious human being, his senses and mind, not in any way dulled. Because he had a ministry to perform. He had to face the Prince of Darkness.

He had work to do on the cross. He had to still had to face death itself. Jesus did not go through human suffering as one under the influence of a drug.

He was tested at every point as we are. There was to be no sense of getting let off or having immunity for Jesus.

No extent, stannuation of circumstances, no accommodation because of who he was. He had to taste death for himself.

It's bitterness and it's emptiness. Many years ago now, hearing a sermon on this text, Professor McLeod of the Free Church College at that time was a good Friday service at St George's Tron in Glasgow.

[8 : 21] His title was The Unanesthetized Saviour. In the sermon, he quoted someone I think he knew who had recently died.

He'd spoken to them not long before they died in the hospice. They had refused drugs and had made this statement to him, I want to be alive when I die.

They did not want to be drugged. They wanted to face death with all their faculties. They didn't want to miss any of it. I want to be alive when I die.

Because Jesus Christ was alive when he died. He missed nothing. He plumbed the very depths of human anguish and emotion.

His death was a voluntary surrender, an activist will. Into your hands I commit my spirit, he says.

[9 : 25] And friends, that means that in moments of personal anguish and pain, that there is one the very Son of God who understands exactly what that is like.

Because he himself underwent the extremes of human pain, physical, emotional and spiritual. There is no sorrow he has not tasted.

He has fully entered into all our fears, all our despondency, all our questioning, all our loneliness into the very darkness of death itself.

Jesus refused the cup of wine and mir. Because there is another cup that he must drink. That cup of God's wrath and judgment.

The psalmist says in Psalm 75, in the hand of the Lord is a cup of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours it out at all the wicked of the earth, drink it down to its very dregs.

[10 : 32] Only here it's now Jesus who holds that cup and drinks it down to its very dregs. See the dreg that he refused.

And then thirdly, hear the mocking that he endured in verses 25 through 32. We read of it there, don't we?

The inscription against him, the king of the Jews, crucified two robbers. Those passed by derided him, wagging their heads. You who would destroy the temple, rebuild it in three days, save yourself, come down from the cross.

The chief priest describes and mocked him. He saved others. He cannot save himself. And those that were crucified with him also reviled him.

The mocking he endured. The throne for this king of the Jews is a cross.

[11 : 31] And there's this threefold chorus of derision and contempt. The response of the passers-by, the religious leaders and the criminals crucified with him.

They raised their voices to express their utter rejection of Jesus. Jesus, the love of God, being demonstrated and placarded before a lost world.

And here is the world's response to that love. It's a response of blasphemy and utter contempt. I sometimes think, we're apt to think anyway that derision and mocking and blasphemy are kind of modern traits.

But friends, that's not the case. Before on that first Good Friday, as today, the cross and the one who hangs upon it was an object of human contempt.

We see it today in the contempt of a world that has rejected him, his name so often a curse and a blasphemy, his word ridiculed and scorned, his death viewed as a sign of weakness and impotence.

[12 : 38] They mock him as a prophet. They laugh at him. They throw his words back in his face.

They wag their heads. It's a gesture of contempt. The chief priests and scribes delight in his powerlessness. He saved others, but he cannot even save himself.

They mock him, come down from the cross. Their words are full of irony, aren't they?

Because it's precisely because he is saving others that he cannot save himself. Jesus taught his disciples to take up the cross, not to come down from one.

They demand a miracle. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. We're reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians. Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom.

[13 : 40] We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, folly to Gentiles. It's still the world's wisdom to look at the cross and deride it and laugh at it and show contempt for it.

We're reminded here that by nature the hearts of men and women have nothing but mockery and disdain for the Son of God.

Here the mocking he endured. And then fourthly here, watch the darkness that enveloped him in verse 33. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

The sixth hour, that is at noon, darkness falls over the land. The darkness lasts until the ninth hour, until Jesus dies. His death on the cross lasted for six hours from the third to the ninth hour, from 9am to 3pm.

And the darkness that Mark records for us here is a kind of supernatural darkness. There are lots of theories that go around about this darkness. Some suggest it was symbolic of the Savior's pain and sorrow as he bore the sin of his people.

[14 : 56] Some think it was something to do with an eclipse. But friends, this darkness had nothing to do with an eclipse because this was the time of the Passover. It was the time of the full moon.

And in fact, it's the events of the Passover that give us the clue as to the meaning of this darkness. Just directly before the Passover in the Exodus, there had been what?

A plague of darkness over the land. That had been God's last word to Pharaoh before the angel of death came and visited.

After that point, only those who were shielded by the shed blood of the Passover lamb would be rescued from the hand of God's judgment.

Now there is here once again a plague of darkness over the land. Only this time it precedes the sacrifice of another Passover lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 53] It's God's firstborn that is to die if I can put it like that. It's God's own Son who sheds His blood to save others.

And then listen fifthly to the cry of dereliction that he uttered. Verse 34, the night power Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi Eloi Lema Sabitthani, my God my God, why have you forsaken me?

The darkness that enveloped Jesus is eclipsed only by the darkness of Christ's cry of God forsakenness. I quoted of course from Psalm 22.

Martin Luther wrote, God forsaken God, who can understand it? And here really Mark takes us to the heart of what was happening on that afternoon.

Jesus finds himself abandoned and forsaken by God. The cry captures the hidden meaning, the spiritual reality of the crucifixion for Jesus, worse than the shame and the nakedness and the mockery and the torture and the physical suffering was this.

[17 : 08] He who had lived in such close harmony and fellowship with God now finds himself in some way cut off from him. We know that all through the Gospels Jesus prays to his Father Abba.

All through the Gospels Jesus seems to enjoy the smile of his heavenly Father. He is the Son of his love, he is the Son with whom he is well pleased.

But that does not seem to be the case here. We're at Calvary. We're on the cross, that sense of sonship and the love of his Father is eclipsed by wrath and judgment.

It's obscured in some way, blotted out by the horror of human sin. The sin that he bore and becomes makes it impossible for him to speak to God as his Father.

John in his Gospel tells us in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. Literally the Word was face to face with God. And now on the cross in some mysterious way that they are no longer able to be face to face.

- [18 : 20] Sin disrupts that relationship and Jesus knows his Father in some way for an enemy. He becomes cursed. Paul says he made him to be sin who knew no sin.

And Jesus has plunged into a black hole of darkness and meaninglessness. The great question why and it's on the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

My God, my God, why? He's searching for an explanation. He's crying out to God, tell me what's going on. And it's a question that we sometimes ask ourselves and Jesus understands that question because he too has asked it.

One day nailed to a cross, he grasped for an answer. Yes, of course Jesus' experience was unique.

He's one bearing the sins of others, the full gravity of sin becomes clear. He bears upon his own body that sense of God's antagonism against sin.

- [19 : 28] Jesus' experience here reminds us that there is never peace and reconciliation between God and sin. There is no compromise or accommodation with sin.

Sin that Jesus bore upon the cross is not sin in the abstract. He bore our sins upon his body upon the tree.

Our sins, sins committed by real people, our lies, our lust, our apathy, our indifference, our pride, our selfishness, our hatred, our cruelty, our sins.

Under the weight of all our sin, he was pitched into that dark hole of suffering and despair and dereliction.

God's own Son is forsaken and plunged into darkness that sinners like us might never be.

- [20 : 38] Friends listened to his cry of dereliction this morning. Then finally witnessed the curtain he tore in verses 38 and 39.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed it last, he said truly this man was the Son of God.

The curtain in the temple is torn from the top to the bottom. That curtain was no flimsy piece of material. It was heavy and thick and substantial, almost like a wall.

Curtain separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. Separated the people from the presence of God.

Once a year on the day of atonement, could the high priest enter behind that curtain to sprinkle the blood of sacrifice. Now at the moment of Jesus' death, this massive curtain was ripped open, torn from the top to the bottom, torn asunder.

- [21 : 48] Jesus, our great high priest, has entered God's presence bearing our sin and offering himself as our perfect sacrifice, shedding his blood as a propitiation.

The way into God's presence has now been opened up through Jesus. The barrier is gone. It has been torn apart through faith in the crucified Jesus.

Anyone can come into God's presence. Not from him we cannot come, but in him we can. In John chapter 20, after his resurrection on that first Easter Sunday, we hear of Jesus standing in the midst of his disciples and John recounts what he says to his disciples and he says this twice.

He says, peace be with you. Peace be with you. Why does he do that? On that great day of atonement when the people watched the priest go into the holy of holies to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people.

They would wait outside to see if the priest's sacrifice was deemed acceptable to God. And if it were, the priest would come out from behind the curtain, his life spared, and the people would rejoice and they would celebrate.

[23 : 10] And as he came out, the high priest would raise up his hands and he would pronounce upon the people a benediction, the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

So on that first Easter Sunday, the Lord Jesus emerged as it were from behind the curtain. Through that heavy veil of death, raising his nail pierced hands, he proclaimed to his disciples, my sacrifice is acceptable to God.

Through me your sins can be forgiven. Through me your guilty consciences can be cleansed. Through me you can have peace with God. And the wonder of the death and resurrection of Christ is that there is someone we can go to have our sins forgiven.

We can have those nail pierced hands raised above our lives and we can hear his voice speak into our guilty consciences and our stained hearts and it says peace be with you.

[24 : 20] It's the greatest need of men and women. The centurion at the cross who witnesses these events answers that correct question that really Mark asks all through his gospel.

Who is this Jesus? He responds by declaring that this man Jesus crucified on a cross at Golgotha is none other than the very Son of God.

I wonder whether we come to that same conclusion. Because this gospel account that Mark gives us is not to be understood as some kind of intellectual antiquarian interest.

It calls us to move beyond saying as many people do oh yes I know Jesus died on the cross. To sing with Paul in Galatians 2 20 I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

We must move to the place where we ourselves declare that Jesus is the Son of God. Where we ourselves see that his death was for us, for our sin.

[25 : 39] It's the most exhilarating and liberating discovery you can make. It's because of Golgotha and Christ's death now that God has nothing against us.

All he had against us has been dealt with and put away. The old hymn puts it like this bearing shame and scoffing rude.

In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah what a saviour.

I wonder if we can say that this morning, today. He went to Calvary for me. He refused the wine and the meh for me.

He endured the mocking for me. He was plunged into the darkness for me. He was forsaken for me.

[26 : 44] He told the curtain for me. When you say with the apostle, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

James Denny, Scottish preacher of a bygone generation, used to say that the only time he envied the Roman Catholic priestess crucifix was when he wanted to take it and shove it in people's faces and say God loves you like that.

Friends look at this table. Bread and wine. God loves you like that.

Let's pray. God our Father we thank you for all that you have accomplished in and through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that he gave himself for us. For we cannot fully understand it.

[28 : 11] We cannot fully grasp it. But by your grace we can trust you and depend on you and rely on what you have done.

Lord help us to cast off our sins. Help us to throw aside our idols and to rest in our great Savior and King, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask it in his name. Amen.

Jesus declared I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty.

We come at this point in our service to the Lord's table, spread with bread and wine, symbols of Christ's body broken and bloodshed.

[29 : 16] Through these elements and by the Spirit of God we enjoy a special time of fellowship or communion with Christ. It's only through Jesus Christ that unholy people like us can draw near to a holy God.

It's at this table and through the Holy Spirit that the risen Christ stands in our midst.

This is the Lord's Supper and it's for the Lord's people. And if you have forsaken your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ, if you've been born again of His Holy Spirit, if you've come to know Him and love Him and serve Him, then come to the table.

If you're not able to do that, if you're not able to come from the outside in, into Christ, into the Lord's people, into the communion of saints, into the forgiveness of sins, then take these moments as we celebrate the Lord's Supper to think about where you stand with a loving God.