

Truly This Man Was the Son of God!
Mark 15:21-39

You've probably played that word association game where someone throws out a word, and you say the first thing that comes to mind:

- George Washington – Rev war, 1st Pres
- Michelangelo – Sistine chapel, **ninja turtles**
- MLK JR – Civil Rights, “I have a dream”
- Michael Jordan – GOAT, **bad crying Memes**
- The Yankees – championships, **evil empire**

If you say, “**Jesus,**” and you know anything about him, you think “**death.**” “Cross.”

- All over the world, he is associated with a **symbol: Cross** – an instrument of death.

Now, it's true not everyone knows about Jesus and the cross. A Christian in Chicago was recently asked by a non-Christian “**Why are you wearing a plus sign around your neck?**” (If you're unfamiliar with the story of Jesus, we are certainly glad you're here).

But if you know anything about the gospels, then you know that **Jesus' identity is tied to his death.**

- The gospels tip their hand early in their narratives (eg., **John 1:29**) on about his death
- Jesus predicts it **three times in Mark.**

Then in the **epistles**, the writers expound on the **implications of Easter.**

- If you're not a Christian, please understand that the central message is about Jesus and the cross.
- A lot of people think the main message is “**Don't have sex, and invite a friend.**”
- “I resolve to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (**1 Cor 2:2**).

Now, many people read/hear about the cross and they are NOT changed.

But others are transformed.

In the opening chapters of **1 Cor**, Paul spends a good bit of time explaining the power of the cross.

- He says that **the cross divides the whole human race.**
- Some see the cross as “**foolishness,**” others see it as “**the power of God**” and are saved (**1:18**).
 - **Greeks** see it as dangerous and foolish.
 - **Jews** believe that anyone hung on a cross was cursed.
 - But some see and believe!
- **God shattered the wisdom of the world with the cross.**

In **Mark 15:39**, a climactic verse in the book, a Roman centurion “sees and believes” but the mockers do not (15:32).

There's a **problem of sight**, as he already explained in **Mark 8.**

What do you see at the cross?

What makes the difference?

God opens up people's eyes – he calls them – to behold the life-changing significance of the cross.

If you are a Christian, you should be doubly grateful. You should be **grateful for the cross** and you should be **grateful that God has opened up your eyes** to see Jesus as the Savior.

Human observation of Mark 15 is insufficient.

- One must look with **spiritual eyes** – the eyes of faith – to see what’s really happening at the cross.
- And One must look with spiritual eyes – **with the whole Bible in view** --- to see what’s really happening at the cross.

Last week I mentioned the **ironies of the cross**.

- The readers know something that the characters in the story don’t know.
- **If you consider these ironies closely, you understand more what the cross was about.**
- D.A. Carson in his helpful book *The Scandal of the Cross*, he notes four of them from the parallel account in Matt., which I will spotlight, and then add a fifth. But there are more.

How do we know these things?

God has opened our eyes, and we have embraced the whole Bible.

So let me point out five ironies of the cross – or **five truths we know because of God’s grace toward us and because we have embraced the whole biblical storyline.**

#1: The Man mocked as King – is the King (Ch 15)

I’ll start with this one because it’s repeated throughout chapter 15.

- **Chapter 15 shows us the King, not ascending to a throne, but a cross.**
- The early church used to talk about **Jesus reigning from the cross.**
 - “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews” (15:9)
 - “What shall I do with the man you call King of the Jews?” (15:12)
 - “Hail, King of the Jews!” (15:18)
 - “And the inscription of the charge against him read, ‘The King of the Jews’ (15:26)
 - “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” (15:32)
- **No one is taking Jesus’ kingship seriously, but Mark knows, the readers know, the Father knows, and we know, that He is the King.**
- Mark expects you to **read the whole narrative by now.**
 - Mark 1:1, “Christ”
 - “Son of Man” (eg., 2:10)
 - Mark 8:29
 - Mark 12:36 – David’s son and David’s Lord
- **He’s more than the King of the Jews!**
- **He’s the King of glory!**
- **He is the King over the soldiers who mock him!**
- **He’s the King over the religious leaders who stir up the crowd to shout, “Crucify Him!”**
- **He’s King over the coward, governor, Pilate.**
- **He’s King over the earth that they’re all walking on.**
- **He’s the King over you and me.**

#2: The Man who is utterly powerless – is all-powerful (15:21-30)

Carrying the Cross (21)

- Jesus was about **30 or so, in good shape**, from his walking and his occupation.
- But he had been **arrested and scourged.**
- Now, he is to **carry a cross on his bloody back.**
- He *follows a path that many criminals had taken.*

Jesus was so brutally tortured during the flogging that he **couldn't even take out his cross beam.**

- He is utterly powerless.
- This once stout carpenter can't carry this cross.

That's when Mark says a man named **Simon of Cyrene took the cross.**

- Most likely, a black man from North Africa (Acts 2:10)
- It's very like that the Rufus mentioned here is the Rufus in Romans 16, since the mention of Simon's children **assumes familiarity to Mark's audience.**
- **What a story this family would have to tell!!!**

Golgotha (22)

- **The place of the skull.** The word "Calvary" is Latin (*calva*) for "skull."
- **The site for crucifixions** would already be set up from previous executions.
 - A person would be crucified in a **marketplace or some busy intersection.**
 - **Not a secluded hill as shown in many pictures. Think shopping mall.**
 - It was intended to scare **others and send a message.**
 - The "**uprights**" would remain in place all the time.
 - The condemned person had to carry out **the crossbeam.**
 - **On that beam, the condemned person would be stretched out and would die.**
- **There was no long system of appeals. (Carson)**
 - Once condemned, boom. Taken out to be crucified.
- The condemned person would be **stripped naked usually.** **Not like the movies – no loincloth.**
- **The crucified one would die by means of suffocation, or possibly a combination of exhaustion and suffocation – eventually the person could no longer hold up his chest cavity.**
 - If they wanted rid of you quickly they would **smash your shins.**
 - Then you couldn't push up and you and suffocate.
- **Crucifixion was not allowable for Romans.**
 - People essentially said, "Don't talk about it in front of your children."

V. 23: Wine/Myrrh – They offered Jesus this to dull the pain. Jesus refused. He would experience the total agony apart from medicinal relief. Here is one of many OT prophecies fulfilled: **Ps 69:21**

V. 24: "they crucified him"

- Jesus had 5-7 inch nails put through his hands; there is body twitched in agony.
- He was then lifted up on a cross.
- Then they took all of his possessions like prizes (Another fulfillment: **Ps 22:18**).
- Here's another irony – the **one who has nothing, owns everything.**
- Another: **He who was stripped will clothe us.**
- "God willed His Son to be stripped that we should appear freely, with the angels, in the garments of his righteousness and fullness of all good things" (Calvin, Harmony, 194).

V. 25: Third hour - **around 9 a.m**

V. 26: The mock inscription

V. 27: Crucified among criminals – More fulfillment. Isa 53:12, He "was counted with the rebels." Previously James and John had asked to be on Jesus' right and left in Jesus' "glory" (10:37), but instead **two criminals are to his right and left in his "glory."**

Temple (29)

V. 29 – Mocking his powerlessness, “... **rebuild the temple in three days**”

- Today, to put together a decent building in our **pre-fab day** is doable.
- But not in those days.
- But as **John 2** says, they no one had a clue as to what he was talking about... later they remembered
- The great meeting place is not in a **temple, but a person.**
- Jesus was talking about his **death and resurrection.**
- Jesus will be the **final sacrifice, the final priest, the mediator.**

See the irony.

God knows, Mark knows, and the readers know:

It's by remaining on the cross that he will eventually “rebuild it,” as he triumphs over death in three days, becoming our great Mediator!

He will rebuild a temple, not made by hands; not limited to a geographical location.

30: The taunt assumes that his own salvation is the greatest good, but **Jesus is not on mission to avoid death, but through death to save others.**

- He came to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45).
- It is precisely by dying, that others will live.
- It is through His weakness, that the power of God will be revealed.

The same principle way applies to disciples. It is by dying that we/others live (2 Cor).

#3: The Man who can't save himself – saves others (15:31-32)

31: “He saved others, he can't save himself.”

- What does it mean to be **“saved?”**
- This is a typical word in Christian circles but not everyone understands it.
- It's used a lot in English
 - **“Bank”** – it has one meaning
 - **Sports** – all kind of meaning (goalie, relief pitcher)
 - **Computers** – save your documents
 - **Drowning** (in an ocean or in your own blood on a cross) – it means rescue me
 - **Mark** – they mean he has healed others or brought them back from the dead.
- **Jesus's work involved saving us from our sins.**
- **Matthew 1:21**, “Call his name, “**Jesus** for he will save his people from their sins.”
 - In Matthew's account, it's a **literary flag.** Read the rest of the book knowing this.
 - **“Yahweh saves”** – equivalent of Joshua
 - **His mission is identified in his very name.**
 - Jesus came to save us from our sins.
- **Are sin is ultimately against God, and so only God can forgive sins.**

- These people were saying more than they realized.
- By staying on the cross, Jesus was saving us.
- He could have exercised His power and came down; but he didn't.

We're Christians today not because Jesus came down, but because He stayed up!

- He endured temptations of Satan, the agony of Gethsemane, the pain and shame of the cross, in order to save us.
- He is drinking the cup for us.

- He is enduring not just physical pain and personal shame, but He is being the sin-bearing substitute.

Only the death of Jesus could do with our sin problem.

- **Morality** can't save you. It can keep you out of jail, but not hell.
- **Religion** in and of itself can't save you.
- **Your parents' faith** can't save you.
- **A person** can't save you.
- **Knowing a few things** about the Bible can't save you.
- **Praying a prayer mindlessly** as a young kid can't save you.
- **Jesus and Jesus alone** can save you from your sin.

#4: The Man who cries out in despair – trusts the Father (15:33-36)

Matthew includes the material in Mark 15:32, but in between Mark 15:32 and 15:33, Matthew records a few additional lines from the mockers.

“He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him.
For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (Matt 27:43)

You see their point. **These mockers don't think Jesus trusts God, the Father.**

If He really is the Son of God – or if He really trust God and has relationship with God – then why is he hanging on this bloody cross?

But don't let this cry of despair make you think he wasn't trusting in the Father...

33: Darkness: A picture of judgment. The cross has cosmic consequences.

- “6th hour” - Jesus has been **on the cross for 3 hours**. (9am-noon)
 - **At about noon, darkness engulfed the whole land about 3pm.**
- This is a divine miracle.
- It was a cosmic sign of God's judgment on sin poured out on His Son (Isa 5:25-30; Mic 3:5-7; Zeph 1:14-15).
 - **Amos 8:9:** “And in that day—this is the declaration of the Lord God—I will make the sun go down at noon; I will darken the land in the daytime.”
- It recalls the darkness and the death of the firstborn in Exodus during the Passover (Ex 10:22-11:9).

34: Cry from the Cross

“Seven Battle Cries from the Cross.”

1. **Luke 23:34:** “Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing.” (**Forgiveness**) □
2. **Luke 23:43:** “I assure you: Today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (**Salvation**) □
3. **John 19:26:** “Woman, here is your son.” (**Relationship**) □
4. **John 19:28:** “I'm thirsty!” (**Physical Distress**) □
5. **John 19:30:** “It is finished!” (**Triumph**)
6. **Matt 27:46, Mk 15:34:** “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (**Despair**) □
7. **Luke 23:46:** “Father, into Your hands I entrust my Spirit.” (**Reunion**)

Mark focuses on this **cry of despair**.

- It is a gut-wrenching cry.
- Jesus is identifying himself with the **suffering one in Psalm 22**.

Carson: “Some commentators insist that these words demonstrate that Jesus has abandoned trust in God.... But this ‘self-pitying of Jesus’ doesn’t make sense of the context... The deep irony of verse 43 is that the mockers are speaking better than they know. He does trust His heavenly Father.”

- **It’s precisely because He trusts God that he hangs there.**
- **Psalm 22** – We are to bring all of Psalm 22 to Golgotha.
- **Psalm 22 is rich in its expressions of trust in God – albeit in a time of despair.**
- This cry is actually a radical expression of trust in God – “my God.”
- **Carson:** “If David can utter such an anguished cry while demonstrating his own steadfast trust in God, why should it be thought unthinkable that David’s greater Son should not utter the same cry while exercising that same trust.”
- This is actually a wonderful example for every day life.

- He feels abandoned, to be sure.
- **But Jesus knows that this is part of God’s will.**
- He knows that **the Father ordained** the cross **before the foundation of the world.**
- He knows that **through this death, salvation will be accomplished.**

Yes, Jesus cried in despair, but He knew this was the way to defeat our enemies and bring us salvation.

In faith, he is accomplishing the Father’s will!

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

35: Some mistakenly thought He was calling out to Elijah (one who never died). They offer him some sour wine this time, not like the wine vinegar (23); the former was a thirst quencher. Soldiers drank it.

Mark anchors his narrative in the beginning, middle and end with three apocalyptic moments:

- **Baptism** – Heavens rent / voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son” / mention of Elijah.
- **Transfiguration** – Garments turn white, cloud descends, /voice, “This is my Son...” / Elijah appears
- **Cross** – Veil rent/ Centurion, “This was the son of God/mention of Elijah.

Elijah was the forerunner of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Judgment is falling on God’s people.

Elijah doesn’t come and take Him down because Jesus is completing the mission.

No one takes him down.

Jesus dies utterly alone with trust in the Father.

He dies alone – but we will never have to be alone.

For all of eternity, we will never have to utter these words, “My God, why have you forsaken me” because **Jesus has hung there for me.**

D.A. Carson captures the irony and the glory of this story in a beautiful poem:

On that wretched day the soldiers mocked him,
Raucous laughter in a barracks room,
"Hail the king!" they sneered, while spitting on him,
Brutal beatings on this day of gloom.
Though his crown was thorn, he was born a king -
Holy brilliance bathed in bleeding loss -
All the soldiers blind to this stunning theme:
Jesus reigning from a cursed cross.

Awful weakness mars the battered God-man,
Far too broken now to hoist the beam.
Soldiers strip him bare and pound the nails in,
Watch him hanging on the cruel tree.
God's own temple's down! He has been destroyed!
Death's remains are laid in rock and sod.
But the temple rises in God's wise ploy:
Our great temple is the Son of God.

"Here's the one who says he cares for others,
One who says he came to save the lost.
How can we believe that he saves others
When he can't get off that bloody cross?
Let him save himself! Let him come down now!" -
Savage jeering at the King's disgrace.
But by hanging there is precisely how
Christ saves others as the King of grace.

Draped in darkness, utterly rejected,
Crying, "Why have you forsaken me?"
Jesus bears God's wrath alone, dejected -
Weeps the bitt'rest tears instead of me.
All the mockers cry, "He has lost his trust!
He's defeated by hypocrisy!"
But with faith's resolve, Jesus knows he must
Do God's will and swallow death for me.

(D.A. Carson, in *Scandalous*, 36-37)

#5: The Man who breathed his last – is the life-giving Son of God (15:37-39)

The people see a dead man.

But we know something more.

37: Mark doesn't record the actual cry, only that Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

- **John 19:30, "It is finished!"**
- It's not a cry of **relief, but of triumph.**
- It is finished – you need the whole Bible to understand it.
- He was saying more than what other people heard.
- He was saying that the mission is complete – He is the way, the truth and the life.

- Atonement has been made.

- *Tetelestai*. Spurgeon, “It would take every word that was ever spoken or ever will be spoken to fully explain that one word.”

38: As tangible evidence of his accomplished work, “the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two” – “from top to bottom.”

- Here is another **miracle** at this central moment in history.

Pastor Sam Storms notes at least three significance aspects of this miracle:

- (1) **It points to the complete, perfect, and altogether sufficient sacrifice for sins that Jesus has offered in himself on the cross.** The sin that had created a barrier both spiritually and naturally between God and man has been atoned for.
- (2) **It also points to the end of the Mosaic Covenant and its laws, which have been fulfilled in Christ.** The “old order” has passed away!
- (3) **It points to the fact that God in all his glory is now freely and fully accessible to all men and women who come to him by faith in Jesus Christ.** For centuries before the coming of Christ, God had contained the revelation of his glory and majesty to the Holy of Holies. Now he bursts forth to dwell no longer behind a veil in a house built with wood and stone and precious jewels, but to dwell in the hearts of his people. (Hebrews 10:19-22; Storms, “The Cross and the Cry”).

The work is done!

The old order has passed away!

God will dwell in us!

We have life! Because of his death, we will never die – if we’re in Christ.

This is love!

- Romans 5:8
- **The Gospel says you’re more sinfully flawed than you ever thought, but you are more loved than you ever dreamed.**

39: The Centurion.

In **Mark 1:1** we had a **destination** to get to... And we have arrived in **verse 39!**

On the lips of a **Gentile Roman Centurion**, (not a Jew!), we hear the confession, “Truly, this man was the Son of God!”

James Edwards: “The Son of God” is Mark’s load-bearing Christological title, which until this moment has remained unconfessed by any human being. The centurion is the first person in the Gospel to confess Jesus as the Son of God, and the confession is evoked by his passion—his suffering and death on the cross.... This centurion had doubtlessly seen other men die by crucifixion. But something in this crucifixion—in the very weakness and suffering of Jesus’ death—becomes revelatory.”

He said this, not at the sight of one of Jesus’ miracles or in response to Jesus’ preaching, but in response to Jesus’ passion.

- **Jesus identity is inseparably linked to his death.**

This centurion’s confession becomes a **pattern** for the Gentiles who will believe.

- It marks the beginning of the fulfillment of **Psalm 22:27**, “All the families of the nations will bow down before him” (22:27).

God will open up the eyes of more Gentiles to see Jesus for who He is! (Acts 10-11)

This is the **main application** for my sermon today.
It's actually Mark's application.

The whole book is **framed by this confession** – Mark 1:1, and 15:39.

Confess Jesus as the Son of God.
Confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

What do you see when you come to the cross? Game over or game-changer?

If you don't have eyes to see, then you would have stopped here and said **that's it.** Jesus is dead!
Game over, right?
He's dead.

No.
It's Friday.
He has died in our place.
But soon, it will be Sunday!
He will be vindicated, and step out into the sunlight, as the victorious Son of God who conquered death through death.

Game over?

No.

Game changer.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything.

- He lived the life we couldn't live and died the death we should have died.
- He's made atonement for our sins.
- He has bore the wrath of God instead of us.
- He has reconciled us to the Father.
- He has clothed us in his righteousness.
- He has been raised from the dead, ensuring our resurrection, conquering our greatest enemies.
- Every spiritual benefit we enjoy today is owing to these realities.
- "May we never boast in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

May you say with this Centurion, "Truly, this man was the Son of God."
Confess Him as Your King. And you will have life; and you will never be forsaken.