

Good Friday

Sermon: Mark 15:22-39 - Jesus: a Tale of the Unexpected

22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. 25 It was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. 28 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!" 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. 33 At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." 36 One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (NIV)

"What did you learn in Sunday School this morning?" a father asked his son.

The son explained: "We learned about how Moses went behind enemy lines to rescue the Jews from the Egyptians. Moses ordered the engineers to build a pontoon bridge. Then, after the people crossed, he sent bombers back to blow up the bridge and the Egyptian tanks that were following them. And then..."

The father interrupted: "Did your teacher REALLY tell it like that?"

"No," said his son, "but if I told you what he said you would never BELIEVE it!"

There is a saying that "the truth is stranger than fiction". When something unusual happens, we often look for the most logical explanation rather see it for what it is. So, someone is healed miraculously, for example - what do we say? Oh, it's just a remission. He must have been taking his vitamins. We don't understand the regenerative powers of the body do we? But a miracle? Well... Right in the first verse of his gospel Mark states what he is presenting: *The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* It is clear from his account is that no-one actually recognises who Jesus actually *is*. This is with two notable exceptions; firstly demons who Jesus casts out (Mark 1:24) and secondly one of Jesus' Roman executioners in this passage - a Gentile!

This is the irony that Mark tries to underline for us in his book: Jesus' own people, the Jews - God's own people - did not recognise it and even his own disciples did not recognise him or his mission. A rabbi, a good man, Messiah? - yes but the Son of God who was to come to die no. Mark drops heavy hints throughout the book that Jesus'

actions indicate his identity such as his claims to forgive sin which caused so controversy in 2:6-10. In these verses Jesus forgives a paralytic' s sins instead of pronouncing healing, leading the teachers of the law to exclaim *"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* They got the idea right but came to the wrong conclusion and rejected him because of what that statement meant.

Jesus makes his task plain to his disciples in chapter 8 by spelling out to them clearly that he was to be killed and rise again but this appears to no avail - in the end they all forsook him and fled when the going got rough just before his trial.

If you can' t believe the unthinkable, then what did their rational mind conclude about Jesus? He was just a man. To his disciples he was a good man, a teacher, a rabbi, someone who did wondrous things like heal people; to his opponents he was evil - he challenged their authority, their religion and even claimed to do things that only God could do like forgive people' s sins.

The greatest picture of their rejection comes in this crucifixion scene. The ordinary passers by and his opponents - the respectable people in the religious establishment came by and mocked him - *" He saved others but he can' t save himself."*As far as they were concerned, he had challenged them, they had rejected him, they got him crucified - they had won!

But the most dramatic bit of all are the words of verse 33 - after the abandonment of his disciples, the rejection by his own people, the brutality and crucifixion of the Romans, he now found himself rejected by his Father.

The truth IS stranger than fiction. Why on earth should this Son of God presented to us in chapter 1 end up forsaken by everybody, including his own Father - what had he done wrong? Well, nothing. He did that which was good. True, he got the religious leaders' backs up because he condemned their religion for the hypocritical sham it was. But he only exposed the truth about them. So why should the Son have experienced even the rejection of his Father. Jesus himself gives us an answer for his death earlier in the gospel which we looked at in the Jerusalem Road series;

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

On the news a while back there was the story of a Scots girl who was kidnapped by militants in the Philippines, probably because she was a westerner. This frequently happens to foreigners in isolated parts of the Philippines, but usually they are released if a ransom is paid to the militants. The ransom price buys someone out of captivity. And that is the picture that Jesus presents us with in Mark 10. Another word that Christians often use to describe what Jesus did on the cross is the word "redeem". If you take something to a pawnbrokers, you will be able to get it back or redeem it if you pay a sum of money. The same idea comes in here where Jesus dies to pay a price to redeem people. The irony of the story is that Jesus was dying to redeem people who had by their unbelief and sin, had rejected God' s way - just like the people that were standing around the cross mocking him!

The ransom price Jesus was paying through his rejection and sufferings was so that not just the Jews but that ordinary people - you and me - could know God. And the only person in the crucifixion scene to recognise him as the Son of God was an ordinary person - a gentile - the Roman centurion.

Part of the dramatic scene when Jesus died was the way in which the curtain in the temple was torn from the top to the bottom. The curtain concealed the most holy place in the temple where only one select person, the high priest could come before God. What is interesting about the holy place was that once a year, the high priest entered it with the blood from sacrifice to make atonement for the people - Yet this supernatural act of it being torn downwards revealed to everyone the interior.

This signified that the death of Jesus on the cross had paid the price for the sins of men and women and now a way was open for them to enter in to God' s presence. And that' s how it is for you and me. The offer is open to me and to you today.

Who is Jesus to you? The Son of God? Or just a good man who fell foul of the system? If he is who he says he is, then Jesus died so that your sin can be forgiven and you can enter into God' s presence and know him.

Maybe like me you have already made that step. But as we have looked again at this familiar story this evening, we see the way in which the Son of God suffered unbelief, injustice, pain and rejection to pay the ransom for our sins. How are we honouring Jesus?

Paul wrote this about the price that Jesus paid for us:

1 Cor 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

Are we living lives that honour God, or are we like the disciples who liked the idea of following Jesus, but never actually understood who they were dealing with. Or worse, are you like the teachers of the law, who preferred to do their own things even though Jesus challenged them and their lifestyle.

The best way I could think of summing up just what it meant for Jesus to die are the words of a modern hymn, *How deep the Father's love for us.*

<p>HOW DEEP THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR US, How vast beyond all measure, That He should give His only Son To make a wretch His treasure. How great the pain of searing loss - The Father turns His face away, As wounds which mar the Chosen One Bring many sons to glory.</p> <p>Behold the man upon a cross, My sin upon His shoulders; Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice Call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there Until it was accomplished; His dying breath has brought me life - I know that it is finished.</p>	<p>I will not boast in anything, No gifts, no power, no wisdom; But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer; But this I know with all my heart - His wounds have paid my ransom.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Stuart Townend © Thankyou Music 1995</i></p>
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