

A DEFINING MOMENT

Mark 15:21-46

Throughout the history of the world, there have been what we might call “defining moments” that really changed and set the trajectory of mankind, leaving a lasting impact. Genesis 3 with the fall of mankind into sin was definitely one of them. Everything was redefined in that moment from innocence and perfection to sin and fallenness. The tower of Babel when God confused the languages was defining. Or the Exodus of Israel and establishment of that nation.

For the Church, I think of Luther’s nailing of the 95 Thesis to the door at Wittenburg. He didn’t realize it at the time but this would spark the Reformation and here we are 500 years later still advancing the clear gospel of salvation by grace through in Christ. For the United States, there have been defining moments for our country like the shot heard round the world: the opening shot of the battles of Lexington and Concord which began the Revolutionary War. Maybe the moon landing with one small step for man and one giant leap for mankind. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech. These are all defining moments in history.

Then, as individuals, we’ve all had defining moments. We can look back on a time period in our lives or a choice we made or an experience we went through that shaped who we are today, forever changing the trajectory of our lives. Some of those moments are coming to mind right now for you probably. Maybe you’re not impressed with some of the moments or decisions that have sent you on the current trajectory you’re on.

The good news is that there’s one moment that we are going to study today that is the moment of defining moments – a moment that can redeem even our worst moments – and that’s the moment Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross. Without this moment in history, none of us would be here today. Because of this moment, the apex of human history and redemptive history, the trajectory of the world, our nation and our lives were changed. And it’s a moment so wonderful that for everyone who accepts it, it gives them everlasting life, hope, peace and joy.

That moment is the moment Jesus Christ died on the cross. It’s really a moment that if we behold it and believe it, it starts to define us. It changes every aspect of our heart (mind, emotion and will). Our thinking, our wants and desires, and also our choices, our identity, our destiny, who we live for, what we live for, how we live. It changes everything. We’re going to look at what it means today when our lives are defined by the cross.

Mark 15:21-22

“They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of the Skull.”

I. JESUS' JOURNEY TO THE CROSS: THE WAY OF SUFFERING. (VV. 21-22)

If you were to go on a tour of Israel today, they'd take you through the *Via Dolorosa*, or *the Way of Suffering*, the route many think Jesus walked from the place of scourging to the place where He would be crucified, which is known as the place of the skull. In Aramaic, that's *Golgotha*; Latin, *Calvarie locus*, from where we get the term *Calvary*. There's a church built on the traditional site, but many think it's by this hill that has a skull-like formation in it. That's one reason some think it's the place of the skull or some think it's on the traditional site where there used to be a cemetery (Jn. 19:41). Either way it was likely a busy travel corridor west of the temple mount, and this was intentional on the Romans part as they wanted everyone to see what happened to law-breakers.

One of the unsuspecting travelers, probably in town for Passover, was this man named **Simon from Cyrene** (modern Libya) who is forced to help Jesus carry the cross-member that Jesus hands will be nailed too, called the *patibulum*. I know that ruins the movies and pictures of Jesus carrying an entire cross, but it is likely He only carried the horizontal beam across the back of the neck. Still it reveals the condition Jesus is in though the beatings and scourging.

But there's 2 neat cross-defining principles we find here for our lives. One is that when you follow Jesus, like Simon literally does, you'll find out soon that you too will carry a cross.

† Cross-Defining Principle #1

We become privileged cross-bearers like Jesus. (Mk. 8:24-28; Heb. 13:12)

Isn't that what Jesus said back in chapter 8? Simon is an illustration for this: "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?*" In Luke, Jesus said take up your cross *daily* and follow Me. I'm afraid too many Christians don't get this. He's not talking about "crosses" we face in life, but a **cross-lifestyle**. Not just denying yourself certain things but a life of **dying to self to live for Christ and for the gospel**. We don't live for ourselves anymore because we've been crucified with Christ and it's no longer we who live but Christ in us (Gal.2:20).

Part of the reason for why we don't understand how to live in light of the cross is because we're so familiar with crosses. Crosses are everywhere – church steeples, church signs, necklaces, stitched into my cowboy boots. We let the cross become casual and forget that today it'd be like exalting an electric chair or something. To let a cross define my life means that I die and my life is now lived in Christ, with Christ, and for Christ and His the gospel.

That's part of the reason the gospel is offensive and brings **opposition and rejection**. Sinners naturally don't want to serve but to be served. Rejection is seen in Jesus being crucified outside the city walls/gates. Hebrews 13:12 tells us is a prophetic fulfillment of an OT type where a lamb was slain for Israel outside the camp to atone for sins. "*Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify*

the people through His blood, suffered outside the gate. So then let us go with Him bearing His reproach.” The author of Hebrews sees this and says, *“Let’s go with Him in this.”*

† Cross-Defining Principle #2

When your life is defined by the cross, you can expect rejection and ostracism from the world.

I guess we can’t help but think of the church in Afghanistan this morning, can we? Mark’s original audience is literally suffering, their blood being shed and being socially ostracized for their faith in Christ. Remember, they’re being encouraged as they read Mark and understand it’s a privilege and an honor to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41).

Verses 23-32

“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 [9 a.m.] when they crucified Him. The inscription of the charge against Him read, “The King of the Jews.” They crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left. [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the 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.”

II. THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS. (VV. 23-32)

Just before Jesus is crucified, they try to get Him to drink some mixed wine drink with myrrh. It’s interesting that myrrh is at His birth and death and so is the thought of His kingship. But here it would have been in a numbing sedative drink (Prov. 31:6). Denying it is like going to the dentist and saying, *“I don’t need the novocaine.”* My dad used to do that because he hated the numbing feeling afterwards. But by Jesus’ denying the drink, He’s saying He’s going to bear the full weight of all our sin and God’s wrath upon Himself. He’s going to drink the full cup without help (14:36). Like David, He’s refusing to offer to God a sacrifice which costs Him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24).

Verse 24 says they crucified Him which means they stripped Him and nailed Him to the cross through His hands and feet. Because clothes were harder to come by back then, the officers basically threw dice to see who would get Jesus’ garment. That was a prophetic fulfillment and reminds us of Him being **the Last Adam**. The first Adam who sinned was disgraced, and was covered by God as God shed the innocent blood of an animal to make leather coverings (Gen. 3:21). Well, **Jesus takes our disgrace and our sin as He, the innocent Lamb of God** is slain so that through faith in Him, **our sins would be covered by His sacrifice.**

Crucifixion was absolutely horrific. It was designed to be a long, drawn-out painful death. It was so horrific that it was reserved for slaves and foreigners while Roman citizens were exempt from it. Our word *excruciating* comes out of the thought of *crucifixion*. Yet think about this: crucifixion is what God chose to reveal His heart to us and chose as the illustration for how we should live...

That's what Paul's getting at in Philippians 2:3-8 says, "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" There's some more principles there for us:

† Cross-Defining Principle #3

The cross helps define the heart of God as self-sacrificially loving.

We know His heart through the cross and He wasn't a self-preservationist. He was self-sacrificial. He humbled Himself and entered into our mess. Self-sacrificial love is what He is communicating to us through the cross. Whenever you doubt God's love, you just look back to the cross. It's right there. Loving & humble. He voluntarily gave His life for us and there's no greater love than that. The apostle John would say if you believe that theology – that Jesus died for you – then apply that theology by loving one another (1 John 4:10-11)! That's principle #4.

† Cross-Defining Principle #4

The cross should redefine us to be others-centered.

We die to self and enter into the concerns of others. We regard others as more important and seek their interests. That's the standard for greatness in God's kingdom, isn't it? In His value system, the greatest are the servants of others. It's totally opposite to this world's fallen, self-centered, narcissistic spirit which says, "*You first.*" "*Take care of number one.*" On the cross, Jesus is showing us how we were created to live as His image bearers– not for ourselves but as servants of God and others. The self-centeredness is actually a result of the fall. Satan turned Eve's focus with her beliefs, desires, and choices away from God to herself. Worship of self is why we're so dysfunctional.

But when your faith is in Christ and you understand that in Him you are complete (Col. 2:10), you are loved, accepted, secure and significant as a child of God in Christ, you can freely enter into the concern for others and even start to desire the good of others because you have everything you need. The gospel purifies our motives in our relationships with others because it frees us from self-centerednessⁱ and keeps us from the "*I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine*" mentality. It's not about us anymore. The cross is the greatest illustration of what it means to love your neighbor.

We see that in His refusal to come off the cross. Even if Jesus miraculously came off the cross, they wouldn't believe Him. They'd say it was by some dark power that He did it like they've been saying since chapter 3. He determined to follow through in the garden of Gethsemane cause **it's the Father's will and to save Himself would keep Him from saving others**. His intention was never to save Himself. The mission was **self-sacrifice, to pour out His life as a ransom for many** (Mark 10:45). They're hurling abuses at Him while He's dying for them: think about that. But this isn't the end. Do you know what happens to many of the priests? Acts 6:7 says many of the priests eventually come to faith in Jesus Christ through the apostles' preaching.

† Cross-Defining Principle #5

The love of the cross draws people to Jesus. (John 12:32; Rom. 2:4)

The cross is what eventually draws them to Him just like He said, *"If I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself."* We're drawn to the strange, self-sacrificial love in Christ. We're drawn to His grace and kindness. That tells us it's important to model Christ to others!

Verses 33-41

When the sixth hour [noon] came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour [3 pm]. 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!" There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

III. **THE DEATH OF JESUS. (VV. 33-41)**

I find it interesting that when it comes to Jesus' death, all four gospel writers simply say, *"he was crucified."* They don't focus so much on the physical pain and horrors of the crucifixion process like we do, trying to explain it for us to understand today. They focus more on the spiritual pain and the supernatural phenomena that really explains what is going on.

Markan Cross Event #1 – Darkness covers the land.

Luke 23:45 says the light of the sun was obscured. It became like night. 3 historians record that everything went dark. And we don't know exactly how but resources outside the Bible record it. If it was an eclipse, it had to be supernatural to last 3 hours. Most eclipses last only a few minutes.

You all saw the eclipse a few years ago. Imagine that for 3 hours! It was eerie. Crickets started chirping as if it was night. They didn't know what was going on. God just shuts the light off.

Markan Cross Event #2 – Jesus Cries Out

Just before He gave up His spirit, Jesus cried out more than once. He's crying out to the Father **quoting Psalm 22** and just like the psalm, the Bible indicates He was heard because of it. The psalmist of Psalm 22 is suffering and crying out, but the Father heard Him and responded to His feeling of abandonment.ⁱⁱ The reference to **Elijah** by bystanders most likely comes from supporters who are looking for the kingdom to come at any moment, expecting Elijah first (Mal. 4:5).

After this He is offered this sour wine now on a hyssop branch according to John, which reminds us of the blood being applied to the doorposts with a hyssop branch at the first Passover in Egypt.

After this, John tells us He pulled Himself up one last time and cried out, *"It is finished! Father into Your hands I commit My Spirit!"* (Mk 15:37; Lk. 23:46) and when He did that, His spirit departed, the earth shook and the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom.

Markan Cross Event #3 – The Temple Veil is Torn

Remember this veil was like a curtain divider that separated man from the holy of holies (ark, mercy seat, shekinah glory). Only the high priest went in there once a year. This tearing had to be supernatural because this wasn't a shower curtain. It was several inches thick and around 60ft high. Even these men who tear phone books in half today couldn't tear this thing.

Mark brings all of these events together in order that we would understand what they mean.

They mean that Jesus' shed blood and death are sufficient to make atonement (covering) for sins once and for all. And that **through His tearing, as the Veil Himself, we've been granted bold access** to God's throne and **He is our new High Priest** who at His death presented Himself before the Father. Hebrews 10:19-22 says, *"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith."* No more sacrifices needed. No more priests needed. No more veil. No more temple. The typology that they were has been fulfilled.

† Cross-Defining Principle #6

**Through the cross we are granted access to God,
forever redefining the trajectory of our lives.**

The torn veil is God's way of saying *"the price has been paid for sin and everyone who is thirsty can come and drink freely in My presence."* In one of D.L. Moody's sermons Moody contemplated Jesus' regathering of the disciples (14:27-28) and His instruction to them, *"Men, I want you to go and find the priests who mocked me, who hurled in my teeth the taunt, 'He saved others, himself he could not save.' Explain to them that if I saved myself, they would have been doomed men. But tell them there is a way wide open."* To the soldiers who divided My garments,

“God and find them and tell them there’s a far greater robe, a bright white and spotless robe awaiting everyone who will come to me. Then find the centurion who thrust his spear into my side and tell him there’s a closer way to my heart if we will come as a sinner needing forgiveness.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Isn’t that great? In this moment, the apex of human history, Jesus took our sin upon Himself and everyone who believes in Him is given His righteousness and everlasting life – forever changing the trajectory of their life and destiny. From darkness to light. Wrath to mercy. War to peace. Lost to found. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *“God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* 2 Peter 2:24 says, *“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness for by His wounds you are healed.”*

The question we can ask is: *Is your sin on you still, or on Jesus?* The moment you come to Christ as a sinner in need of salvation from sin is the moment your life will forever be redefined by the what happened that day. Spiritually, you enter into His death and burial and are raised to new spiritual life in Christ with a new destiny. That’s the beautiful wonder of the cross. It doesn’t matter what moments you’ve had in your past that made you who you are today. Christ can forgive and restore and renew, giving you His power for a His new path in your life, a new trajectory. If you haven’t trusted Christ as your Savior, I would encourage you to do that right now. Just get real with God about your sin and need for a Savior. Say, *“Jesus I know I’m sinner just like everyone else, but I believe you came and died for my sins so that I could have life and eternal life with You.”* Just get real with God as a sinner in need of a Savior.

Isaiah 53 prophesied Jesus would not only be resurrected but that people would believe in Him. 53:10 says, *“But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring [His spiritual seed], He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.”* One of “seeds” is Josph.

IV. THE BURIAL OF JESUS. (VV. 42-47)

“When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Joseph brought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking to see where He was laid.”

So in contrast to the mocking priests, Mark introduces us to those who loved Jesus. First, all of these women who are great examples of what it means to follow Jesus. They’re being introduced now because they’ll show up at the resurrection in chapter 16 again. But there’s one man that stands out because he’s a **member of the Sanhedrin**. Remember that’s the group that’s been so

hard on Jesus all throughout this gospel and got Him crucified. We find out that one of them named **Joseph of Arimathea has been a secret disciple this entire time** (Jn. 19:38). He asks Pilate for the body of Jesus so they can bury Him before the Sabbath begins at 6:00 pm. Instead of letting Jesus be throw in a mass grave of other wicked men, Jospheh takes Him and places Him in his own tomb – which He’s only going to borrow for the weekend! Isaiah 53 prophesied this. *“His grave was assigned with wicked men (plural), yet He was with a rich man (singular) in His death.”* God has used the incredible prophetic detail of Isaiah 53 it to lead more Jews to faith in Christ than any other prophecy. It’s the 4th Servant Song of Isaiah.

† Cross-Defining Principle #7

Living in light of the cross means we become self-sacrificial servants like the Savior.

Jospheh becomes the first person, post-crucifixion, to really show himself to be **a self-sacrificial servant like the Savior**. By going before Pilate, Jospheh is risking **association with insurrection**, his **reputation** and **position**, becoming **ceremonially defiled**. But isn’t it interesting that just like Simon, who carried his cross, what he is known for today is only what he did in connection with Jesus. They’re defined by how they relate to the cross. Only what we do for Christ will remain in the long run. And Mark’s original audience can relate to Joseph’s risk as they risk their lives for their association with Jesus.

The question I have for us this morning is: *Will we? Will we take up our crosses and follow Jesus, allowing the cross to define our lives?* There’s far too many cross-less Christians today. At some point, you’ve got to be like Jospheh saying, *“I’m going to follow Christ. I don’t care what the world thinks of me. I will go public in my declaration of Christ, and I will love like Christ loved. And by His grace, I want to be a servant like the Savior.”*

ⁱ James Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press), 162.

ⁱⁱ William Varner, *Passionate about the Passion Week* (Dallas, TX: Fontes Press, 2020).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ray Stedman, Elaine Stedman, *The Power of His Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2006), 41.