Discipleship According to Mark

Jesus Died (Mark 15:33–39)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at Houston Chinese Church on November 8, 2026

Introduction

- This morning we've arrived at the central point of Mark's Gospel. The climax of the story. The crux of the matter. We've arrived at the cross of Christ. As Christians, we cherish the cross. We sing songs about the cross. We wear them around our necks. We decorate our churches with them. **Because for Christians, the cross is the clearest expression of God's love for us.** If we want to understand the depths of God's love, we look to the cross.
  - But what I find so notable in Mark's account of the cross is how the love of God is just indirectly referenced. Instead what's far more emphasized is the wrath of God. **The cross seems to display God's anger as much as it does his love**. Now I know the words "wrath" and "anger" are not written in the text. But what I'm going to argue is that they're clearly symbolized in the text. The wrath of God was on display at the cross of Christ.

- I know that doesn't sit right for many. **Many people grew up only familiar with an angry God who's always mad at them for messing up.** That's their perception of the Christian God. He's a strict disciplinarian. He's a stern father with a short fuse. An ill-tempered judge quick to punish sinners who step out of line. **For some, the thought of an angry God is distasteful. For others, it's downright scary.** They're either turned off or terrified. Either way, they want nothing to do with a God of wrath.
  - Which means you have one of two options. **You can reconstruct your view of God.** Where he becomes purely a God of love. Where there's not an ounce of anger in him. He overlooks your faults. With no need to exact punishment for your sins. That's one way to respond to the notion of an angry God. You reconstruct your view of God.
    - **Or you can reject the idea of God altogether.** You can take the path of the atheist or agnostic and deny the existence of God. You can treat the God of the Bible as merely the product of ancient myths or the projection of human constructs. You can respond by just abandoning faith.

- But what if there's a third option? What if—instead of reconstructing God or rejecting God—what if you received him? **What if you received him as the One who made a Way for his holy wrath to be satisfied without the punishment of sin falling on sinners like us?**
  - What if you hid yourself in the Savior who bore the anger of God in your place on the cross? That, my friends, is what the cross of Christ is all about. **Yes, it is the clearest expression of God's love *for us*. But that's only because, *for Christ*, the cross was the clearest expression of God's wrath.** And that is what's emphasized in this morning's text. Here we see Jesus hanging on a Roman cross, taking upon himself God's holy anger and righteous judgment. There are two objects in the text that symbolically convey divine anger. It's the Darkness in v33 and the Cry in vv34-36. And having satisfied this anger by his death, there are two symbolic results—the Curtain in vv37-38 and the Confession in v39. I want to consider all four in detail.

The Darkness

- Let's begin by considering the supernatural darkness that came over the land right in the middle of Jesus's crucifixion. Let's read v33 again. "*And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*"
    - We're told earlier in v25 that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, which is equivalent to 9:00am. He then hung there, on the cross, for three hours being mocked by bystanders. Then, at the sixth hour, at noontime—when the sun is at its highest—a darkness suddenly fell over the whole land.

- This was a supernatural darkness. Some have tried to explain it away by suggesting that it was a total solar eclipse that just so happened to take place that day. There must be some scientific explanation because, for many, a supernatural darkness is simply implausible. **But when you consider the timing of when the crucifixion occurred, the solar eclipse explanation turns out to be—not just implausible—but astronomically impossible.**
    - Remember, Jesus was crucified during the Jewish Passover (14:1), a feast always celebrated on the first month of the lunar calendar *during a full moon*. And because of the moon's position during a full moon—in relation to the earth and sun—it's impossible to have a solar eclipse at the same time. Ancient people understood this. **They knew a solar eclipse cannot occur simultaneously with a full moon.** Those there that day at the cross—and Mark's original ancient audience—**all would've understood this sudden darkness to be supernatural.** It was a sign from God.

- Anyone familiar with the OT knows that light is often used symbolically in Scripture to represent God's blessing and favor. **And on the flip side, darkness is used to represent his anger and judgement.** Think of the ninth plague in Exodus—the plague of darkness (Ex 10:21-23). Sudden darkness in daytime. Right before the slaying of Egypt's firstborn sons. That supernatural darkness functioned as a sign of divine judgment against the sins of Egypt.
    - Or consider the prophetic book of Amos. In **Amos 8:9,** the LORD speaks of a future Day of the Lord, saying. "*In that day I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight*." In a *not-yet* sense, that Day of the Lord will occur at the end of time, but in an *already* sense, this great day of judgment has already passed—when the sun went down at noon as Jesus hung on the cross.
        - **The point is that this supernatural darkness that covered the whole land as Jesus was crucified was symbolically communicating the wrath of God.** God was angry and ready to judge sin.

- I know that speaking about God's anger doesn't sit well with many people. Isn't he supposed to be a God of love? **If God is love, then clearly he's not the kind who would get angry at us.** That's the assumption. But that kind of thinking misunderstands both love and anger. Love and anger are not mutually exclusive emotions. **The opposite of love is not anger. The opposite of love is indifference.**

- If you see an evil deed being perpetrated against someone you claim to love, causing great pain—**if you don't get angry at that evil being done, then I'm not sure if you really love that person.** If you're not angry, it seems you're anything but loving. You seem indifferent.
    - Love cares enough to hate evil. To be angry with evil. If that makes sense for how we react to evil deeds, then how much more for God? **We *want* God to be angry with evil. But then we have to accept the fact that evil lies within us.** In our sin.

- **The only way you'll come to grips with the idea that "God is angry with us" is if you accept the biblical view of sin. If you think human sin is merely the result of ignorance**, then the appropriate response from God would be pity—not anger. And what we need is for him to send us a Good Moral Teacher to save us from our ignorance.
    - **If you think our sinfulness is fundamentally a disease of the soul**, then God's appropriate response would be—not anger—but compassion. And what we need most is for him to send a Divine Healer to save us from our spiritual sickness.
        - **If you think sinners are essentially victims**—that sin is a form of acting out in response to the abuse we've suffered—then the appropriate response from God would be sympathy—not anger. And what we need is for a Cosmic Therapist to listen, empathize, and heal our emotional wounds.

- **But the biblical view is that sin is, first and foremost, an evil committed against a holy God.** Remember when King David committed adultery and conspired to kill the woman's husband? After he was confronted with his great evil, he cried out to the LORD in Psalm 51:4, "*Against you, you only, have I sinned*".
    - David wasn't denying that he sinned against others. But he was recognizing that his sin was fundamentally a treacherous act of rebellion against the High King of Heaven. **If that's true, then the appropriate response from God should be righteous anger. And what we need most of all is for him to send a Redeemer.** Someone who will bear that anger in our place and make it possible for sinners like us to be reconciled to God.

The Cry

- And that's what Jesus came to do. **The darkness in the sky suggested that God is angry with someone and is carrying out judgement on someone.** Which begs the question, "With whom? On whom?" And the answer is Jesus. This is evident in the agonizing cry that we hear from him. Look at v34. "*And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*""
    - Now it goes on to say in v35 that bystanders mistook his cry to *Eloi* as a cry to *Eli*, which is short in Aramaic for Elijah. There was a popular belief back then that the prophet Elijah functioned like a guardian angel. Who would return to protect and rescue righteous sufferers in times of crisis.

- So the bystanders thought Jesus was crying out to Elijah for rescue. In v36, we're told they were curious to see if Elijah might come. So someone offers Jesus sour wine, which was used by soldiers, in those days, as a stimulant. By offering it to Jesus, I think they were hoping to keep him alert and alive long enough to perhaps see a miracle of deliverance.
    - But there was no deliverance. There was only this cry, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott has four possible explanations for this cry.

- Some see this as **a cry of despair**. They argue that Jesus never expected to die like this. He was convinced God would deliver him from his enemies. But now, hanging on a cross, about to die, he cries a cry of unexpected despair.
    - Of course, the weakness of this view is its failure to account for the many instances in Mark's Gospel where Jesus predicts his impending death to great detail (8:31). Dying a criminal's death on a cross came at no surprise to him.

- The second view is to see this as merely **a cry of loneliness**. He asks, "*Why you have forsaken me?*," but it's argued that it was based on a mere feeling. Jesus felt forsaken, but the Father wouldn't actually do that. God would never forsake his own Son. Yet at the moment, it sure felt that way to Jesus. You can see the advantage of this viewpoint is that you can avoid speaking of God's anger or punishment actually being inflicted on Christ.
    - The third view offers the same advantage but in a modified form. It views this as, ironically, **a cry of victory**. Jesus quotes the first line of Psalm 22, which describes a righteous one who suffers without just cause. Proponents of this view argue that, by quoting the first verse, Jesus intends for us to recall the whole psalm and especially the last few verses, which end in triumph. **So this is not an agonizing cry of despair. It's a loud shout of victory.** Again, if this is true, then Jesus was not really forsaken. Which would mean the cross was *not* a display of divine wrath and punishment.

- **But the problem with these last two views is the failure to read this cry in the context of the darkness surrounding it.** Just as darkness in the Exodus preceded the slaughter of the Passover lamb (which bore punishment in the place of others), so to this darkness preceded the slaughter of the True Lamb (who likewise functioned as a substitute). Jesus really was punished. He actually was forsaken.

- In the end, the only way to make sense of this cry, in its context, is to see it as **a cry of dereliction**. To be derelict means to be in a state of abandonment. Maybe you've heard of a derelict building—a building abandoned, forsaken, marked for demolition. **Theologians call this a "cry of dereliction" because, in that moment, Jesus truly experienced a state of abandonment.** How exactly the Triune nature of God was not divided or destroyed remains a mystery. Our Three-in-One God didn't stop being Three-in-One at the cross. But it's clear that, on the cross, God the Son was somehow forsaken.

- **In the Bible, God's ultimate punishment for sin is to forsake the sinner. That means to completely cut off the individual from the joy and blessing of God's grace**. Every person alive experiences God's grace, to some degree, even if they don't acknowledge it. But if we die—having never repented of our sins and turned to Christ for rescue—then we will be cut off from all traces of his grace. **We will be utterly forsaken by God.** That's what hell is.
    - And yet this is what the Son experienced on the cross. He was forsaken by God. Completely cut off from grace. **No amount of physical torture or suffering comes close to the horrors of being completely cut off and forsaken by God.**
        - Being scourged with a whip that has 39 lashes—each with jagged pieces of bone or metal attached at the ends—I'm sure that's unbearably painful. Having iron nails pierce your hands and feet is horrifying beyond words. **But far more agonizing for Jesus was the experience of being forsaken by the Father.** He received the full measure of God's anger and judgment against sin.

- But why? Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He was sinless. He did nothing wrong to provoke God's anger or deserve his punishment. **So for whose sins was he being punished?** It was for the sins of sinners like us.
    - ***We* deserve to be forsaken by God, but Jesus took our place.** The Father and Son worked in concert. The plan was for the Father to forsake the Son, so that he wouldn't have to forsake those for whom the Son dies. "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*." (2 Cor 5:21)
        - On the cross, Jesus became sin. **He became the most sinful man history has ever known because the sins of a countless multitude of believers in every age and place throughout time were placed upon his shoulders.** For three agonizing hours, all the lies, hatred, pride, greed, lust, and jealousy of mankind—all of it was poured out on him.
            - And in response, God punished those sins by pouring out on his Son all the anger and judgement that should've fallen on sinners like us. **On the cross, Jesus experienced hell for us.** It's no wonder he screamed from the depths of his soul.

The Curtain

- Now we're told in v38 that at the very moment of his death, "*The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom*." Notice this torn curtain. This is the first of two symbolic results of Jesus's death. **This "*curtain of the temple*" is most likely referring to the veil that shielded the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies).** That central room in the temple, which housed the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the very presence of God. The Most Holy Place was considered God's earthly throne room.
    - And this thick curtain—that reached up to the temple ceiling 30-feet high—covered the entrance to the Most Holy Place, acting as a constant reminder that the holiness of God and sinfulness of man cannot abide together. **There is a thick barrier between God and man. Access to God is barred and restricted—all because of sin.**

- Think back to the **Garden of Eden**. After Adam and Eve rebelled in sin, they were expelled from Eden, and we're told that cherubim (angels) with flaming swords were put in place to block the way back. They could no longer enjoy direct, face to face communion with God.
    - And then, in the book of Exodus, when the LORD descends on **Mount Sinai**, Moses alone is summoned to come up to the top to meet with God. But the people must keep their distance. A boundary is set around the mountain, and the people are warned to not even touch the mountain (Ex 19:12). Set one foot on it and you die. That's how restricted the access is to God.

- And then, after the Israelites have settled into the Promised Land and have constructed the **tabernacle**—where the Ark resided, where the Shekinah glory of God rested—we're told that that veil blocking the Most Holy Place was designed with a pattern of cherubim woven into it (Ex 26:31). Recalling those angels blocking the way to Eden.
    - Then we're told that, for only one day out of the year, the high priest alone was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place to offer a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. I don't think the high priest was excited, just jumping at the opportunity to enter the throne room of God. He was probably shaking in his high priest boots.
        - Walking into the Most Holy Place was an extremely dangerous task. **Exodus 28 tells us that the high priest was fitted a garment that had little golden bells attached to the hem**. Scholars think that those jingling bells were there to signal to his colleagues, who were waiting outside, that he was still alive and still ministering on their behalf.

- That's how dangerous it was— how restricted and off-limits it was—to approach God in the OT. **And that 30-foot, thick curtain, with cherubim embroidered all over it, served as a constant reminder that the way is shut.** You cannot enter. God is far too holy, and we are far too sinful. You can walk into his throne room, but don't expect to walk back out. That's why that curtain was put up—to remind everyone that you cannot approach a holy God.

- But then look at v37 again, "*37And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 38And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*" From top to bottom. Remember, that was a 30-foot high curtain. To specifically tell us that it tore "*from top to bottom,*" is Mark's way of implying that it was God himself who tore that curtain. The message is loud and clear: **What once barred the way into the presence of God is now gone!**
    - Our sin has been punished. Our debt has been paid. God's righteous anger has been satisfied. God's holy judgment has been served. And all because of Jesus and his substitutionary death! **In him, we have free access to enter the throne room of God.** Listen to how the author of Hebrews puts it, "*We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.*" (Heb 10:19)

- **Jesus's death opened the way—a new and living way—into the Most Holy Place, to approach God, to rest and take refuge in his presence.** It's no longer dangerous or scary, if we approach through Jesus and the way he opened for us.
    - That's the Christian's confidence. We have confidence to draw near with full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22). **Not because we're confident in ourselves—in our own merit—but because of our faith in what Christ has accomplished.** That through his death, he has satisfied God's anger. He has fulfilled all righteousness. Our sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west. So the way is open.

- **If you are a Christian, you don't have to fear approaching God.** I know sometimes we feel too sinful, too dirty, to come before him. And maybe you're feeling that right now. **You're uneasy to be in a worship service like this because you feel unworthy.**
    - Well, the Gospel's answer is *not* to tell you to stop thinking like that. It won't tell you that you actually are worthy. That you're doing your best. You're doing great. **No, the Gospel will agree with you—that you are unworthy to be in God's presence.** But Jesus has made a way. He took your sins, your unworthiness, upon his shoulders. He died for them. He propitiated the Father's wrath. He satisfied God's righteous anger. Jesus experienced God's wrath on the cross, so that you and I can experience the cross as the clearest expression of God's love.

The Confession

- **And ironically, the first person to see the love of God in the cross was a Roman centurion.** One of the soldiers who, hours earlier, had helped put Jesus on the cross. This was one of his executioners. He probably took part in mocking and beating Jesus. **Yet it was this man who was the first to spiritually enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.** Look at v39, "*And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*"

- Up to this point in Mark's Gospel, the only ones to make this confession were God the Father (at Jesus's baptism in 1:11 and his transfiguration in 9:7) and demons whenever Jesus would cast them out (3:11; 5:7). **This centurion is the first human being to confess Jesus as the Son of God.** And note that it's triggered by his contemplation of Jesus's suffering and death.
    - **Not until his death on the cross can anyone truly understand who he is, why he came, and what it means for him to be the Son of God**. Mark began his Gospel in chapter 1:1 identifying Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and now at the end of his gospel that claim is finally understood.
        - Now it's crystal clear that the Son of God came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). He came to satisfy anger, to take punishment, to die as a substitute for many.

- If all it took for this centurion was the sight of Jesus on the cross—being forsaken by God, absorbing the wrath reserved for us—if a battle-hardened, pagan soldier whose hands are just as guilty of putting Christ on the cross as ours—**if he could take one look at the cross and be utterly transformed into a believer who confesses Christ, then that should inform a church's priorities.** That's where the power of salvation lies. That reinforces our commitment to maintain a Christ-centered, cross-centered ministry in this church.
    - **There's a good reason why we make every effort to preach Christ and his cross every Sunday morning.** And why so many of our songs are centered on this central theme of the cross. And why, in our bible classes and bible studies, we're always trying to bring it back to Jesus and his cross.

- Because there's power in that message. The power to change a hardened skeptic. The power to melt a heart of stone. **If a Roman soldier who put Jesus on the cross can be saved, then so can you.** So can the most obstinate unbeliever you know. Don't rule anyone out. Don't rule yourself out. If you confess Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, and believe in your heart that he died for your sins and God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9). That's the hope of the gospel. That's the confidence we have because of the cross.