

The Power of the Cross (Mark 15:1-39)

A Handout

“The power of the cross” is a profound phrase. Its depth comes directly from the authentic power that was held in and on the cross, a power to forgive and thereby thoroughly defeat sin. We can never meditate too often on the cross, whether it be on the historical story, on our own need for the cross, or on its implications for those who live under its power, that is, freedom from both the penalty and the control of sin, so that we may walk rightly within the will of God.

A) Summary: Civil Trial, Conviction, and Crucifixion (Mark 15:1-32)

Mark 15:1-15 Civil Trial and Conviction

- Mark 15:1-5: Jews “delivered [Jesus] to Pilate” (15:1) and “accused Him harshly” (15:3) of “many charges” (15:4).
- Yet Jesus remains relatively silent, only responding once when Pilate asked Jesus if He was in fact the “King of the Jews,” to which Jesus answered, “It is as you say” (15:2)
 - ✦ Emphasis is on “you,” and Jesus gives Pilate no basis for any guilt of treason (against Rome)
 - ✦ Jesus’ silence “amazed” Pilate (15:5) and probably led Pilate to believe His innocence
- Mark 15:6-15: Jesus’ unjust but God-willed conviction and sentence
 - ✦ Pilate follows a goodwill custom to release a prisoner each year and offers either Barabbas or Jesus (15:8-9)
 - ✦ The chief priests “stirred up the crowd to ask [Pilate] to release Barabbas instead” (15:11)
 - ✦ Although Pilate believes Jesus is innocent, he frees Barabbas and sends Jesus to be crucified
 - ✦ The crowd’s cries function as a legal decree by popular demand. If Pilate denies their wishes, they may complain against him and jeopardize his position. Pilate’s guilt lies in choosing security over moral judgment.

Mark 15:16-32 Punishment and Crucifixion

- Mark 15:16-21: Roman soldiers mocked and punished Jesus prior to His crucifixion
 - ✦ Jesus was first “scourged” (15:15), then insultingly dressed up as a king (purple, crown of thorns; 15:17)
 - ✦ Then they mockingly acclaimed Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews” (15:18), and continued to “beat His head with a reed” and “spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him” (15:19-20)
- Mark 15:22-32: Jesus’ crucifixion
 - ✦ Reflecting Mark’s Roman audience, crucifixion did not need much explanation
 - ✦ Note the fulfillment of various prophecies (e.g. “casting lots for [Jesus’ clothing]” (15:24; Ps 22:18), “crucified two robbers with Him” (15:27-28; Isa 53:12), reminding us Jesus has fulfilled a plan in place from the beginning

Summary: This is a story of an unjust conviction and intense physical suffering, which will only intensify as a deeper, more agonizing spiritual suffering sets in when Jesus bears our sin. Yet it is that spiritual suffering that ultimately redeems Jesus’ unjust conviction at the hands of transgressors.

B) Summary: Death on the Cross and Burial (Mk 15:33-39)

Sequence of Events: 1) Darkness (15:33), 2) Jesus’ cry (15:34), 3) Jesus breathes His last (15:37), 4) Veil of the temple torn (15:38), 5) Centurion’s confession that Jesus was the Son of God (15:39)

- #2: Jesus’ cry: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”
 - What did Jesus’ cry signify? i) genuine relationship with God, ii) a certain type of break in the relationship
 - At that moment on the cross, Jesus bears all the sins of man, and as such, God judges the sins of man borne by Jesus at that moment on the cross
 - God’s holiness requires that God cannot look upon sin (and therefore upon Jesus), hence the separation

- This is a temporary separation between two Persons who have a relationship that is more loving, genuine, and intimate than we can fathom, making this separation much more agonizing than the physical separation
- Yet this does not diminish those physical sufferings: he felt every blow, every bone of the whip, every bit of spit, heard every mocking word, felt the nails being driven through Him, felt His strength wither away on the cross, and felt His moment of death.

Summary: Though Jesus' physical suffering does not compare to His separation from the Father, it does give us a powerful sense of suffering that the Suffering Servant endured, as well as the love and humility that was displayed on the cross. The cross comes to represent the sacrificial and selfless heart that we desire to understand, to receive, and to display towards God and to our neighbors, as per the greatest commandment, as we "take up our cross daily."

C) What is the Power of the Cross

Where does it come from, and how do we tap into it? What do we mean when we say that we must lean on the power of the cross, or that we must hold the cross close to our hearts? Why do we even need the cross of Jesus?

Why do we need the cross? (Why did Jesus have to go to the cross?)

1. In His love, God ordained that Jesus will be the way that sinful man can be reconciled to dwell with the Lord

- It was necessary that:
 - Jesus demonstrate His identity, authority, and mission
 - Jesus is tempted, yet remains sinless, in order to be a sufficiently holy sacrifice (once, for all sanctified; Heb 10)
 - Jesus must be sacrificed (He must die)

- This has been in motion from the fall (Adam and Eve)

2. Jesus demonstrates that He will be the Mediator that man needs in order to be reconciled with God

- Jesus, the Son of God (1:1), teaches among the people, in contrast to God in the OT, with whom the people had to maintain distance, lest they be killed by God's holiness. With Jesus, the barrier can be healed (e.g. Mk 5:25-34)
- His holiness must be exchanged with our sin as it was on the cross. We must receive this exchange to partake in this once for all sacrifice, for the payment of our sin and to receive freedom from its power
- In fact, all the lessons that we have learned from Jesus (e.g. about missional calling, commandment to love God and our neighbors, warnings against worldliness, division, pride) are carried out only by the power of the cross

The Power of the Cross

The power of the cross is the power that frees us from the punishment of sin and the power of sin. It frees us to live by the Holy Spirit as we mature in the exercise of our faith in Jesus' work on the cross and in the Father who sent Him.

- There are numerous temptations: sex, money, power, comfort, and others
 - Their draw is a false promise to fill some kind of void in your heart that can be satisfied only through God
 - Nonbelievers do not know God and hence do not find this rest, but many Christians repeatedly fall because they lack sufficient faith in the cross and in God and hence do not exercise their faith proactively
- Faith in our righteousness before God, in our true relationship with God, in God's goodness and the goodness of His ways give us the ability to
 - Search our hearts to identify what troubles or tempts us, and humbly acknowledge our sin
 - To come to have a truly repentant heart and to be assured of our forgiveness if we confess our sin
 - Be assured that God will work in us through His Spirit to overcome

Summary: On the cross, there was a real exchange of our sin for Jesus' righteousness. Through our receiving of God's grace by faith in the gospel of God, we are reconciled with God. In our relationship with Him, God takes us and grows us as we ourselves exercise our faith, enabling us to take up our own crosses daily and have the darkness in our hearts filled with His light. The cross is the foundation of our reconciliation and the source of the love, grace, and humility we need to overcome any trial or temptation that may come, as we see the love, grace, and humility of God displayed.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the historical account of Jesus' crucifixion significant to our faith?
2. Why is Jesus on the cross the only way for man to be reconciled with God?
3. What temptations or habitual sins have you overcome through the power of the cross?