

Implications of Mark 15:33-41 “Forsaken at the Cross”

One game kids like to play when swimming is diving into the deep end in search of coins. I used to do it when I was younger! A person would throw some coins into the water. You’d hold your breath and venture downward into the deep section of the pool, reaching and feeling along the bottom in search of a precious coin. Eventually you’d have to come up for air. Then you’d try again, and you’d keep trying until you found all the coins.

When we study God’s Word we never find all the coins. In fact, we never even reach bottom! That picture sums up what we attempted to do last Wednesday evening and will do so again tonight.

On Sunday mornings, we have been journeying through the Gospel of Mark. In recent weeks we’ve examining what happened on the cross. For three weeks our focus was on the *mockery Jesus endured at the cross*. This past Sunday we beheld something even worse than human mockery, *the forsakenness of the cross*. We listened as the Son of God cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In Acts 20:20 Paul said he ministered the Word “publicly and from house to house.” There are two prongs to a Word centered ministry: public preaching *and* one on one teaching/discipling. Both are essential. Paul did both, and so must we as a church.

In our Sunday morning worship service we *proclaim* truth. God’s Word is preached. We don’t stop in the middle of the proclamation and say, “Anybody have anything they want to say right now? Any comments or questions?” That’s intentional. We need to *hear* the proclamation of God’s Word.

But is there a place for questions and comments? Absolutely. What has been *proclaimed* must be *applied*. The public ministry of the Word paves the way for the follow-up implementation of the Word into our lives, the “house to house” emphasis.

That’s what we seek to do on Wednesday evenings, to investigate the Scriptures utilizing a question and answer, discussion oriented approach.

And certainly the subject of the cross necessitates we do so. When you study what the Gospels record concerning the cross, many questions come to mind, questions that have to do with *clarification* (what does the text really mean?) and *application* (what difference should the text make in our lives?).

Tonight, I’d like for us to go deeper, to consider the *implications of Mark 15:33-41*. Our approach will be:

1. A Quick Overview of the previous study (5 minutes)
2. Discuss questions that the study raised (25 minutes)
 - a. Questions to clarify: What does it mean?
 - b. Questions to apply: What difference should this make in my life?

A Quick Review:

Main Idea: Using but a few words, Mark allows us to see Jesus’ forsakenness from two perspectives in Mark 15:33-41.

I. We see the pain of being forsaken (33-37).

A. There was darkness (33).

1. What Jesus suffered physically was excruciating.
2. What Jesus suffered spiritually was beyond comprehension.

B. There was His cry (34).

1. He identified with the psalmist.
2. He felt complete alienation.
3. He asked the 'why question.'
4. He looked by faith beyond the suffering.
5. He invites us to experience the fellowship of His suffering.

C. There was a misunderstanding (35-36).

1. The people heard what He said.
2. The people left Him alone.

D. There was a unique death (37).

1. He died in agony.
2. He died with a shout of accomplishment.

II. We see the gain of being forsaken (38-41).

A. The curtain tore (38).

1. When Jesus died He removed the barrier between God and man.
2. When Jesus died He gained access to God.

B. The centurion testified (39).

1. A Gentile man was impressed by how Jesus died.
2. A Gentile man declared who Jesus is.

C. The women watched (40-41).

1. They were witnesses to His death.
2. They would soon be witnesses to His resurrection.

Make It Personal: He was forsaken so that you might be accepted.

Discussion Questions

Let's examine the account by asking probing questions. Again, some of the questions are for purposes of clarification, others for application. [Read through all the questions before beginning to answer them one by one]

1. Let's probe the darkness.

- a. How long was it dark?
- b. How do you feel when you are in the dark?
- c. Why was there darkness while Christ hung on the cross? Give biblical support.
 - There was darkness in Egypt before the first Passover lambs were offered.
 - It was predicted in Amos 8:9-10.
- d. What questions does the darkness raise for you?

Remember Spurgeon's observation: "I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish. Here the wormwood and the gall, and all the other bitterness, are outdone. Here you may look as into a vast abyss; and though you strain your eyes, and gaze till sight fails you, yet you perceive no bottom; it is measureless, unfathomable, inconceivable. This anguish of the Saviour on your behalf and mine is no more to be measured and weighed than the sin which needed it, or the love which endureth it. We will adore where we cannot comprehend (51)."

2. Let's ponder Jesus' cry: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

- a. I believe it was Luther who wrestled with this deeply and said, "God forsaken of God! Who can understand it?!" Why did He say that?
- b. What does it really mean to be *forsaken*? Illustrate the word.
- c. The cross reveals how much God hates our sin. How so?

3. Suppose your non-Christian neighbor, who has very little understanding of Scripture, asked you, "Why did Jesus die on the cross? What made His death different from the death of other great men? What is it that makes the cross so significant for you Christians, 2000 years after the fact?" How would you answer?

4. I've suggested that one way to keep the cross fresh in our hearts and minds is to read and sing the great, cross-centered, cross-saturated hymns in our daily personal times with God (and for sure in our corporate worship as a church!). Let's define that.

- a. What are some characteristics of a good, cross-centered hymn?

--it's objective rather than subjective; it's more than a song that "makes me feel good about Jesus"; that's because it reflects on what Christ accomplished, not simply on what Christ means *to me*

--it's reverent, not merely sentimental and certainly not flippant

--it engages the mind using word pictures that help us see the Savior as He suffers

--it's doctrinally rich and sound; every word contributes to the communication of truth (as opposed to settling for a deficient word just to make it rhyme, etc)

Let's look at the hymnbook for some examples...

E.g.—Look at #495 "Heaven Came Down". Note how the song expresses what Christ did in *my life*. That's good, but it's not reflecting on what happened on the cross.

E.g.—#493 "It Is Well with My Soul"; This is probably my favorite hymn. But is it cross centered? Granted, it mentions the cross in verse 3, but it essentially shows the difference the cross makes in our lives when trials hit. That's a good thing to ponder, but are we thinking about the cross when the hymn ends? Perhaps, perhaps not.

But there is no perhaps about some hymns, and we need to make sure we regularly meditate on and sing such hymns. For example, here are some cross centered hymns (#188 "At the Cross") (#175 "Hallelujah, What a Savior!")

Observation: There are actually a small percentage of hymns that focus on the cross in our hymnbook. I'm not saying the hymns included are deficient. It's just few are thoroughly cross-focused.

Allow me to share with you some examples I found in another hymnbook, *The Trinity Hymnal*. Note how they don't merely mention the cross, but thoroughly engage our minds in pondering the cross.

E.g.—181, 183, 192, 193, 196

b. What are the benefits of singing hymns that focus on the cross?

c. What happens to us as individuals and as a church if we consistently sing songs that are NOT cross centered?

d. Take 5 minutes and find a good example of a cross centered, cross saturated hymn. Then pick one verse out of that hymn, meditate on it, worship Christ through it, and be prepared to share it with the rest of us at the end of our time.

