

Main Idea: Using but a few words, Mark allows us to see Jesus’ alienation (we might say ‘forsakenness’) from two perspectives in Mark 15:33-41.

- I. We see the pain of Jesus’ alienation (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 separation.
 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 Jesus’ alienation (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: Jesus experienced alienation so that we might experience reconciliation.

On this day we call Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey to the applause of the crowd, and launched Passion week. We’ve been preparing for this special week all month in our current series, “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*,” an exposition of Mark 15.

Thinking about the cross should take place, not just once a year, but continually. And to help us do just that, a team of individuals from our church have been using wood to create special projects designed to generate conversations about the cross. Two years ago, it was the cross puzzle. Last year, the gospel panorama. This year, it’s the *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* frame.

When you leave today, each family will receive this special gift, for your future encouragement. But we’re also encouraging you to give one to your friends and neighbors, perhaps on Good Friday, and assemble it with them, and talk about the significance of the cross, and of Isaac Watts’ song.

I’d like to take sixty seconds to demonstrate. This is being recorded so you can go back later and watch this explanation online, and encourage others to do the same, as well as to watch the message that follows, and the other messages in the sermon series.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2007.

Now, for today's message we turn our attention to Mark 15:33-41, and a message entitled, "*Alienation on the Cross.*"

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:33-41

When I was in the seventh grade, I had to go to the hospital for some minor tests, and was there a couple of days. What an experience! My parents took me to my room. After visiting hours that night, they left. I felt all alone. In the bed next to me was an elderly man who was delirious. They had him strapped down to keep him from hurting himself. He was moaning and yelling non-stop. And then I heard him say, "Hey boy, come here. There's a knife in that drawer. Get it, and cut me loose!"

Frankly, I was petrified! I was in a totally strange place and didn't know a soul. Finally, a nurse came into the room and told me to just ignore the man. Easier said than done! Eventually they moved me to another room up in pediatrics.

It's hard to go through a painful experience anytime. But especially if you are alone.

This morning, we return to the scene of the cross. Our Beloved Savior has already endured much unthinkable pain. The blunt spikes that ripped through His hands and feet. The thorns that pierced His brow. The cruel mockery of the crowd.

Yet as terrible as was this pain, He now entered into something even worse. He experienced the pain of alienation. He was all alone on the cross, experiencing aloneness unlike any other person. It's true. We may go through deep valleys where we FEEL alone and forgotten by God. But Jesus WAS alone, *forsaken on the cross*. That's the word He used. Why have you *forsaken* me?

What does it mean to be *forsaken*? To be forsaken implies there was once a relationship, a companionship that is now being withheld or has been taken away. A spouse with an unfaithful marriage partner understands this experience, but only in part. No one has ever experienced forsakenness, alienation, as Jesus did on the cross.

What did Jesus mean when He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you *forsaken* me?" What really happened to Him as He hung there nailed to two pieces of wood? In one sense, this is a question that we cannot answer.

As Charles Spurgeon explains, "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)."

But in another sense, we *must* answer this question. Where we will spend eternity depends on it. We must understand what Jesus experienced, and why, and believe it.

Yet there's a problem. To understand what Jesus experienced in Mark 15, we must understand the backstory. If we don't know the backstory, we turn Jesus' death on the cross into something sentimental, even inspirational, and this will happen in thousands of churches this week (that's not an exaggeration).

Friends, Jesus did not die to inspire us to a better life. He died to solve a problem that entered the world in Genesis 3. What was that problem? Sin. What did their sin do? It brought about alienation in three ways. First, alienation from God. They were cast out of the garden, out of the presence of God. Second, alienation from each other. Before sin, they lived in harmony. Now they blame-shift and compete with each other. Third, alienation from self. They have lost their joy, and now experience guilt and shame and internal anguish of soul.

And it's not just Adam and Eve. Their descendants will all enter the world in this condition, alienated from God, from each other, and from themselves.

This is what the first Adam experienced. And this is what the last Adam experienced as well. Why is He hanging there in agony? He is not simply hanging there. As I said last week, He is *working*. He is accomplishing the work, the mission His Father gave to Him. He is solving the problem of Genesis 3 in the only way it can be solved. He is experiencing alienation so His people can experience reconciliation.

Now we're ready to look at Mark 15. In Mark 15:33-41 we see first the *pain*, and then the *gain* of Jesus' alienation.

I. We see the pain of Jesus' alienation (33-37).

There are four evidences of this pain in the text.

A. There was darkness (33). "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Darkness. There's something eerie about darkness. Mysterious. We feel out of control in darkness, vulnerable.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all report the darkness. None tell what caused it. Luke's account says, "For the sun stopped shining (23:45)."² It could hardly have been an eclipse of the sun since it was the time of the Passover full moon.³

Why the darkness? In the Bible darkness often symbolizes divine judgment. Do you remember one of the plagues God sent on the Egyptians in Moses' day? It was three days of darkness so thick you could feel it. Do you remember what happened right after that darkness? The first Passover lambs were slaughtered. See the connection? What's happening at Calvary? The final Passover lamb is being killed on the heels of darkness.⁴

This was exactly what God predicted would happen. In the eighth century BC, the prophet Amos recorded this prophecy in Amos 8:9-10, "In that day, declares the Sovereign LORD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.'"

When Jesus was born, a supernatural light pierced the night sky. Now as He dies, a supernatural darkness covers the mid-day sun.

To this point, Mark's crucifixion account has focused, for the most part, on what Jesus suffered from *human* hands. The pain, the mockery, and so on.

1. *What Jesus suffered physically was excruciating.* Without question. But...

2. *What Jesus suffered spiritually was beyond comprehension.* What do I mean by *spiritually*? I'm talking about the kind of suffering that the human eye cannot see, a supernatural suffering. Jesus is now experiencing divine judgment for sin.

You say, "I thought Jesus was sinless." He was and is. Yet hanging on the cross He is now taking upon Himself the sins of others. This is what the Bible means when it says, "Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3)." And "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6)."

What is the penalty for sin? "For the wages of sin is *death*" (Rom. 3:23). And that is what happened to Jesus during those 180 minutes of darkness. He experienced spiritual death.

² The Greek verb *ekleipo* means "to cease, depart, or fail," such as the *eclipse* of the light of the sun.

³ Observation by Wessel, p. 782.

⁴ Observation by Kent Hughes, p. 206.

Listen to how the *Living Bible* paraphrases the first part of 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins...” That’s what happened to Jesus on the cross. As Kent Hughes explains, “Wave after wave of the world’s sin was poured over Christ’s sinless soul. Again and again during those three hours his soul recoiled and convulsed as all the lies of civilization, the murders of a thousand ‘Killing Fields,’ the whorings of the world’s armies, and the noxious brew of hatreds, jealousies, and pride were poured on his purity.”⁵

And so, Jesus hung there in the darkness, thirty minutes, then an hour, then another thirty minutes, and another hour. For three hours the darkness remains, and Jesus says not a word. “Wave upon wave comes to his convulsing soul. He who had never known a millisecond of separation from the Father and the Holy Spirit is alone,” Hughes reflects.⁶

And then, after three hours of eternal suffering, Jesus shatters the silence. Notice verse 34, “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ [that’s Aramaic] which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” This is the second evidence of the pain of alienation.

B. There was His cry (34). By examining the other gospel accounts, we learn that Jesus actually uttered seven sayings while hanging on the cross. He spoke the first three before the darkness came:

1. Luke 23:34—“Father, forgive them”
2. Luke 23:43—“Today you will be with Me in paradise”
3. John 19:25-27—“Woman, behold your son...Son, behold your mother”

Then He spoke the final four sayings *after* the darkness.

4. Here and in Matt. 27:46—“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”
5. John 19:28—“I thirst”
6. John 19:30—“It is finished”
7. Luke 23:46—“Into Your hands I commend My Spirit”

Mark records only Jesus’ fourth utterance. It is perhaps the most tragic words ever spoken. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

“I don’t think it is possible for any of us to even remotely understand the agony that wrung this tremendous cry from the lips of Jesus,” writes Ray Stedman. “If you can imagine a beautiful young girl, an innocent virgin, being raped by an ugly, foul, rapacious man, and the horror that she would feel in that moment, you aren’t even in the range of what was going through the soul of Jesus when he was made sin for us. You say, ‘I don’t understand it.’ Well, join the club—I am way beyond my depth in trying to explain anything about these events to you.”⁷

Our aim in this sermon not *full comprehension*. That would be impossible. But God does not require full comprehension. What He requires is faith.

Listen carefully to the Savior’s cry. Jesus does not pray, “My Father,” as He had in the first saying from the cross, “Father, forgive them...” or as He will in the last saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.” He calls aloud, “My God!” Why these words?

These are the first words from a psalm of David, a messianic psalm. Let’s turn to Psalm 22 and make five observations about Jesus’ cry.

⁵ Kent Hughes, p. 207.

⁶ Kent Hughes, p. 207.

⁷ Ray Stedman, *Expository Studies in Mark 8-16: The Ruler Who Serves*, p. 206.

1. *He identified with the psalmist.* Apparently, David wrote this psalm of anguish to express his feelings to God during a time when he experienced an enemy's attack. But keep in mind that Jesus said that the Scriptures (that's the Old Testament to us) *testified about Him* (John 5:39). Here on the cross Jesus quotes David.

The psalm speaks of the *silence of God* in verses 1-2, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, *but you do not answer...*" The psalm highlights the *holiness of God* in verse 3, "You are enthroned as the Holy One." There is why God was silent! The psalm reveals the *Messiah's rejection* by hateful men (6-8, 12-13). The psalm records a vivid description of the *horrors of crucifixion* (14-18).

Yes, there on the cross, Jesus identified with the 22nd Psalm. He fulfilled the 22nd Psalm. It summed up His experience.

2. *He felt complete separation.* Barclay observes, "Up to this moment Jesus had gone through every experience of life *except one—he had never known the consequence of sin*. Now if there is one thing sin does, it separates us from God. It puts between us and God a barrier like an unscalable wall. That was the one human experience through which Jesus had never passed, because he was without sin."⁸

"Why have you *forsaken* me?" In those dreadful hours, He who had enjoyed eternal fellowship with His Father now experiences separation from His beloved Father.

And why? "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil," Habakkuk says of God (Hab. 1:13). God cannot look upon evil. And this is what His Son has become.

Herschel Hobbs wrote, "If you can imagine every sin that has ever been or ever will be committed being reduced to one nauseous mass, then you can grasp the horror of that which was nailed to that cross...See them as one bundle of writhing snakes! Smell their putrefying odor! Then we begin to get some fair idea of the revulsion that was in the holy heart of God."⁹

Dear friends, when Jesus took the sins of rebels like you and me upon Himself, He then experienced the just consequence of those sins. He went through the fires of hell for those sins. Literally. It was but three hours of darkness on the human clock, but this is not a mere human. This is the eternal Son of God enduring an eternity of suffering. This is the infinite One experiencing an infinite degree of agony.

Isaac Watts says it so well, in another of his classic hymns.

*Was it for crimes that I have done, He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree!*

*Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut His glories in,
when Christ, the mighty Maker died, for man the creature's sin.*

3. *He asked the 'why question.'* As far as I can determine, this is the only recorded question Jesus ever asked His Father. Some say we should never ask 'why' when we pray. Our Lord did. We ought to bring all of our questions God, including 'why,' as long it's not a challenge, but a faith-cry.¹⁰

⁸ Barclay, p. 364.

⁹ Hobbs, p. 53.

¹⁰ Strauss, p. 75

4. *He looked by faith beyond the suffering.* You say, “I don’t hear any faith in those words, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”! But think about it. The very fact that He prayed those words is an affirmation of His belief that God is listening.

Furthermore, although Mark 15 records Jesus saying only the first verse of Psalm 22, Jesus certainly had the WHOLE psalm in mind. He, for sure, knew not only how the psalm began, but also how it ended.

Do you know? Psalm 22 does not end in dismay, but in hope. Verse 24 declares, “For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

By faith, the psalmist ends the psalm by affirming that God *did* hear. And though his pain was great, David ends his prayer by looking beyond the pain to the result of it. He affirms in verse 27, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.”

And as did David, so now does the Son of David.

5. *He invites us to experience the fellowship of His suffering.* On the cross Jesus identifies with David. Indeed, Jesus invites us to identify with Him. Remember His invitation? “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and *take up his cross* and follow me (Mark 8:34).”

In preparing for a message like this, I wrestled with two thoughts. The first? I cannot fathom the depth of the pain Jesus experienced on the cross. Words failed me. The second? Do I really *want* to know? My initial reaction is *No!* I don’t like pain! But then I think about this reality.

In heaven I will experience glory and joy, *but only in this life can I experience the fellowship of His sufferings.* Think about it. Jesus said that eternal life is *knowing Him* (John 17:3). To know Him, I must know His suffering. Indeed, my capacity in eternity for being able to appreciate Him and His suffering is being determined now, in *this* life.

It’s the difference between *book knowledge* and *knowledge by experience*. Let me illustrate. Several years ago, I read information about the Rocky Mountains and looked at pictures in brochures, and gained some knowledge about the Rocky Mountains, some *book knowledge*. Then one August we got in a car, drove to Colorado, and I *saw* the Rocky Mountains. A picture is one thing, but *knowledge by experience* is breathtaking.

I can read the Bible and learn about Jesus’ suffering. But He offers me more. He wants me to enter into the *fellowship of His suffering*.

You say, “What’s that?” Peter talked about it in 1 Peter 4:13, “But rejoice that *you participate in the sufferings of Christ*, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

Paul talked a lot about it. For instance, in Philippians 3:10-11, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the *fellowship of sharing in his sufferings*, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”¹¹

It’s through the suffering that we experience in this life, particularly the suffering that comes because of our association with Christ, that the Lord invites us to experience a special bond, a fellowship with Himself. Indeed, the fellowship of His suffering prepares us for an even fuller experience of His glory in the life to come. Isn’t that what Romans 8:17 says? “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed *we share in his sufferings* in order that we may also share in his glory.”

¹¹ Other texts include: 2 Corinthians 1:5; 4:10; Galatians 6:17; Colossians 1:24

We're talking about the *pain of Jesus' alienation*, and we've seen two evidences of it thus far. There was *the darkness*, and then *the cry*. But there's more.

C. There was a misunderstanding (35-36). In verse 35 we read, "And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'Behold, he is calling Elijah.'"

Bible commentators suggest the mix-up is due to the similar sound of *Eloi Eloi* and *Elijah*. The people at the cross heard Jesus say *Eloi Eloi* and thought He was calling for help from *Elijah*. That may be the case. However, it strikes me that what we have here is a perfect illustration of 1 Corinthians 2:14, a text which says (my loose paraphrase), "Those who don't have the Holy Spirit hear the Word *and don't get it*."

1. *The people heard what He said.* They heard His cry. Mark specifically records for us the *Aramaic words* that Jesus uttered. He wants us to know that the Jews at the cross heard the words in their heart language, as He cried out in the anguish of His alienation. But they thought He was calling for Elijah!

So consequently, this is what they did. Verse 36 says, "And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.'" In John's account, we're told that Jesus spoke the words, "I thirst," and then received the sponge drink (John 19:28-30). We can imagine why. He has just endured the fires of hell. Then...

2. *The people left Him alone.* At the end of verse 36 we're told what the man who offered the drink said (NIV), "Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down."

And so He hangs on the cross, *alone*, and *forsaken*, feeling the full weight of *alienation* from God, from other people, and with deep personal shame and anguish as well. This was the penalty of Adam's sin, of our sin. And He took it willingly.¹²

Verse 37 says, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last."¹³ Here's the final evidence of the pain of His alienation.

D. There was a unique death (37). It was unique in two ways.

1. *He died in agony.* Never has a man experienced such agony. And it's that reality that makes the following so unexpected.

2. *He died with a shout of accomplishment.* Typically, victims of crucifixion hung on their crosses for days, getting weaker and weaker, until they were unable to inhale and exhale any longer. At which point they suffocated. But not Jesus. He did not suffocate. Mark says He let out a *loud cry*.

What He cried, Mark does not tell us. But John does, recording these words in John 19:30, "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, '*It is finished*.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

It's one word in the Greek text, *tetelestai*, which means "complete, finished." What is finished? His life? No. He did not moan, "I am finished," but announced triumphantly, "It is finished!"

What had He finished? He had finished the work. What work? The work His Father had given Him to do, the work of removing the alienation brought about in Genesis 3.

Listen again to the theme verse of the book, 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*."

¹² Oh friends, how can we tolerate sin in our lives, knowing what our Lord endured for it? Let us hate our sin, every trace of it. And let us turn to the One who died to set us free from it, every trace of it.

¹³ Matthew 27:50 says He "yielded up his spirit." John's account states, "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (19:30)."

This is what He did on the cross. Jesus did not die as a victim, but a victor! He paid the ransom payment necessary to set sinners free!

And this brings us to point two. We've seen the pain. Now the gain.

II. We see the gain of Jesus' alienation (38-41).

The gain is demonstrated by three events that occurred right after Jesus died.

A. The curtain tore (38). "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."¹⁴ This is the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in God's temple. What happened to it? It was torn in two. And note the *direction* of the tearing, "from top to bottom." This indicates that God above, seeing the death of His Son, ripped apart the barrier that stood between sinful people and His holy presence.

Also note the *timing* of the tearing. What time did Jesus die, and what time did the curtain tear? At 3:00 in the afternoon. That's the time of the evening sacrifice in the temple. As Jesus hung on the cross mid-afternoon, the priests were busy at work in the temple doing what the priests had done for centuries. When all of a sudden, the great barrier between the holy place and the most holy place ripped right down the middle!

It's not surprising that in the months following Jesus' return to heaven, "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith," as Acts 6:7 states. I read one commentator who suggested some of those very priests were probably serving in the temple and saw the curtain rip the day Jesus died.¹⁵

What are we to make of this torn curtain? It speaks of the *gain* of the cross!

1. *When Jesus died, He removed the barrier between God and man.* I like how Hughes puts it, "The veil into the Holy of Holies was supernaturally slashed in two as if a great sword had fallen."¹⁶

2. *When Jesus died, He gained access to God.* Hebrews 10:19-22 explains, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, *let us draw near to God* with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

Let the beauty of this word sink in. We have *access*! Think of an *access road*. If I told you, "That access road will take you to the park," what would happen if you got on the road? You'd end up in the park!

Jesus provided the *way of access* to heaven. It's the only access road that will take you there. "I am the way," Jesus said. "No one comes to the Father except through me," He announced (John 14:6).

Do you know what's tragic? It's when a person knows about the access road but refuses to take it, insisting he'd rather try to make his own access road to God.

Is that what you've been doing? You've heard that Jesus died for sinners, but you've refused to acknowledge that your desperate need for Him. You've deluded yourself into thinking that you are a *good person*, that surely God will accept you into His heaven, after all you've done for Him.

"My God is a loving God. He would never send a sincere person like me to hell!"

¹⁴ Matthew adds that "the earth shook; and the rocks were split," and furthermore that "the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life (27:51-52)."

¹⁵ J. Vernon McGee, p. 193.

¹⁶ Hughes, p. 209.

If that's the case, my friend, then why did Christ die on the cross? If God accepts sinners on the basis of their good deeds, then why did Christ endure the agony of the cross? If there are other access roads, like the one you *think* you are making, then Christ was a fool. He died for nothing.

This is the implication of anyone's attempt to build their own access road. They are saying, "Jesus, you didn't need to go through the horror of hell for me on the cross, maybe for others but not for me. You misjudged me, Jesus. I'm a good person. God is going to accept me anyway. That's why I've never admitted my sinfulness and received You as my Savior and Lord. I'm okay. I don't need You, nor Your cross."

You object, "I have never said that to Jesus!" Okay, maybe not with words, but is that not what your actions are saying? If you are refusing to admit that you are a helpless sinner and in desperate need for Christ to save you, you are saying to Him, "You didn't need to die on the cross, not for me. Your assessment of me was wrong."

My friend, if I'm describing you, I urge you to do this. *Look at the torn curtain! Look, and believe God's assessment regarding the work of His Son.*

Perhaps you're still not convinced. "I need more proof," you say. Okay, here it is. Mark presents a second event that demonstrates the gain of Jesus' alienation.

B. The centurion testified (39). "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!'"¹⁷

Notice who is speaking, a *non-Jew, a Roman Gentile*. Is that significant? Yes, indeed, for Jesus' death removed not only the vertical barrier but a horizontal one. Romans hated Jews. But this Roman, a man who earlier had mocked and nailed Jesus to the cross, now changes his assessment. What made the difference? Mark is very specific.

1. *A Gentile man was impressed by how Jesus died.* This centurion had seen plenty of men die, but never one like Jesus. Typically, men cursed him from their crosses, but Jesus asked for his forgiveness. Others died defeated men, but Jesus died as one in total control. He gave up His spirit at the very moment He willed to do so.

But it's not simply how He died. It's who Jesus is that changed this man.

2. *A Gentile man declared who Jesus is.* Some skeptics assert, "Only weak and gullible people believe in God." That's not true! Here's a man's man, a Roman centurion, making the first declaration of the crucified Jesus' true identity. "Surely this man was the Son of God!" he declared.

And then, to finish the crucifixion account, Mark puts a spotlight on a third event. He says in verses 40-41, "There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem."

That's interesting. There were women at the cross, many of them. What did they do?

C. The women watched (40-41). "They *were watching from a distance*." Why does Mark tell us that? I can think of two reasons.

1. *They were witnesses to His death.* Some critics say Jesus didn't die, but merely *fainted*, and didn't rise from the dead, but merely resuscitated in the cool air of the tomb. So goes the "swoon theory." Mark makes it clear there were witnesses who saw Jesus die, *many* of them, many women to be precise, a point that shows the high regard the Bible has for women.

¹⁷ Luke's account indicates he also said (Luke 23:47), "Surely this was a righteous man." Matthew's account informs us that the centurion and the other soldiers "became very frightened (27:54)."

There's another reason Mark wants us to know that the women watched Jesus die.

2. *They would soon be witnesses to His resurrection.* Critics say that the reason Jesus' tomb was empty was because the disciples went to the *wrong tomb*. Hardly. The same three women Mark names here at the cross will be at the tomb on resurrection morning (16:1). They saw Him die. They saw the empty tomb, and it was the right one!

We've seen the pain. And now, we're beginning to see the gain. Because Jesus experienced alienation on the cross, God is now replacing alienation with reconciliation, in the same three ways Adam forfeited it.

See that torn curtain? God is now reconciling sinners to Himself. How? Not through a temple in Jerusalem, but through faith in the merit of His Son.

See the change of heart in that Roman centurion? God is also now reconciling sinners, not just to Himself, but to each other. And it doesn't matter who they are. Jews, Romans, and eventually people from every ethnic group will be reconciled to Him and to each other in His church, the very Body of His Son.

And see those women looking on from a distance? He's also about to replace their fear and internal anguish of soul with joy and peace and a holy boldness that will enable them to be His first witnesses. And that's what we'll begin to see next time, as the Lord allows, as we gather and marvel the empty tomb.

Make It Personal: Jesus experienced alienation so that we might experience reconciliation. Peace with God. Peace with one another. Peace of mind and soul. These are the gifts Jesus offers today to all who will treasure Him above all else.

Closing Song: #185 "*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*" (four verses, new tune)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we continued to survey the wondrous cross by considering the *alienation* that Jesus experienced on the cross in Mark 15:33-41. After reading the passage again, discuss what the word alienation means. What is the opposite of alienation?
2. Genesis 3 is a vital backdrop to the alienation that Jesus experienced on the cross in Mark 15. How so? What's the connection between what happened to the first Adam and the last Adam (Jesus)?
3. We are told in verse 33 that when Jesus was hanging on the cross, there was darkness for three hours during the middle of the day. Why is this significant? Mark doesn't tell us why it became dark. Are there other passages that may help explain?
4. In verse 34, Jesus broke the silence. What did He say, and why? Why does Mark include the Aramaic rendering as well? What effect did Jesus' words have on the bystanders? What effect should they have on us?
5. According to Mark, what happened in the Jewish temple right after Jesus died (38)? What effect did His death have on the centurion (39)? What's the significance of the information regarding the women in verses 40-41?
6. Spend time as a group praying for our *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* outreach. Ask the Lord to give us many gospel conversations, and for His Spirit to grant saving faith to some.