

The King The Cross Part 12
Sermon Series on the Gospel of Mark
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
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TEXT: Mark 15:1-15



It is a joy to be in God's house this morning. This summer, we have been going on a journey through the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of Mark is one of the earliest Christian writings. It is a summary of Peter's preaching in Rome about Jesus Christ. It's a very early attempt to present to a pagan society the meaning of Jesus' coming, to reveal His identity and what it might mean for each one of us. The Roman world, like our world, was a world that was in a state of chaos. There was a very high divorce rate—over 50%. There were huge economic challenges. It was a society that was afraid of wars on the east and the west. It was a violent society. It was a society that was addicted to entertainment, and if the Romans had had smart phones, we would say it was just like our time in many ways. Yet, this Word, this good news of Christ, goes out from the first century, addressing its world, and it goes out here now because it's the Word of God to the twenty-first century. We have been going through the Gospel of Mark this summer, and we are almost finished. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel. It is good for people with decreasing attention spans as it moves rapidly from scene to scene. Do know that scientists and sociologists can actually measure the movement of your eyeballs and mine when we read our screen time? It is really sad what happens. When you read a print book, your eye moves all the way across the line and your brain organizes that information. When you read electronically, your eye goes all the way across the first line, half of the second line, and about a

third of the third line, and your brain and mine become slightly disordered. But, the gospel, the Word of Christ, compels our attention this morning. We have been listening to the Gospel of Mark and hearing it with the angle of a series called *Christianity Explored*. *Christianity Explored* is an inductive reading of the Gospel of Mark. It has been used throughout the world as an



invitation to get people to read the gospel and to talk about it. We have been praying this summer that we would have 25 intentional evangelistic efforts to have either a small group in our neighborhood, a one-on-one conversation with a coworker or a family member, and, praise God, we are very close to that number of efforts that you have made and followed Christ. Some of you have used *Christianity Explored*. If you didn't use it this summer, it's a tool that you should be familiar with, and it's also something that we will be doing together this fall. It is a great entry point for someone who has no background at all in the gospel. *Christianity Explored* frames the topic of Jesus around these three questions: "Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus come? What does it mean for us?"

These questions, though they seem so simple, are life-giving questions.

Who is Jesus? In our passage this morning, the identity of Jesus is very prominently displayed: Jesus is the King. Look at the passage just read for us. In Mark 15:2, Pilate asked Jesus directly: "Are you the King of the Jews?" and Jesus answered: "You have said so," which is a way of agreeing with that statement, not denying it. In Mark 15:9, Pilate speaks to the crowd:

"Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

In Mark 15:12, Pilate speaks to the crowds and says:

"Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"

Later in the chapter, as Jesus is mocked by this group of Roman soldiers, they saluted Him: "Hail, King of the Jews!" There it is again. The charge that is affixed to the cross hanging above Jesus as He is crucified marks out His identity in three languages: "The King of the Jews." Even as He is hanging on the cross for six hours, those who pass by deride Him, yet identifying Him again in Mark 15:32:

"Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

Who is Jesus? Our text suggests this morning that Jesus is the King.

Then we move to the second question: “Why did He come?” The answer to the second question in *Christianity Explored* is that Jesus came to be rejected, to be killed, to rise again. That's why He came. He came to be rejected—He came to absorb, to attract, all of our rejection of God. The greatest moral evil in the universe is our rejection of God. The Bible calls this sin or transgression: whenever we choose something else other than God for our happiness, for our joy, for healing; whenever we reject His counsel and choose to live to go our own way. Jesus comes to attract this rejection, and we will see that rejection played out in our text. Jesus came to be killed, and we will see Him die this morning in Mark 15, and yet Jesus' death is no mistake. Jesus' death is not a mistake by God; indeed, it is a master stroke. Jesus' death takes us to the heart of Christian faith and theology, that the sinless King takes the punishment that sin deserves, and that Jesus, in His death on the cross, was actually opening the gates to His kingdom. So, let's look at that in our passage, and then we'll asked the third question: “What does this mean for us in the end?”

In Mark 15:2, the King is on trial before the Roman governor:

“And Pilate asked Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ And He answered him, ‘You have said so.’”

In other words: *“You have spoken correctly.”* Jesus does not deny Pilate's statement, his question. When Jesus is accused of many other things, Jesus remains silent before Pilate, and Pilate is stunned in Mark 15:4:

“Have You no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against You.”

How readily we all defend ourselves. We are quick to speak: “You know, here's the circumstance. Here is why; if you just understood this. . .” Jesus remains silent, and we are invited, beginning in Mark 15:5, to follow this arc of silence that is resolved ultimately upon the cross—this arc of silence between the time when Jesus acknowledges His identity as King and yet lets His actions speak about the meaning of His kingship, about why He comes as King.

We need to follow this extreme tension of Jesus' silence until He breaks it on the cross. In between the silence of Jesus, we will hear the voices of many clamoring against Him. Jesus makes no answer to Pilate, who is amazed. The crowds come to Pilate at the time of the Passover feast, and in the custom of Roman clemency, to release someone as a gesture of magnanimity. Pilate asks in Mark 15:9:

“Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”

Yet, we see the chief priests stirring up the crowds, rejecting Christ for His popularity. Pilate perceives that the chief priest had delivered Jesus up out of envy. They as a group reject Him

and seek His condemnation. Pilate asked the crowds in Mark 15:12:

“Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?”

The crowds reject Him for Barabbas, “son of the father”, in Aramaic. Barabbas was, we are told, a man who was a murderer. He had participated in an insurrection, and what this charge means is that Barabbas was a man who violently sought the overthrow of Roman rule, and the crowds say: “We like that guy!” It is astonishing that Pilate releases a man with a proven track record of trying to overthrow the government. You see, the crowds reject Jesus for a different reason, not out of envy like the chief priests. The crowds reject Jesus because they have a very different vision of kingship. They want a king like the nations who will fight their battles for them, and they seek a political solution to their problems. Pilate asks: “What shall I do then with the one you call King of the Jews?” and they cry out: “Crucify Him!” Crucifixion was a punishment reserved only for subject peoples and for crimes against the state. Pilate rejects Jesus, wishing to satisfy the crowds. Pilate’s rejection of Jesus is rooted in his seeking after popularity. He’s more concerned with his ratings than justice, and, wishing to satisfy the crowd, he releases a man who is seeking to overthrow the government and orders Jesus to be scourged and then delivered over to be crucified.

Jesus is placed into the custody of a group of soldiers who clothe Him in a purple cloak. They twist together a crown of thorns and place it upon the King. They begin to salute Him with a mocking voice in Mark 15:18:

“Hail, King of the Jews!”

The soldiers reject Jesus for sport and entertainment. The soldiers reject Him and have fun with Him as they strike His head with a reed and spit upon Him, kneeling in false homage to Him. After mocking Him, they strip Him of the cloak and lead Him out to the place of crucifixion. They brought Him to the place called Golgotha, which is in Aramaic is the *Place of the Skull*. We get the word *Calvary* from this. This place, this outcrop right outside the city walls, Jesus is taken there. He is crucified, and as He is crucified, the soldiers divide His garments among them, rolling dice at the foot of the cross. There are inscriptions found throughout the Mediterranean of this game that was played by Roman soldiers. It is called the *Game of the King*. There is a square image with lines drawn in it, and the game is played by casting sheep’s knuckles as dice. As they played the Game of the King, soldiers would pick one of their own and make him king. They would give him a robe, a crown, a scepter and pay homage to him and gamble for his possessions—his clothes, his wife, his home back home in Rome.

It was the third hour when they crucified Him, 9 AM. The inscription of the charge reads: “The King of the Jews,” and Jesus was crucified between, the ESV says, two robbers, but the term that Mark uses actually is the term for insurrectionist, a revolutionary. There was one on His

right and one on His left. As Jesus hangs upon the cross, those who pass by reject Him further as powerless. They mock Him in Mark 15:29-30:

“Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!”

The chief priests and scribes mocked Him as powerless in Mark 15:31:

“He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.”

Lastly, those who were crucified next to Him also reviled Him. Can you imagine, the King! “Come down from across,” is the summons. “If You are really powerful, then come down and we will believe in You,” is the last derision.

The King of glory has come into this world. Why did He come? He came to be rejected, to be killed, to rise again. As Jesus is upon the cross, as all these human mocking voices gather an assemblage, finally we see a divine response in Mark 15:33:

“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.”

The sixth hour in Roman time is reckoned from 6 AM, and the six hour is noon. When the sixth hour comes, darkness comes over the whole land until the ninth hour. Jesus has already been on the cross for three hours, and now for the final three hours that He is hanging on the cross, in the middle of the day in April, in the middle east, it's dark. That just doesn't happen.

What's happening with this darkness for three hours? What's happening is answered for us when Jesus finally speaks. The silence that began with Jesus' making no answer is broken in Mark 15:34:

“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?’”

Jesus pierces the silence with a quotation from Psalm 22. What do you live by? Jesus lives by the Word of God. Jesus speaks a Psalm to interpret for us this darkness, and what's happening in three hours, the most important three hours of all time, is that the wrath of God is poured out. The sky turns dark because God's wrath and fury against the sin of the world. The rejection of all humanity that's gathered to the Son, the beloved Son, the sinless Lamb, the wrath of God, which is described as coming in darkness and fury in Scripture, is poured out. Jesus experiences the wrath and judgment of God. Some of those who were standing by heard Jesus from a distance, and Jesus' cry from the cross sounded to them like a summons for Elijah. “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come and take Him down,” and that's the question. Is Jesus' power

revealed to us this morning by stepping down from the cross? Mark wants to invite us to see that Jesus, as the King of glory, reveals His power by remaining on the cross. Jesus remains on the cross. He does not come down, and finally, in Mark 15:37, He utters a loud cry and breathes His last.

There are two reactions to Jesus' death on the cross, and both of them are of immense significance this morning. When Jesus dies upon the cross, Mark tells us of a second divine response. The first divine response to the beloved Son on the cross was for the Father to pour out the wrath and judgment that you and I face. That's a real thing, and when Jesus offers Himself for you and for me, the Father replies a second time in Mark 15:38:

“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”

This is the veil that hangs, an ornate woven fabric, that Josephus tells us was so intricately woven together that two teams of oxen could not pull this veil apart. This veil hung in the sanctuary, and it was 90 feet high, and it separated sinful man from a holy God. Two teams of oxen could not pull it apart, but Mark tells us in Mark 15:38 that the most remarkable thing happened: the veil that separated God from man was opened up from the top! Oh, hallelujah! You can't open this veil, and neither can I, but God opened it! No words were needed. The veil has been opened from top to bottom, and a holy God has offered fellowship with sinful man through the death of His beloved Son. Mark 15:39 gives us the right human response. All the mocking voices that accrue in the chapter find final resolution in the voice of the centurion in this verse:

“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!’”

The Centurion, the commanding officer, the one in charge of the crucifixion group, the leader of the professional executioner band, saw Jesus die, and he stood facing Him, and when he saw the way that Jesus breathed His last, the Roman soldier said: *“Truly this Man was the Son of God.”* This takes us all the way back to the opening verse of Mark's Gospel. The opening verse of Mark's Gospel, Mark 1:1 says:

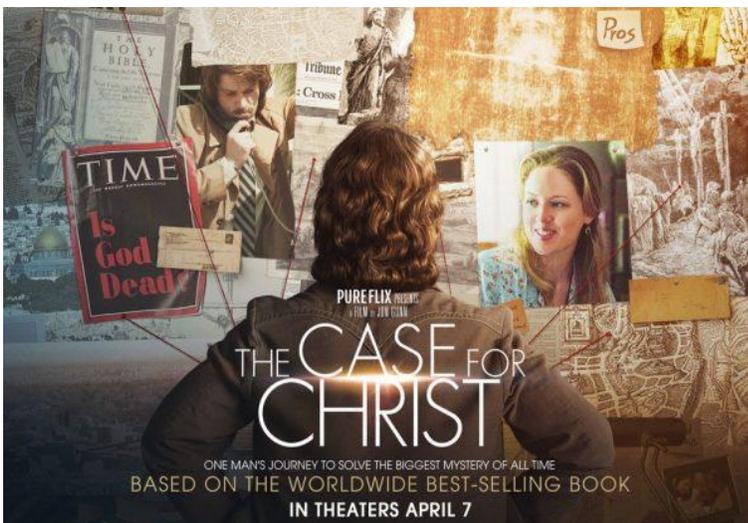
“This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

And so the next great confession of Jesus' identity as King, as Son of God, as Savior of the world, is voiced at the cross by this Roman soldier.

So what does it mean for us if Jesus is the King, if He is the King who came to be rejected, to be killed, to rise again? What does it mean for us? The first thing it means is that we are called this morning to believe in Jesus. We are to believe in Him, to trust Him that He has done everything we need to give us a place in His kingdom. Do you believe that? Some of us this morning are

tugging at the veil from the bottom. Some of us are imagining that the way into God's presence is by what we do. Some of us are wondering if we have done enough? Some of us have looked honestly at ourselves and said: "If God takes an accurate reckoning of what I've done, He will never let me into His presence." Dear friends, Mark 15 summons us to agree with the Roman soldier: "Truly this was the Son of God," and the veil has been torn open from the top. If you have never trusted in Christ, this is a great time to do that and to say: "Lord, I believe in You and what You have done, because the veil does not open without the death of Christ on the cross."

The second thing this means for us is that we are equipped and empowered to share the love of Christ. The second thing I would like you to do this week is something I don't usually ask you to do, but I want you to watch a movie. A movie came out last year called "The Case for Christ."



I saw this movie this past week, and I was really blessed. I've read the book. The book is by Lee Strobel. Lee Strobel was a legal editor for the *Chicago Tribune*. Lee was an atheist and his wife was an atheist. In the narrative of Lee's life, his daughter's life was saved at a restaurant by an off-duty nurse who was a believer. That nurse and her husband ended up at this restaurant because they felt the prompting from the Lord this

night to eat at this restaurant where they don't usually eat. That's all of us. Do you listen to the Lord about where you go out to eat? You should. Well, Lee's daughter was choking and nearly died, and this nurse stepped forward and saved her life. That began a friendship that led to Lee Strobel's wife's conversion. God used her to open the gates to this family, and Lee was distraught—and that's a nice way of saying it. He was upset, like maybe some of your family members. The first one in a generation that becomes a believer can cause shockwaves in a family, and Lee was upset. He made a decision to seek to destroy his wife's faith by investigating Christianity, like a journalist, to see if this is true. He honed in on the death and resurrection of Christ. He interviewed experts, and as the narrative unfolds, there's a very powerful scene where he goes to meet with a Catholic priest, Father José Maria Marquez. This man was an archaeologist and then began to serve in full-time ministry. As Lee is interviewing Father Marquez, he asks about the reliability of the Scripture. The priest explains the testimony of Scripture and the reliability of the manuscripts, and they reach this point in the conversation, and he says to Lee: "Whenever someone looks into those eyes for the first time, the Galilean who hung on the cross two millennia ago suddenly becomes a real person." Lee asks: "But why

would he do it? Why would he allow himself to be killed? If he really is the Son of God, why not use his power to defend himself?" (That's the question we heard: "If you are the Son of God, come down.") And the priest answers him. He says: "The answer to that is what got me out of the dirt and into the church. It's really very simple...Love."

This morning, if you're unsure of God's love for you, look no further than the cross of Jesus Christ. He is the King of glory. Why did He come? He came to absorb the rejection that we all make of God, to be killed, to die on the cross, to be raised from the dead and offer new life. The only fitting response to Christ's death for us is to worship Him. I have a friend who is a seminary professor, and she always says the point of every sermon is worship. There is some real truth in that. The right response to Jesus' is love is to worship Him. We are going to close this service with a song written by Chris Tomlin in collaboration with Jonas Myrin, a worship leader at Hillsong Church in London. The lyrics were actually written by Nashville-based songwriter Matt Armstrong. Matt came up with this lyric: "Where your love ran red and my sin washed white." Chris Tomlin said that lyric was the catalyst for this song. It was such a powerful way of seeing the grace of God in a fresh way. Worship is something that comes from our heart. It's a singing out to God; it's forgetting about the people around you; it's not worrying about what they're doing. It is responding to the grace of God, and I want to invite you to stand with me now. I want you to close your eyes, and I want you to hear this phrase. I want you to hear the phrase and then I want you to see it: "Where Your love ran red, my sin washed white."

Lord Jesus, You went to the cross willingly. You had the power to come down, but if you had saved Yourself, You would not have saved us. Where Your love ran red, my sin washed white. Lord Jesus, help us to see the concrete reality of Your grace. Some of us need a fresh reminder right now that we are washed clean by the death of Christ. Lord, some of us have gotten distracted with other things that have taken over the affections of our heart and made us jump and cheer for lesser things. We want to offer to You our praise now. Where Your love ran red, my sin washed white. Lord, we desire to be in awe of You and to offer ourselves in glad, joyful response. Let's sing and worship the King together.

Amen.