

It is now the afternoon of Good Friday. Jesus is about to die on the cross. But if we're going to understand why Jesus died, if we are going to see his death rightly, then we have to focus on the details that Mark gives us. Because it is those details, Christians, that will help us to understand.

And the first one of these details is the darkness which was over the whole land. Mark tells us that there was darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. The sixth hour being the sixth since the dawn, so roughly about noon, and the ninth hour roughly three hours later. They varied a little bit from day to day. But this was the time of day that we would expect it to be bright. It's the hottest part of the day. It's the time when the sun should be out and shining. And yet there is darkness. This isn't a natural darkness either. It's not some kind of eclipse, because you can't have a lunar eclipse during a full moon, and a solar eclipse would only be a couple minutes long. This is lasting for three hours, so this is something else. This is a darkness which has been sent by God.

And it shows us what is happening in this moment, because a darkness like this sent by God shows his wrath. It shows his judgment against sin. We know this from places in the Bible like the Exodus with the plagues of Egypt. Exodus chapter 10 says: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days." So this darkness then is a judgment that God had sent upon Egypt. It showed his wrath against Pharaoh and against his pride. But this isn't the only place we find darkness like this in the Bible. In Isaiah chapter 13, God is speaking to Babylon, and he says: "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light, the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light." So this was a judgment that was also spoken against Babylon. God was showing his wrath upon them because of what they had done to his people.

But Christians, God doesn't send this darkness only upon his enemies. Sometimes he sends it upon his own people because of their sins. Amos 8, for example, says: "'On that day,' declares the Lord God, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation. I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head. I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.'" Israel had sinned, and God threatened to send darkness upon them because of his wrath against that sin.

So in one sense, Christians, the darkness which we see on Good Friday is God showing his wrath against Israel. Because, after all, they had rejected Jesus. They had rejected their king. They had rejected their Lord, and God was showing his wrath as a result of it. But in another sense, Christians, this darkness that came showed God's wrath against all sin, that God was pouring out his judgment upon every sin of every man. Every sin that had ever been committed had been laid onto Jesus in this moment. So in a very real sense then, this darkness has come because of Jesus. Because Jesus is bearing the wrath of God against our sins for our sake. That's the first thing that we can learn from the details that Mark gives us.

The second detail that we want to focus on is that Jesus cried out with a loud voice. We wouldn't normally expect this to happen, because crucifixion is a kind of thing that makes you get weaker and weaker and weaker over time. In fact, the reason why anybody dies on the cross is because they become so physically weak they can't even breathe anymore. They just suffocate to death because they can't support themselves anymore. And so we would expect somebody who is dying on a cross or who is about to die on a cross to not be able to talk at all, or at best to talk very, very softly or gasping. But Jesus cries out with a loud voice. He still has the strength to do so.

And that's important because it shows that Jesus did not just die on Good Friday, as if he had to die. Jesus chose to die in this moment. And we know this from what he says in John chapter 10: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." Jesus didn't have to die. He could've called on angels to come and to take him away, to deal with all of these things. But Jesus chose to die. Jesus willingly died for us in this moment. Not even the Romans, as good as they are at crucifying, could force him to die. Jesus did it out of love. He willingly chose to die for our sake, so that we can know that Jesus willingly bears the wrath of God in our place. That's the second thing that we can learn from the details in Mark.

The third detail that we want to focus on is the tearing of the curtain, especially that it was torn from top to bottom. Because this curtain was one of the curtains in the temple of God, and its purpose was to divide the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. And this curtain was huge. It was something like eighty feet tall from top to bottom. But its purpose was to keep people out of the Most Holy Place, to keep people away from the ark of God. Because God said to Moses in Exodus 25: "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel." So in other words, Christians, the ark of God is his chair. It's his throne. It's the place where he promised to be for Israel, which meant that the Most Holy Place in the temple was God's room. It was the place where he was, and it was totally different from everywhere else in all the rest of the world. To be in that room was to be in the presence of God. To be in that room meant that you were seeing God face-to-face. So the purpose of that curtain, then, was to keep people out. Because of our sin, if we came into the presence of God, it would destroy us. And as long as that curtain was still there, the way to God was shut.

But now, Mark tells us that when Jesus died this great curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. The way is no longer shut. It has been opened. We have been brought back to God through the death of Christ. And more than this, it says that the curtain was torn from top to bottom. Remember, that curtain is eighty feet tall! This is not something that any man could have done. God himself tore the curtain open. God himself did this, because now the way to him is open once more. As Hebrews 10 tells us: we can "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." Jesus opened the way, Christians, by his death on Good Friday, so that we know that Jesus willingly

bears the wrath of God for our sake to bring us back to the Father. That's the third thing that we can learn from the details in Mark.

And the last detail that we want to focus on for this evening is the women: Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Salome, and the others who were with them. These women, Mark tells us, were with Jesus from the beginning. They followed him. They helped him in whatever way that they could. And these women had been with him for a very long time. In fact, they had followed him from Galilee down to Jerusalem. And these women saw everything that happened. They were there on Good Friday. They saw Jesus die on the cross. They could give a testimony of what they saw. They could say, "I was there." And they were also witnesses of his tomb, because Mark tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary saw where Jesus was laid. They could give a testimony of what they saw. They knew that Jesus had been buried in the earth.

But these women were also the first to come to the grave on Sunday morning. These women were the first witnesses of the resurrection. They could testify of what they had seen, or rather what they had not seen. Because even though Jesus suffered and died, he rose again on the third day. Jesus did not stay dead. And his resurrection proves that everything that happened on Good Friday is acceptable to God. Jesus's resurrection proves that he willingly bore the wrath of God in our place to bring us back to the Father. We know that this is true because he now lives.

So Christians, by these details and all of the other ones that Mark gives to us too, we can see the death of Christ rightly. Jesus died to satisfy the wrath of God. Jesus died because he chose to. And Jesus died to bring us back to God. And we know that this is true because Jesus rose from the grave on the third day. And knowing that this is true, Christians, as the book of Hebrews says, let us draw near to God. Let us hold on to our hope. And let us give thanks to God, because Jesus's death is not an ordinary death. Good Friday is not just another Friday. On Good Friday, Jesus died so that we would be forgiven. And we know that this is true because he lives.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place. We give you thanks for all that he has done and glorify you forever. In his name we pray. Amen.