

**The Memoirs of Peter**  
**The Death of God's Only Son, Part 2**  
**Mark 15:33-39**  
**August 18, 2013**

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Well, turn with me to Mark's gospel, the 15th chapter and let me begin by reading to you the paragraph that is really the zenith of Mark's gospel, it is the apex of the truth to which he has been driving. It is the center of the gospel and it is the central event of all of human history. Mark 15, and I'll begin reading in verse 33:

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Through a series of divine miracles that Friday afternoon, God the Father made His voice heard above the taunting, ridiculing, and mocking crowd. In the passage that we've just read together, Mark challenges us to examine the cross from the perspective of God Himself. From 12 o'clock to three o'clock on that Friday afternoon, God made His own view of the death of Jesus clear. During Jesus's final three hours on the cross through a series of divine miracles, God the Father provided His own eternal commentary on the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let me just remind you of what we looked at last time together, and I'm just going to touch on these, if you weren't with us, I encourage you to go back and maybe catch up and get a running start in this coming week, and so you'll know how all of this fits together. But just to remind you of what we've already looked at, we started by looking at the first miracle which is a miraculous darkness. Jesus was crucified at 9 am and the first three hours of the crucifixion had all the appearances of being a normal crucifixion. But after three hours something dramatic happened. Verse 33, "When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour." By the Roman clock, this from was 12 o'clock until 3 pm. At noon the sky became dark and it stayed like that for three hours. God had a reason in that darkness, His reason was to show His judgment against sin.

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I can't put it any better than the great Presbyterian commentator William Hendriksen does, "The darkness meant judgment. Judgment of God upon our sins. His wrath, as it were, burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus so that He as our substitute suffered more intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation and forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior bore its horrors in our stead."

From 12 to 3 pm it was dark in Jerusalem and it wasn't a solar eclipse. It was a supernatural miracle of darkness because God the Father was making a divine point about the death of His Son. And that point is, that He hates sin with such a profound hatred that He must always judge it, even if that sin has only been credited and it's been credited to the Son that He loves.

There was a second divine miracle that day and it was a miraculous desertion. Verse 34 says that the ninth hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cries out, He cries out in Aramaic the mother tongue in the home that he grew up in and Mark translates it for us, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus, at that point in time, was painfully aware that God the Father had forsaken Him. The Greek word means to be deserted, to be abandoned.

In Jesus's cry there was a message from God about why Jesus had to die. That day Jesus, unthinkably, was godforsaken. In a miracle of divine love toward us for the six hours that He hung on that cross the fellowship and communion that Jesus as a perfectly righteous Man had enjoyed with His Father through His entire earthly life was broken. He was abandoned by the Father as the Father publicly displayed Him as an object of His wrath. Because you see, the essence, think about this with me, the essence of the eternal judgment that you and I would receive is what? It's not primarily the suffering, it's not the darkness, it's the separation. Separation from the God who made us and who created us.

Second Thessalonians 1:9 says that sinners ultimately will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord. On the cross, Jesus endured the separation from God that you and I deserve for all of eternity. He endured it. God the Father turned His back on His own Son for us and that day God treated Jesus as you deserve to be treated, He turned His back and abandoned Him. And Jesus was truly alone.

The Father gave His commentary on the cross through a third miracle that happened that day and it was a miraculous death. A miraculous death. Usually the death of crucifixion was a very slow gradual death in which the victim slowly lost all bodily powers and voice and ultimately consciousness and a gradual suffocation. So when Jesus died, crying out with a loud voice, it was a sign to all of those who understood crucifixion, that He was really nowhere near the death of crucifixion. Now we can't be sure in verse 37 exactly which of the 7 sayings of the cross that Jesus spoke here but it was probably the sixth. It's quoted for us in John 19:30 when He cried

out, “It is finished!” Tetelestai. It’s completed. It’s done. It’s paid in full. The work is finished. Then Jesus immediately spoke the seventh and final word from the cross, Luke tells us in chapter 23 verse 46, “... Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’”

Again, with a loud voice Jesus prayed and entrusted His spirit to the Father. Mark describes Jesus’s actual death in these words, notice verse 37, He “uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.” Matthew says He “yielded up His spirit.” The point of the way that’s expressed in the gospel records is that Jesus was sovereign over the time of His death. No one took Jesus’s life from Him. He laid it down, He gave it up when He chose. It was a miraculous death.

Now that brings us to a fourth miracle that took place at the cross at three o’clock that afternoon, it was a miraculous destruction. A miraculous destruction. Notice the curtain is torn in verse 38: “And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” Herod’s temple was a magnificent piece of architecture. Herod the Great had initiated the reconstruction project and by the time of Jesus’s death, they had been working on the Temple of Herod for nearly 50 years. There were huge courtyards surrounded by beautiful arched balustrades. This is a reconstruction that’s in the city of Jerusalem to this day, a small scale model of what we can piece together from the records of the historians and the descriptions in various places.

The focal point of this huge Temple Mount and that huge area that you see there that’s called the Temple Mount is about 35 acres in size. It’ll hold, even to this day (that top surface is still there, not the original one but that area), and it’ll hold, and has held, up to 400,000 people in modern times. It’s huge, but, of course, the focal point in the center of that massive Temple Mount was a building, the Temple proper. At the front, it’s 150 feet wide by 150 feet high - that’s 50 yards high by 50 yards wide. It is a massive structure.

Now if you had walked inside of the Temple proper that was the focal point, if you had walked inside of that you would have entered The Holy Place, where the priests ministered daily. In this rendering, it’s where you see the people there on the front side of the curtain, that’s a large room that was The Holy Place. Toward the back of that expansive room was a small room that was a perfect cube, 30 feet by 30 feet by 30 feet. And it was accessible by only one man, just once a year, the High Priest on The Day of Atonement. The Holy Place, where the priests ministered daily, was separated from the Holy of Holies by a curtain. The Jewish Mishnah tells us that that curtain was 30 feet by 60 feet, and it was made up of 72 squares of cloth or material. It was suspended from four gold covered pillars. Josephus describes it, he tells us it was primarily a rich blue, and it was beautifully decorated with gold emblems and thread. They tell us it was a hand-breath thick, if you can imagine that. A hand-breath, or almost four inches thick. The priests claim that it took over 300 priests to move it.

There was a reason for this curtain, it was a barrier. It pictured the distance, the distance between sinful people and the presence of a Holy God. But at the exact moment Jesus died, at the time the Passover lambs were being executed just outside on the Brazen Altar, at that very moment as He died, the priests who were serving that day heard that four-inch thick curtain which had hung there for years begin to rip, and it ripped completely in two. And as Mark puts it, “from top to bottom.” It was clearly a divine act, a commentary, God’s commentary on the death of His Son. What was the message of the torn curtain? You know the message. It was a message of the end of symbolism with all of its shadows. It was the end of the priesthood and the sacrificial system. It was the end of the great divide between a Holy God and a sinful but redeemed people. Our great High Priest had entered into the presence of God to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice.

Turn over to Hebrews. Listen to the writer of Hebrews explain this. Chapter 6, Hebrews chapter 6, verse 19: “This hope we have,” the hope of the gospel, the hope of God’s covenant promise in the New Covenant, verse 19: “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul,” and it is a sure and steadfast hope, and our hope “enters within the veil,” goes into the Holy of Holies, “where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Turn over to chapter 9, verse 7 into the second room in that Temple, “only the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this...” Here’s why that curtain, here’s why only one man, only the high priest once a year. The Holy Spirit was making this point, “...that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing.” But turn over to chapter 10, verse 19. Look at verse 14, speaking of Jesus, “...by one offering” [by one sacrifice] “He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” He offered Himself once for all, and He took away sin. Verse 19: “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter...” We, notice that word, “we” have confidence to enter. Not the priests only, “we,” all of us who are believers in Christ, we have confidence to enter “... the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil...” and that veil is no longer a curtain, the veil that was really torn wasn’t that curtain, it was the body of Jesus Christ. And through the tearing of His body you and I can enter into the very holy presence of God.

This is what the torn curtain symbolized. Our great High Priest went into the Holy of Holies to offer the sacrifice and He was both the priest and the sacrifice. But Jesus didn’t come out and close the curtain like every other high priest had done; God the Father, after He had rendered His once for all offering, tore the curtain from top to bottom and He invited us in. Through Christ, we can come to God directly. We need no priest, we need no additional sacrifice, we need no ritual. Today in prayer we can come into the presence of our Holy God, but in the future we will be able to stand in His presence, because the veil has been torn; not just that piece of cloth, but the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father wanted us to know that in the death of His

Son a way had been made into His presence for all of us who will turn from our sins and follow His Son as Lord and Savior. It was the end of the Old Covenant with its sacrifices and with its priesthood. It was the beginning of the New Covenant with its direct access to God through the veil of the torn flesh of Jesus Christ. God the Father spoke very clearly that day, and it was the testimony of a completely finished redemption. Salvation was done, finished, based on His finished work on the cross. Listen, it is the height of arrogance for any human being to think that he can add to that finished work. We don't need more ritual slayings of Jesus in some ritual in some medieval church. What we need is only Christ, His finished work.

But the miraculous destruction didn't stop with that curtain. Matthew tells us and I want to bring into the record here Matthew's account, Matthew tells us there was another piece of miraculous destruction and that was that the earth quaked. In Matthew 27:51 we read, "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split." At the moment Jesus died, God made another point. You know there's a major fault line that runs beneath the Jordan Rift Valley. Over the last 2,000 years, Israel has averaged one major quake every 100 years. Josephus reports that in 31 B.C. 10,000 people died in Palestine in an earthquake. Historians record that two quakes in the first century damaged the Temple, one in 64 A.D. and another in the early 30's A.D. That may be a reference to this very quake that Matthew references. God shook one of Israel's faults at the exact moment Jesus died. And according to Matthew it was a significant quake, because he says the rocks were split and the tombs were opened.

Now what's the message behind this earthquake? Well in the Bible, earthquakes often accompany the divine presence. You remember at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:18 "the whole mountain quaked violently" - why? To symbolize the presence of God. Earthquakes also often point to divine judgment. Jeremiah 10:10: "The Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation." God sent an earthquake at the cross to indicate that His divine presence was there in the death of His Son; that He was pouring out His divine wrath on His Son, but that He would also pour it out on those who were complicit in His Son's death. The earth quaked.

Another part of the miraculous destruction that occurred that day was the tombs opened. Again, Matthew fills us in on this little detail. In Matthew 27:52 it says, "...the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." Now this is a little difficult to interpret but it's probably best to put a period and a full stop after the statement, "the tombs were opened." Apparently, on Friday at three o'clock, the tombs were cracked open as a result of the earthquake and then Matthew jumps ahead in time to Sunday, for the moment, to tell us what eventually happened to those opened tombs. After Jesus's resurrection, many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. We don't know if these were Old Testament believers

or intertestamental believers or whether they were those who believed in Jesus during His ministry and were raised from the dead. Regardless, after Jesus's resurrection they were raised. They came out of the tombs, they entered Jerusalem and they appeared to many. Apparently to other followers of Christ just as Jesus did. Now you might ask yourself, "Wow, that would be a great way to show unbelievers, right, that Jesus was everything He claimed? Why didn't they appear to the rest of the Jews and to Pilate and to Herod?" It's because this message from God about the death of His Son was not intended for unbelievers but for us who believe. Remember what Jesus Himself said? They will not believe. If they won't believe Moses and the Prophets they will not believe what? Even if someone rose from the dead. They would have just explained it away. They would have found a way to excuse it and they did. And so this was not for unbelievers but for believers. The resurrection of these believers from their tombs was a reminder of the reality that there's another resurrection coming; that Christ was merely the first fruits but there's a full harvest on the way. God punctuated the reality that in the death of His Son, death itself was dying, had been condemned, and would someday fully die. Its sting had been plucked, its victory overruled, and if you're in Christ, the death of those you love who are in Christ, your own death, is not final.

That was God's commentary. That life would come out of the death of His Son. That resurrection would come as a result of the death of His Son. So that day God spoke through a series of divine miracles; a miraculous darkness, a miraculous desertion, a miraculous death, a miraculous destruction. The curtain was torn, the earth quaked, the tombs were opened.

But there was one other miracle that day, and it was perhaps the greatest miracle of all. It was a miraculous deliverance. Look at verse 39. "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last ..." Stop there for a moment. You understand, that every crucifixion was overseen by four seasoned veterans of the Roman army. One of those four men was usually a centurion. Centurions were over 100 men; they were the backbone of the Roman army. They were known to be men of courage, men of integrity, but because Roman soldiers were all career soldiers, and because they were not allowed to marry, there was nothing to soften or to temper the cruelty and the coldness of these men. This centurion, like the other three soldiers under his charge, was a hardened, profane, callous man. He had apparently even joined the rest of the cohort stationed at the governor's official residence earlier that morning in mocking Jesus and striking Him and spitting on Him and taking that reed and beating Him over the head with it and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then he and this detail of four men had headed out to Golgotha and there they had affixed Jesus to that cross member that Jesus had struggled to carry but had fallen under the weight of and had been carried for Him by Simon and they laid Jesus on that cross beam and they drove nails through the anchor points of His wrists. And then they hoisted that cross member up with Jesus tied to it to the standing beam, with His feet about 18 inches off the ground and there they left Him and watched Him die, they gambled

over His clothes. This was part of the one of the perks that went with the crucifixion detail as you got to keep whatever the prisoner had, you got to divide it up, and they did that.

So they had all participated, but a lot has happened since then. This centurion had watched how Jesus had endured being nailed to that cross member. He had watched the peace and calm of His soul. He had watched Him obviously suffer physical agony but not like the other men he had nailed to crosses. He wasn't cursing them and the crowd, instead He was praying, "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." He had seen Jesus remain silent under the scoffing of Israel's leaders. This centurion had heard from the mouth of Jesus's enemies all that Jesus had claimed for Himself. Israel's King. Israel's Messiah. And even the Son of God. He had heard all 7 of our Lord's last sayings. He had heard Jesus refer to God as His own Father when He had said, "Father, forgive them," and "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." He had heard Jesus forgive the thief and express that He was a King and that today that thief would be with Him in paradise. He had sat in mysterious darkness for three hours wondering what in the world the message of the gods might be. He had listened as Jesus, obviously not near death, had dismissed His own life and then he felt the earth quake at His death. When Jesus died, Mark tells us the centurion was right there. Notice verse 39, "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last." This soldier was face to face with Jesus as He died and as he watched Jesus die, up close and personal, he was struck with two things. He was struck with how Jesus died. When he "saw the way He breathed His last." He was also struck by the events that surrounded Jesus' death. Matthew says, "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened."

In response to all this notice verse 39, "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" Here is the crescendo of Mark's gospel. Here is what Mark has been driving toward through his entire gospel, and it's left to a Gentile, and to a Roman soldier to deliver. But this Roman soldier isn't speaking just for himself. Notice what Matthew says in verse 54 of the 27th chapter of his gospel: "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus." All four of them, together, when they saw the earthquake and they saw the things that were happening they became very, the Greek word for very means extremely, they were extremely frightened, or the word could even be terrified. And they said, not just the centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Now the centurion and his fellow soldiers issued two very specific verdicts about Jesus after His death. And the first one is recorded in Luke's gospel, Luke 23:47: "Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising," that is glorying the God, speaking of the true God, "saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent.'" Or this man was righteous. And then here, in

Mark, and as well as in Matthew, when the centurion was standing there saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

Now the Greek construction and your Bible probably notes in the reference there that this expression could mean a son of God, or it could mean the Son of God. I believe the context demands that it mean the Son of God. Why? Why do I believe that the centurion and the other soldiers came to genuine faith in Christ that day? Very quickly let me give you a little list of reasons.

First of all, all three Synoptic Gospels record the soldiers’ confession as the climax of Jesus’ death. It falls pretty lame if they were simply saying “this man was one of the heroes sent by the gods.” Secondly, their confession is listed with the other miracles surrounding Jesus’s death. Thirdly, their confession fits well with Jesus’s earlier prayer for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him. Number four, Christian tradition celebrates the conversion of these men. Number five, their conversion fits with and powerfully illustrates the purpose behind Jesus’s death. Why did He die? Chapter 10: 45: “to give His life a ransom for many.” And I think the sixth reason is that in Luke’s account, Luke very specifically says that these men - “glorified” is the Greek word - they glorified the God, and the definite article is there in the Greek, making it clear that they’re talking not about just any god, they’re talking about the God who Luke refers to being glorified throughout his gospel, the One true and living God.

So they had heard Jesus’s claims to be the unique one-of-a-kind Son of God, to be God the Son. And these profane Roman soldiers are now convinced that it’s true. What makes this amazing is here ends the testimony that began in chapter one. You see, Mark groups his gospel, he structures his gospel around the true nature of Jesus and that hinges on several great confessions throughout Mark’s gospel.

Let me just remind you of them very quickly. First of all there’s Mark’s own confession, in chapter 1 verse 1. He begins this gospel by saying, “The beginning of the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God.” That’s where he started. But the confession doesn’t stop there. You have the Father’s confession at the start of Jesus’ ministry at His baptism in chapter 1 verse 11: “A voice came out of the heavens and said ‘You are the Son I love and in You I am well-pleased.’” Even the demonic enemies of Jesus confessed Him to be God’s Son. In chapter 3 verse 11, “Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him [Jesus], they would fall down before Him and shout, ‘You are the Son of God!’” We see a specific instance of this in chapter 5 verse 7: “and shouting with a loud voice, he said, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!’”

You have the Father’s confession at the end, or near the end of Jesus’s ministry at the Transfiguration in chapter 9:7: “Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them (on the mount of

Transfiguration) and a voice came out of the cloud (saying), ‘This is the Son I love, listen to Him!’”

You have Jesus’s own confession in a public setting that He was the Son. You have it in chapter 12 verse 6. You remember, He tells the parable there on the Temple Mount that implicates the leaders of Israel in His death. He describes a man who owned a vineyard and sent his own beloved son. “He had one more to send, a beloved son, he sent him last of all to them, saying ‘they will respect my son.’” And in the parable they killed the son. And the leaders got it, they understood Jesus was talking about them. But not only was He talking about them, He was making clear His own claim to be the Son of God.

But that’s not where Jesus’s confession stops; Jesus made a confession under oath. I want you to turn to chapter 14. Mark chapter 14; notice verse 61. This is at that second Jewish trial during the night at Caiaphas’s house. Just a few hours before. Verse 61, Jesus kept silent at all the false charges that were brought up and He didn’t answer, He knew they were all trumped up, He knew what the point was, He knew no justice would be done, but again, the high priest Caiaphas was questioning Him, and saying to Him, and Caiaphas, here, takes the direct approach. He walks up to Jesus and he says, “Are You the Messiah?” Christos? Hamashiach? The One the Old Testament promised? Are You the Son of the Blessed One? And Jesus said, “I am.” And He said, “you shall see the Son of Man” and here He quotes a Messianic passage from Daniel chapter 7: “You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” They got it by the way, verse 63, “Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You heard the blasphemy.’” He’s claimed, under oath, to be God’s Son. By the way, Matthew in his account makes it clear that Jesus was under oath, this is how Caiaphas said it, Matthew 26:63: “The high priest said to Him, ‘I adjure You (or I put you under oath) by the living God to tell us whether You are the Christos, the Messiah, the Son of God.’” And Jesus said to Him, ‘You’ve said it, I am.’”

So you have Jesus’s confession under oath. You have Jesus’s enemies’ confession, not that they agreed but they confessed His claims even at the cross. Matthew 27:40: His enemies at the cross said, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God (as You have claimed), come down from the cross.” In Matthew chapter 27: 43, again, they quote Him as saying, “I am the Son of God.”

Going back to Mark’s gospel and there’s one other time that we have this confession and it’s from the centurion and the soldiers. It’s their great confession here in verse 39: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Their confession appears from the mouth of those who have just watched Him die. You know what’s remarkable to me is that this Roman centurion, think about this with me. I just traced you through the confessions in Mark’s gospel. This Roman centurion is the first human being in Mark’s gospel to truly confess that Jesus is the Son of God. And that

confession wasn't because he witnessed one of Jesus's dramatic miracles. It's not because he saw Jesus feed the 5,000. It's not because he saw Him quiet the waves and the wind on the Sea of Galilee. It's not because He healed the lame or the blind, but it flows from this hardened soldier and these soldiers observing Jesus's passion, His suffering, and His death. It reminds me of what Jesus had said just a couple of days before during the Passion week in John chapter 12: 32: "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

My father-in-law, as I've told you before, used to say, read the Bible with a sanctified imagination. I want you, for a moment, just to imagine what this scene was like. Imagine what it would have been like to have been these soldiers. You have just participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. You have just watched Him die, and upon the moment He dies the reality blazes across your mind that you have just executed God's only Son. What's amazing about this confession is that it comes from soldiers who, six hours before, had mocked Him and crucified Him and their confession comes seconds after Jesus died in humiliation and agony as the worse of criminals on a cross that they nailed Him to. Nowhere do you see Jesus's deity and power more clearly shown than at what happened at the cross. Four hardened soldiers who crucified Him, who watched Him die, by divine grace came to see the reality of who He really was. This is a miracle of grace. I am absolutely confident as most of church history has been, that we will see these four men in heaven. We will talk to the men who took our place and crucified the Son of God.

Five times, five times in six hours the Father answered Jesus's prayer for the forgiveness of those who were at that scene that day. First, by saving the thief who was guilty of the very crime of which Jesus had been found innocent but was still crucified. And now, these four hardened Roman soldiers who were the men who actually crucified God's only Son.

Think about what God was doing here. Just stop and think about the message God was sending. By making these men followers of Jesus, by saving them, by delivering them from their sins, God was demonstrating that the death of His Son was all about rescuing people, rescuing people from their sins and from His coming wrath. Regardless of what they had become, regardless of who they were before He found them. But as wonderful as the miracle of the conversion of these four Roman soldiers was, understand it was the exception that day. Most of the people gathered at the cross had an entirely different response. Listen to how Luke records it. This is Luke 23:48. It says, "all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return (to their homes) beating their chests."

Don't miss the point. Most of the people who watched Jesus die walked away knowing about Jesus, having heard His claims, having seen His death, having witnessed all of the miracles we've just studied together, they saw God's own commentary on this monumental event, and they felt bad about it. It affected them deeply and emotionally. But many of them never did

anything about it. Oh there were some, undoubtedly there were some in this crowd who were in the crowd on Pentecost 50 days later, when Peter preached and said, “You crucified the King of Glory.” And they repented and believed. But many of these walked away and the next day they continued with their lives.

Can I just ask you a question? How many times have you done the same thing as this crowd that witnessed the crucifixion? Perhaps you grew up in a home where you’ve heard about the crucifixion constantly. You could preach this message in some ways yourself. You’ve been to dozens or even hundreds of services like this one, maybe you’ve even been emotionally affected, perhaps even made more sober, more contemplative as the crowd was that left the crucifixion that day. But if you’re honest with yourself you’ve left every time, unchanged. You’re the same person you’ve always been, you still love your sin, whatever form that takes for you, you still make the calls about what you’re going to do with your life. You call yourself a Christian perhaps, but you know in your heart it’s all a charade, it’s all a facade.

Mark has presented the evidence. The question is, what’s your response to Jesus going to be? Are you going home with the crowd? Sad about what you’ve seen, overcome by a sense perhaps of your own guilt? But tomorrow your life just goes on like it always has before. Or are you like the centurion, and like the other soldiers, willing tonight, to fall in genuine worship at the feet of Jesus Christ, acknowledge Him to be your Lord, your Savior, your Sovereign, your King?

I want you to try for a moment to picture the scene that Mark has painted of the cross. I want you to let your imagination picture the strange crowd assembled just outside the city walls of Jerusalem on that April day. Lift up your eyes, and look at the three crosses rising on that little hill and there on the center cross is Jesus of Nazareth, His naked body covered only with dried blood, and human spittle and crawling flies. His hands and feet cruelly nailed to the instrument of Roman torture and execution that we call the cross. Remember, this really happened. Jesus was a real man who really lived. He was really executed. He died truly as the gospel writers describe it. This isn’t imagination, this isn’t fantasy. You can go to this place today where this happened. Think about that scene and contemplate this: the death of that Man is my only hope for redemption. The only way that I can avoid an eternity of suffering for my own sins is for His death to pay the price to God that I owe. The only way that I will ever be rescued from God’s wrath against me and my many sins, is to put my trust solely in what He suffered for me, and in His death in my place. I must acknowledge Him as my Lord and my God. I must renounce all of my own merits, all of my own efforts, all of my own doings and I must trust in what He did during those six hours as my only hope of ever standing before a Holy and Righteous God. Trust Jesus the Son of God now.

For us who are already Jesus’s disciples, how do we respond to this? I want you to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Second Corinthians chapter 5. Verse 14. Here’s how it affected Paul;

here's how it should affect us: "For the love of Christ," that is the love that Christ has demonstrated and what He did for us, it controls us, it compels us, "having concluded this, that one died for all," that is, one died in the place of all those who would believe, "therefore all died." All believers died with Jesus. And He died for us all, so that they who live, that's us, we now live a new life because of what Jesus did, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him." Underline that, that is our response to what Jesus did. The love that He has shown ought to control you, it ought to compel you, it ought to drive you, so that you no longer live for yourself. When you get up every morning you should remind yourself, my life is not my own, I have been bought with an incredible price. I belong to someone else. I don't get to live my life the way I want to live it. Instead, "He died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves," but that they might live "for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Let me just ask you, does this describe your life? Do you no longer live for yourself, but you live for Him who died and gave Himself for you? That is the only reasonable response to what Jesus Christ did for us. He goes on to say in verse 16, "Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh." He says my whole perspective on life here in this world has changed. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, what he's saying is, I once thought of Christ in a fleshly way, I was an unconverted Jew and I thought of Him as a false messiah, "yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature (a new creation); the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." And notice verse 18, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 20, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

Listen, your life isn't your own, you belong to the One who bought you, the One who paid for you with His own blood, so that you don't live for yourself any more, you live for Him. And what does it mean to live for Him? It means you have a new ministry, and that ministry is as an ambassador with the message of the gospel. The message of reconciliation. So you want to ask yourself, do I live for Him? And ask yourself, are you serving as an ambassador, with the message of the gospel? Look back in verse 14. "All died..." We all died with Christ who have believed in Him, "...and He died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but Him who died and rose again on their behalf." That's the only right response to the amazing events outside the city of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. Let's pray together.

Our Father, I can only pray as a preacher, that You would take my incredibly weak and inadequate effort to present the most profound truth, the most amazing event that has ever occurred on this planet, and explain it to these dear people who have gathered here. Father, may Your Spirit take that reality and do what I could never do, make it come alive in their hearts, burn it within their hearts; I pray that for me as well. Father, may be never ever get over what

Jesus did for us. May we glory in Him and in His cross, and may we no longer live for ourselves, but may we live for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.