

What Makes a Day Good? - *Mark 15:21-41*

Introduction:

- Good Friday... Let me ask you, what makes a day good?
- I'm sure plenty of us have had days where we get to the end of it, and look back and think "man that was not a good day", it just feels like everything has gone wrong, and you can't wait for the day to be over.
- So what has to happen in a day for you to get to the end of it and look back and think "that was a good day"?
- It's probably different things for different people, maybe getting recognized at work for something you did, maybe a restful day reading a book, etc... We all probably have our own definitions for what makes a good day.
- But I want you to think about the passage that we just read:
- We're skipping over a bit of the story of Mark here, last Sunday we looked at Peter denying Jesus. Since then, Jesus has been moved from his trial before the Sanhedrin to a trial before the Roman governor. Even though the Jewish authorities had already decided that Jesus deserved death, they didn't actually have the legal authority to sentence him to death, so they sent him to the Roman government to be legally condemned.
- And that's exactly what they got. The Roman governor, Pontious Pilate, gave into the demands of the people, sentencing Jesus to death on a cross, sending him away to be mocked and beaten once again while Barabbas, a guilty man, walked free.
- And that's where we pick up the story this morning, with Jesus being led to his death, and crucified, too weak to even carry his own cross. The words of this passage record for us the final moments of Jesus' life, and his last breath as he died in one of the most painful and torturous ways that was possible at the time.
- And as we read these verses, this is not what I think any of us would consider a "good day". If you were in Jesus' place, or the place of one of his followers, this would not be the kind of day where you get to the end and think, "Man that was a good day".
- Yet here we are, 2000 years later, celebrating "*Good Friday*". That seems a little backwards doesn't it? Why do we call it that? What is it that makes this day so good?
- That's exactly the question we're going to consider together this morning, "What makes Good Friday, good?"
- And to find an answer to that question, I want to focus on two specific details in this passage.

- Almost every verse here is so rich with detail that you could take an entire sermon and then some to look at, but I want to focus on two specific details that Mark includes in his account of these events, two miraculous signs that took place as Jesus hung on the cross.
- And as we look at both of these signs, it will help us understand a bit more of what makes good Friday so good, and why it is a day worth celebrating.

The Darkening of the Sun shows us the weight of Jesus' death

- The first sign that I want us to look at is in V. 33:

"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." - Mark 15:33 (ESV)

- Both of these signs are kind of mentioned quickly in the background, so it's easy to read right over them, but there's something amazing going on in this moment.
- As Jesus was hanging on the cross, there was a period of three hours, when darkness covered the entire land. The sun stopped shining.
- From the sixth to the ninth hour would have been from noon until 3pm, so this was not a period of time when there should have been darkness, yet there was.
- And this was not some natural phenomenon. It wasn't an eclipse, or anything like that, it was a supernatural sign in which the sun stopped shining, and darkness covered the land.
- James Edwards connects this darkness back to the darkness over Egypt when God sent plagues on the nation as a result of Pharaoh's pride, or even the darkness that existed in the chaos before creation.
- This is a darkness from God.
- And what's happening in this moment is that the darkening of the sun is showing us the weight of Jesus' death. What was really going on in this moment, and what it really meant.
- We've already considered the incredible injustice of this moment as we've looked through Mark 14. Jesus was an innocent man, who rightfully should have been recognized as the king of the Jews, yet he's hanging on a cross, dying, for crimes he didn't commit, with his rightful title "*King of the Jews*" being used as the very charge against him, being hurled at him as an insult.
- At three different points in these verses, we see people mocking Jesus as he hangs on the cross, the priests, the people watching, and even those who were being crucified next to him mocked him saying "Save yourself if you're so powerful". The injustice is sickening.
- But it's more than just that. Jesus is more than an innocent man, dying unjustly on a cross. Jesus is God. Jesus is the creator of the very people who put him on that cross.

- John Ch.1 tells us that Jesus is the very Word of God, through whom everything on earth was created.

“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” - John 1:3 (ESV)

- It was through Jesus Christ that everything in this world was created, yet in this moment he is being put to death by his own creation.
- As the sun goes dark it's almost as if creation itself is groaning as the creator is put to death.
- And it's in the midst of that darkness that you get this gut wrenching cry from Jesus in V. 34: *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*
- Ronald Kenaghahan comments really well on this moment,
 - *“There is only darkness. It is as though Jesus had been abandoned in the darkness, and this sense of being cut off from everyone sets up the lonely cry of 15:34. With stark simplicity Mark leaves his readers to contemplate the mystery of the Son of God hanging on a cross, cursed by God (Deut 21:23) and utterly alone.”*
- It's a terrible mystery to consider, that the Son of God should be put to death by his own creation, and abandoned by his Father.
- It's the devastation of sin on full display. The reason that Christ hung on a tree, the reason that he suffered this way, and was abandoned and cursed by God was because in this moment, he took the sins of the entire world onto himself.
- And it wasn't just about the sins of those who were directly involved in Jesus' execution.
- James Edwards writes,
 - *“The emphasis on darkness covering ‘the whole land’ has universal connotations: the whole earth is implicated in Jesus’ death, not just the Jews.”*
- It's not their sin that caused Jesus to need to die on the cross, it's our sin. It's my sin.
- In this moment, Christ took the penalty for my sin onto himself, and experienced the separation from God that I rightfully deserve. That all of us deserve, yet he did it because of the incredible love that he has for us.
- This sign, the darkening of the sun, really does show us the weight of Jesus' death, as well as the seriousness of our own sin. That because of our sin, Jesus had to go to his death on the cross, that the creator of the world, the Son of God, would die in our place, causing even the sun to stop shining.
- This is a moment for us to reflect on the seriousness and devastation that comes from sin.

- And it's heavy isn't it? It's difficult to sit with the reality of what sin is, and what our sins cost. We feel that weight. Not quite showing us why we call this day "Good Friday". But this is only the first of the two signs that we're looking at today.

The tearing of the Temple curtain shows us the triumph that came through Jesus' death

- The second sign that Mark records for us is in V. 38, and this is happening right as Jesus breathes his last breath:

"And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." - Mark 15:38 (ESV)

- The curtain of the temple was torn in two. This may seem like a bit of an arbitrary detail to include, but again, there is something incredible that is taking place.
- The curtain that is being referred to here is the curtain that closed off the part of the Temple known as the "Holy of Holies". This was the part of the Temple where God's presence rested, and it was completely closed off and separated from the people. The only one who was allowed to enter that part of the Temple, and be in the presence of God, was the High Priest, and even that was only allowed once each year.
- Anyone who tried to enter the Holy of Holies in an unworthy manner, who wasn't supposed to be there, died. Sinful humanity can not be in the presence of a Holy God. The curtain was a symbol of the separation that existed between God and his people because of Sin. It was a protection for the people. They couldn't be in the presence of God and live, so they needed the High Priest to be the mediator between them and God.
- So when this curtain was torn, it was to show that something great was happening in that moment.
- In the moment of Jesus' death, as he accomplished the task that he had been sent to earth for, taking the sins of the entire world onto himself, paying the price for sin that we deserve, the barrier between God and humanity was torn in two. That separation no longer needed to exist.
- Through Christ's death, he opened up a way for us to have a completely new and different kind of relationship with God that was not previously possible. You and I don't need to have another person speak to God on our behalf. We don't have to regularly sacrifice animals in order to be forgiven for our sins.
- Because of Christ's death on the cross, we are able to have a personal relationship with our God, and experience his presence in us through the Holy Spirit.
- Through his death, he took all of our sins onto himself, and paid the penalty that we deserved. Think to what we just considered a few minutes ago about how serious our sin is. Jesus took all

of that onto himself willingly so that now, he is the one who acts as our great High Priest. He is the one who acts as the mediator between us and God, speaking to God on our behalf.

- Because of what Christ has done, for those of us who have trusted in him, when God looks at us, he doesn't see our sin. Instead, he sees the blood of his Son, that has washed us to be white as snow.
- While the darkening of the sun shows us the weight of Christ's death, the tearing of the Temple curtain shows us the triumph that came through Christ's death.
- J.C. Ryle writes,
 - *"In the instant that our Lord drew his last breath, the work of atonement for a world's sin was accomplished. The ransom for sinners was at length paid. The kingdom of heaven was thrown fully open to all believers. All the solid hope that mortals enjoy about their souls may be traced to Jesus' death on the cross."*
- Jesus said in John 14:6

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" - John 14:6 (ESV)

- He is the only way to the Father, and we see in this passage how that is true. Through Christ's death he is victorious. Through his death, he provided himself to become the way to the Father, and no one comes to the Father except through him.
- And this is a way that is open to all who would believe in him. No matter how serious your sin, no matter what you've done, or how far gone you feel, Christ died to take your sins onto himself, knowing everything that you would ever do. That is the incredible love that he has. All that he asks is for us to confess that we are sinners in need of a saviour, repent of our sins, and turn to a life of obedience to him.
- That is the good news, and the hope of the Gospel.

Conclusion:

- Both of these signs, the darkening of the sun, and the tearing of the curtain, show us an essential element of what Good Friday really means, and both really function as two sides of the same coin.
- You can't have one without the other, you can't separate the two.
- You can't truly appreciate the joy, and triumph, and freedom that's found in the Gospel without being willing to sit in the weight and the seriousness of sin.

- But if all you're doing is sitting in the weight of sin, it will leave you feeling lost and hopeless, and you'll miss the joy and hope that Christ's death makes available to us.
- These signs are two sides of the same coin that show us why Good Friday is so good.
- **Good Friday is good because Jesus took on himself the weight of our sins, so that the way could be opened for us to have a relationship with God.**
- But, as much victory and triumph as there is in Jesus' death, the hope that he gives in the midst of the darkness of sin, this still feels like a difficult spot for this story to end, with Jesus hanging dead on the cross.
- Thankfully though, this is not the end of the story. Another part of what makes Good Friday so good, is that it's not the end of the story. It seems pretty final, but on Sunday we're going to look at how the story really ends.
- But for today we want to sit in the weight and the significance of the moment of Jesus' death. We're tempted to rush through this, to get to what feels like a more uplifting story, but I think that it's important for us to give ourselves this time to really reflect on Jesus' death, and the weight of this moment.
- And as we do that, I want to read you a bit of a longer quote by William Barclay as he talks about the "limitless love of God" that was displayed through Christ on the cross, then consider how we respond to that love. Listen to what William Barclay says:
 - *"Jesus came to tell men of the love of God; more, he was himself the incarnate love of God. If he had refused the Cross or if in the end he had come down from the Cross, it would have meant that there was a limit to God's love, that there was something which that love was not prepared to suffer for men, that there was a line beyond which it would not go. But Jesus went the whole way and died on the Cross and this means that there is literally no limit to God's love, that there is nothing in all the universe which that love is not prepared to suffer for men, that there is nothing, not even death on a cross, which it will refuse to bear for men. When we look at the Cross, Jesus is saying to us, 'God loves you like that, with a love that is limitless, a love that will bear every suffering earth has to offer.'"*
- I know that's a bit of a longer quote, but as I read it this week, it was just so beautiful. I love this description of just how much love we were shown at the cross. The Gospel is a message of limitless, unfathomable love.
- So just how are we supposed to respond to that much love?
- I said in a sermon a few weeks ago that the Gospel demands a response. You can't hear this message and not respond in one way or another, whether your response is to accept, or to reject it.
- But in this passage, I want to point out one clear picture of an appropriate response to everything that's going on, and it's in V. 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!’” - Mark 15:39 (ESV)

- This centurion, who likely had some hand in everything that had just happened to Jesus, sees everything that takes place as Jesus dies, and in that moment, comes to a point of true belief that Jesus was actually everything that he said he was. *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”*
- This centurion saw all that Christ had done, and it changed him, so deeply leading to this declaration that Jesus truly was the Son of God.
- Today, we’ve seen a picture of the limitless love of God, displayed through Christ on the cross. We’ve seen the weight of our sin, and the triumph of Jesus’ death. How will you respond?
- I want to end with this encouragement, respond by worshipping God for the great gift of the Gospel, turning to Christ in repentance and faith, receiving forgiveness of your sins, and the blessing of a personal relationship with God.
- *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”*