

Words of Loss

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- [0 : 0 0] Mark chapter 15. This is the Word of God. A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.
- They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.
- And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.
- The written notice of the charge against him read, The King of the Jews. They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.
- Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, So, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down to the cross and save yourself.
- [1 : 1 7] In the same way, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves.
- He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.
- Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.
- And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- Amen. So, this morning we're going to look at Mark chapter 15, Words of loss from Jesus, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- [2 : 3 3] Those of you who aren't Christians, but who are listening in wherever you are, you know, you might really struggle to find out why is it that Christians find Jesus so compelling?
- What is it about Jesus that grips our lives so completely that we will say, Yeah, I want to follow Jesus. I want to worship Jesus. I'm going to sing songs to Jesus.
- I'm going to talk to Jesus. I'm going to talk about Jesus. I'm going to read the Bible and pray. And that might be a mystery to you that you're still trying to figure out. And one of the things that's so absolutely compelling about Jesus is the way that he demonstrates such love and compassion towards others, even when he's really suffering himself.
- And we begin to see in Jesus depths of love that are quite remarkable. When Jesus was being crucified, he said seven things that are recorded for us.
- And we've been looking at them over the last few weeks. There were, as he's been killed in a very cruel and unjust way, there were words of forgiveness. Father, forgive them.
- [3 : 5 5] They don't know what they're doing, he prayed. There were words of welcome to a thief who's been crucified beside him. Today you'll be with me in paradise. There were words of love to his mother providing her with a home.

But what we're seeing today is that he himself loves at tremendous cost. Words of loss come from his lips. This is not just a man.

He's not just a prophet, a teacher. It's not just a great example of how to live and love with dignity in the face of suffering. This is God's eternal son made flesh.

And that means what happens to him all the more astonishing and incredible. So that's what we're going to think about today is just these words of Jesus, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And we're looking at the cross of Jesus to learn from him, how do we cope with hard times? The pandemic has been hard and is hard for us in different ways.

[5 : 06] So as we see Jesus howling with despair, crying out to God, one thing we see is how honest we can be about what's going on in our lives.

We don't have to fake it to make it. Jesus doesn't hide his fear, his dread or his loneliness. You don't have to pretend you're fine if you're not.

So we can be honest. But the other thing is that we can also be hopeful. Because as Jesus faces the darkness of this moment, he does so that we don't have to face the darkness alone.

He's with us, whatever we're going through. And here's my Thursday thought. On Thursday morning, when you get up out of bed and think, what did we learn at Cornerstone on Sunday?

It's this, that it's impossible for God to abandon those that Jesus was abandoned for. Jesus goes through this process of abandonment here, and that means that you don't have to.

[6 : 06] That God will always be with you, because in this moment, he wasn't with Jesus. There's a real emphasis here in Mark's gospel, first of all, on the darkness in verse 33.

At the sixth hour, so that if your watch was set in Jerusalem that day to their time zone, you would have looked at your watch, six hour, that's 12 noon for us.

So Jesus was crucified at 9 a.m., the third hour of the Jewish day. And then there's three hours where he interacts with the thieves, where he is going through great pain, where he interacts with his mother, and suffers a lot of agony.

And then at noon, at the sixth hour, as John would put it, or as Mark would put it, darkness comes over the whole land. And that darkness, in the middle of the day, lasts for three hours.

So imagine this. Try and get a picture in your head of being in a house where there's a basement, a cellar, and you're asked to open the cellar door and go down into the darkness.

[7 : 26] And there's no lighting. You don't have a torch, and there's no light in the cellar. And you find that it's a spiral staircase, and this is a really deep cellar. It just seems to go down and down and round and round.

And the further down you go, and the further round you go, spiraling deeper and deeper, the light that you left behind is getting dimmer and dimmer.

Until finally, you're in complete and utter darkness, feeling your way down the steps. And then suddenly you trip. You fall down.

You start to tumble down the stairs, and you're trying to grab onto something to stop your fall, when suddenly the steps vanish beneath you, and you're falling, plummeting into the void, into the darkness.

You seem to be falling into a pit which has no bottom. That's kind of what it was like for Jesus at the cross. He's on a downward spiral, step by step, into deeper and deeper darkness.

[8 : 32] darkness. The night before, he's at the last supper with his disciples in the upper room. When Judas leaves the room, and Jesus knows what's going on, Judas leaves the room to sell him out for 30 pieces of silver.

The darkness starts to descend. From the upper room, he goes to Gethsemane, where Judas returns to betray Jesus with a kiss, another step into the darkness.

And then as he turns to his disciples for help, they all run. He's abandoned by his friends. More darkness. He's put on trial before the high priest, and people stand up and lie about him and make all kinds of false accusations.

Greater darkness. They lie. They beat him. They mock him. They scourge him. They put a crowd of thorns on his head.

They spit in his face. The darkness is getting darker. Eventually, he's taken from Pilate, where expedience trumps justice, and he's taken out to Golgotha, where we read that he is nailed to the cross.

[9 : 50] He is crucified. The darkness continues. Another step down into the abyss. Then there's the taunts of his enemies and the thieves beside him.

There's the pain and the physical torment of crucifixion. So all through that night and all into the next day, Jesus has been on a relentless march down into this darkness, step by step, deeper and deeper, round and round, into the depths of suffering.

And now, suddenly, he plummets. The ground beneath his feet has finally, totally, disappeared. And he is in free fall.

Nothing to grip onto, no light, no meaning, nothing, nothing to hold to. It's just Jesus hurtling down into an abyss of hatred and suffering with nothing tangible or solid to support him.

Down and down and down, Jesus goes into a bottomless well of suffering. That's what the darkness speaks of. Hell's jaws are open and Christ is thrown down into them.

[11 : 07] The darkness becomes total. He is swallowed up by the darkness. darkness. Here's a quote from John Calvin. He must grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death, suffering in his soul the terrible torment of a condemned and forsaken man.

This is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. So the darkness, the hour of darkness, the three hours of darkness speaks of the deepest sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth.

The darkness itself is inexplicable. There's no natural cause to what happens here. It is a supernatural darkness that covers a whole land in the middle of the day for three hours.

And in those three hours, Jesus bears the wounds of hell for all the world for all eternity. It is the most dense and intense concentration of pain and suffering possible.

Heaven and earth are plunged into gloom. The angels of heaven look on and they weep in disbelief and despair at what is happening to God's Son on planet earth.

[12 : 41] And the creation is groaning as the life of the Creator is being extinguished. Samuel Rutherford, who was a Scottish theologian from many hundreds of years ago, said this, the darkness, it's as if the Son had said to Jesus, Lord, Lord, if thou be going to another world, take me with you.

Donald McLeod, a 21st century Scottish theologian, says, the light of the world is being extinguished. there is a darkness that consumes the soul of Jesus Christ.

And that darkness consumes the creation as well. It's a sign of curse and of abandonment. It's a really great book I've been reading to help me think about this called Christ Crucified by Donald McLeod, who is a Scottish theologian, still alive and well and just publishing some more books.

But it's a really fine book if you want to read about the atonement to understand more about what Jesus suffered and why he suffered it. Great. The quotes from John Calvin and Samuel Rutherford are his research, not my research.

So important though to get a window into what the darkness means and what Jesus is doing to rescue people like me and you from what sin has done to us and the guilt that it brings.

[14 : 18] So there's the darkness and then there's what's called the cry of dereliction. So this cry of Jesus on the cross is very famous in Christian thinking and theology and history.

It's called the cry of dereliction, of abandonment. So Mark tells us that at noon, as this darkness falls, Jesus, he cries out with a loud piercing cry.

It's a howl, isn't it? I'm sure it just put people's hair on end who were standing there listening. This scream of pain and loneliness crying out to God and to the universe, what's going on?

It's a wounded animal cry. it's the agony of a human being whose mind and heart are being shattered into millions of fragments.

Jesus falling apart under the weight of this darkness and the darkness is the weight of the sin and punishment that he is bearing for the world, for us.

[15 : 28] Psalm 22, which we did sing a little bit from earlier, gives us a sense of that reality. If you've got a Bible or a phone, you can just look it up.

I'm going to read a little bit of Psalm 22 to you, though. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me?

So far from the cries of my anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer. But night by night, but I find no rest.

The Psalm takes us to the deepest sufferings of Jesus. Further on, it says, I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax. It is melted within me. My mouth has dried up like a pot shirt. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

[16 : 32] You lay me in the dust of death. My God, my God.

One thing that does say to us is this, that he turns to God in the darkness. My God, my God, is an affirmation of faith. He doesn't rage against God in his suffering.

He doesn't deny God in his suffering. But in this moment, he cannot fathom God or what God is doing.

And to top it all, he gets no answer, no comfort, no warm reassurance. he experiences the agony of the abandoned, of somebody who is utterly and completely alone.

He's abandoned to suffer without any help. He's abandoned to his enemies without any kind of intervention. He's abandoned to despair without any light of understanding.

[17 : 43] He's abandoned to death and to his all consuming darkness. Because the Father in heaven has withdrawn his care, his protection, his comfort.

And there is no one in the world less prepared for this than Jesus. He's the one who is the eternal word, who has always dwelt at the Father's side. And now in the out of his greatest need, the Father is not there.

He's lost his sense of sonship, hasn't he? Earlier when he's been crucified, he cries out, Abba, Father.

Forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. But now he's so low, so broken, so confused, so wounded, he cannot say Abba.

He's no sense of having a father anymore. He's alone, unloved, as far as he can understand it.

[19 : 04] And so his whole identity and self- understanding is shattered and taken from him because love is the very ground and foundation of his existence.

The eternal love of the Trinity is what has shaped and formed his identity forever. He's always been the beloved of the Father, but now he is not the Son, he is sin.

How much Jesus has given up for us. and it's devastating to him. To lose all of this is mentally, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually devastating.

He is utterly broken, forlorn, and disorientated. He feels and experiences total meaningless and confusion. What's going on?

Donald McLeod in his book calls it the boundless why? In this moment, he's grappling for answers and he can't find any. He's trying to understand what's going on, what's the reason for the cross, and in this very moment, he can't even see why he is suffering.

[20 : 21] We know that he suffered for the joy that was set before him to save many people, but part of the suffering of the cross is that he can't even see that anymore.

The light is going out. There is no sense to this horror, and that's a revelation of sin as something that is chaotic and meaningless and shambolic and illogical and destructive, and because he's bearing sin and made sin, his experience becomes shambolic and meaningless and chaotic and destructive.

He isn't spared anything. Why? He went for us. Mark, earlier in this gospel says he gave his life a ransom for many.

That was his purpose, to die in order to set us free from sin, death, and despair. And Mark is zooming in here on the ransom payment, the unspeakable cost to Jesus of what he does to win our freedom, to win our lives and our forgiveness.

forgiveness. He takes himself the awesome and awful consequences of human sin before God so that those who come in faith to him can be free from these same consequences.

[21 : 45] He did this for us as a substitute in our place, bearing God's wrath and the eternal punishment of sin, bearing all the pains of hell so that we can be spared what he went through.

Will you turn to him in faith today? I want to think for a moment about the consequences of this. First of all, it means this, that if you become a Christian, you will never be abandoned.

What's the benefit in becoming a Christian? Well, one thing is that if you're a Christian, you have this guarantee that because Jesus was abandoned at the cross, God will never abandon you.

That's the Thursday thought, isn't it? That becoming a Christian means we'll never be abandoned. It's impossible for God to abandon those that Jesus was abandoned for.

So you will never be abandoned. It doesn't mean you won't have dark seasons. It doesn't mean that there won't be times you feel forsaken. There is in the experience of every human being, including every Christian, times when it seems that God's face has turned away from you.

[23 : 01] Bereavement, illness, spiritual depression, mental health struggles, sin struggles, spiritual apathy, times when we feel we're tumbling down the steps into the darkness, when we feel that God's favour is gone, when we feel as if God is against me, how can I have to go through all this?

And that's devastating for us. But in that moment, we need to realise that if we're leaning on Christ, we will never have the fate that he had at Golgotha.

We will never be condemned. We are immune to curse and condemnation. Because Jesus was cast out, he can say, all those who come to me, I will never cast out.

I will never turn them away. When we look at Jesus abandoned on the cross, we need to remember that we will never be forsaken.

He took that from us and for us. So don't give way to despair. God will not abandon you. Never conclude that all is lost.

[24 : 13] It never will be because of Jesus. Wait on the Lord, says Psalm 27. Wait on the Lord and you will see his goodness in the land of the living. There is a lot of waiting in the Christian life.

But we wait on a God who will never forsake us and never abandon us. Job, a man who suffered greatly, says this, yet though he slay me, still I will trust in him.

There are many wounds in the Christian life, but we have a God who will never leave us alone. And because of that, I want to say that we won't abandon each other either.

Jesus was left alone so we don't have to be left alone. In an atomized world where people are pushed apart, where people hide away as individuals and feel alienated from each other, in an atomized world, Jesus comes to bring us back together.

He comes to restore community. He comes to bring the lonely and set them in families. And I think pandemic has reinforced our sense of atomization and separation.

[25 : 29] It's maybe pushed us inwards to look after our own interests and to kind of ensure our own well-being and survival and we've lost sight of others.

We want to make our home our sanctuary, but guess what? Your home is God's sanctuary. He lives in your home if you're a Christian. And he says to you, your home is not your castle where you build a moat and drop the drawbridge and keep people out so you can get some peace and quiet for yourself.

That's not a Christian home. A home where God dwells has lots of bridges so that others can come in. It has open doors and permeable walls because God gives you a home so that you can give others a home so that no one is left alone.

We find our rest and security not in bricks and mortar, but in God and in Jesus and his sufferings for us. And that means that we can offer a home to others.

Do you know, I've thought more than ever during lockdown, I've thought about retiring. I'm like, oh, it'd be nice just to go somewhere tranquil and quiet and listen to the birds and the trees and be beside the water and slow life down, spend more time with the people I love.

[26 : 50] That's kind of what pandemic and lockdown did to me and it's probably done it to some of you as well. I want to say this to myself and to you.

Jesus did not die abandoned and alone so that I can pursue the life that makes me most chilled. He gave himself in love so that I will give myself in love.

He gave himself to loneliness and abandonment so that I can go to the lonely and abandoned of this world and say, we're not going to forget you.

We're not going to leave you behind. You don't have to be on your own. God's family is here. God's community. Our homes and our hearts are open.

So as meeting with people becomes more possible, please connect, invite people, serve people, engage with people, live on mission and look after those who are on the periphery or those who are most alone.

[27 : 56] And don't think that this is the time for you to escape into a little world all of your own. I want to say this as well.

Finally, or right, second last, finally. Okay. He was left with nothing so you could have every spiritual blessing. Ephesians chapter one, verse three. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

So just remember that. He was left with nothing so that you could have everything that you need in Christ. every blessing is yours. Now, not everything you want is a blessing.

So this doesn't mean you'll get all the things that you think you need to make you happy. Some of the things you think might make you happy won't make you happy. But all that is blessedness is yours.

And the hard thing about that is it doesn't come all at once in a deluge. It's drip fed to us. I remember being in hospital after surgery on a morphine pump.

[29 : 03] And a lot of pain and restlessness and couldn't sleep. And I just wanted all the morphine in one very large happy dose.

One blissful big hit. One happy high. But they wouldn't let me have that. I had a little pump and I just got a wee bit at a time.

Because if I took all the morphine I wanted in one moment, I wouldn't have done that. It would have been quite harmful. So God gives us the blessings we need, not all at once, not more than we can cope with, but step by step, drip by drip.

There's still pain, but there's still blessing. Real blessings. Incredible blessings every day. And, you know, sometimes I get so fixated on how difficult some things are for me.

The wrinkles in my life, the hard things and the upsets, that I stop seeing that there is real blessing in the very ordinary things of my life. And these blessings are in Christ.

[30 : 15] If we neglect Christ, then we'll be neglecting our blessings. If we neglect the gospel, prayer, repentance, scripture, Christian community, then we're neglecting the blessings.

So connect with those things so that you can connect with Christ who is the blessing. Finally, I just want to mention your destiny. Our ultimate destination in life is to appear one day before God.

And just as Jesus had to at Golgotha. He wasn't able to appear before God as his father then. He appeared before God as his judge. And that's what will define our existence ultimately is that one day we will appear before God either as father or as judge.

Who you are in relation to God is what matters most about you. You will finally either relate to him as a son or a daughter or as the one who will judge your sin.

So what's it going to be? I really want to encourage myself and you to speak honestly to God today about our spiritual struggles, our anxieties and fears, about our final destiny and who we are in relation to God.

[31 : 32] Do we see him as judge or as loving father? Is our future secure in him? Because Christ was abandoned at the cross. Have we trusted Christ and accepted what he's done on our behalf so that we can be sons and daughters of the king forever?

Let me say a short prayer. Lord God help us not to be immune to what this passage unfolds and reveals. May it bring life to some of those who are listening today who have never experienced the life of the goodness of the gospel.

May this great truth move them enough today and melt the hardness of their hearts so that for the first time they would cry out to you that you would be their saviour.

Lord help those who need that this morning and help all of us to grieve for what sin does and for what sin costs Jesus.

But help us also to be thankful that he loved us enough to bear our sin in this way. Amen.

[32 : 41] Amen.