Jesus Opened the New Way

Mark 15:33-47

Key Verse: 15:38 “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

We have studied the crucifixion of Jesus in Mark’s gospel with three viewpoints as the Christ. In 14:53-15:15, through the trial before Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, we saw Jesus as the King of the Jews. According to the book of Isaiah, Jesus was the Promised Messiah who would come as the king of the Jews. In 15:16-32 through the crucifixion of Christ we saw Jesus as the redeemer who gave his life as a ransom for many. Jesus died on the cross in our place. Jesus did not save himself in order to save us. In 15:33-47 through the events on the cross we will study Jesus as the high priest who opened the new way for sinners to come to God. Let’s continue to study what happened to Jesus on the cross and the various responses from the world through his death and burial.

First, one of Jesus’ seven words on the cross. (33-37) Look at verse 33. “***At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.***” Jesus was crucified with the two criminals on the top of the hill. Suddenly the sun began to lose its light and the whole land became dark. It was not the day of the eclipse, but nature responded to the death of the Son of God. Another synoptic gospel added that there was a big earthquake.(Mt 27:51) **And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**) It was written that there were seven last words Jesus said on the cross. This is one of the seven. This outcry of Jesus on the cross was prophesied on Psalm 22:1. “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish.*” This is David’s psalm. But God showed the Messiah, Jesus’, cry in advance through David’s cry. Jesus knew that God the Father would save him and raise him from the dead, still he cried out because of the separation from the Father. Prophet Isaiah said that our sin separates us from God. (Is 59:2) Jesus is sinless, but God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. (2 Co 5:21) Jesus took our sins in his body and died on the cross. Our sin separated Jesus from the Father God. Do you know how painful it is when we are separated? Do you know why people cry out when their loved one dies? We suffer because of separation. We become sorrowful, thinking that we cannot see them anymore. But Jesus didn’t become sentimental on the cross. He endured the cross to the end. Jesus endured the momentary separation for the eternal reunion. Hebrews 12:2 says, “*For the joy set before him he endured the cross...*” We believe that Jesus took our pain and sorrow and died in our place. Still, we become sorrowful when we are separated. Let’s endure the cross by fixing our eyes on Jesus. Let us endure our momentary separation for our eternal reunion. Amen!

Look at verses 35-36. “***When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.” he said.***” People thought that Jesus was calling Elijah for help because he said, “Eloi, Eloi”. They offered a pain reliever to Jesus, but he refused it. **Now with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.** (37) John, one of the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ death, said that the loud cry was “*It is finished*!” (Jn 19:30) Jesus meant that he completed his mission as the Messiah on the cross. Jesus meant that God paid the full price of our sin through Jesus’ death on the cross. The words “It is finished” also meant that Jesus fulfilled all the promises, prophecies and laws written in the Old Testaments. (Lk 24:27, Jn 5:39) With these words Jesus breathed his last. His life on this earth ended at the age of 33. We have studied his life from the manger in Bethlehem, his youth in Nazareth, his teaching and ministry in Galilee and Judea, and now his death in Jerusalem. His life on this earth as the Son of Man seemed to be over beautifully, but sorrowfully. But wait, his life did not end in this way. His death is not the end of his story. New life started from him and for this world with his resurrection. First of all, he rose again in the hearts of the eyewitnesses. Let’s see who they are.

Second, the new and living way (38-41) There were many who witnessed the death of Jesus. The Roman centurion was one of them. Look at verse 39. “***And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!***” A centurion was the chief of the brutal and senseless Roman executors. He saw many other criminals who had died on the cross. He also saw how Jesus died. But Jesus was different from the others. Jesus prayed for those who had nailed him to the cross. The centurion saw Jesus who did not save himself to save others. Jesus did not open his mouth and say even one word to defend himself. He died on the cross like a lamb slaughtered. The centurion saw darkness overcoming the whole land and the earth shook violently when Jesus died. He had a holy fear of God. Finally, he came to a conclusion saying, “*Surely he was the Son of God*!” Above all he was touched by Jesus’ forgiving prayer for sinners like him, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*” (Lk 23:34) Jesus saved one lost soul even at the last minute of his life. (There was a man who was saved at the last minute. He was one of the criminals who was hung on the tree with Jesus. (Lk 23:42-43). So, do not give up to the last minute!)

Jesus opened the way to God not only for the centurion, but for the whole world. Look at verse 38. “***The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom***.” When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The curtain of the temple divided the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. According to Moses’ law, high priests entered the Most Holy Place only once a year with the blood of atonement for his own sin and for the sins of his people. No one could enter the Most Holy Place behind the curtain except the high priests. This curtain was the symbol of a barrier between the Holy God and the sinners. The curtain was around 4 inches thick. The distance between the Holy God and sinners was as thick as the curtain. But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain was torn in two and God opened the way for sinners to come to him freely. God opened the new and living way for sinners to come to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:19-20 says, “*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body*.” In the past, high priests entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of animals for the atonement of sin once every year. But Jesus himself entered the Most Holy Place once for all through his own blood, not by animal’s blood, for our eternal redemption. (He 9:12) Now all people can enter the Most Holy Place through Jesus Christ. Amen! We call this a new and living way.

People of this world seek for peace. But there are not many people who know that true peace comes from reconciliation with God. Around 20 years ago, Missionary Sarah Barry visited N. Korea as one of the charitable group members. She was invited to the Arirang Festival, one of the biggest festivals in N. Korea and there she saw a huge card section named “Peace” with many pictures of tanks, weapons, and soldiers. She told a N. Korean soldier next to her saying that peace does not come from guns and weapons, but from Jesus Christ. Guns and weapons cannot create peace, but fear and hostility. People stored up the wrath of God with their sins. There was a great wall of hostility between God and sinners because of sin which separates God from us. There was no peace in men’s hearts under God’s wrath and hostility. But God destroyed the wall of hostility by sending Jesus Christ who died for our sins. Jesus became a sacrifice offering for reconciliation between God and sinners. Ephesians 2:14 says, “*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*.” Amen! Because of Jesus who destroyed the barrier between God and sinners, we have confidence and freedom to approach God and call him *Abba* Father. Hebrews 4:16 says, “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*.” Still, there are Christians who hesitate to come to God out of fear and doubt. I pray that they may have confidence and freedom to come to God and call his name in the time of their need.

While Jesus was tried and hung on the tree, all of his disciples ran away except John. There were several women who had watched the execution of Jesus from a distance. They were Mary Magdalen, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. In God’s ministry there have been the devoted and sacrificial women of God who supported the Lord behind the scene like these women. We’ll study about these women next week.

Third, Joseph of Arimathea (42-47) Joseph of Arimathea was also one of those who were changed by the death of Jesus. He was a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God. (43) In the past he was a hidden follower of Jesus. But now he didn’t need to hide himself. He boldly went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. He wanted to show his love for Jesus after he died. Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. So, he summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock. Then Joseph rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. By doing so, the prophecy of Isaiah about Jesus is fulfilled in this, *“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death*...” (Is 53:9) Jesus was hung on the tree with two other criminals and buried in the tomb of the rich Joseph Arimathea.

Here we learn the change of Joseph after the death of Jesus. In the past his pride and fear blocked his access to Jesus. Like Nicodemus, one of his colleagues, he did not follow Jesus in public. He was a hidden disciple. But now he showed himself as his follower in public. God opened the way for him to come to Jesus with confidence and freedom. Romans 8:1-2 says, “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death*.” Like Joseph, all those who look at Jesus on the cross have confidence to come to God. Like Joseph, like the centurion, and like the criminal, all those who come to Jesus by faith will receive his mercy and find grace. God opened the new and living way for all sinners to come to him freely with confidence. Amen!