

Mark 15:21-42

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[0 : 00] I'm going to pray for us. It'd be great just to bear in mind as we go through the passage.! Just keep a thumb in that passage.! Page 1022 is just as a bit of a reminder. Or you can keep it open on your phone.

Let me pray for us before we look into it together. Almighty God, we thank you once again for your word, the Bible. And we thank you that you speak to us through it. And we pray now for our hearts as we come to you.

And we ask that you would encourage us, that you'd build us up, that you'd help us to think about you and ourselves, and bless us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I don't know if you've ever had sort of emergency training of what to do in an emergency situation. Or perhaps you might have seen this, the training that goes on, if you're ever, I hope not, if you're ever in a natural disaster.

I hope that doesn't happen. But sometimes you get this kind of emergency training, what you would do if you're in an emergency situation. One of the things that they often say is, make sure you're okay first, make sure you're okay first, before you help out anyone else.

[1 : 19] You even get that on the, you know, if you're on a flight, they always say, don't they, when the oxygen mask comes down, like, attach yours first, before helping the person next to you.

Basically, they say, it's kind of saying, you must make sure that you're safe. You must make sure that you can survive. You must make sure that you can, that you can save yourself first.

If you tried to save somebody else first, you'd be, if you tried to do it without looking after yourself, you'd be ineffective at helping the person next to you.

Example, if you, you know, if it's, depending on the severity of it, if you were in an emergency situation, you've gashed your arm, you've got blood streaming out, if you don't get that seen to you, you're going to, you're not going to be able to help anyone, are you?

You know, you could, depending on how deep it is, you could be under some serious trouble if you don't get that sorted. You won't be able to help anyone. You need to get that strapped up, get it sorted, bandaged, get it all put together so that you can save other people.

[2 : 23] You need to save yourself in order to save others. That is how we think, that's how if you go to any of that kind of training, how you're informed, this is how you need to go about things.

We could be tempted to think that about Jesus, couldn't we? We could be tempted to think, what good is Jesus if he's dead?

How can he save anyone? He's been going around, we've watched his life all the way through Mark's gospel. He's been helping people, he's been doing miracles, just blessing everyone, feeding 5,000 people with, you know, next to nothing.

How is he going to be doing any of this stuff if he's dead? That is what those who killed him thought would happen.

That's what they kind of wanted. If he's dead, all of this stuff and this people that are following, it'll all stop because if he's dead, he's out of the way. What good is it if he's dead to anyone?

[3 : 28] Well, it'll be no use to anyone anymore. Killing him, they thought, is the proof, as well, is the proof that we need that he's not who he said he was.

Because if he was God, this wouldn't happen. If he was God, this wouldn't happen. We're going to be thinking about the last moments, really, the last six hours of Jesus' life.

We're going to think it at three points. We're going to think in ironic mockery, unfair judgment, and then gracious welcome. Ironic mockery, unfair judgment, and then gracious welcome.

First thing is ironic mockery. Ironic mockery. I mean, you look at it, the mockery, it kind of continues from what we saw last week.

We're still on this idea that we brought up last week, this whole, the last sort of hours of his life, what we see is this upside down coronation procession.

[4 : 33] It's not a normal coronation procession. You think of King Charles and the gold and the finery as he made his way to receive a crown on his head.

Here, everything's upside down. It's upside down because he's saying praise to the king, long live the king, hail the king. We don't see that. They say that, but it's ironic.

They don't mean it. And yet, in their mockery of the king, they unknowingly, unknowingly proclaim the truth of who he is. And they proclaim the truth of the gospel.

We see that, the mocking. They offer Jesus, we see straight away, verse 23, they offer Jesus wine mixed with myrrh.

They play roulette with his clothes. That's, in the Psalm 22, that's sort of many years before that's spoken of. They even put a sign above his head that reads the king.

[5 : 33] It is obvious that the sign is intended to mock because at that moment he looks far from regal and royal. The climax of any coronation is when the king takes his place on a throne when he's exalted and lifted high for everyone to see.

And we have that moment here. He is lifted high for everyone to see, but it's not a throne, it's a cross. Once nailed, he's lifted high, crown on his head and a plaque, a banner with his title.

This is Jesus' coronation moment as the king. Not long live the king, but the passers by her, the insults, they shake their heads. Even those, we read, crucified on his right and his left are at it.

The thief on the cross, you know, it's not recorded here. And so even here, we see them insulting him. Even as he's dying, the mocking continues, yet the insults, what's really striking about the insults here is they ring loudly of the good news of truth.

It is ironic. You look at what they say and it's the reason Jesus came that they speak about. It's the good news. Verse 30, look with me. Verse 30, come down from the cross and save yourself.

[6 : 50] Verse 32, let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. And verse 31, right in the middle of the insults, it hits the nail of the gospel, the good news of why Jesus came to this earth, it hits it on the head with amazing precision and clarity.

He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. He saved others, but he can't save himself. That could not be said any better.

They proclaim Jesus' mission, the good news of why he came. He saved others, he saves others, but he can't save himself. That's absolutely true.

At any point, up until Jesus breathes his last, Jesus could have given up. He could have got off the cross, at any point, he could have come down, he could have saved himself. He had the absolute power and authority to come down.

No question. But if Jesus does that, if he comes down off the cross and saves himself, maybe those watching would see and believe, wow, he must be God if he can do that.

[7 : 59] Really impressive. But if he'd have done that, he wouldn't have been able to save anyone else. He wouldn't have been able to save any of them and he wouldn't have been able to save any of us.

Let me tell you a story. A story of a soldier, World War II soldier, Private Willingham. Private Willingham was one of 10,000 British and Polish paratroopers dropped into the Netherlands to try and capture and sort of hold bridges over the Rhine.

The mission was a total failure. Only 2,400 out of the 10 made it alive. So three quarters died of a ferocious, long nine-day battle.

And at one point, Private Willingham, he was from Portsmouth, he stumbled with his wounded commanders through debris into a small house in a place called Annistrat.

He made the way into this house and he made his way into the cellar and he found 20 Dutch civilians hiding from the onslaught.

[9 : 11] They'd been trapped. And so they're in there, in the cellar, he finds them and in the cellar, all of a sudden, the door opens and a German soldier throws in a hand grenade.

Throws in a hand grenade. The soldier's just got there. Throws in a hand grenade. In a split second, Private Willingham makes the decision to throw himself on the grenade.

It meant certain death for him, but it saved the lives of the 20 Dutch civilians and Willingham's two sort of soldier friends who are with him.

If Private Willingham had attempted to save himself, everyone dies. If he tries to get out, probably, you know, even if he tries to get out, he probably would have died as well, but if he tries to get out, everyone dies.

Go sit back there. Everyone dies, but people live, 20 civilians and his two soldiers live because Private Willingham died.

[10 : 15] If Jesus comes down from the cross, he saves himself, but he would fail his mission. His existence is coming down from heaven and becoming a man.

It would have been a failure and there would be no good news. It is Jesus staying, finishing the cross, remaining, hanging on that cross that means he can save.

The reason Private Willingham saved others is because he took the blast instead of others. The reason Jesus saves by his death is where we're going to go next as we think about our second point, unfair judgment.

Unfair judgment. When Jesus dies on the cross, we have this phrase, judgment. judgment. He is judged. He's receiving judgment. He's receiving punishment from God the Father.

Now, I've not been in a court of law, as you might be happy to know because I'm not a lawyer, so the only other reason I would be there is if I'd done a crime.

[11 : 27] So I've not been in a court of law, but when someone is guilty of a crime, the judge hands out a judgment. That's what they hand out. That's what they call it when they hand out a punishment, you know.

And the punishment normally fits the crime. Somebody's done a lesser offense, they might get a fine or they might get sort of community service and it increases.

You might get some years in prison or a life sentence. The punishment fits the crime. lesser crimes receive a lesser punishment than more severe ones. Jesus receives the punishment, the judgment for crimes against God committed not by him but by humanity, by us.

God is the judge in this heavenly courtroom. God is the judge. Jesus is in the dock for the sins, the mistakes and all the mess that we've made. God judges him for our wrongdoing.

When Jesus is on that cross, the living God, actually, what happens as we read through this story is that the living God gives us a sign that judgment is happening.

[12 : 36] He gives us a sign. A sign in nature, you might say, that that is happening. That's what we see in verse 33 and 34. Look with me. At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

Three hours of total darkness in the middle of the day. This is not a solar eclipse. It is God the Father demonstrating that he is judging Jesus in this moment.

Whenever we see darkness in the Bible, it always relates to God's perfect, holy, right judgment at sin. You'll remember another moment where there's darkness, not for three hours, but for three days.

The ninth plague when God is punishing Pharaoh and Egypt as judgment over the nation of Egypt, darkness covers the land for three days.

It's for three hours on purpose. It's pointing back to that. The darkness is a picture, a visual sign of God's holy displeasure, his judgment that he's landing on his son.

[13 : 42] The darkness is, when it goes dark, it is like God is speaking as a visual picture saying, right now in this moment, right now as you see darkness, I am the judge and I'm dishing out the punishment on my son.

I'm judging him right now. It's a sign to those watching and it's a sign to us. We see that Jesus feels the judgment acutely in this moment.

He's been on the cross for six hours, three hours of darkness. He cries out, verse 34, Eloi, Eloi, leme sebikthane, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why have you forsaken me? In other words, why have you left me? Why have you left me to his father? The judgment of God, God's punishment was not only physical, I mean, it's pretty bad, it's terrible, the barbaric torture that he goes through, but it is spiritual as well.

It is, why have you left me? It is desertion. He is isolated. It means that Jesus, what we read in Psalm 22 is what's going on in Jesus' mind as he faces this alone.

[14 : 57] He faces a father's abandonment and his father's desertion of him. You know, that is what Jesus feared more than anything else. That is what Jesus feared more than anything else.

He never experienced this desolation, this isolation. From the beginning of eternity, he had known the most profound intimacy with God the Father. Now he's on his own.

Now he's on his own. And in Jewish culture, it was common for someone with a psalm, if you quoted the first line of the psalm, everybody would know that actually you meant to pray the whole prayer.

They didn't just quote individual lines, they would quote the first line to show, this is how I'm feeling to everyone else. We have that in Psalm 22. What we have is Jesus' mind, his inner thoughts as he suffers.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

[16 : 02] I'm a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me, they hurl insults, shaking their heads. The actions of the mockers are predicted.

My mouth is dried up like a pot shard, my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth, dogs surround me, all my bones are on display, they divide my clothes among them. Jesus is judged, but he's deserted by his father for our crimes against him.

Jesus is treated as guilty. What that means is, because he's treated guilty for things he didn't do, it means that the punishment that we should have on us is on him.

It means that if you put your trust in Jesus, you are actually acquitted, you're acquitted of your sins. That's the opposite of being guilty, isn't it?

If you go to a court and you're up for trial, and at the end of it they say not guilty, it means you're acquitted of anything that you've done. That is what happens to us because the punishment, the guilty punishment lands on Jesus.

[17 : 20] We're pronounced as innocent, Jesus is traded out, and we're traded in. It is a bit of a scandal, isn't it? It is a scandal what we see here.

It's not a fair trade. This is not a fair trade at all because Jesus did nothing wrong, and there isn't really an illustration that fits the level of injustice that we see here.

You might say, okay, let's think of something. How big is the gap of the swap here? Is it like, okay, maybe we could think, go wild, what about trading a £10 million yacht for a grain of sand?

That's quite ridiculous, isn't it? £10 million yacht, how much do you want? Oh, can I give you a grain of sand? That doesn't cut it. Okay, what about, let's go bigger.

You go, okay, what about an island? An island for a grain of sand? What about a nation? What about, I'll give you a nation, and all you have to do is you can trade me a grain of sand.

[18 : 23] You say, well, that sounds pretty big. That sounds a bit, doesn't cut it. Okay, let's go bigger. What about continent? Continent for a grain of sand? Let's have that as a swap. Doesn't cut it.

What about, okay, what about the world? I'll give you the world for a grain of sand. It's not big enough. What about the universe? I'll swap you the universe for a grain of sand. Is that as much as the swap is?

No. It's the creator of the universe swapping himself, not for a grain of sand, but for nothing. It's the creator of the universe swapping himself, and not for just for nothing, for less than nothing.

He'd be treated, not he's going to be killed. He's going to receive less than nothing. It's the biggest trade. There's nothing that maps onto this trade, because it's the author of life, Jesus Christ, being swapped for less than nothing.

It's not a fair swap. But it's what saves us from our spiritual mess, because all our sins are put on his shoulders, and he's judged in our place.

[19 : 39] The living God, because God the Father abandoned and deserted his son, because Psalm 22 is true, it means that we never will be abandoned and deserted.

Not one of his people can ever say that God has abandoned them and mean it like Jesus did. Even if we have that experience and we feel that way, God will always be with us.

Once the swap happens, the living God will always be with you, he'll always defend you, he'll always stick with you and be in your corner, he'll never be distant or hard to reach. because he cut off and neglected his son, we'll never be neglected or cut off.

This level of closeness to God has never been possible until this moment. God is bringing his presence, his real presence of having a real relationship spiritually with him near.

That's where we're going to go. Now third point, God's gracious welcome. God's gracious welcome. Verse 37, we see the moment that he dies.

[20 : 50] With a loud cry, Jesus breathes his last. And then we see something happen at the moment Jesus dies. Verse 38, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The moment in the temple, that moment, highly significant. We need just a quick reminder about the temple. The temple was right in the centre of Jerusalem.

It was the centre of the Jewish faith, where worship happened, where sacrifices happened, where the priests lived. And the temple was ordered, if you were to look at it from a bird's eye view and look at how things were organised, you would see that the closer you got to the middle, in the middle of the temple, it was like degrees of holiness.

It was holier in the centre and as you got out outside the temple to the normal city, it got increasingly less holy, if you like.

The deeper you went inside the temple, because it got holier, the less people were allowed in. The less people. So the outer courts, everyone allowed, the inner courts, just like the priests, especially religiously, and then right at the heart of the temple, you've got a room, the holiest place in the temple, that's called the holy of holies.

[22 : 08] That's how holy it is. It's not just holy, it's the holy of holies. Right in the middle of the temple structure called the holy of holies. And in the holy of holies, only one man was allowed in, and he was only allowed in once a year.

The reason? The reason because God was present in the holy of holies in a special way like nowhere else on earth. Special way. And to remind everyone that they couldn't go in the holy of holies, there's a huge, this curtain that we read that was torn, there's this huge curtain, it's huge.

It's 60 feet high, it's 4 inches thick. I mean 4 inches thick, it's a pretty thick curtain. It acted and it was there as a reminder that they couldn't go in.

They weren't allowed into the holy of holies. To understand, we need to do even more digging about why is that there? Why is no one allowed to go all the way further back?

Well you remember, right at the beginning of the Bible, who do we have? Adam and Eve kicked out of Eden. You might remember, as they're kicked out of the garden, something really important happens. It comes in, you can turn with me if you want, it's Genesis 3 verse 24.

[23 : 16] God says, we read this, this is what happens. After he, that's after God, after God drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the garden of Eden, cherubim, it's just another word for a certain type of angel, cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

The cherubim with the flashing swords were there, almost you might say like bodyguards, bouncers, spiritual bouncers, to say to Adam and Eve, you're not allowed back in here.

If you come, I've got a flaming flashing sword. You're not allowed back in here. Eden's forbidden for you right now. You've been kicked out because of what you've done. So to be near to God, you have to get somehow, get past the bouncer.

The temple, the way, the whole temple was set up to remind everyone of what happened with Adam and Eve.

And it had been that way ever since. The Holy of Holidays is like a mini Eden. God's presence was in Eden in a special way. It's in the Holy of Holidays in a special way. And to make sure everyone understood that, the curtain had embroidered on it cherubim with flaming flashing swords.

[24 : 32] It was sewn into the curtain. The temple curtain was there to remind everyone as they saw the curtain. As soon as a Jewish person would see on the curtain, instantly they'd think straight back everything that happened in Eden.

You do remember you're not allowed into Eden to be with God and his presence because of your sin and your mess. It's exactly the same. You're not allowed into the Holy of Holies. God was in present and you're not allowed in.

It's this curtain, 60 feet high, 4 inches thick, that's torn from top to bottom the moment Jesus breathes his last. You see what the judgment of Jesus is meaning for you in your place?

You see, when the curtain rips in two, God is saying to the cherubim, put down your flaming sword. Stand down.

I don't know, you might have picked up from the language that I've used, obvious illustration. When you were younger, perhaps you were going out and you used to need some ID and venues asked for a bouncer for you to be able to get in the front door.

[25 : 45] As you can imagine with my boyish face, I still do quite often. But the whole purpose was to check. We want to see if you're allowed in here lawfully without the ID, you're not welcome.

You can't get in, you can't get past the bouncer. We have the same situation, but in a spiritual sense, our spiritual identification is full of sin and we're not welcome.

But Jesus gives us a new ID. Jesus gives a new ID that says we're allowed in and the cherubim can check the ID.

And God tells them stand down, put down your flaming sword. You can come back in to Eden. The curtain is torn in two.

The living God is saying in that action, he's saying to each one of us, you're allowed to come and be with me. Come back. Come back and have life.

[26 : 48] Have life and hope and joy and peace and everything that I can give you with new life. If you're allowed in, I've made a way for you to come in and it's free, you're welcomed. You're welcomed in with God's kindness and grace to be with him and know him forever, to know his presence in your life.

His presence is no longer restricted to a building but is available to everyone. It's available to everyone. His presence can come out and you can go in. You can know God.

You can know God. You can have a relationship. You can be his friend. a relationship with the real God through his son Jesus Christ because the judgment lands on Jesus and so he tells the cherubim stand down.

You're welcome here. You're welcome into Eden. Eden of course is just a picture of eternal life. Of going to be with him in heaven.

And so, the upside down coronation reaches its conclusion. The king is crowned and lifted high for all to see. He's lifted high and takes his place as the king.

[27 : 53] It comes through him being humiliated and mocked in ironic ways which proclaims that he can't save himself. He can't save himself because he stays on the cross, finishes the course to save you and me, to be judged.

What good is it if Jesus dies? Well, to those at the time, they thought it was brilliant. We also think it's brilliant.

Not because we've got rid of him. But because he's died in our place to save us. It is the true definition of everything that is good. It is that Jesus as a servant would come to take your place.

It's the most important death, the most important day that has ever happened. because it means we can have life because he chose not to save himself. It means that you can be welcomed in to know the presence of God in your life today but forevermore.

To have eternal life with the living God forever. Let's pray. Almighty God, what you did at the cross is astounding.

[29 : 10] It's amazing that you finished the course under so much suffering, emotional suffering, physical suffering and spiritual, being spiritually deserted, isolated and left.

It's like a wilderness for you and you, you were left. Lord, and I just praise you and I thank you for my own self and for everyone here who has put their trust in you, that you've paid for their sin and that you've said it's finished and that their future is secure in you because you've been judged.

Innocently, you were judged for our sin. I thank you that the curtain of the temple is torn in two. I thank you that the cherubim have been told to stand down and put down their swords because you welcome us in forever because you want to be with us and you give us your presence that we can know you and have a relationship with you forever through your son Jesus Christ.

And so we praise you and ask for your blessing upon us in Jesus' name. Amen.