

Unexpected Suffering

October 25, 2020



Daily Devotionals Introduction

As you read about Jesus in the Gospels, you might see some things that perhaps you weren't expecting. For this 13-week series, we'll open the Book of Mark together and study the life of Jesus—The Unexpected King. During this series, we will gain a better understanding of who Jesus is and what it really means to be his disciple.

As an individual or as a family, use these daily devotionals and reflection questions to connect with Jesus each day this week.

Each day, there will be a thought stemming from our Scripture passage along with 2-3 questions. Our hope is that as we journey together through the book of Mark, we'll be able to come out the other side knowing more about the life of Jesus.

Be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, passages, and each of the questions. If you are a part of a life group, let these devotionals stir your thinking and be the foundation for your group conversation.

Our prayer is that these devotionals, questions, and reflections will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

Day 1

Over the course of this week, we are going to be sitting with some different aspects of the cross of Christ that may not get as much press as some other elements. The key to understanding the cross and what God accomplished on it is realizing how the cross is the climax of the Scripture's story. The cross is where God's justice is brought to fruition. On the cross, Jesus was shamed. On the cross, Jesus won the decisive victory against Satan, sin, and death. On the cross, Jesus is calling us to follow him by bearing our own.

To begin today, take a few moments and prayerfully read through **Mark 14:43-15:47**.

Ours is a culture that loves stories. From *The Lord of the Rings* to the *Star Wars* films to Disney's *Moana*, we crave compelling narratives. The Bible is no different than many of our most well-known stories because the Bible itself *is* a story - a unified story that points us to Jesus.

Like any good story, the Bible has characters, plots, sub-plots, themes, a climax, and a resolution. If I were to ask you about your favorite movie and why it's your favorite, I'm sure you'd say something about its climax. Usually, it's the climax that *makes* the movie. For example:

The climax of *Star Wars* comes when the death star is destroyed and Darth Vader becomes Anakin Skywalker again, leading to freedom for the entire galaxy. That moment helps *make* that series.

The climax of the *Bible* comes at the moment of Jesus' crucifixion when Jesus is given the death penalty for crimes that he never actually committed.

For us to understand this climactic moment in **Mark 14-15**, to fully grasp the meaning of cross, we must first understand the *backstory* of the cross.

That story begins with God creating a world full of peace, purpose, belonging, and relationship (**Genesis 1-2**). This good world that God created was disrupted by sin and led to all kinds of human problems (**Genesis 3**).

Now, work seems pointless, marriages can be painful, parenting becomes the hardest thing on the planet, sickness plagues our bodies, and death seems to get the last word.

To fix things, God chooses a family through which he wants to bless the entire world (**Genesis 12**), but they don't always get things right either.

In the Bible, we read all kinds of stories of people who try to trust in their own way of living rather than God's. Time and time again, this leads them to unfortunate circumstances. The Old Testament ends acknowledging that our world is messed up and leaves us with a question: "Who is going to make right all that is wrong in this world?"

That brings us to the climax of the Bible – to Jesus. The story of the Bible shows us how in Jesus' death, he accomplishes God's plan to make right what is wrong in the world.

Questions for reflection:

- Is seeing the Scriptures as one long story with Jesus as its climax the same or different than how you viewed them before?
- In your own words, how does the cross solve the problem raised in **Genesis 3**?
- How have you seen the cross of Christ bring redemption in your own life?

Day 2

The cross of Christ is the climax of the story of Scripture, not just because it *sounds* like a good story, but because on the cross some astounding theological events took place including God bringing about His justice.

For many, the cross of Christ is about forgiveness alone, but that's only part of its theological significance. To "forgive and forget," as the saying goes, is to misconstrue *true* forgiveness, *true* reconciliation, *true* restoration – which Jesus and the cross are all about.

"Forgiveness is not enough. There must be justice too..." says American Episcopal priest and theologian, Fleming Rutledge.

In the Old Testament, it is said that the Messiah will be one who executes *justice*.

Jeremiah 23:5 says, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

Isaiah 9:6-7 says, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to *uphold it with justice* and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

Then, in the New Testament, Jesus walks onto the scene and boldly preaches that these Messianic prophecies are fulfilled in Him (**see Luke 4:17-21**).

Innately, we long for there to be justice. Instinctively, we know that there is something "out of sorts" with our world. Theologian N.T. Wright makes our longing for justice clear when he writes of our unjust world.

He says, "Innocent people get convicted; guilty people are let off. The bullies, and those who can bribe their way out of trouble, get away with wrongdoing – not always, but often enough for us to notice, and to wonder why. People hurt others badly and walk away laughing. Victims don't always get compensated. Sometimes, they spend the rest of their lives coping with sorrow, hurt, and bitterness. The same thing is going on in the wider world. Countries invade other countries and get away with it. The rich use the power of their money to get even richer while the poor, who can't do anything about it, get even poorer. Most of us scratch our heads and wonder why..."

When something terrible has happened in our world, we know that forgiveness, plain and simple, is not enough. We also demand justice.

Therefore, the cross is not simply about forgiveness in and of itself. Our individual sins along with the sin that lies behind oppression, injustice, evil, and wrongdoing must be dealt with.

For God to simply “forgive and forget” is to minimize the pain that millions of people have endured throughout history. It is to belittle the suffering of people today and underestimate the gravity of what is wrong with this world.

That is one of the purposes of the cross. In Mark, we see Jesus, the Innocent One, condemned unjustly (**Mark 14:64**). Mysteriously, all of the injustice of the world comes to head in this moment.

But Jesus doesn't just crumple up His unjust verdict, throw it in the trash, and condemn the religious leaders and Pilate for their miscarriage of justice. No, He suffers the injustice. He bears His cross.

This leads to one of the purposes of the cross. By suffering unjustly, God doesn't sweep under the rug all of life's injustice. He deals with it. As Paul says, on the cross, God “condemned sin in the flesh” of Jesus (**Romans 5:3**).

Questions for reflection:

1. Where in your life or in the world would you like to see God's justice come about? Write a prayer to God expressing that longing.
2. Read again through **Mark 14:43-15:47**. What are some examples of Jesus suffering unjustly in these verses?
3. Why is it good that God be a just God? How does God accomplish his justice through Jesus?

Day 3

The cross, as a symbol, has disseminated into our culture in numerous ways. Some people wear it as a necklace, others tattoo it to their bodies, while others may get a cross paperweight to hold down the important documents on their desk.

One of the things that often gets overlooked in the myriad of ways that we talk about the cross is the actual historical meaning of the cross. Lost to many in our culture is the idea that the cross was a 1st century torture practice that was reserved for slaves, poor people, or anyone Rome wanted to make an example of.

The cross, in Jesus' day, was a way to *humiliate* someone. The cross was the way in which the Romans attempted to *dehumanize* those unfortunate enough to be nailed to its wooden beams.

Aside from the actual act of being nailed to a cross, crucifixion involved several different aspects:

1. When someone was crucified, they would undergo *scourging* by the Romans. The Romans were excellent at bringing people to the brink of death without going over the edge until they wanted to. Those who were scourged would be tied naked to a post and beaten with a whip of leather cords with sharp pieces of bone or metal attached to cause lacerations in the victim.
2. After someone underwent scourging, the person being crucified would be paraded through the city streets to be mocked and ridiculed by the populous. Part of the idea of the crucifixion was to publicly *shame* the person who was being crucified and to send a message to everyone watching, "Don't do what this guy did or you'll end up just like him."
3. After being scourged and paraded through the streets, the person was then nailed to two wooden beams in the wrists and ankles, which would have caused excruciating pain. Once nailed to the cross, the crucified person is then forced to be his own executioner. The cross was a death penalty that caused people to die due to *asphyxiation*, not necessarily the scourging and nailing itself.

When Jesus went to the cross, he was scourged, paraded through the streets, and hung on a cross to die. Jesus willingly and purposefully allowed himself to be *humiliated* so that he could show true solidarity with everyone enslaved to sin.

As one scholar says, "No other mode of execution would have been commensurate with the extremity of humanity's condition under sin." Jesus voluntarily died a slave's death so that we might be freed from being enslaved to sin itself.

Questions for reflection:

1. Read and meditate on **Matthew 27:15-54**. Underline the different actions that people did to Jesus throughout this section of Scripture (i.e. underline the phrases that say Jesus was “scourged,” “mocked,” etc.)
2. How does God voluntarily and purposefully undergoing humiliation for the sake of the world shape how you think about your relationship to Him? What does this reveal to you about His character?
3. Write a prayer to God expressing your thoughts and feelings after sitting with this aspect of the cross.

Day 4

As we have pointed out through the gospel of Mark series, the word “gospel” literally means “good news” and comes from the Greek word “euangelion.”

Central to the idea of the gospel is the idea of Jesus’ kingship. In Mark’s account of Jesus’ life and ministry, he tells us that, “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” (**Mark 1:14-15**).

In the New Testament, the cross is the point in which Jesus becomes King over all of creation.

Just like servants of the Roman emperors would go out proclaiming, “Octavian has won! Nero has won! Domitian has won the victory!”, followers of Jesus proclaim because of the death and resurrection of Jesus that “Jesus has won! Jesus has won! Jesus has defeated Satan, sin, and death! We are free!”

Paul makes this connection between Jesus’ death and Jesus’ kingship in his letters.

Take a look at **Romans 1:1-6** and **Philippians 2:5-11** and note how Paul relates the kingship of Jesus to Jesus’ work on the cross (Side Note: phrases like “Son-of-God-in-power” and “Lord” are kingly titles).

Jesus’ work on the cross and his resurrection led Paul to exclaim to other followers of Jesus, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the *victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ” (**1 Corinthians 15:57**).

In Mark’s gospel account of Jesus’ crucifixion, he is adamant to point out that through Jesus’ work on the cross, he becomes our King. I’m not sure how many times you noticed it, but over and over again Mark, through his characters, has them remark that Jesus is “King of the Jews” (**Mark 15:9, 12, 18, 26, 32**). The Roman centurion exclaims that Jesus is “the Son of God” (**Mark 15:39**). Finally, we hear it from Jesus Himself when asked if He is the Messiah by the High Priest (**Mark 14:61**) and Jesus responds “I am.”

Somehow, some way, Jesus, on the cross, becomes King. Now, with Him ruling, the mess we made will be mopped up, evil will finally be dealt with, and God’s Kingdom will overcome the principalities and powers.

Questions for reflection:

1. Have you ever connected Jesus’ death to His being enthroned as King? How is this similar or dissimilar to how you have thought about Jesus’ work on the cross before?
2. In Mark’s account of Jesus’ life, what theological meaning does he give to Jesus’ death through his narrative?
3. What percentage would you put on the amount of surrender you have to King Jesus in your life? What would it take for you to bump that percentage up 1-2%? 10%?

Day 5

Everything changed for me the summer after my senior year in high school. I attended a conference where the speaker presented the Gospel and my life changed forever.

It was at that time that I often tell people, “God tore me down and started building me back up.” The Holy Spirit got my attention and I never wanted to live the same way again.

I can’t remember what the speaker at that conference talked about, but what I do know is that he said something about Jesus, something about the cross, and something about how Jesus took what I deserved on Himself. I deserved condemnation. I deserved death. My sin should have placed *me* on the cross, but Jesus took my place.

This might be the most popular way to look at the cross, but it’s always good to sit in and reflect on this *because* of our familiarity. So, for today’s devotion, let’s sit in that reality.

Prayerfully read Mark 15:6-15.

LISTEN: Read the passage. Sit quietly for a moment before you begin. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak and show you what the Lord wants for you in this passage. Mark words or phrases that stand out as you read.

LINGER: Read the passage again out loud. Are the same words or phrases you marked the first time still standing out? Write them down. How do these words or phrases apply to your life right now?

LEARN: As you read the text for a third time, ask yourself, “How is God inviting me to respond? What does He want me to be learning from this?” Write out what comes to mind.

LIVE: Read the passage one last time and answer these questions:

- Why is God showing me this now?
- What does this mean for my life?
- What needs to change in my life?
- What does this teach me about the character of God?