

Jesus the Christ paid the penalty for the sins of God's people; rejoice in God and put your faith in him Mark 15:21-39

Introduction and Context

- For an extensive discussion of the historical background to the Gospel of Mark, see the sermon outline written for Mark 1:1-13.
- Mark 15:21-39 is part of the third and final section of Mark's Gospel. Garland has labelled this section as Jesus in Jerusalem – The temple, the cross and the resurrection (Mark 11:1-16:8)¹.
- In this final section of the Gospel, Jesus no longer avoids the crowds or maintains secrecy. He teaches publicly in the temple where everyone can see him and where he is confronted with opponents (Mark 11-12). Those who dislike Jesus, are jealous of his popularity and wish to have him killed (Mark 11:18, Mark 12:7, Mark 14:1). After spending time in the temple, Jesus then moves to the Mount of Olives, where he predicts the destruction of the temple and then gives his disciples on instructions on what to do during the time leading up to its destructions and how it relates to the return of Christ (Mark 13).
- Mark 15:21-39 can be considered as the culmination of events which began already in Mark 14:
 - 14:1-11 = A woman's act of supreme devotion to Jesus is sandwiched between the murderous conspiracy of the high priests and teachers of the law. To them, Jesus' death is a means of advancing their own power, plans and reputation (Mark 14:1-2, 10-11) whereas for the woman, Jesus' death is precious (Mark 14:3, 8). She anoints him for his burial because she considers him to be of inestimable worth. Interestingly, the chief priests and scribes did not want Jesus to be arrested and killed during the Passover feast (Mark 14:1).
 - 14:12-25 = Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples is divided into three scenes; the preparations for the supper (14:12-16), Jesus' words at the meal predicting his betrayal by one of the twelve (14:17-21) and Jesus' interpretation of the meaning of his death using the bread and the cup of wine (14:22-25). In each of these scenes Jesus demonstrates his foreknowledge of what will happen to him. He knew that the disciples will find a man carrying a jar of water who will lead them to the place where they can prepare for the meal (Mark 14:13). He knew that one of his disciples planned on betraying him (Mark 14:18-20). John's Gospel tells us that Jesus actually had a hand in exposing Judas and forcing him to act much sooner than what he had planned (John 13:26-27). Notice how the chief priests didn't want to arrest and kill Jesus during the feast (Mark 14:1-2), but Jesus, by exposing Judas, forces them to do exactly that. In all these events, we see that Jesus' death is not some tragic miscarriage of justice. His death is the fulfilment of God's predetermined plan in Scripture (14:21). His death must also take place during the Passover Festival so that the disciples will realise that he is the true Passover lamb (Mark 14:22-25).
 - 14:26-52 = After the Supper, Jesus and his disciples return to the Mount of Olives. Once again, Jesus shows his foreknowledge of events. He predicts that the Shepherd will be struck and the sheep will scatter (Mark 14:27). The disciples are offended that Jesus thinks they will abandon him, but sadly, his words will come true (Mark 14:50). Yet, Jesus also once again promises that

¹ Garland, 2015: p147.

he will be resurrected (Mark 14:28)². Knowing that he is about to face the burden of God's wrath, Jesus spends his final few moments of peace and quiet in prayer (Mark 14:32-42). He realises the immensity of what he will do on the cross, and it overwhelms his soul to the point of death (Mark 14:34). He expected his disciples to stay awake so that they might encourage him (Mark 14:32-34), but they fall asleep. They clearly do not think Jesus is in any great danger. After finishing with his prayer, Jesus announces that the time of his betrayal has come (Mark 14:41). Judas arrives with a small army (Mark 14:43) but Jesus rebukes him, because he is not leading a political rebellion (Mark 14:48-49).

- 14:53-72 = Jesus is led to the high priest whilst Peter follows from a safe distance (Mark 14:53-53). Mark tells us about Jesus' testimony before the Sanhedrin and Peter's denial in the courtyard. We are meant to understand that just as Jesus boldly acknowledges that he is the Christ (Mark 14:61-62), Peter is busy denying Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). Jesus stays silent whilst he is being falsely accused (reminiscent of Isaiah 53:7) and he ensure that he is condemned only for the truth of who he is (Mark 14:62). Even though the Sanhedrin considers Jesus' words to be blasphemous, it is true that he is the Christ. When asking him for a prophecy (Mark 14:65), it is ironic since Christ has already repeatedly prophesied regarding his death (Mark 10:33-34). In contrast to Jesus, Peter is unwilling to testify before a servant girl. Instead of denying himself, he denies Jesus (Mark 8:34-35 contrasted with Mark 14:71).
- Mark 15:1-20 = It appears as if the Jewish high priests, in an attempt to make sure Jesus is killed, substitute the charge of blasphemy for political insurrection. They tell Pilate that Jesus is claiming to be a king, causing Pilate to think he is guilty of a crime against the sovereign power of Rome. According to the historian Tacitus, the Romans considered any king not appointed by them to be a threat. Jesus does not directly admit to having claimed to be a king (Mark 15:2), his comment appears to rather have the meaning 'Whatever you say.' That's why Pilate is surprised that he is not defending himself (Mark 15:3-5). It's clear that Pilate realises that the Jewish leaders are trying to have Jesus killed on trumped up charges, and therefore he tries to have Jesus released (Mark 15:9-10). However, his plan backfires as the Jewish leaders inspire the crowds to ask for Barabbas (Mark 15:11). Pilate, in his desire to please the crowd and maintain peace, is then forced to have Jesus crucified (Mark 15:13-15). Jesus is then flogged by the Roman soldiers, who also mock him and spit on him (Mark 15:16-20, compare with Isaiah 50:6).
- In a very short space of time (Mark 14:1-15:20), Jesus has gone from being anointed to being led out for crucifixion. None of these events have taken place outside of God's foreknowledge and plan.

Form and Structure

- The Gospel of Mark was written to help us understand who Jesus is, what Jesus came to do and how we should respond to Jesus. For more information about the overall form and structure of this Gospel, see the sermon outline written for Mark 1:1-13.
- In Mark 15:21-39 we come to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Suffering and death is part of what Jesus came to do (Mark 8:31). He does so in order to free God's people from the penalty of sin (Mark 10:45). Jesus' crucifixion will also be the moment where someone finally confesses that Jesus is the 'Son of

² This will be the fifth time in the Gospel that Jesus has predicted his resurrection. See also Mark 8:31, 9:9, 9:31 and 10:34.

God.’ In Mark 1:1 we were told that the Gospel is about Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. The first time that someone realised the identity of Jesus was in Mark 8:29, when Peter confessed that he is the Christ. This confession did not however, include the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. With the confession of the Roman centurion (Mark 15:39), Jesus is recognised to be the Son of God as testified by the Father with his baptism and transfiguration (1:1, 9:7), acknowledged before the Jewish leaders (14:61-62) and confessed by demons (1:24; 3:11; 5:7)³.

Exposition

21-27: *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 the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. side.*

▪ **Who was Simon?**

Simon was a Jew on his way to the city for the Passover celebrations⁴. He came from Cyrene, a town in Libya and thus quite far away from Jerusalem. He is identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus, presumably because they were known to the people when Mark wrote his Gospel. It is possible, that the Rufus mentioned by Mark is the same Rufus mentioned by Paul in Romans (Romans 16:13). It appears as if some people from Cyrene were among the first Christian believers at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). In addition, some believers from Cyrene fled Jerusalem following the death of Stephen (Acts 7) and began sharing their faith in Antioch. Acts 13:1 mentions Lucius of Cyrene as one of the teachers of the Christians in Antioch.

▪ **Why did Simon have to carry Jesus’ cross?**

Before Jesus was led away to be crucified, he was flogged by the Roman soldiers (Mark 15:15). Being flogged means Jesus was whipped with leather cords that had pieces of bone or metal tied in them that would rip the flesh off one’s back⁵. As a result of this, Jesus back would be lacerated and he would be in a lot of pain. Depending on the severity of the flogging which he received, this would explain why he was not strong enough to carry his own cross and why the Roman soldiers forced Simon to do so. Although Jesus started out carrying his cross (John 19:17) the pain caused by the heavy beam and his weakness following the beatings he received meant he did not have the physical strength to continue carrying the cross⁶. Normally condemned men carried the crossbeam to the site of the crucifixion where it was then fastened to a vertical beam already firmly fixed in the ground⁷.

▪ **Where was Golgotha?**

Golgotha is a transliteration of an Aramaic word meaning “skull.” The precise location of this place is uncertain but it was certainly outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem, presumably next to a

³ Stein, 2008: p720.

⁴ Blight, 2014: p304.

⁵ McLaren, 2017: p1590-1591.

⁶ Blight, 2014: p304.

⁷ Garland, 2015: p171.

main road so that the bodies of the criminals being crucified could be easily seen by all passers-by. The traditional site of the crucifixion is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, located outside the city walls (Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:35–36; Hebrews 13:12)⁸.

- **Who offered him wine mixed with myrrh and why?**

The wine was most likely offered to Jesus by well meaning women from the city of Jerusalem. This wine was a primitive narcotic, meant to alleviate some of the pain which criminals would experience during their crucifixion. For this reason, it is highly unlikely that the Roman soldiers would offer wine to the criminals.

- **Why did Jesus refuse to drink the wine?**

In Mark 14:25, Jesus told his disciples that he would not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the day when he drinks it new in the kingdom of God. Presumably, Jesus refused to drink from this wine because he does not want to dull the pain. Jesus chooses to scorn the pain and drink instead the whole cup of suffering that God has given to him (Mark 10:38; 14:36)⁹.

- **How did crucifixion work?**

Details regarding Jesus' crucifixion are related sparingly by Mark in order to focus attention on the theological significance of Jesus' death. Mark's early readers would have known the pains and horrors of crucifixion where we do not today. Crucifixion was a method of capital punishment in which the victim was tied or nailed to a large wooden beam and left to hang, perhaps for several days, until eventual death from exhaustion and asphyxiation¹⁰. From John 20:25, it seems clear that Jesus was nailed to the cross (see also Psalm 22:16). A nail would be driven through his hands or wrists and also through his ankles. The victim would then hang on the cross, pulling himself up to take each breath until he ran out of energy and suffocated.

Crucifixion was reserved for the lowest of the low. For people who had no rights or status. As a method of execution it was designed to humiliate and degrade as well as kill.

- **Who cast lots for his clothes and why?**

The Roman soldiers cast lots for his clothes (see also Psalm 22:18). They are the ones who crucified him. Jesus' clothes likely included a robe, a long T-shirt-like garment called a tunic, a cloth belt, sandals and perhaps a head covering¹¹.

- **When was the third hour?**

In that time, the hours were counted according to daybreak. If sunrise was normally around 06:00, then the third hour refers to the third hour after sunrise, most likely around 09:00.

- **Why was there a written notice above his head?**

The charge on which a person was condemned was often written on a placard and hung around his neck. In Jesus's case, it was nailed to his cross (John 19:19). All four Gospels record the words differently (compare Matthew 27:37; Luke 23:38; John 19:19), possibly because the inscription was trilingual (John 19:20). THE KING OF THE JEWS ironically proclaimed the truth about Jesus. He was

⁸ McLaren, 2017: 1591.

⁹ Garland, 2015: p172.

¹⁰ Asphyxiation is where you suffocate to death as a result of a lack of oxygen/inability to breathe.

¹¹ Blight, 2004: p306.

the Christ. But it also shows the criminal charge according to which he was killed. For the Romans, he was considered a political opponent.

28-32: *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 from the cross and save yourself!"

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 Christ, 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

- **Who are those that passed by?**

Since the crucifixion took place in public, the ones who pass by are most likely ordinary people on their way to and from work and other errands. They may be members of the Sanhedrin or court attendants who had been privileged to sit in on the hearings/trial of Jesus¹². The mockery of Jesus by the passers-by (and others) recalls the words of Psalm 22:7.

- **When did Jesus talk about destroying the temple and rebuilding it?**

This allegation was also mentioned during Jesus' trial (Mark 14:58). We do not find Jesus saying these words in Mark's Gospel but they are recorded by John (John 2:13-25). In Mark's Gospel, there is one incident in Mark 11:17 where Jesus alludes to Jeremiah 7:11, which appears in a context that threatens the destruction of the temple. He also told an allegory in the hearing of the chief priests, teachers of the law and elders about wicked tenants who would be destroyed (Mark 12:1-12). In that allegory, he quoted from Psalm 118:22-23. Finally, in his private conversation with his disciples, he expressly prophesied that the temple will be destroyed (Mark 13:1-2).

Jesus' death does in effect destroy the temple made with hands and becomes the foundation for a new one not made with hands¹³.

- **What is ironic¹⁴ about the words of the teachers of the law and the chief priests?**

They do not realise that Jesus has the power to save himself but on account of his messianic mission he chooses not to do so because he wants to save others. The taunt of saving others thus actually expresses a truth. If Jesus was to save himself from God's wrath at human sin, then he would not be able to save others¹⁵.

33-39: *At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice,*

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

¹² Blight, 2004: p308.

¹³ Garland, 2015: p173.

¹⁴ Irony, in its broadest sense, is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or event in which what appears, on the surface, to be the case, differs radically from what is actually the case.

¹⁵ Garland, 2015: p173.

When some of those standing near heard this, they said,

"Listen, he's calling Elijah."

One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

"Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said,

"Surely this man was the Son of God!"

- **Why was there darkness?**

Darkness in the Bible can signify mourning (Jeremiah 4:27-28), God's judgement (Exodus 10:21-23; Isaiah 13:9-13; Jeremiah 13:16; Joel 2:10; 3:14-15; Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9-10) the great day of the Lord (Mark 13:24) and a new beginning (Genesis 1:2; Job 38:17; Psalm 74:12-20). Darkness does not indicate God's absence¹⁶.

Given the fact that Jesus tied his coming death the Passover (Mark 14:22-25) it is best to understand the darkness as symbolising God's judgement. That is to say, the three hours of darkness during Jesus' crucifixion were a visual confirmation that Jesus was busy experiencing God's anger and judgement against sin. This darkness comes at the sixth hour (12:00), the time when one would expect the sun to shine at its most brightest. The darkness lasts until the ninth hour (15:00).

- **How long did it take for Jesus to die on the cross?**

Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate early in the morning (Mark 15:1) so that by the third hour (09:00) he was hanging on the cross (Mark 15:25). He was alive on the cross until the ninth hour (15:00) when he uttered a loud cry and breathed his last (Mark 15:37). From this, it seems as if Jesus was on the cross for a total of 6 hours before he died. This is quite a short time, as indicated by the fact that Pontius Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead when Joseph came to him to ask permission to bury his body (Mark 15:44).

- **What did Jesus mean when he cried out 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'**

Jesus quotes from Psalm 22. He is experiencing what it means to be cut off from God in the place of his people. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21, 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.' Jesus is also busy experiencing the curse, the judgement that sin deserves. In the words of Galatians 3:13, 'Christ redeemed us from curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.'

On the cross, Jesus was bearing in his human nature the burden of God's wrath¹⁷. In his body and soul he was bearing the wrath, the anger of God, against the sin of all God's people¹⁸. The curse,

¹⁶ Garland, 2015: p174.

¹⁷ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 17.

¹⁸ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 37.

the penalty that sin deserves, was being paid by him¹⁹. In his unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, and agony which he endured on the cross, has was delivering God's people from the anguish and torment of hell²⁰.

On the cross, Jesus had the *experience* of being forsaken by God²¹. He experienced only God's wrath and anger at sin during his time on the cross. He had the feeling of being completely deserted by the Father, but this did not hinder him from continuing to be assured by faith that God was reconciled to him²². Indeed, Psalm 22 makes it clear that it was the Father's will for the Son to suffer the penalty for sin (Psalm 22:15, Isaiah 53:6, 10) and we also get the idea that the Father is helping and sustaining him on the cross by the Spirit (Psalm 22:9-10, Isaiah 50:7). The Father has not abandoned him or turned his face away from him (Psalm 22:24). He is sustaining him on the cross. Nevertheless, Jesus is at the same time bearing the burden of God's wrath.

In crying out from Psalm 22, Jesus turns to a Scripture passage that describes his frightful circumstances and his intense feeling of abandonment, but also his faith in 'my God.' The Psalm expresses pain at the thought that God has abandoned one in a time of greatest need, but continues to show trust that God will help and that ultimately he will not be abandoned. God answers the prayer of Jesus immediately to end suffering through death²³. God will raise Jesus from the dead and exalt him to the right hand of power.

- **Why did the bystanders think he was calling Elijah?**

Eloi, Eloi can easily be misheard as 'Eli, Eli'. There was a folk tale in Israel that Elijah would come to help the Messiah in his time of need. Presumably, this is what some of the people were expecting. If he really was the Christ then Elijah would come to his aid. The people did not realise that in the person of John the Baptist, Elijah had figuratively already come (see Mark 9:12-13). John the Baptist performed the same kind of ministry as what Elijah performed.

- **Why does Jesus shout just before he dies?**

The loud shout indicated the moment of Jesus death. He dies with an unusual show of strength. A shout of victory that anticipated the triumph of the resurrection. A cry of victory²⁴.

- **What is significant about the curtain temple being torn?**

There were two curtains at the Jewish Temple. One curtain separated the Temple court from the courtyard and would be the most visible. This outer curtain had heavenly imagery embroidered on it²⁵. The other curtain separated the innermost holy of holies from the rest of the Temple. This inner curtain is described in Exodus 26:31-33, 35.

¹⁹ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 39.

²⁰ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 44.

²¹ Many Christians claim that Jesus was forsaken by God the Father on the cross. Psalm 22 however, rather emphasises that he had the experience of being forsaken. God the Father did not turn his back on God the Son on the cross. As a result, I am not convinced that the idea that the Son was abandoned on the cross or rejected by the Father is Biblical. This idea is prevalent in some forms for communion (e.g. [GKSA Form 2](#)), but it is not explicitly mentioned in the Three Forms of Unity.

²² See Calvin's Commentary on Psalm 22 and Mark 15:33-39.

²³ Garland, 2015: p174-175.

²⁴ Blight, 2014: p311.

²⁵ Barry et. al., 2012. Mark 15:38.

Most commentators understand that the inner curtain is the one that was torn in two. This would then show that access to God was no longer provided by temple sacrifices but by the unique sacrifice of Jesus. The fact that it was torn in two from top to bottom shows that God is the one who has done it.

▪ **How does the centurion know that Jesus was the Son of God?**

Being a Gentile, the centurion was unlikely to know about the expectations regarding the coming of the Messiah. He would however, be aware that the Roman Caesar Augustus also used the title 'son of god' to refer to himself. The meaning was that he is the unique person on earth in whom the deities were pleased and his authority was divine. Having seen the sky darkened for three hours and the way in which Jesus has responded to his accusers, the centurion has somehow come to realise that the true Son of God is Jesus the Christ.

In the Old Testament, the phrase 'son of God' is used of angels (Genesis 6:2; Daniel 3:25), Israel (Exodus 4:22-23; Malachi 2:10) and the king (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7). All specify a unique relationship to God. The early church used this term to describe the uniqueness of Jesus' intimacy with his Father, tantamount in many ways to a declaration of his divinity. When this expression is used in Mark by the evil spirits (3:11; 5:7) and the centurion at the cross (15:39) it emphasises the divinity of Jesus .

Thus the centurion realises that Jesus is divine, not the Caesar of Rome.

Key themes

- Jesus is the Christ who suffers and dies for the sins of God's people

Indicative & Application

Jesus is the Christ who suffers and dies for the sins of God's people

- The focus of mark 15:21-29 is the crucifixion of Jesus. Specifically, the theological implications of Jesus' death. On the cross we see the cost of sin. In the death of Jesus, we see the penalty that sin requires.
- Physical suffering.
 - Sin requires physical suffering, that is why Jesus had to suffer physically. He was flogged by the Roman soldiers, struck on the head and spat upon (Mark 15:16-20). By the time he started carrying his cross, he is so exhausted they have to get someone else to do it for him (Mark 15:21). Then of course, he is crucified. Nails driven into his wrists and his feet, the cruellest form of punishment known to the Roman Empire. Normally it was reserved only for the most hardened criminals and never for a Roman citizen.
 - Jesus suffered this pain not because he deserved it any way. He was an innocent man, a good citizen who obeyed God's law perfectly. And he really is the Christ, the Son of God. He is not being crucified because he lied about his identity. He is being killed because he is not the kind of Christ which the people wanted. Isaiah 53 tells us that Jesus suffered this pain and death on behalf of God's people. For the sake of lost sheep like you and me, the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all.

- Jesus' physical suffering shows us that the punishment of sin includes a physical dimension. We were created body and soul, and it is body and soul that must be punished with the most severe everlasting punishment²⁶. When Jesus comes to pay the penalty for sin, he must therefore also suffer physically.
- We see something of the physical penalty that sin deserves in our fallen world today. We live in a world that has been cursed by God because of human sin (Genesis 3), and as result pain, hunger, violence, abuse, suffering and broken bones are common to us all.
- The physical cost of sin will be seen most clearly in the world to come. At the end of Mark 9, Jesus talks about a place where the 'worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' A place of suffering, pain and torment. A place called hell. A place so terrible Jesus says, that it would be better for someone to have their hands or feet cut off rather than for them to be thrown into hell.
- For those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, we confess the words of the Apostles Creed, Jesus descended into hell. Throughout his whole life and especially on the cross, he experienced the unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, agony, and torment of hell so that we don't have to. Through his suffering he delivered us from hell so that we can look forward to life in the new heaven and the new earth. Life in a perfect world, where we will have physical resurrection bodies, but where there will be no more crying, our mourning or suffering or pain (Revelation 21).
- Shame and humiliation.
 - There was more to Jesus' suffering than just this physical dimension, there is also a social dimension. Shame and humiliation. Death on a cross is not only an extremely painful way to die, it also very humiliating. The humiliation of being publicly beaten, stripped naked and hung outside the city where people see your naked body as they walk past. The humiliation of friends and family abandoning you, watching from afar as you die condemned with criminals. Hanging on the cross, Jesus is completely alone. The object of hatred, shame and isolation
 - Jesus did not deserve this shame and humiliation anymore than what he deserved to suffer physical pain. He was the blessed man who walked in God's ways. According to Psalm 119:5 no one who walks in God's ways will be put to shame. He suffered shame and humiliation not because he deserved it, but because he was paying the penalty for our sin.
 - We see something of the social cost of sin in our world today. One of the consequences of our rejection of God is that our world is full of relational pain and breakdowns. We struggle to get on with friends and family. In our wider society, racial abuse, hatred and a general disregard for the welfare of others is common. By nature we hate our neighbours (Titus 3:3)²⁷.
 - The true social cost of sin will be seen most clearly only in hell. Often people joke about going to hell – all friends will be there, it will be fun and games compared to the boredom of singing songs in heaven. But hell is a place of total social breakdown. A place of shame and humiliation. A place of loneliness and isolation. There will be no love and friendship, just the ridicule, the hatred and the cruelty similar to what Jesus experienced.
 - For those who trust in Jesus Christ, we do not have to fear that we will have to suffer all the shame and humiliation sin deserves because Jesus suffered shame and humiliation for us. The

²⁶ See Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer #10 and #11.

²⁷ See Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 2.

social cost of our sin has been paid by him. As a result, We can look forward to the new creation, being part of a new family (1 John 3:1-3). The book of Revelation (Chapter 21-22) speaks of a city where God's people will dwell in love, harmony and peace. A city where nothing impure or shameful will be allowed to enter (Revelation 21:27). We will enjoy honour and glory because Christ has suffered our shame and humiliation.

- Spiritual suffering.

- In the ninth hour after sunrise, 15:00 the afternoon, we read in verse 34, Jesus cried out with a loud voice 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' The sky was darkened, Jesus was busy experiencing the full wrath of God against the sins of God's people.
- Jesus was bearing in his human nature the burden of God's wrath²⁸. In his body and soul he was bearing the anger of God against the sin of all God's people²⁹. The curse that sin deserves, eternal punishment of body and soul, was being paid by him³⁰.
- We cannot grasp the depths of Jesus' pain and anguish on the cross. He suffered, just for the unjust, both his body and his soul, in such a way that he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"³¹ He had the experience of being completely deserted by the Father as he bore the burden of God's wrath. In the words of Psalm 22:15, 'his soul was laid in the dust of death.'
- Jesus did not suffer God's wrath and anger against sin because he deserved it. He alone was the blessed man who walked in God's ways (Psalm 1). He was giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Through his death he was paying for the sins of all God's people.
- The glorious promise of the Gospel is that because Jesus has suffered for us, we don't have to. We can be forgiven by God, we don't have to be forsaken and abandoned by him. We don't have to face the burden of his wrath against our sin. The penalty of our sin has been dealt with in full. The curtain of the temple has been torn in two from top to bottom. The way into God's presence has been opened wide. There is no longer any need for priests, temples or sacrifices. All those who trust in Jesus can now enjoy fellowship with God through his Spirit. We can look forward to the day when we will dwell with God in his presence for all eternity (Revelation 21).

Confessional control

The Bible's teaching regarding the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ is summarised in our confessions:

[Heidelberg Catechism](#) Lord's Day 4, 6, 11, 15 and 16 all have some bearing on the death of Jesus Christ.

[Belgic Confession](#) Articles 19, 20 and 21 are also relevant.

The second main point of doctrine from the [Canons of Dort](#) also explains the meaning of Christ's death and how believers are redeemed through it.

²⁸ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 17.

²⁹ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 37.

³⁰ Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 39.

³¹ See Belgic Confession Article 21

Sermon suggestions

Theme

- Jesus the Christ paid the penalty for the sins of God's people; rejoice in God and put your faith in him

Goal

- In keeping with the goal of Mark's Gospel, your sermon must answer the question, 'Who is Jesus?' and 'Why did he come?'. In the crucifixion of Jesus Christ you must explain that this was the work which the Messiah came to do, suffering, death and resurrection. The focus of the crucifixion of Jesus is on what he achieved through his death on the cross. You must be very clear that Jesus' death was payment for the sins of God's people.

One God in three persons:

- What does Mark 15:21-39 reveal about who God is (Father)?
 - From this passage, we learn that God is just. He does not allow sin to go unpunished. He requires that sin committed against the most high majesty of God must also be punished with the most severe, that is everlasting, punishment of body and soul³².
 - We also learn that God is merciful. Instead of punishing his people, he punishes his Son, Jesus Christ. God did not have to show us mercy, there is nothing which obligates him to make atonement for our sin. The fact that Jesus Christ willingly chose to endure such suffering for the sake of sinful people and for the glory of God the Father, speaks to a love that is much greater than anything we can imagine.
- What does Mark 15:21-39 reveal about what God does in my place and on my behalf (Son)?
 - This passage draws our attention to the suffering of Jesus. He bore the burden of God's wrath in his human nature. In body and soul, he bore the punishment which my sin deserves. He suffered physically and spiritually on the cross so that those who believe in him don't have to.
- What does Mark 15:21-39 reveal about what God does in me and through me (Holy Spirit)?
 - God the Holy Spirit is the one who opens my blind eyes so that I can realise who Jesus Christ truly is (Mark 15:39) and what he has done for me. This realisation encourages me to rejoice in God and to put my faith in Jesus Christ.

Suggested sermon outline

I Introduction

Was Jesus' death just a tragic end to a promising life? [Talk about the many wonderful things Jesus did and how good it would have been if he lived on earth for longer so that he could do more wonderful things]

Jesus' death is celebrated by Christians [Talk about how churches are built in the shapes of crosses, how the Gospels all focus on the death of Jesus, how Jesus himself focused on his death]

³² See Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer #10 and #11.

Why is Jesus' death celebrated by Christians? [Talk about it being the moment in history where Jesus paid for the sins of God's people]

Some people do not think that sin is very serious today or that God cares about sin [Give some examples of what people say to excuse their sins etc.,]

Jesus' death shows us that God takes sin very seriously.

- II Jesus' death shows us that sin requires physical punishment
 - A Show from the Bible where Jesus suffered physically
 - B Explain why Jesus had to suffer physically
 - C Warn people that physical suffering in hell will be a reality for those who die in their sins
 - D Encourage Christians that they must not fear any punishment when they die since Christ has been punished on our behalf
 - E Encourage Christians that we can look forward to a life of peace and joy in the new creation
- III Jesus' death shows us that sin results in shame and humiliation
 - A Show from the Bible that Jesus suffered shame and humiliation
 - B Explain why Jesus had to suffer in this way
 - C Warn people that hell is not a place of fun and games, but isolation, loneliness and despair
 - D Encourage Christians that they must not fear shame and humiliation since Christ has suffered for us
 - E Encourage Christians that because of Jesus' suffering we can look forward to a life of undeserved glory and honour in the new creation
- IV Jesus' death shows us that sin requires spiritual suffering
 - A Show from the Bible the spiritual anguish experienced by Jesus
 - B Explain the meaning of the darkness
 - C Warn people that hell is eternal punishment of body and soul
 - D Encourage Christians that Christ has suffered all the punishment we deserve so we never have to fear being forsaken or abandoned by God
- V Conclusion
 - A Mark 15:21-36 shows us that Jesus is the Christ who was punished for the sins of God's people. We should respond to the good news of his death like the Roman Centurion, recognising that he truly is the Son of God, rejoicing in what God has done for us in Christ, putting our faith in him for the forgiveness of our sins.

Liturgical matters

- The most appropriate song to sing during a sermon on Mark 15:21-39 is Psalm 22. Hebrews 2:12 tells us that the Spirit of Christ prophetically spoke the words of Psalm 22 through the mouth of David. Singing the words of this psalm helps us to understand something of what Jesus experienced

on the cross. There are also several direct quotations/parallels between Psalm 22 and Mark 15/Jesus' death on the cross:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| ○ Mark 15:24 | Psalm 22:16, 18 |
| ○ Mark 15:29 | Psalm 22:7 |
| ○ Mark 15:34 | Psalm 22:1 |
| ○ (Mark 15:39) | Psalm 22:27 |
| ○ Matthew 27:43 | Psalm 22:8 |
| ○ John 19:30 | Psalm 22:31 |
- Psalm 22:1-21 can be sung before the sermon and reading from Mark 15. Psalm 22:22-31 can be sung afterwards.
 - A free metrical translation of Psalm 22 is available from [Seedbed Psalter](#) or the [Free Church of Scotland](#) ([audio example 1](#), [audio example 2](#)).

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