

## Evotional – 7 July 2013 – Mark 15:33-41

### **Why did Jesus die?**

In the previous passage we looked at 'how' Jesus died, but today we focus on 'why'. The cross has always been a problem for people – Paul wrote that it was 'a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness for gentiles'; Muslims find it impossible to accept that Jesus did actually die on the cross; and today's secularists find the whole concept distasteful. Would it not have been better for Jesus to have ministered for another 30 years, bringing healing, wisdom and peace, rather than dying? Why did he have to die?

Mark (and the other New Testament writers) present a number of explanations of the cross. Just as a well-cut diamond sparkles because of its many different facets, so the glory of the cross is revealed as we look at the different facets.

Mark gives us seven incidents which help us to appreciate the meaning of the cross:

### **1. Darkness (v33) and 2. Jesus' first cry (v34)**

Jesus had been on the cross since 9am, and at 12pm it became dark for three hours. In the Old Testament, darkness was often a sign of God's anger and judgement (see e.g. the 9<sup>th</sup> plague in Egypt, Isaiah 13 and Amos 8). Unusually, Jesus addresses his Father as 'God' (quoting Psalm 22) and is distant from him. We see that something objective is happening; this was not about feelings but about a change being effected; a curse being lifted, a ransom being paid (see Mark 10:45), as a result of which we do not just feel different; we become different, we are justified, we are made new.

### **3. Confusion (v35-36) and 4. Jesus' last cry (v37)**

Something new is happening. The Jews were waiting for Elijah to come before the Messiah, but Elijah had been and gone along with Moses (see Mark 9); now was the time to listen to Jesus himself. He had come to fulfil the Old Testament laws and prophets, to be the one perfect sacrifice instead of the old daily sacrifices; he came to bring in a new covenant (Mark 14:24) in place of the old; his final loud shout was a victory shout (John 19:30); sin and death were now defeated.

### **6. Centurion (v39) and 7. Women (v40-41)**

Gentiles (like the centurion) were seen as furthest away from God and were restricted to the outer courts of the Temple in Jerusalem; slightly further in were women. But it was a centurion who Mark records as the first person to call Jesus the Son of God (until then, only God and demons had understood Jesus' identity – see Mark 1:11 and 3:11); and women were given special mention and would be the first witnesses to the resurrection. The old barriers were coming down; God was reconciling the whole world to himself in Christ; God's new and inclusive kingdom was being revealed; something liberating is happening.

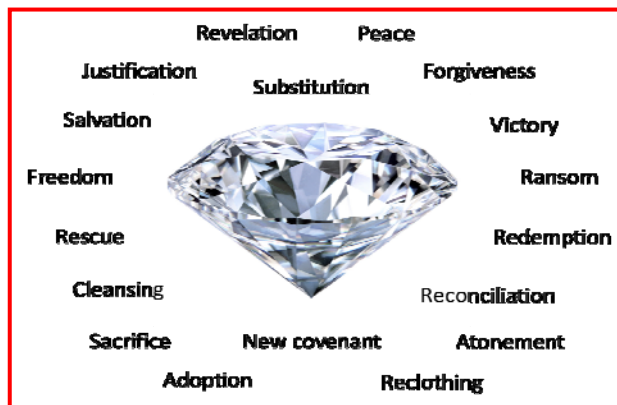
### **5. Torn curtain (v38)**

At the heart of the Temple was the Most Holy Place where nobody could go except the High Priest once a year. In front of it was a thick curtain to keep the rest of us out, symbolising God's holiness. When Jesus died, God tore the curtain from top to bottom; the sequence of events that started at Jesus' baptism where God tore the heavens and sent his Spirit on Jesus (see Mark 1:10) had reached its climax. Sinners can now approach God because we are put right with him as a result of the cross; the old barriers are gone; the victory is declared by God. Something objective and new and liberating is happening.

### **What does that mean for us?**

'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, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.'

Let us also be drawn to worship as we consider the many facets of the cross revealed to us on the New Testament. (Here are a few:)



### **Questions:**

1. Which facet of the cross means most to you?
2. Is there any aspect that you find uncomfortable?
3. If someone asked you why Jesus died, what would you say?
4. How will the cross affect the way you live this week?

### **Prayer:**

May I never lose the wonder, the wonder of the cross. May I see it like the first time, standing as a sinner lost. Undone by mercy and left speechless, watching wide-eyed at the cost. May I never lose the wonder, the wonder of the cross.