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**Mark 15:1-16:8**

**Christ, His Cross, and His Resurrection**

As we all know, and have already been celebrating this morning, today is Easter. And that means a couple of days ago we celebrated Good Friday. Now, you may ask: what is Good Friday, and why do we call it that? Good Friday is the anniversary, year after year, of the day that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, died, and was buried. The day when the worst injustice of all of history was committed: where the only truly innocent and righteous person ever to live, the Son of God Himself, was unjustly beaten, mocked, and executed as a criminal, crucified on a cross. And so again, you might ask, “Why in the world do we call that *Good Friday*?” We dare to call it Good Friday because Jesus died on the cross *in order to save us from our sins and the wrath of God, even death and Hell, that we deserve!* We can celebrate the cross *because Jesus didn't stay dead!* Three days later *he rose from the grave!* Good Friday is Good because of Easter Sunday! Because Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! This is why we celebrate Easter year after year, the anniversary of when Christ rose from the grave! But it's also why - *even more importantly* - why we gather together as the church, *week after week*, on Sunday, the Lord's Day, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, worshiping Him, believing in, and celebrating this gospel! Every Sunday is Easter Sunday! In fact, we need to remember, believe, and rejoice in the good news of Jesus's death on the cross for our sins and resurrection from the grave so that we can be raised to eternal life not once a year, not just once a week - but we need to remember and believe this *every single day of our lives!* It is good and right to celebrate Easter - but it is *wrong* to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus *only* once a year at Easter. If you're not remembering, believing, and rejoicing in this gospel of Jesus *every week*, well then you might not truly understand just how amazing the story of Easter is! You might not truly believe!

So it is good and right for us to celebrate Easter today - to celebrate the gospel! It's good and right for us to pause and look at the biblical story of Easter this morning. But as we look at the good news of the story of Easter today, it should move our hearts to *believe* this good news, more and more, so that our hearts are not content to just celebrate Easter once a year - it will move our hearts to celebrate and rejoice in the death and resurrection of Christ every Sunday; even more than this - every day of our lives!

Therefore, let us celebrate this Easter Sunday by focusing our eyes on the gospel - the good news of who Jesus is, what he has done, and how we can be saved from our sins by simply believing this message and following him! And we see this gospel very clearly from our passage this morning: Mark 15:1 - 16:8.

First, we see who Jesus is...

### **I. Jesus is God's Promised King and Savior (15:1-32)**

Last week, on the anniversary of Palm Sunday, we read an account of Palm Sunday from the book of Matthew for our call to worship. We read how, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, the people crowded in the streets, singing Hallelujah and laying palms branches down on the ground before him, praising him as God's promised King, the Messiah! Yet just a week later, in the same city of Jerusalem, Jesus is publicly rejected, denounced as King, mocked as a charlatan, beaten, and crucified on a cross among criminals. Chapter 15, verses 1-32, show us how this story unfolds. Yet they also show us, that even as the religious and political leaders reject, mock, and condemn Jesus, the truth of Jesus's identity is publicly revealed; even though they mock and reject him, Mark shows us plainly, even through bitter irony, that Jesus truly is God's promised King and Savior.

We see this several times throughout chapter 15. First, we see it in Jesus's interactions with Pontius Pilate. The chapter begins with Jesus, as a bound prisoner, being "delivered... over to Pilate." We see Pilate's interrogation of Jesus in verse 2: "And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'" And he answered him, 'You have said so.' We see it again in verses 6-15. Pilate brings Jesus before the crowds of the Jews, and offers to release for them one of two prisoners: either Jesus, or Barabbas, who was a murderer and a rebel. Pilate starts speaking to the crowd in verse 9-10: "'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up." Pilate presents Christ as the King of the Jews. He also makes it a bit of an easy choice: either free a known rebel and murderer, or Jesus, a man in whom he found nothing wrong or worthy of condemnation. Yet the Jews - the Old Covenant people of God, the ones to whom God sent the prophets, promising that a King and Savior would come - they did not believe Jesus's claims but *rejected Jesus*; they did not receive Him as their King, they did not believe in who Jesus is, and they did not trust Him to bring salvation from God. Instead, they cried for murder.

Then, in verses 16-20, we see the Roman, Gentile soldiers mock and beat Jesus, humiliate and shame Him. They stripped him and put a “purple cloak” and a “crown of thorns” on him, a cruel mockery of kingly clothes and a kingly crown. They spit and strike him, and mockingly kneel down and salute, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (v.18).

We see this again in verses 21-32, as they lead Jesus out to be crucified, nailing him to and raising him on the cross, in between condemned criminals. Not only did the Roman soldiers mock and shame him, but so did the Jews, even the chief priests and religious scribes, the religious leaders themselves! We see this clearly in verses 26-32: “And the inscription of the charge against him read, ‘The King of the Jews.’ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!’ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.” The religious leaders publicly shamed and mocked the very Messiah that had come to fulfill GOD’s promises of a King and savior! Jesus made it very clearly in His perfectly righteous life, authoritative teachings, and miraculous ministry that He is the promised King of God, the Son of David, bringing about God’s Kingdom! He made it very clear that He is the Christ, the Messiah, God’s promised savior! Yet the religious leaders here don’t believe in Jesus - the cruelly mock, despise, and reject Him!

But the suffering, humiliation, shame, and even death of Jesus on the Cross *wasn’t a failure!* It wasn’t a mistake. It wasn’t a win for the world, for the unbelieving Jews, the soldiers, or even Satan. The cross was Jesus’s victory! The cross itself *shows us that Jesus is King!* The cross itself is Jesus’s path to glory, bringing about His promised King, fulfilling his claims and promises! *Jesus’s cross is His path to His crown!* The chief priests looked on and thought that the cross of Christ - his suffering, condemnation, and humiliation - that thought this cross was *proof* that Jesus isn’t God’s King. After all, they thought: God’s Savior, the Messiah, wouldn’t possibly let any of this happen to Him! If He’s truly the King, He would show His power! He would bring about the Kingdom of GOD!”

Yet that’s *exactly* what Jesus was doing on the cross. In fact, *it’s for that very reason* that Jesus would not come down! The cross of Christ wasn’t revealing His weakness - it reveals

Jesus's *power and glory!* Why? Because through His death on the cross *Jesus would fulfill GOD's promises of salvation for His people.*

Which brings us to point number two...

## **II. Jesus Died on the Cross to Save Us From our Sins (15:33-39)**

Jesus reveals that He is the Messiah, God's promised savior for His people, by dying on the cross *as a sacrifice for our sins*, bearing the full wrath of God against sin, paying the penalty that we all deserve! Jesus endured terrible mental and emotional suffering in this process; we've already seen how cruelly he was mocked, shamed, and humiliated! Jesus endured terrible physical suffering and affliction, both in his previous beatings, and in the cruel execution on the cross. Yet that is not the worst suffering Christ endures here. IN fact, it's not even what's most highlighted and emphasized in this passage. Mark doesn't highlight the or describe for us the physical horror and torment of what Jesus endured here; he doesn't highlight Jesus's physical anguish. Instead, what he highlights is the *spiritual anguish and suffering that Christ endured on the cross*. We see this in vv.33-34: "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabacthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" On that cross, the greatest anguish and suffering Christ enduring was being *forsaken by God*, having the very wrath of God poured out on Him, being punished for the sins of the world!

The Jews viewed the cross as a sign that Jesus was guilty *in the eyes of God*, that He was under GOD's curse! After all, the Old Testament Law says, in Deut. 21:23, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." When Jesus was on the cross, He truly was cursed by God! Yet not in the way that the Jewish priests assumed. Jesus wasn't being cursed or punished for His own sins - He had none! He lived a perfectly righteous life, perfectly obeying the will of God in every way! Yet he was truly cursed by God on the cross. Yet He was not cursed for His own sins - He had none, had done nothing wrong! He endured the wrath of God *that we deserve!*

We have all sinned. We have all rejected GOD, disobeyed Him, made ourselves our own gods and decided we want to live our lives according to what's right *in our own eyes*, rather than trusting and obeying God. That's what we do every time we sin! Every time we sin, we commit *idolatry*. Every time we sin, we commit *cosmic treason and rebellion*, trying to dethrone God in our hearts, making ourselves God and King over our lives! We are all sinners, and in our sin, we make ourselves *God's enemies!* Every single one of us *deserves GOD's punishment*; we deserve

God's wrath; we deserve to be *cursed*, judged by God and condemned to death - not just physical death, but eternal damnation in Hell! We deserve the full weight of God's Holy wrath to crash down upon us! And one day, whether you like it or not, whether you're ready for it or not, that wrath is surely coming, and we will all stand before the Lord on Judgment day! If you're not a Christian, if your faith isn't truly in Christ, then *you are under God's wrath*. And don't think that "faith in Christ" simply means believing God exists or believing that these things really happened. As *James 2:19* remind us, even the demons, even Satan, believes in God, and believes He exists, that Hell is real, and that Jesus died on the cross; yet they do not rejoice in these things, they do not love God, they do not *trust* in Christ as Lord and King! They are not saved! If you're not trusting in Christ's grace alone, you are a sinner under the wrath of God and unless you repent you will go to Hell. But here's the glorious news about what Jesus did on that cross: *Jesus bore GOD's wrath against sin in our place, so that we don't have to receive the punishment, the death, the eternal damnation, that we deserve!*

We see this in verses 37-38: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." The curtain in the temple blocked off the Holy Place; it showed that sinful people can't enter into the presence of the righteous, Holy God - not even the priests! It shows that we are sinful, God is Holy, and because of our sin, we can't live with God - in fact, we deserve God's wrath. Year after year, this point was underscored in the Old Testament; the high priest would bring a sacrifice into the Holy of Holies, through the curtain, making atonement for the people of Israel. Yet that sacrifice wasn't good enough to truly atone for sins; it had to be repeated, and the curtain still remained, blocking off God from GOD's people. Yet the second Jesus died, what happened? *The curtain was torn in two!* Jesus offered himself as the true, greatest sacrifice, tearing down the curtain in order to bring sinful people - just like you and me! - back to God! Christ died as a substitutionary sacrifice, offering atonement for His people, securing salvation for all who trust in Him! And Jesus Christ alone could do this because He not only lived a perfectly righteous life, as a real human being, but He is also *the very Son of God!* Indeed, the cross uniquely reveals this to be true! We see this in v.39: "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" As the God-Man, Jesus Christ was able to satisfy God's wrath against sin, offering up his own infinitely perfect, infinitely righteous life as a precious, priceless payment and sacrifice!

On the cross, Christ became a curse for us, to redeem us from our sins! Christ bore God's wrath in our place, paying our penalty, our debt! In his death on the cross, Jesus was bearing GOD's wrath and satisfying it completely, offering Himself as the true, greatest, once-and-for-all sacrifice, laying down his life as a substitute in our place! He bore God's wrath against our sin, so that *everyone who repents and believes this message, truly trusting in Christ alone*, is represented by Christ on the cross!

If you're putting your faith in this good news and are trusting in Christ alone this morning, then hear the glorious news of the gospel: *God is not angry with you anymore!* If you're trusting in Christ alone, GOD has completely forgiven you and will not hold any of your sins against you! You will not face the wrath and punishment you deserve! Why? *Because Christ bore the entirety of God's wrath in your place!* He endured the wrath of God so that you don't have to!

And we know this is true because Jesus didn't stay dead; we know God accepted this sacrifice in our place *because He raised Christ Jesus from the grave!* Which brings us to point three..

### **III. Jesus Rose from the Grave, Defeating Sin and Death (15:40 - 16:7)**

Before we get to the resurrection, Mark tells us about Jesus's burial. And this section is important because here we see the group of women, Joseph, and Pilate all testifying to the fact that *Jesus actually, physically died and was literally buried in a sealed tomb*. First, in verses 40-41, we see a group of women, that followed and supported Jesus in his life and ministry, now witnessing his death on the cross. Then, in verses 42-47, we see another follower of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, do a very risky, bold thing: he asks Pilate to be able to bury Jesus in a tomb. We see Joseph, Pilate, a Roman centurion guard, and the women again all acting as witnesses, giving us absolute certainty that Jesus truly died and was truly buried. They even roll a large stone against the tomb. We're left without any doubt: Jesus truly, physically died. His body wasn't stolen. He wasn't just unconscious - he lay dead, buried in the tomb.

And this sets the stage for the climactic ending! In chapter 16, the story fast forwards a couple days. Jesus was crucified on Friday, just before the Sabbath. Verses 1-2 tell us that, "When the Sabbath was past," and "very early on the first day of the week," these same women went to the tomb, to anoint Jesus. But when they got there, they were met with a shocking surprise: "And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back - it was very large. And

entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him’” (16:4-6).

Friday, these women watched their Messiah die. Early that Sunday morning, they went to the tomb expecting to find Jesus still dead and buried - and yet He wasn't there! The stone had been rolled away; an angel was sitting in His place! And the angel calmed them, assuaging their fears, assuring them that Jesus “has risen” from the grave! There's not other explanation; there's not doubt about it - this is the miraculous work of God! Jesus Christ rose from the grave! Jesus Christ defeated sin, Satan, and even death! God accepted the sacrifice that Christ made for our sins! GOD vindicated Jesus Christ before all, proving that Jesus really is who He claimed to be! The resurrection proves that Jesus really is King; Jesus really is the Messiah, God's promised Savior; Jesus really is the Son of God; Jesus really is the crucified and risen Lord, Lord of all! CHrist rose from the grave *fulfilling His promises to bring about salvation!*

That Sunday morning, on the very first Easter, Jesus Christ rose from the grave and *changed everything!* Just as the sun was dawning on a new day, so a new age was dawning on mankind; Christ rose from the grave and ushered in a new age, a new era, that we now live in! No longer do we have to be slaves to sin. No longer do we have to remain spiritually dead in our sins, enemies of God and children of wrath. No longer do we live under the power and curse of the Law. No longer does death have to have the last word or have power over us! Christ rose from the grave *for us!* Since Christ has been raised, *we can be raised too!* If we're in Christ, we don't have to fear death! If we're in Christ, then you and I will be *raised to eternal life!* The grave couldn't hold Jesus; if we're in Christ through faith, then the grave won't be able to hold us either! Just as we heard from in our call to worship earlier: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

If you're trusting in Christ this morning, then just as Christ was raised, *you will be raised to eternal life with Him!* God the Father accepted Christ's sacrifice in your place! Just has he vindicated and justified Christ in the resurrection, so you are vindicated and justified before all, declared righteous by God! YOU are forgiven, are reconciled to God, you are part of His people, and *you will be raised to live with God in paradise forever!* If we believe the gospel is true and are trusting in Christ as our risen Lord, then we don't have to fear death anymore! We're going to be raised, not to eternal judgment, but to *eternal life in Christ!* And it will be glorious!

But this sure hope is only our *if we respond to this good news with true faith*. Which brings us to our final point...

#### **IV. Jesus Demands a Response: We Must Repent, Believe, and Follow Him (16:7-8)**

This passage - and the entire gospel of Mark - ends quite suddenly and abruptly in verses 7-8. Now, as you look down at your Bible's, you'll see verses 9-19 continuing on, but you'll also see that those extra verses aren't part of the original manuscripts. And what that means is that we have very good reason to believe that Mark, when he was writing this book of the Bible, *didn't write* verses 9-19, but stopped in verse 8. The earliest manuscripts we have stop at verse 8; many of the oldest, most reputable Christians, writers, and ancient historians recognize that Mark ended at verse 8, meaning that, hundreds of years later, scribes that were copying the book added on verses 9-19. Now, why would they do that? My guess is because stopping at verse 8 feels *very abrupt!*

The passage ends with the angel's command to the women in verses 7-8 "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." And boom; that's it. The curtain closes; the screen goes black. It's obvious why scribes were tempted to add more and finish the story. But we have to ask: *why did Mark, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, choose to end this book here, in verse 8?* I think it's because he wants to leave us on a note of suspense, leaving us with the question: what happens next?

The women have just been told that Christ has risen. A heavenly messenger from God gives them a command: Go and tell the disciples that Christ has risen, and to go to Jesus! But Mark doesn't tell us whether or not they obeyed; he doesn't finish the story. Instead, all we're told is that the women were "seized" with "trembling and astonishment...for they were afraid." It doesn't end on a note of faithfulness - it ends on a note of *fear*. Rather than ending with the women obeying and telling the disciples, we're told that "they said nothing to anyone." So we're left wondering - what's going to happen? How are these women going to respond to the Lord? Are they going to believe and walk by faith? Or live in fear and disbelief? Will the disciples respond in faith, and go to Jesus? Or not? That's the dramatic tension, the question, that we're left with as this passage closes, the curtains fall, and the screen goes dark.

The women just heard that Jesus rose from the grave, yet they haven't seen the risen Christ yet (not where Mark leaves us). We're left asking, "What will they do with the glorious news they've just heard? Will they believe and turn to follow Jesus? Or turn away in fear, showing their disbelief by their disobedient silence?" Now, we know how the story ends from the other gospel (Matthew, Luke, and John). We know that the women do believe, tell the disciples, and they all go to Jesus and follow him. So why does Mark end on this note of tension? I think the answer is: because he's shifting the focus away from the screen and *onto the audience*. As the screen goes black, the camera turns *to us*. The question that I think we're supposed to be left with is: *how are you going to respond to what you've just heard about Jesus?* Like the women, we've just heard the glorious news that Christ is risen, and yet you and I haven't seen him risen with our eyes. So the question is: do you believe this good news? Will you turn to Jesus in faith, trusting in this gospel, trusting in Christ's death and resurrection for your salvation from your sins? Will you live out a life of faith by repenting, by turning away from yourself, your sin, the world, and turning to Christ as the true Lord and King of your life? Will you walk a life of faith, by following after Jesus, trusting Him with your whole heart, just as He calls you - just as He *demand*s - you to do? How will you respond to the gospel we've heard today? How will you respond to Jesus?

Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again from the grave! *Whoever* turns to Christ in faith, *truly believing the gospel and trusting Him alone*, will be saved! But that also means *only those who truly turn and trust, who repent and believe, will be saved*. The good news of the gospel demands a response: Christ calls us to turn and *follow Him*. If you truly believe the good news we've heard today, then *live out your faith* by following Jesus! Answer his call and follow Him, trusting Him daily, surrendering to Him as King and Lord in your heart, seeking to obey and glorify Him in all things! We are not saved by works at all; we can't be! But *all* who trust in who Jesus is and what He has done will be saved by grace through faith in Christ alone! And all who have true, saving faith will live not in fear and unbelief, but in faith as they turn and follow Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, let us celebrate this glorious gospel by remembering, believing, and rejoicing in it every single day! Let us continue to repent and believe, to turn, trust, and follow Christ, every day of our lives!

And if you're not a believer this morning, then I leave you with the question: what will you do with this gospel that you've heard today? How will you respond to Jesus? My prayer is that you will turn to Jesus in faith and follow Him! Come to the Lord; confess your sins; believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again, doing everything necessary to save you from your sins, for you to be forgiven, and have eternal life! Ask the Lord to forgive and save you because of what Christ has done and He will! Then, prove your faith genuine and make it public through baptism, as your first visible sign of turning to follow Jesus in a life of faith as part of His people, the church! If you have any questions about this, or about baptism, or church membership, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.