

## Mark 15:21-41 - Why did Jesus die?

Clint Le Page

Main Point – The Lord Jesus was abandoned in death so we would not be

The death of someone we *care about* just feels wrong.

Last month, near Werribee, 24 yo **Natan Mwanza**(SLIDE) was travelling on a bus minding his own business.

Two young men approached him and got into some discussion.

Natan got off the bus, and the two men ambushed & stabbed him to death.

Natan had no police record.

He was called a 'gentle giant', a calm and loving person.

His family had fled the Democratic Republic of Congo and came to Australia thinking it was a safe place.

But his devastated father said, 'he was killed for nothing'.

A tragic, senseless and devastating loss for Natan's family.

Sadly in Victoria there's so many tragic and senseless killings.

Some might say that Natan's death was just unlucky – on the *wrong* bus at the wrong time.

Today we're thinking about *Jesus'* death.

And was he killed for nothing? Or was there some *greater reason* for it?----

Why did Jesus die? And why does it matter for each *and every one* of us?-----

That's what we'll consider this morning.

Today we're looking at this eyewitness account of Jesus' last day, written by Mark, a follower of Jesus.

And we'll consider this passage under **two headings**,(SLIDE) and the first is, **A painful and real death.**

Jesus, nearly 2000 yrs ago, experienced a painful and real death.

He had been arrested the night before.

The Jewish leaders interrogated Jesus based on testimony from false witnesses.

He'd been condemned as deserving death for blasphemy - claiming to be the Son of God & equal to God.(14.62-63)

And Jesus was spat on, blindfolded and bashed.(14.65)

But the Jews needed the Roman authorities to bring the death penalty.

So he's taken to the Roman governor *Pilate*.

And as many of us heard last Sunday, Pilate believed Jesus was *innocent*.

But Pilate was a weak people-pleaser, in a vulnerable political position.

So he gave the crowd what they wanted, and handed Jesus over to be crucified.

We read in ch15 **v15** how Jesus was flogged, which would have torn open his back.

He was mocked and beaten and spat on, *again* (v17-20).

Jesus is led out to be crucified and that would have been by 4 Roman soldiers and a centurion.

Jesus is so weakened by the flogging, blood loss n' beating, he can't carry his own cross.

We're told a man from north-Africa does, Simon of Cyrene.(SLIDE)

Presumably we're told who his sons *were*, because they were known to the church in Rome, and people could speak to them if they wanted.

Jesus is taken outside the city – likely near where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, is now.(SLIDE)

Jesus doesn't accept the pain-killer in **v23**– wine mixed with myrrh.

Nails are hammered through his hands and feet, and he's strung up on a cross.(SLIDE)

We're spared the details but first century people in the Roman Empire were familiar with the *cruel* practice.

Normally people would be stripped naked, and writhe in agony.

Powerless, helpless, humiliated, degraded.

They hang there until they die of exhaustion and unable to breathe, which could take hours, or days.

Jewish historian *Josephus* called crucifixion the most wretched of ways to die.-----

We'll come back to the terrifying darkness in v33 and cry of abandonment in v34.

But in **v37** Jesus cries loudly and breathes his last.

And the centurion, who's familiar with executing people and knowing when they're dead, sees Jesus has died.

As I said, people could sometimes take 2 or 3 days to die by crucifixion, so Pilate is surprised that Jesus was dead in 6 or 8 hours.

And **v44(SLIDE)** confirms Pilate checked with the centurion and *confirms that* Jesus was dead.

And the women in **v40** watching from a distance see it.

These faithful female followers of Jesus, see Jesus suffer, see him die, and see him be laid in the tomb, **v47**. Jesus really died.-----

Come back on Sunday to think about the significance of his resurrection.

### **But next heading, Why did Jesus die?(SLIDE)**

Was he just **unlucky**?

Like Natan Mwanza, wrong place, wrong time?-----

I mean, we heard last Sunday, that Pilate wanted to release Jesus, thinking he didn't deserve death (15.9 & v14. **SLIDE**)

And was it just unlucky that Pilate's political position was insecure, and he didn't want any complaints to Rome, so he let Jesus be crucified to satisfy the crowd (v15).

Is that it? *Was it just unlucky?*-----

Or *was it* because Jesus was a **liar** who deserved it?

When Jesus is hung up on the cross and the people pass by, they yell insults at him.

**V29**, 'You said you'd destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days', where's that now?

Whereas actually Jesus never said he'd destroy the temple.(John 2.19)

**John 2.19** says(**SLIDE**) he would *rebuild it*, talking about his resurrection from the dead, and the church, his saved people, being the new temple.

But many Jews thought Jesus deserved death for his lies.-----

Even for claiming to be the Son of God (14.61-63).

Or you say you're the King of the Jews, but where's your mighty victory and followers? *Why isn't* God coming to help you now?

Some thought he was a liar.-----

Or was he a **loser**?

In **v30** people are saying, if you're so powerful, if you're the mighty Son of God, come down from the cross.

You're not powerful enough to save yourself.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, taunted and shamed by the people, the Jewish priests, and even by the criminals next to him, he seems like a loser

### **Or is he the Lord who saves?**

The Jewish leaders in **v31** say, 'he saved others, but he cannot save himself'.

*Is that true*, or is Jesus being crucified, not to save himself, but TO save others.

I put to you, that he is the Lord who is crucified to save others.-----

Hero's sacrificing themselves *to save others* is a really common theme in true and fictional stories.

In the first **Toy Story movie**,(**SLIDE**) Woody risks his life to save Buzz Lightyear.

But in Avengers, *Captain America rebukes Iron Man* - the flamboyant, pompous, and self-indulgent super-hero, for not being willing to sacrifice himself for others.

But at the end of the Avenger's movie, he does,(**SLIDE**) and people fall in love with him.

Then at the close of Avenger's **Endgame**, Iron Man, Tony Stark, makes a mega sacrifice - of his life; for others, his family and *humanity*.

He gives his life so many others can live.-----

But really Iron Man's sacrifice and that of all super-heroes only points to the bigger story, the ultimate sacrifice ever made, that of Jesus Christ.

The sacrifice of super-heroes are but sparks & shadows of the greatest sacrifice.-----

Jesus had predicted his death multiple times – ch 8(v31), ch 9 (v31), ch10 (v34).

He calmed the storm, he healed the sick with a word, he kicked out evil spirits from people, he raised the dead back to life.

Jesus could have avoided the crucifixion and destroyed his enemies if he wanted.

He went to Jerusalem, intentionally knowing what was coming. It wasn't unlucky.

He could have got down from the cross if he wanted.

He wasn't a loser.

Some nearby wanted a miraculous rescue in v36.

And Jesus could have called on 12 legions of angels (**Matt 26.53. SLIDE**) to help.

60,000 angels could have come to his rescue if he wanted.

So why did Jesus stay on the cross? *Why did he* choose this, why did he choose to suffer and die?-----

It was to save undeserving humanity.-----

Can you see the irony in **v31**?

If Jesus came down from the cross and saved himself, he could not save others.

As Jesus died, it was him, or them; him or us.

Jesus is the King of Jews who saves his people not from the Romans, but he dies to save them from the judgement of God, for *rejecting* God.

Jesus is not a liar, but the Lord.

He is the King who goes to cross to save his people from sin and its punishment.

If Jesus came down from the cross for the Jewish leaders to get their 'proof' and believe in v32, Jesus would not be the King who saves God's people.

But Jesus dies to take the judgement of God in our place.-----

We can know this, because about a week earlier he'd said in **Mk 10.45(SLIDE)** he would give his *life* as a ransom for many.

You pay a ransom to free people from kidnappers or bondage.

And Jesus would give his life, he would die, to save people trapped in sin and facing an eternal death without God or anything good.

That's why in ch15 **v34** Jesus cries out, **(SLIDE)** 'My God my God, why have you forsaken me?' Jesus didn't just *feel* forsaken?

Or just quote a bible verse in Psalm 22 cos it came to mind.

Jesus was forsaken and abandoned by God as he suffered and died on that cross.

The 3 hrs of darkness over the whole land was not some *coincidental* solar eclipse.

You don't get eclipses during a full moon.

Just as during the 10 Plagues of Egypt, darkness was a judgment on Egypt for not letting God's people Israel go free from slavery (**SLIDE-Ex 10.21**).

Now God's judgement upon sin was actually coming down on his Son, Jesus.

The three hours of darkness symbolized Jesus was judged and abandoned by God.

It was a miraculous and cosmic event with eternal & mammoth significance.

He doesn't just die, he suffers hell in our place.-----

Jesus was abandoned by God so all who believe and trust in him would not be.

If you've trusted in Jesus to save you, know this Christian:

In whatever you're going through, you are not alone.

Jesus was forsaken by God so you never would be.-----

Even better than that, Jesus was forsaken by God so we could be welcomed by God.

Jesus took on himself the death and wrath of God that deserved to come on us, for our rebellion and rejection of God.

Our sin, ignoring and disobeying God, cuts us off from God.

And Jesus was engulfed in sin, sin's punishment - death!

Jesus died.

The Son of God in the flesh was separated from the Father to open the way to God, to open the way for us to have relationship with God.

To forgive sins. Save sinners.

And to reconcile us to God.

*More real than* Iron Man's sacrifice

*And greater than the sacrifice of anyone who died to save another.*

Jesus died to open the way to relationship with God.

And to prove that Jesus' death achieves this, look at what happens when Jesus dies in

**v38**... the **curtain** in the temple is torn from top to bottom. **(SLIDE)**

In the temple then, that was a 18 meter high curtain, a 6 story high curtain, torn from top to bottom when Jesus dies.

That action by God symbolized and demonstrated that the way into God's presence, in the Most Holy Place of the temple, has been opened through Jesus' death.

Through faith in Jesus we can come to God.-----

Oh how Jesus must have been powerful and loving Lord.

Strong to stay on the cross and suffer God's judgement.

And loving to stay there for us, to save us, all who rely on him.

This was always God's plan to reconcile undeserving people to himself.

Psalm 22, written by King David 1000 years earlier, acts like a prophecy of Jesus' experiences on the cross.

Did you notice the **connections to Psalm 22?** It's phenomenal! **(SLIDE)**

Jesus' clothes were divided among the soldiers, who cast lots (rolled dice) for them, like in Ps 22.18.

Jesus' hands and feet were pierced when crucified - v16.

He was mocked and taunted - v8. **(SLIDE)**

He was encircled by enemies who speak against him – v12

He was abandoned by God – v1. **(SLIDE)**

But, in the end, the end of Ps 22 will come true for Jesus too. **(SLIDE)**

God will save him in the end, and raise him to life, to God's praise – v21.

And people will praise God because of him, and turn to the Lord because of him, v27.

Psalm 22 reverberates through the crucifixion account.

Jesus was living out the situation of Ps 22.

I hope you can see and marvel at this?-----

So if Jesus died for a planned purpose.

If he died to save sinners and bring us to God, **what is the right way to Respond?**

Psalm 22 said, turn to the Lord.'

But I want to bring you back to Mark 15 for the author describes an appropriate response for us.

**V39, (SLIDE)** When the centurion, who was standing opposite Jesus, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

We don't know exactly what it was, but something about Jesus, what he said and did, and the way he died, made this soldier know Jesus was special.

More than special, Jesus was 'the Son of God'.

Roman Emperor's were sometimes called a son of God – a divine presence shown in their power and triumph.

But the King Jesus has been killed on a cross and this man knows he was God's Son.

This is intended to be a Christian confession, and the climax to the book.

Back at the very start Mark said his book was about the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And now at the end of his life we have a non-Jew declaring that to be true.

And by 'Son of God' we mean Jesus has a unique relationship with God the Father and that he is Lord.

Some walked past crucified Jesus and ignored him.

And that's still what many Aussies do on Good Friday.

Others walked past Jesus and mock him.

Still others said if you come down from the cross we'll *believe in you*.

This centurion sees him die on the cross and he believes in Jesus.

Believes he was the Son of God.

So what is the right response to Jesus' death?-----**(SLIDE)**

Christ *didn't come down* from the cross, but stayed, suffered and died, so everyone who *believes in him* would not perish in hell, but have eternal life.

He is the Lord and King who gives his life to save his people, give us relationship with God.

He dies a real death to give us real life, eternal life in relationship with God.

So confess that he is Lord, and trust in him to save you.-----

**My father, Russell**, died nearly 2 months ago.**(SLIDE)**

And what he shared of his story at his baptism in 2019, was still true in the *days* before he passed.

He did not grow up in church and believed all religions believed in the same God.

When he first *really* learned about Jesus as a 40 year old, he thought he was too much of a sinner to be saved.

But he came to believe that Jesus is**(SLIDE)** the way the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by him.

My Dad said, 'Jesus gave his life to save sinners, and I am one of them'.

Dad knew his good deeds could never make up for his sins.

He knew that going to church enough would never be good enough.

My Dad died, sure that God *would* welcome him into heaven, because of Jesus.-----

Are you sure?-----

If you want that salvation and surety, believe that Jesus died on the cross to open the way to God.

*Trust him*, and God will not abandon you, but welcome you.

Let's pray.