



Mark 15:35–41

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, ‘Listen, he’s calling Elijah.’ 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ‘Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,’ he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And

when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' 40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Reflection

Out of his great love for us God sent his Son to save us from our sins. This is what we did to him.

They first laid their hands on Jesus in the

Garden of Gethsemane, where he was betrayed and arrested late Thursday evening. At the end of his Jewish midnight trial they spat in his face and struck him with their fists, others slapped him, before handing him over to the Romans in the early hours of the morning. At the end of his dawn trial conducted by the Romans Jesus was brutally flogged, deep lacerations scoring his back, it's likely that some of the cuts reached bone. Sometime after sun-up he was made sport of by a whole company of Roman soldiers. Some of them likely had lost compatriots to Jewish uprisings, led they thought, by men like this man. Others were just sick, sadistic cowards. They stripped him, put a scarlet robe on him, pressed a crown of razor thorns down on his head and put a staff in his right hand. Then they bowed down and worshipped

him to the amusement of the whole company. The next time they bow down to him, when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, they'll shudder as they remember this moment.

After the laughter dried up, tired of their sport they spat in Jesus' face, they took the staff out of his hand and struck him on the head viciously with it, again and again. Some thorns would have broken off, many more however would have been pressed deeply into Jesus' head from these blows. Next they forced Jesus to carry the heavy cross-beam of a Roman cross out of the city. It pressed into the fresh wounds on his back. He found it hard to see from the blood streaming out of his head – if you've ever cut your head you'll know how the blood flows. And finally, out of blood loss

and exhaustion Jesus fell under the weight of the wood, just outside the city gates. They kicked him and dragged him to his feet, and forced a passer-by to carry the cross-beam the remainder of the way out to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. Then before Jesus knew it (remember, he was a carpenter from a very young age), nails resembling metal stakes were being expertly driven into the nerve centres in his wrists, and one, precisely through both his ankles which were placed one on top of the other on the vertical section of the cross. The cross was then set in place and the struggle between life and death, between breathing and suffocating, and the excruciating pain, began. This is what we did to Jesus.

It's been six hours of pulling on those nails

in his wrists and pushing on that nail in his ankles to raise himself high enough to open his chest cavity to be able to take a breath, before slumping back down again out of pain and exhaustion until his desperation for oxygen forces him to repeat the process. Over and over again. The Son of God inches toward death in excruciating pain, publicly humiliated and being mocked and insulted from every quarter... that is until the very sun in the sky stops shining and darkness covers the land, as if creation itself is too ashamed of what humankind was doing to Jesus and tried to cover it up. The last three hours have been deathly silent. Something was breaking in the very cosmos itself; the whole world is out of joint. Deathly silence; until Jesus cries out in the last verse of yesterday's passage:

‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)

These words are the first verse of Psalm 22, a psalm written by David 1000 years earlier, a psalm that prophesies in great detail about exactly the events that are unfolding on the cross. People are rightly sceptical about prophecy. Some have accused Jesus of deliberately trying to fulfil Old Testament prophecy. But it is very difficult to choose the place in which you were born and the means in which you will die. Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Isaiah 53 – all written hundreds of years before – speak about the death of the Messiah, and are being fulfilled down to the smallest detail in Jesus’ death. Psalm 22 describes cruci-

fixion, the piercing of hands and feet, centuries before it was even invented. It also speaks of soldiers gambling for Jesus' clothes; pretty hard to engineer while dying on the cross. Psalm 22 even contains the exact words of mockery that Matthew's account records on the lips of passers-by,

43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

In today's passage we see Psalm 69 fulfilled. Some of those standing by and watching Jesus die, most likely Roman soldiers, react to his cry,

'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?'

They misunderstand Jesus. Most likely

it's the language barrier. Jesus is speaking in Aramaic. Above his head, the sign that represents the charge against him is written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Likely mishearing or misunderstanding the Aramaic, 'Eloi, Eloi' has been mistaken for 'Elijah'.

Perhaps out of mercy, perhaps out of idle curiosity, one of them offers Jesus a drink of wine vinegar, cheap wine the soldiers drank for hydration. In doing so, unwittingly they fulfil Psalm 69:21, which reads,

21 They put gall in my food
and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Another prophecy, impossible to plan, fulfilled as the son of God dies exactly according to plan. When it comes to Elijah,

in part they were right, the Old Testament did prophesy that Elijah would return as a forerunner to the Messiah but Elijah has already returned, in the person of the John the Baptist, his spitting image – same clothes, same food, same region – and in person at the transfiguration.

Prophecies fulfilled, the son of God dies, exactly according to plan; at the end, just as at the beginning, on his terms and not theirs, verse 37,

37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Jesus isn't killed. He gives up his spirit. Just as he knew his betrayer, just as he handed himself over in the garden, just as he was silent before his accusers, just as

he offered Caiaphas the words needed to condemn him, just as he did not respond to the charges before Pilate, and just as at any moment he could have called upon ten thousand times ten thousand of his mighty angels to deliver him from their hands – Jesus isn't killed. This is on his terms. This has always been his plan since humankind fell in Genesis 3. Jesus isn't killed. He gives up his spirit.

And in this moment the whole of creation cannot contain itself. The darkness is lifted, bright blazing sun blinds those who are looking on. The earth begins to shake under their feet. Rocks split open, tombs in the caves break open and people are resurrected from the dead, the several storey curtain that divides off the inner sanctum of the temple in Jerusalem is torn, not

from bottom to top, but from top to bottom – the whole of the created order is beside itself at what has just occurred. But more of this in our next talk.

Think & Pray

For now, spend some time thinking back over today's passage and indeed all of the Old Testament prophecy that Mark has been at pains to show us is fulfilled in Jesus. Consider the compelling evidence that this provides for the truth of the gospel; words written centuries earlier, in different languages, by multiple authors, culturally, geographically and historically removed, being fulfilled to the letter in Christ.

You might like to read Isaiah 52:13–53:12 to close. It's written 700 years before Je-

sus and it's amazing; it'll make your spine tingle in how accurately it speaks of his death and resurrection. Then close in prayer, praising God that everything happens according to his good and perfect plan, from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, down to what is going on in your life right at this very moment. Praise him for his good, pleasing and perfect plan.