

Mark 15:25-39

Trademarks and symbols are useful things. They help us to recognise something immediately. A harp will tell us that we are drinking Guinness. Four linked symbols will tell us that we are driving an Audi car, a red telephone on wheels tells us that our insurance is from direct line and if someone wears a cross it probably means that they are a Christian.

The cross is the most well known and immediately recognisable of all symbols and it is at the very heart of the Christian gospel. Yet when you think about it it is a barbaric and painful symbol. I can remember someone once pointing out to me that it would be odd to wear a Guillotine or a gun around me neck so why was I wearing another execution implement.

It's a good question and the answer of course it that it reminds us that Jesus Christ died on the cross that first Good Friday for you and for me. But WHY should God allow his much loved Son to die such a painful and humiliating death and why should he do that for you and for me?

As Jesus suffered and died on the cross two very strange things happened. They were unusual happenings, signs that helped to show what was actually taking place on that first Good Friday. They can help us to understand why God allowed Jesus to die in such a way and what his death means for us.

We are told in our reading from Mark's gospel that as Jesus hung on the cross DARKNESS CAME OVER THE WHOLE LAND which might not be unusual at night but this was the middle of the day. A great dark cloud gathered over Calvary shutting out the light and turning midday to darkest night. That is a graphic picture of what has happened in our relationship with God. There is a dark cloud that prevents us from seeing him clearly and from communicating with him clearly. The things we do, our attitudes and our priorities can form a barrier between ourselves and God.

put up picture of girl

Mark 15:25-39

Every time we disobey God, put ourselves first, ignore his priorities and do things which hurt him we are putting a barrier between him and us. *Ask for suggestions of things that do this: lie, rude, gossip. Lazy, steal - time etc. add layers of mist and then black out.*

These things: disobedience, selfishness and evil, which we call sin cause a barrier that cuts us off from God and stop us seeing him clearly and eventually stop us hearing him as well. In the end the barrier can become so thick that we may not even be sure if he is there or not. *Turn off OHP*

We deserve to be punished for our disobedience and sinfulness. But at Calvary, as he died on the cross Jesus Christ took the punishment for all our sin and failure, all our carelessness and selfishness. He suffered and died on our behalf. The apostle Peter puts it this way "Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.". Jesus carried our sins "so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness"

As he died on the cross our sins were like a great dark cloud hanging over Jesus and separating him from his Father which is why he called out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!" This was a cry of real anguish. It wasn't a cry of doubt. He didn't feel that his father had let him down or failed him But he did feel abandoned! Which for Jesus would have been the ultimate torture.

He had spent his whole life, his whole existence in perfect tune with his Father. They were extremely close, united almost in thought and purpose. To be separated in this way was completely outside Jesus's experience and was, for him, total agony. As Christ died there on the cross he carried our sins for us and was separated from God - in the way that we have always been because of our waywardness and disobedience.

Jesus did this so that the second thing could happen - and that was that as Jesus died THE TEMPLE CURTAIN WAS TORN IN TWO FROM TOP TO BOTTOM (v51) *put up picture* this was

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the curtain that was at the entrance to the holiest part of the Temple called the Holy of Holies. The dwelling place, if you like, of God. Of course God cannot be contained in any one place as he is almighty and present everywhere, but this part of the Temple was kept as the inner room, the holiest place, so holy that the High Priest himself was only allowed in it once a year after proper preparation on the day of atonement.

Jesus' death caused that curtain to be destroyed. Up until now God had been hidden and remote, even from his priests - and no man knew what he was really like. The only way that the ordinary person could communicate with God was through the priest, who was his representative. But in Jesus' death we see God's love for us and we find that the way into God's presence, which until now had been closed to all mankind, is now open for us to come and go as we please. Jesus' death caused the curtain to be destroyed. There is now **nothing** cutting us off from direct access to God. Jesus has removed the barrier as he carried our sins on the cross and **nothing** at all can prevent us from coming to God.

The writer to the Hebrews put it this way: "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" Jesus' death for us on the cross has given us free access to God. We can come to him directly, to the mighty living God! And we can stand before him blameless as his much loved children and communicate with him for ourselves. We are free to spend time in his presence like any child with its father, to bring our worries, our fears, our requests, our joys and our love directly to him. We no longer need a go-between because Jesus has removed our barrier of sinfulness and thanks to Jesus' death for us we stand before God as if we were sinless.

And that is why as he died Jesus shouted out IT IS FINISHED! It is finished. This is not a cry of defeat but a call of triumph. Christ was saying, "It has been accomplished!", "it is all done!"

Mark 15:25-39

Jesus had completed what he set out to do and we are free as a result. Sins that drag us down and bind us have no longer any power over us. They cannot, now permanently separate us from God.

All we need to do now when we sin and fail is to come to the foot of the cross, to bring our sins to Jesus who has carried them for us, for forgiveness and restoration so that we can be restored to fellowship with our heavenly Father. We can come confidently and directly to God as his loved children. We can be confident of our new status and the new freedom we have in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus died for us on the cross. **things will never be the same again.**

Jesus Christ carried our sins and separation so that we can now have free access to God. It is completed, finished! There is nothing more to do!