

Starters or Refreshments: Week 3

Passion!

Aim this week: To look at the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Recap on last week:

In the first half of Mark's Gospel we saw that Jesus was a controversial figure. He challenged established customs such as those about the Sabbath and about who was "clean and unclean". He also forgave sins and the religious powers saw that as blasphemy.

Transfiguration – (Mark 9 .2 – 8)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ... ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'

God affirms who Jesus is. God's glory is revealed ahead of suffering

Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem - Mark 10 . 32 – 34

Jesus took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; ³⁴they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'

Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem, although having a good idea of his likely fate. Was he going just for the Passover? Did he choose to confront the religious authorities to see if they were for him or against him?

It comes to the crunch! Mark 11 . 15 – 18

15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.'
¹⁸And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.

Jesus in the Temple. "You have made it a den of robbers". Note the priests' response.

Why now? The Passover

Major Jewish festival. Recalling the events of the Exodus – the key event of slavery to freedom.

A meal, a question, an arrest – Mark 14

Verses 12 – 25 Jesus gathers to share the Passover Meal with his friends. It will become known as the Last Supper. The Passover Meal was eaten when the sacrificial lamb was killed in the temple. Note Jesus' meaning when he says "this is my body and this is my blood".

Verses 26 – 42 The Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prays; "Father all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want, but what you want".

Verses 43 – 52 Jesus is arrested. (Note verses 51 & 52. Some think this was Mark himself)

Verses 53 – 65 Trial and Torture

Jesus dies on the Cross and is buried – Mark 15

God is not remote from human anguish and suffering. He has entered into our life completely. Look at the indignities he suffered on the cross. The sponge he was given to drink wine from (15 .36) was what the Roman soldier used instead of toilet paper.

Theories of the Atonement:

Atonement (literally the “At – one – ment”) means being made one, or put right, with God)

There are as many ways of understanding why Jesus died on the cross as there are Christians. But that's OK because, whatever we believe, he died for each of us. There are three main themes:

1. Sacrifice and Debt

Humanity has been disobedient, so we are in debt to God. Only Jesus (the God-Man) could make the payment on our behalf. Some suggest that Christ was punished instead of us, but that suggests a vengeful God. Others say that, because God gave us freedom of choice, God is responsible when we choose to sin so on the cross God bears the consequences of the freedom he gave us.

2. Love inducing Repentance

God's love is seen in the self-sacrifice of Jesus. Such a demonstration of love induces us to repent (turn away from our wrong) and so atonement is made possible.

3. Victory over Evil

In Christ God overcomes the power of evil. God has allowed free will and therefore evil also exists. We are unable to save ourselves. God acts to save us.

These three theories have influenced Christian thought for centuries. Most people's experience is probably a bit of each. Jesus' death was an inevitable consequence of his self-giving love. He put people first; ahead of regulations (which protected the interests of the powerful), he challenged prejudice (which saw people for what were instead of who they were), he asked us to see God in each other (when we are more often concerned with just ourselves).

Jesus crucifixion can therefore be seen as humanity's final rejection of God. That could be it! All over! People have rejected God and chaos will therefore result (note the darkness in 15 .33).

However his self-sacrificial love has made an impression and, having watched him die, a Roman centurion says, “Truly this man was God's son” (Mark 15 .39).

The Empty Tomb - Mark 16

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

The oldest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel actually finish with that. Some other manuscripts go on to describe some resurrection appearances of Jesus. Why might Mark finish so suddenly? Does he want us to make up our own minds here as well? He doesn't want us to rely on second hand evidence. he wants us to experience the Risen Christ in our own lives.

Our response to the risen Christ.

Jesus as Lord – There is no higher authority to which we owe allegiance.

Jesus as Saviour – A Saviour brings Salvation. The love, acceptance and forgiveness that Jesus offers frees (rescues, saves) us from guilt and fear. We are offered new life, life in all it's fullness.

Through Christ the broken relationship with God is restored, a new covenant established. God accepts us and loves us without condition. He waits for our response. We are called to respond to love with love. We are unfinished and God is bringing us to completeness (wholeness).