

# Jesus: The One Who Is, Who Was, Who Is To Come

## “He Died” (Mark 15:33-39)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on 3/24/2013

### Introduction

- ❖ America has four Gods. That’s what two Baylor sociologists concluded after conducting the most wide-ranging, comprehensive survey of religious belief in America. In 2010 they published their findings in a book called, *America’s Four Gods: What We Say About God – And What That Says About Us*.
  - ▶ According to their research, 95% of Americans believe in God, which is a remarkable level of agreement considering how diverse we are as a nation. But our difference lies in how we view this God and what we understand his role to be in our lives.
    - In some of the interviews, they would ask people to respond after showing them evocative images, such as a wrathful old man slamming the Earth, a loving father's embrace, an accusatory face or a starry universe. Which of these images best captures your view of God?
- ❖ The researchers boiled down the results to four Gods: the Authoritative God, the Benevolent God, the Critical God, and the Distant God. And it really only takes two questions to figure out which God is yours: *a) Do you believe God engages humanity?* Is he directly involved in worldly and personal affairs? *b) Do you believe God judges humanity?* Is he angered by human sin and will he punish it?
  - ▶ If you don’t believe God engages us in the present, that he’s not directly involved in history, then you believe in either a Critical God or a Distant God. And the real difference there is whether you still think he judges us. **The Distant God** is the god of the Deist, the First Mover. He wound up creation and then walked away. There is no moral judgment or accountability.
    - In contrast, **the Critical God** will still judge human sin but only in the afterlife. That means the present blessings or suffering that people experience on this earth are not attributed to God’s will or action. That’s just part of the randomness of life, but they still believe God will sort it all out in the end.
- ❖ So those are the two options if you don’t believe God engages humanity. But if you do, if you believe he directly involves himself in our lives, then you have either an Authoritative God or a Benevolent God. Again the difference lies in the judgment question. **The Authoritative God** judges human behavior. He holds us up to a moral standard and is capable of carrying out judgment – not just in the afterlife – but in the present, whether on a personal scale (i.e. illness, misfortune, etc.) or on a global scale (i.e. natural disasters, etc.)
  - ▶ But in contrast you have **the Benevolent God**. This is not a God of anger, not one who will condemn you. This God is a force of positive influence in the world. Here to bring out all the good from the bad. He's all about love and benevolence.
- ❖ Now the impression I get is that more and more people these days are balking at the idea of an Authoritative God and embracing a Benevolent One. To be honest, I think they’re scared of God’s anger, and they’ll do whatever it takes to hide from it, even if it means denying the reality of divine anger and judgment.

- ▶ They'll say these things are inconsistent with belief in a loving God. If God is love, then he's not the kind who would get angry and judge. But this kind of thinking misunderstands both love and judgement. They're not mutually exclusive. **The opposite of judgement is not love. It's indifference.**
  
- ❖ If you don't care about what's right, about justice, if you sit back and let sin and evil triumph when you have the power to do something, then you're anything *but* loving. **Love cares enough to want to see sin addressed and justice done.**
  - ▶ A loving parent cares enough for his child to discipline the child. It's the indifferent parent that does nothing. So it is, love without judgement is mere sentimentality. It's not real love.
  
- ❖ So it's not as simple as claiming an Authoritative God or a Benevolent God. That is a false dichotomy, as if God can only be one or the other. Yes, the God of the Bible is authoritative. He does get angry at sin. He does judge in this life and the next. But the God of the Bible is also described as loving, merciful, and yes, benevolent. It's not a question of either/or but both/and. I hope to demonstrate that for you today.
  
- ❖ I feel like lately I've been preaching quite a bit on this theme of God's anger and judgment. We just finished a series through Amos, which has been all about God being angry at Israel's sin, and his predictions of this coming Day of the Lord (day of judgment).
  - ▶ And here we go again. I didn't plan this intentionally, but now I see it as providential. After six Sundays in Amos hammering on God's anger and judgement against sinners and their sin, how fitting is it to follow up with a key passage that describes what God has done with his anger and how he has carried out his judgment.
  
- ❖ Last week, we began a new series to span through the Easter season that we're calling **Jesus: The One Who Is, Who Was, Who Is To Come**. We'll be looking at key events in Jesus' life and ministry. Last Sunday we considered his incarnation.
  - ▶ Today our focus is on Jesus' death and how, in death, he took upon himself God's anger and judgment. There are three objects in this passage, surrounding Jesus' death, packed full of symbolism. I want to point them out and explain their meaning. We'll consider The Darkness (v33), The Cry (vv34-36), and The Curtain (vv37-39).

### **The Darkness**

- ❖ Consider with me the supernatural darkness that came over the land right in the middle of Jesus' crucifixion. Let's read v33 again. "*And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*"
  - ▶ We're told earlier in v25 that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, which is equivalent to 9:00am. He hung there for three hours being mocked by bystanders. And at the sixth hour, noon when the sun is at its highest, a darkness suddenly fell over the land.

- ❖ This was a supernatural darkness. Now some skeptics argue that it must have been a solar eclipse. But these ancient people didn't know better and interpreted it as a divine omen. But it couldn't have been a solar eclipse. That is astronomically impossible.
  - ▶ Jesus was crucified during the Jewish Passover (14:1), which was celebrated on the first month of the lunar calendar during a full moon. And we know that in a full moon the earth is positioned between the sun and the moon. But for a full solar eclipse to occur, the moon has to be between the sun and the earth. You can't have both.
    - Ancient people understood this phenomena. They knew a solar eclipse could not occur simultaneously with a full moon. That's why Mark believed this darkness to be supernatural. It was a sign from God.
  
- ❖ Now one could argue that this was not a unique occurrence in those days. Ancient Jewish literature describes other extraordinary phenomena that accompanied the deaths of famous rabbis (appearance of stars at midday, lightning and thunder, etc.). Roman historians record that at the death of Julius Caesar, a comet shone in the sky for seven successive days. But the difference is that these signs were regarded as divine eulogies meant to honor the noble dead.
  - ▶ **But this supernatural darkness in Mark's Gospel is not a divine eulogy. Rather it's a divine display of anger.** In the Bible, light is often used to represent God's blessing and favor AND darkness to represent his anger and judgement.
    - Just think of the ninth plague in Exodus, the plague of darkness (Ex. 10:21-23). It occurred right before the slaying of Egypt's firstborn sons. It's clear the darkness was a sign of divine judgment against the sins of Egypt.
  
- ❖ Even in the book of Amos, we have that verse in chapter 8:9, where God, in prophesying about the Day of the Lord, says, "*In that day I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.*"
  - ▶ Amos could only see in part what we now see in full. That "Day of the Lord" he and the other prophets so often spoke of was not just pointing to some end times event. There were two reference points in mind – a double fulfillment. In a not-yet sense, the Day of the Lord awaits the end times, but in an already sense, this great day of judgment has already passed having taken place on the day Jesus was crucified.
    - The point is this: **The supernatural darkness that covered the land at the moment of Jesus' death was meant to communicate that God was angry and ready to judge sin.**
  
- ❖ I realize this offends people. But perhaps it's because we're usually interpreting God's anger through our own experiences with anger and rage. But you have to remember that God does not get angry in the same sense that you and I get angry.
  - ▶ J.I. Packer reminds us that God's anger is not "*the capricious, arbitrary, bad-tempered and conceited anger which pagans attributed to their gods. It is not the sinful, resentful, malicious, infantile anger which we find among humans.*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 184.

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way: God’s anger is “*his settled opposition to all that is evil, arising out of His very nature. . . . His nature is such that He abhors evil. He hates evil. His holiness of necessity leads to that.*”<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ **The only way you’ll come to grips with the idea that “God is angry with us” is if you accept the biblical view of sin. If you think human sin is merely the result of ignorance,** then the appropriate response from God would be pity not anger. And what we need most is for him to send a Good Moral Teacher to save us from our ignorance.
    - ▶ **If you think our sinfulness is fundamentally a disease of the soul,** then God’s appropriate response would be compassion not anger. And what we need most is for him to send a Divine Healer to save us from our sickness.
      - **If you think sinners are basically victims,** that sin is a form of acting out in response to the abuse we’ve experienced, then the appropriate response from God would be sympathy not anger. And what we need more than ever is a Cosmic Therapist to come and heal our emotional wounds.
  - ❖ **But the biblical view is that sin is first and foremost an offense against a holy God.** Remember when King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and conspired to kill her husband? After he was confronted with his sin, he cried out to God in Psalm 51:4, “*Against you, you only, have I sinned*”.
    - ▶ He's not denying that he sinned against Bathsheba and her husband, but David recognized that his sin was fundamentally a treacherous act of rebellion against the King of kings and Lord of lords.
      - **If that’s the case, then the appropriate response from God should be righteous anger. And what we need most of all is for him to send a Redeemer** who will bear that anger in our place and make it possible for unrighteous sinners to be restored in relationship with a righteous God.

## The Cry

- ❖ And that is where Jesus comes in. The darkness in the sky suggested that God is angry with someone and is carrying out judgement on someone. That begs the question, "With whom? On whom?"
  - ▶ And the answer is Jesus. This is evident in the agonizing cry that we hear in v34. “*And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*”
- ❖ Now it goes on to say in v35 that bystanders mistook his cry to *Eloi* as a cry to *Eli* (Aramaic for Elijah). It was a popular belief back then that the prophet Elijah functioned sort of like a guardian angel who would return to protect and rescue righteous sufferers in times of crisis.

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<sup>2</sup> D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 3:20-4:25*, 75-76.

- ▶ So these bystanders thought Jesus was crying to Elijah for rescue and wondered if he might come. Which explains why someone offered Jesus sour wine. That type of wine was used by soldiers in those days as a stimulant, so by offering it to Jesus, they were hoping to keep him alert and alive long enough to see a miracle of deliverance.
- ❖ But there was no deliverance. There was only this cry, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ*, has four possible explanations for this cry.
  - ▶ The first is that this was a **cry of unbelief or despair**. Some have argued that Jesus never expected to die like this. He was convinced God would deliver him and vindicate him before his enemies but God let him down. Hence the cry of despair.
    - Of course the weakness of this view is its failure account for the many instances in the Gospels where Jesus predicts his impending death to great detail (8:31). Dying a criminal's death on a cross came at no surprise to Jesus.
  - ▶ The second view is to see this as a **cry of loneliness**. In other words, Jesus knew the Father would never actually forsake him, but at the moment he certainly felt so. It was based on a feeling. He wasn't actually forsaken. The view is attractive to some because it avoids the theological difficulty of having to explain how God the Father could forsake God the Son and not divide the Trinity – and not destroy the triune nature of God.
    - ▶ The third view offers the same advantage but in a modified form. It views this as a **cry of victory**. There is no question that Jesus is quoting the first line of Psalm 22, which begins by describing this righteous one who is suffering without just cause with which Jesus can identify. But proponents of this view argue that, by quoting that first verse, Jesus intended for us to recall the whole psalm and especially the last verses which end in triumph. So this is not an agonizing cry of despair but a loud shout of victory. Again the emphasis is that the Son was not actually forsaken.
- ❖ But the problem with these last two views is the failure to read this cry in the context of the darkness surrounding it. Just as darkness in the Exodus preceded the slaughter of the Passover lamb which bore punishment in the place of others, so to this darkness preceded the slaughter of the True Lamb who likewise functioned as a substitute. Jesus really was punished. He really was forsaken.
  - ▶ These views also failure to recall Jesus' great distress a chapter earlier in the garden of Gethsemane. There in v36 he prayed that if possible this cup would be removed from me, yet not my will but your will be done. Jesus was referring there to the Old Testament metaphor of the cup of God's wrath (Isa. 51:17). He was well aware that soon he would have to drink that cup of wrath to the last drop.
- ❖ In the end, the only way to make sense of this cry in its context is to see it as a **cry of dereliction**. To be derelict means to be in a state of abandonment, as in a derelict building marked for demolition. Theologians call this a "cry of dereliction" because, in that moment, Jesus truly experienced a state of abandonment. How the triune nature of God was not divided or destroyed remains a paradox. But it's clear that the Son was actually forsaken.

- ❖ **In the Bible, God's ultimate punishment for sin is to forsake the sinner. That means to completely cut off the individual from the joy and blessing of his grace.** Every person alive experiences God's common grace, to some degree, even if they don't recognize it. But if we die, having never repented of our sins and turned to Christ for rescue, then we will be cut off from common grace. We will be utterly forsaken by God. That's essentially what hell is.
  - ▶ And yet this is what the Son of God was experiencing on the cross. He was forsaken by God. Completely cut off from any ounce of grace. Not even Hitler or Bin Laden had ever experienced in this life the horror of being utterly cut off from grace. But that's what Jesus was going through.
    - I'm sure having iron nails pierce your hands and feet is painful beyond words. But far more agonizing was the experience of being forsaken by the Father. He was receiving the full measure of God's anger and judgment against sin.
  
- ❖ *But why?* Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He was sinless. He did nothing to provoke God's anger or deserve his punishment. ***So for whose sin was he being punished?***
  - ▶ Answer: For the sin of sinners like you and me. We deserve to be forsaken by God but Jesus willingly (voluntarily) took our place. The Father and Son worked in concert. The plan was for the Father to forsake the Son on the cross, so that he would not have to forsake those for whom the Son dies as a substitute.
    - **1 Peter 2:24** says, "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*" **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"
  
- ❖ That means on the cross, Jesus, in a sense, became the most sinful man the world has ever known because the sins of millions and billions of believers in every age and place were being placed on his shoulders. For three agonizing hours, all the lies and hatred and pride and greed and lust and jealousy was being poured out on him.
  - ▶ And in response, God the Father punished those sins by pouring out on his Son all the anger and judgement that should have fallen on sinners. On the cross, he was experiencing hell for us. It's no wonder Jesus screamed from the depths of his soul.

### **The Curtain**

- ❖ Now we're told in v38 that at the very moment of Jesus' death, "*The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*" This is the third and final object I want to point out. Notice this torn curtain. **Mark is most likely referring to the curtain in the temple that shielded the Holy of Holies.** This central room in the temple housed the Holy Ark, which represented the presence of God himself. It was considered the earthly throne of God.
  - ▶ And this thick curtain, that reached up to the temple ceiling 30-feet high, covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies, acting as a constant reminder that the holiness of God and sinfulness of man cannot abide together. There is a barrier between God and man.

- ❖ But at that moment when Jesus uttered a *“loud cry and breathed his last”*, we’re told that 30-foot curtain was torn from top to bottom. That added detail implies that it was God who tore that curtain. The message is loud and clear: **What once barred the way into the immediate presence of God is now gone!**
  - ▶ Man’s sin has been punished. Man’s debt has been paid. God’s righteous anger has been satisfied. God’s holy judgment has been served. All because of Jesus! In him we have free access to enter the throne room of God.
    - *“We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.”* (Heb. 10:19)
  
- ❖ And ironically, the first person to enter by faith was a Gentile – a Roman centurion no less. He’s the last person Mark’s readers would have expected to be the first person to see Jesus for who he really is. This was one of Jesus’ executioners. He likely took part in mocking and beating Jesus just hours earlier.
  - ▶ And yet when the centurion saw how Jesus died – the *“way he breathed his last”* – he could not but confess, *“Truly this man was the Son of God.”* (v39)
  
- ❖ Up to this point in Mark’s gospel, the only ones to make this confession were God the Father (at Jesus’ baptism in 1:11 and his transfiguration in 9:7) and demons as Jesus cast them out (3:11; 5:7). This centurion is the first human to confess Jesus as the Son of God, and note that it was triggered by his contemplation of Jesus’ suffering and death.
  - ▶ **Not until his death on the cross can anyone truly understand who he is, why he came, and what it means for him to be the Son of God.** Mark began his gospel in chapter 1:1 identifying Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and now at the end of his gospel that claim is finally understood. Now it is clear that the Son of God is he who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). He came to die, to bear anger, to take punishment, as a substitute for many.
  
- ❖ In the pioneer days, living in the prairies, settlers would sometimes find themselves in danger of being burned alive. Imagine looking out your window only to see in the distance a great plume of black smoke. The wind is whipping up a prairie fire and it’s rushing towards you.
  - ▶ These prairie fires burn hot and fast, and they can reach up to 700 degrees Fahrenheit and travel at speeds of 600 feet per minute – too fast to outrun on a horse. So how do you and your family survive?
  
- ❖ You do what all homesteaders do. You grab your family and run out to the edge of your field. Stooping down you light your field on fire and watch as your livelihood becomes a burnt patch of ground. Then you take your family out into the middle of what once was your field.
  - ▶ And you watch as the prairie fire roars toward you. You feel the heat as it draws near. Sweat pours from you as the fire rages up to the edge of your field. But it stops there. Finding no fuel to burn, it turns to the left and to the right and rages on. But you and your family are saved.

- ❖ This is a picture of the gospel. At the cross, Jesus bore the divine anger that is due to sinners. God's judgment burned over him. And now the offer goes out to all, "*Come and hide in Jesus! Turn from your sins and find safety in him.*"
  - ▶ The judgment of God is coming towards you. His holy wrath will burn up all who remain in their sin. **But there is a safe ground where his anger has already burned. That safe ground is in Jesus.**

### Conclusion

- ❖ *Do you see now how God is both Authoritative and Benevolent?* He's not either/or. He is both/and. Thank you, Lord, for the cross, for the death of Jesus, to prove this point!
- ❖ Let me leave you with this thought. **There are a lot of people out there who only know an Authoritative God. And they're scared to death of him.** All they know is a God of anger.
  - ▶ Clearly they've never had this gospel clearly explained to them. They've never understood what love we have from the Father that he would give his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
    - They don't know the glory and grace in what the innocent Son did on the cross on behalf of guilty sinners.
- ❖ Christian, you need to tell them this. Don't let them live a minute longer under this cloud of divine anger or to fool themselves into thinking they can hide from it. You've been commissioned. You have a personal responsibility as a disciple of Jesus to tell them to come and hide in Jesus. To turn from their sins and find safety in Him. *To whom will you tell this? Who in your life desperately needs to hear this good news?*