

Key Text

Mark 15:15-37 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ^[28] ^[a] ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Death of Jesus

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). ^[b]

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.

Introduction

Pain. We've all experienced it. From the bodily pain of arthritis that makes simple chores difficult to the emotional pain of rejection that causes us to pause before we send a text. Pain pervades our lives.

Let's pause for a moment and consider how pain works.

On the one hand, pain can distract us. Jeff is at his son's basketball game. They've been working on his son's dribbling. Jeff promised his son that he would watch and give him some tips after the game. But it's hard to concentrate. Jeff has been having issues with his lower back. Right now, it feels like somebody is taking an ice pick and digging it into his side. He can't get comfortable on the bleachers, and he certainly can't pay attention to his son's game. **Pain has a way of distracting us from the task at hand.**

On the other hand, pain can focus our attention. She never would have known about the support group if the pain hadn't become too hard to bear. Manie passed away suddenly. One minute he was in the kitchen getting burgers ready for the grill and the next minute he was lying on the deck as they called 911 and tried CPR. "He didn't have a chance," the doctor said. A massive brain aneurysm. She had driven by the church for months and seen the sign for a grief support group that meets on Thursdays. She had never paid attention before. After Manie's death, however, she saw it. And she went. Her friends wouldn't believe it. Her? In a church? She couldn't believe it herself. But she was desperate, and she knew she couldn't go on. That's how bad it was. **But that's also what pain does. It causes us to focus. To see things we have never seen before and to find help when help is needed.**

So, pain can do two things. It can distract us or it can focus our attention. The question for us today is: What happens with spiritual pain? Does it distract you from the task at hand or does it focus your attention on something good?

Getting to the Heart

If you have been reading along in the *Crucified. Glorified.* prayer journal, you will remember the readings last week that told the story of Jesus being crucified. First, he was tried by Pilate, then sent to Herod, and then

brought back to Pilate and handed over for crucifixion. **When Mark records the crucifixion of Jesus, he offers us a glimpse into the power of pain.**

Let's begin by considering how pain distracts. Crucifixion was a painful ordeal. Beaten, stripped, bleeding, Jesus hung there to die. He would not die from loss of blood. He would die from loss of air. With his arms stretched out, he would reach a point when he would no longer have the strength to raise up his chest to breathe. His own weight and weakness would suffocate him. And people would walk by and watch as Jesus hung there in misery.

Mark tells us that people who were passing by began mocking Jesus.

They looked at Jesus, hanging there in pain, and they laughed at him.

Some remembered how Jesus said he would tear down the temple and raise it again in three days (Mark 15:29). What a joke! "Save yourself, and come down from the cross!" they said (Mark 15:30). **The pain of the crucifixion distracted these people from what was going on.** To these people, the very fact that Jesus was suffering on the cross meant that he didn't have power to save or do any of the things he said he would do.

It wasn't only those who passed by who were distracted by Jesus' pain. The religious leaders themselves saw the pain and made a conclusion: this was proof that Jesus was not the Messiah. "He saved others; he cannot save himself," they said. "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:31–32).

When Jesus was crucified, the pain of crucifixion and the shame of dying on a cross distracted people from God and from what God was doing in the midst of all of this pain.

It is easy for us to be distracted by pain. It could be the pain of others, as at the crucifixion, or it could be the pain we are experiencing ourselves.

Pain can distract us from the ways of God. In fact, pain can make us wonder, "Where is God?"

Think about Paul. He had a "thorn in the flesh." Paul doesn't tell us what this was, but he does tell us about its pain. It was a "messenger of Satan" and it harassed him. It beat him up. Three times he called out to God to remove it and God never took it away (**2 Corinthians 12:7–8**). Imagine

the distress. Here was a man who had seen Jesus in a vision. He had been delivered from his enemies. He had made it through storms and through beatings and through riots in the cities. But now, he comes before God with pain and cries for relief—and nothing happens. This pain could very well have distracted the apostle Paul.

Pain like that didn't stop with the apostle Paul. It continues today. And it still has the power to distract you from God.

When people walk away from their faith, the first step in that journey often involves pain.

Ron left his faith when he walked out of the children's hospital for the last time. He went to the parking garage and he cried. He had been going to the hospital, visiting his son, and coming to the car and praying each time he went home. This time, however, there was no need to pray. His child was dead and, for Ron, so was God.

Amanda left her faith when she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. She had three children, two with autism, and she had recently gone through a divorce. She was estranged from her parents, estranged from her spouse, and now it was like she was estranged from her own body. She didn't want to face this degenerative disease alone but the pain of the divorce, the pain of the diagnosis, the pain of a future filled with steroids and flare-ups distracted her. She turned away from God.

All of us have pain in our lives. Our pains are different, unique. But they all have the potential to be a tool of Satan. Satan uses pain to beat us up, to make us suffer, to make us angry, depressed, isolated, despairing. But even more, Satan always uses pain to distract us from God. His ultimate goal: our giving up on God and walking away.

- 1. Pain distracts us by causing us to question God' existence, love, presence and plans**
- 2. Pain distracts us by causing us to question our own worth and righteousness**
- 3. Pain distracts us by suggesting it's not worth it to follow God**
- 4. Pain distracts us by encouraging us to give up**

That's why Mark's account of the crucifixion is so important. **Because at the crucifixion, we see one Man who did not give up and walk away: Jesus.** Jesus endured the pain and used it to focus attention on what he was doing—bringing about the victory of God.

When the soldiers brought Jesus to Golgotha, they laid him on the ground to nail him to the cross. Mark tells us that they offered Jesus “wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it” (Mark 15:23). This was a merciful act. Because crucifixion was so painful, the soldiers offered wine mixed with spices. It would not obliterate the pain, but it might make it a bit easier to bear. Jesus, however, refused.

Jesus would not be distracted. He would face the pain and endure it—for you. You see, pain did not distract Jesus in the crucifixion. No, pain focused his attention on the work of God that would bring victory over pain.

When Jesus died, John was standing there at the foot of the cross. He tells us what he saw. At the very end, Jesus knew it was all finished. He had endured the pain of crucifixion and he had endured the pain of divine punishment for sin. He had endured abandonment from God. When this was all over, he cried out, “I thirst” and was given a sip of sour wine. Jesus wanted this wine not to dull the pain but to wet his lips so that he could declare his victory over pain. He cried out, “It is finished,” and with that, he bowed his head and died (**John 19:28–30**).

Pain did not distract Jesus. Instead, it focused his attention on the work of God. Jesus would fight against Satan and bear every one of Satan's afflictions. Jesus would take every thorn in the world and wear it as a crown. He would experience the eternal punishment of sin, drink every last drop of God's cup of wrath, so that there is nothing left for you. Jesus triumphs over pain by enduring it for you. His pain is his triumph—the victory of God. Now, there is nothing Satan can ever do to him or to his people to separate them from God. There is no wrath or punishment for those who are in Christ Jesus. All of Satan's weapons are destroyed, all of God's wrath is endured, and Jesus now reigns as our victor over pain.

Paul knew this. He knew it personally. When he cried out to God because of the thorn in his flesh, God answered him and said, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*” (**2 Corinthians 12:9**).

God made his power known not by taking away Paul's pain but by coming to be with him in the midst of it. In the midst of pain, Paul knew the victorious power of God. God would use this pain for his purposes. For this reason, Paul boasts in his weaknesses. He says, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). Paul knew the power of Christ. He has taken the thorns of this world and turned them into a crown of victory. In the midst of pain, Paul knew the victory of God. He knew that God's "grace is sufficient for you."

Taking It Home

So, what do you do with the pain?

We all have pain, but most times, we don't talk about the pain. We try to tough it out. We think that Christians shouldn't have pain. And that's dangerous. Because, when we don't talk about the pain in our lives, we lose sight of its significance. Its power is not to be underestimated. Satan can use pain to lead us away from God. He can use it to distract us—to cause us to question whether God exists or whether God cares about us. Paul offers us a different way. This different way does not ignore pain. It does not say, "It doesn't hurt." **No, Paul cries out in pain to God. And he talks about pain with others.** And so should you. Paul models for us how we can share our pain with one another. But that's not all.

Paul also trusts God in the midst of pain. He knows that God has control. Why? Because Jesus Christ has entered into our pain. He has suffered under it and defeated it by rising from the dead. **Jesus brings us victory over pain.** Every thorn you bear is known by Jesus. Every pain you experience has already been in his hand. Satan's claim on you is finished. He is defeated. He cannot conquer you with pain. **Jesus is the victor over pain! He promises to be with you in the midst of it and he will bring you closer to God and closer to one another as you suffer through it in this world.**

Think about how God worked through the pain in Paul. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he shared his pain. This drew God's people closer to Paul and closer to God. As Paul writes in the opening of the letter,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Rather than distract us, pain directs us.

- 1. Pain directs us to focus our attention on Jesus,**
- 2. Pain directs us to remember His victory over Satan,**
- 3. Pain directs us to believe His promise to be with us,**
- 4. Pain directs us to the comfort He gives us in all our affliction**
- 5. Pain directs us to share that comfort with others**

In the midst of pain, we hear the words of our Lord, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”