

Lesson 5: The Cross

Key Concept: The cross

Bible Study: Mark 15

Bible Study

Recap

Last week, we talked about 2 major questions. First, why is forgiveness possible? The answer is because God is both gracious and merciful, and as a result, gives us grace and mercy. Second, how is forgiveness possible? The answer is through faith and repentance. This week we're going to look at how grace, mercy, faith, and repentance really converge in chapter 15 of Mark on the cross. The cross really is at the center of the Christian journey, so we're going to look at ways to respond to it.

Introduction: A Thought Experiment

Here is a thought experiment to help apply the lesson from last week on grace, mercy, faith, and repentance and see how you're processing it.

1. Question 1: If you were to die tonight, how certain are you, from 0 to 100%, that God would say to you, "Come spend eternity with me in heaven"? Write down your answer.
2. Question 2: List the reasons why you put whatever percentage you put.

Let's begin by talking about the wrong answers (Biblically) to these questions. You can usually group the wrong answers into the same 2 categories we've talked about before.

Religious Wrong Answers: A religious wrong answer is one that places hope or confidence in what I am, or what I have done. Examples of religious wrong answers would be...

- *I go to church.
- *I've been baptized.
- *I pray and read the Bible.
- * I'm a good person and have done more good than bad.
- *I don't steal.
- *I don't lie (well, not unless I absolutely have to).

If you gave any of the reasons above as the reasons why God would let you into heaven for #2, then the percentage you chose for #1 is irrelevant because you are trusting in yourself for salvation (not Jesus). Even if you are certain that God would let you in heaven, the Bible actually says that He wouldn't because you haven't

received His grace and mercy. You haven't put your faith in Him; your faith is still in you.

Irreligious Wrong Answers: Irreligious wrong answers do one of 2 things. First, irreligious wrong answers deny the reality of God. Remember the philosophical skeptics such as the new atheists. They might answer the above questions by saying, "I am less than 100% sure God would want me to be with Him because I don't even think God exists." Second, remember the PB/Gaslamp crowd. They might answer the first question wrongly by saying, "I am only 49% sure God would want to be with me because I am a pretty bad person. I think I have done more bad than good."

Bottom line: If your percentage is anywhere less than 100%, then this is a really good indicator of one of 2 things. First, you are not in relationship with God. If you have been forgiven by Jesus, you know it. There is no doubt about it. It is an objective reality that happens through His death on the cross, which we'll talk about today. Moreover, Jesus has given you a gift of grace by forgiving your debt. Your faith is in Him, not yourself. So you are 100% confident that God wants to be with you because you are united to Christ by faith. Second, if you put a percentage less than 100%, then it is possible that you are in relationship with God, but you are still a spiritual babe and are struggling to articulate these fundamental concepts (grace, mercy, faith, and repentance) that are the foundation of a relationship with God.

The Right Answer (Biblically):

So what's the right answer? There is a right answer to God's question, "Why should I let you into heaven?" According to the Bible, the right answer has to do with God's grace. The right answer is something like this: "God, I am 100% confident that You will say to me, "Come spend eternity with Me in heaven because Jesus has forgiven me of my sin and I have put my faith in Him." "It's not because of anything I've done, but because of what Jesus Christ has done on my behalf." In other words, it's not about the good things we've done for God, but rather it's about the good thing Christ has done for us. He died on the cross so that we could be forgiven of our sin. God was willing to suffer for us to grant us forgiveness!! He was abandoned so that we could be accepted. We saw Jesus say this in Mark 10:45—He came not to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many. He paid our debt for us.

Please turn with me to Ephesians 2:8-9. This gives the right answer. We are saved by grace through faith: it's a gift we receive when we put our trust in Jesus—that is faith. Putting your trust in Jesus that He lived the life you should have lived and died the death you should have died. We're not saved by anything we do—by being nice people, by paying our bills on time, or by going to church or reading the Bible. No, we are saved from eternal punishment by Jesus' death on the cross, and IT IS A GIFT. You can't earn it "by works." "It is the gift of God." The Bible says that gift is grace.

So, the right answer to the question is simply this—to point at Jesus. You should let me in because of Him (pointing to Jesus). He is my only hope—I am in Him and He is in me

Reactions to the Cross

As we have discussed, the cross is at the center of the Christian story, and as we will see, the cross demands a response from each one of us. Today we will look at the ways that people responded in Mark 15.

Coaching Point: Read through Mark 15 aloud and highlight the 5 possible reactions as you get to them.

(1) PEOPLE-PLEASING PONTIUS PILATE. (Read Mark 15:1-15)

He orders a sign to be attached to the cross. It reads: “the King of the Jews”. All the Gospel writers assure us that Pilate was convinced of Jesus’ innocence. He offers to release Jesus, but the crowd wants a man called Barabbas released instead. Time and again, Pilate sticks up for Jesus. Yet, he eventually hands Jesus over to be crucified. So why does Pilate hand over an innocent man? Look at verse 15.

Pilate was a crowd-pleaser. Although he knew that Jesus was innocent, peer pressure caused him to lose his nerve and made him give in to the evil desires of others. He was afraid of what this would do to his political career and so he abandoned Jesus. When he faced a world that despised Jesus, his good intentions were overcome by political aspirations.

Coaching Point: Ask if they can identify with the people-pleasing Pilate? Has a people-pleasing approach affected your relationship (or lack thereof) with God?

(2) THE BUSY SOLDIERS. (Mark 15:16-20, 24)

This is the most important question in all of life, and the soldiers here are too busy gambling for His clothes to process it. They are absorbed in just doing their job. They missed the significance of what was going on and what it could have meant for them because this was just another day at the office for them. They were punching the clock.

We do the same thing. We go through life doing our duty, working hard, and we find ourselves far too busy to consider really significant questions in life because we’re “crazy busy.” How many times have you found yourself saying this: “I’m just crazy busy right now. This will pass.” Only something else comes up and the frantic pace keeps up and you find that you really never got around to the “God question.”

Coaching Point: Ask if they can identify with feeling crazy busy? How has this feeling of busyness affected your relationship (or lack thereof) with God?

(3) THE SELF-SATISFIED RELIGIOUS LEADERS. (Mark 15:21-31)

They mock Jesus among themselves. This is the end of the road for the religious crowd that we have seen in the book of Mark. They have become self-righteous and self-satisfied, sick as dogs spiritually, yet proclaiming to the world (and themselves) how spiritually healthy they are. They mock Jesus because they are self-satisfied with their own religious performance and see no need for Him.

Coaching Point: Ask if they can identify with the religious leaders? Has a religious approach affected your relationship (or lack thereof) with God?

(4) “GIVE ME A SIGN” BYSTANDERS. (Read Mark 15:29-30, 36)

Mark also records the reaction of some other bystanders. They want Jesus to prove to them that He is God by giving them the exact sign of their request. They want Jesus to be their personal genie who says, “Your wish is my command.” Jesus knows that no sign will be enough because humans have an infinite capacity to rationalize things away.

Then, one man hears Jesus cry out and thinks He’s calling to Elijah. In Jewish legend, Elijah, who was an Old Testament prophet, was celebrated as a helper of those in need. This man, like the others, has just come for the show. He wants to see Elijah perform some spectacular miracle and rescue Jesus. The sight of Jesus on the cross doesn’t move this man at all. Instead, he is totally detached and refuses to get involved.

Coaching Point: Ask if they can identify with the men who need a sign? Has the presence or absence of signs from God affected your relationship (or lack thereof) with God?

(5) THE ROMAN CENTURION. Read Mark 15:39.

This man wasn’t a Jew. He was a Roman. This was a hardened soldier who was a high-ranking military officer. He had doubtless fought in many campaigns and seen many men die, but he had never seen a man die like this. He recognized that Jesus was “the Son of God.” And, that is our final option as we look at what happened at the cross. We can recognize that Jesus is telling the truth: that He is indeed the Son of God.

Coaching Point: This is the place that you really want to see where they stand spiritually. If they are ready to trust Jesus and put their faith in Him, then encourage them to respond to Jesus and to pray with you.

The Prayer of Commitment

“Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I desperately need Your forgiveness. Thank you for living a sinless life and dying a sinner’s death on the cross for my sins. I now turn from my sinfulness and self-trust. I have been trusting in my own good works and I am sorry. I now place my trust in You, and in You alone for the forgiveness of my sins and the free gift of eternal life. You took my sins upon Yourself and gave me Your righteousness. Thank You Lord for giving me this gift of Your righteousness through faith. I am asking You to take complete control of my life. Make me like You, Lord Jesus.”

Heavenly Father's Heart*

*This little story that follows isn't something that you, as a disciple-maker, will share with someone in a Mark study. Rather, this vignette is excerpted from *T4T A Discipleship ReRevolution* by Steve Smith & Ying Kai, pg. 56, to help inspire you, to help you remember the heart behind the book of Mark.

“When Ying Kai was a young student in Taiwan, he worked hard to pass an important exam that would enable him to get into a good middle school. He really wanted a new bicycle to ride 30 minutes to the new school, but doubted he would get it since his family was so poor. One day, however, as he passed his parents' bedroom, he heard his father comment to his mother that he would buy a new bicycle for Ying. Ying was overjoyed. That night before bed, he asked his father for a new bicycle. But his father said “no!” Ying was perplexed, but did not give up because he knew his father's heart! As he persisted, his father finally said “yes.” The next day, he had a new bicycle.

Ying says: “Because I knew my father's heart, I never gave up. If I didn't know his heart, I probably would have given up.” So if we know our heavenly Father's heart, we will have more confidence to do what He wants us to do.

All throughout the Bible, God chooses a person to save him and his whole household....Noah, Lot, Rahab, the Gerasene demoniac, Cornelius, Lydia and the Philippian jailer. God chooses you to save you and all those who belong to you. This isn't a guarantee, meaning that God always saves entire households, but it does help you see that God's heart is for none to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). “If you know His heart, then you will not give up asking Him for what is on His heart.”

Discussion Questions

1. If you were to die tonight, how certain are you, from 0 to 100%, that God would say to you, "Come spend eternity with me in heaven." Give your percentage.
2. List the reasons why you put the percentage you put.
4. What are the 2 possibilities for those who give a percentage less than 100%?
4. Read Eph. 2:8-10 & Mark 10:45. Discuss what is the right answer Biblically.
5. Read Mark 15. Describe the 5 different responses to the cross.
6. Of the responses to the cross, which do you most identify with and why?

Week 5-Reactions to The Cross

Recap

- A. Why is forgiveness possible? Grace and Mercy.
- B. How is forgiveness possible? Faith and Repentance.

Introduction: A Thought Experiment

- A. Question 1: How certain from 1 - 100% are you?
- B. Question 2: Why?
- C. Religious wrong answers: what I have done or what I am
- D. Irreligious wrong answers: deny existence of God OR works-based
- E. Any percentage of <100% means one of two things:
 - 1. Not in relationship with God
 - 2. Spiritual infant struggling to articulate fundamental concepts
- F. Right answer: point to Jesus
 - 1. Ephesians 2:8-10

Reactions to the Cross

- A. People-pleasing Pilate
 - 1. Mark 15:1-15
- B. The busy soldiers
 - 1. Mark 15:16-20, 24
- C. The self-satisfied religious leaders
 - 1. Mark 15:21-31
- D. "Give me a sign" by-standers
 - 1. Mark 15:29-30, 36
- E. The Roman Centurion
 - 1. Mark 15:39