

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 30/3/18) **“THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD!”**
(Mark 15:16-39)

Introduction Today is “Good Friday”. Do you think of today as a dark and solemn day? Or as a thankful and joyful day? Surely it is both. It is a day for remembering the darkness of Jesus’ crucifixion, the darkness of his unjust execution by the terrible, lingering method of hanging on a cross. It is a day for remembering the costliness of our salvation. But it is also a day for remembering our salvation itself, for giving thanks and rejoicing because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross. And Mark’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion is itself two-sided. Mark makes us face the darkness, but also affirms that this death is the saving death of Jesus the King.

The King is Mocked (15:16-20) **Read 15:16-20.** This is harsh treatment, and its harshness is unnecessary and demeaning. The soldiers take a man who has already been sentenced to death, and to a particularly cruel death, and they subject him to mockery and casual mistreatment. But Mark also invites us to see something less obvious. In their mockery the soldiers address Jesus as “King of the Jews”, a title which occurs repeatedly in Mark’s narrative. It has already been prominent in the account of Jesus’ trial – **read 15:2,9,12** – and it will occur again later in this narrative. Mark wants us to see that those who mock Jesus are wrong: he is not a pretend king, a person fit for cruel mockery and physical mistreatment. Rather he is truly a king, the Messiah of Israel and the King of Kings. As we read or hear Mark’s narrative, Jesus is not effectively belittled by the soldiers’ mockery and mistreatment, or by any of the mockery and mistreatment which he suffers. He remains the central figure of this narrative, and of the whole Gospel story. He is the Son of God who chooses freely to drink this cup of suffering, and to fulfil obediently his Father’s purpose of salvation.

The King is Crucified (15:21-32) The crucifixion account proper begins here. **Read 15:21-25.** The language is simple, even bare. The Gospel writers don’t have to load their narratives up with emotive language – they trust the power of their story. But there is another reason for the bareness of the language – their original audience knew about crucifixion; they knew how horrific it was. So there is real value for adolescent or adult Christians to find out what it was like, by reading about crucifixion or by seeing a film like *The Passion of the Christ*. Even in this bare, simple account there are details worth noting. Notice in v.21 that Mark names not only Simon of Cyrene but his sons Alexander and Rufus, who play no part in these events. I think that we can be confident that they were known to at least a substantial part of Mark’s original audience, known as disciples. To us this is a reminder that the story doesn’t finish with Jesus’ death – it

continues with his resurrection, and it continues with every disciple who has believed in the crucified and risen Jesus. And notice v.24 - **read again**. This echoes the language of Psalm 22, verse 18 - **read**. This is the very psalm which Jesus will quote just before he dies, and we are reminded that this is not a random, meaningless death, but part of God's plan of salvation. As Mark's account of Jesus' crucifixion continues, we see features similar to those in vv.16-20. **Read 15:26-32**. Again Jesus is named as "the King of the Jews", but this time the title is on the written notice of the charge against him. John's Gospel tells us how much the chief priests hated this wording, trying unsuccessfully to have Pilate change it. Taken literally, these words proclaim that Jesus' offence is not *claiming* to be the Messiah, but actually *being* the Messiah.

And again Jesus is mocked, mocked by the passers-by and by the chief priests and teachers of the law, and even by the criminals crucified with him. Unlike Luke, Mark doesn't tell us that one of these criminals later repents and speaks up for Jesus - I think that he wants to focus our attention on the mockery. But he also undercuts their mockery. He does this by the words on the official statement of Jesus' offence, and he does it by an unintended meaning in the mockery of the Jewish leaders - **read vv.31b-32a again**. Mark wants us to see that it is precisely because Jesus saves others that he can't save himself. Mark's Jesus, our Jesus, dies not as a defeated man but as Saviour and King!

The King is Acknowledged (15:33-39) We now come to the last few hours before Jesus' death, with particular attention to his final moments. **Read 15:33-39**. I want to draw attention to four significant details. Firstly in v.33. Mark records, without explanation, three hours of darkness in the middle of the day. This is a strange event, and one which must have filled those present with fear. But Mark probably wants us to see more in this than simply a frightening event. He may be suggesting that this is a reflection in the natural world of the terrible event taking place. He may be suggesting that God's judgment is foreshadowed - **read Amos 8:9**. Certainly he is underlining the fact that this is no ordinary death. Then there is Jesus' cry in v.34. It is the first verse of Psalm 22, and Mark may want us to think of the whole psalm, including its positive ending, but these words are Jesus' chosen words just before he takes his last breath. I am sure that they express his feelings at this moment, and I agree with those who see them as pointing to a real separation between God the Father and Jesus the Son as he takes the sins of the world upon himself. Then there is the tearing of the temple curtain in v.38, which Matthew tells us was caused by an earthquake. Some see this as expressive of God's coming judgment, anticipating the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Others see it as speaking of Jesus as opening the way to God. Both are

possible, but the fact that the Writer to the Hebrews uses the language of Jesus going behind the curtain as our forerunner encourages us to give priority to the second meaning. Jesus in his death has opened the way to God for all who put their faith in him. Finally, there is the cry of the centurion in v.39: "Surely this man was the Son of God!" Centurions were generally tough and practical men, so this is a remarkable declaration. It is not clear what exactly he meant by these words, but I think that Mark intends us to read them in the light of his whole Gospel. This is the man whose baptism was accompanied by a voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, whom I love." This is the man who commanded the storm to be still, so that his disciples asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him." This is the man who prayed in Gethsemane to God as "Abba, Father". Mark tells us that the one who has been crucified is the Messiah King, and in a unique sense the Son of God. This is the one who died, the One Who Died For Us. This is what Good Friday is all about! It is about death, certainly, but it is also about victory - Jesus' victory over death, and over sin.