

Hanging Out with Jesus

Hope Amidst Despair:

Jesus' Journey to the Cross

From Man in the Mirror's Vice President, Brett Clemmer

Edited Transcript

Mark 15:16-23; Luke 23:26-33

It's great to be with you guys here this morning! We're going to talk about hope amidst despair. This is a tough passage that we're going to look at this morning. I've been marinating in it all week. I can tell you, it's just a depressing place to sit for a few days. We're going to sit in it for about half an hour this morning. If you have a bible, turn to Mark 15:16-23. Let me pray for us and then we will jump into this.

Father, thank you so much for bringing these guys here this morning where we want to learn more about you so that we can follow you more closely, Lord. Father, this morning, as we look at this passage about your Son on His way to His execution, Lord, help us to experience this in a way that we can really experience your love for us and what you were willing to sacrifice, what Jesus is willing to put himself through in order to bring us hope for eternal life with you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

I don't know about you but this has been a frustrating time. Anybody else experiencing this? It's a hard time to be a Christian. It's a hard time to have biblical values. We live in a country that for the last 220 years or so has, for the most part, followed Judeo-Christian values, and we're seeing that erode a little bit. One thing that's good to have is a little bit of perspective. There's really never been a country that has really adhered to Judeo-Christian values the way that America has over the last 200-220 years or so. Our country is a unique historical occurrence to be focused like that.

Now, some of that is eroding. It's hard. I don't know about you but for me, one of the most difficult parts of that is that the value of being able to stand up for what you believe in, if it's in disagreement with what somebody else believes in, that value that that's okay seems to also be eroding. It feels like we're being pushed more and more towards all having to think the same way, this cultural mandate that comes from a secular humanist view.

Honestly, it's a relatively consistent attitude in secular humanism that these folks are being pushed into and that we're being pushed into but it's frustrating, it's hard. I got people that are posting stuff in social media accounts that I consider friends, "little f", friends, and they're writing stuff about Christians and they're writing stuff about the Christian world view that is just harsh and sometimes even despicable. It's very difficult because the worst thing I can do is, what? Respond in the same way. I can't be as harsh and as negative as I'm experiencing.

That's frustrating, especially for me as a guy because if somebody punches me in the nose, I want to punch them back twice as hard. Anybody else like that? Yeah, we're guys, right? Pick on my family, pick on my faith, I get my hackles up a little bit. It's a frustrating time!

Fortunately, I also know a lot of guys who are personally going through difficult times or frustration, even worse than just frustration with how your friends are talking about certain things on Facebook, and I've got friends whose jobs aren't working out, or can't even find a job, can't find a job that really uses their talents. Guys I know that are losing their homes even still. Even though we're in an economic recovery, they're still suffering the consequences of the last few years of financial difficulty.

Guys that are in jobs that are being asked to do unethical things and having to choose what they're going to do. You can imagine, if you go to work every day, and your boss is continually asking you to do stuff that disagrees with your ethics; that wears on you. Day after day, you come home, and you're frustrated, and you're down, and you're depressed because of that.

We see horrible things happening in our society. This week we've seen the fact that it looks like there's a national organization that is manipulating abortion so that they can take tissue and sell it or at least, have it used for research. Talking about it in such a cavalier way, it's just gut-wrenching to hear the way that this is being talked about, about the incredible complete dehumanization of a baby inside of a womb. We're just surrounded by this stuff, it's just constant. It's just constant.

Yet, we have to figure out how, as Christians, how do we walk in a world like this and not lose hope? How do we walk in a world like this, a broken world, a fallen world, and not become just so depressed that we just give up and become a hermit, just put on a hoodie and sit in a La-Z-Boy, and watch TV all day long. Just withdraw. Please don't do that by the way. How do we do that? I think this passage gives us a little bit of a picture into a time of complete despair and we can look at how Jesus came through this time, and I think it gives us some lessons for what it's like to be in a difficult time.

Let's look, if you got your Bible, let's look at Mark 15, and we're going to read verses 16 to 23 together. It says this, "And the soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is the governor's headquarters, and they called together the whole battalion, and they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him, and they began to salute him, 'Hail, King of the Jews,'" and they were striking his head with a reed, and spitting on him, and kneeling down in homage to him, and when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him, and they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled the passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross, and they brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, and they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it."

The setting here is that we have Jesus. He's going back and forth between Pilate and Herod. He's back with Pilate again. Pilate had him flogged. I don't know what they talked about last week but flogging was a terrible, terrible thing to happen to somebody. They were hit with a whip that had multiple cords. They had bones and metal embedded in it. The Bible says his hands were held above his head, and he was flogged. He's bleeding profusely. Most people who suffered a Roman flogging died of the flogging. They didn't die during the flogging but they died afterwards. Their skin and muscles would be ripped down to the bone. They would get infections or bleed to death.

Mockers, Helpers, & Thieves

This is the state that Jesus is in. What we see here first of all is we see some people. Let's look at what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about the people that were around Jesus. They were the mockers, the helpers, and the thieves as he went through this experience. Next, we're going to talk about where did Jesus' hope come from? Then, finally, we'll talk about how we can be confident sufferers ourselves.

Here we are in this setting and the first group of people that were around Jesus were the mockers. Now, before it even had gotten to this point, he had been mocked. The religious elite had brought him and arrested him in the garden. They had a fake trial, an illegal trial even under Jewish law in the house of the former high priest. They had brought him to the Roman authorities and they were threatened by him, and they had mocked him really all through his teaching.

Then, the crowd gets riled up and they call for his crucifixion. Pilate really, according to some of the early historians, some of the early Christian historians, they actually are very sympathetic towards Pilate saying that he was doing whatever he could to get Jesus out of this predicament but that people wouldn't hear of it. He had a political reality that he was facing which you can see because the next group of mockers are these soldiers.

Now, it says in verse 16, the soldiers led him away inside the palace, and they called together the whole battalion. This was between 200 and 600 soldiers. Now, think about this for a second. Here's a half beaten to death rabbi and he is no threat to anybody, and yet they called 200-600 soldiers together for this process. Pilate is scared. He's freaked out. The people were going nuts.

The people had a choice between getting Jesus back as rabbi that teaches love and peace, and Barabbas who is a murderer. And they chose Barabbas to take back. They chose to ask Pilate to commute the sins of Barabbas, not to commute the sins of what in Pilate's eyes had to be a relatively harmless rabbi. He has to have all these soldiers there.

And these are not probably the best of the best. Jerusalem is a remote outpost. These are probably not Roman soldiers from Italy. These are probably Roman soldiers that were recruited from the surrounding countries, from the surrounding area, Palestine. They may not have really liked the Jews all that much. They probably didn't like the Jews all that much and they're stationed here. There's 200 to 600 of them. What do they do? They decide they're going to have some fun with Jesus. He's accused, the charge that the Jews bring against Jesus, really the only way that they can get the Romans to kill him is the charge of elevating himself above Caesar, saying that he is the king. Caesar is not the king, he is the king.

This is the charge that's against him and so the soldiers take that charge and they used it to make fun of Jesus. They put a robe on him like a royal robe. It's probably a discarded cloak that somebody had lying around. In the Matthew passage that talks about this story, they gave him a scepter made out of reeds. Basically, a bundle of sticks. Then, they put a crown of thorns on his head, a fake crown. They mocked him. They say, "Hail, King of the Jews." It's the same way that they would say, "Hail Caesar." They're saying, "Hail, King of the Jews."

They take the scepter out of his hand, and they beat him with it, and he's got this crown of thorns on his head, and they're hitting him on the head. You can imagine that crown of thorns is being pushed more and more into his head. He's pathetic. He's physically destroyed. He's sitting there, his back is bleeding.

You imagine, they put this cloak on him. They took his clothes off, and then they put the cloak on him. Then, they took the cloak off him, probably pulling scabs and stuff like that open as they did it. They're driving this crown into his head. They're mocking him.

This is the sovereign king of the universe. This is Jesus Christ. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, nothing was made without him. He is standing in the palace of a backwoods Roman province in the courtyard being mocked and beaten by a bunch of lowlife soldiers and he's just...taking it. He's just taking it. They take the cloak off, they put his own clothes back on him, what's left of him I guess, and they led him out to crucify him.

The next group that we see here are the helpers. In the Luke passage, it says, there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. If you look at Jesus' ministry, you'll actually see throughout his ministry that Jesus not only had the three, Peter, James, and John that were his inner circle, he had the rest of the 12 that were his disciples. Then, he had even a larger group of disciplines beyond that, at least 80 or so, that he would send out in groups to do things, but he also had this group of women.

Frankly, they were rich women. The women had a lot to do with financing Jesus' ministry. These women now are following, and they're mourning, and lamenting for him. They're wailing. They're heartbroken. The other helper that you see is Simon of Cyrene and this is an interesting footnote in the scripture that it would be so specific about who this is. Look at the Mark passage and he says, "They compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross." Why so precise?

Alexander and Rufus were probably known to the church when Mark was writing this passage. Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome, had a lot of input from Peter. Probably the reason that he says, "Simon of Cyrene, the father of Rufus and Alexander," is because they knew Rufus and Alexander, the people reading this. That gives another sense of validity to the story that Mark is telling.

Simon of Cyrene. Cyrene is in current day Libya. There is a huge population of Jews that lived in this area. He could have been a Middle Easterner or North African who would come in for the Passover, come in to Jerusalem for the Passover from the country. You see that he's pressed into service.

Now, Simon, some of the little kids play, he jumps out of the crowd and says, "Let me help." Remember earlier when Jesus says, "If a Roman soldier compels you to walk a mile with him, walk two." This is the same, where he was compelled, the soldiers grabbed him and walked him out. During this time, when the Romans crucified people, what they would typically do is they wouldn't beat you first. They would tie the crossbeam to your arms and then, they would march you through the city and out of the city, up to where you're going to be executed, and they would flog you on the way.

Jesus has already been flogged in an effort probably by Pilate to get him out of this. He's already been flogged, and so he literally can't carry this crossbeam, probably 40 pounds of big wooden beam on top of him. They grabbed Simon. The worst thing that could happen to the Romans is for Jesus to die before he made it to the place where they're going to execute him, right? Where is the spectacle on that?

They grabbed Simon out of that crowd. You see Simon and the women, their helpers. The interesting thing about this is the prophetic-ness of something that Jesus said before. If you go back to Mark 8:34, you'll see Jesus say this very famous saying, whoever will come after me must do what? Take up his

cross and follow me. In Jesus saying this in Mark 8, he's saying to his disciples, "Look, if you're going to follow me, you could die. If you're really going to be willing to be committed to my teaching, and to following me, and to everything that we're doing here, you have to be willing to be tied to a crossbeam, flogged through the streets, and die in a Roman execution." Then, this is exactly what happens to Jesus.

Back when Jesus said that earlier in his life, there's really no indication that that's something that would have happened. You see this prophetic nature of this. Then, there's Simon carrying Jesus' cross for him, and following after him.

Then, who are the third people you see? You see the thieves. These guys have been justly accused or at least justly under the law of the day. You'll see later on in the passage in the weeks ahead that in John's account, one thief is righteous and the other one is unrighteous. One mocks Jesus and the other one says, "What are you doing? We've been justly accused. This man is here unjustly."

Here we are, the sovereign king of the universe, Jesus Christ, the savior of mankind, is beaten bloody, staggering through the streets. Somebody else is carrying the tool that they're going to use to execute him. He's been mocked by soldiers. He's got wailing women and a guy from out of the country carrying his cross for him, and he's going to be crucified between two thieves. This is the setting.

Jesus' Hope

In the midst of that, how does Jesus do it? How does he maintain hope in the midst of this incredible injustice? How can he bear up under this weight? We're going to look at some scriptures and what I want to show you is that the reason that Jesus could bear up under this weight, the reason that he could maintain hope is because of his purpose and his motivation.

I'm going to go through some scriptures pretty quick here. We're going to look at Hebrews 2:10-18. Listen to this.

"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctified and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brother saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers' in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise; and again, I will put my trust in him; and again, behold, I and the children God has given me.'

"Since therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely, it is not angels that he helps but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are also being tempted."

Jesus' purpose was to be the propitiation for our sins. What's that mean? To pay the price. Jesus knew that he had to go through what he was going through in order to pay the price for our sins. Because he knew his purpose, he was able to persevere through the pain, and the suffering, and the injustice, and the heartache, and the mockery, and the despair, and the disdain because he had an overarching purpose that made all of that unimportant.

All I can tell, I don't think purpose is enough. I think you better have some motivation to really fulfill that purpose and his motivation was love. John 3:16, God so loved the world that he sent his son. That's the father's motivation and Jesus' motivation is the same. In the Luke passage, it says he actually turns to them when he tells a story which is at Luke 23, he turns to them and amidst of all of these, and he says, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not wait for me but wait for yourselves and for your children for behold the days are coming when they will say blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed."

Then, they will begin to say to the mountains, "fall on us," and tell the hills, "Cover us." For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

What is that all about? Jesus is prophesying. This is the second time. He's actually prophesying the sacking of Jerusalem that's going to happen. Part of the reason that the church survived was because Jesus had told his followers, "Look, Jerusalem is going to get sacked. When you see the city surrounded, get out." Very interestingly, if you look at the history, what happened after Jesus died, and rose, and then went to heaven, about 80 AD, the Romans came and they sacked Jerusalem--but the Christians weren't there. The church had fled because they remembered what Jesus said.

Here, you see in a very real practical way in the midst of this horrible time, Jesus is telling the Christians, get out, when you see the Romans come, get out. Look, if they'll do this to me now when things are relatively peaceful, when the wood is green, imagine what they're going to do when things are not this good, when there's a lot of unrest in this area. They're going to destroy this place. Be ready to get out. Even in the midst of all this, Jesus is taking care of his people.

Then, if you look at 1 John 4:9-10, it says this. "In this, the love of God was made manifested among us that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love. Not that we love God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, the payment for our sins." Jesus' purpose was to pay for our sins but his motivation was his love for us. His purpose was to pay for our sins but his motivation was his love for us.

How do you maintain hope? One thing is that you have to realize what hope really is. Too often, we think of hope as wishful thinking. I hope I win the lottery. I hope I get into that college. I hope I can get a good deal on that car. I hope the Patriots wins the Super Bowl again. I hope my daughter marries a rich doctor. I hope, but that's wishful thinking. That's fairy dust. That's not hope in the Bible. What hope is in the Bible is *rational expectation*.

When they say put your hope in Christ, what they mean is not hope that Jesus pays for your sins but live your life in such a way that you know that he already has paid for your sins. Not hope that you can get through the suffering that you're going through but know that you will get through the suffering because Jesus suffered before you. And when you suffer, you're joined with Christ.

Paul made it very clear that every time he went through beatings, and persecutions, and being chased, in a shipwreck, and bitten by snakes, and all of this other stuff that he just regarded it as being joined with Christ. He was going through what Christ went through, and it made him closer to his Lord. When we go through suffering, guys, this is what we're doing. We have the rational expectation that we will get through this because Jesus has already suffered, the sins are paid for.

Hope in Christ is not some hope in a magical fairy god that probably might take care of you if you're good enough. Hope in Christ is the rational expectation that you will live with him forever. That is hope in Christ. Don't get caught up in magical fairy dust thinking about Christianity. Jesus' hope came from knowing how the story ends. He knew what was going to happen. He knew what was being accomplished. We, when we go through suffering in our lives, we need to have the hope that what we're suffering through has a larger purpose than maybe what we can see in the moment.

Confident Sufferers

Then, how can we be confident sufferers? Only because we recognize that Jesus is victorious. Only because we recognize that we're no longer slaves to sin. Only because we recognize that death has been conquered. That's how we can be confident sufferers. Peter and Paul gave us some pointers in this. If you have a bible turn to 1 Peter 3:8. 1 Peter 3:8. Here are some pointers from Peter. How do we respond, how can we be confident sufferers?

"Finally, all of you," he says, "have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." I'm looking at stuff on Facebook, I'm looking at stuff on Twitter, and I'm seeing all of this crap that people are talking about, all these anti-Christian stuff that people are saying, all of these dehumanizing stuff that I see, and I'm supposed to have unity of mind with you. Sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. You can't do that without hope. You just can't do that without hope.

"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

By the way, that's Psalm 34 that they just quoted there, that Peter just quoted there.

"Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? Even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them nor be troubled but in your hearts, honor Christ as the Lord as holy.

"Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet listen to this, yet do it with gentleness and respect having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, not if you're slandered, when you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame for it's better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous from the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

Peter says don't be afraid but bond together. That's what we need to do. We need to bond together in sympathy and brotherly love. We need to be ready with a response but we need to be so winsome when we face these things. So winsome that when we're slandered people are ashamed, they feel guilty because of their slander.

I got to tell you, I see a lot of stuff out there. I want to fire back. People say stuff about Christianity or about Christian belief, I want to fire back. Don't you want to fire back? Don't you wish you could just shoot them down with the answers? I want to be that man, but it's not what we're supposed to do. Guys, you can curse the darkness or you can shine the light. You can curse the darkness or you can shine the light. I submit to you that for most people, now, some are called to curse the darkness, there are some. Most of us are not. Most of us are called to shine the light. When you suffer, shine the light. Shine the light of Christ. That's the response that we're supposed to give.

This brings us to the big idea, **Suffering unjustly reminds us of Jesus' pain and purpose**. Suffering unjustly reminds us of Jesus' pain and purpose. When you're suffering, when you're going through some kind of unjust accusations, or loss of your job through no fault of your own, or relationships are broken, just remember that Jesus knows exactly what you're going through. Everything that you've suffered, he suffered too, and worse. He was willing to do that because of his purpose, because of his motivation, because he loves you. He loves you. I'm going to read this passage in closing and then we'll pray.

Romans 8 says this, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself would be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

"Not only the creation but we ourselves who are the first fruits of the spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. Now, hope that is seen as not hope, for who hopes for what he sees, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise, the spirit helps us in our weakness for we did not know what to pray; for as we ought but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words; and he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

"For we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose, for those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the first born among brothers. Those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified."

Go back up to Romans 8:28. "We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose." One of those mysterious verses, right? Let me make sure you understand the context. All things work together for good--it's talking about suffering. It's not talking about inconvenience or even good circumstances, it's talking about suffering.

When someone says, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose, you might be like, "Man, I know that verse is true but it's about suffering." Yes, you're suffering while we work together for good when you're called according to His purpose.

Verse 31: "What then, shall we say to these things if God is with us, who can be against us? He who do not spare His own Son that gave him up for us all, how will He not also, with Him, graciously give us all things? Who should bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?"

Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, He was raised. He was at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? It’s our tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword. As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as the sheep to be slaughtered? No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.”

Closing Prayer

Jesus, it’s stunning to see what you went through on our behalf. It’s horrifying, Lord, to think that my sin would need to be paid for by you, and that you would do it so willingly. Father, I pray that we would understand the gravity of your sacrifice for us, that we would see the love that covers the terrible sin in our lives and has made payment for it.

Lord, I pray that we would be able to walk through times of difficulty with our heads high, not confident in our own strength and power, Lord, but in the fact that you went through this already. That you, even now, sit in heaven interceding on our behalf, talking to your Father about your brothers down here on Earth and asking Him to take care of us.

Lord, give us courage, give us strength as we walk through difficult times. Lord, help us to love those around us even and especially those who disagree with us, who prosecute us, who mock us, who revile us. Lord, make your people a winsome people so that when those people slander us, they’re ashamed of their slander. For your glory, in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.