

Followers of the Way

The Cry of Dereliction

Steve Campbell 04-16-23

Mark 15:21-39

The 1995 film 'Braveheart' was directed by and starred Mel Gibson as the title character, William Wallace, a Scottish nobleman who fought for independence for his homeland. The most iconic moment in the film is when Wallace has been captured and is being tortured. The magistrate tells him if he cries out for mercy, he will be given a swift death.

So, he takes one last breath, and cries out ... 'Freedom!' He wanted to see his own people liberated.

This makes great cinematography, but the film has the unfortunate honour of being named as the second most historically inaccurate movie of all time.

As Jesus hung on the cross, having been tortured and in agony, He too cried out. He wanted to see His people, all people, liberated... not from the tyranny of the Romans, but from the even deadlier tyranny of sin. What He was suffering was the only way to do this, and His cry came from the depth of His being.

It was not because of the horrendous physical torture He had endured, nor the mental anguish He was subjected to, but it came through the spiritual dereliction He was facing: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' What caused Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, to emit such a cry of dereliction? We are all familiar with this story, it is the very heart of the Gospel, so it is always good to return to it and delve ever deeper.

Mark uses the term 'gospel' to introduce Jesus – 'The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (Mk 1:1). This term sums up all that Jesus came to do, offer salvation to lost sinners, as He told His disciples in Ch.10:45, 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

The word ransom is used only here and in the parallel passage in Matthew, and means the price of release, especially to ransom a slave. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned and were banished from the lush provision of the Garden to the wilderness East of Eden, we have been under the slavery of sin. Yet even then God had set in motion His plan of salvation, which came to fruition in His Son, Jesus Christ. As fully God and fully Man, He was to be our ransom to redeem us back to the Father; His life for ours.

Jesus knew this full well, and so did the devil who tried to steer Him off the path to the cross, offering a much easier way. But Jesus resisted. However, when the time drew near and He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, the humanity of Jesus was clearly seen, as He said to His disciples, 'My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch (Mk 14:34).

He went further into the garden alone and when the realization of the immense task that lay before Him hit home, His honest feelings came flooding out in prayer, 'Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me' (v.36). This cup was the cup of suffering that He had to drink. I believe with all my heart that if Jesus had ended His prayer there, the Father would have answered it. But if that prayer had been answered ... then no-one would be saved. So, thanks be to God, Jesus did not end His prayer that way! He went on to say, 'nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'

Despite the anguish of soul Jesus was going through, His trust in the Father never waned. Notice how He addresses Him – 'Abba, Father'. This was the most intimate filial term He could use, similar to our 'papa' or 'daddy'.

This is an Aramaic term; but why you may ask, not Hebrew? Surely this was the language of the Jews? Yes, it was, until the time of the Exiles. The northern kingdom of Israel was exiled and scattered in 722 BC by Assyria. Then the southern kingdom of Judah was exiled by King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC to Babylon. Both these world powers spoke Aramaic, as did Persia when they came to prominence. So this was the lingua franca of the day, the language of trade and international relations.

And so it remained until 4th century BC, when Alexander the Great supplanted it with Greek. This became the international language, which Jesus and all His disciples knew. However, as Aramaic was a Semitic language closely associated with Hebrew, it remained their mother tongue, the language of the home; while Hebrew was the language of religion.

So, for Jesus to address His Father as 'Abba' was a very close and intimate thing to do. Although overwhelmed with sorrow at what was facing Him, He trusted in His 'Abba' Father and submitted to His will. He went willingly to the cross, enduring the injustice of a kangaroo court, the humiliation of being stripped, mocked and scourged, and the agony of hanging six hours on a wooden gibbet. As Hebrews 12:2 tells us, it was for 'the joy that was set before him [that] he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

That was in the future; for now, He had much to suffer! The physical torture He underwent was enough to kill a lesser man. He had a crown of thorns pressed deep within His skull and struck repeatedly on His head, then He was whipped until the flesh was torn from His back, and finally nailed to a cross where He hung for six agonizing hours, gasping for breath, until every last ounce of blood was drained from His body.

On top of that He had the mental and emotional distress of His friends deserting Him. Despite their emphatic claim that they were willing to die with Him, when it came to the time of testing, they all fled – one of His followers betrayed Him with a kiss, and even His closest disciple denied knowing Him. The Sanhedrin accused Him falsely, Pilate condemned Him unjustly, and all mocked Him ceaselessly – soldiers, religious leaders, passers-by, even the criminals who were hanging by His side.

Jesus was subject to total and utter humiliation; for although every portrayal of the crucifixion in paint or on screen shows Him wearing a loin cloth, the truth is He was totally naked. Although nudity in the Greco-Roman world was acceptable, to the Jew it was shameful. As we read in Isaiah 47:3, 'Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered.'

Yet despite all the physical and mental torment He endured, this was not enough to elicit His cry of dereliction. **The cry came after it fell dark. It was noon, the brightest part of the day, yet an eerie darkness covered the land. This was no natural phenomenon, like a solar eclipse – which some have used in an attempt to explain it away – but this would be impossible, because Passover was celebrated during a full moon.**

This was nothing less than a supernatural event. This was a sign of God breaking into His creation to reverse the laws of nature. Darkness indicated God's anger, His wrath, as we see in Isaiah 13:9-11,

See, the day of the LORD is coming
– a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger –
to make the land desolate
and destroy the sinners within it.
The stars of heaven and their constellations
will not show their light.
The rising sun will be darkened
and the moon will not give its light.
I will punish the world for its evil,
the wicked for their sins.

The darkness showed God's wrath against sin, and as Jesus 'himself bore our sins in his body on the cross,' He was actually made sin for us ([1 Pet 2:24](#); [2 Cor 5:21](#)).

So during those hours on the cross the whole weight of God's wrath was being poured out on Jesus, who represented the sins of the whole world. Because He cannot look on sin, the Father turned His face away, and that's when Jesus made His cry of dereliction – 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

It was literally a cry in the darkness, a shout from the wilderness of abandonment. Why was Jesus forsaken? So that we may never have to be. He is our substitute; it was not just Barabbas he replaced, He took *our* place on the cross.

Remember –

he was pierced for *our* transgressions,
he was crushed for *our* iniquities;
the punishment that brought *us* peace was upon him,
and by his wounds *we* are healed. (Isa 53:5)

It truly was a cry of dereliction from the heart because He was indeed abandoned, forsaken by God, the only way we could have our sins forgiven. But notice again, that cry of dereliction was uttered in Jesus' mother tongue of Aramaic, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*' (v.34). According to Alan Cole in his commentary on Mark, 'Here we tread on holy ground... [for] we have the very words of the

Saviour preserved.¹ Despite knowing He was forsaken by God, His trust in His heavenly Father never wavered.

Although Psalm 22 begins with a cry of dereliction, it does address the Almighty as 'My God' which is an affirmation of faith. But it also ends with a shout of triumph -

v.19 But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

v.22 I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.

v.24 For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

v.27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

v.31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

So Jesus never lost trust in His 'Abba, Father', even while He bore the full wrath of God against sin, becoming a propitiation for us, an atoning sacrifice turning away God's wrath from us. This is an important and vital teaching which we need to uphold and proclaim because there are those in the Church who deny it, claiming this doctrine to be 'a form of cosmic child abuse.' We must refute this at all costs. Thankfully we know and understand the significance of Christ's crucifixion, but in our 21st century Western culture, where Jesus is only recognised as a swear word, how many others do?

(Share Screen) A few years ago the Church we were leading here in Spain took a stand in an exhibition, where we offered Christian literature and displayed posters about the Christian faith. One poster showed photos of various body piercings with the slogan, 'Some Piercings Cost More Than Others'.

One young lad, about 10 or 11 years old, looked at the poster and asked, 'What's wrong with that man's hand?' This gave us an excellent opportunity to share the gospel with him, someone with no pre-conceived ideas whatsoever.

This is the world in which we now live, and we need to find ways to explain the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection to a generation totally ignorant of even the most basic facts of the Christian faith. In one sense this makes it more difficult, because, unlike Billy Graham in the mid 20th century, we can no longer assume an undercurrent of biblical or Christian knowledge. But, in another sense, this makes sharing the gospel easier as we are not dealing with a load of baggage or false ideas accumulated over a life time of Church-going or imbibing wrong teaching.

¹ Cole, R. Alan, Mark, Tyndale NT Commentaries, 1961, IVP, p.242

We need to look for ways of connecting to our culture, e.g. the cross as jewellery.

In 2004 Mel Gibson directed another film which was much more historically accurate, the Passion of the Christ. In the scene of the crucifixion, the hand holding the hammer which drives the nails through Christ's palm is Mel Gibson's, because he wanted to show it was *his* sins, too, that led Christ to the cross; and it is *his* sins, too, that can be forgiven through that sacrifice.

May we, with every fibre of our being, proclaim Christ crucified, remembering that it is only by His cross that we can know salvation.