

How Can a Crucifixion Be Good News?

Thomas Robinson, *How the Gospel Works* 4, October 6, 2019

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 Translation TR

¹ Brothers and sisters, I'm making clear for you **the good news** (*euangelion*, Gospel): I **announced it as good news** to you. You also **welcomed** it. You're **standing** firm in it. ² You're also being **saved** through it, if you're holding tight to the very **message** that I announced as **good news** to you – unless you believed in vain.

³ For I handed on to you among the very **first things** what I also received: (A) that **the Anointed King** (*Christos*) **died for our sins** in accord with the **scriptures**,⁴ and that he was **buried**, and (B) that **he was raised on the third day** in accord with the **scriptures**,⁵ and that he **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Later he **appeared** to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom remain till now, but some have died. ⁷ Then he **appeared** to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ But last of all, ... he **appeared** also to me.

Mark 15:22-39 Translation TR Jesus' Crucifixion

²² And they bring him to the "Golgotha" place (which means Skull's Place). ²³ And they tried giving him wine mixed with myrrh, but he didn't take it (Ps 69:21). ²⁴ And they crucify him and divide his clothes by throwing dice for them – who gets what (Ps 22:18). ²⁵ It was about nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ And there was a written placard of the charge against him: "The King of the Jews."

²⁷ And they're crucifying two insurrectionists with him, on his right and left. ²⁹ And people passing by were scoffing at him, wagging their heads (Ps 22:7): "Well, well! You're destroying the temple and building it in three days? ³⁰ Just deliver yourself by getting down from that cross!" ³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes ridiculed him to each other, "Did he save others? He can't even get himself out of this. ³² The Anointed One? The King of Israel? Let him get down now from the cross so that we can watch and trust our eyes." Those crucified with him were also insulting him.

³³ And when noon arrived, a darkness came over the whole land till about three in the afternoon. (Am 8:9) ³⁴ It was then that Jesus called out loudly, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you forsake me?" (Ps 22:1) ³⁵ And some bystanders listening said, "Hey, he's calling Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and tried to get him to drink it, saying, "Wait, let's watch whether Elijah comes to take him down." ³⁷ And Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the temple veil was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who was posted opposite him, saw that he breathed his last in this way, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-24 Translation TR The Word of the Cross

¹⁸ For the message (*logos*) that's centered on the cross is sheer foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being delivered, it's God's power....

²¹ For since, given the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom didn't know God, God decided through the foolishness of this proclamation to deliver those who trust in it.

²² And whereas Jews are asking for signs and Greeks are seeking wisdom, ²³ we by contrast are proclaiming an Anointed King, crucified! To Jews, it's an offence, and to Gentiles foolishness,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, an Anointed King who is God's power and God's wisdom.

Galatians 2:20 Translation TR Crucified with Christ

²⁰ I've been crucified with the Anointed King. I live, but it's no longer I myself, rather the Anointed King is living in me. The life I'm now living in flesh, I'm living by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Romans 3:21-26 Translation TR

²¹ But now apart from law (Torah) God's faithful righteousness has been manifested, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²² God's righteousness working through the faithfulness of Jesus the Anointed King (Christos) for all who have faith.

For there's no distinction: ²³ for all people sinned and lack the glory of God, ²⁴ while freely being declared in the right by his grace, through the redemption from slavery that's in Anointed King Jesus. ²⁵ God put him forward as his mercy-seat through the faithfulness made real in his blood. This was an embodiment of God's faithful righteousness, because in God's forbearance he passed over former sins, ²⁶ leading up to the embodiment of his faithful righteousness in the present time, such that he himself is righteous even as he declares a person to be in the right who lives life from the faithfulness of Jesus.

The Mystery at the Heart of Everything

We're exploring how the Gospel works. How God works shining into hearts in the face of Jesus. But there's a problem. 1 Cor. reflects it. Gospel isn't guidance, wisdom, morality. It's a complex event that's being announced. Something already done that changes everything. It puts you in a new place. Trust it! But what events! Crucifixion, Resurrection! Paul knows Jesus' cross is offensive, foolish. But it embodies God's power, wisdom. The basics are simple, impossible things, except by God's action, drawing humans into them. The Messiah died; for our sins, fitting scripture. He was raised, scripture, he appeared. Things unexpected, humanly impossible, vast purposes for us, new reading of scripture! Yet Paul watches the power of the event in others and experiences that power himself.

The Event that Refuses to Become a Theory

When Paul reflects on the announcement in Rom. 3, it's not so much about us or even Jesus, it's about God, his faithfulness to his promises, the whole story of scripture. The best center of reflection is the Exodus. In grace God comes for a people who are both enslaved and sinful. He delivers them from slavery and brings them into a right relation to himself by covenant in spite of sin. He creates a place of meeting between them and himself, a mercy-seat, a place of forgiveness (Day of Atonement). The cross is like that, complex, multisided, no one atonement theory. It fulfills promises, establishes kingdom, engages death, brings sinners into forgiveness, delivers captives from slavery, forms a new people, creates a meeting place between God and humans. It's Jesus' whole story of faithfulness – human & God – loving service & death/blood.

What is Happening Here?

When Gospels like Mark describe the event, the narrative has its own unexpected character addressed to us. A crucifixion was grisly, awful! Mk doesn't emphasize the pain, horror, thudding nails, torn flesh. He doesn't play on our emotions to build pity and pathos. He trust us to hear the echoes of scripture pointed to by Jesus' cry from Ps. 22:1. But he has also trained us through the Gospel to know that this cry is unthinkable. Jesus, Messiah, Son of God who was transfigured, commanded storms, healed lepers! Yes, others abandon him, but not God. But there it is, the mysterious foreign cry! Why? Mk stresses what people see. People scoff. Priests & insurrectionists both insult him. The question is, What do you see? What's happening here? Surface is obvious: The end. Can I see more: God dies my human death. Faithful. "...who loved me & gave himself for me!"