

The Death of Jesus

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[0:00] So a scripture reading for today is from Luke chapter 23, which you will find on page 884 of the Pew Bible.

! Luke 23 verse 44. It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And having said this, he breathed his last. Colum. Shall we sing?

Psalms 22 from verse 14 to verse 20 the tune is soldo let's stand as we sing to God's praise like water I am empty and though my bones are torn apart my inmost feeling bells away and into as discerned my heart my strength is dried like shattered clay and as I fight to draw my breath my tongue is sticking to my jaws you lay me in with my blood in the up of death and like of dogs there close there's me their circle round me is complete

[2:57] I am beset by evil men, and they have pierced my hands and feet.

I count the number of my bones, with floating eyes the people stare.

They throw the dice to get my gold, among themselves my golds they share.

Come quickly, rescue me, my strength. Do not be far from me, O Lord.

Save me from burn of evil dust, my precious life from cruel sword.

[4:23] I'm very grateful to Robert for taking the first part of the service. It just protects my voice, I guess.

You can listen to another voice, a nicer voice altogether than Robert's than mine. But we're going to turn now to Luke chapter 23 and from verse 44 to 46.

They say that what happens on the pitch stays on the pitch. When I was a student in Aberdeen University, I used to play for the Christian Union football team.

We were by far the best football team in the university. But because they knew we were Christians, other teams used to goad us into retaliating.

And if they could get us to sway at them, all the better. Well, on one occasion, we were playing against a football team from Elgin. And their central midfielder took a dislike to me.

[5:31] He kicked me up in the air until I could hardly walk. After the game, which we won, we were having refreshments with the opposition. And this central midfielder, who had been really vicious to me during the game, offered me a handshake and said to me, no hard feelings, huh?

Well, I wanted to punch him and I couldn't walk for weeks afterwards. But as they say, what happens on the pitch stays on the pitch. When it comes to the cross of Jesus, does what happened at Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, does it stay there?

Does it stay on that hill, changing nothing about the rest of the world? Indeed, it does not. For the cross of Christ, it changes everything.

Not just for the hill on which Jesus died, but the whole world from then on. The events recorded in these three verses, in Luke 23, verses 44 through 46, tell the most powerful story of the God who gave his only beloved son for us.

And I want to briefly see three things with you today. May it be as a result of what we hear today, our Christianity does not stay in this church, but spreads into the whole of our lives, changing everything about us and about our world.

[7:09] So first of all then, the darkness of the cross, the darkness of the cross. For those gathered to witness the crucifixion of Jesus, the three hours between 12 noon and 3 o'clock, the 6th hour and the 9th hour, must have been the strangest time of their lives.

There are times when the sky does amaze us. A couple of years ago, the northern lights were so bright, we could see them from our back window in Annie's land. North of us, of course, they fill the sky with bright reds, yellows and greens.

More recently, during the solar eclipse, the sky went dark before the light returned. It felt otherworldly, mysteriously unsettling.

How much more terrifying must it have been for those who had gathered to witness the crucifixion of Jesus when darkness fell upon the face of the whole earth. At 12 noon, the 6th hour of the Jewish day, the sun should have been at its zenith, its brightest.

But for three hours, darkness came across the whole earth because the light of the sun failed. Some have suggested it was a solar eclipse. But Luke does not say that the sun continued to shine, but the moon covered its light.

[8:30] Luke says, as you can see, the sun's light failed. Now, the sun is the life of our galaxy, but for three hours, its light was darkened.

A bright display of the northern lights is infrequent, but it's perfectly natural. What happened for three hours that day has never happened before. It was very far from being natural.

It was a miraculous darkness. God is doing something to stop us in our tracks. He's telling us that Jesus endured the maximum of suffering during those three hours when the sun stopped shining. Everything in history up to this point has been leading to the darkness of the cross. By virtue of the injustice of the trial, the cross is the height of moral darkness.

By virtue of the sun failing to shine, the cross has become the height of physical darkness. Over a thousand years before this, darkness had fallen upon the land of Egypt.

[9:43] It was, if you remember, one of the ten plagues God sent upon the Egyptians in order to free his people from slavery. The darkness was a symbol of God's judgment and curse upon the land of Egypt.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, darkness is a symbol of the judgment of God. For example, in Joel chapter 2 verse 31, the judgment of God is described in this way, the sun shall be turned into darkness.

And then in Matthew 24, 29, Jesus describes God's judgment by saying, the sun will be darkened. So in the Bible, physical darkness and God's judgment go together.

But it's not just darkness and judgment which go together. It's also darkness and human sin. For example, in Proverbs chapter 2 verse 13, men of twisted speech, who you can't trust, they're described in this way, they forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness.

And again in John chapter 3 verses 19 through 20, the apostle John, who was very fond of the imagery of light and darkness, he writes, this is the judgment.

[11:05] The light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. So not only does physical darkness and God's judgment go together, physical darkness and human sin go together.

On that day, when the sun stopped shining for three full hours, human sin is encountering God's judgment.

God is judging human sin. The sins of the world are receiving their due penalty. Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of God, is being judged not only, not on account of his own sin, for he had no sin.

He was being judged on account of our sin. Finally, the prophecy of John the Baptist comes true. Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

The darkness of the cross consisted in this. Jesus was being condemned and judged on account of our sin and guilt.

[12:20] The darkness of our sin was being laid on the shoulders of Jesus, the light of the world, and he was being judged on our account. So it wasn't a moral or physical darkness on the cross as much as it was a spiritual darkness.

Jesus, the beloved Son of God, was being forsaken by his heavenly Father. His Father was crushing his body and judging his soul as the punishment for our sin.

Jesus was our substitute, standing in our place and paying the penalty. For these three hours, the sun stopped shining in the sky and all the awareness of his Father's love stopped shining in Jesus' holy heart.

The Apostles' Creed talks of how the sufferings of Jesus culminated in his descent into hell. If ever Jesus went to hell, it was here on the cross and it was now for these three hours.

He was not merely separated from God on account of our sin. He was being cursed by God on account of our sin.

[13 : 35] The darkness on the outside was a mirror of the darkness on the inside as Jesus was tormented for us. Here is the cup of suffering Jesus was so loath to drink from and from which Jesus asked to be delivered.

This is the cup of God's wrath against all human sin. John Rabbe Duncan was an Aberdonian and he was the first minister of Milton Free Church of Scotland in Cowcadence.

He went on to become professor of Old Testament at the Free Church College in Edinburgh and on one occasion Duncan was lecturing to his students on the connection between the Jewish Passover and the Christian communion when with special reference to the cup of wine Christians drink at the Lord's Supper he was in full flow.

He suddenly stopped mid-sentence. He was quite an eccentric man. He left his notes behind and he stared at his students and with tears in his eyes he said to them it was the cup of our damnation and he took it willingly.

It was the cup of our damnation and he took it willingly. The darkness was our damnation and Jesus took it willingly suffering in our place bearing our sins upon the tree giving himself as the sacrifice for our sin and guilt.

[15 : 16] This is the heart of the gospel. This is the darkness of the cross. Jesus took the blame for my sin and through his darkness I have light.

This is the heart of the gospel. The Son of God loved me. He gave himself for me. Many years before this the prophet Jeremiah asked in his lamentations is this nothing to you who pass by? Is this nothing to you who pass by? On the cross God forsakes God. God the Father curses God the Son and all because he loved us.

Is this nothing to you who pass by? Well as the hymn writers say in vain the firstborn seraph angel tries to sound the depth of love divine.

Never has the love of God for sinners like us been so demonstrated as when Christ was forsaken for us.

[16 : 34] Do we carelessly walk past the cross and it means nothing to us? Or standing at the darkness of the sufferings of Christ do we bow our knees and our hearts move by how much he must love us?

Do you determine this day that if he was forsaken for you you will never forsake him for the empty vanities of this world?

When we as Christians are tempted to sin and turn our backs on our faith in Jesus all we need to do is go back to this cross and see our Christ suffering there for us.

How can we sin against such a saviour as he? How can we forsake the Jesus who refused to forsake us?

We shall hold fast to him. We shall turn away from all which nailed our master to this cross. We shall love him and worship him. We shall devote ourselves to him.

[17 : 46] We shall follow him. The darkness of the cross. Secondly, we have the power of the cross. The power of the cross.

It wasn't just the sky which went dark and it wasn't just those gathered at the foot of the cross who witnessed something miraculous that day. Immediately after the darkness had passed three o'clock in the afternoon and Jesus had been condemned by his heavenly father on account of our sin.

We read in verse 45, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The curtain of the temple was torn in two. There are nine words here.

The righteous life and sinner's death of Jesus achieved these nine words. The curtain of the temple was torn in two.

The cataclysmic events of Calvary led here that in the temple of Jerusalem not one mile distant from Calvary a curtain was torn in two.

[18 : 59] Now the temple was always busy filled with priests busy about their religious duties. So what happened that day would have been seen by many religious people.

But as the eyes of hundreds were focused upon Jesus on the cross, the eyes of the priests and the ears of the priests were focused on this loud ripping sound as this brightly colored and decorated curtain in the temple was ripped apart.

The curtain hung between the temple and what was called the most holy place. In Jewish religious thought, God was thought to inhabit this most holy place.

Once a year, the Jewish high priest would enter into that most holy place carrying the blood of sacrifices to make a torment for the sins of Israel.

And this vast curtain separated the most holy place from the rest of the temple and the rest of the world. This curtain signified the divide between a holy God in the most holy place and a sinful humanity outside.

[20 : 18] It was a picture, this curtain, that access to God is barred, that our sin has caused a terrible rupture in our relationship with God.

The Berlin Wall was historically a symbol of the division between east and west, and the curtain of the temple was a symbol of the division between God and humanity caused by our sin.

Just at the beginning, Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden and the way back barred by cherubim with their flaming swords. So the curtain was a symbol of how we no longer have access to God and his paradise because of our sin.

It's the red light preventing us from getting to know God. It is the ultimate stop sign. We, by nature, cannot know the love, beauty, and grace of God, the majesty of God's compassion and his peace. Just as surely as our sins separated us from God, so this curtain separates us from God. But the death of Jesus achieved this.

[21 : 38] Nine words. The curtain of the temple was torn in two. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment and he bore the penalty of our sin.

In his body and soul, Jesus endured the darkness of being separated from God for us and by his death he abolished human sin and the division which existed between God and us.

He himself dealt with those flaming swords of the cherry of him so that we could return to the presence of God in the paradise of Eden. The death of Jesus means that the curtain in the temple is no longer necessary.

Through Jesus died on the cross, he has switched the red light which prevented us from knowing God to a green light inviting us to get to know God.

With his death on the cross, Jesus abolished forever the Jewish system of priests and sacrifices and ceremonies and temples. The curtain was torn in two and now we all, whoever we are, through faith in Jesus Christ, are invited to get to know God.

[22 : 58] as our father and friend. Now this is all very theological, very complicated. At the recent OM mission during the Commonwealth Games, I was given a wristband with four symbols on it to make the gospel easy to understand and explain.

I wear it all the time so that when people ask me what does your bracelet mean, I can explain to them the gospel in very simple terms.

It also makes this point about the torn curtain very easy to understand. The first symbol on my bracelet is that of a diamond signifying we are precious to God.

The second symbol is a black and white square, which signifies that our sins have separated us from God, just as black is separated from white.

the third is a white hand with a black circle in the middle, signifying that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin.

[24 : 05] And the fourth symbol is of two hands in a handshake, signifying that through what Jesus has done, we are reconciled to God, that we can be his friends.

And these four symbols, the diamond, the square, the hand, and the handshake, explain the torn curtain in the temple, the very heart of the gospel.

Through his death, Jesus has taken away our sin and made peace with God for us. This torn curtain means the world to us because it means friendship with God.

If the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand a hundred years ago plunged the world into war, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago opened the world to peace with God.

There is no other way to be at peace with God and for our friendship with him to be restored. Some people think we can do it with religion, like those Jews in the temple.

[25 : 17] They think they can reach up to God and make peace with him through endless prayers and religious devotion. They are wrong because true peace with God can only be bought at a far higher price, the death of God's own beloved son, Jesus Christ.

The curtain of the temple was not torn by the priests rushing into the presence of God, but God tearing it apart by the death of Jesus.

The scissors which tore the curtain were shaped like a cross. The scissors which tore the curtain were shaped like a cross. What does this mean for us today?

It means this. It is not what you do for God which is important, but what God has done for you. God has reached down to you through the cross of Jesus to reconcile you to himself.

Jesus has done it all. The curtain of the temple will never be resown. It will never be put back in place for those who put their trust in Jesus. If you believe in Jesus today, you are at peace with God.

[26 : 30] God's your father and God's your friend. in the previous passage, remember last week Jesus promised the dying criminal saying, today you shall be with me in paradise.

Through Jesus' death and the ripping of that curtain, paradise is open to you today. And you're invited to share in the beauty of God's love and God's peace.

Or perhaps today you're a Christian who's experiencing some level of doubt. You're passing through what one saint called the dark night of the soul.

This is your experience but it's not your reality. If only you could see how close you are to God and how paradise is open to you.

Our doubts may be real but the reality of God is even more real. enjoy your friendship with God.

[27 : 37] Get to know him better. Experience what it means to really know him as your father and your friend.

Jesus' death resulted in a curtain being torn in two. Do not stand on the outside but make your way into God through faith name Jesus Christ your crucified and loving saviour.

The power of the cross. Well lastly and briefly the victory of the cross. The victory of the cross. I'm sorry my voice is really rather boring today.

I can't put it up, can't put it down, can't put it fast, can't put it slow. Just lock in for the next five minutes and you're finished. So the end has come for Jesus. He'd been on the cross for barely a matter of hours.

Sometimes strong men took four days to die by crucifixion. But Jesus weakened and exhausted by the torture he had received lasted only a few hours before he cried out with a loud voice Father into your hands I commit my spirit and breathe as last.

[28 : 56] According to Luke these were his last words. Words not of pain and grief as you might expect them to be but words of trust and of confidence.

many children especially American children are taught this prayer. Now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep and if I die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Children brought up in religious Jewish families at that time prayed a different prayer every night as they went to bed. Children would pray Father into your hands or rather they wouldn't say Father they would say into your hands oh God I commit my spirit into your hands I commit my spirit.

They're taken from Psalm 31 from verse 5 the last words on Jesus mouth were scripture but perhaps more powerfully they with words he had prayed as a child with Mary his mother teaching them to him as she knelt by his bedside.

Jesus returned at the very end to the simple trust and confidence of childhood placing himself into the hands of God.

[30 : 25] He called out to God not as God but as Father by this we see the darkness had lifted and the sun had begun to shine in his heart again God's judgment against all human sin had been fully paid by Jesus on the cross.

He has given his life as a ransom for many his work is now complete and now he hands his life over to God in this childlike display of trust and confidence.

These aren't the words of defeat as though the darkness had overcome the light for even then as the sun began to shine again in the sky these are words of victory the light has overcome the darkness and rather than life being taken from him Jesus committed his life to his heavenly father even in this last act Jesus is in complete control even to the extent of giving up his life in words of childlike trust and confidence Jesus knows that he's completed the work of dealing with our sins once and for all and now he commits himself into the loving hands of his loving father for all the gruesomeness and horror you know it's a really very beautiful scene a loving son going home to his loving father death is never a beautiful thing but this was for all

Jesus humiliation never was his dignity more highly seen than in this moment when men having done their very worst to him and God having judged his son Jesus committed himself to the loving hands and arms of his father in effect he's crying out these words he's saying having completed the mission for which I came oh father I'm now coming home to you death had no mastery over Jesus rather on the cross Jesus turned death to his advantage it's become his servant!

Ushering him into his father's presence the house of many mansions here's a cry of victory Jesus victor over sin Jesus victor over the world Jesus victor over death Jesus the victor and into the hands of his loving father he commits his victorious spirit you see what happened at calvary it didn't stay at calvary what happened on the cross changes everything the darkness fell signifying Jesus paying the penalty for our sin the curtain of the temple was torn in two signifying our friendship with God being restored Jesus gave up his spirit signifying his victory over sin and death will the death of Jesus change everything for you we go back to Jeremiah's question and lamentations and ask it again is this nothing to you who pass by is this nothing to you who pass by surely not nothing surely everything sure it's enough to put our faith and trust in

[34:09] Jesus Christ and surely enough to give him our lives forever in praise and worship let us pray Lord Jesus we cannot even for one moment enter into the suffering you endured on the cross but we can enter into the salvation you won for us on the cross we thank you that for those three hours you endured hell on our account our hell our punishment our penalty we thank you the sun began to shine again and the curtain of the temple was ripped in two we thank you Lord Jesus that you restored our friendship with your heavenly father so that we can know him as he really is and we thank you the very end Lord Jesus you declared your victory in such wonderful words which make our hearts bleed within us as we think of how you returned with such childlike faith and confidence into the loving hands and arms of your father we thank you that all you did Lord

Jesus you did for us and we thank you oh father for begetting such a son we worship you for him and ask that you would give us faith and love in him today we ask these things in Jesus name amen